

ACCEPTED (7-0)

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

LAUGHING GULLLarus atricillaLocation: Lake Cheraw; Cheraw; Otero County, ColoradoDate: September 13, 1998Setting:

Brandon Percival and I were doing a "Big Day" and were at Lake Cheraw about 2 p.m. The Laughing Gull flew over the dike on the main highway and did a looping fly-by at about 25 feet of height. Other gulls (California, Ring-billed, Sabine's) were present. This offered some brief comparisons. The light was very good and we were at fairly close range (100 yards). We observed the bird in flight only, and only with binoculars. The observation lasted about 1 minute in all and we did not see the top surface of the bird very well, though we did see the back color and upper wing well. However, we did get on the bird at a distance and tracked it in our binoculars for the entire time as it approached and did the close fly-by. It flew right by us, nearly overhead, then curved back around the dike and passed by again at low altitude before heading far out on the lake where we lost it to sight.

Description:

This was a second year bird. It was roughly the size and shape of a Ring-billed gull but the mantle was noticeably darker. The upper surface of the wings was dark gray and graded more or less gradually into black at the wingtips. I did not note presence or extent of white on trailing edges of upper wing. The bird had a faintly grayish-washed hood: a grayish smudgy patch on the sides of the head and the nape. It was otherwise white underneath (body and underwing) except for blackish tones to the wingtips from underneath. I did not observe the flanks. I noted the bill as it passed by: it was quite long and drooped, proportionately larger and "droopier" than a Ring-billed or Franklin's gulls' bill and it was all dark. The tail was quite remarkable and we observed it well: it was white with a narrow, black sub-terminal band that was broken in the middle and did not reach the outer tail feathers – that is, it was like two horizontal "dashes", or a broken tail band, on an otherwise white tail. This was a brief observation but I believe it was adequate to identify the bird.

Similar Species:

The presence of a partial hood eliminates 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, with a smaller bill, often has a white border separating the black wing tip from the gray wing, is paler gray overall and has distinct white wingtips. The combination of dark back, broken tail band and large bill should eliminate this species.

Experience with Species:

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

This report is prepared from notes immediately following observation on September 13 and from memory.

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