

MCD 6/9

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS SIGHT RECORD FORM

Results: ACCEPT 6-1

Species: Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*
(Common Name) (Scientific Name)

Date(s) of occurrence: April 3, 1999 and April 18, 1999

Number of birds seen: 1

Sex: Unknown

Plumage: Alternate I

Exact location: Horseshoe Lake, northeast of Loveland

Elevation: Approx. 4900 feet

County: Larimer

Nearest town: Loveland, CO

Length of Observation: 30 min.

Time(s) of Observation: 5:30 – 6:00 pm (April 3); 10:00 am – 10:20 am (April 18)

Other observers who saw the bird with you: None

Other observers who independently saw the bird(s): Richard Stevens, April 4, at Boyd Lake (about 1 mile east); two unidentified birders, April 18 (one is a CSU student named Jason)

Light conditions [quality; direction relative to bird(s) position]:

Good light due to partly sunny sky; setting sun directly behind me (April 3); also good light on April 18, partly sunny sky, sun behind me.

Optical equipment used: Swift Panther telescope, 15-45x zoom. Observed mainly at 45x when the bird was stationary; 15-20x when the bird was flying.

Distance from bird (estimated unless otherwise noted):

200m (both dates)

Was the bird photographed? No.

If so, have you submitted photos?

Who took the photographs?

Describe the general and specific habitat in which the bird(s) occurred:

Lake/Reservoir, drawn down with extensive sandflats. Bird was frolicking with about a hundred gulls, staging prior to joining an evening roost (Apr 3). On April 18, bird was swimming and flying in vicinity of gull/merganser flock on open lake.

Describe the bird's behavior (flying; feeding; habits; behaviors used in identifying the species or in supporting the identification):

Seen standing in shallow water, walking through water, harassing other gulls, taking short flights, pulling on debris in shallow water with beak (Apr 3). Resting on water, flying (April 18) in association with feeding mergansers.

Describe the bird in detail: This is the most important part of this report. Include overall size and shape, and how you placed the bird in the general group that you did. Give complete details of plumage, including head, throat, undersides, nape, back, wings, and tail. Give particular emphasis to marks you used to identify the (bird(s)). Describe other details, such as color and shape of bill, legs, eye, etc. that were important in making the identification. (Fill out this portion even if photographs are submitted: you may attach additional sheets, drawings, field sketches, or copy of field notes):

Overall size and general shape that of Herring Gull ("HERG"). Field marks noted were: mostly white head and underparts with the exception of some dusky markings on nape, sides, flanks and undertail coverts. The eye was dark. The feathers around the eye were smudged with light gray. The crown was a light cream color, not as white as the face and throat. The bill was completely black, and was longer and thinner than that of companion HERG. The upperparts (back and wings) were mottled chocolate brown except for black primaries. Secondaries (seen when wing was extended) and tertials were almost as black as primaries, and tipped with white. The mottling of the upperparts was due to small white specks on the brown feathers of the wing coverts. The brown back feathers lacked the speckling, but were generally edged a cream color. Legs were a gray/flesh color (not pink, not yellow). Additional field marks in flight were noted among the upperparts: secondaries, inner and outer primaries were equally dark; therefore no window of light inner primaries was evident as with HERG. The rump was mostly white; the tail was white basally with blackish specks, and black terminally, forming a broad blackish tail band strongly contrasting with the whitish rump. On April 18, extension of primaries beyond tail, when sitting, was noted to be about an inch longer than that of HERG.

On April 3, the bird was in the company of several similar species, including HERG, Thayer's Gull (THGU) and California Gull (CAGU). This bird was noticeably

larger than all accompanying birds (about 100 present in the group, mostly adult CAGU) except for HERG. When standing next to an Alternate II HERG, no size difference was noted. It stood out from two brown Basic/Alternate II THGU by having darker brown back and wings and whiter head and underparts. On April 18, the bird appeared slightly smaller than companion HERGs.

Describe the bird's song and calls if heard: None

Discuss similar species and how you eliminated them:

Elimination of HERG, *Larus argentatus* (including subspecies *smithsonianus*, *argentatus*, and *argenteus*): HERG, although similar in size and shape, never would appear as the combination of dark on the upperparts and of light on the head and underparts, as exhibited by this bird. Basic I HERG that is dark brown would be so on both upper- and under-parts, with the exception of a whitish head. However the head of such a bird would not appear all whitish as on this bird. Furthermore, Basic I HERG would not show the contrast between white rump and dark tail. Basic II HERG would be much paler gray on the back. Although HERG is often obviously larger than *L. fuscus*, there is overlap on some individuals. In flight, Basic I HERG shows an obvious pale window on the inner primaries that was absent in this bird. No plumage of HERG should have an all dark bill at this time of year. Primary extension beyond tail is shorter than that of LBBG.

Elimination of HERG, *L. a. heuglini*: I cannot definitively eliminate this very similar species; however it is noted that the home winter range is in the vicinity of the Middle East. Also, this subspecies averages larger than *L. a. smithsonianus*, the North American subspecies of HERG, and presumably would show the pale window in flight. Furthermore, if like other Herring Gulls, should not have an all dark bill in Spring.

Elimination of HERG, *L. a. vegae* and *L. a. taimyrensis*: These species are characterized by dark grey mantle in adults, but typically pale subadult forms (*vegae*), especially in summer, possibly due to arctic bleaching conditions. Summer range (*vegae*) includes northwest Alaska, so it is conceivable that a stray subadult (probably *vegae*) joined western North American wintering Herring Gulls, instead of wintering in coastal areas of the northwestern Pacific Ocean. Subadult forms of these subspecies presumably resemble patterns of other HERG subspecies, and therefore would not show dark brown upperparts in concert with white head and underparts, would not have all dark bill in Spring and would show pale window in flight.

Elimination of Great Black-backed Gull, *Larus marinus*: Size of body and bill was too small for this species. Basic/Alternate I plumage would be less brown and more mottled than the observed bird.

Elimination of Slaty-backed Gull, *Larus shistisagus*: Basic/Alternate I of this species is more uniform in color, brownish above and below, not contrasting dark above, white below. Primaries are grayish, not black.

Elimination of other "Black-backed" Gulls: This bird was too small, especially in the bill structure, for Western Gull (*L. occidentalis*) or Yellow-footed Gull (*L. livens*), both species that are not known to wander far from their respective ranges on the west coast of North America. Kelp Gull, a South American species that has bred in coastal North America in the Gulf of Mexico, also has notably different bill structure.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species:

I have birded actively in the United States from 1973-present, mainly in the East, and have had extensive experience with *L. argentatus smithsonianus* and *L. marinus*. Within the last 15 years, I have observed at least 10 *L. fuscus*, in plumages Basic II, and Basic Definitive. I have paid closer attention to gull identification within the last 2 years, during which time I have carefully studied several *L. fuscus* and many HERG in Colorado. I had never observed Basic I *L. fuscus*.

List books, guides, recordings, or other sources consulted and how this influenced you identification (during and after observation):

No references consulted during the observation. Afterward, I consulted Gulls, 2nd Ed., by PJ Grant, Seabirds of the World: The Complete Reference by J. Enticott and D. Tipling (1997), and The Advanced Birding Video Series I. The Large Gulls of North America (1997)

These sources provided descriptions of similar species.

This report was made from notes taken during X, or after observation, or later from memory .

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