

FIELD NOTES

ACCEPTED (7-0)

Species reported: Laughing Gull

Number of individuals: one

Location: Lower Latham Reservoir- east side on sandbar.

Date of sighting: 08/23/98

rec'd 8-28-98 - 3

Time: 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

Reporting observer: John W. Vanderpoel
7583 Estate Circle
Niwot, CO 80503

Other observers: None

Light and weather conditions: Sunny and warm in the 80's; gentle wind out of the west. The sunlight was diffused not harsh for Colorado.

Optical Equipment: Zeiss 10 X 40B, Kowa Telescope

Distance to bird: Approximately 120 yards. The bird was standing and sitting amongst 50 Ring-billed, 5 California and 500 Franklin's Gulls.

Description:

size - slightly larger (perhaps 1 inch) than the Franklin's Gulls but considerably smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls (almost 3 inches) it was with. The legs were slightly longer than the surrounding Franklin's as well. The legs were black.

head - basically all white and this is what made the bird stand out immediately from all of the surrounding Franklin's Gulls all of which had a well developed half hood. There was some diffuse gray smudging on the hind neck and an ill-defined trace of a post ocular spot which was less noticable than some adult basic birds I have observed. The white head was the key initial feature.

bill - all black. Even at this distance I noted that the bill was slightly longer than the surrounding Franklin's and was more decurved or drooped.

chest and belly - the chest was whitish in the middle but the flanks were washed with dusky gray, and this gave the bird a separable difference from the whitish breast and belly of the surrounding adult basic Franklin's Gulls.

wing shape - the primary tip projection was not as long as I would have suspected and I suspect that the bird was molting some of its primaries. The bird never flew or raised it's wings.

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upperwing - No brown carpal bar was visible. The greater coverts appeared uniformly gray, which indicates either adult basic plumage or 2nd basic plumage. I looked for a white tertial crescent and really couldn't notice one. This leads me to believe that it may be a 2nd basic plumaged bird. I was unable to see any white apical tips on the primaries.

underwing - Not visible.

tail - The tail was white tipped and I could not notice any traces of black.

mantle/back - uniformly dark gray the same color or very slightly lighter than the surrounding Franklin's Gulls. Keep in mind that the harsh Colorado sunshine always makes judging degrees of darkness in gray mantles tricky. The mantle was certainly darker than the surrounding Ring-billed Gulls.

Voice: N/A

Previous Experience: I've seen and videod thousands of Laughing Gulls including multiple records of out of range Laughing Gulls in California and Ohio. I have seen Laughing Gulls and a Franklin's Gull together in December in Cabo San Lucas where they are both out of range.

Identification Aids: (list of books, illustrations, video or other birders consulted in identification)

at time of observation - none

after observation - none although I must confess to watching hours of video on both Franklin's and Laughing Gulls earlier this spring.

Conclusion: The bird was definitely a Laughing Gull. I am not sure whether it is a basic plumaged adult or a 2nd basic bird. Franklin's Gull can be ruled out however by at least the following ~~four~~³ field marks:

- whiteish head with oly a trace of gray on hindneck.
- The slightly longer and more drooped bill.
- The longer legs.