

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

A

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus marinus*)

Location: Pueblo Reservoir; Pueblo, Pueblo County, Colorado

Date: March 14 - April 20, 1993

Setting:

Brandon Percival and I discovered this bird on the tires at the south marina at Pueblo Res. at about 9:00 a.m. on March 14, 1993. We observed the bird for about an hour and a half and then left to check reference books. We returned and observed it for an additional hour. I saw this individual later that afternoon and again on approximately 15 other occasions through April 20th. It was very reliable and could usually be found standing or sitting on the tires in the marina. I also observed it several times in flight and floating on the water. I saw it from distances as close at 50 yards and from as far as 1/2 mile when it was well out in the lake. This bird was also seen by Van Truan, David Silverman and Dave Johnson and others here in Pueblo. Some other birders who saw it were Duane Nelson, Dick Schottler, Joe Roller, Paul Lehman, Shawneen Finnegan, Claudia Wilds, Gerald Maisel, Blake Maybank and Arnold Small. We all had ample opportunity to observe the bird under a variety of conditions and distances and it was photographed by Joe Roller. I watched it with my scope (Kowa 20-60X) and binoculars. It usually was in loose association with Herring, California and Ring-billed Gulls. It easily won occasional disputes with these smaller gulls and I once saw it peck at a Herring Gull and cause it to disgorge some food which the Black-backed Gull ate.

Description: (I saw this bird on many occasions. This description is taken from field notes on the original day of observation, March 14.) The bird was in first winter plumage. It was about 30" long, appearing to be about 2" longer than, and bulkier than, nearby Herring Gulls, and much larger than Ring-billed Gulls. In direct comparison to a first year Herring Gull it had a larger and thicker bill, a more angular and blocky (double-peaked) head, was whiter overall with a nearly white head, more checkered upperparts and wing coverts of a colder grey color. This bird had a massive, hooked black bill. At close range it could be seen to have a vaguely pinker or lighter edge to the base of the lower mandible. Legs were thicker and longer than a Herring Gull but were about the same color of pale pink. The eye was dark. The bird was large and bulky overall; the wings extended to about 1 1/2" beyond the tail. The bird gave an overall whitish appearance when compared to all other immature gulls that were present. The head was white with faint black smudges, especially in front of the eye, through the eye, the auriculars, the crown and the hindneck. The smudging gave a "black-eye" look to the face. There was a narrow white feather border around the lower rim of the eye. The neck was mostly white and the white continued through the undersides. There was indistinct blackish flecking to the breast (especially the sides) and the flanks. The back was a medium cold brownish-grey. The greater and lesser coverts were boldly checked, the scapulars less so. The folded secondaries were dark brownish with broad whitish fringes. The primaries were blackish. The lower back and rump were white with small flecks of black at the margins. In flight the bird was more boldly marked than other immature gulls - being two-toned: white head, blackish back and wings, white rump and upper tail, blackish tail band. The black terminal band to the tail was about about 1 1/2" in extent and rather sharply contrasting with the white base and tail. There were indistinct and small black mottles and specks on the white part of the tail and the white rump. The wings in flight were black, finely checkered with white and with darker primaries and secondaries.

Similar Species:

The large size, in direct comparison with Herring Gull rules out most gulls. This bird was longer and thicker-legged, whiter and thicker billed than the Herring Gull (also see other points in description above). California Gull is smaller, much darker and has a two-toned bill. Glaucous and Thayer's gulls would never have this dark a back, and Glaucous has a two-toned bill. Slaty-backed Gull would be much lighter overall, would have much lighter flight feathers. Lesser Black-backed Gull is smaller, has less bulky bill. Western and Yellow-footed gulls would be darker, might show grey feathers in back, and lack a black tail band.

Experience with Species:

I have seen many Great Black-backed, Western, Yellow-footed and Herring gulls. I have seen one previous Great Black-backed Gull in Colorado.

This report was prepared from notes made at the time of observation.



Mark Janos
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Pueblo, CO 81001

Tail: Often see-able at about 3:30-4:30 p.m. as bird perched. Black terminal band distinct but irregular. About 1" of black. Borders w/ white, varied. Spots of black on white & few streaks extends into white, esp. at center of tail. Edges of tail white.

Tail:



Sides of rump in perched bird white w/ fine black bars.

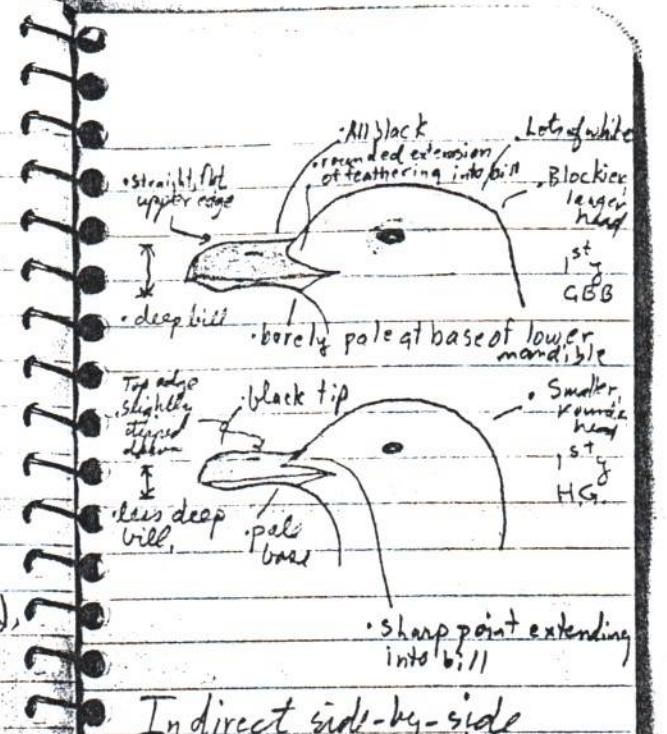
→ 11:35 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. also

2:00 - 4:30 p.m.

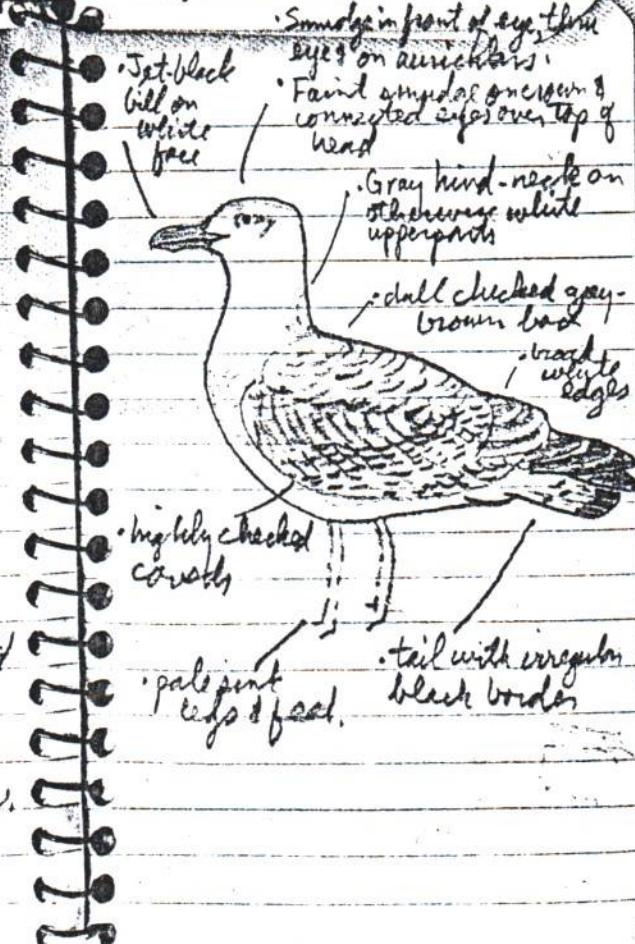
Bird always in view on tires or in water. In clear flight 3 times; but only left S. Marina harbor twice for c. 10 min / time.

Additional notes

Backs of bird dullly mottled and checkered but 2° coverts most sharply patterned. On folded w. sides: 1°'s darkest, then 2°'s (1° folded white sides).



Indirect side-by-side comparison with 1st y. Herring Gull
Taller; longer-legged; longer; Most obvious difference was in bulk:



DOCUMENTATION OF LATILONG BIRD SIGHTING
FOR
THE COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS' RECORDS

23-93-69

A

Species: Great Black-backed Gull | Larus marinus
(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.

Date (s): 14 March 1993 Time Bird Seen: 3 PM to 4 PM

Locality: South side Marina - Pueblo Reservoir
Pueblo - Pueblo County Colorado
Nearest town, county and state:

Optical equipment: SWIFT Spotting Scope 15-60X zoom lens

If photographed, please enclose copy. Equipment used:

Number of birds seen: 1 Sex: ? Plumage: 1st Winter

Light conditions: Good

Distance from bird, and how measured: 125 yards estimated

Describe the bird's overall behavior:

This bird sat on tires used for breakwater. It did fly once, land in the water, & returned to the tires

It was last reported May 8, 1993, by

Brandon Percival & Van Truan

Describe the habitat in which you observed the bird:

Marina; boat dock at large reservoir

Other observers who independently identified this bird (Please list name and address):
Bird found by Mark Janos 14 Sedum - Pueblo CO Brandon Percival 835 Harmony
Bob Dickson 55 Villa Pueblo CO Dave Johnson 1920 Greenwood Pueblo CO
Van Truan 812 W 14 Pueblo CO + many other observers

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.

Noticeably larger than nearby Herring Gulls, this bird also had a proportionately large head & black beak. Beak was heavy & black. Eye was black. Head was dull white, belly was light but profusely speckled. Speckles were light brown on dull whitish chest & belly. Wings were whitish with dark speckles. Speckles were even more dense & dark than light speckles on underparts. The speckles on the ~~wings~~ gave the bird a very black-white checkered pattern. Primaries were solid dark turning slightly lighter in interior primaries. Secondaries were dark with light edgings. Rump was light. Terminal band of tail was dark. Upper portion of Terminal band was very serrated and uneven creating a dark streaky appearance into ^{white} upper tail coverts.

Legs were grayish-flesh. Back of bird was less checkered than wings with speckles more diffuse. Bird may have been molting out of 1st winter plumage.

Describe the bird's calls or sounds, if heard; including method of delivery-- i.e., from perch, in flight, etc.:

I did not hear it.

List similar species and how you eliminated them:

First winter Herring Gulls were nearby; we easily saw these smaller size, proportionately smaller head & bills in comparison to the Great Black-backed Gull. Herring Gulls also were more uniformly brownish, lacked the checkered pattern & serrated dark terminal tail band. Second winter Herring Gull also lacks serrated tail band & checkered pattern. Young Herring Gulls also have paler base to beak in comparison to Great Black-backed Gull.

Prior experience with this and similar species:

I have seen many Great Black-backed Gulls in

Maine & Massachusetts. I've seen many Herring Gulls in many places.

This report was written from notes made during after ✓ observation; from memory ✓

NAME (print): Dave Silverman

Mailing address: P O Box 362 Rye CO

signature: Dave Silverman

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