

California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

December 26, 2006

346-03-2006

Memorial Lake, Fort Indiantown Gap, Lebanon County, PA

I was scoping the large Herring Gull flock on the lake when a "different" looking gull flew through my field of view low over the water. I followed it and was impressed by the extent of the black in the outer primaries. Then I was even more impressed when the bird landed with a couple of adult Herring Gulls nearby and was noticeably smaller. Basically, I was looking at a gull that looked similar to a smaller, darker gray (backed) Herring Gull. I was immediately stuck by the darker mantle (than Herring Gull), though it was closer to Herring than Lesser Black-backed in shade. The bird's head was rounded and heavily streaked, especially towards the nape. The bird's bill was long and less angular than surrounding Herring Gulls with a large amount of black just in front of a red gonys spot. I couldn't really tell if the gull was dark-eyed or not given the (poor) quality of the lighting (very late afternoon, almost sunset), but everything that I could see was representative of a typical adult California Gull. I did not note the color of the bird's legs since I only saw it in flight and on the water; however, with lighting conditions and distance (~150 m), I probably wouldn't have been able to determine leg color anyway, even if the bird had been sitting out of the water. The primary pattern that I observed involved extensive black in the outer primaries, extending further from the wingtip than adult Herring Gull. In addition, very little white was noticed in this primary pattern, except for a small amount of white on the outer primaries (I could not determine the exact location of these mirrors). After watching the bird for a little while, I sprinted back to my car to get my camera. I took some god-awful bad shots of the bird in fading light, none of which are conclusive, but I was able to write down fairly detailed notes as soon as I returned to the car. I was leaving to head home when I spotted some birders a little ways down the lakeshore, Billy Weber and his parents. It took a few minutes, but I was able to refind the bird and showed it to Billy. At that point it was really starting to get dark and views were less than satisfactory.

In terms of the identification, I am positive that the bird I observed was a California Gull, based on my recognition of the bird as fitting structurally what I've seen on California Gulls in the western states (Arizona, Washington, Utah), and then supported by plumage details and bill size, shape, and pattern. The possibility of a hybrid Lesser Black-backed x Herring Gull was considered mostly because that is the only real sticking point that I can see in getting a sight record of an out of range California Gull accepted... but I think the bill pattern of red and black as well as all other observed features being consistent with California Gull should eliminate that possibility. Though I am sure of the identification, I understand that the committee may have trouble accepting this as a California Gull without a photograph.

Interestingly (and probably relevant to this report), I observed and photographed a probably Lesser Black-backed x Herring Gull hybrid adult at Memorial Lake the very next evening (photos included for reference). However, this bird structurally appeared to be a Lesser Black-backed Gull with a very light mantle and was certainly not the same bird as the California Gull from the night before (most easily told for sure in this case by bill pattern, I would imagine).

This report was written on January 7, 2007 based on notes from the time of observation and a post that I sent to PAbirds after the observation.

Tom Johnson

Hummelstown, PA

1/7/06

# Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

## Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: California Gull *Larus californicus*

Date of Sighting: 26 December 2006 to 26 December 2006

Location: MEMORIAL LAKE

County : LEBANON

Observer(s): Tom Johnson

Date of Submission: 2006

Submitted by: Tom Johnson

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut			X					
A. Guarente	X		X					
T. Johnson			X					
<del>L. Stanley</del> B. Lister			X					
E. Witmer			X					
J. Heller			X					
G. Malosh				X				
TOTALS			6	1				
DECISION			X					

Comments: 6/1

Signature (Secretary)

Date:

9/20/07