

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD UNUSUAL RECORD

Species: Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus graellsii*)

Date: 11-12 December 1999**Number seen:** one**Sex:** ?**Plumage:** Basic II**Locality:** Horseshoe Res. (11th), Lake Loveland (12th)**Elevation:** about 5000'**Nearest town:** Loveland**County:** Larimer**Time observed:** about 14:40 - 15:00 MST (11th); about 13:20 - 13:25 and 16:45 - 17:00 MST (12th)**Duration of observation:** about 20 minutes (11th); about 4 minutes (12th) off and on

Description: While birding with three other Records Committee members (after a RC meeting) and Doug Faulkner, I found a dark-mantled gull lying on the ice at the southwest end of Horseshoe Lake. The bird was in Second Basic and had its head tucked when I first noticed it. The five of us watched and waited for it to do something. Finally, it picked its head up, showing a large, mostly-black bill. This caused us a bit of consternation, as it seemed too large-billed for a Lesser Black-backed (LBBG) which is what I had thought it was when I found it. The bird, and the other gulls around it, then flew a bit further west, so we watched it in flight. Because of the bill size, we considered all other species of dark-mantled gulls, but eventually rejected them all. We saw it fly one additional time.

The head had a strong slope to the forehead and shortish, but thick bill. The distal 1-2 mm of the bill were pale yellow as was the basal 2-3 mm, the rest was mostly dark, with the proximal half being paler than the distal half. Compared to that of nearby Herring Gulls (HERG), mostly youngsters, the bill was just slightly shorter and somewhat thicker, and had a small to moderate gonydeal angle that was not as pronounced as that of the HERGs. The head was white, streaked lightly with brown, with the heaviest markings around the eyes. The eyes were a dark amber, obviously in the process of changing from dark to yellow. The neck was white with light, brown streaking on the back of the neck; the chin and throat were white. The underparts were white, but with some dark gray mottling on the sides. The legs were pink, though somewhat paler than that of adult HERGs nearby.

The upperparts (mantle and wings) when perched were roughly the same tone throughout, but with the mantle being somewhat grayer than the wings. The scapulars and wing coverts were thinly fringed with pale brown - these fringes were difficult to detect without relatively high-power scopes. There was one adult-type lower scapular that was broadly-fringed with white, producing an obvious, but not extensive, scapular crescent. The tertials were not adult-like, being mostly dark brown, tipped broadly with whitish, and with thin, short, dark bars in the whitish. The primaries were not tipped in white, or even pale, making it very difficult to discern the number of primary tips extending beyond the tail. However, through Bill's Questar, I believe that I could make out the tips of three primaries beyond the tail, with a very small gap between the tips of P9 & P10 and a much wider gap between the tips of P9 & P8. The tail tip fell between the tips of P8 & P7. In flight, the wings were uniformly toned. Though the wingtip was nearly black, there was no apparent demarcation between the wingtip and the rest of the wing - the wing appeared to grade from dark grayish-brown to blackish somewhere between the coverts and the wingtip. There were no mirrors or primary tongues. I do not recall whether there was a white or pale trailing edge and I did not see the underwing pattern at all well. The rump and base of tail were white, very lightly marked with blackish, and the distal half or more of the tail was black, though not a solid block. I never saw this area particularly well. I found the same bird at Lake Loveland the next day.

ACCEPT 7-0

Recd 1/5/00 ape
(2 photos)

Similar species eliminated: We consciously worked to eliminate all other possibilities, as this is the most difficult of plumages for definitive identification, requiring looking at a large suite of characters. Despite this, the bill color was probably the single most important character noted, as all other dark-mantled gulls do not have virtually all-dark bills when in Basic II. Comparisons here are made with Basic II plumages of other species, NOT with adult plumages, so pay attention. HERG ruled out by mantle and wing color and bill color (bill should be mostly pale in Basic II). California Gull (CAGU) eliminated by size (it was just slightly smaller than most HERGs and the same size as the smallest HERGs), mantle color (too dark for CAGU in direct comparison), and leg color. Other, darker forms of HERG ruled out by size (they should be larger) and because the bird showed only the vaguest of windows in the inner primaries. Slaty-backed (SBGU) and Kelp (KEGU) gulls eliminated by wing pattern, mantle color (not blackish), and bill color (being much too dark for either species). Great Black-backed Gull eliminated by size and by upperparts color and 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 >60 *graellsii* LBBGs on the Great Lakes and the East Coast and four previously in CO, bazillions of *smithsonianus* HERGs, >125 *vegaae* HERGs, 10s of 1000s of GBBGs, 1000s of CAGUs, and >75 SBGUs. I have not seen any other of the darker, Asian HERGs, nor have I seen KEGU.

Light conditions: Bright with the sun behind me and somewhat to my left

Optical equipment used: Leica 32x, Questar at high power, and Zeiss 7x42

Distance, and how estimated: estimated closest approach at about 40 meters

Other observers who saw the bird with you: Doug Faulkner, Bill Lisowsky, Joe Mammoser, and Joey Kellner

Other observers who saw the bird independently: unknown, though this might be one of the Basic II LBBGs that Steve Dinsmore has been seeing in Larimer Co. recently

If photographed, type of equipment and film: ~~I did not photograph the bird~~ photos included

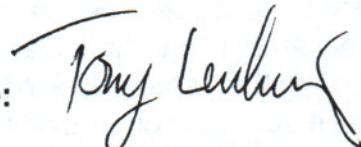
List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:

a) at time of observation: Nat'l Geo. 3rd ed.

b) after observation: none

Reporting observer: Tony Leukering

Signature:



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

Date report was written: 11 December 1999 from notes written a couple hours after the sighting (thus the notes were written immediately before I typed out this report)



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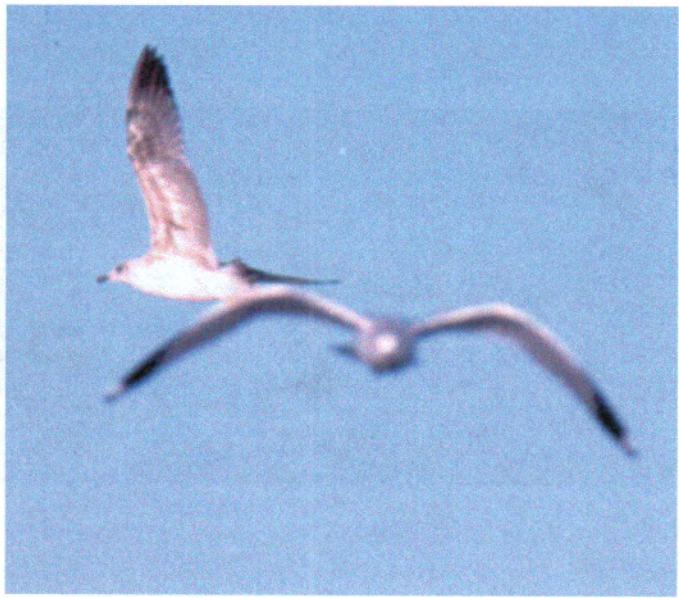
LBBG (Boanic II)

Lake Loveland, CO

12 Dec 99

Tony Leukering

(over)



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