

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

ACCEPT 6-1

MEW GULLLarus canus (brachyrhynchus)Location: Pueblo Reservoir, Pueblo; Pueblo County, ColoradoDate: November 19, 1994; December 29, 1994; January 1, 1995Setting:

I found the bird while observing many gulls floating on Pueblo Reservoir. I was overlooking the water from an elevated bluff about 1/4 mile west of the north shore marina. Although there were as many as 4000 Ring-billed Gulls on the reservoir, this bird was fairly easy to see in a small group of gulls immediately below us. It spent most of the time floating in close company with Ring-billed and Bonaparte's gulls, affording close comparisons. Brandon Percival also saw the bird and we watched it for about an hour, between 12:30-1:00 p.m. Light was good. There was little or no wind and our distance to the bird was about 200-400 yards. I watched the bird through a Kowa TSN4 20-60X scope. We had no trouble seeing the bird's features at the distance and conditions under which we observed it. On January 1, 1995 I watched this bird perched with about 100 Ring-billed Gulls. I scoped it at about 50 yards distance and was able to see every feature extremely well.

Like the other gulls it spent most of its time floating quietly. But when a school of shad came to the surface nearby it joined the feeding frenzy and became lost in the crowd. It re-appeared shortly thereafter and continued its quiet floating.

Description:

The bird was a winter adult. In direct, side-by-side comparison with Ring-billed Gulls, this bird was clearly smaller. It was barely shorter in length and its head was about an inch shorter off the water than the Ring-billed. Its head was smaller and rounder and more delicate. The crown was rounded, not flattened like a Ring-billed Gull. The forehead met the base of the upper mandible in a steeper angle than that of the Ring-billed Gull. The bill was very dramatically shorter and thinner—really tiny compared to the Ring-billed Gull but much larger than nearby Bonaparte's Gulls. The bill was bright yellow, with no "ring". Its wings were slightly longer than the Ring-billed Gulls. The smaller, rounder head and its overall more attenuated shape, with the plain yellow bill reminded me of an adult kittiwake as much as a Ring-billed Gull. The bird had a white head, white underparts and white tail. The back was plain, medium grey. This grey was slightly darker than the Ring-billed Gull in direct comparison, but did not seem to be as dark as a California Gull (although one was not nearby to compare to). The sides of the breast, head and neck were more heavily marked with dusky smudges and speckles than the winter Ring-billed Gull. I could not tell the color of the eye for sure, but at that distance all gull eyes looked dark. In flight the upper wing was the same medium grey as the mantle. The wing tips were marked with black and white.

On January 1, 1995 I saw that the iris brown at a distance, but dull yellowish-brown at close range. At this time I also noticed that it had a proportionately longer folded wing (when measured against the tail) than the Ring-billed Gull. It clearly had more white windows in the black wing tip also. At very close range, through my scope, the bill looked greenish-yellow at the base and bright yellow at the tip, with an indistinct greyish border between the two colors.

Similar Species:

The size (Ring-billed Gull or smaller) rule out all larger Larus sp. The direct comparison in size, shape, colors and structural characters of this individual made differentiation from winter adult Ring-billed Gull (see description) fairly straight forward. The black-headed gulls have black or red legs, a different upper wing pattern and white rumps and banded tails. Adult winter Black-legged Kittiwake would lack speckling on the neck and breast; would have a grey and black smudged nape; and would lack white in the wing tip.

Experience with Species:

I have seen most Larus gulls in north America. I have seen many Mew Gulls (brachyrhynchus) on the west coast, including in March of 1992 in Seattle, Washington. I saw single Mew Gulls in Pueblo in March and September 1990, including a juvenile, and an adult winter bird at Pueblo Res. in Nov-Dec 1992.

This report is prepared from notes made during and after observation.

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