



346-02-2005

California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

Age: Adult in basic plumage

Date: November 12, 2005 9:30-10:30 AM

Location: Roughly 1 mile west of Presque Isle State Park, Erie County

Site: Lake Erie offshore of Baer Beach Subdivision, Millcreek Township, Erie County, PA.

Observer: Ben Coulter
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Distance to bird: I first picked the bird up sitting on the water approximately 200 yards directly offshore. It was later relocated standing on the beach about 1/3 of a mile to the east, but eventually I closed the distance to about 150 yards. The bird was somewhat closer during the flybys.

Conditions: Mostly sunny. Temperature 50 F. The light was good, but harsh. There was some heat distortion.

Optics: Swarovski 8.5x42 binoculars, Leica 77mm APO scope w/ 20-60x eyepiece, Nikon Coolpix 995

Description: Medium-large slender white-headed gull. Head appears smallish with dark eyes protruding when viewed head-on. Bill long and slim. Head, neck, breast, belly, flanks, undertail coverts, rump, uppertail coverts white. Head and neck with blotchy brown streaking around eye, nape, and most prominently at sides of neck, extending around front to make necklace. Mantle/upperparts color medium-gray, several shades darker than *smithsonianus* or Ring-billed. Scapular and tertial crescents white, contrasting strongly with darker upperparts. Wings long and thin, with black wingtips. White mirrors on P9-P10. Outermost 6 or so primaries with black on outer half of feather on both webs, more extensive than Herring Gulls, making wingtip seem to be dipped in ink. Primaries and secondaries with white tips, contrasting well with dark upperparts when wings spread and giving a white trailing edge. Tail unmarked white. Irides appearing completely dark in the field. Bill straw yellow; long, thin and without noticeable gonydeal expansion. Faint blackish subterminal mark on bill on both mandibles in front of dull orangish-red mark on gonys. Legs and feet dull grayish-green.

Supporting Evidence: see photographs and video by Ben Coulter.

DSCN9581.MOV: Shows CAGU on water. Note riding high in water, with small rounded head and long bill. Darker mantle contrasting strongly with white markings.

DSCN9582.MOV: CAGU on beach. Small-headed and long-billed, with dark mantle. Leg color visible.

DSCN9583.MOV: CAGU preening on beach with Herring and Ring-billed Gulls. Size intermediate, with darker mantle, slim bill and darker eyes conspicuous. Leg color visible briefly.

DSCN9587.JPG: Blurry, but leg color visible. Very long-necked and small-headed. CAGU is just left of center.

Similar species: Ring-billed Gull is smaller, with a proportionately shorter bill lacking a red gonys spot, a paler mantle color, a pale iris as an adult, more crisply-defined head streaking concentrated around eye, crown and nape, and less black on the wingtip.

American Herring Gull can be ruled out by its bulkier structure, more angular head, paler mantle color, less extensive black in the primaries, broader wings, and different bare part colors. Black-tailed Gull is slightly smaller, with a black tail band, no white mirrors, a pale eye and distinctive bill pattern. Lesser Black-backed Gull has a slate-gray mantle, different bare part colors, and only a small mirror on P10.

Discussion: I found this California Gull sitting on the water on Lake Erie. It looked darker-mantled, but was difficult to see well whilst it bobbed up and down on the choppy water. Eventually, I obtained satisfactory looks at the bill pattern and shape, and dark eyes to confirm the identification. It then flew over to join a group of gulls further east on the beach, and I observed the distinctive wing pattern and grayish-green legs. This may or may not be the same adult CAGU I later found at Gull Point on 11/20/2005 and again off Baer Beach 11/26/2005. A partial description was written, but not submitted to PORC until now.

Prior experience: I've found this species previously in Erie, and on the Niagara River.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: California Gull *Larus californicus*

Date of Sighting: 12 November 2005 to 12 November 2005

County : ERIE

Location : MILLCREEK TOWNSHIP

Observer(s): Ben Coulter

Date of Submission: 2010

Submitted by: Ben Coulter

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

Specimen: No

Recording: Video

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
R. Wiltraut	X							
A. Guarente	X							
T. Johnson								
B. Coulter D. DeRamus	X		X					
E. Rutt B. Coulter	X							
J. Heller	X							
G. Malosh	X							
TOTALS	5		1					
DECISION	X							

Comments: 6/0

Signature (Secretary) Nick Pulcinella

Date: 8/30/10