



PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE
210 Welcome Ave. Norwood, PA 19074

5 February 2002

Peter G. Saenger
1830 Woodside Ave.
Alburtis, PA 18011

Dear Peter,

Thank you for submitting documentation on the Black-tailed Gull at Lake Ontelaunee on 2 January 2000. After careful review, the Committee regrets that it has not accepted this record.

The vote was two members in favor of acceptance, four not in favor, and one abstaining. The dissenters felt in general that despite your excellent written description a second-basic or third-basic Lesser Black-backed Gull was not eliminated with the necessary certainty for a first state record -- especially for a gull.

Rest assured that we considered this documentation at great length. Rather than trying to summarize the majority opinion myself, I enclose a copy of member Matt Sharp's analysis, which expresses the concerns that some of us had.

The 2-4-1 vote may seem like a strongly negative view, but it was a very close call for those who voted no. Several members emphasized that additional photographs showing the gull from different angles at closer range might easily have clinched the identification for them.

Of course non-acceptance does not mean the bird was not a Black-tailed Gull, and indeed many aspects of the description point strongly in that direction. In fact one member who voted to accept the record, George Armistead, has seen Virginia's Black-tailed Gull on many occasions and felt that your description and the photos were adequate.

It may not be much consolation, but the Committee greatly appreciates the extensive details you provided. Nothing would be more gratifying to us than a return of this gull that would enable a diagnostic photographic record.

Sincerely,



For the Committee:
Paul Hess, Chairman

Record No. 343a-01-2000

343A-01-2000

Black-Tailed Gull
Larus crassirostris

2 January 2000

Location: Lake Ontelaunee, Reading, PA., Berks County.

Time: 13:30-17:00

Weather & Lighting: Mostly clear, with broken clouds moving in toward end of observation period, temp. mid to high 50's F, little to no wind, lighting was from behind observer. Bird viewed in both direct sunlight and end of day fading light through clouds.

Distance and angle: 125-200 meters, on frozen lake surface, viewed from south end of dam breast, sitting on rip-rap about 8 meters above lake surface and from dam breast of about 12 meters high.

Optics: Swarovski scope with 20-60 zoom.

Observers: Peter G. Saenger, 1830 Woodside Ave., Alburtis, PA 18011, crex@early.com (additional observers listed below).

Observation

The bird was found sleeping among approximately 75 Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* and 50 Ring-billed Gulls *Larus delawarensis* and was noticed due to its darker upper-parts. The bird was observed for 3.5 hours: sleeping 2 h (head & bill hidden), standing/walking 1.25 h, and flying .25 h; at 20-60 power.

The mantle, back, and folded wings, excluding the primary tips, appeared to be a uniform mid to dark gray. When compared with other gulls present, the gray was much darker, about what I would expect on an average Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*. The primary tips were black, no white tips to the primaries, nor any mirrors.

The head, neck, and upper breast were streaked with brownish markings.

Eye: iris very pale yellow.

The bird raised its wings when approached by a Herring Gull and the under-side of primaries were black and the remaining under-wing a light gray. This was also viewed when the bird flew. Wings seemed long for the body size.

Bill was yellow, with a very noticeable red band on both mandibles at the tip, with a black band, behind it. The bands were not as sharply defined as "rings" as in a Ring-billed Gull, with the edges of the colors blending, but well colored and on both mandibles. The bill looked very long and

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heavy for the bird, when compared to the similarly sized Ring-billed Gulls, and more slender, but long when compared to the bills of Herring Gulls.

Head shape seemed smooth, but not high and rounded.

The size of the bird, when compared to Herring Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls, was slightly larger than a Ring-billed Gull and smaller than the Herring Gulls.

Legs: Straw colored, pale legs.

Tail: White with a broad grayish subterminal band on the upper surface, with a thin white terminal band. The outer tail feathers appeared to be totally white. Rump white. Viewed from below (bird briefly twisted tail sideways while preening, the tail looked mostly white.

When standing, the back had obvious white crescents due to the white on the terminal ends of the tertials and secondaries; also viewed in flight.

Something caused all the gulls to flush, by which time, there were close to 5,000 gull present. I personally did not ever get a clear look at the tail fanned. The gulls circled and landed back in the same location on the ice.

Notes

I had gone to the lake to look for another gull sighted the day before which was probably a Lesser Black-backed Gull. This bird initially looked like it may have been the same, but was lighter in mantle color (than the bird seen on Sat.). I watched it for 15-20 min. until it briefly raised its head and I saw the red/black at the bill tip. This is when I realized I had a different gull. The bird was not moving around much and it took another 30-45 min. for me to notice that the tail had a dark band. This is when I called Ken Lebo, who then joined me and also took photos.

Other observers: Ken Lebo, Harold Lebo, Katrina Knight, Bernie & Pauline Morris, Harold & Joan Silagy, Matt Spence, and others?

The photos I took through my scope (with attachment), show a small, dark mantled gull, with Herring Gulls nearby. Unfortunately the distance is too great to see the bill or its coloring clearly. There was something wrong with the film or the developing, as the prints (entire roll) have a cloudy cast and mottling in the emulsion. I also feel that the mantle coloration appears darker than the bird did, though the Herring Gulls present give a good comparison.

Conclusion

In direct comparison with other gull species present, I eliminated; Herring Gull due to size difference, bill coloration, mantle color, and lack of white in primaries, the same for Ring-billed Gull, except for body size, which was similar, and bill size, which was much larger. Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* eliminated by size and mantle coloration, Lesser

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Black-backed Gull by bill coloration, lack of white in primaries, tail band, and under-wing pattern (same with other dark mantled species). California Gull *Larus californicus* by eye color, bill coloration (red on tip side of black and on both mandibles), lack of white on primaries, under-wing, and tail pattern. Band-tailed Gull *Larus belcheri* by eye color, head streaking, and under-wing pattern. I am comfortable with identifying adult gulls in our area, but have no previous experience with this species. After reviewing available literature, I would place the bird as a third year basic.

References

Field guide to birds of North America, 1999. National Geographic.

Harrison, Peter 1987. A field guide to seabirds of the world: a photographic guide.

Harrison, Peter 1983. Seabirds: an identification guide.

Grant, Peter J. 1982. Gulls: a guide to identification.

Lethaby, N. and J. Bangma 1998. Birding, Vol. XXX: No. 6, 470-483.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Ballot - Round One

Species: Black-tailed Gull (*Larus crassirostris*)

Date of Sighting: 2 January 2000 to 2 January 2000

Location: BERKS

County: LAKE ONTELAUNEE

Observer(s): Peter Saenger

Date of Submission: 2000

Submitted by: Peter Saenger

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

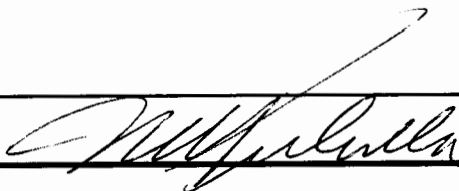
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Recording: No			Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead	X							
D. Couchman				X				
P. Hess								X
R. Ickes				X				
B. Reid			X					
P. Rodewald					X			
M. Sharp				X				
TOTALS	1		1	3	1			1
DECISION				X				

Comments: 2/4/1

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 11/2/00