

Colorado Field Ornithologists Sight Record Form

(Please print or type. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.)

2004-6
1A

Each table cell will automatically enlarge as you type!

CBRC FILE #:		
RESULTS:		
Species: (Common Name) Great Black-backed Gull		(Scientific Name) Larus marinus
Date(s) of occurrence: Dec. 17, 2004		
Number of birds seen: one	Sex: ?	Plumage: 2nd basic
Exact location: northwest corner of Union Res.		
County: Weld	Nearest town: Longmont	Elevation: ~5000 feet
Length of observation: ~ 5 minutes		Time(s) of observation: 13:15
Other observers who saw the bird(s) with you: None		
Other observers who independently saw the bird(s):		
Light conditions (quality; direction relative to bird(s) and observers position: High clouds, light wind from the north. Bird was seen sitting on the water to the west and flying to the south of the Res.		
Optical equipment used: Lieca APO 32x		
Distance to bird(s) (estimated, unless otherwise noted): 50 to 60 yards.		
Was (were) bird(s) photographed? NO		If so, are you submitting photos?
Who took the photograph(s)?		
Describe the general and specific habitats in which the bird(s) occurred: Reservoir		
Describe the bird's (birds') behaviors, particularly behaviors that were used in supporting the identification, e.g., flying, feeding, habits: The bird was observed amongst a flock of Common Mergansers, probably harassing the Mergs for food. It was then seen flying to the south over the main part of the Res.		
<p>DESCRIPTION -- This is the most important part of this report. Include in these details the overall size and shape of the bird, how you placed the bird in the general group that you did, and give as many plumage details as possible, even including those that you feel might not have relevance to the specific identification. Features to include are the color(s) and/or patterns of the head, eyes, bill, back, folded wings, open wings, tail, chin, throat, breast, sides, flanks, belly, vent, and legs. Also, please include, where possible, shape of the whole bird, of the wings – folded or open, of the bill, and of the tail. Please fill out this portion even if photos are accompanying your report. We welcome attachments of additional sheets of description, drawings, field sketches, or copies of field notes. This large gull was notably bigger and bulkier than the nearby Common Mergansers, and much larger than the loosely associated R.B. Gulls. It had a large pale bill with a black, ill-defined sub terminal ring and a pale tip. The slope of the forehead was gradual giving the bird a large blocky look to the head. The head, breast, belly and flanks were white (the flanks had a bit of brown flecking). The mantle was a checker-board pattern of dark and light giving the back a gray appearance. The wings and tertials had the same pattern, but appeared more brownish. The primaries were darker than the rest of the body. In flight the rump was white and the tail had a dark terminal band with an indistinct border. The under side of the wing had coverts darker than the flight feathers. The legs were not observed.</p>		
Describe the bird's (birds') call(s) and/or song(s), if noted: None heard.		
SIMILAR SPECIES – This is another critical part of your report. Please discuss how you eliminated similar species from consideration: Given the age of this bird most other large gulls are ruled out by the whiteness of the body and the pattern of the mantle. Am. Herring Gull would have much more brownish wash to the body and the head. The mantle pattern is inconsistent with Western, Slatey-back, Lesser Black-backed or Yellow-footed Gulls.		
What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species? Very minimal		
List books, guides, recordings, or other sources consulted and how this influenced your identification (during and after observation):		
This report was made from (check one) ___ notes made during observation ___ notes made after observation <u>X</u> later from memory.		
Date and time of written report: Dec. 18, 2004		
Reporting observer: Ric Olson		Signature:
Reporting observer's address: 9450 N. Heather Dr. Castle Rock Co 80108		
City:	State:	Zip:

1A 2004-62

Colorado Field Ornithologists Sight Record Form

CBRC FILE #:		
RESULTS:		
Species: (Common Name) Great Black-backed Gull		(Scientific Name) <i>Larus marinus</i>
Date(s) of occurrence: 6 November 2004		
Number of birds seen: 1	Sex: Unknown	Plumage: 1 st or 2 nd winter (I'd guess 1 st winter but I wouldn't bet too much on this.)
Exact location: Southern portion of Terry Lake (Northern Ft. Collins)		
County: Larimer	Nearest town: Fort Collins	Elevation: About 5020 ft.
Length of observation: About 1/2 hour		Time(s) of observation: About 3:00 – 3:30 pm
Other observers who saw the bird(s) with you: Rachel Hopper (who first found the bird as it was flying out in the middle of the lake.)		
Other observers who independently saw the bird(s): None known		
Light conditions (quality; direction relative to bird(s) and observers position): It was mostly sunny, with the bird to the west or northwest of us. The sun was getting low to the west-southwest and the air was a little unstable, leaving viewing generally fair.		
Optical equipment used: Leica APO-Televid 62 + 16-48 zoom		
Distance to bird(s) (estimated, unless otherwise noted): At closest (flying) about 300 meters. Standing on the shore and swimming, about 800 meters.		
Was (Were) bird(s) photographed? No		If so, are you submitting photos? N/A
Describe the general and specific habitats in which the bird(s) occurred: A fairly large suburban water storage reservoir.		
<p>Describe the bird's (birds') behaviors, particularly behaviors that were used in supporting the identification, e.g., flying, feeding, habits: The bird was first seen flying north with a fairly large fish in its bill. Soon another gull fell in behind, keeping pace with the bird. After a turn or two I identified the chasing gull as an adult Herring Gull (HERG) (pink legs, pale gray mantle, wingtip pattern, no dark in bill, etc.) The Great Black-backed Gull (GBBG) was significantly larger than the pursuing HERG, with slower, more ponderous wingbeats. It basically just ignored the HERG, turning to the western shore where it landed in shallow water to eat the fish. Other HERGs gathered to wait for scraps, but none were successful in stealing any food (they didn't really even try- perhaps intimidated by the size of the GBBG.) The GBBG looked substantially bigger than the HERGs when sitting on the water as well. After checking our references we lost the bird for a while, but re-found it preening on the shore a bit to the south. Here it was in the company of three adult HERGs, and when they all straightened up to look around the GBBG was a full head taller than the HERGs as well as longer and more robust looking- clearly a giant among big gulls.</p>		
<p>DESCRIPTION – As mentioned above, a very large gull with a pale face and breast contrasting with an overall dark back. Bill details were hard to see convincingly but it appeared to be quite robust and dark overall. In some light it appeared possible that the bill was pale based, but we couldn't determine this for sure. The face was nearly white, with a small looking dark eye (again, hard to see details at the distance we were at.) The breast and sides also appeared to be mostly white, with minimal brown streaking. The bird was too far away and the air quality too poor to clearly see details of the upperparts such as pale checkering, but overall the mantle and wing surfaces appeared dark gray except for the projecting primaries, which looked basically black. I think the coloring of the upperparts essentially was the "average" of the dark centers and light edges of these feathers- a similar effect can be seen by blurring one's eyes and looking at a field guide illustration from arm's length or farther. The dark gray of the upperparts was much darker than that of nearby Herring Gulls (pale gray) and California Gulls (darker gray but not nearly as dark appearing as the GBBG), but not nearly as inky as a 3rd winter or adult GBBG. I didn't detect any brown tones in the mantle or wing coverts, secondaries, or tertials. A narrow white tertial crescent was visible on the standing bird. The primary projection didn't appear especially long on the standing bird, contributing to the overall impression of stoutness. The legs were grayish-pink. In flight, the bird showed a lot of white on the rump, with a dark, almost black-appearing terminal tail band. The head also looked quite white in flight. The upper wing surfaces looked dark gray overall, with wide nearly black wingtips and a crisp, thin white trailing edge. I didn't see any white in the wingtips from above or from below. I didn't see the undersides of the wings as well as the upper surfaces, but again my impression was of mostly dark gray wings with darker (almost black) wing tips and a crisp, thin white trailing edge.</p>		
Describe the bird's (birds') call(s) and/or song(s), if noted: Not heard.		

SIMILAR SPECIES – The size of the bird (significantly larger than adjacent Herring Gulls) rules out most other gull species. Besides the clear difference in size, 1st winter Herring Gull or Thayer's Gull, although pink-legged, can be ruled out by the lack of brown tones, the pale face, and extensive white rump. 2nd winter HERG can be ruled out by the pale face, breast, and sides, as well as a lack of pale gray in the inner primaries. 1st winter Kelp Gulls (KEGU) may have grayish-pink legs, but wouldn't be substantially larger than HERG and wouldn't show as dramatically contrasting faces and underparts compared to the upper parts. Also, they appear to have brown tones in their upperparts. 2nd winter KEGUs have contrasting dark gray and brown feather tracts on their upper parts and wings. Although young California Gulls may have pink legs, this bird was much too big, lacked the brown tones, and was way too short-winged to consider this species. While Glaucous and Glaucous-winged gulls are quite large and pink-legged, this bird was way too dark overall and the dark primary tips and terminal tail band completely rule these two out. 1st winter Slaty-backed Gulls are much more brown than this bird, and don't have extensive enough dark primary tips or the white rump. Similarly, 1st winter Western Gull wouldn't show the white rump or pale face, and is brown overall. 1st winter Yellow-footed Gull has a grayish mantle that contrasts with brownish-gray coverts, which doesn't match the pattern of this bird. Lesser Black-backed Gull is much too small to consider in this case, in addition to having contrastingly darker tertials, being more brown overall, and long-winged.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species? I saw several young GBBGs in North Carolina this past June, and saw and photographed two 1st winter GBBGs standing and flying with HERGs in Duluth last October.

List books, guides, recordings, or other sources consulted and how these influenced your identification (during and after observation): The Sibley Guide to Birds and Gulls of North America, Europe, and Asia (Rachel's copy consulted during observation).

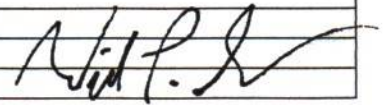
This report was made from: Notes made during and after the observation.

Date and time of written report: 10 November 2004

Reporting observer: William P Schmoker

Signature:

Reporting observer's address: 3381 Larkspur Dr. Longmont, CO 80503 email: bill@schmoker.org



Along with Tony Leukering, Jim Schmoker and Nancy Gobris, I observed a Basic II Great Black-backed Gull on 14 November, 2004 at Long Pond in Fort Collins. This is almost certainly the same bird that Rachel Hopper and I found on 6 November, 2004 on nearby Terry Lake. I submitted a report on that bird, stating that I thought the age was 1st or 2nd Winter. The main problems there were the long viewing distance and bad air we were dealing with.

On 14 November we were able to see the bird at closer range and I was able to photograph the bird this time. With the better observation conditions I'm convinced that the bird is in Basic II plumage. In particular, there is a distinctive pink coloration in the basal half of the bill and a small but crisp white tip on the bill. The upper part coloration (mostly dark brownish-gray with paler gray in the mantle) with pale marbling also looks good for a Basic II bird. A basic III or adult GBBG should have yellow in the bill, should have lost the marbling in the upper parts, and should have white mirrors in the primaries. Other salient features that identify this bird as a Great Black-backed Gull and rule out other species are found in my original report.

-Bill Schmoker

Photos 14 November 2004, Long Pond, Ft. Collins.

