

COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULL - Larus ridibundus

DATES: October 8 and 9, 1988.

LOCATION: Cherry Creek Reservoir SRA, Arapahoe County, Colorado.

NUMBER OF BIRDS SEEN: One.

AGE AND SEX: Adult in winter (basic) plumage.

TIME OF OBSERVATION: 4:15 P.M. - 5:00 P.M.-MDT on October 8; 8:00 A.M. - 8:45 A.M.-MDT on October 9.

WEATHER CONDITIONS: (10-8) Clear sky; Wind, NW 15-25 MPH; Temperature 65° (10-9) Overcast sky; Wind, calm; Temperature 45° F.

HABITAT: Fresh water reservoir on the plains along the front range of the Rocky Mountains.

OPTICAL EQUIPMENT: 10X50 Bushnell Binoculars; 15X-60X B/L Zoom telescope.

OTHER OBSERVERS:

Wade Leitner - 1108 Bighorn, Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

Steve Stachowiak - 2263 S. Quentin Way #F201, Aurora, Colorado 80014
(plus several others who saw this bird on the morning of October 9)

DISTANCE FROM BIRD: (10-8) 50 yards at its closest point when the bird was first found sitting on a mud flat up to one-half mile when it flew out over the reservoir. (10-9) relocated approximately 100 yards to 300 yards out on the reservoir off the swim beach. All distances estimated.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF BIRD: A relatively small gull when compared to the number of Ring-billed Gulls (Larus delawarensis) and California Gulls (Lar californicus) it was sitting with on the mud flat. It was roughly the same size and bulk as several nearby Franklin's Gull (Larus pipixcan).

HEAD AND NECK: Head and neck pure white with a brownish-gray auricular spot. Prominent blackish eye crescent. There were two very thin, suffuse brownish lines over the crown: one extending from eye-to-eye; the second extending from auricular spot to auricular spot. These marks were quite difficult to see and were noted only when the bird was preening on the mud flat on October 8.

EYES: The eye appeared dark. I didn't note any orbital ring if indeed one existed.

UPPER AND LOWER MANDIBLES: Bill long and pointed, bright red with a dark tip.

LEGS AND FEET: Legs bright red. Color of feet not noted.

UPPERPARTS: Mantle was pale gray. Rump and uppertail coverts were white.

UNDERPARTS: White including undertail coverts. There was no pinkish wash discernable on the breast as mentioned by some of the field guides (not present on all winter adults).

RETRICES: Square tail. Uppertail and undertail white. There was no terminal band.

WINGS: Long and pointed. Upperwings: Primaries (1st to 5th or 6th) white with black tips. The white primaries along the leading edge of the outer wing was most obvious as the gull circled about in flight over the reservoir. Rest of the upperwing pale gray with a thin, white trailing edge. Underwing: First two primaries white with black tips. Rest of primaries dark gray. The remaining parts of the underwing, including the lining, were white. The dark gray primaries were easily seen when the bird preened

WINGS (continued):

(spreading its wings) and in flight over the reservoir.

VOCALIZATION: None heard.

BEHAVIOR: (10-8) The bird preened on a mud flat in the company of Ring-billed Gulls, California Gulls and Franklin's Gulls. Drifted off into shallow water on a couple of occasions, then returned to the mud flat. Suddenly flew off away from the observers in direct flight northeastward over the reservoir gaining considerable altitude before finally circling back approximately one-half mile away when it was lost from view amidst a flock of other gulls that were also in the air. (10-9) The gull was re-found sitting on the water with other gulls, swimming here and there, pecking now and then at the surface of the water. Several power boats passed near to it causing the bird to fly off a short distance before circling and settling back on the water again. It was during these brief periods of flight that the bird's dark gray underwing primaries were most easily seen. Its flight was more gull-like than the tern-like flight of the Bonaparte's Gull (Larus philadelphia).

ELIMINATION OF SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES:

BONAPARTE'S GULL (Larus philadelphia): This is the one species that the Common Black-headed Gull could most easily be confused with, but the Bonaparte's Gull generally averages one to three inches smaller. The Common Black-headed Gull is more bulky and gull-like while the Bonaparte Gull is more dainty and tern-like. The Bonaparte's Gull has a smaller, black bill in the winter adult with all underwing primaries white and translucent giving this species, when flying, a distinctiveness of the white "triangular" marking on the leading edge outer primaries of the upperwing. The same white outer primaries on the upperwing of the Common Black-headed Gull are less distinctive due to the dark gray primaries on the underwing coupled with generally paler gray on the upperwing surfaces-a fairly good field mark in flying birds (winter adults).

SLENDER-BILLED GULL (Larus genei): Has a noticeably longer forehead profile, longer bill and neck and tapering tail giving a "giraffe-necked" look. Has a pale white or yellowish eye. There are no valid North American records for this species.

GREY-HEADED GULL (Larus cirrocephalus): Noticeably larger than the Common Black-headed Gull. Winter adults of this species with white more extensive than black on outer primaries with prominent white mirrors on the outer two primaries of the upperwing. Entire underwing dark gray to grayish-black. Pale eye. There are no valid records for this species in North America.

There are no other gulls with the distinctive and extensive white primaries on the leading edge of the outer upperwing in flight.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES:

COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULL: I have seen this species only twice before in over 50 plus years of bird-watching in North America. One winter adult at Jones Inlet, Nassau County, New York on March 1, 1975. One winter adult at Victoria, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada on November 3, 1977.

BONAPARTE'S GULL: Have seen literally thousands of winter adults along the Atlantic coast from South Carolina to the south shore of Long Island New York, where wintering flocks (some exceeding 5000 birds) frequent

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES (continued):

such locales as Jones Inlet, Moriches Inlet and Shinnecock Inlet. Also have seen along the Pacific coast in winter primarily off California and Washington. Have seen every fall (in winter plumage-adults and immatures) from October through December in eastern Colorado. Seen in breeding plumage along the Atlantic coast; Churchill, Manitoba and at Anchorage, Alaska as well as in Colorado during spring migration.

SLENDER-BILLED GULL and GREY-HEADED GULL: Have never seen either of these species.

OBSERVER MAKING THIS REPORT:

Jack Reddall, 4450 South Alton Street, Englewood, Colorado 80111

Jack Reddall

DATE: October 15, 1988

