

PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE
613 Howard Road, West Chester, PA 19380

19 February 2003

Matt Sharp
7135 Bryan St.
Philadelphia, PA 19119

Dear Matt,

The second-round vote on your record of the California Guli at Tullytown on 10 November was 4 in favor and 2 not in favor. A majority of the members found your details sufficient to add the species to Pennsylvania's provisional list, but Bob Leberman and I maintained our position that the description fell slightly short of the conclusive evidence necessary for a first state record. Bob and I both placed it in Class IV-A.

You'll recall my first-round analysis stating why I felt that the details were not quite complete for a species whose ID is not immediately obvious. My second-round comment was: "I hate to pass up what may be a first state record, but I see nothing in the first round comments that changes my mind about the troubling underwing description. I'm open to third-round reconsideration if the others can convince me about this."

Frankly I suspect that indeed you did see Pennsylvania's first California Gull, and I regret that a suspicion isn't quite enough for me.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Paul", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Record No. 346-01-2001

346-01-2001

ADULT CALIFORNIA GULL
ON DELAWARE RIVER FROM FLORENCE NJ
NOVEMBER 10, 2001

SIGHTING DETAILS

At approximately 1:15 I spotted an adult California Gull from the park in Florence. The bird was downriver from me and on the PA side of the river. My first impression upon seeing this bird was that its upperparts were a shade darker than the adult Herring Gull it was next to. I then noticed its apparently dark eye, smaller size, and yellow bill with red gonys spot bordered distally by a nearly complete black band. This combination of characters led me to believe that I was looking at an adult California Gull. I had the bird in view for 10-15 minutes total. It drifted further downriver getting further and further away, so I ran down to the farthest downriver point in the park and was able to relocate the bird slightly upriver from me. As the bird floated further downriver a boat came by and flushed the bird back upriver and to the NJ side. At its closest point while in flight the bird was nearly full frame in my scope. The closest the bird came while on the river was maybe 20 yards away. The sky was clear and bright with the sun overhead. The river was fairly calm. At one point while the bird was on the water it swam in between an adult Herring Gull (HEGU) and an adult Lesser-black-backed (LBBG) putting all three species in my field of view at once. The bird was flushed a second time by a passing boat with a large number of Herring Gulls. It appeared to head upriver but I was unable to relocate it after I lost it in the flock.

OPTICS

Leica APO 70mm scope with 32x eyepiece.
Swarovski EL 8x32

DESCRIPTION

AT REST ON WATER

Size and Structure:

The bird was pretty much the same size as LBBG. At one point when the bird was facing me and next to an adult LBBG it appeared broader across the chest making it look slightly bulkier. The head was fairly rounded giving a gentler look than Herring Gull, but it did not approach the dove headed look of an Iceland Gull. The bird appeared to have a full set of fresh primaries with 4 or 5 white apical spots visible past the tertials.

Bill:

Yellow with a red gonys spot bordered distally by a black band on both the upper and lower mandibles. The bill was more slender than Herring and appeared fairly long relative to head.

Iris:

Dark and contrasting noticeably against the white face.

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Legs:

Yellow. Seen reasonably well while bird was in flight, especially as they dangled when the bird lifted off from or landed on the water

Coloration:

Upperparts were bluish-gray and the rest of the bird was white. The mantle was similar in tone to Herring Gull but slightly darker. This was my very first impression upon seeing the bird. As I studied the bird on the water and in flight the mantle tone could appear almost as pale as on adjacent Herring Gulls. This was due to the bright sun and the changing angles of me to the bird versus me to adjacent Herring Gulls. In broadside views of both species at the same time it was possible to see the distinctly darker mantle shade on the California Gull. With the bird in the same field of view with LBBG and HEGU and with the birds at comparable angles the California Gull was closer in tone and shade to HEGU being less slaty-gray than LBBG and more bluish-gray

Head:

Almost all white with light brownish streaking on the back of the crown and head and on the nape.

Tertials:

Like the rest of the upperparts in color with white tips

Primaries:

Black with prominent white apical spots.

Under-parts and Tail:

White.

IN FLIGHT

Wings from above:

The amount of black in the wing tip was noticeably more extensive than on Herring Gull. The wingtips had a dipped in ink appearance with the apical spots contrasting distinctly. The white tip on the outermost primary (P10) was large. There was a white mirror on the next primary (P9) which combined with the white on P10 to create a large white area on the wingtip. The black on the primaries appeared evenly demarcated from the wing coverts and cut back towards the body slightly as small black sub-terminal bar on an inner primary (p5?)

Wings from below:

White, slightly grayer on flight feathers but lacking the gray wedge on LBBG

Discussion and Separation from other Species.

This bird appeared to be in definitive basic plumage indicating that it was at least 4 years old. The combination of head characters alone on a bird this age (dark eye, and yellow bill with red and black markings) would seem to rule out Herring Gull. Many 2-3 years

old Herring Gulls at the same site had red and black marking on a yellow bill, as did Lesser Black-backed Gulls. But the majority (all?) of the HEGU and LBBG I have seen at this site have the red preceding the black, with the black on the face side of the gonys. The combination of size, bare parts coloration, slightly darker upperparts, and more extensively black primaries would seem impossible for Herring in definitive basic. The bird was obviously larger than a Ring-billed Gull, which also has very different bill markings and paler upperparts. The bird was obviously paler above than a Lesser Black-back and the amount of white on the primaries was also more extensive than on that species. The head streaking was also lighter than on adult basic Lesser Black-backed Gull but other LBBGs on the river this day were in various stages of head molt. I have never seen an adult lesser with a dark eye either in life, in press, or on the web. The bird was small for a Yellow-legged Gull. The rounded head, dark eye, and bill markings all are wrong for Yellow-legged Gull *L. cacchinans michahellis* and *atlantis*. The smaller size relative to Herring Gull should rule out nominate *L. cacchinans*.

After writing this description I re-read the Jon R. King article in Birders Journal on separating California Gull subspecies in the field. Based on the mantle color and shade, extent of head streaking, and the bulkiness relative to LBBG I would guess that this bird was *albertanensis* rather than *californicus*. But I did not get a chance to study the finer details of the primaries needed to confirm that one way or another.

This description is based on notes taken in the field. It was written on the 10th when I returned home. I briefly consulted the Sibley Guide prior to writing the description. The discussion was added later after consulting Sibley, Nat'l Geo 3rd edition, the Birders Journal article, and various websites.

For what it is worth I have attached a sketch of the upperwing made in the field



7135 Bryan St

Phila PA

19119

346-01-2001

LBBG - A2-16+8
1st 7+4
2 3

minor on
89-155 aspx on 10
looking
black



Gr-1

cut back
against white Dispo's

legs yellow

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round One

Species: California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

Date of Sighting: 10 November 2001 to 10 November 2001

Location: TULLYTOWN

County: BUCKS

Observer(s): Matt Sharp

Date of Submission: 2001

Submitted by: Matt Sharp

Written Description: Yes

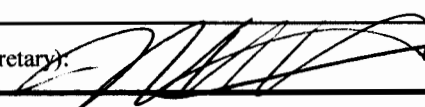
Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead			X					
D. Couchman <i>Heitholtz</i>		X						
P. Hess				X				
J. Stanley			X					
B. Reid			X					
R. Leberman				X				
M. Sharp								X
TOTALS		1	3	2				1
DECISION								

Comments: 4/2/1 - send for 2nd round

Signature (Secretary): 

Date:

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round Two

Species: California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

Date of Sighting: 10 November 2001 to 10 November 2001

Location: TULLYTOWN

County: BUCKS

Observer(s): Matt Sharp

Date of Submission: 2001

Submitted by: Matt Sharp

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead			X					
D. Heathcote			X					
P. Hess				X				
J. Stanley			X					
E. Witmer			X					
R. Leberman				X				
M. Sharp								X
TOTALS			4	2				1
DECISION				X				

Comments: 4/2/1

Signature (Secretary):

Date: 1/10/03