

## COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

ACCEPT 6-1

## LAUGHING GULL

Larus atricilla

Location: Lake Henry; Crowley County, Colorado

Date: May 1, 1995

Setting:

I was birding on the afternoon of May 1 and ran into Brandon Percival at Lake Henry. I found the Laughing Gull on the north edge of the lake. It was floating on the water just off shore with a variety of other gulls (California, Ring-billed, Franklin's and Bonaparte's). There were about 75 nearby gulls in all. This offered good side-by-side comparisons. The light was excellent and we were at fairly close range (75-100 yards). We observed the bird in flight and at rest from 4:15-4:30 p.m. It spent most of its time floating on the water but was somewhat restless, arising several times to fly along the beach and circle a short distance out over the lake before returning to land on the water again. It approached other gulls and tipped its head back, gaping the big, deep red bill and calling. The call was a loud, distinctive, far-carrying series of "caw" notes. We both observed the bird in our binoculars and in my Kowa TSN4 scope at 20-60x.

Description:

The bird was an adult in full breeding plumage. At rest and in flight this bird was small-headed, large-bodied and long-winged. It was a rather hefty gull, fitting in better with the Ring-billeds and Californias, rather than the Franklins and Bonapartes. Although it looked most like a Franklin's Gull it was quite a distinctive bird, given a good look. Overall the bird was approximately 15" long, being much larger than the side-by-side Franklin's Gulls. It was nearly as large as the Ring-billed Gulls (although not quite) but rode higher on the water and had a different shape than the Ring-billeds, showing a higher head with a long, thick neck and a proportionately smaller head. The bird had a velvety, black hood with two white eye crescents. The bill was large, being longer, bigger and droopier relative to the Ring-billed Gull's. The bill was all dark red. The legs were deep red. The upper wing and mantle were dark gray, even darker than the Franklin's Gull. The spread wing showed how the dark gray blended gradually into the black distal wing and wing tip. There was no white border between the black wing tip and gray inner wing. The rest of the body and tail were white. The trailing edge to the wing was narrowly white and the underwing was whitish with a darker wing tip. At rest on the water the wingtips extending far beyond the tail and were black with tiny white specks on their tips.

Similar Species:

The black hood eliminate many other gulls. Of the "black-headed" species, Bonaparte's, Little and Common Black-headed are smaller, much lighter on the back, and lack the black on the wing tip. The Franklin's Gull is smaller, shorter winged, has a white border separating the black wing tip from the gray wing, is paler gray overall, has distinct white wingtips and has a smaller bill.

Experience with Species:

I have seen thousands of Laughing and Franklin's Gulls.

This report is prepared from notes immediately following observation on May 1 and from memory.

Mark Janos  
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Pueblo, CO 81001

Mark Janos

ACCEPT 6-1

Colorado Field Ornithologists-Sight Record Form

Species: Laughing Gull. Scientific Name: *Larus atricilla*.

Date: May 1, 1995.

Number of birds seen: 1. Sex: unknown. Plumage: adult.

Locality: North side of Lake Henry.

Nearest town: Sugar City. County: Crowley.

Times Observed: 4:00-4:20 PM.

Duration of observation: 10 minutes.

Other observers with me: Mark Janos 10 Sedum Court Pueblo, Colorado 81001  
719-544-5002.

Other observers who saw the bird independently: The Colorado Rare Bird Report  
reported that someone saw it the next day.

Light conditions: excellent.

Optical equipment used: 10X40 Bausch & Lomb Binoculars. KOWA TSN 4 Spotting  
Scope.

Distance from bird: 40 yards.

Describe the bird's behavior: The bird swam beside California & Ring-billed  
Gulls.

Describe the bird: The size of the bird was about 16 1/2 inches. The shape of  
the bird was typical gull shaped. The plumage of the bird was an adult. The  
color is as follows: The bill was all red. The eyes were black. Around both  
eyes there was a little white above and below both eyes. The head was all  
black, going from the chin to the nape to the top of the head and all the areas  
in between. The hind neck was white. The mantle was slaty gray. The wings  
were also slaty gray. The wing tips were black with four small small white  
dots. The tail was white. The throat was white. The breast was white. The  
belly was white. The flanks were white. The feet and legs were always in the  
water and were not seen my be. The shape of the bill was thinish and not very  
long like most black-headed gulls. The shape of the wings and tail were  
typical gull shaped. I identified this bird by it's laughing calls, by the  
bird's gull shape, and by the bird's all red bill and black head and by the  
bird's small white spots on tail and by the bird's little color of white around  
the eyes.

Describe the bird's song and calls: The bird made a laughing sound at all  
times.

Describe the habitat: The bird was observed on a man-made reservoir in  
Southeastern Colorado.

How did you eliminate similar species:

Franklin's Gull: This species has much more white around the eyes. Also big white spots on wing tips and has a black tip to the red bill.

Bonaparte's Gull: This species has a much lighter gray back and has all black bill.

Common Black-headed Gull: This species has a brown head.

Little Gull: This species is much smaller and has black bill.

What is your prior experience with this species and other similar species:

Laughing Gull: I have seen 2 at Salton Sea in California with Guy McCaskie in winter 1993, and one at Upper Queens Reservoir in Colorado May 22 & 24, 1994 with Mark Janos on 5/22 and Chris Wood on 5/24.

Franklin's Gull: I have seen many in Colorado and North Dakota.

Bonaparte's Gull: I have seen many in Colorado, California and two in North Dakota.

Common Black-headed Gull: I have seen 1 adult at Jim Hamm Nature Area near Longmont, Colorado April 14, 1990.

Little Gull: I have seen two, 1 at Lord's Lake, North Dakota (4th State Record) during June 1994 and 1 at Pueblo Reservoir, Colorado on November 25, 1994.

List Books if helped with the identification: National Geographic Society's Bird's of North America.

This report was made with notes taken during and after sighting.

Reporting observer: Brandon K. Percival. Signature: *Brandon K. Percival*

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