

1997-36

ACCEPTED 7-0

# COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

## LITTLE GULL Larus minutus

Location: Lake Holbrook; Rocky Ford; Otero County; Colorado

Date: October 12, 1997

I was birding with Brandon Percival at Lake Henry. I found the Little Gull on the beach on the south end of the lake. There were about 2500 adjacent resting Franklin's Gulls and the Little Gull was perched on the edge of this flock. This allowed for direct comparison with the larger, darker Franklin's Gulls. Forster's Terns were also present and adjacent. It perched on the lake edge for about 10 minutes, at about 9:00 a.m. We observed it at a distance of about 75 - 100 yards with our binoculars and in my KOWA TSN-4 20-60x scope. We both viewed it through my scope. Our best views were of the bird perched, in the open. When the entire gull flock startled, it flew up as well and we got great views of the flying bird, the upper wing pattern and buoyant flight style. We lost it in the swirl of around 2500 flying gulls and were not able to re-find the bird. The light was excellent, sunny, and the sun was from our back.

### Description:

The bird was a juvenile. It was much smaller than the Franklin's Gulls. It's body size was about like nearby Forster's Terns, but it was not as long as the tern and was much shorter-tailed and smaller-headed with a short neck. (There were no Bonaparte's Gulls around; but this bird would have been approximately that size in comparison). The bill was noticeably small and slim, (much smaller than that of either the Forster's Tern or Franklin's Gull bills) and was overall tiny, slightly drooping, and all black.

Overall the bird was small, dark above and light below, and flashy. (The only field guide, other than Grant's Gulls, that shows this distinctive juvenile plumage is the Audubon Master Guide to Birding). It was all white except for: 1) a blackish smudge around the eye and a clear black teardrop behind the eye on an otherwise white face; 2) sooty black cap, hind neck, and shoulder. This color bled down onto the sides of the upper breast; 3) back and wings sooty black with rows of neat white or pale feather edges on the scapulars which gave a strongly scalloped appearance to the whole back. The tail was short, square and white with a narrow black terminal band. In flight the wing was very short and roundly blunt at the end; not tapered and pointed. The spread wing and mantle showed a complex pattern, sort of a big, ill-defined "M:" shape. The mantle was dark. From above, the spread wing showed a blackish brown leading edge to the inner wing, which narrowed at the "wrist", then expanded into a wide blackish triangle shape formed by blackish primaries and primary coverts. The inner primaries and secondaries were white without any darkness on the trailing edge. We tried to view the underwing, but I was unable to get a good take on it. The legs and feet were flesh colored.

### Similar Species:

The small size and black cap eliminate many other gulls. Of the "black-headed" species, Laughing, Franklin's and Common Black-headed gulls are much larger. The Bonaparte's Gull is really the primary I.D. challenger. However it is larger with a larger bill. It lacks the distinctive scalloped scapulars and the wing pattern is different. Bonaparte's has a dark trailing edge to the wing (inner primaries and secondaries).

### Experience with Species:

I have seen thousands of Laughing and Franklin's Gulls. I have seen three other Little Gulls but not a juvenile before.

This report is prepared from notes made immediately following observation.

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*Mark Janos*



18 Oct 97

Little Gull - 1 juv. pl.

~9:00 a.m. for ~10 min.

75-100 yds; excellent sun  
at back. Perched on  
beach; in open. Briefly  
in flight. On fringes of  
flock of ~2500 Franklin's  
Gulls.

Much smaller than Fr.  
Gull. Body size ~ like  
Forster's Tern, but shorter  
in length (much shorter-  
tailed) & smaller-headed  
w/ a short neck. Bill  
very small, much smaller

than F. Tern or F. Gull's.  
Ting, sl. drooping, all  
black.

Overall bird is small,  
dark, sleeky, white  
except for:

- Blackish smudge @ eye  
& clear black tear drop on  
white face.
- Sooty black cap, hind  
neck, shoulder; bleeding  
down onto sides of  
upper breast.
- Back & wings sooted black  
w/ rows of vast white  
feather edges on scapula -

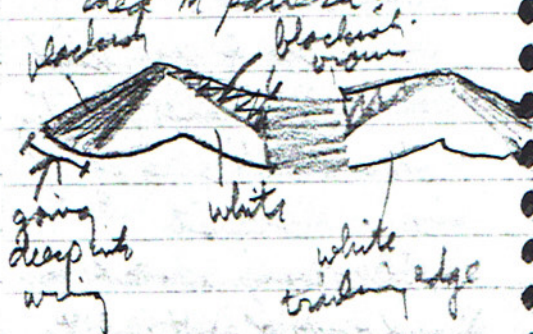


bars; giving strong  
scalloped look.

- tail short, white w/  
black tip.

- In flight, wing is very  
short, blunt

- Spread wing & mantle  
show a messy, ill-def-  
ined "H" pattern:



26 Oct 1997 (after belizant)  
Pueblo Res.

\* Red-n Grebe - 1 winter pl.

~300 yds - 1 mile. 12 noon  
for 20 min. Scope; low sun.

Med.-sized (larger than  
nearby H. Grebe) but a

that shape. Neck med-  
long. Long, big head.

Long, <sup>sl</sup>drooping bill.

All grey w/ white  
cheek.

Nov 1 1997

Red-n Grebe. 1

(as above)