

Accepted (6-1)

PHOTO

Colorado Field Ornithologists--Sight Record Form

Species: Little Gull *Larus minutus*

Birds sighted: 1 juvenile

Time: 1st sighted about 4:30 p.m. 9/12/95. Viewed again several times through 9/14 for a total of perhaps 1-1.5 hours

Location: Clifton sewer lagoon next to 32 road and north of the Colorado River.

Status: A & R list 5 previous fall records. No previous Western Slope records.

Setting: I spotted this bird in company with an immature Sabine's Gull at about 4:30 p.m. I studied the bird for only 10-15 minutes before leaving. When I left, I believed the bird to be a plumage of Sabine's that I had not previously seen. I called Brenda Wright when I got home, and she and Coen Dexter went out to see the bird early in the evening. I joined them at the site. We could not reach a consensus as to an identification, as none of the descriptions that we had with us satisfactorily described the bird in question. Coen researched all of the resources he had at hand that evening and concluded that the bird was Little Gull in juvenile plumage, basing the identification primarily on the description and painting in Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding (Farrand 1983). He showed me this on the morning of the 13th, and I readily concurred that this was the bird we had seen. We went to see the bird again at about 11:00 a.m. and observed it in excellent light and at close range for perhaps 20 minutes. The Sabine's Gull was no longer present. The bird was later viewed by other observers (including Ron Lambeth.) Dexter was able to photograph the bird on the 13th. It was last seen on the 14th.

Behavior: The bird fed constantly, picking insects or insect larvae from the surface of the sewer pond. When pressed, it would take flight and circle the lagoon, occasionally hawking insects. Generally the bird was quite tame and readily approachable.

Description: A very small gull, slightly smaller than the Sabine's Gull that it accompanied on the 12th. The crown was dark, nearly black with brownish highlights in good light. The bird had a phalarope-like eye patch surrounding the eye and broadening as it extended back from the eye. The bill was rather small and black. The face, front, and underparts were all white. The white extended across the hind neck, dividing the dark crown from the dark back. A dark "collar" extended down the sides of the breast and across the back. The feathers of the back were dark brown, almost black, tipped with buffy brown. The light feather tips give the back a distinctive scalloped appearance. At rest, the primaries extended well beyond the tail. These feathers were black, tipped with white. The rump and tail were white, with a rather broad black terminal band on the tail. The band on the tail was slightly broader in the center than on the edges, which at some angles created the illusion that the tail was slightly forked. At other angle it was clear that the tail was gently rounded. In flight a dark carpal bar was conspicuous, which with the dark primaries formed a distinctive "M" pattern. The feet and legs were pinkish.

Vocalizations: None

Habitat: Sewer lagoon.

Similar Species: Immature Sabine's Gull (present for direct comparison) is much light brown on the back and head, has a forked tail, and does not have a prominent carpal bar. Black-legged Kittiwake is much larger and does not have the distinctive scalloping on the back. The wing-pattern of the Bonaparte's gull is quite different, especially in showing a distinctive black margin on the trailing edge. Bonaparte's also are

much lighter on the back and lack conspicuous scalloping. No other gull species approaches the appearance of the juvenile Little Gull.

Experience: None of the observers who saw this bird had previously seen this plumage.

Books consulted: National Geographic's *Bird's of North America*, Peterson's *Western Birds*, and Harrison's *Seabirds* were all consulted on the first evening and proved inadequate. *Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding* provided the best information and painting. Surprisingly, the *Golden Guide to North American Birds* contains a useful painting of this plumage.

Report: Prepared from notes taken at the time of observation.

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