

September 1, 1984

23-84-38

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COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS
Sight Record Form

Species: LAUGHING GULL (Larus atricilla)

Date: 25 May 1984

Location: Cheraw Reservoir, Cheraw, Otero Co., Colo.

Time: 4:15 p.m.; duration of observation approx. 15-20 minutes.

Other observers who saw bird: Laurens Halsey, Judy Ward

Observation conditions: Weather: partly cloudy, wind calm.

Lighting: Back lighted during most of the observation time but on a few occasions when it flew below the horizon color patterns could be determined. Optical equipment: 8 X 40 binoculars and Bausch & Lomb 60X zoom telescope set between 20 and 30 power.

Distance: estimated, several hundred yards to as close as 80 feet.

Photographed with Fujica ST605 with Vivitar 300 mm zoom lens;
Kodachrome 64 film at 1/125 sec. at f8.

Behavior: The bird's flight was bouyant, as opposed to labored, as it was flying along the grassy shore occasionally diving into the grass, apparently feeding. Acrobatic flight, smooth and well controlled, but not darting about as a tern or small gull.

General description:

Size and shape: Although there were no other gulls present, we figured it to be about the size of a small Ring-billed Gull (Larus delawarensis). Initially thought it was a Ring-billed until we noticed the dark markings on the head. It was a slender-bodied bird with long, narrow wings. Did not seem heavy-headed; was well proportioned. The bill was slender which made it look long.

Plumage: (Immature - second summer). This bird gave the impression of being an adult type by having the underparts, tail, rump and most of the head white. When I saw the bird's back, I determined it to be in subadult plumage. The brownish gray mantle smoothly progressed to dark grayish brown outer primaries. Generally the back was very smooth looking with no sharp contrasts between the wing tips and the rest of the wing. There was no white at all in the outer primaries and the trailing edge of the wing was broadly edged with white. The underwing was unmottled dusky. The head showed an indistinct hood with the nape to mid-crown heavily mottled with dusky gray. This hood made it to the eye which showed a broken white eye-ring. The rest of the head was white.

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The legs were dark red and the bill was uniformly dark in color.

Similar species: Although many "white-headed" gulls may show dark mottling on the head, particularly in winter, I have never seen any that gave the impression of a definite hood nor have I seen any with a conspicuous broken eye-ring. The closest, in plumage, size and possible for the region would be the familiar Franklin's Gull. The long, slender wings and slender body of this bird were not consistent with the shape and proportions of a Franklin's Gull which has in my mind shorter and wider wings, a heavier body and a bigger head in proportion to body size. A Franklin's Gull in similarly aged plumage (i.e., white underparts, tail, rump, collar; mantle turning from brown to gray; legs adult color) shows a contrast between the outer primaries and the rest of the wing, whereas this bird looked smooth. Bonaparte's (*Larus philadelphia*) and Common Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) were eliminated because of size and lack of any striking wing pattern.

References: (Used after observation). Roverson's Rare Birds of the West Coast; Peterson's (revised edition); Robbin's

Report prepared from notes made during and immediately after observation.

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I have enclosed a set of three photographs. Although they are not of the best quality, I feel that they show some distinguishing characteristics, if not in plumage in shape and proportions. The photographs were reproduced from slides; if you would care for a copy of the slides, let me know.