

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

A

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL

Larus fuscus

Location: Pueblo Reservoir; Pueblo, Pueblo County, Colorado

Date: February 7, 1993

Setting:

I saw this bird about 3:00 p.m. on February 7th. I watched it with my scope (Kowa 20-60X) as it landed about 400 yards away on the open water just beyond the tire breakwater at the south marina at Pueblo Res. It floated in the close company of a couple of adult Ring-billed Gulls and an adult Herring Gull which allowed for great color and size comparison. I watched the bird for about 2 minutes and then walked out to the end of the marina point so that the bird was only about 150 yards away. I watched it from there for about another 10 minutes (15 minutes observation in all). I began to look through the other gulls in the marina and when I next looked back, the Black-backed Gull was gone. After it landed, I only saw it floating on the water and never again saw it in flight. It paddled around in small circles and once raised its wings high over its back. The afternoon was slightly overcast but the light conditions were good.

Description:

The bird was an adult in winter plumage. It was about 24" long, barely shorter, but notably less hefty than the nearby Herring Gull and quite noticeably larger than the nearby Ring-billed Gulls. I would guess it to be about the size and shape of a California Gull. It was slender and long-winged with the folded wingtips extending to about 1 1/2" beyond the tip of the tail, giving the bird a longish, attenuated look. The mantle and upper surface of the wings were very dark grey, easily two or three times darker than a Herring Gull and much darker than I would estimate a California Gull to be in the same light. The dark grey wing graded evenly into the black wingtip, without a sharp border between the two colors. I did not note a white "window" in the wingtip when the bird stretched. The underwing was very dark, especially the primaries, wingtips and secondaries. There was a broad white trailing edge to the secondaries. The underparts, head and neck were white, with the head and hind-neck heavily smudged with brownish spots, giving the foreparts a dusky wash. The front of the face and fore-neck were white. I did not observe the color of the legs and feet. The bill was moderately large, but not as powerful looking as that of the Herring Gull. 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 Ring-billed and Herring Gulls) eliminate these. In addition the Ring-billed Gull is 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.



Mark Janos
10 Sedium Ct.
Pueblo, CO 81001