

Black-legged Kittiwake

*Rissa tridactyla*

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Location: Sunset Point at Presque Isle State Park, Erie Co., Pa.

Date: November 7, 2013

Time: 9:35 AM

Weather: Cloudy, NW wind to 25 mph, temp. at 43 F.

Viewing distance: approximately one mile offshore

Optics: Swarovski 8 X 42 Binocular and Kowa TSN 884 Prominar spotting scope from 20X to 60X.

Details: I was conducting my waterbird count and was sifting through the many Bonaparte's Gulls heading west past Sunset Point when I spotted a first cycle Black-legged Kittiwake. It was well offshore, perhaps as far away as a mile from me. However even at this distance the classic field marks could easily be seen. The kittiwake was larger than the Bonaparte's Gulls with obviously longer wings. The kittiwake's wing beats were slow and shallow while the Bonaparte's wing beats were more tern-like, more of a deep rowing or sweeping movement. The upperside pattern was unmistakable. I could clearly see the bold black "M" pattern across the otherwise white upperside, created by the combination of the black outer primaries and leading edge of the outerwing, with the diagonal black bar crossing the forewing. The black bar across the upper part and sides of the neck distinguished it from the similarly patterned Little Gull and Ross's Gull. The only other field mark that could be seen from this distance was the narrow black terminal tail band. The rest of the bird including the head was white. Because of the distance, I could not clearly see the dark spot behind the eye and of course the black feet. The kittiwake continued flying west and then out of sight. It only took a couple of minutes for it to pass the point. I was able to obtain some rather poor quality photographs. However, despite the distance of the kittiwake the upperwing pattern can still be seen in the photos.

I have identified kittiwakes here as well as Niagara Falls, and in the North Atlantic.