











Common Gull (Mew Gull) *Larus Canus* (adult winter)

This report is a joint effort by David Rich of Wales, Harold Morrin of Millersville, PA, and Jonathan Heller of Mount Joy, PA.

Date: 1/2/92.

Location: Lake Ontelaunee (Reading Lake) along Route 73 in Berks County, PA.

The bird was first found by Jonathan Heller at 15:55 who noticed that the mantle was slightly darker than Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*) but not as dark as the two adult Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*Larus fuscus*) seen earlier. The gull was of a similar size to Ring-billed Gull. It was immediately identified as Common Gull by David Rich, an experienced birder from the United Kingdom. Then it was confirmed by Harold Morrin. A little later it was seen by Berks County compiler for *Pennsylvania Birds*, Rudy Keller, and his friend Dean Kendall. The following notes were taken while observing the bird without reference to field guides.

Time: 15:55 -- 16:40.

Equipment: Questar Telescope X 50 and Bushnell zoom 15-45.

Weather: Perfect light conditions. It was overcast, calm, and cold. The water on the lake was mostly frozen.

Distance: About 300 yds.

Other birds present: The bird was seen in direct comparison with Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) and Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*), and it was in close proximity to 2 adult Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*Larus fuscus*). The bird was seen standing on the ice, swimming in the water, and preening but was not seen flying.

Identification Points:

Size: similar in size to Ring-billed Gull. Some observers thought the bird may have been minutely smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls.

Head: Head was noticeably rounded in comparison with the Ring-billed Gulls. Top of head, nape, and the side of the neck were speckled/smudged. The speckling/smudging was slightly darker by the eye and on the side of the neck.

Eye: dark.

Bill: totally yellow and unmarked. Also smaller and narrower than Ring-billed Gull.

Breast: Speckled light gray.

Mantle and wing coverts: Uniform gray, darker than Ring-billed Gull but lighter than the 2 adult Lesser Black-backed Gulls in close proximity. Two small white patches in mid-back. Between the gray mantle and the black primaries there was a noticeable white crescent which was noticeably much wider than on the Ring-billed Gulls.

Primaries: Only seen closed. Black with small white patches.

Tail: Completely white.

Legs: Yellow.

Experience:

David Rich -- A United Kingdom birder who is very experienced with Common Gulls and immediately identified it.

Harold Morrin -- A birder of well known repute who has traveled widely and seen many Common Gulls.

Dean Kendall -- has seen Common Gulls on the West coast.

On 1/3/92 Jonathan Heller found the Common Gull (Mew Gull) again and had it confirmed by Harold Morrin, David Rich, Jerry Book, Frank Haas, Barb Haas, Chris Pederson, Ed Pederson, Jan Witmer, Pat Witmer, and other birders. It was photographed by Frank Haas.

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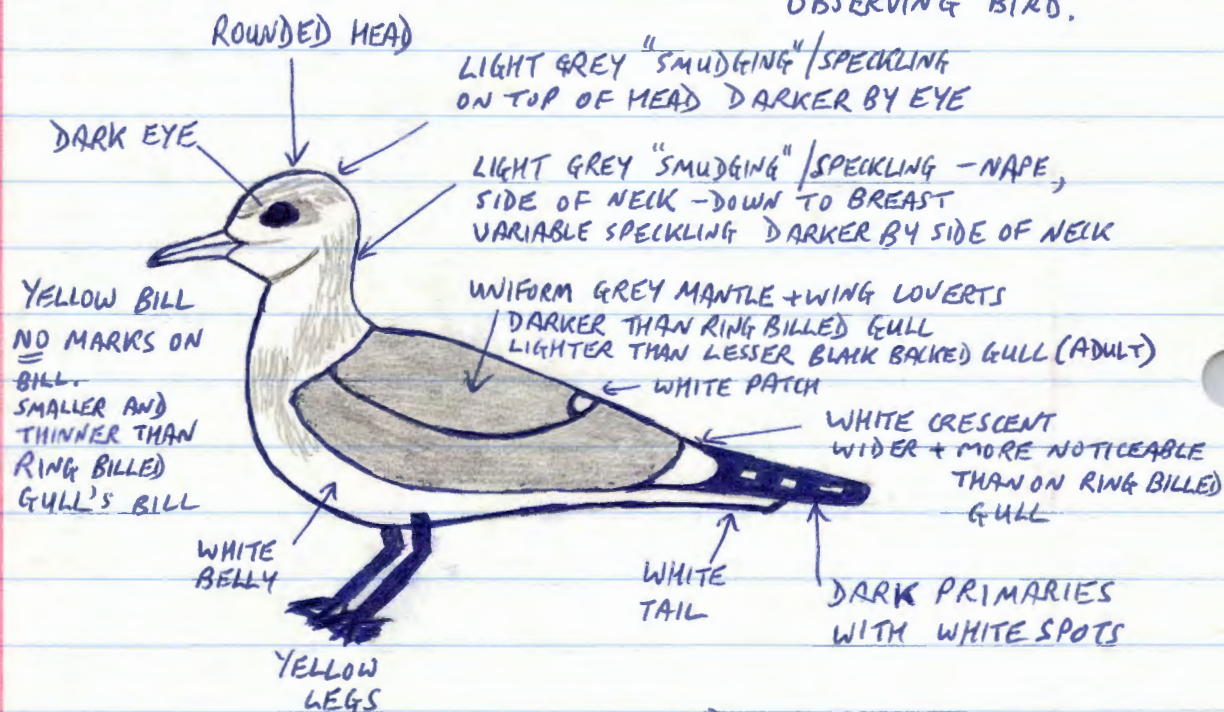
COMMON GULL (MEW GULL) (LARUS CANUS)

ADULT WINTER

SEEN 2nd JAN 1992 LAKE ONTELAUNEE (READING LAKE)
ON ROUTE 73, BERKS COUNTY, PA.

OBSERVERS DAVID RICH, JONATHAN HELLER, HAROLD MURRIN

EQUIPMENT QUESTAR X50 DRAWN FROM NOTES + DIAGRAMS WHILE
OBSERVING BIRD.



SIZE - SIMILAR SIZE TO
RING BILLED GULL

COMPARED WITH RING BILLED GULLS
& ADULT LESSER BLACK BACKED GULLS
HERRING GULLS.

David Rich

2nd JAN 1992

52 HEOL WEST PLAS,
COITY, BRIDGEND,

MID-GLAM. CF 35 6BA

UK.

To the rarities committee, bird clubs, etc

Please be free to use above diagram in any
publication - if you want to !!!

David Rich



344-01-1992

REPORT OF AN UNCOMMON OR RARE SPECIES AND/OR HIGH NUMBERS

SPECIES Common\Mew Gull, *Larus canus canus*\c.brachyrhynchus

Observer(s) writing account Paul Schwalbe, Glenna Schwalbe, Mark Schwalbe Date 9 January 1992

Date of observation 6 Jan 92 Location Blue Marsh, Berks Co., PA

Conditions under which observation was made:

The observation started at about 3:20 p.m., the sky was clear with a bright sun about 90° to the right. The gull was on the beach with a thousand +/- Ring-billed Gulls. However, we had an unobstructed view since it was in the front row of gulls, with Ring-bill's on both sides and behind, in the same field of view, providing direct comparisons. The bird in question was about 60 yards away. We were able to observe the bird for 20 - 25 minutes as it preened itself. This was the beach below the pavilion at the end of the road in the Blue Marsh Rec. Area, at Blue Marsh Lake. There were about 12 other birders there looking at the gull, including Rick Wiltraut, who had his camera.

Description:

Mark found the bird by scanning the flock of gulls on the beach and looking for an individual that appeared darker than the rest. Immediately after he found it, the gull turned towards the area where we were standing and started to preen its neck and breast feathers. Thus no one else had a direct side view of the bird, however the amount of wing that was in view, did look darker than those of the Ring-billed's in the area.

The entire head and all of the underparts that could be seen were white, with extensive spotting on the entire head, throat, foreneck, and a few on the upper breast. The spotting was especially heavy on the forehead. The head and bill had a diminutive look.

The bill looked like that of the Black-legged Kittiwake (two of us have seen many of these in Europe), but a little shorter. The culmen dropped with a gentle curve down to the tip, and there was practically no angle at the gonys. In other words, it was not "gull-billed" as it is in a Herring or Ring-billed. The color was a dirty or dusky yellow, but a definite yellow. There was no indication of a "ring" on the bill, neither on the lower nor the upper mandibles.

The eye was dark, not light as it could be seen to be on some of the adjacent Ring-billed's, when their head was in the right position. At one point Paul could see the faint upper half of a broken eye ring, but could never detect the lower half.

344-01-1992

Twice the gull stretched out its wings. While being studied it extended the right wing and held it out for about three seconds, during which the underside could be examined. From the underside, primaries 1 & 2 had large mirrors of about equal size. Primaries 3 - 5 and perhaps #6 (in the shadow of the birds body) were dark except for the extreme tips. There were no apparent white areas between the black and the grey on these primaries.

The legs looked to be the same length as they were on the surrounding Ring-billed's. They were slightly darker than the Ring-billed's. Glenna called them a grey-yellow rather than a green-yellow.

While the bird was sitting, neither the tail pattern nor the extended upper wing was seen. The observation ended when the entire group of gulls on the beach took to the air. Unfortunately at this time the bird could not be found in flight, nor did we find it again after they all returned to the beach.

Similar species:

The Ring-billed Gull, *Larus delawarensis*, is different in the following ways: 1. The bill is larger as well as being enlarged near the tip, "gull-like", with the obvious "ring". 2. The eye is light in color, pale yellowish iris. 3. Primary #1 has a smaller window than it does in *L. canus*, and it is usually much reduced on primary #2 (Harrison 1983). 4. The upperparts are a lighter grey than in the Common Mew (Grant 1986). 5. The prominent white tertial-crescent (which we didn't have the opportunity to see) of *L. canus* is reduced in the Ring-billed (Grant 1986).

L. c. canus vrs *L. c. brachyrhynchus*:

This is the problem. One of the best distinguishing characteristics according to Grant, 1986, is the more extensive white between the grey and black on the 3rd to 5th primaries. As stated above, we did not see the upper wing, so our observation is of no help there. However, Grant does say that this characteristic can also be seen from below. We did not see any white at all in this area on the underside of the wing, which suggest *L. c. canus*. Grant also says that the head markings in the winter adult *L. c. brachyrhynchus* are more diffuse, producing a uniform grey-brown head. This bird did not have a uniform grey-brown head, but rather a white head with many distinguishable dark markings as is found in *L. c. canus*. This too suggest that the bird was *L. c. canus*. Some *L. c. canus* have a dark subterminal band on the bill in winter, but many do not, so this does not help since this bird lacks such a band. The Mew frequently has a pale greenish-yellow iris, this is rarely so on *c. canus* and the bird in question had a dark eye (Grant, 1986). Differences between the two races as given by Cramp, 1983, are of no help.

However, the points of difference between the two races that we do have, seem to indicate that this bird is the Common Gull, *L. c. canus*.

344-01-1992

Optical equipment:

The bird was found with binoculars but the details were studied with a Kowa TSN-4, 25X.

Additional comments:

As soon as we had lost the gull for study, we went up to the car, sat down and wrote what we had seen. This was on the 6th of January. On the 9th of January the descriptive part of this report was written from these notes, the rest a couple of days later.

The bird had been seen just before we arrived according to those present. While we were walking down to the pavilion area, all the gulls on the beach flew up, circled around for a bit, then settled back down on the beach. Thus the gull in question had to be found once again after each of these "explosions". There were three or four such episodes while we were there and our observations were made during one of the quiet periods with the gulls sitting on the beach.

References:

Cramp, S., 1983 Chief Editor. Handbook of the Birds of Europe the Middle East and North Africa. The Birds of the Western Palearctic III: 801. Oxford University Press.

Grant, P. J. 1986 Gulls, A Guide to Identification, 2nd Ed. 51-57. Buteo Books.

Harrison, P. 1983 Seabirds. 144, 335-337. Houghton Mifflin.

P. Anna Schwalbe

Anna P. Schwalbe

Barbara Schwalbe

First Pennsylvania Record of Common Gull
(Mew Gull)
Berks County

This report is a joint effort by David Rich of Wales, Harold Morrin of Millersville, Pa., and Jonathan Heller of Mount Joy, Pa.

Date: 2 January 1992

Location: Lake Ontelaunee (Reading Lake) along Route 73 in Berks County, Pa.

The bird was first found by Jonathan Heller at 1555 who noticed that the mantle was slightly darker than Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*) but not as dark as the two adult Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*) seen earlier. The gull was of similar size to Ring-billed Gull. It was immediately identified as Common Gull (*L. canus canus*) by David Rich, an experienced birder from the United Kingdom. Then it was confirmed by Harold Morrin. A little later it was seen by Berks County compiler for *Pa. Birds*, Rudy Keller, and his friend Dean Kendall. The following notes were taken while observing the bird without reference to field guides.

Time: 1555 to 1640 h.

Equipment: Questar Telescope 50X and Bushnell zoom 15-45X.

Weather: Perfect light conditions. It was overcast, calm, and cold. The water on the lake was mostly frozen.

Distance: About 300 yards.

Other birds present: The bird was seen in direct comparison with Ring-billed Gulls and Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*), and it was in close proximity to two adult Lesser Black-backed Gulls. The bird was seen standing on the ice, swimming in the water, and preening but was not seen flying.

Identification Points:

Size: Similar in size to Ring-billed Gull. Some observers thought the bird may have been minutely smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls.

Head: Head was noticeably rounded in comparison with the Ring-billed Gulls. Top of head, nape, and the side of the neck were speckled/smudge. The speckling/smudging was slightly darker by the eye and on the side of the neck.

Eye: Dark.

Bill: Totally yellow and unmarked. Also smaller and narrower than Ring-billed Gull.

Breast: Speckled light gray.

Mantle and wing coverts: Uniform gray,

darker than Ring-billed Gull but lighter than the two adult Lesser Black-backed Gulls in close proximity. Two small white patches in mid-back. Between the gray mantle and the black primaries there was a noticeable white crescent which was noticeably much wider than on the Ring-billed Gulls.

Primaries: Only seen closed. Black with small white patches.

Tail: Completely white.

Legs: Yellow.

Experience:

David Rich: A United Kingdom birder who is very experienced with Common Gulls and immediately identified it.

Harold Morrin: A birder of well known repute who has traveled widely and seen many Common Gulls.

Dean Kendall: Has seen many Common Gulls (Mew Gull) on the West Coast.

On 3 January 1992 Jonathan Heller found the Common Gull (Mew Gull) again and had it confirmed by Harold Morrin, David Rich, Jerry Book, Frank Haas, Barb Haas, Chris Pederson, Ed Pederson, Jan Witmer, Pat Witmer, and other birders. It was photographed by Frank Haas.

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ADDENDUM: Although it took several trips by several birders to get confirmatory photographs as to which race of *Larus canus* the Berks County bird was, the original conclusion stated in the above article was correct.

Our review of the literature indicates that all but one record of *Larus canus* in the East are of the nominate race (*L. c. canus*). The Mew Gull (*L. c. brachyrhynchus*) is the expected race on the West Coast.

Please read Ed Kwater's excellent article elsewhere in this issue which provides the racial separation information.

Pennsylvania's First Mew Gull, With Notes
on Its Racial Identification

Ed Kwater

The adult Mew Gull (*Larus canus*), found by Jonathan Heller and identified by David Rich at Lake Ontelaunee (Berks County) on 2 January 1992 was Pennsylvania's first record of this species, pending acceptance by the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee. The bird was present for several weeks but was rather elusive during the first few days of its stay. Eventually it could be found more reliably on the shore at Blue Marsh Lake only a few miles from Lake Ontelaunee. The bird would often appear soon after midday in the company of Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*) and Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*) which provided an excellent comparison.

Identification of the bird as a Mew Gull was relatively straight-forward. However, assigning it to one of the four races of Mew Gull was less easy. More prolonged views were needed before it could be safely identified as the nominate European race, *L. c. canus*. To most observers it appeared slightly smaller than many of the Ring-billed Gulls present. The head was more rounded than in Ring-billed Gull and the crown peaked slightly just behind the eye. The head and neck were heavily streaked with brownish-gray, particularly on the nape. In Ring-billed Gulls in basic plumage the nape is usually spotted, not streaked, a subtle difference but nevertheless evident in the field at close range. Most of the markings on the neck and breast were brownish-gray crescents on the feather edges. The coarseness of the markings indicated that the bird was still in full basic plumage. The rest of the underparts were pure white. The character which made the bird immediately obvious in a flock of Ring-billed Gulls was the mantle color. This was a noticeably darker gray than in Ring-billed and Herring gulls, approaching a pale Laughing Gull (*L. atricilla*) in shade (Fig. 1).

The folded primaries extended well beyond the tail when the bird was at rest giving it a long-winged appearance. The visible primary tips were jet black with large subterminal white mirrors on the two outermost feathers. The mirror on P1 was slightly larger than that on P2 (Figs. 2 & 3), but both mirrors were larger than the corresponding mirrors on the accompanying Ring-billed Gulls. Small white tips on the second to fifth primaries (P2-P5) showed

as a line of spots on the folded wing tips. The prominent white tertial crescents were much more noticeable than in Ring-billed Gull, due to the relatively dark mantle and wing coverts. The bird also had small white scapular crescents which were more noticeable than in Ring-billed Gull. The tail was all white.

In flight, or when the bird flapped its wings, the upperwing pattern eliminated *L. c. brachyrhynchus*, the North American race of Mew Gull. The large white mirrors on the outer two primaries were immediately obvious. The amount of black decreased toward the mid primaries with only a subterminal black spot on P6. Apart from a white trailing edge to the inner primaries and secondaries, the rest of the upperwing was uniform gray. In *brachyrhynchus* the amount of black on the wing is less than in *canus* particularly on P3-P5. There is a distinct, crescent-shaped white area in *brachyrhynchus*, separating the black tips of P3-P6 from the gray of the rest of the upperwing (Grant 1986, p. 56). It was clear from flight observations of the Berks County bird that the upperwing pattern matched that of *canus* perfectly. The large size of the wing mirrors and the lack of any black in the outer upperwing coverts confirmed the bird as an adult rather than a second-year bird.

The eye was noticeably larger in relation to the size of the head in the Common Gull than in the accompanying Ring-billed Gulls and the iris was very dark. In adult *brachyrhynchus* the iris is usually pale yellow as in Ring-billed Gull, but may sometimes be dark. The bill was noticeably shorter and thinner than in Ring-billed Gull. At first glance it appeared to be unmarked yellow with a slightly paler tip. Closer scrutiny revealed a small gray smudge on the gonys and a second one on the culmen directly above the gonys. Adult *canus* usually shows at least some subterminal gray marking on the bill in basic plumage. While this often appears as a complete bill ring it is not normally as thick or as black as in Ring-billed Gull. Adult *brachyrhynchus* usually lacks any dark subterminal bill marking in basic plumage (Grant 1986). The tarsus was slightly shorter than on the accompanying Ring-billed Gulls. The legs were grayish-green in color, duller than in Ring-billed.

There are two other subspecies of Mew Gull which should be considered—*heinei* and *kamtschatschensis*. *Heinei* breeds from central Russia to central Siberia (Grant 1986). It is larger, on average, than either *canus* or

brachyrhynchus and noticeably darker on the upperparts (Cramp & Simmons 1983, Grant 1986). *Kamtschatschensis* which breeds in @northeastern Siberia (Grant 1986, Harrison 1983) is the largest of the four subspecies, approaching Herring Gull *L. argentatus* in size and is also darker than either *canus* or *brachyrhynchus* (Grant 1986). Because of their ranges, neither of the larger subspecies would be a likely candidate for vagrancy to the eastern United States. Almost all previous records in this area have been due to transatlantic vagrancy by *canus*.

In conclusion, identification of the Berks County Mew Gull as an individual of the nominate race was clinched by the diagnostic upperwing pattern. The dark iris color and presence of faint gray subterminal bill markings were also highly suggestive of Common Gull.

REFERENCES

- Cramp, S. and K.E.L. Simmons. 1983. *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa*. Vol. III. Oxford University Press. @
Grant, P.J. 1986. *Gulls, a Guide to Identification*. @Buteo Books.
Harrison, P. 1983. *Seabirds, an Identification Guide*. Croom Helm. @

Fig 1. Mew Gull of the European race *canus*, Blue Marsh Lake, Berks County, Pa., January 1992. Note the darker gray mantle and wing coverts (in comparison to the adjacent Ring-billed Gulls), large white mirror showing on P1 and the coarse crescent-shaped markings on the neck and breast. The stubby yellow bill, without an obvious bill ring can also be seen. In color by Eric Witmer.

Figs 2 & 3. Mew Gull of the European race *canus*, Blue Marsh Lake, Berks County, Pa., January 1992. The large white wing mirrors can easily be seen on the outer two primaries that on P1 being larger than that on P2. In color by Eric Witmer.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: **Mew Gull**

Date of Sighting: **2 January 1992**

Observer(s): **Jonathan Heller, Harold Morrib, David Rich**

Date of Submission: **1992**

Submitted by: **Jonathan Heller, Harold Morrib, David Rich**

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V		
					A	B	C
E. Kwater	X						
B. Haas	X						
F. Haas	X						
R. Ickes	X						
G. McWilliams	X						
S. Santner	X						
J. Skinner	X						
TOTALS	7						
DECISION	X						

Comments:

Signature (Secretary): *Tom Haas*

Date: *2-27-93*