

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

ACCEPTED (7-0)NEW STATE RECORD UNUSUAL RECORD Xrec'd 12.98**Species:** Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)**Date:** 19 December 1998**Number seen:** one**Sex:** ?**Plumage:** Basic IV/Def.
Basic**Locality:** Pueblo Reservoir**Elevation:** about 5000'**Nearest town:** Pueblo West**County:** Pueblo**Time observed:** about 16:05 - 16:30 MST**Duration of observation:** about 25 minutes

Description: While participating on the Pueblo Reservoir CBC, I found a dark-mantled gull sleeping (head tucked and lying down) on the tires at the South Marina among >3000 Ring-billed Gulls (RBGU) and a smattering of Californias (CAGU) and Herrings (HERG). It was considerably larger and larger-headed than the nearby RBGUs. I thought that the bird was a *gracillii* Lesser Black-backed Gull (LBBG), but with its head tucked I couldn't be sure. However, I eventually saw all the necessary features, convincing me it was, indeed, a LBBG.

The LBBG occasionally picked its head up, but I never saw it standing. It was also partially blocked by a sleeping Ring-billed Gull, such that I could only see its head and its body from between the tertial and scapular crescents forward. The mantle was considerably darker than that of the nearby RBGUs. To make sure that I was discerning the contrast in mantle colors correctly, I found an adult CAGU with RBGUs; the contrast between that combination was much less than between the LBBG and RBGUs. After I saw the bird pick its head up and look around four times, I had noted all the pertinent features of the head. Its head was heavily streaked with somewhat of a concentration of streaking around the eye. The bill was yellow with a large red gonydeal spot and a broken dark ring distal to the red spot. The bill was relatively long and thin, but with more of a gonydeal angle than that shown by the CAGUs also in view. The eye was yellow, contrasting rather well with the darkly-streaked head, though at times difficult to discern due to the poor weather conditions (see below). The mantle was dark gray with a thin, but well-demarcated white scapular crescent. The upper wing coverts were the same dark gray of the mantle, with no apparent brownish feathers in any of the tracts visible to me. I could not see the tertial crescent or the primaries. The underparts were white.

My first thought was that the bird was an adult in Definitive Basic, but most of the LBBGs I've seen in that plumage (including one on each of the next two days) have not had dark markings on the bill. However, J. Vanderpoel (pers. comm.) told me that some full adults do have dark bill markings in Basic plumage. But, due to the lack of brownish feathers in the mantle and wing coverts, I would say that the bird was at least in Basic IV plumage, if not in Definitive Basic.

Similar species eliminated: CAGU is eliminated by the darkness of the mantle (even darker than nominate CAGU), eye color, and bill structure; Great Black-backed Gull (GBBG) ruled out by size (would dwarf RBGU), mantle color, and bill structure; *smithsonianus* Herring Gull eliminated by mantle color. Other, darker forms of Herring Gull (*vegae*, *taimyrensis*, *heuglini*) potentially ruled out by mantle color, though one or more of those forms may approach *graellsii* LBBG in this feature. Without information on the bird's leg color and primary tip pattern, I can not certainly eliminate dark-backed forms of Herring Gull, though I believe that even the darkest of those forms are paler than are *graellsii* LBBG. Black-tailed Gull is ruled out by size and head pattern.

Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration): No vocalizations heard.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species? I have seen >50 *graellsii* LBBGs on the Great Lakes and the East Coast, bazillions of *smithsonianus* HERGs, 10s of 1000s of GBBGs, and 1000s of CAGUs. I have not seen any other form of Herring Gull nor Black-tailed

Light conditions: Occasional heavy snow, overcast, with fog produced by the warm lake meeting the frigid (<0° F) air

Optical equipment used: Kowa 30x

Distance, and how estimated: estimated closest approach at about 50 meters (water's edge on south side of marina to tires)

Other observers who saw the bird with you: none

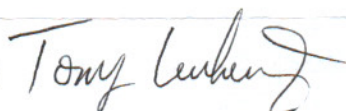
Other observers who saw the bird independently: none

If photographed, type of equipment and film: I did not photograph

List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:

a) at time of observation: none **b) after observation:** I consulted with John Vanderpoel on the bill pattern related to age, but it did not affect my identification of the bird, only it's age

Reporting observer: Tony Leukering

Signature: 

Address: Colorado Bird Observatory, 13401 Piccadilly Road, Brighton, CO 80601

Date report was written: 29 December 1998 from notes written within at the time of the sighting

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL

Larus fuscus

Location: Pueblo Reservoir; Pueblo, Pueblo County, Colorado

Date: December 22, 1998 (Dec 19, 1998 - January 2, 1999)

Setting:

This bird was present for at least two weeks and was seen by many observers during its stay. The description below is from my observations on December 22 (leg color from my observations on Jan 1). I believe it was first seen by Tony Leukering on December 19 on the Pueblo Reservoir Christmas bird count. I observed the bird with my scope (Kowa 20-60X) as it perched on the edge of the lake and then flew a short distance into the lake and floated off. It was about 75 - 150 yards distant during the observation period and was with adjacent Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. I watched it from there for 20 minutes total. The light was excellent - sunny and from the back

Description:

The bird was an adult in winter plumage. It was about 24" long, and surprisingly, was about the size of nearby Herring Gulls - quite noticeably larger than the nearby Ring-billed Gulls. It was at least as bulky as the Herring Gulls and the head was even blockier and more robust looking than the Herring Gulls. It was noticeably longer-winged than that species though, 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 gray, easily two or three shades darker than a Herring Gull. The dark gray wing graded evenly into the black wingtip, without a sharp border between the two colors. There was a distinct 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. The legs of the bird were a dull chalky pink (not yellow). The bill was, and about as powerful looking as that of the Herring Gull - perhaps a little shorter and stockier than a Herring Gull bill. 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 pinker 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). The larger size, blocky head and pinkish legs of this bird do not rule out Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Experience with Species:

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

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

Mark Janos
10 Sedum Ct.
Pueblo, CO 81001

