

V2N4

123/89

340-01-1988

COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULL (Larus ridibundus) IN ERIE
COUNTY, Ed Kwater.

On Friday December 23rd 1988, Jerry McWilliams and I were birding at Erie Public Dock, sifting through a large concentration of gulls (Laridae). Several hundred thousand birds were judged to be present, following the estimate of at least half a million birds on the CBC, December 18th. At about midday we turned our attentions to a large flock consist~~ing~~ing mainly of Bonaparte's Gulls (Larus philadelphia) feeding on shoals of Gizzard Shad (Dorosoma cepedianum) attracted by warm water in an area known as the West Slip. There was a heavy movement of gulls into this area from Erie Bay and also a continuous exodus as birds returned to the bay area after feeding, resulting in a constant turnover.

After watching the flock for about half an hour my attention was drawn to a bird which I identified as a Common Black-headed Gull (Larus ridibundus) in first-winter plumage. I quickly alerted Jerry. The bird was noticeably larger than the Bonaparte's Gulls, being intermediate in size between these and the associated Ring-billed Gulls (Larus delawarensis). It also appeared heavier than Bonaparte's in build, with slightly broader wings. In flight there was obviously much more brown and black, and less white on the upperwings. This was most noticeable on the median and lesser coverts which were dark brown

340-01-1988

forming a solid, heavy, diagonal bar across the inner wing, much more prominent than the corresponding black or brownish-black bar in first-winter Bonaparte's Gull. The tips of the primaries and secondaries were black forming a thick, dark bar along the trailing edge of the wing, once again noticeably broader than the corresponding bar in first-winter Bonaparte's Gull. More black was also visible along the length of the outer primaries, restricting the size of the white area on the primaries, which lacked the translucency of ^{and mantle} Bonaparte's. The rest of the upperwing was pale gray. The nape and sides of the neck ~~and~~ were white, not gray as in Bonaparte's. The head pattern was seen clearly when the bird alighted on the water. There was a blackish spot behind each eye with a diffuse blackish-brown stripe joining them across the hind crown. A second, less distinct brownish stripe joined the eyes across the mid-crown. The head shape was less rounded than in Bonaparte's with a flatter, more sloping forehead. The bill was also noticeably heavier, being approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ as long and about half as deep again as Bonaparte's. The basal half was a dirty flesh pink and the rest was black. The culmen seemed less decurved than Bonaparte's giving a blunter-tipped effect to the bill. The underparts, tail, rump and uppertail coverts were white with a black band across the end of the tail. The legs were pale flesh pink. Due to the behavior of the bird, the underwing pattern was not

340-01-1988

seen. It was flying slightly below the level of the observation point and usually feeding away from us. It would frequently disappear behind wooden posts in the dock or into a dense flock of other gulls but was relocated several times, initially by its larger size.

The bird was observed for a total of approximately 5 minutes through $\times 10$ binoculars and $\times 20$ spotting scope at a range of 30 yards, and was then lost to sight. Jerry and I engaged in a 4 ~~hour~~ hour search but could not relocate it.

This was the second Common Black-headed Gull reported for Pennsylvania, the first being found by Don Snyder at Presque Isle (Erie County) on May 28th 1979. My previous experience with this species consists of observations of very large numbers in the British Isles where it is an abundant breeding species, with up to 300,000 pairs annually (Sharrock 1976). It also has an extensive distribution in the rest of Europe and Asia (Camp and Simmons 1983). In North America, following the first nesting in Newfoundland in 1977 (Finch 1978) it has spread and is now breeding at 8 known sites in Newfoundland, Labrador and Maine (Montevicchi et. al. 1987). With its now annual occurrence in the Great Lakes (including Niagara Falls and Cleveland) it

should be looked for in any large concentrations of gulls.

References

Cramp.S and K.E.L. Simmons 1983 - Birds of the Western Palaearctic. vol. 3. Oxford.

Finch D.W. 1978 - Black-headed Gulls nesting in Newfoundland. Am. Birds 32 : 312

Montevecchi W.A, D.K. Cairns, A.E. Burger, R.D. Elliot, and J. Wells 1987 - The Status of the Common Black-headed Gull in Newfoundland and Labrador. Am. Birds 41 : 197-203.

Sharrock J.T.R 1976 - The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland. Poyser.

Common Black-headed Gull in Erie County

On December 23, 1988 while observing several thousand Bonaparte's Gulls (*Larus philadelphia*) feeding in the west slip of the public dock at the foot of State Street in Erie, Ed Kwater and I spotted a first winter Common Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*). Ed Kwater was the first to find and identify the bird and I was able to find it seconds later. The following is a description from my observation of the bird.

The bird was discovered at approximately 1:30 PM. Viewing conditions were good under clear skies. Winds were southwesterly to 32 MPH with the temp. about 55°F which was balmy enough to have steady hands while viewing the bird. Observation time was about 10 minutes or less. Our distance from the bird was approx. 100 feet. When I first had the bird in view it was flying directly away from me and below eye level, so the upper parts could be seen. One of the first characteristics of the bird that helped establish its identity was the size. It looked like a very large Bonaparte's Gull. The upper parts were similar to a first winter Bonaparte's, but the dark lesser coverts that form the bar across the forewing was very wide and dark brown, unlike the narrow black bar of the Bonaparte's. The black trailing edge of the primaries and secondaries was at least twice as wide as the first winter Bonaparte's thickening at the outermost secondaries and innermost primaries. The outer primaries showed more black on outer shafts and tips than Bonaparte's. The black-tipped retrices that formed the tail band may have been slightly thicker than the Bonaparte's, but was not used as a separable character. The Black-headed Gull disappeared behind a pier only to reappear moments later in the same spot of its initial sighting. At this moment a side view of its head could be seen revealing the larger two-toned bill. The basal half was pale fading to black on the outer half of the mandibles. We experienced difficulties in keeping the bird in view as it continually disappeared behind the pier and dodged in and out among the thousands of Bonaparte's Gulls giving us only brief, but identifiable views of itself. Unfortunately, the Black-headed Gull did not reappear from behind the pier after the third or fourth feeding pass. Intensive searching for the bird in the remaining 3½ to 4 hours of afternoon light, failed to relocate it.

Jerry McWilliams



Record No.: 340-01-1988

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of 1

Species: Common Black-headed Gull

Date of Sighting: Dec 23, 1988

Observer(s): Ed Kwater, Jerry McWilliams

Date of Submission: 1989

Submitted by: Ed Kwater, Jerry McWilliams

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V		
					A	B	C
E. Kwater		X					
B. Haas		X					
F. Haas		X					
R. Leberman			X				
G. McWilliams		X					
S. Santner		X					
P. Schwalbe		X					
TOTALS		6	1				
DECISION		X					

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

B. Haas

Date:

11-10-90