

ACCEPT 7-0

## Rare Bird Report

**Species:** Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

**Place:** Union reservoir, Weld County

**Time:** March 8, 1995 5:15-6PM The bird was looked for but not seen in the early AM and from 5-6 in the afternoon of March 9, 1995.

**Reporter:** Bill Prather The bird was also seen by John Prather.

**Observation conditions:** When first sighted the bird was about 100 yards from me with the sun low in the sky mostly to my back. The bird flew out over the lake to as much as 1/2 mile away and then flew back and landed near the original spot. All aspects of the bird were observed with a 40 power scope.

**Plumage and Description:** The bird was a large gull in a flock of several hundred Ring-billed Gulls and about 30 Herring Gulls. It towered above the Ring-bills and was noticeably taller than all but one Herring Gull while it was standing on the ground or in the water, and when all the gulls suddenly took flight its massive body and wings were obvious and it was easy to spot it in the cloud of flying gulls-it appeared much bulkier than any other gull in the flock. Its appearance was that of a breeding adult except it had a indistinct dark smudge on the bill next to the red spot and a faint dark terminal band on the white tail. The mantle was a very dark slate-almost black and we could see no contrast with the dark of the wing tips. There was a large white "window" on the very tip of the wings that was mostly continuous over the entire tip. The underwings appeared mostly white. The head and tail were immaculate white except for the faint tail band. The bill was larger but not greatly different in shape than those of the Herring Gulls. It was yellow except for the red spot on the gonys and the dark smudge. The feet were pink but not as bright and more flesh-colored than those of the Herring Gulls. The eye appeared darker than that of the Herring Gulls-I could just make out yellow in the Herring Gulls eyes but not in those of the GBB.

**Separation of similar species:** The large size, black back and pink legs rule out all other species except Western and Slaty-backed Gulls. Both of these are not much bigger than Herring Gulls-especially so in flight. Both Western and Slaty-backed Gulls have more of a continuation of the white trailing edge on the wing tips and a small window on 1 feather rather than a larger window on parts of 2 feathers. Slaty-backed Gull also usually has a narrow whitish band between the mantle and the wing tip and Western Gull has dusky underwing tips. I observed neither of these field marks. Slaty-backed should have brighter pink legs-more like Herring Gulls. Western Gull should be lighter on the back with a definite contrast between the mantle color and wing tips.

Bill Prather