

360-02-2003

**Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*)
Yellow Creek State Park, Indiana County, PA
September 19, 2003**

Jim Valimont, Paul Hess and I joined the ranks of numerous birders in searching area lakes for storm related birds during the passage of Hurricane (now a tropical storm) Isabel. We were in communication with several birders during the day and we received a call from Margaret Higbee that there was a Sabine's Gull at Yellow Creek State Park in Indiana County.

Since the park was about an hour away from where we were, we decided to go to there. I was interested in seeing this species which I have missed several times in Pennsylvania. We arrived at the park to find out the bird was not seen for about 15 minutes. After a short time, Margaret relocated the gull resting on the water. I saw the bird on the water and later in flight where the striking wing pattern was revealed.

DESCRIPTION:

Small to medium sized gull.

Head: white with brownish cap and nape.

Bill: black.

The back and visible part of the folded wings were light brown. All feathers had pale fringes, giving a scalloped look to the back. The primaries were black with no visible white spots.

The breast and sides were white. Some brown extended on the sides of the upper breast.

In flight, the bold pattern of the wings was the obvious characteristic indicating this was a Sabine's Gull. The leading edge of the wing (primaries to the wrist) was black forming a black wedge. The inner part of the wing was brown forming a carpal bar. The brown color extended into the leading edge of the inner wing and onto the back of the bird. The remainder of the wing was white. The black wedge on the leading edge and the brown carpal bar outlined the white area, forming a large white triangle. I did not see the underside of the wings.

The tail was white, with a broad black subterminal band. The forked tail was not obvious.

The brownish back, brown in the crown and nape and black tail band indicates a juvenile bird.

Comparison with other species:

Juvenile (or Basic 1) gulls with similar wing patterns and dark tail bands are Bonaparte's, Black-headed, Little and Black-legged Kittiwake.

Bonaparte's Gulls have a dark carpal bar, but a white leading edge to the wing outlined in black, forming a white wedge. The remainder of the wing is pearly gray, so the wing pattern is not as striking as a Sabine's Gull. The dark carpal bar (which does not extend to the leading edge of the wing) and black in the leading edge of the wing forms a dark 'M' pattern. Bonaparte's also has a black subterminal tail band in juvenile plumage, but is a smaller bird, more ternlike in flight, and with a finer bill. A juvenile Bonaparte's has a white head, with a black spot on the ear coverts, and lacks a brown cap, back and nape like sabine's.

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Black-headed Gull is similar in plumage to a Bonaparte's with a similar wing pattern. Although juvenile Black-headed has brown on the head, it isn't as extensive or dark as on sabine's. The bill is finer, and pale orange with a black tip.

Little Gulls are also similar in wing pattern at this age, but are smaller than all other species mentioned, have a dark ear covert spot, and are darker (more black than brown) on the cap and back than a sabine's. The bill is also smaller and finer compared to sabine's.

Black-legged Kittiwake is similar in general wing pattern to the above, but does not show the striking pattern of a sabine's. Juvenile Black-legged Kittiwakes have an obvious black collar, and a black ear covert patch, and are whiter on the head compared to sabine's.

I have seen juvenile Sabine's Gull at Niagra Falls and several adults off the coast of California.

I observed the gull through a Leica spotting scope with at 20 – 60X eyepiece at various distances (approximately 50 to 100 yards).

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Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*)

Date of Sighting: 19 September 2003 to 19 September 2003

Location: YELLOW CREEK STATE PARK

County : INDIANA

Observer(s): Mike Fialkovich, Jim Valimont, Paul Hess.

Date of Submission: 2003

Submitted by: Mike Fialkovich

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

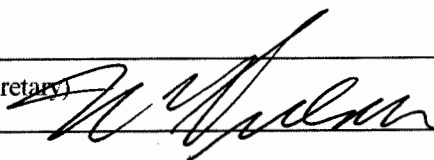
Specimen: No

Recording: ~~Video~~ **NO**

| Member | Class I | Class II | Class III | Class IV-A | Class IV-B | Class IV-C | Class V | Abstain |
|--|---------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|---------|---------|
| G. Armstrong <i>R.W. Trim</i> | | | | | | | | |
| D. Heathcote | | | X | | | | | |
| P. Guris | | | X | | | | | |
| J. Stanlev | | | X | | | | | |
| E. Wimer | | | X | | | | | |
| R. Leberman | | | X | | | | | |
| M. Sharp | | | X | | | | | |
| TOTALS | | | 6 | | | | | |
| DECISION | | | X | | | | | |

Comments: *GLD*

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

2/5/05