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**Common Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)
Moraine State Park, Butler County
December 6, 1998**

by Mike Fialkovich

When I heard Randy Stringer saw a Common Black-headed Gull at Moraine State Park, I was eager to search for it since I have not seen this species for nine years, plus I wanted to hopefully photograph the bird for documentation. In addition, I received a call from Paul Hess (Butler County compiler) asking if I was planning on looking for it with the idea the more observers, the better the documentation for this first county record.

The gull appeared shortly after I arrived at the park. It was first observed in flight at the swimming area on the south shore of Lake Arthur and later observed as it rested and preened on a mudspit in the company of Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls.

Common Black-headed Gull Description

Small to medium sized gull with pointed wings, short thin bill, and tern-like flight.

- **Head:** Black, round ear spot with a light gray band over the crown joining the ear spots. Another light gray band ran over the crown from eye to eye. Dark smudge in front of the eye.
- **Underparts:** breast, sides, belly and vent clear white.
- **Bare Parts:** Legs and feet dark red, bill reddish orange with a dark tip.
- **Wings:** pearly gray mantle and wings; the upper wing with a white leading edge. Primaries tipped black. The undersurface of the wing showed a more narrow white leading edge, and the area from the white to the trailing edge was black (primaries only). The inner portion of the underwing (coverts and secondaries) was grayish.
- **Tail:** white.
- **Size:** the bird was perched with Ring-billed (*Larus delawarensis*) and Bonaparte's Gulls (*Larus philadelphia*). The Common Black-headed Gull was intermediate in size between those two species.
- **Age:** The lack of dark markings on the upper surface of the wings, the clear white leading edge of the wings, the white tail, dark red legs and reddish orange bill indicates an adult bird in basic plumage. A basic one bird would have lighter orange legs and an orange bill (with a black tip), along with dark markings on the upper surface of the wings, and a tail with a black subterminal band.

Comparison with Bonaparte's Gull

Several Bonaparte's Gulls were perched with the Common Black-headed so direct comparison could be made between the two species.

Adult Bonaparte's Gulls in basic plumage possess a similar build and plumage to the black-headed, however they are noticeably smaller in size. The Bonaparte's bill is entirely black, and its legs and feet are lighter red compared to the Common Black-headed Gull. While observing the birds, I noticed the black headed's legs and feet were very dark (blood) red, and the bill was reddish orange with black confined to the tip.

In flight, bonaparte's and black-headed show a gray upper wing with a white, wedge shaped leading edge, and black tips to the primaries. The underwing of the bonaparte's shows a white leading edge with the remainder of the underwing gray; primary tips black. The undersurface of the primaries of the black-headed are black, resulting in a black tipped appearance to the underwing. This was quite noticeable when the bird was in flight.

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340-01-1998

Rare and/or Unusual Bird Sighting Documentation

SPECIES: Black-headed Gull

DATE SIGHTED: December 7, 1998

SIZE, SHAPE, and PLUMAGE DESCRIPTION:

The bird was a slightly smaller size than the Ring-billed Gulls that it was with, but almost the same size. The legs were red, the bill was dark and visible red, more so towards the base. On the upperwing, there was a white area like in an adult Bonaparte's Gull. There were dark areas in the primaries under the wing and a dark patch behind the eye.

BEHAVIOR:

The bird was seen among Ring-billed Gulls both feeding and sitting on the ground.

NUMBER, SEX, AGE: 1 adult, in basic plumage.

LOCATION:

On the south side of Lake Arthur in Moraine State Park on the Pleasant Valley Beach, Butler County, PA.

CONDITIONS, TIME, WEATHER, OPTICS, EXPERIENCE:

It was cool, about 45 degrees F and the sky was cloudy. It was about 7:15 a.m. and there was a little breeze. Bird was seen at varying distances as short as about 20 yds. I observed the bird through my Leica 8 X 42 binoculars and my Kowa TSN-2 scope. I have only seen Black-headed Gull twice before, last Thanksgiving in Nova Scotia and last summer in Newfoundland.

ANY OTHER OBSERVERS?

Bill Reddinger, Walt Shaffer, and Dana Shaffer while I was there, others before and since.

NAME, ADDRESS, PHONE NUMBER, EMAIL, DATE OF WRITE-UP:

John G. Fedak jfedak@rbv.iu6.k12.pa.us
221 Washington Street (814)275-4086
New Bethlehem, PA 16242

Written up on December 7, 1998.

340-01-1998

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Larus ridibundus*) -- adult basic

Date: 8 December 1998

Number of individuals: 1

Locality: Lake Arthur, Moraine State Park, Butler County

Observers: Paul Hess, Sam Sinderson, Brad Wilson

Time of observation: 0925-1015 **Length of observation:** about 45 minutes

Light conditions: heavy overcast and slight mist/drizzle

Optics and distance: 8 x 32 Leica and 20-40X Kowa TSN-822, at 20-30 feet

Description and separation from similar species (i.e., Bonaparte's Gull, which could be compared in the same binocular and scope glass):

Relative size -- conspicuously larger in wingspan, body bulk, and overall length than Bonaparte's.

Head -- white; prominent dark earspot behind eye; two dusky bars crossing over the crown from eye to eye and from earspot to earspot, which Bonaparte's lacked.

Upper body -- nape pure white, while Bonaparte's nape and rear of head had a faint hint of grayish; mantle and back light gray, slightly paler than the Bonaparte's.

Upperwings -- light gray; white wedge across primaries; black primary tips giving a narrow dark rim to the outerwing. Like the mantle, the wings' gray was paler than Bonaparte's and in flight contrasted less with the white primary wedge than did the Bonaparte's.

Underwings -- Underside of primaries prominently dusky, unlike the pure white of Bonaparte's; inner wings weren't seen well but appeared to be whitish, unlike the Bonaparte's grayish.

Underbody and tail -- entirely white.

Bill -- dark red, shading to black tip. Conspicuously longer and thicker at the base than the black Bonaparte's bill.

Legs -- rich pinkish red.

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Comments: We observed the bird first in flight, then perched at water's edge on the South Shore swimming beach where it had been seen during the previous three days. When we arrived at 0730 only Ring-billed Gulls were present, but our patience was rewarded. About 0830 Bonaparte's began dribbling in by ones and twos, and finally at about 0925 one gull among a half-dozen Bonaparte's flew in with dusky under-primaries that were instantly conspicuous to all three of us. It landed directly in front of us at water's edge and permitted surprisingly close approach to 20-30 feet while it stood preening among the Bonaparte's for the entire 45 minutes we spent watching.

Experience with the species: I saw countless Black-headed on two trips to Europe, and this was my second in North America.

This account is written December 9 from descriptive notes made at the scene.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Paul Hess".

Paul Hess
1412 Hawthorne St.
Natrona Heights PA 15065

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round One

Species: Black-headed Gull (Larus ridibundus)

Date of Sighting: 6 December 1998 to 8 December 1998

Location: MORaine STATE PARK

County: BUTLER

Observer(s): Paul Hess, Sam Sinderson, Brad Wilson, John Fedak,

Mike Fialkovich, Mark McConaughy

Date of Submission: 1998

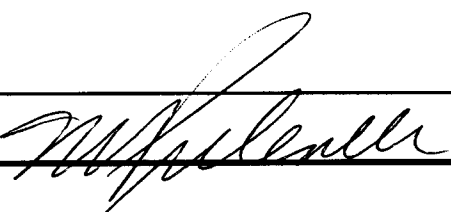
Submitted by: Paul Hess, Mark McConaughy, Mike Fialkovich, John Fedak

WRITTEN DESCRIPTION YES PHOTO YES SPECIMEN NO REWARDING NO

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
D. Couchman	X							
T. Floyd								X
P. Hess								X
R. Ickes	X							
J. McWilliams	X							
B. Reid	X							2
P. Rodewald	X							
TOTALS	5							2
DECISION	X							

Comments: 5/0/2

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 9/28/00