

APPENDIX II

23-81-7

A

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD SIGHTINGS
FOR
THE COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS' RECORDS

Species: Mew Gull ; Larus canus
(Vernacular name) (Scientific name)

If you watch birds solely for your own enjoyment, a written description of your observations is unnecessary. But, if you have seen something unusual, and would like to share this with others, a written description is essential. Compilers of regional bird lists must insist that their records be scientifically sound; future bird students -- those studying occurrences 50 years from now -- must have a written record on which to depend. By providing the verifying written description, you are employing a basic rule of the scientific method.

We recognize that experienced field observers can provide important and reliable records, if supported by an adequate verifying description. Thus this request is an effort to perpetuate your record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for examination by others in the future. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation, irrespective of the observer.

Dates (s): 28 April 1981 Time Bird Seen: 5:20 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Locality: Union Reservoir, Weld County, Colorado

Longmont, Colorado (Boulder County)

Nearest town, county and state:

Optical equipment: 8.5 x 44 Swift Audubon binoculars, 20X wide angle lens on a Bushnell Spacemaster II scope

If photographed, please enclose copy. Equipment used: no photo as of 29 April

Number of birds seen: 1 Sex: ? Plumage: (= 2nd summer) (adult an

Light conditions: cloudy for 15 minutes in middle. Sun was from the west south west of the bird, observers to north of bird

Distance from bird, and how measured: 25 - 30 meters (guesstimated)

Describe the bird's overall behavior: Bird first seen sitting among low weedy vegetation at reservoir's edge near the northwest corner. Later it walked east and west, but never more than 10 meters from the original spot. Never foraged. No displays noted. Bird flew se across lake. Wingbeats shallower than Ring-billed Gulls'. No vocalizations.

Describe the habitat in which you observed the bird: Union Reservoir is a large rural reservoir used primarily for agriculture and recreation. The northeast corner invariably has the most extensive mudflats without cattails on the lake. The bird walked along the edge of the sparsely vegetated mud area along lake.

Other observers who independently identified this bird (Please list name and address):
Timms Fowler, 1805 Shields, #E7, Ft. Collins, Colo. 80526 221-2318

Mike Middleton

449-9233

The Halseys,

530-1628

Description of the Bird

Bill and Soft Parts

Bill size was shorter than any Ring-billed Gull's bill that I've seen, both in terms of absolute size and size relative to the head. Length of exposed culmen was approximately 1/2 the length of the head (see drawing). Bill shape not strongly hooked, rather it was gently curved towards the tip. Gonydeal angle smoother than nearby Ring-bill's. Because of its stubbiness, the bill's depth from culmen to gonys did not seem particularly shallow. However, it was no deeper than that of the nearby Ring-bill. Bill color straw yellow basal 2/3 (Fowler: greenish straw), black distal 1/3, tip yellow, but this was so restricted that it was visible only in the best light through a scope. Orbita/ring red. This character was evident to me in all lights and poses, but never evident to Fowler, Halsey, or Middleton. Iris thoroughly dark, no pale flecking evident. (Fowler and Halsey later said they saw "a very deep red iris," but still could not acknowledge the presence of an eyering.) Position of eye relative to mouth corner In this bird the eye was immediately posterior to a vertical line marking the mouth corner. (See drawing and Fowler's comments on this observation.) In the Ring-bill, the eye was set further behind this line. Leg length proportionately longer than in Ring-bill to the extent that when both birds stood together their bellies were approximately even. The left leg was injured and the bird limped. Leg color greenish-yellow. Mouth lining never revealed. That of the Ring-bill was orange-red.

Size and Shape

/shorter

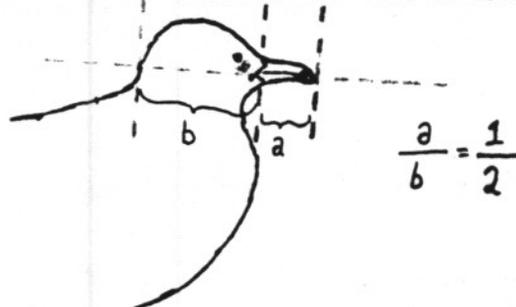
Body size 10 - 15 % smaller than adjacent Ring-billed Gull. It was almost twice as tall as nearby Forster's Terns. Head shape smaller, nicely rounded compared to that of Ring-billed, which showed slightly longer (hence, flatter) crown. Neck always appeared shorter than that of Ring-billed.

Plumage

Head, neck, breast, belly, throat pure white with 2 exceptions: 1) dark smudge beneath eye above bill base and, 2) upper breast, sides of neck showed a few pale-brown smudges (not streaks) left from previous winter and/or subadult feather generation. Mantle ever so slightly darker gray than the nearby Ring-bill's. This character was seen and affirmed by all observers. The colors were compared in excellent light with the birds facing both in the same direction. Compared to adjacent Forster's Terns, the mantle colors were very similar. The black on the wings was restricted to the outer primaries; no black was present on any of the secondaries.

The extent of the white "mirrors" on the primaries was not noticed. Tail appeared all white in flight. Upper wing coverts (part of the mantle) showed no mottling, all gray. Tertial crescents are the white, half-moon-shaped terminal fringes on the tertial feathers, although usually these crescents are visible only on the longest tertial. In this bird there appeared a slight contrast between the gray inner feather and its pale fringe, but it was also evident that the tertials were abraded. Hence, it is difficult to assess this character. Underwings never observed.

This drawing, based on a drawing made in the field, shows the size of the bill relative to the head, the position of the black on the lower and upper mandibles, the shape of the head, and the position of the eye relative to the corner of the mouth.



This shows the approximate position of the upper breast and side of neck smudges, as well as their shape.



Prior experience with this and similar species:

I've observed Mew and Ring-billed Gulls together in California during February, 1980. I've seen many Ring-bills of all age categories in Colorado. On 7 March 1980 I observed a probable sub-adult Mew Gull in Colorado (report on file with the CFO Records Committee). In the past year I've studied approximately 40-50 museum specimens of Mew Gulls in order to familiarize myself with their morphology and plumages.

This report was made from notes written directly from the period of observation.

Discussion

There can be little doubt that the bird was either a Ring-billed or Mew Gull. In attempting to determine the bird's identity one must first establish the age of the bird and, secondly, the extent of feather wear. This latter point is crucial because a character which might be of use soon after a fresh set of feathers is acquired may resemble that of a similar species after much abrasion and loss of the feather edge has occurred. Such is the case with the bird in question. I will discuss this in further detail later in the report.

Three plumage details suggest that the bird had attained or was very nearly in full definitive adult plumage. 1) the mantle was entirely gray and the secondary coverts lacked any of the mottling suggesting the presence of retained sub-adult feathers. 2) The black of the wing-tip was restricted to the primaries; it did not extend to the primary coverts. 3) The tail was completely white. The presence of black on the bill cannot be used as a reliable age character because both the Mew and Ring-billed Gulls may show black on the bill in early adult and sub-adult stages (see photo and discussion in Grant, 1979, p. 151). Most probably the bird was in the process of acquiring the Alternate III (= 3rd summer) plumage although, it's possible that the bird could have ^{been} approaching an advanced Alternate II (= 2nd summer) plumage.

The age of a feather and its relative wear must be taken into consideration when evaluating plumage characters involving lighter-colored parts of the feather. Grant (1979, pp. 146, 151) discusses the presence of broad tertial crescents. It is important to remember that the tertials of this bird are no less than 6 months old and possibly as much as 8 months old. In this time one can expect substantial reduction of the pale areas of feathers as a result of exposure to sun, weather, and physical abrasion. If a bird of this feather-age shows tertial crescents then there lies support for the bird being a Mew Gull. If, however, the bird shows worn edges and lacks the tertial crescents, this cannot be construed as evidence for Ring-billed Gull. Because this bird lacked tertial crescents and tertial abrasion was noted, this character must be discarded. Similar logic may be applied to the assessment of the size of the white mirrors on the two outer primaries, which were not observed. A lack of long mirrors on the two outer primaries could not have been construed as evidence supporting Ring-billed Gull.

The dark eye color and the presence of the heavy bill band suggests an apparent contradiction of characters. If the bird was a Ring-billed Gull, the pale eye should have begun to show by the 2nd summer (Grant, 1979, p. 166). If the bird was a Mew Gull, why did it show such a dark heavy bill band at such an advanced age? In trying to balance these two characters, it is my feeling that greater variability with respect to age can be expected in the

Discussion (continued)

color and size of the bill band than in the color of the eye. That the orbital ring had attained its breeding condition (red) lends support to the notion that the eye also had reached its final adult color.

The following list summarizes the evidence in the order of their importance as I view them. The balance of evidence favors the recommended identification as Mew Gull.

<u>Characters suggesting Mew Gull</u>	<u>Characters suggesting Ring-billed</u>		
mantle color	darker gray	bill band	heavy, dark
eye color	dark	leg length	long
orbital ring	red	tertial crescents	?
bill size	small	primary mirrors	?
head size, shape	small, round		
body size	small		
leg color	greenish-yellow		
neck smudges	pale brown		
primary mirrors	?		
tertial crescents	?		

References and Photograph Sources Used in Discussion

- Dwight, J., 1925. The Gulls (Laridae) of the World: their Plumages, Moults, Variations, Relationships and Distribution. Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist. 52:63-401.
- Grant, P.J., 1979. Field Identification of West Palearctic Gulls, part 2. British Birds 72: 142-182.
- Lauro, A.J. and B.J. Spencer, 1980. A method for separating juvenal and first-winter Ring-billed Gulls (Larus delawarensis) and Common Gulls (Larus canus). American Birds 34:111-117.
- Robbins, C.S., Brunn, B., and Zim, H.S., 1966. A guide to Field Identification: Birds of North America, Western Publishing Co., Inc., N.Y.
- Terres, J.K., 1980. The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., N.Y.
- Udvardy, M.F., 1977. The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds, Western Region. Alfred A. Knopf, N.Y.

Mark Holmgren
2355 Panorama Avenue
Boulder, Colorado 80302
303 449-6892

Mark Holmgren
4 May 1981

APPENDIX II

23-81-7 Timms R. Forder

A

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD SIGHTINGS
FOR
THE COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS' RECORDS

1805 S. Shields, Apt. H-7

Ft. Collins, CO 80526

221-2318

page 1 of 4

Species: Mew Gull ; Larus canus
(Vernacular name) (Scientific name)

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Dates (s): 28 April 1981 Time Bird Seen: 1720 to 1830Locality: Union Res., Weld County, Colorado
Longmont, Colorado
Nearest town, county and state:Optical equipment: Bushnell Custom 10x50 and a 20x Bushnell Spacemaster II Scope
If photographed, please enclose copy. Equipment used: None taken.Number of birds seen: 1 Sex: 2 Plumage: Almost Adult (Alt. II or III)Light conditions: Variable: excellent direct light from WSW (observers north of bird) 60% of time observed; 40% fair indirect light due to cloud cover.Distance from bird, and how measured: 25-30 meters (visual estimate)

Describe the bird's overall behavior:

Initially the bird sat on the shoreline at the reservoir's north end; then later stood, walked around and finally flew across the lake (SE).

Describe the habitat in which you observed the bird:

Muddy-sandy shoreline with sparse vegetation and a dirt road 25-30 meters away.
No particular plant species were noted.

Other observers who independently identified this bird (Please list name and address):

Mark H. Halverson 2355 Panorama Ave. Boulder, CO 80302 449-6892Mike Middleton 449-9237The Halsos 530-1628

28 April 1981

T.R. Funder

Description of the birdInitial Observations:

- ① The gull's bill was stout and appeared short.
- ② Its head was very round. In profile it formed a smooth, rounded line from the base of its bill over the crown and down to the neck.
- ③ Left eye was dark.
- ④ Plumage appeared to be that of an adult.
- ⑤ Its bill had a black tip rather than a ring.

Detailed Observations:

Note: An adult Ring-billed Gull happened to land next to the suspected Mew Gull and direct comparisons were possible. The gulls were usually within 1 meter of each other, often within 0.5 meters. These gulls were observed for 40% (28 minutes) of the total observation time.

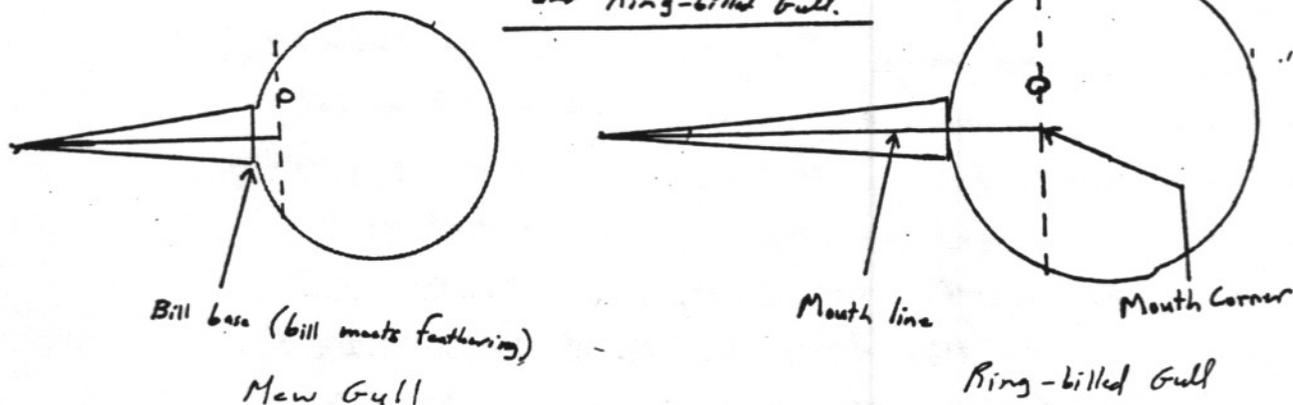
Size:

It was obvious the Mew Gull was significantly smaller (approx. 10-15%) than the Ring-billed Gull, with a shorter neck and rounded, smaller head. The Ring-billed Gull looked "heady" i.e. head size exaggerated relative to the Mew Gull. Similar to ~~the~~ ^{the} difference in Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle head sizes.

Bill:

The Mew Gull's bill length was $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ times its head length viewed in profile. Also its eye position relative to the bill's base and mouth corner was very different from that of the Ring-billed Gull. The Mew Gull's eye was very close to the bill base and the mouth corner extended only to the vertical eye line. (See diagram). However in the contrasting Ring-billed Gull, its eye was set relatively far back (posteriorly) to the bill base, and the mouth corner extended to at least the middle of the eye. Overall the length of the "mouth line" (corner of mouth to tip of bill) was much greater in the Ring-billed Gull. (See diagram.)

Contrasting Length of Mouth Line and Position of Eye, Bill Base, and Mouth Corner in Mew Gull and Ring-billed Gull.



Bill base (bill meets feathering)

Mew Gull

Mouth line

Mouth Corner

Ring-billed Gull

Note: diagram is only schematic to illustrate points stated.

It is not drawn to show bill length relation to head size.

Finally the bill color was greenish-straw with the ^{this} distal $\frac{1}{4}$ black. The extreme tip was yellow but was barely visible.

Eye:

I observed the eyes to be very dark, however on several occasions under just the right light a distinct, very dark red, amber color could be seen. Middleton noted this also but it was not evident to Holmgren at anytime. Finally I could not see the red-eyering observed by Holmgren.

Plumage:

The Mew Gull's head, neck, belly were clean, white with the throat and upper breasts showing small dark smudges. Smudges were also seen below each eye. Its mantle was slightly darker gray than the Ring-billed Gull.

No vocalization were heard.

Discussion:

I have seen many Ring-billed Gulls in Colorado and have never seen a Mew Gull. Clearly I am not a gull expert, but I feel my observations on morphology, etc. are correct and accurately reflect the bird in the field. This report and accompanying diagram were prepared from notes taken during the period of observation.

The discussion of similar species and their differentiation I defer to Holmgren. My report is to establish and corroborate what the bird looked like; I can not add anything to Holmgren's analysis.

APPENDIX II

23-81-8

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A

Species: MEW GULL ; LARUS CANUS
(Vernacular name) (Scientific name)

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Date(s): APRIL 28, 1981 Time Bird Seen: 6:20 pm to 6:40 pmLocality: NW CORNER OF UNION RESERVOIR, E OF LONGMONT,
WELD CO., COLORADO
Nearest town, county and state:Optical equipment: BUSHNELL 7x35 BINS, MARK HOLMENE'S SPOTTING
SCOPE

If photographed, please enclose copy. Equipment used: _____

Number of birds seen: 1 Sex: ? Plumage: ADULTLight conditions: PARTLY CLOUDY - GOOD LIGHTDistance from bird, and how measured: ESTIMATED 200'Describe the bird's overall behavior: BIRD VERY QUIET. ~~STANDING~~ WITH
AN OCCASIONAL SHIFT TO A DIFFERENT POSITION, OR A SHORT WALK
TO RESUME A MOTIONLESS STANDING. LIMPED ON 1 LEG.

Describe the habitat in which you observed the bird:

EDGE OF RESERVOIR - ON A NARROW SANDY BEACH WITH LOW
VEGETATION.

Other observers who independently identified this bird (Please list name and address):

MARK HOLMENE

APPENDIX II Continued

Describe in great detail the bird which you saw. Emphasize particularly the field marks used to identify the bird, but include a complete description of the bird. Include size, overall shape, plumage and color pattern; details on shape or size of bill, wings, and tail. (Reference to its resemblance to field guide descriptions is not enough). Describe what you actually saw in the field.

SOON AFTER I ARRIVED, A RING-BILLED GULL (ADULT) FLEW IN AND LANDED WITHIN 5' OF THE "MEW," ALLOWING CLOSE COMPARISON. GENERAL OVERALL ~~GENERAL~~ APPEARANCE OF MEW WAS OF SMALL RING-BILLED ADULT. PLUMAGE WAS ADULT PLUMAGE - WHITE HEAD, GREY MANTLE - EXCEPT BILL, WHICH HAD A DARK TIP ON NEAR TIP, I COULDN'T TELL IF IT WAS BLACK ALL THE WAY OUT TO END. I COULD SEE YELLOW TIP OF RING-BILLED, SO IF MEW HAD YELLOW TIP IT WAS VERY SMALL. BIRD WAS NOTICEABLY SMALLER, MORE DELICATE-LOOKING THAN RING-BILLED. BILL WAS SLIGHTLY SMALLER AND LESS ROBUST AS WELL. HOOK OF VENTRAL SURFACE NOT AS PRONOUNCED AS IN RING-BILLED. SAME COLOR AS RING-BILLED'S - YELLOW IN BILL. DESCRIBE THE BIRD'S CALLS OR SOUNDS, IF HEARD; INCLUDING METHOD OF DELIVERY-- SMALLER, I.E., FROM PERCH, IN FLIGHT, ETC.:

NOT HEARD

List similar species and how you eliminated them: HEAD VERY WHITE, WITH DARKER PATCH BETWEEN EYE AND BILL. SMALLER HEADED THAN RING-BILLED, WITH A LOWER PROFILE, NOT AS RECT OR SHORTER NECK - AS IF THE RING-BILLED'S HEAD WAS FLATTENED. EYE COLOR DARK (SPECIFIC COLOR NOT SEEN) EYE MORE FLATTENED (● INSTEAD OF ● IN RING-BILLED) AND CLOSER TO BILL. MANTLE VERY SLIGHTLY DARKER GREY, AND PURE GREY, WHEREAS RING-BILLED HAD MORE BROWNISH-GREY. *

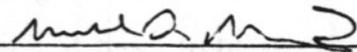
Prior experience with this and similar species:

NEVER SEEN THIS SPECIES, HAVE SEEN MANY RING-BILLED GULLS.

This report was written from notes made during _____ after X observation; from memory _____.

Name (print) : MICHAEL D. MIDDLETON

Mailing address: 3185 19TH ST., BOULDER, CO. 80302

Signature: 

Return Form To:

CFO Records Committee
c/o Curator - Dept. of Zoological Collections
Denver Museum of Natural History
City Park
Denver, CO 80205

* LEGS MORE GREENISH-YELLOW THAN YELLOW LEGS OF RING-BILLED. ONLY WHITE EDGE OF TAIL SEEN UNDER FOLDED WINGS. LEGS LONGER THAN RING-BILLED.