

1999 - 66

Rec'd 1/6/004

CFO-ORC-FILE#

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS SIGHT RECORD FORMResults: ACCEPT 7-0Species: Lesser Black-backed Gull
(Larus fuscus)

Date: August 28, 1999

Number of birds seen: 1

Sex: Unknown

Plumage: 1st summer

Locality: Timnath Reservoir, on the far eastern edge of the reservoir, alongside CR 13 (between Larimer and Weld Cos.)

Elevation: ~5000 ft.

Nearest Town: Timnath

County: Larimer

Time Observed: 9:30

Duration of observation: 30 minutes

Other observers with you: Paul Carlson, Joyce Carlson, June Morgan

Other observers who saw the bird independently: Steve Dinsmore and Nick Komar both located the bird on later dates, and identified as a Lesser Black-backed Gull. In addition, Steve Dinsmore has spotted what he believes to be the same bird on several occasions throughout the fall, in Fort Collins. John Vanderpoel and Alex Cringan both saw what they identified as a Greater Black-backed Gull, Vanderpoel before and Cringan after I did. Vanderpoel stated in an e-mail that based on my description, he thought it was the same bird.

Light conditions: Excellent - late morning, clear skies, looking west with the sun at our backs.

Optical equipment: Leica 10X42 Trinovid binoculars, June Morgan's Leica scope.

Distance from bird: ~40 meters

Describe the bird's behavior: The bird was first seen resting on shore with ~15 Ring-billed Gulls, and one adult California Gull nearby. After about 15 minutes, it began flying around the inlet, before resting on the water about 60 meters away. It was at this point that we put the Leica scope on it. After ~10 minutes, the bird flew again, this time disappearing over the main portion of the reservoir.

Describe the bird: A large gull, somewhat larger than nearby California Gulls, roughly the size of a small Herring Gull, with a gray-brown back, ~3 shades darker than nearby California Gulls. The head was whitish with a small amount of dark streaking. The eye was dark. The bill was dark, with the very tip fading to yellowish, and slender. It did not appear to be particularly long, but definitely could not be described as heavy. The undersides were whitish, with a moderate amount of barring on the undertail coverts. The secondary coverts were the same color as the back, the tertials and primaries were blackish-brown. The tail appeared black. In flight, the primaries and primary coverts appeared solid blackish, the secondaries and secondary coverts dark brownish. The tail appeared black, with a white rump. The wings looked ragged and worn, as if the bird were just about ready to molt.

Describe the bird's song and call if heard: None heard.

Describe the habitat in which you found the bird: Timnath reservoir is a large lake surrounded by agricultural fields. There is an inlet at the eastern end which reaches the road, and during the fall is surrounded by ~40 meters of mudflats. The bird was first seen on the mudflats.

How did you eliminate similarly appearing species: Greater Black-backed by size, bill shape, and the dark back, which is typical of 2nd year Lesser Black-backed Gull, but not any plumage of Greater. Kelp Gull and Western or Yellow-footed Gull by size and the slender bill. Herring Gull by the lack of pale inner primaries, the dark back, and the contrast between the back and undersides. Any other large gull at all likely in Colorado should have a lighter back.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species: I have observed thousands of Herring Gulls in Illinois, and have a good feeling for their size relative to Ring-billed Gulls. I have observed perhaps a dozen Greater Black-backed Gulls, several times at close range with Herring Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls present, in 1st winter and adult plumages. I have observed perhaps 8 Lesser Black-backed Gulls, most notably here in Colorado during the winter of 1998/1999, when there were apparently several individuals present around Larimer Co. One second winter bird that year had secondary coverts identical to the shade and color of this birds back and secondary coverts.

List books if they helped in your identification: Since there had been a report of a Greater Black-backed Gull at this site a few days earlier, we did check Peterson's Western Birds to review the relative sizes of both species. After the fact, I checked the third edition of National Geographic, and Grant's Gulls. This report, though, was written from notes taken within 5 minutes of the bird's departure.

Reporting Observer: Paul Sweet

Signature Paul Sweet

Address: 3113 Sharps St.,
Fort Collins, CO
80526

1999-66

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Lesser Black-backed Gull

Number: 1 first-alternate

Location: Timnath Reservoir, Larimer Co., Colorado

Habitat: small bay on large lake

Date: 31 August 1999

Time: 7:22-8:41 a.m.

Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 612 1/2 West Magnolia St. Fort Collins, CO 80521

Others who saw bird(s): m. ob.

Red 1/21/00 wpl

Description of bird(s): During the days prior to this sighting, I had heard reports of both Great and Lesser Black-backed Gulls at the northeast bay of Timnath Reservoir. When I arrived on 31 August, I quickly found a dark-mantled gull resting with a small flock of Ring-billed and California Gulls. The bird was only very slightly (less than 5%) larger than the largest California Gull; it did not stand out in the flock on account of its size. At a distance, the pale-headed, dark-backed appearance of the bird was striking. The bill was black with a very faint pale (yellow?) tip and a hint of pink color at the base. The bill was slightly shorter than the bill of a California Gull, but noticeably thicker with a more bulbous tip. The eye appeared dark-colored. The head and underparts were white with sparse gray or gray-brown mottling on the nape, shoulders, and flanks. The mantle and upperwings appeared dark brown to black, depending on the lighting. In flight, I noted that the inner primaries were very short (they were being molted) and there were at least a couple of white spots on the secondary coverts, possibly also the result of molt. There were no white mirrors in the primaries. The rump was white. The tail was also white with a broad, black subterminal band and a narrow white tail tip. The legs were dull flesh-colored. On the basis of the bill and leg colors, evidence of molting flight feathers, mantle and upperwing patterns, and tail pattern, I concluded that the bird was a Lesser Black-backed Gull molting from first-alternate to second-basic plumage. I took several photos of the bird before leaving.

On 30 September and 12 October, I observed an identical gull at Strauss Cabin Lake in the southeast part of Fort Collins. This lake is less than two miles from Timnath Reservoir, so I assume all sightings were of the same bird.

Similar species and how eliminated: The combination of size (compared directly to California Gulls), mantle color, bill shape and color, leg color, and tail pattern eliminates other large gulls including Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls.

Previous experience with species: I have extensive experience with Lesser Black-backed Gulls, mostly from North Carolina, although I am seeing increasing numbers in Iowa, Nebraska, and Colorado.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with clear skies and the sun directly behind me. Estimated viewing distance was less than 100m. I used 10x42 binoculars and a 20-60x spotting scope.

References consulted: Grant Gulls: A guide to identification

How long before field notes written? none written

How long before this form completed? written 31 August and updated after subsequent sightings

1999-66

10 September 1999

Red 1/6/00 upl
(3 photos)

Larry Semo
9054 Dover Street
Westminster, CO 80021
lsemo@swca.com

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL

Date Observed: 31 August, 1999
Location: NE corner of Timnath Reservoir, Larimer County, Colorado
Time: 4:30 pm - 5:15 pm MDST
Conditions: overcast-partly sunny (stormy)
Observations Distance: between 100 and 300 feet
Previous Experience with Species: Have observed numerous Lesser Black-backed Gulls in all age plumages in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Texas, Florida, and the upper east coast
Observation Postures: Observed standing (feeding on carp), swimming, and in flight

+Photographed

I was informed of the presence of a first-winter Lesser Black-backed Gull which was being seen at Timnath Reservoir by COBIRDS. The following sections of identification points are transcribed from notes taken in the field during the observation.

Bill

- lower mandible somewhat light (pinkish) but only along the basal third to quarter. Bill was thinner than a Great Black-backed Gull;
- the bill was long but somewhat deep, gonydeal angle present but not as absurd as with Great Black-backed Gull;
- bill somewhat deep at base;

Head and Neck

- relatively flat-topped (male?) white head with thin brown streaks;
- streaking originated at eye and goes posteriorly, cheeks lacked streaks, streaks were thin across face and nape but were heavier toward the flanks;

- eye dark with small dark patch surrounding it (black-eyed appearance);
- streaks formed a broken band at base of throat that separated white throat and breast;
- streaks continued from cheeks and crown downward along the nape;

Mantle

- at base of mantle and neck, the brown streaks became heavier and began to mottle;
- mantle appeared uniform mud-brown but upon closer inspection, revealed diffuse scalloping due to growth of new (dark-colored) mantle feathers. Some of the worn mantle feathers had very slight light edging observable only at close distance which may have been a product of wear;

Breast and Flanks

- breast white;
- anterior flanks were boldly brown with nearly horizontal streaks;
- posterior flanks contained light brown vertical streaks (small gap between larger anterior streaking and thinner posterior streaking);
- vent and base of under-tail coverts contained dark vertical streaking;

Wings

- primary extensions appeared black;
- tertials were brown with obvious white edging;
- primary extended well beyond the tail giving a "stretched-out" appearance to the bird;
- in flight, the wings were typically a mud-brown overall with lighter brown-white scalloping on the upper coverts;

Tail

- rectrices all dark except for light barring on numbers 4, 5, and 6 on both right and left sides with the amount of white-dark barring greater in extent on the outer of the 3 feathers. The vast majority of the time, the bird was observed standing. It is possible that more white was present on the tail than observed due to folding of the rectrices and being partially hidden by the primaries;
- upper-tail coverts whitish with dark, bold spotting, flecking;

Legs

- leg color a combination of pink/straw;

Separation Between Similar Species

Great Black-backed Gull, the closest species in plumage appearance to Lesser Black-backed Gull, is typically larger in overall size. While considerable overlap can exist in sizes of Larids, it is a basic assumption that Lesser Black-backed Gulls are typically slightly smaller in overall size than a Herring Gull; Great black-backed Gulls are considerably larger in size than a Herring Gull in general. While no size comparisons with Herring Gulls were had during this observation, numerous California Gulls were present adjacent to the subject bird at various times. Impressions of these inter-specific comparisons indicated that the subject bird was roughly the same overall size to that of a California Gull. A few Ring-billed Gulls were also present; the subject bird did appear noticeably larger than a Ring-billed Gull.

The subject bird's bill always appeared too slim overall to that of a Great Black-backed Gull. The bill of a Great Black-backed Gull is typically massive in length and width. This width is greatly exaggerated at the gonydeal angle on Great Black-backed Gull. The bill of the subject bird appeared much slimmer and lacked the bulbous gonys of a Great Black-backed.

Mantle and upper wing coloration and pattern appeared too uniform in color for a first-winter Herring Gull but also appeared darker than a Great Black-backed Gull. In flight, the upper wings appeared too dark for a Great Black-backed and lacked the lightness of the Great Black-backs secondary coverts.

The lightness of the head and neck of the subject bird appeared much whiter than that of a first-winter Herring Gull. Also, a second-year Herring gull would typically have a lighter mantle and upper-wing coverts than a first- or second-winter Lesser Black-backed Gull.

First-winter California Gulls would not have the degree of contrast between the head and breast and the mantle and upper-wing. First-winter California Gulls would have a two-toned pink and black bill. In flight, a first-winter California would display a double set of dark wing-bars (on the secondaries and upper edge of the greater secondary coverts). Second-winter California Gulls would still have the two-toned bill but would also display yellowish legs and a gray mantle (with brownish upper-wing coverts).

Ring-billed Gulls are definitively smaller overall than Lesser Black-backed Gull. Being a three-year maturation gull, first-year Ring-bills would already display a somewhat grayish mantle and a two-toned bill.

The lightness of the head and breast of the subject bird may have appeared slightly darker than other first-winter Lesser Black-backed Gulls I have seen; however, mantle and upper-wing coloration appeared way too dark for a first-winter Great Black-backed Gull. The flecked but overall whitish upper-tail coverts appeared lighter than the buff-brown pattern of the upper-tail coverts and mantle of a Herring Gull.

One puzzling note was the bill color. Though first-winter Lesser Black-backed Gulls are supposed to have an entirely black bill, the bill on the subject bird appeared to have a lightish base to the lower

mandible. While this may have been an observation error, it certainly illustrates the lack of rules into Larid identification. Though a few identification marks seem slightly exaggerated for a Lesser Black-backed Gull, the overall appearance, shape, and plumage characteristics seemed best fitted to a first-winter Lesser Black-backed Gull.

The subject bird's bill shape appeared too slim overall to that of a Great Black-backed Gull. The bill of a Great Black-backed Gull is generally massive in length and width. This width is greatly exaggerated at the gonysial angle on Great Black-backed Gull. The bill of the subject bird appeared much slimmer and less the bulbous curves of a Great Black-backed

throat and upper wing coloration and pattern appeared too uniform in color for a first-winter Herring Gull but also appeared darker than a Great Black-backed Gull. In flight, the upper wings appeared too dark for a Great Black-backed and lacked the lightness of the Great Black-backs secondary coverts.

The lightness of the head and neck of the subject bird appeared much whiter than that of a first-winter Herring Gull. Also, a second-year Herring Gull would typically have a lighter mantle and upwing coverts than a first or second-year Great Black-backed Gull.

First-winter California Gulls would not have the degree of contrast between the head and breast and the mantle and upwing coverts as a Great Black-backed Gull would have a two-toned pink and black bill. In flight, a first-winter California would display a double set of dark wing bars on the secondaries and upper edge of the greater secondary coverts. Second-winter California Gulls would still have the two-toned bill but would also display a whitish breast and a gray mantle with brownish upwing coverts.

Ring-billed Gulls are definitively smaller overall than Lesser Black-backed Gull. Being a three-year-old bird, the subject bird would already display a somewhat grayish mantle and a two-toned bill.

The lightness of the head and breast of the subject bird may have appeared slightly darker than other first-winter Lesser Black-backed Gulls I have seen however, mantle and upwing coloration appeared way too dark for a first-winter Great Black-backed Gull. The blacked but overall whitish upper-tail coverts appeared lighter than the buff-brown pattern of the upper-tail coverts and mantle of a Herring Gull.

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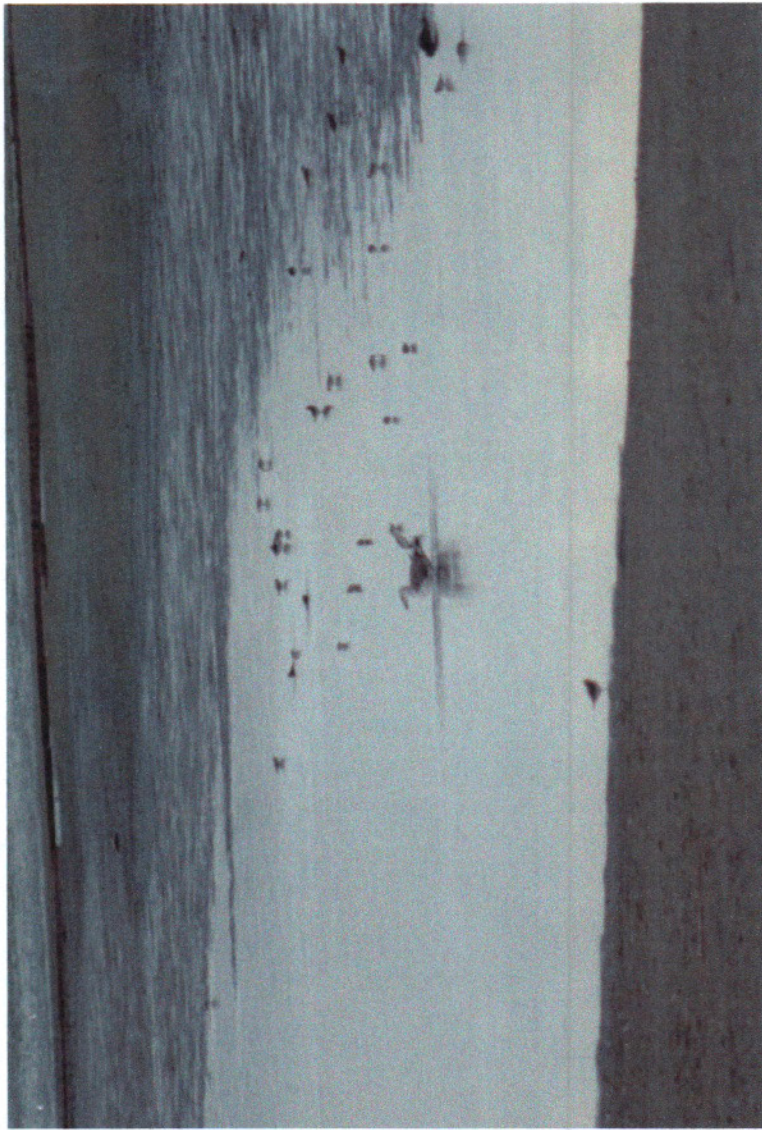


Lesser Black-backed Gull

Timnath Reservoir, Larimer Cty, CO

31 Aug. 1999

Larry Somo



Lesser Black-backed Gull
Timnath Res. Larimer, CO
31 Aug 1999
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