

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

Great B.B.G.
Accepted 7-0GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL
Larus marinusLocation: Pueblo Reservoir; Pueblo, Pueblo County, ColoradoDate: December 21, 1996 through the end of 1996

I observed this bird on three occasions in 1996 between December 21 and December 31. I watched it standing on tires at the north marina on all 3 occasions. It sometimes flew off the tires, circled and then landed on the water where it would float, paddle back to the tires and then climb back up. It stood adjacent to Ring-billed and Herring Gulls for direct comparison.

This individual has returned for the fifth year.

Description:

It is an adult winter bird. It was enormous, being a full head taller than Herring Gulls. It was broader-shouldered, thicker-necked and bigger-headed. It had thicker and longer dull pink legs.

The bill was proportionately short, thick and powerful; deeper and heavier than the Herring Gull bill. Bill color was yellow and there was a red spot with blackish edges on the gonys. The crown was long and broad, squared off at the front and back. The forehead was sloping, and met the bill at a low angle. The legs were dull pink. The eye color appeared brown, light yellowish-brown in some lights. The orbital ring was red. The head and body were white. There was fine streaking on the crown, nape and behind the eye. The mantle and wings were dark, slaty gray -- a shade lighter than black. The wing in flight showed a dark gray upper wing blending gradually into a black wing tip. There was little or no white in the wing tip -- just white tips to the primaries and a single white window on the outer primary. The underside of the flight feathers, especially the distal 2/3 of the wing, was dark. The rump and the tail were white.

Similar Species:

The large size, in direct comparison with Herring Gulls rules out most gulls. This bird was longer and taller and much, much darker than the Herring Gull. California Gull is light, much smaller, and has a two-toned bill. Glaucous and Thayer's gulls would be much lighter on the back. Lesser Black-backed and Western gulls are smaller than, or the same size as, a Herring Gull and not as dark gray above. Western Gull lacks streaking on the head and has a darker underwing. Slaty-backed Gull would be nearly this size, but lighter than this bird above, with a white border between the black wing tip and the gray 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 five previous times in Colorado.

This report was prepared from memory.

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