

MEW GULL - Larus canus

23-96-25

red
11-25-96

Mew Gull 7-0

DATE: November 2, 1996.

LOCATION: Cherry Creek Reservoir State Park, Arapahoe County, Colorado.

NUMBER OF BIRDS SEEN: One.

PLUMAGE AND SEX: Adult in winter plumage. Sex unknown.

TIME OF OBSERVATION: 0930-1015 and 1330-1400 MST.

WEATHER CONDITIONS: Clear sky; Wind, south at 5-10 MPH; Temperature, 50-60 F.

HABITAT: Fresh-water reservoir on the eastern high plains along the "Front Range" of the Rocky Mountains (observed mostly on and around a mudflat).

OPTICAL EQUIPMENT: 9.5X44 Celestron Binoculars; 15X-60X B/L Zoom Telescope.

DISTANCE FROM BIRD AND HOW MEASURED: 150'-250'; estimated.

BIRD/SUN ORIENTATION: Bright sunlight directly upon the bird coming from behind the observers' backs. There were no shimmering light waves.

OTHER OBSERVERS WHO INDEPENDENTLY IDENTIFIED THE BIRD:

Joe Roller, M.D. (who first found the bird) - 13040 West 16th Drive, Golden, Colorado 80401.

Bob Righter - 2358 South Fillmore Street, Denver, Colorado 80210.

BEHAVIOR AND DEMEANOR: First discovered sitting on a mudflat in close company with s 40 or so other species of gulls (RING-BILLED GULL, - Larus delawarensis and CALIFORNIA GULL, - Larus californicus). The group of gulls was packed in quite tightly and our first views of the bird in question were mostly of the head as it was nearly hidden behind other gulls. As the birds milled around each other, the Mew Gull came into better view. For the most part it was content to bury its head under its wing only once in a while raising its head to peer about. With the sudden appearance of a NORTH ERN HARRIER - Circus cyaneus) gliding in over the mudflat, the whole flock of gulls took flight in wild disarray. With the abrupt departure of the gulls caused by the Harrier, we lost sight of the Mew Gull and, thus, did not observe its manner of flight. The gulls slowly returned one by one and we were able to relocate the Mew Gull, this time swimming in the water in clear view just off of the mudflat. It proceeded to swim slowly back to the shore where it waded in and joined the host of other gulls. We continued watching and taking notes as the bird did some preening.

We returned to the mudflat shortly after noon and refound the Mew Gull. This time it was standing by itself away from the rest of the gulls providing excellent looks. As we watched it busily went about preening itself, often dropping and extending its wings in the process exposing the large white "mirrors" in the black primaries.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION: A medium-sized gull, slightly smaller than nearby L. delawarensis and noticeably smaller than nearby L. californicus. The small, thin, yellow bill and rounded head were the field marks which first drew our attention.

HEAD (CROWN, NAPE, FACE & NECK): White with brown flecking.

EYES: Dark.

UPPER AND LOWER MANDIBLES: Yellow and unmarked; very thin and short.

LEGS AND FEET: Yellowish-green, medium length (slightly shorter than L. delawarensi)

UPPERPARTS: Uniformly dark gray mantle, noticeably darker than L. delawarensis.

RUMP AND UPPER TAIL COVERTS: White.

UNDERPARTS: White.

RETRICES: White. Square tail of medium length.

WINGS: Long, pointed and extending well beyond the tail when at rest. Upperwings were dark gray with black tipped primaries. Large, white mirrors in primaries (easily seen when bird extended its wing during preening activity). Large white tertials noted when bird was sitting. Underwings not readily seen since we did not observe the bird in the air.

VOCALIZATION: None heard.

ELIMINATION OF SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES (winter adults in each case):

RING-BILLED GULL (Larus delawarensis): Slightly larger in typical individuals. Long broader, yellow bill with black sub-terminal ring. Yellow eye. Mantle, pale gray. Fewer and smaller white mirrors on the upper primaries. There were a number of the gulls close by providing good comparisons.

HERRING GULL (Larus argentatus): Considerably larger, more robust. Large, thick, yellow bill with red spot on lower mandible at the tip. Pink legs. Yellow eye.

CALIFORNIA GULL (Larus californicus): Somewhat larger with darker gray mantle. Long narrow, yellow bill with red and black spots near the tip. Green legs. There were a number of these gulls in close proximity providing good comparisons.

THAYER'S GULL (Larus thayeri): Larger, nearly the size of L. argentatus. Large, thick yellow bill with red spot on lower mandible near the tip. Bright pink legs.

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (Rissa tridactyla): Roughly the same size. Winter adult has smudgy nape mark. Black legs.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES (winter adults only):

MEW GULL: Seen literally thousands in Alaska during spring and summer trips there in 1985, 1988, 1992 & 1993. Also seen in late summer in the harbor at Bergen, Norway in 1989. Seen but once (winter adult) in Colorado, December 2, 1984 at the very same mudflat at Cherry Creek Reservoir.

RING-BILLED GULL: Seen in vast numbers all over North America during the past 60 years.

HERRING GULL: Seen all over North America plus Scandinavia (1989), Great Britain (1990) and Spain and Portugal (1994) over the past 60 years.

CALIFORNIA GULL: Seen throughout the western United States since 1960.

THAYER'S GULL: Most Colorado individuals that I have seen (since 1973) have been immatures particularly first-winter birds. Occasionally I have come across a winter adult usually in the Denver area. Adults also seen at Churchill, Manitoba in 1984 in breeding plumage.

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE: I have seen a very few winter adults in Colorado. Seen hundreds off Provincetown, Cape Cod, Massachusetts in January 1995 and 1996 as well as off of eastern Long Island, New York from 1960 through the 1990s during visits there

THIS REPORT WAS WRITTEN BASED UPON NOTES MADE AT THE TIME OF OBSERVATION AS WELL AS AFTERWARDS.

BOOKS, ILLUSTRATIONS AND ADVICE CONSULTED THAT INFLUENCED THIS REPORT:

Gooders. John. 1990. Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe. Kingfisher Book

Grant, Peter J. 1986. Gulls, A Guide to Identification. Buteo Books.

Field Guide to the Birds of North America. 1987. National Geographic Society.

Personal Files of Field Notes.

Considerable discussions at the time of observations with Joe Roller and Bob Righter.

OBSERVER MAKING THIS REPORT: Jack Reddall - 4450 South Alton Street, Greenwood Village Colorado 80111-1205.

Jack Reddall

DATE: November 7, 1996