

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

23-92-410
(23-92-41) A

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL

Larus fuscus

Location: Cherry Creek Reservoir; Cherry Creek S.R.A.; Arapahoe County, Colorado

Date: November 14, 15, 1992

This bird was found by others the previous week and seen by many.

Setting:

I found this bird about 3:00 p.m. on November 14 and again in the afternoon of the 15th. I watched it with my scope (Kowa 20-60X) as it stood perched on a log off of the Prairie Loop at Cherry Creek. It also swam in the water, preened, spread its wings and took short hopping flights, but I never saw it in sustained flight. I saw it for a total of about 45 minutes on both days at distances of about 200-400 yards. The light was excellent.

Description:

The bird was an adult in winter plumage. It was about 24" long, smaller than a Herring Gull and seemed about the size of a California Gull (although I did not get side-by-side comparison with a California). It was slender and longer-winged (folded wingtips about 2" beyond tail) than a California Gull. The mantle and wings were dark grey, a whole shade or two darker than the California Gull (as the California is darker than a Herring Gull). The dark grey wing blended evenly into the black wing tip, seemingly without a sharp border between the two colors. There was a broad white terminal border to the secondaries. The underwing was quite dark, especially the primaries, which were blackish from underneath. The head was white with a dusky wash to the crown, nape and sides of neck, paler and less extensive than on the California Gulls nearby. The face and fore-neck were white. The legs were yellow in some lights but fleshy- or pinkish-yellow at other times. The bill was bright yellow with a large red sub-terminal spot on the lower mandible.

Similar Species:

The darker mantle and long-winged look (in direct comparison with California and Herring Gulls) eliminate those two. Ring-billed Gull smaller, lighter and with dark ring on bill. Other dark-backed gulls are Slaty-backed (larger, with pink legs, more white in distal primaries, smaller red spot on bill), Great Black-backed (darker, larger, with massive bill) and Western/Yellow-footed Gulls (darker, larger, pink-legged (Western) with massive bills).

Experience with Species:

I have seen many Great Black-backed Gulls, Western Gulls and Yellow-footed Gulls. I have only seen three Lesser Black-backed Gulls, one adult, and all in Colorado.

This report was prepared from notes made at the time of observation.

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LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL
(Larus fuscus)

23-92-41 A

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Nov. 11, 1992

CFO Official Records Committee
% Zoological Collections
Denver Museum of Natural History
City Park
Denver, Colorado 80205

Nov. 11, 1992, from 2:15-2:45 pm, I observed an adult, winter-plumaged Lesser Black-backed Gull, at Cherry Creek SRA Arapahoe Co., Colorado. It was swimming and then perched, preening, on a stump several hundred yards offshore, north of the sandspit at the Prairie Loop parking lot a favorite observation point for local birders. Because the bird was an adult, it was fairly easy to identify, and I was aided by numerous Herring, Ring-Billed, and California gulls nearby for comparison, as well as ideal viewing conditions: low, bright, winter frost lighting, clear air and no wind. My observations were made w/ a Bushnell Spacemaster scope w/ 40X objective. Because the bird was perched out of the water, and was actively preening and stretching, I was able to observe most of the salient features.

Size: The bird was smaller than a Herring Gull, larger than a Ring-billed; it was about the size of a California Gull.

Shape: The bird was rather streamlined for a gull, an effect produced in part by its elongated wings, which extended well beyond the tail, further relatively than in nearby gulls of other species. It also had a "flat-headed" appearance, a combination of a flatter crown and a longer beak, in comparison to California Gull, which appears more "round-headed".

Color and Markings: This bird first caught my (unaided) eye because of its dark-gray back, even though it was swimming so distance offshore. When I returned from my car with my scope, the bird had conveniently hopped up on a stump to preen. Its back and the upper surfaces of its wings were indeed dark gray, but not black. However, it was many shades of gray

darker than neighboring gulls of other species. Its wing tips (perched) were darker than the mantle, but not much. The trailing edge of the upper wing was white, and there was one small white patch toward the tip of the outer primary. I did not get a good look at the underwing. The crown and nape were heavily streaked, but the throat, breast, and belly were spotless, snow white. The tail was all white.

Bare parts: The feet and legs were medium, but definite yellow, not bright yellow nor dull yellow. The prominent beak was bright yellow, with a large, horizontally elongated bright red, oval spot on the lower mandible, set back from the mandible tip. This red spot was a most arresting feature of this bird; the spot was much more pronounced than the spot on Herring Gulls. The eye was pale yellow, not dark like in some gull species.

Age: The all-white tail indicates an adult.

Plumage: The streaking on head and neck indicates winter plumage.

Frankly, this bird could have posed for the drawings labeled "winter adult" on p. 155 of NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America (2nd ed.)

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P.S. Off the record, I suspect this bird was accompanied by a first-winter bird of the same species. A ^{first-winter} bird of virtually identical size and shape was perched on an adjacent stump. Its face, crown, and nape were very light-colored, with a conspicuous dark ear patch. The bird flew shortly after I became aware of it and I did not make any other pertinent observations.