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Accepted

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL

Larus marinus

Location: Pueblo Reservoir; Pueblo, Pueblo County, Colorado

Date: November 19, 1994 (but present through end of November)

Setting:

I discovered this third winter bird perched on a muddy spit in the back bay behind the south marina at Pueblo Res. It was perched with Herring, California and Ring-billed Gulls. It washed and drank in shallow water, preened on land and finally flew off towards the center of the lake. I watched it from 10:55-11:15 a.m. at 200-600 yards. It flew over me at less than 75 yards. Sun was good. I watched it with my binoculars and with my Kowa TSN4 20-60X scope.

Good sense says that this is the same bird that was at Pueblo Reservoir as a first winter bird (Mar.-Apr. 1993) and as a second winter bird (Oct.-Nov. 1993). It is much more distinctive now as a third winter bird.

Description:

The bird was gigantic. It seemed even larger than it had as a first and second year bird. It either grew, or the darker, adult-like mantle and wings made it appear even larger. Perched, it was at least 4" longer and 2" taller than a side-by-side Herring Gull. It was massive and easy to recognize, even without binoculars, because of its size and blackish color. It stood more erect and taller, on longer legs than other gulls. It had heavy, powerful flight.

The bill was huge, thicker and nastier-looking than the Herring Gull's. The bill was dull yellow with a black, sub-terminal smudge. The head was blocky and squared at the crown and nape. It had a long, gently sloping forehead that met the base of the upper mandible at a shallower angle than the Herring Gull. Together with the larger bill, this gave the bird a powerful, distinctive look. The legs were pale pink and long. The eye was yellow. The head and body were white, without black smudging. The mantle and wings were dark, slaty grey, just a shade or two removed from black. In the spread wing, the dark grey upper wing merged evenly with the black wing tip. There was little or no white in the wing tip. The underside of the flight feathers, especially the distal 2/3 of the wing, was dark grey. The rump was white. The tail was white with black mottling in the center of the spread tail feathers. The black in the tail and the black splotch on the bill indicate that the bird is third year, although the mantle and wings look adult-like.

Similar Species:

The large size, in direct comparison with Herring Gull rules out most gulls. This bird was longer and taller and much, much darker than the Herring Gull (also see other points in description above). California Gull is light, much smaller, and has a two-toned bill. Glaucous and Thayer's gulls would never have this dark a back, and Glaucous has a two-toned bill. Lesser Black-backed and Western gulls are smaller than, or the same size as, a Herring Gull and not as dark grey above. Slaty-backed Gull would be nearly this size, but lighter grey above, with a white border between the black wing tip and the grey distal wing, and with more smudging on the head and neck in winter plumage. The Yellow-footed Gull would have yellow legs.

Experience with Species:

I have seen many Great Black-backed, Western, Yellow-footed and Herring gulls. I have seen Great Black-backed Gulls four previous times in Colorado.

This report was prepared from notes made at the time of observation.

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blackish grey grades evenly
into the black wingtips.
Rump white. Tail white,
but with blackish smudge
in center of spread tail.

Trailing edge of secondaries
w/ broad white border.

Undersides of flight
feathers dark.

