

**Species reported:** Mew Gull- most likely in adult basic plumage, possibly 2nd basic

**Number of individuals:** one

**Location:** Union Reservoir-northwest end

**Date of sighting:** 11/18/99

**Time:** 9:00 AM - 9:20 AM

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

**Other observers:** Sharon Dooley

**Light and weather conditions:** Sunny and warm in the high 50's; Strong wind out of the west. The sunlight was very harsh.

**Optical Equipment:** Zeiss 10 X 40B, , JVC Video camera

**Distance to bird:** ranged from 40 feet to 75 yards. The bird was swimming among the 600+ Ring-billed Gulls.

**Description:**

**size** - very slightly smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls it was with.

**head** - rounder than most of the Ring-billeds. The head was white but heavily streaked/mottled with a tannish brown. The eye color was not clearly seen, but appeared dark.

**bill** - Structurally the bill was thinner than the blunt tipped bill of the surrounding Ring-billed Gulls. The color was difficult to determine because the bird was back lighted by strong sunlight.

**legs** - not visible

**chest and belly** - The chest was heavily washed with brown

**wing shape/primary tip pattern** - The bird obliging flew very close to us on several occasions. Both P10 and P9 had a white subterminal mirror. The mirror on P10 was large (typical Mew like), however, the mirror on P9 is smaller than typical for a Mew. (see freeze frame in video). P8

**tail** - The tail was white.

*Red 1/12/00 wpl*

*(VIDEO)*

*ACCEPT 7-0*

**mantle** - The mantle was several shades darker than the surrounding Ring-billed Gulls.

**Voice:** N/A

**Previous Experience:** I've seen and filmed perhaps two thousand Mew Gulls of all ages.

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

**at time of observation** - none

**after observation** - Reviewed enclosed video

**Conclusion:** The bird was an adult basic Mew Gull of the sub species *brachyrhynchus*. The structure of the bill alone on this individual rules out Ring-billed Gull, though obviously the darker mantle and prominent tertial and scapular crescent also rule that species out. The overall size and the bill size and shape helped rule out the similar California Gull. Even the smallest (runt) California Gulls are Ring-billed sized or larger. The bill was also too small to fit for the Asian subspecies *kamtchatschenis*.

I have included some video tape of both this individual and the Mew Gull seen at Cherry Creek Reservoir on Nov. 20, 1999.

## COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

CFO-ORC FILE # 1999-57

NEW STATE RECORD \_\_\_\_\_

UNUSUAL RECORD XACCEPT 7-0Rcd 1/5/00 wpl**Species:** Mew Gull (*Larus [canus] brachyrhynchus*)**Date:** 20 November 1999**Number seen:** one**Sex:** ?**Plumage:** Def. Basic**Locality:** Union Res.**Elevation:** about 5400'**Nearest town:** Longmont**County:** Weld**Time observed:** about 15:45 - 16:15 MST**Duration of observation:** off and on during that time period for a total of about 20 minutes

**Description:** Sue Bonfield and I stopped by Union Reservoir to look for the Mew Gull (MEGU) that John Vanderpoel had found there on the 17th. We could not find it at first, but there was a large bunch (>400 at final estimate) of Ring-billed Gulls (RBGU) at a field on the north side of the road that runs along the north side of the reservoir. The field was being plowed while we were there and there was a thin, but continuous stream of gulls coming to the field from the direction of the reservoir. Finally, I found the MEGU in flight over the field, shortly after which, it landed in the field right in front of us. We watched it for quite some time as it changed perches a couple of times. Each time we lost it in flight with the RBGUs, we were able to refind it quickly in the field due to its extensively-streaked head.

The bird was a smallish gull, smaller than the nearby RBGUs, but not a lot smaller. It was obviously a full adult, with no suggestion of immaturity (e.g., dark markings on tertials, rectrices, or primary coverts; primary-tip pattern was adult-like). The head and neck were extensively streaked with brown, such that at any distance, the bird looked brown-hooded. The eyes were dark and the bill was an unmarked, pale greenish-yellow. Compared to that of the RBGUs, the bill was shorter and thinner. The mantle was obviously a shade or two darker gray than the mantle color of the nearby RBGUs, and it had a bluer cast. The bird had an obvious and well-defined white scapular crescent, much more obvious than that of any of the nearby RBGUs and more so than on any RBGU that I've ever seen. The tertials were the same color as the mantle and had large, well-defined white tips forming large tertial crescents, very much larger and more noticeable than those of RBGUs. The upper wing coverts were the same color and tone as was the mantle. The bird had very long wings and the black primaries had obvious white tips. The underparts and tail were white. The legs were pale yellow.

In flight, we could see the wingtip pattern well. In addition, while the bird was standing, we could often see the pattern on P10 on the underside of the far wingtip, as the bird often held its wingtips drooped below the tail. P10 had a very large white mirror that almost reached the tip of the feather, thus isolating the black feather tip from the rest of the black on the feather. P9 had a large white mirror, also, though it was about half the size of the mirror on P10. However, the mirror on P9 still appeared larger than the P10 mirrors of the three RBGUs that I checked nearby in flight. Each of the primaries 5-8 had white tips, subterminal black straps, and large, white tongues. This created a wingtip pattern that showed a minimal amount of black and with the P5-8 tongues and the P9-10 mirrors just about bisecting the black.

Similar species eliminated: Ring-billed Gull is eliminated by size, bill size and pattern, mantle color, head pattern, and wingtip pattern. California Gull by size and bill and wingtip patterns. Common Gull (*L.c. canus* and *L.c. heinei*) probably eliminated by mantle color, but definitely by wingtip pattern (there is no white P8 tongue in these forms, and the black on the wingtip is more extensive). Kamchatka Gull (*L.c. kamschatkensis*) also eliminated on wingtip pattern. Black-legged Kittiwake eliminated by head and wingtip patterns. Red-legged Kittiwake eliminated by leg length and color, head pattern, and wingtip pattern.

**Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration):** No vocalizations heard.

**What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species?** I have seen many 100s of Mew Gulls, with the vast majority of those very recently (Dec. 1998 in northern CA and August and September 1999 in AK). I have seen uncountable bazillions of RBGUs. I have not seen any other form of what currently constitutes Mew [Common] Gull. I have seen 1000s of Black-legged Kittiwakes and no Red-legged Kittiwakes.

**Light conditions:** sun behind me and to my left, though close to setting

**Optical equipment used:** Leica 32x and Zeiss 7x42

**Distance, and how estimated:** estimated closest approach of about 30 meters

**Other observers who saw the bird with you:** Sue Bonfield

**Other observers who saw the bird independently:** John Vanderpoel and Sharon Dooley (on 17 November 1999)

**If photographed, type of equipment and film:** did not photograph

**List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:**

**a) at time of observation:** none

**b) after observation:** none

**Reporting observer:** Tony Leukering

**Signature:**



**Address:** Colorado Bird Observatory, 13401 Picadilly Road, Brighton, CO 80601

**Date report was written:** Written from memory on 28 November 1999 (I forgot my field notebook that day!).