

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

ACCEPT 7-0**GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL**
Larus marinusLocation: Pueblo Reservoir; Pueblo, Pueblo County, ColoradoDate: November 18, 1995 through the end of 1995

This individual was discovered a couple of days earlier by someone else and I heard about it through the Pueblo birding "hot line". I found it on the 18th. It was standing on the tires at the north marina at Pueblo Res. It was perched with California and Ring-billed gulls. It stood quietly, although twice it flew a few feet to either re-perch on the tires or float on the water. On the 18th I watched it through my binoculars and through Kowa TSN4 20-60X scope. The light was excellent and from over my shoulder. I walked out on the marina's floating docks to get closer and observed this individual from approximately 50-75 yards.

This is apparently the same bird that was at Pueblo Reservoir as a first winter bird (Mar.-Apr. 1993), as a second winter bird (Oct.-Nov. 1993) and as a third winter bird (Nov. 18, 1994-Jan. 1995).

Description:

This is an adult winter bird. It is huge, towering head and shoulders above all other gulls. It is roughly two feet long. On other occasions this year I was able to compare it directly with Herring Gulls and it is several inches longer and taller than that species. I was able to pick this bird out without binoculars as it stands so tall, is so massive and is nearly black on the back. It stood very upright on long, thick, widely-spaced pink legs.

The bill was proportionately short, thick and powerful. The bill color was yellow and there was a red spot on the gony. The red spot is bordered, especially on the upper side, by a blackish smudge. The head had a long, broad crown, squared off at the front and back. The forehead was sloping, and met the bill at a low angle. The legs were dull, chalky pink. The eye color was a cross between yellow and brown. The iris looked brown with binoculars, but in the scope it was yellowish-brown. The orbital ring was red. The head and body were white. There was fine streaking on the crown, nape and behind the eye. The mantle and wings were dark, slaty gray -- a shade lighter than black. When the wing was spread, the dark gray upper wing blended gradually into the black wing tip. There was little or no white in the wing tip -- just white spots on the primaries and a single white window on the outer primary. The underside of the flight feathers, especially the distal 2/3 of the wing, was dusky. The rump and the tail were white.

Similar Species:

The large size, in direct comparison with Herring Gulls rules out most gulls. This bird was longer and taller and much, much darker than the Herring Gull. California Gull is light, much smaller, and has a two-toned bill. Glaucous and Thayer's gulls would be much lighter on the back. Lesser Black-backed and Western gulls are smaller than, or the same size as, a Herring Gull and not as dark gray above. Western Gull lacks streaking on the head and has a darker underwing. Slaty-backed Gull would be nearly this size, but lighter than this bird above, with a white border between the black wing tip and the gray distal wing, and with more smudging on the head and neck in winter plumage. The Yellow-footed Gull would have yellow legs.

Experience with Species:

I have seen many Great Black-backed, Western, Yellow-footed and Herring gulls. I have seen Great Black-backed Gulls five previous times in Colorado.

This report was prepared from memory.

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