

Slaty-backed Gull

12 Feb 1989

Record Number: 89-11

Classification: A-D

Bettendorf, Scott Co., IA

*A. Barker, J. Fuller, ***P. Petersen

to 21 Feb; IBL 59:52, 78, 82, 61:85, Fuller 1989

DOCUMENTATIONS

Ann M. Barker, 12, 14 Feb

Jim Fuller, 14 Feb

Peter C. Petersen, 14 Feb

Thomas H. Kent, 14 Feb

Gerald White, 16 Feb

Peter C. Petersen, 18 Feb

Michael J. Baum, 18 Feb

Tanya E. Bray, 19 Feb

Ross Silcock, 19 Feb

Carl J. Bendorf, 21 Feb

Peter C. Petersen, 14 Mar

PHOTOGRAPHS

Peter C. Petersen, 14 Feb, P-0277 (IBL 59:123, IL Birds & Birding 5:70))

John Hoogerheide, 18 Feb, P-0278 (IBL 59:123)

LETTERS

Bruce Peterjohn to Thomas H. Kent, 16 Sep 1989

Ron Goetz to Thomas H. Kent, 19 Sep 1989

Guy McCaskie, 26 Sep 1989

Ronald E. Goetz, 24 Oct 1989

Lawrence C. Binford, 2 Dec 1989

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 59:52, 78, 82; IL Birds & Birding 5:70

Records Committee: IBL 61:85

Photographs: IBL 59:123 (P-0277, P-0278), IL Birds & Birding (P-0277)

Fuller, J. 1989. Slaty-backed Gull in Scott County. IBL 59:121-123.

VOTE: 3 A-P, 3 A-D, 1 NA

A-D. Photos are not conclusive but descriptions are, especially Kent's observation of wing tip pattern that is unique to this species.

A-D. It appears that the other contenders for this bird are Western Gull and dark race Herring Gull (L. f. heuglini). Both of these would seem much more likely in terms of probability of vagrancy in the Midwest. In view of photos and written documentations, however, I feel both have been satisfactorily eliminated. Herring Gull: As with Barker, I have had no experience with the L. f. heuglini form, but agree with her that the bird described here had a darker saddle and different wingtip pattern. Western Gull: The written accounts consistently noted broad white trailing edge to the wing. While this was somewhat subjective, I feel the photo helped substantiate the observation. With regard to wingtips, the Western and Slaty-backed share the mirror on the first primary, although other aspects of the wingtip differ. While not visible in the photo, there was good

written description of the white spots separating the mantle from the wingtip. The obviousness of these (based upon written descriptions) appear to be somewhat less than the evidently heavy-handed illustration in Harrison, and more like the photos in Grant. The written descriptions of the underwing pattern, while also subjective, indicate that the underwing of this bird was lighter than what would be expected from a Western. This was not supportable from the copy of the photo. Based upon the photos and written description, I have no problem in accepting this record. Due to its significance, however, I would recommend that we solicit the input and findings of the Illinois Records Committee before making final judgement. The reproductions of the photos I saw were not, in my opinion, diagnostic. Thus my vote is A-D rather than A-P.

A-P. For 1) Thick white trailing edge to the upperwing 2) Visible white separation between dark grey inner primaries and black outer primaries 3) Folded wingtips show 4 white spots not five as would be expected in the Western 4) Detailed descriptions by many observers. Although a winter plumaged adult Western Gull is hard to eliminate the above seems to satisfactorily eliminate Western.

NA. The bird in question presents a very difficult I.D. Identification of the bird as a Slaty-backed Gull seems to rest on three key features; leg color, mantle color, and the pattern of the wingtips. The mantle of this bird was variously described as "dark gray" to "blackish". To me, the mantle appeared very black, almost as black as the mantle of a Great Black-backed Gull. Most observers described the wingtips as being darker than the wingtip [sic], but I would say they were only slightly darker than the rest of the wing. This should eliminate Gr. Black-backed Gull, since this species has uniformly black upperwings. All of the descriptions mentioned pink legs with some noting brighter pink feet. This is certainly consistent with Slaty-backed, but does not rule out Western or the Siberian race of Herring Gull. Most observers described the bird as Herring Gull sized, but no one made specific reference to build. Body and head shape and size might have been used to eliminate consideration of Western Gull, a generally bulkier bird. The pattern of white on the uppersurface of the wing figures heavily into the identification of this bird. Although most observers described a row of white subterminal spots on the outer primaries, this feature is not evident in the photo provided, nor did I see this myself when I specifically looked for it. As near as I can tell from the photo (which is very blurry), the bird has a large subterminal spot on the outer primary and smaller white terminal spots on the inner four or five primaries. However, I would like to see sharper photos before I can make a good judgement of this mark. A couple of other points; most observers mentioned that the bill was Herring Gull sized, but keep in mind that female Western Gull could have a bill this size also. Also, there appears to be considerable contrast between the flight feathers and underwing coverts on the underside of the wing. It is possible that this is because of lighting, but I can't be sure. Slaty-backed Gull

should have a pale underwing without evident contrast. From the descriptions, photo, and my personal observations of this bird, I cannot conclude that the bird was a Slaty-backed Gull. I don't feel any of the descriptions convincingly eliminate Western Gull, and only one observer even mentioned the possibility of a hybrid. I need to see more photos before I can consider accepting this record.

A-P. See comments in my documentation. Head and bill size appear to be smaller than for St. Louis bird. We may get more documentations from Illinois, as well as outside review.

A-P. Documentations are consistent with each other and consistent with Slaty-backed Gull as far as research I have done on this species.

A-D. A-D rather than A-P, although Petersen photo shows absence of white in 9th primary--very suggestive of Slaty-backed, if photo analysis is correct as to which primary is black. Barker analysis fair--narrows choice to Western and Slaty-backed (other than possibility of hybrid). However primary pattern not clearly described or diagrammed. Fuller's is an excellent description--mentions dark area around eye, especially "distally" (sic) [author's sic]--I presume this means post-ocular. I would like to have seen a better discussion (any discussion!) of ID vs Western Gull. Petersen discussion brief and similar to Fuller's, although details not as comprehensive. Having seen bird myself, I concur with ID, but believe Fuller's documentation is adequate. THK also mentions ocular 'patch', as did myself. THK description of primary pattern probably best, as is discussion of similar species. As suggested by Bendorf, this bird appears to be different from the St. Louis bird, based on bill size etc.

REVOTE: 2 A-P, 3 A-D, 2 NA

A-D. 1) When NA voter commented there was no specific reference to build of bird, I checked my own documentation and found I noted that "Overall size, shape, and build was virtually indistinguishable from Herring Gulls within several feet...may have been less than 5% smaller than Herring Gull but essentially there was no difference." Grant's guide 2nd edition admits "Western Gull is about the size of smithsonianus [rare of Herring Gull] or slightly smaller, but it is very stockily built, with heavily domed forehead, very stout and 'blob-ended' bill...and proportionately shorter and broader-winged. The compound effect of these structural differences is to give a generally much larger impression, and especially in the [adult] plumages, recalls Great Black-backed Gull when an observer sees Western Gull for the first time..." (page 179-180). My documentation also describes bill as appearing identical proportionally to a Herring Gull. This also is difficult to reconcile with Grant's comments above about Western. Thus I feel Western is eliminated in a reasonable way. 2) As the NA voter comments, the upper wingtip pattern does figure heavily into this ID. I also specifically looked for the row of subterminal spots but, like the NA voter, was unable to pick it out. However, this diagnostic feature was mentioned in a number of documentations and probably best

described by Kent. The fact that this feature didn't show up in a fuzzy photograph, or was not detected by me or the NA voter doesn't mean it wasn't seen by others. Bird does not have to be equally well seen and described by all documentors in order to be an overall conclusive record.

A-D. The dissenter saw the bird, but since a documentation was evidently not submitted, we have no way to evaluate the observer's observations. In this case, a documentation would have been helpful even without top of the form filled in. Based upon the information we did receive, I feel it adequately supported Slaty-backed Gull, dissenting opinion notwithstanding. Most of the dissent was based upon not seeing what 9 other documentations were reasonably consistent about. Also, I disagree that the ID rested upon only 3 features (leg color, mantle, and wingtips). Wing's trailing edge, underwing pattern, and others supported the identification.

NA. Although several verbal accounts counterdict the picture the subterminal and terminal white spots on the outer primaries and lack of white separating the primaries and secondaries support Western Gull. Until other physical evidence is produced I must change my vote to NA.

NA. I will not accept this record until I see better photos.

A-P. I think the combination of features seen in the photos are enough to be diagnostic. These features include size, build, eye smudge, head shape and size, leg color, wide white trailing edge, color of mantle, and detail of wing tip. Most recent print shows large mirror and terminal spot on 10th primary, terminal spot on 9th primary, terminal spot and faint subterminal white on 8th primary, and wide smudge white on 7th and 6th primary. There are a number of points of distinction from Western Gull: (1) body build (this was described and is seen in photos), (2) head size and shape, (3) smudge through the eye, (4) wide trailing edge, (5) light underwing, and (6) wing tip pattern. Even the suboptimal photo shows a wing tip very much like that in the NG guide and unlike the Western Gull.

A-P. Absence of reference to build of bird could be a key to ID also since no one noted that it was other than a Herring Gull size one could assume a Herring type build if another type was not noted or described. I do not read from the documentations that there was "considerable contrast" between flight feathers and coverts on underwing. To me documentations mention slightly darker under surface of primaries compared to rest of underwing. One documentation didn't even mention any contrast.

A-D. NA raises good points; perhaps entire data needs outside review. I don't buy hybrid possibility because of rarity of possible parents and this extreme rarity of hybrid fitting description of this bird. To me, biggest question is raised by the virtual certainty that this bird and St. Louis bird were different. Thus, amazing coincidence that the only two Slaty-backs for lower 48 occurred in same general area (although a case could be made that this is where an Alaskan stray would wind up--following the MO/Miss River valley).

2nd REVOTE: 5 A-P, 2 A-D, 1 NA

NA [see attached sheet]

A-D Although I still have some doubts, I have decided to accept this record because most of the evidence favors Slaty-backed over Western. In my mind, none of the photos are diagnostic. The Hoogerheide photo, purporting to show a post-auricular patch, is not sharp enough to make such a determination. Note that the Herring Gull in back of and to the left of the Slaty-backed in this photo has an eye pattern nearly identical to that of the Slaty-backed. The review of McCaskie was especially helpful in clearing up some of my questions as to whether this bird may have been a Western. The Goetz review was likewise helpful, especially his analysis of the wing pattern. The Peterjohn review was mostly useless since it included very little in the way of critical detailed analysis. I still think that this bird may have been a Western Gull or a hybrid, but for now I will accept the bird as a Slaty-backed Gull.

A-P With the photo by Hoogerheide clearly showing the dark eye smudge and streaking on the neck that was documented by the various observers we have further photographic proof for acceptance of this bird. The addition of the outside reviewers comments should help to give more weight to the acceptance of this record for the benefit of the NA voters. This record should be voted according to the evidence in the photos and the written descriptions contained in the documentations just as the outside reviewers have done. The documentations and photos together make this Slaty-backed Gull record beyond reasonable doubt.

A-P Comments by outside reviewers very interesting, especially McCaskie's that plumage of this bird is closest to southern Westerns, but that these birds retain white head feathering throughout winter (i.e., no head streaking such as Moline bird had). Hoogerheide photo clearly shows eye marking extending to rear from eye--probably the most important single field mark clearly documented.

SENT TO: Ann M. Barker, 25368 250th St., Priceton, IA 52768.; Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, RR 6, Iowa City, IA 52240; Peter C. Petersen, 235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport, IA 52803; Gerald White, 1505 E. 5th St., Muscatine, IA 52761; Tanya E. Bray, 1107 Ironwood, Ct #185, Bellevue, NE 68005-4758; Ross Silcock, Carl Bendorf.

89-11 Slaty-backed Gull; 12 Feb 1989; Bettendorf, Scott Co., Ia.

Vote: N/A

Comments: It seems that we are considering one of four black-backed gulls Great Black-backed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Slaty-backed Gull, and Western Gull (L.O. Wymani). I have eliminated Greater and Lesser Black-backed Gull based on size. The gull is too small for Greater and too large for Lesser. That leaves Slaty-backed or L.O. Wymani. The following is my assessment based on the experts comments, original documentations, and pictures by Petersen and Hoogerheide.

Size: In Hoogerheide's picture the gull seems larger than the Herring Gull directly behind it, but smaller than the Herring Gull in the distance.

Conclusion: Size supports neither.

Bill: The gull in Hoogerheide's picture shows a deeper yellow bill with an abrupt terminal culmen, a definite gonydeal angle, thick lower mandible compared to the culmen, and a wide deep gape as inferred by Bray's bill description. These characteristics point to Western Gull, but because the picture shows no side profile of a Herring Gull bill these perceptions lose weight. I have determined that the second bird back from the black-backed gull is a winter plumaged adult Thayer's Gull.

Conclusion: Bill shape and size are the strongest physical evidence supporting Western Gull.

Iris: The picture appears to have a yellow iris.

Conclusion: Nonconclusive; both should have yellow iris.

Legs: The legs color looks pinkish compared to the bill. The legs look short with no leg showing above the knee. The picture on page 136 of Harrison's shows Slaty-backed Gull with short legs like this, however no written accounts or other pictures of reference material I have confirm this.

Conclusion: Short legs weakly favor Slaty-backed Gull.

Head and Neck: The dark feathered area behind the eye is evident in the photo, and Goetz says this is diagnostic for Slaty-backed Gull. The photo shows a white headed gull with no apparent streaking on the crown or nape just black streaking on the hindneck.

Conclusion: Postocular feathering supports Slaty-backed. Lack of crown and nape streaking weakly supports Western.

Tailing edge of wing: The width of the white in the secondaries and inner primaries in the photo by Petersen supports Slaty-backed, but is not so wide as to eliminate Western.

Conclusion: Strongest physical evidence for Slaty-backed.

Pattern of primaries: Upperwing pattern, as I see Petersen's picture shows a subterminal white spot on the first primary, a small subterminal white area on the fifth primary, and white and black terminal halves to primary number six. In contrast the documentation by Kent, Silcock, and Bray describe a pattern of subterminal white areas in the middle primaries more typical of Slaty-backed. Conclusion: Photo and Petersen's diagram support Western. Observer accounts support Slaty-backed.

Underwing: McCaskie states "Western Gulls always show a large amount of black on the undersides of the primaries and secondaries". Harrison's Page 137 shows a underside pattern which mirrors Petersen's photo and McCaskie's comment.

Conclusion: Physical evidence supports Western Gull.

Overall Conclusion: I have seen both subspecies of Western Gull in California, but I only can recall that they were black-backed west coast gulls. I tried once to see the gull but missed it, so all I have to go on is the documentation, expert commentary, references, and the photo provided by Petersen and Hoogerheide. At this point based primarily on the bill size and shape in Hoogerheide's photo and underwing pattern in Petersen's photo, I believe the gull is an L.O. Wymani subspecies of the Western Gull.



Slaty-backed Gull at Moline (Rock Island Co.), 14 Feb. 1989.
Photo by Peter Petersen

Herring Gull--M.C.: 6000, Peoria, 30 Dec.-28 Feb. (A); 5200, LCal, 4 Feb. (L); 1350, Winthrop Harbor, 14 Jan. (L); 900, Zion, 3 Dec. (L); 500, e. Grundy Cty, 9 Jan. (M); 150, Spfld, 2 Jan. (B); 60, Rend L, 11 Feb. (DR).

Thayer's Gull--North Pekin (ad.), 20 Dec., but (ad. + 2 1st-year), 7 Feb., and (3 ad. + 1 3rd-year), 17 Feb. (R); Peoria (1-3), 24-27 Feb. (R, A); Chi (ad.), 3 Dec. (L) & 28 Dec. (*RE); Alton (1st-year), 10 Dec. (G); Hartford (2 ad.), 9 Feb. (G); Chi (Navy Pier) (ad.), 22 Jan. (*WM); Evanston (1st-year), 11 Dec. (EW); Zion (3 ad.), 1-2 Jan. (EW, L); Decatur, 15-17 Dec. (D), LChau (ad.), 23 Dec. (*MB); e. Grundy Cty (2 ad.), 30 Dec.-13 Jan. (*M); LCal (3 ad.), 31 Dec. (*L).

Iceland Gull--Tazewell Cty (1st-year), 17 Dec.-1 Mar. (*A, TP) and (ad.), 25-26 Feb. (A); LChau (1st-year), 23 Dec. (*MB, *A, *B); Zion (2nd-year), 1-11 Jan. (EW, L, *J, m.ob.); Peoria (2), 19 Jan. (A); Chillicothe (1st-year), 24 Feb. (R). Kumlien's: e. Grundy Cty (ad.), 10 Jan. (*M); North Pekin (ad.), 7 Feb. (R).

Lesser Black-backed Gull--Alton (ad.), 4-23 Dec. (BR, *G) and probably the same bird at Hartford, 9 Feb. and Alton, 18 Feb. (G, JE); Tazewell Cty (ad.), 17-19 Dec. (*A) and 9, 17 & 26 Feb. (R); Peoria (ad.), 26 Feb. (A); Spfld (from fall), thru 7 Dec. (B, DO).

Slaty-backed Gull--Rock Island, 14-25 Feb. (*PP, *TK, *MB, m.ob.). Second Illinois record.

Glaucous Gull--Pekin area: (1st-year)--7-17 Feb., (2nd-year)--7 Feb., (3rd-year)--20 Feb., and (ad.)--14-20 Feb. (R); Peoria: (1st-year)--27 Feb., and (2 ad.)--24 Feb. (R); Fulton Cty, 3 Dec. (A); LChau (ad.), 23 Dec. (*A, *B, *MB); Alton (1st-year), 10 Dec. (G et al.), and (age ?), 15 Jan. (JV et al.) and 18-19 Feb. (BR, G et al.); Hartford (2 1st-years), 9 Feb. (G), with (1) thru 11 Feb. (BR, m.ob.); Carl L (ad.), 11 Feb. (G, TBa); Evanston (1st-year), 11 Dec. (EW); Zion (1st-year), 3 Dec. (L) and 2 Jan. (EW, DR, JHa); Rock Island/Moline (1-4), all winter (PP et al.); e. Grundy Cty: (1st-year)--6 Feb., (subad.)--2 & 4 Jan., (ad.)--9 Jan. (M); LCal: (imm.)--31 Dec. and (ad.)--7 Jan. (L); Spfld (2nd-year), 2 Jan. (B).

Great Black-backed Gull--JP (ad.), 8 Dec. (HR); Moline (ad.), 18 Dec. (PP); Rock Falls (ad.), 18-28 Dec. (*LJ); Pekin (ad.), 30 Dec. (A); LChau (ad.), 8 Jan. (A); LCal (ad.), 31 Dec., 8 & 15 Jan. (L); Lake Cty (subad.), 14 Jan. (JP); North Pekin (1st-year), 9 Feb. (R); Hartford (1st-year), 9 & 11 Feb. (G; BR et al.); Peoria (ad.), 24 Feb. (R); Peoria (3rd-year), 19 Feb. (A).

Black-legged Kittiwake--Wilmette (1st-year), 26 Dec. (*EW, *TB); JP (1st-year), 7 Jan. (HR).

Mourning Dove--M.C.: 249, Rend L, 31 Dec. (m.ob.); 200+, s. Shelby Cty, all winter (KF); 100, Spfld, 31 Dec. (B); 49, Henderson Cty, 17 Dec. (LM).

Barn Owl--BRSF, 19 Dec. (*BB); Sanganois C.A., 27 Dec. (*R).

Eastern Screech-Owl--M.C.: 16, Spfld 18 Dec. (B); 11, s.e. Du Page Cty, 18 Dec. (EW); 7, Fermi, 19 Jan. (VB).

Great Horned Owl--M.C.: 8, s.e. Du Page Cty, 18 Dec. (EW); 6, Spfld, 18 Dec. (B); 6, Fermi, all winter (VB).

Snowy Owl--Henderson Cty, 17 Dec. (LM, MB); Mendota, 11 Feb. (SP); Chi (Meigs Field), all winter (m.ob.)

Long-eared Owl--Homer L (Champaign Cty), 4 Dec. (C); Topkea (Mason Cty), 4 Dec.-4 Feb. (A); Urbana, 10 Dec. (C); Calhoun Cty (2), 14 Dec.-15 Jan. (m.ob.); Du Page Cty (3), 15 Dec.-28 Feb. (EW, TB); Allerton Park (Piaa Cty), 15 Jan. (C); Deer Grove F.P. (Cook Cty), 4 Feb. (JP); s.w. Cook Cty (2), 23-28 Feb. (EW).

Short-eared Owl--Philo, 17 Dec. (C); Fermi (1-2), 25 Dec.-16 Jan. (EW, m.ob.); Union Cty (5), 29 Dec. (JHa, DY, K); Victoria (2), all winter (MB); Lane (De Witt Cty), 31 Dec.-1 Jan. (D); Rend L, 31 Dec. (DR); s.w. Saline Cty (2), 31 Jan. (JDe); Northbrook (2), 4-11 Feb. (J).

Northern Saw-whet Owl--Allerton Park (Piaa Cty) (1-3), 15 Jan.-26 Feb. (C, m.ob.).

Belted Kingfisher--M.C.: 9, Chi North Shore C.B.C., 26 Dec. (m.ob.); 4, Mason Cty, 2 Jan. (A); 4, s. Shelby Cty, all winter (KF). Others: Spfld (3), 18 Dec. (B); Braidwood (2), 2 Jan. (M); Wheeling, 22 Jan. (J); FGP, 24 Jan. (DW); CONWR ("fairly common all winter") (DR); Fermi, all winter (VB).

Red-headed Woodpecker--M.C.: 37, Rend L, 31 Dec. (BD et al.); 9, Homer, 10 Dec. (JS); 5, Braidwood, 2 Jan. (M).

Pileated Woodpecker--Homer (2), 9 Dec. (JS); Joliet (male) all winter (M, m.ob.).

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker--M.C.: 8, Champaign Cty, all winter (EC); 6, CONWR, 17 Dec. (KM, DR); 4, Adams Cty, 26 Feb. (RDi); 3, M.Arb, 18 Dec. (JHa et al.).

Northern Flicker--M.C.: 25, Spfld, 18 Dec. (B).

Eastern Phoebe--LaRue Swamp (Union Cty) (2), 29 Dec. (*DR).

Horned Lark--M.C.: 4000, Union Cty, 29 Dec. (m.ob.); 3500, Vermilion/Edgar cty, 8 Feb. (DW); 1400, Mason/Fulton cty, 17 Feb. (KM); 800-1000, Woodford Cty, 5-8 Feb. (A, DWi); 941, Knox Cty, 8 Feb. (MB); 600, Spfld, 11 Feb. (B); 400, Channahon, 6 Feb. (M).

Barn Swallow--Spfld, 9-10 Dec. (*B, DO--photo).

Red-breasted Nuthatch--CONWR, 17 Dec. (SO); LChau (2), 23 Dec. (MB et al.); Bartlett (Cook Cty) (2), all winter (JP); Peoria (2), 7 Jan. (A); Spfld (2), 17 Jan. (B); Champaign Cty (3), 22-23 Jan. (C); M.Arb (4), 18 Feb. (EW, RW).

Carolina Wren--Glencoe, 26 Dec. (EW, TB); Jo Daviess Cty, 11 Feb. (EW).

Winter Wren--Homer, 9 Dec. (JS); SLCA, 2 Jan. (A); Bussey Woods (Champaign Cty), 17 Jan. (EC); Spfld, 25 Jan. (B).

Marsh Wren--Spfld, 4-18 Dec. (B); Joliet, 18 Dec. (*M); Rend L (2), 31 Dec. (*BD, *DY et al.).

Golden-crowned Kinglet--M.C.: 55, Rend L, 31 Dec. (m.ob.); 32, CONWR, 17 Dec. (KM, DR).

Ruby-crowned Kinglet--Wheaton, 17 Dec. (JHa, TB, RW).

Eastern Bluebird--M.C.: 107, Mercer Cty, 19 Dec. (PP et al.). Others: Mode (8), all winter (KF); Bethalto (4), 19 Dec. (KM); Ryerson C.A. (Lake Cty) (2 males), 23 Dec. (J, RB); Knox Cty (6), 11 Jan. (MB); FGP (2), 24 Jan. (DW).

Hemitt Thrush--Chi North Shore C.B.C. (4), 26 Dec. (m.ob.); CONWR (3), 17 Dec. (KM, DR).

American Robin--M.C.: 543, Chi North Shore C.B.C., 26 Dec. (m.ob.); 113, CONWR, 17 Dec. (KM, DR); 10+, s. Shelby Cty, all winter (KF); 100+, Urbana, all winter (EC); 100, E. Peoria, 20 Feb. (DWi); 54, Evanston, 29 Jan. (EW); 30, Homer, 26 Jan. (JS).

Gray Catbird--Greenbelt F.P. (Lake Cty), 1 Jan. (*TB).

Northern Mockingbird--Mode (6), all winter (KF); Spfld (5), 18 Dec. (B); Carl L (4), 3 Dec. (KM); SLCA, 2-22 Jan. (A); Urbana, 10 Dec.-22 Jan. (C).

Brown Thrasher--Massac Cty, 12 Feb. (*DR); Lake-of-Woods (Champaign Cty), 18 Feb. (EC, C); HLCA, 19 Feb. (JHa, F, DR).

Cedar Waxwing--M.C.: 639, Chi North Shore C.B.C., 26 Dec. (m.ob.); 194, CONWR, 17 Dec. (KM, DR).

Northern Shrike--Blackwell F.P. (Du Page Cty), 3 Dec. (MCh); KCP, 4 Dec. (*C); Joliet (ad.), 17-29 Dec. (*M); Kane Cty, 20 Dec. (JP); Fermi (1-2), 30 Dec.-19 Feb. (VB, JP, WM); Braidwood/GLPSP (2), 2 Jan. (M); Alsip, 25 Feb. (WM).

Loggerhead Shrike--M.C.: 9, Rend L, 31 Dec. (DR et al.); Carl L (4), 21 Jan. (KM); Stewardson (3), 12 Dec. (KF). Others: Mahomet, 11 Feb. (C); Knox Cty, 17 Feb. (MB).

Cape May Warbler--Wheaton, 15 Dec. (TB, RW).

Yellow-rumped Warbler--M.C.: 34, Waukegan C.B.C., 1 Jan. (m.ob.). Others: LChau (2), 3 Dec. (MB); Sherwood (Will Cty) (3), 21-30 Dec. (*M); Joliet, 18 Jan. (M); Carl L (5), 21 Jan. (KM); SLCA (2), 11 Feb. (A).

Bay-breasted Warbler--Spfld, 2-18 Dec. (*B).

Common Yellowthroat--HLCA, 28 Dec. (*TB, *RW); Rend L, 30 Dec. (*DR, JHa et al.).

Indigo Bunting--CONWR, 17 Dec. (KM, *DR); HLCA, 28 Dec. (SB, *DR).

Rufous-sided Towhee--M.Arb, 18 Dec. (EW, TB); Palso, 18 Dec. (PD).

American Tree Sparrow--M.C.: 510, Fermi, 17 Dec. (VB); 305, Rend L, 31 Dec. (m.ob.); 275+, Jo Daviess Cty, 11 Feb. (EW); 274, LCal, 31 Dec. (L).

Field Sparrow--Fermi, 4 Jan. (DR, JHa, VB).

Vesper Sparrow--Olive Branch (Alexander Cty), 28 Dec. (*K).

Savannah Sparrow--Wayne Fitzgerald S.P., 31 Dec. (DR).

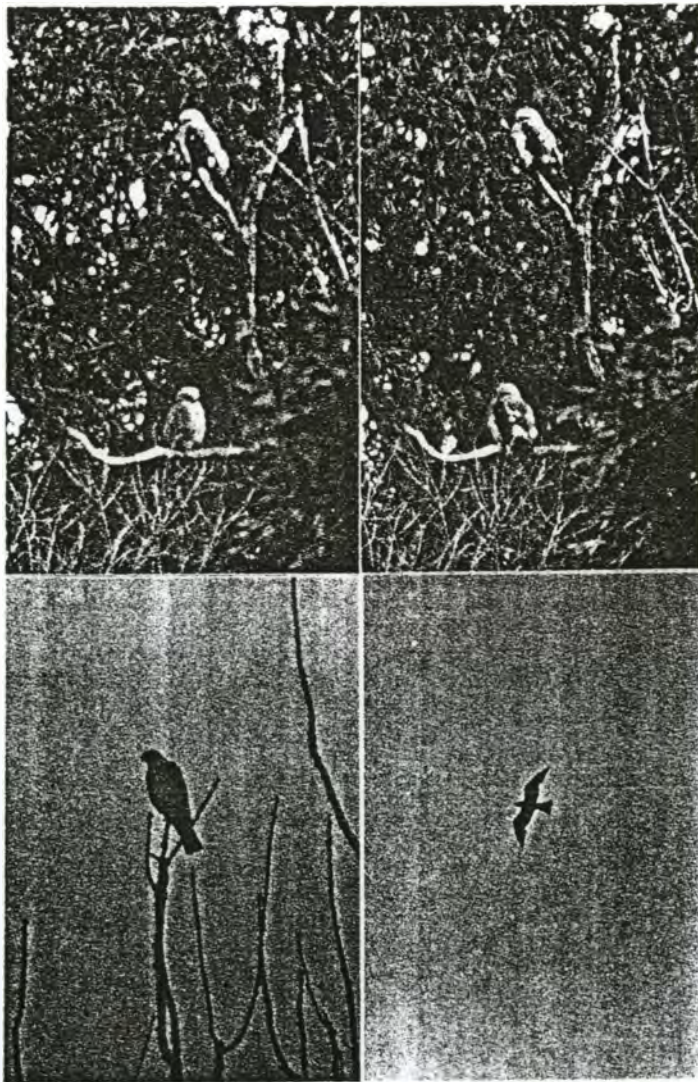
Fox Sparrow--Henderson Cty, 17 Dec. (LM); Fermi, 17 Dec. (VB).

Song Sparrow--M.C.: 25, St. Clair Cty, 11 Jan. (KM); 10-15, Fermi, all winter (VB); 9, LCal, 31 Dec. (L).

Swamp Sparrow--LChau (10), 21 Dec. (DWi); Mason Cty (21), 23 Dec. (MB et al.); Zion (2), 1 Jan. (EW); Spfld (5), 2 Jan. (B); Fermi (10-15), all winter (VB).

White-throated Sparrow--M.Arb (24), 18 Dec. (EW, TB).

Golden-crowned Sparrow--Green River C.A. (Lee Cty), 21 Feb. into spring season (*JK, *DWi, *PP, *m.ob. plus photos). Third Illinois record.

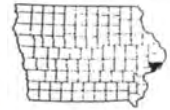


Subadult Mississippi Kites at Dudgeon Lake Area, 6-8 June 1989.
Photos by Jim Scheib (top), Marc Phelps (lower left), and Tom Kent (lower right).

SLATY-BACKED GULL IN SCOTT COUNTY

JAMES FULLER

On Sunday, February 12, Ann Barker reported a dark-mantled adult gull on the Mississippi River above Le Claire, Scott County, to the Iowa Birdline. She had surmised a Lesser Black-backed Gull, but could not rule out other dark-winged gulls because she had only been able to scope it floating down the river at 500 yards and so was not able to view leg color and wing pattern.



On a beautiful, clear Valentine's Day morning (February 14) I started searching for Ann's bird at Le Claire with no success and so continued downstream. At 10:40 a.m., I had reached the Moline, Illinois, waterfront and there at mid-river, all by itself, was a dark-mantled gull sitting on a rock seawall. It was in the identical location where I had seen my first Iowa Great Black-backed Gull in December 1986. Shortly after I got the bird in the scope, it took off and flew in a large circle. Then, wonder of wonders, it proceeded directly at me, finally settling down to stand with a group of Herring Gulls on shelf ice a mere 60 yards away.

The first clue that this was not a Lesser Black-backed Gull was the bright pink legs and feet. The mantle and upper wings appeared dark grey, not black, and the bird's size and general head and bill shape were the same as that of the Herring Gulls. As the bird walked around picking at shad in the ice, it stretched its wings and flew short distances several times. The wing had a very wide white trailing edge and what appeared to be an unusual pattern of white areas at the wing tip. At this point, feeling that the bird was very possibly a Slaty-backed Gull, I roused Pete Petersen from his Wild Bird Shop. He put up the "gone birding" sign and grabbed his camera. After Pete confirmed the probable identification, we hurried off to pass the word.

Features of the bird as noted by several other observers, including Ann Barker, Tom Kent, and Pete Petersen, were as follows: The general size and posture was the same as that of the nearby Herring Gulls; head and relative bill size were also similar. The mantle and upperwing were a dark gray, but not jet black, except for the outer primaries which were quite dark. The crown and nape had fine streaking, typical of winter adult gulls, and the head, tail, and underparts were otherwise white. The bill was yellow with a subterminal red spot on the lower mandible. The eye was yellow and had a dark smudge around it, especially distally. Legs and feet were a bright pink, especially the feet, and differed from the gray-pink of the Herring Gulls.

The upper wing had a broad trailing edge of white and a very narrow leading edge. The trailing edge was apparent on the standing bird as a white area, which was larger than that of the adult Herring Gulls. The outermost primary had a large (longer than wide) subterminal white area as well as a small white tip, with a narrow dark area between. Apical white spots were seen on all of the rest of the primaries through the 5th. The 8th through the 5th primaries also had subterminal white marks which became closer to the trailing edge, thus producing a white arc into the wing tip. The under surface of the wing was light compared to the upper surface and the flight feathers were an opaque gray. The pattern of white spots, although fainter, could also be seen on the underwing.

Similar species were excluded as follows: Lesser Black-backed Gull has yellow (not pink) legs and does not have the wing tip pattern of this bird. Great Black-backed Gull has a jet black mantle, larger size, and different wing tip pattern. Western Gull should have a larger bill, a clear white head, less white in the trailing edge, a darker underwing, and inconspicuous sub-terminal spots on the upper wing tip. Yellow-footed Gull is similar to Western Gull but with yellow legs.

This is the first record for Iowa. The first accepted sighting for Slaty-backed Gull in central North America was in the St. Louis area on 20 December 1983 to 29 January 1984 (Goetz, Rudden, and Snetsinger 1986). That bird was seen by many Iowa birders, including myself. Two other hypothetical, but possibly correct, records are from Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan, on 28 November 1981 (Goetz, Rudden, and Snetsinger 1986) and at Two Harbors, Minnesota, from 4 to 28 January 1968 (Green 1969).

There are only three West Coast records south of Alaska: 1 March 1974 at Clover Point, Victoria Island, British Columbia (Roberson 1980); 11-12 November 1986 at Port Hardy, Victoria Island, British Columbia (*Am. Birds* 41:134); and 31 December 1986 to 4 January 1987 at Elwha River, Clallam County, Washington (*Am. Birds* 41:319-320).

The most bitter arctic cold front of the winter brought wind chill factors as low as 50 degrees below zero Fahrenheit in Iowa the first few days of February. Siberian expresses, such as that one, have been associated with the appearance of arctic birds in the mid-continent area. There had been one of the most bitter outbreaks of the century just prior to discovery of the St. Louis bird. The normal range of the Slaty-backed Gull is the Asian coasts of the North Pacific and Bering Sea, and, in winter, south to Japan. It is a rare fall migrant and summer visitor to western Alaska and the Aleutians.

The gull's presence in the Quad Cities area attracted national attention, and reports were included on the North American rare bird alert as well as the "hot lines" of all surrounding states. Many birders from a number of states searched for it, and most were successful. It was estimated that as many as 200 birders were in the area on Saturday, February 18th. The bird was sighted along an approximately 15-mile stretch of the river from above Le Claire to Credit Island at Davenport. This is comparable to the 19-mile range that the St. Louis gull used. For several days in a row, it consistently came in to the Moline riverfront area in late afternoon. Otherwise, there was nothing predictable about its habits. The last confirmed sighting occurred on Tuesday, 21 February, when it came in to roost at Moline very late in the day.

REFERENCES CITED

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 Green, J. C. 1969. Observation of a black-backed gull. *Loon* 41:55-56.
 Roberson, D. 1980. *Rare Birds of the West Coast*. Pacific Grove, CA: Woodcock Publications.

6 Longview Knoll, RR6, Iowa City, IA 52240.



Slaty-backed Gull on Mississippi River on 12 and 18 February 1989. Photos by Pete Petersen (top) and John Hoogerheide (bottom).

105-K E. Ticonderoga Dr.
Westerville, OH 43081
Sept. 16, 1989

Thomas H. Kent, Secretary
I.O.U. Records Committee
211 Richards St.
Iowa City, IA 52246

Dear Tom:

. . .

Slaty-backed Gull (12-21+ Feb. 1989 at Davenport): My acceptance of this record was partially based on several detailed descriptions (particularly those of T. Kent and C. Bendorf). These descriptions noted all of the significant field marks (size, back color, head pattern and wing pattern) that are necessary to eliminate all similar species. Most of the other documentations did not completely describe the bird--many of these were the result of viewing the bird at great distances where some of the field marks could not have been noted. If the detailed descriptions are accurate, the identification was certainly correct.

In addition to the written descriptions, I received Xerox copies of two photos of this bird. One of the photos shows the bird at rest--but the quality is very poor and I cannot determine which of the many gulls was the Slaty-backed. The other photo shows the gull in flight. The bird's head streaking is not visible in this photo, but the upper wing pattern appears to be clearly visible. This pattern consists of a large white mirror on the outermost primary, and small white tongue-tips on the 6th and 7th primaries (also perhaps on the 8th) creating the appearance of a series of sub-apical spots across a portion of the upper wing. The under wing pattern is not visible on the photo, although one sub-apical spot appears to be present on one of the wings. Assuming that the wing pattern is accurately portrayed in the photo (and the white spots on the wings are not an artifact of xeroxing the photos), these characteristics corroborate the detailed descriptions of Kent and Bendorf and indicate that the bird was a Slaty-backed Gull.

. . .

Sincerely,

Bruce Peterjohn
Bruce Peterjohn

Ron Goetz
1628 Yale Ave., Apt. 2N
Richmond Heights, MO 63117

19 September 1989

Thomas H. Kent
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, IA 52240

Dear Tom:

Sorry to continue to run behind in my correspondence. I am finally returning your prints of the Slaty-backed Gull, together with my detailed assessment of the evidence I have seen so far. As you can see, I accepted the record, although I do feel the evidence is not entirely complete. In particular, I was unable to come up with a consistent interpretation for the white areas in the primaries in Petersen's photo of the flying bird -- I simply can't tell the difference between what was only blurring due to motion and what was really there. So the best evidence for the correct primary patterning really was your written description, the only description of the primaries with close to enough detail.

Sorry I could not return the photos and my opinion before the Iowa Records Committee meeting.

The Illinois Committee would appreciate having duplicates of Petersen's photos for our file -- apparently Vernon never received any from Pete -- and I remain very intersted in at least seeing Hoogerheides's photo.

I have enclosed a copy of our new officially adopted Bylaws. As you can see, they make for quite a sizeable stack of paper.

The last address I have for Dennis Paulson is Burke Museum DB-10, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195. However, I never have had replies to the last two letters I sent to that address, so perhaps you should contact him to make sure he is interested before sending all of your evidence.

Finally, does Bruce Peterjohn ever let you know which records he does not intend to print in advance of **American Birds** publication? I requested that he do so for Illinois sightings some time ago, and have never heard from him again! (Of course, Illinois sightings have been submitted too late for his **American Birds** deadline far too frequently in the recent past, so it has hardly been an issue). Do you have any system of regular communication with Bruce concerning his opinions on Iowa records?

Cheers,



Comments on the Iowa/Illinois Slaty-backed Gull, February 1989

I have before me written documentations from Ann Barker (12 & 14 February sightings); Jim Fuller (14 February sighting); Pete Petersen (14 February sighting); Tom Kent (14 February sighting); Gerald White (15 February sighting); Pete Petersen (18 February sighting); Mike Baum (18 February sighting); Ross Silcock (19 February sighting); Tanya Bray (19 February sighting); and Carl Bendorf (21 February sighting), as well as three photos taken by Pete Petersen 14 February. The following is my assessment of the field marks displayed by this bird based on the evidence at hand, and may be subject to change should better photos become available, particularly one by John Hoogerheide which is said to show the feathering around the eye.

Size and shape. Most observers stress that this gull was nearly identical in size to Herring Gulls; Silcock says slightly larger, while Bendorf says less than 5% smaller. No one reports on the size in finer detail. Herring Gulls are not all the same size -- in fact, many can be fairly easily classified as "male" (large) or "female" (small) in the field based on direct size comparisons among many individuals, and this difference in the size of Herring Gulls can be used to more accurately gauge the size of an individual gull. In spite of this lack of detail, we can say that the size of this bird is at least roughly appropriate for Slaty-backed Gull and Western Gull, and at least atypical for Lesser Black-backed Gull and Great black-backed Gull. The size is very roughly corroborated by the two photos of the sitting bird.

Bill size, shape and coloration. Almost all observers state that the bill was nearly identical to that of Herring Gull in proportions (presumably including gonydeal angle), size, and coloration (including size and shape of red spot on gonys). The only real exception is Bray, who says that the bill was a deeper yellow color and slightly longer than in Herring Gull. In any case, the bill sounds too long for Lesser Black-backed Gull and lacking the large gonydeal spot of that species, while Great black-backed Gull always has a deeper bill than virtually all Herring Gulls. Most Western Gulls show a comparatively well-developed gonys, and typically have a stouter appearing bill than Herring Gull; however, I don't believe that female Westerns are necessarily eliminated by the descriptions provided. The bill is entirely hidden in two of the photos available, and not in sharp focus in the other, so no photographic confirmation of this portion of the description is possible for now.

Gape. Only Bray describes the gape color: dark red. Because this color varies seasonally on individual gulls and because gape color is only sporadically described in the literature, I am not sure what relevance this feature has in the present instance.

Irides. All observers state that the irides were yellow or pale; this is at least possible in all similar species, although many Westerns (particularly northern birds) show some brownish overlaying the yellow. The degree of brown in the iris is apparently a highly variable trait in Westerns: it seems that Westerns are not as completely segregated into northern and southern types as I once believed, since there are apparently many birds with a mixture of subspecific traits. In any case, the iris color is not corroborated by photos at hand.

Legs and feet. All observers state that they were pink. Three observers (Barker, Fuller and Petersen) noted that the feet were brighter or darker than the legs. Fuller, Bray and Bendorf felt that the legs and feet were pinker (or brighter or more reddish) than in Herring Gull, and Kent also notes that they may have been a little darker than in Herring Gull. All of these descriptions could be appropriate for Slaty-backed or Western Gulls; they are completely inappropriate for Lesser Black-backed Gull (even allowing for the grayish to fleshy legs said to be present on some individuals), and dubious for Great Black-backed. Two photos show pink legs on the standing bird, and the flight shot seems to show rather dark reddish feet. However, there are no other pink tones in the latter photo, so one should not put too much credence in the apparent redness of this color.

Plumage of the head. All observers except White, Baum and Silcock note streaking at least on the hind-neck; the color of the streaking is variously said to be gray-brown, light brown, brown, brownish, and ochre; several observers say it extended to the head as well as the nape, and Bray at least describes it as extending to the sides of the neck. More importantly, Fuller, Kent, Bray, and Silcock report that (in Fuller's words) there was a darker area around the eye, especially distally (Bendorf also notes that there may have been darker feathering around the eye). This mark can be very useful in supporting the identification, as I am not aware that any of the similar gulls except Slaty-backed show it. However, since there can be some dark near the eye in almost any gull (the point is that in the Slaty-backed the dark feathers entirely surround the eye, and extend backwards from the eye), and since the Hoogerheide photo is said to corroborate this mark, I would prefer to wait for an opportunity to view this photo before deciding how much weight to give this character.

Mantle color. Descriptions of the mantle color range from dark gray to nearly black. It is conceivable that any of the dark-mantled gulls could be described this way under various lighting conditions. The photos show a mantle color roughly appropriate for Slaty-backed, although it could also be appropriate for Lesser Black-backed or Western. It appears to be far too dark for California Gull or the various other gulls of similar darkness (including the **vega** Herring Gull and currently known Herring X Great Black-backed hybrids).

Trailing edge of wing (tips of secondaries, tertials). All observers note a broad trailing edge of the wing on the flying bird and/or very broad white tertial crescent on the standing bird: this is corroborated by the photos. This feature looks good for Slaty-backed, but it is not as easy to apply as many observers seem to think. The trailing edge does indeed look too wide to me for Lesser Black-backed Gull and especially Great Black-backed Gull, but I don't think the photos eliminate Western Gull. I have not been able to find a good way to quantify this feature, and until I can do so I remain wary of illusions.

Patterning of the Primaries. Undoubtedly the most important field mark; although almost all observers made some attempt to describe what could be the correct pattern, it is important to note that it is not merely the presence of subterminal white in the mid to outer primaries, but the extent and precise location of white that counts. None of the observers really provides enough detail, although Kent comes close; however, the fact that they could see white "tongue-tips" at all is an indication that the bird was a Slaty-backed and not one of the other species, in which the tongue-tips are smaller and fewer.

It would have been helpful if a better sketch of the pattern had been made -- of the two sketches which do exist, Barker's looks a little too much like a Franklin's Gull, while Petersen's (14 February documentation) looks far too much like a Western Gull. As for the photos, the flight shot provides only limited information: the large mirror on the 10th (outer) primary shows well, but otherwise I find it difficult to make any positive determination of the pattern from this picture. The photo did not freeze the motion of the wings, and some of the pattern which seems to be present is likely only blurring. On the other hand, it does not appear that there was a mirror on primary 9, which is fairly unusual in Slaty-backed but the norm in Westerns.

Underwing. It seems to me that some of the observers must have misunderstood the nature of the underwing pattern in Slaty-backed, as some of the descriptions are too pale, almost more appropriate for a Thayer's Gull than for any dark-mantled gull (for example, see Petersen's 18 February documentation). The underwings of Slaty-backed show gray on the undersides (of the basal portions) of the flight feathers, contrasting with the white underwing coverts and white trailing edge -- this contrast is greater than is ever seen in a Herring Gull, although it might be reduced in certain types of lighting. The same general effect is also seen in Lesser Black-backed Gull and Western Gull. The distinctive feature of the Slaty-backed's underwing compared to these two species is the limited amount of true black in the primaries. Western Gulls in particular have at least three, often (especially southern birds) four, of the outer primaries almost wholly blackish from underneath. (Note: Great Black-backed actually have a very limited amount of true blackish in the underprimaries also -- possibly even less than in Slaty-backed.) The flight photo seems to show an area of limited blackish in the underprimaries as one would expect in a Slaty-backed, but, again because of the blurring in this photo, I am not 100% convinced of this.

Conclusions. All in all, I am inclined to accept the bird as a Slaty-backed, since all the field marks could be appropriate for that species, and since no other identification really seems tenable. In particular, Lesser Black-backed and Great Black-backed can probably be ruled out by the photos alone. Western Gull is more difficult, but the preponderance of evidence seems to favor Slaty-backed: head markings (especially the described smudge through the eye); limited black in underprimaries; described presence of subterminal white markings (tongue-tips) in at least some of the mid-outer primaries, including primaries 7 and 8 according to Kent (Westerns normally have short to medium length tongue-tips on primary 5, scarcely visible to short tongue-tips on primary 6 and virtually none on primary 7 -- noticeable tongue-tips on primary 6 are most common in paler mantled birds); very dark gray mantle color (possibly useful in eliminating paler Westerns); pale eye (eliminating some Westerns); and Herring Gull-like bill shape (again, eliminating some Westerns). Hybrids do not seem to provide any reasonable alternative to the identification. The discrepancies among the descriptions are relatively minor, and probably not more than what one should expect among so many observers, and some of the inconsistencies are probably due to differing expectations of what to look for. It is a shame that better photos of the primary patterning were not obtained (at least 4 different photographers were able to get diagnostic shots of the St. Louis/Alton bird in 1984), but the harsh conditions and relative scarcity of photographers make this understandable. This would seem to be at most the fourth midwestern record (including a Minnesota record that will remain at best hypothetical, and a Michigan record that was better photographed than the present individual and should probably be accepted).

Ronald E. Goetz
19 September 1989

I.O.U. Records Committee 1989 Batch #

26 Sep 1989
Guy McCaskie
954 Grove Street
Imperial Beach
California 92032

89-11 Slaty-backed Gull: 12 Feb - 21 Feb 1989
Bettendorf, Scott Co., IA.

After reading the accounts submitted by the various observers, and studying the two photographs, I feel confident that the bird was indeed an adult Slaty-backed Gull (Larus schistisagus) in winter plumage. I have only a limited amount of experience with Slaty-backed Gulls, seeing them in Alaska during the springs of 1988 and 1989, and being able to compare them only to Glaucous-winged Gulls (Larus glaucescens) and Glaucous Gulls (Larus hyperboreus). I admit that I have never seen a Slaty-backed Gull in winter-plumage, but have had extensive experience with Western Gulls (Larus occidentalis) in all plumages, and feel that I can tell the difference between the nominate birds of the north and wymani of the south.

From everything I can learn from reading all the descriptions the bird was the size and shape of a Herring Gull (Larus argentatus) with a bill appearing to be identical to that of a Herring Gull. The bird had pink legs and feet, and had a pale eye. The bird was clearly a full adult, showing no indication of immaturity in the feathering on the wings or tail, and had the dusky streaking about the head possessed by most large gulls in winter plumage.

The size and shape of this bird is correct for small [female] Slaty-backed Gulls. The color of the mantle [dark gray] is correct for a Slaty-backed Gull, as is also the coloration and pattern of the wing-tips [black with white mirror on the first primary]. The coloration of the bill [yellow with a red spot near the gonys], and the coloration of the legs and feet [pink], match those of adult Slaty-backed Gulls, as does also the coloration of the eyes [pale yellow]. As such there are is nothing in the descriptions or visible in the photographs indicating the bird is anything other than a Slaty-backed Gull.

If the bird had been a Western Gull, based on the coloration of the mantle I would have to call it a bird of the darker mantled race wymani from the more southern population. These birds have similar patterns on the wing-tips, and I feel there is nothing in the descriptions or photographs that could be used to differentiate between the two. However, I do not feel a Western Gull shows as broad a white line along the trailing edge of the wing as is evident on this bird, the white tips on the secondaries and inner primaries being larger than those on a Western Gull, and matching those on a Slaty-backed Gull. In addition some observers indicated the under-sides of the flight feathers looked pale, Ann M. Barker actually sketching the under-wing so as to appear much like the under-wing on an adult Thayer's Gull (Larus thayeri), but the photograph showing some darkness. Western Gulls always show a large amount of black on the under-sides of the primaries and secondaries, this being a prominent mark on birds viewed flying

overhead, and evidently not present on the Iowa gull.

The bill on a Western Gull is normally noticeably shorter and heavier than that of a Herring Gull when both are compared side by side, this difference not being noted on the Iowa gull, observers actually stating the bill looked to be identical to that of a Herring Gull. In winter Western Gulls from the southern population show no dusky streaking about the head and neck, this area of the bird remaining entirely white as in summer. It is very clear that the Iowa gull had some dusky streaking on the nape and back of the neck, as well as having some dusky coloration about the eyes, marks that clearly eliminate the possibility of it being a Western Gull.

I would agree with everyone that the bird was not a Lesser Black-backed Gull (Larus fuscus), that gull having yellowish feet and legs when in adult plumage, and also having a longer and slimmer bill than that of a Herring Gull, as well as having a slightly different pattern on the wings. I would also agree with everyone that the bird was not a Greater Black-backed Gull (Larus marinus), that gull being noticeably larger than a Herring Gull, and having an even darker mantle that described for the Iowa Gull.

Additional Comments on the Iowa/Illinois Slaty-backed Gull, February 1989

The following updates my review of this record dated 19 September 1989; additional evidence comes from the photo of the head by John Hoogerhede, and I have also responded in part to the reviews by Guy McCaskie and Bruce Peterjohn.

In the Hoogerheide photo, I think the following factors should be noted:

1. The bill shape seems to me to be on the heavy side for Herring Gull, bulbous enough toward the tip for a female Western. This impression may be an artifact of the bird's pose, and in any case does not rule out Slaty-backed Gull.
2. There is certainly considerable dark around the eye, but its precise pattern can not be confirmed due to the lack of clarity in the photograph. However, it could easily be the pattern exhibited by Slaty-backed Gulls.
3. The markings on the lower side neck form distinct streaks, and are thus both typical of markings found on Slaty-backed and rather unlike markings found on the necks of Western Gulls (head markings of winter Westerns tend to range from slight smudges to overall clouding, with discrete streaking of the side neck being at least atypical).
4. The eye color is not confirmable in this photo.
5. All other factors (leg color, size, mantle color, tertial crescent) are consistent with the written descriptions previously reviewed and with the Petersen photographs.

Other comments. I would again urge observers to be careful in the elimination of Western Gull: McCaskie's elimination of that species based on the width of the trailing edge of the wing, the bill shape, and the combination of rather dark mantle and distinct head streaking is somewhat too facile, not taking into full account the variations among individuals, between the sexes, and between the populations of Western Gulls. It may well be true that Westerns in the San Diego area have wholly white heads in winter and narrower trailing edges than Slaty-backed, but I have seen specimens at the Field Museum of Natural History which showed mantles as dark as any *wymani* and yet had substantial head streaking. Also, note that there is a tendency for more northern birds to show increased white tongue-tips and gray tongues in the primaries, and so it would not be surprising to me if the width of the white trailing edge of the wing also increased in northern populations (as mentioned in my original review, I have been unable to quantify this feature, and remain wary of its use). Thus it seems to me possible that a Western Gull with a particular mix of subspecific traits could display greater similarity to the descriptions of the present bird than Guy indicates.

As a final comment, I don't think it is fair to rely too heavily on Bruce Peterjohn's acceptance of the bird, since he saw only a xerox of the in-flight photo, rather than the photo itself: I do not believe the photo is sharp enough to support the assertions he makes concerning the patterning of the primaries, and feel that the xeroxing process must have made the photo look sharper than is actually the case. Perhaps a copy of the photo could be sent

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to him so that he could provide a more meaningful opinion?

Conclusion: Unchanged: I am still inclined to accept the bird as a Slaty-backed based on the preponderance of evidence, although I still do not believe the evidence is completely definitive.

Ronald E. Goetz
24 October 1989

COMMENTS ON IOWA-ILLINOIS SLATY-BACKED GULL, FEBRUARY 1989

I have on hand 4 color prints (one closeup by Hooderheide, 2 perched by Petersen, 1 flying by Petersen), descriptions by Barker, Fuller, Petersen (2), Kent, White, Bray, Silcock, Bendorf, and Baum, and comments by Peterjohn, McCaskie, and Goetz (2).

The observers and commentators have adequately eliminated the Great and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and I agree with them. Hence I will deal only with the elimination of Western Gull.

Mantle. The dark mantle could fit only the southern race of Western, wymani, which I do not think can be eliminated by mantle color alone. The northern race, nominate occidentalis, including intermediates as far south as Monterey, are eliminated; they do not really approach wymani, being only very slightly darker than typical occidentalis; when a wymani appears in Monterey next to intermediates, it stands out dramatically.

Bill size and shape. Although the observers say the bill was like Herring, it is, I think, like a very large Herring, judging from the close-up photo; it is rather heavy, being deep in relation to length, and has a fairly well-developed gonydeal angle; thus it fits a small Western, which therefore is not eliminated by bill. Underwing color is hard to evaluate from the one flying photo, but I get the definite impression that the secondaries are too pale for Western, especially considering that the underwing is in shadow and hence should appear even darker than in life. I am not sure that this is supposed to be a difference between Western and Slaty-backed, as Grant mentions only the primary color; but I do think the Moline bird is too pale in the secondaries for a normal (perhaps any) Western, according to both the photo and descriptions. Head and neck. I agree with McCaskie that wymani lacks dusky marks in winter. I also believe, from field experience, that typical occidentalis has very little if any dusky in winter, certainly not as much as the Moline bird, and that "Westerns" that have this much are really hybrids with the Glaucous-winged Gull (hybrids are very common and often seen in California). But hybrids are between glaucescens and o. occidentalis and therefore have mantles that are paler than the latter, or at least equal to it. Because of the dark mantle, this hybrid can be eliminated, making the dusky streaks on the head and neck and important mark that eliminates Western. For what it might be worth, I note that this bird is rather consistently described as having "brown" or even "ochre" marks, rather than gray or grayish-brown, and that the 1983 Slaty-backed in IL-IO was described as having marks tending toward reddish-brown (ochre?); perhaps this is a hitherto unnoticed field mark??

White wing margin. Although I agree with Goetz that the amount of white on the trailing edge of the wing is difficult to judge in the photos, I think the photos show too much white, both flying and sitting, for a Western. The descriptions all say there was a great deal of white. So, while this is difficult to judge, and perhaps there is overlap, the Moline bird seems to have a great deal, too much for at least most, if not all, Westerns.

Leg and foot color has always struck me as similar in Western and Herring in winter. Some good descriptions say these were a darker pink than the nearby Herrings, a character of Slaty-backed. This helps eliminate Western, though I am not sure it is diagnostic. Black eye (here I introduce a new term...). I have never seen what I considered a pure Western with a dark eye smudge. I cannot judge its shape or extent in the photo, just that

it is present. A bird with such a dark mantle, if a Western, would have to be wymani, which has no "black eye." The only Western with an eye smudge would have to be a hybrid with glaucescens, which would often have one (I have seen such hybrids). The black eye goes hand-in-hand with head and neck streaking. Thus this mark eliminates Western. Wingtip pattern. This is, of course, the most important point. The descriptions agree with the flying photo. While the photo is not perfectly clear, I do not think blurring has caused it to be unreliable. I believe I can see three white mirrors, one large one on the 10th (outer) primary, encompassing both wesbs, and small ones that I judge to be on the 8th and 7th primaries. The tip spot on the 6th seems rather too large, and might include a mirror. The absence of a mirror on the 9th is not important; it is on the inner web, which might not be visible on a wing this closed, and in any event, Grant indicates it is not always present; one description says it definitely was not present, which is alright for Slaty-backed. The important point is that, in my experience, Western never has mirrors on the 8th and 7th. If such a bird were to be seen, it would have to be a hybrid with glaucescens, and hence would not have a very dark mantle. Thus this pattern eliminates Western. Iris color is said to be pale, which eliminates some of the northern nominate occidentalis; it also helps to eliminate hybrids with glaucescens, which has a dark eye.

Summary. The above points, some diagnostically, and all in combination, definitely, in my opinion, eliminate Western. Everything in the photos and descriptions is consistent with Slaty-backed, and I would accept the bird as such.

Laurence C. Binford
2 December 1989



99 Peter C. Petersen

Slaty-backed Gull P-0277
Bettendorf, Scott Co., IA
14 Feb 1989 Peter C. Petersen

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dorf (photo in Moline)
1988 John Hoogerheide

Slaty-backed Gull P-0278
Bettendorf (photo in Moline)
18 Feb 1989 John Hoogerheide

89-11



What species? Slaty-backed Gull How many? 1

Location? ① Just north of Le Claire, Ia.
(2+3) - Moline Il. riverfront

Type of Habitat? river; open water or up on ice shelf or seawall

When? date(s): ① 2-12-89 (2+3) 2-14-89 time: ① 3:00 - 3:30 PM
② 12:15 - 12:45 PM
③ 4:00 - 5:30 PM

Who? your name and address: Ann M. Barker, 25368-250th St, Princeton, Iowa 526

Others with you: ① after 20 minutes - Pete Petersen, Walt Zuurdeeg
③ Tom Kent, Mary Lou Petersen, Cal + Bernie Knight, Tom Rockwell

Others before or after you: _____

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

① An adult winter-plumaged gull with a very dark gray (not black) mantle. Appears to be the same size as Herring Gulls with which it is skimming. Seen at a distance of 500 yds or so; therefore detailed field marks not distinguishable. General shape identical to Herring Gulls. Bill yellow; spot not visible. Some white near tips of wings - not visible clearly. Feet and legs not seen at all. Tentatively I.D. as Lesser Black backed, and reported to Birdline.

② At approx. 75 ft. gull standing on ice shelf. General appearance as described in first sentence above. Legs seen clearly; they are pink, with feet slightly darker pink. Following this observation, Gull settled down on ice to sleep; wing details not seen. Iris is yellow. Bill is yellow with red gonys spot; about the same size + shape as Herring's. Head white with gray-brown streaking on hindneck.

③ General appearance as described above except that mantle appears darker in overcast or dim light. Size still looks the same as Herring Gulls. Saddle very dark gray. Rump and underparts white. Legs and feet pink. Tail white. Upperwing (see sketch) uniform dark gray, darker at tip, with very broad white trailing edge. Large white spot on first primary, and variable white band above outer primaries. Underwing light pale gray to white. During observations, bird flew over centerline of river putting it in

Similar species; how eliminated: (A) Greater black backed - Gull in question has slaty-gray saddle rather than coal black. And Gull in question is same size as Herring Gulls; Greater black-backed would be much larger. (B) Lesser black backed - Gull in question has pink legs and feet, and has much more white on primaries. (C) Western - Gull in question has considerable white on primaries, and does not show dusky trailing edge to underwing. Also has broader white trailing edge to upperwing than would the Western. (D) Herring Gull - dark race - no experience with this, but those shown in Harrison do not show as dark a saddle as Gull in question, nor as much white on primaries.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification?

If yes, explain: ① Discussed (at time of first sighting) the remote possibilities of Western or Slaty-backed. Could not see leg color; felt it was most likely Lesser black-backed. ③ No one seemed to have reservations.

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

① Sunny - looking east @ 3 PM with sun from behind. ~500 yds. KOWA TSN-4 @ 20-60 zoom
② Sunny - 75 feet, approx., KOWA TSN-4, Leitz 10 x 40's.
③ Mostly overcast. - 100' - 500 yds (bird was active and flying.) KOWA TSN-4 + Leitz 10 x 40's.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

None with this species. Had seen both Greater and Lesser black-backed Gulls last year

References and persons consulted before writing description: Guides - Robbins, Nat. Geog., Audubon; Harrison Seabirds. Pete Petersen, Tom Kent.

How long before field notes made? 1 hr this form completed? 1 wk

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).

What species? _____
How many? _____
Location? _____
Type of habitat? _____
When, date? _____
What your home and address? _____
Others with you? _____
Others before or after you? _____



What species? SLATY-BACKED GULL (ADULT) How many? 1Location? MISSISSIPPI RIVER - QUAD CITIES OF IOWA & ILLINOISType of habitat? RIVER - SOME ICEWhen? date(s): FEB 14, 1989 time: 11:15 AM to 11:30 AM
10:40 AM to 11:00 AMWho? your name and address: JIM FULLER, 6 LONGVIEW KNOLL, RR#6, IOWA CITY, 5224.others with you: SECOND VIEWING - PETE PETERSENothers before or after you: ANN BARKER, TOM KENT, CAL & BERNIE KNIGHTDescribe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior. MOB

A DARK-MANTLED GULL WAS REPORTED TO THE IOWA BIRDLINE BY ANN BARKER, AS BEING SEEN NORTH OF LECLAIRE ON THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER LATE SUNDAY (1-12-89) AFTERNOON. I TALKED TO ANN BY PHONE THE NEXT DAY, AND SHE FELT THE GULL WAS PROBABLY A LESSER BLACK-BACKED, BUT SINCE SHE ONLY SAW IT FLOATING DOWN THE RIVER AT APPROXIMATELY 500 YARDS, OF COURSE, SHE WASN'T SURE. ON TUESDAY MORNING, I STARTED NORTH OF LECLAIRE, AND SEARCHED AND SLOPED EVERY SPOT THE RIVER COULD BE VIEWED, UNTIL I REACHED THE MOLINE RIVERFRONT AT ABOUT 3400 RIVER DRIVE. THERE I FOUND 1 DARK-MANTLED GULL, ALL ALONE SITTING ON A ROCK SEAWALL, THE MIDDLE OF THE RIVER. SHORTLY, IT FLEW IN A LARGE CIRCLE AND THEN CAME DIRECTLY TOWARD ME, EVENTUALLY SETTLING DOWN WITH HERRING GULLS ON SHELF ICE ABOUT 60-75 YARDS AWAY. I IMMEDIATELY NOTICED THE PINK LEG, 4 FEET, INSTEAD OF THE YELLOW I HAD BEEN EXPECTING. I WATCHED THE BIRD FOR 20 MINUTES AS IT PICKED AT FISH IN THE ICE, WALKED AROUND AND FLEW SHORT DISTANCES. AFTER SEEING THE LEGS, THE WIDE TRAILING WING EDGE, AND THE

Similar species and how eliminated:

(OVER)

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

SUNSHINE - CLEAR SKY, 60-100 YARDS, 9X36 BINOCULARS
AND KOWA TSN-4 (20-60X ZOOM)

Previous experience with species and similar ones: SEEN AT ALTON, ILLINOIS 1/15/88References and persons consulted before writing description: NGS FIELD GUIDE AND HARRISON'S "SEABIRDS"How long before field notes made? 1 HOUR this form completed? 2 1/2 DAYS

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

UNUSUAL UPPERWING TIP PATTERN, I STARTED THINKING SLAY-BACKED GULL, AND BROUGHT PETE PETERSEN FROM HIS STORE TO LOOK AT IT. WE WATCHED ANOTHER 10-15 MINUTES FROM ABOUT THE SAME LOCATION AND DISTANCE. 89-11

IN GENERAL SIZE, THE GULL WAS NO DIFFERENT FROM THE NEARBY HERRING GULLS. ITS HEAD AND BILL SIZE AND SHAPE WERE ALSO SIMILAR, AS WAS ITS BEHAVIOR.

THE BACK (UPPERWING) AND MANTLE WERE A DARK GRAY, BUT NOT JET BLACK AS IN A GREAT BLACK-BACKED. THE WING TIPS WERE DARKER, AND THE MANTLE WAS ALSO SLIGHTLY DARKER THAN THE UPPERWING.

THE HEAD WAS WHITE WITH LIGHT BROWN STREAKING ON THE HEAD AND BACK OF THE NECK. THE BILL DID NOT SEEM LARGE FOR THE BIRD'S HEAD SIZE, IT WAS YELLOW, AND HAD A RED SPOT ON THE LOWER MANDIBLE, JUST IN FROM THE TIP. THE EYE WAS YELLOW AND THERE WAS A DARKENED AREA AROUND IT, ESPECIALLY DISTALLY.

THE BREAST, OTHER UNDERPARTS, AND TAIL WERE WHITE. THE LEGS WERE A BRIGHT PINK, ESPECIALLY THE FEET, AND WERE NOTICEABLY DIFFERENT THAN THE GRAY-PINK OF THE HERRING GULL LEGS + FEET.

WHEN FLYING THERE WAS A VERY WIDE WHITE TRAILING EDGE AND A VERY NARROW LEADING EDGE TO THE WING. WHEN THE BIRD WAS STANDING, THE TRAILING EDGE SHOWED UP AS A LARGE WHITE PATCH (LARGER THAN THAT OF THE HERRING GULLS). ALSO WHEN FLYING, OR RAISING ITS WINGS, THERE WAS A LARGE WHITE SUBTERMINAL MIRROR NEAR THE TIP. THERE WERE ALSO SMALL WHITE TIPS TO THE OUTER PRIMARIES, WHICH BLENDED INTO THE WHITE TRAILING EDGE MEDIANLY, AND SEVERAL OF THE OUTER PRIMARIES ALSO HAD A SMALLER WHITE SPOT WHICH WAS IN FROM THE FEATHER TIP. THE UNDERWING WAS A LIGHTER GRAY, BUT ALSO HAD A WHITE SPOTE PATTERN WHICH APPEARED SIMILAR TO THAT OF THE UPPERWING.

DIFFERENTIATION FROM OTHER DARK-MANTLED GULLS

- ① LESTER BLACK BACKED - LEG COLOR AND WING PATTERN DIFFER
- ② GREATER BLACK BACK - GENERAL SIZE, MANTLE DARKNESS AND WING PATTERN DIFFER.
- ③ WESTERN GULL - WING UNDERSURFACE AND TRAILING EDGE DIFFER
- ④ YELLOW-FOOTED GULL - SAME AS ABOVE PLUS LEG COLOR DIFFER

1. Species: Slaty-backed Gull Number seen: 1
 (If known) Age: adult Sex: ? Plumage: late winter
 2. Location (including county): Ben Butterworth Parkway at 3rd St, Moline, RI
 3. Date(s): 14 Feb. 1989 Time of day: 11:25 AM to 11:35 AM
 4. Observers -- Your name: Peter C. Petersen Phone: (314) 355 7051
 Address: 235 McClellan Blvd. Davenport, IA zip 52803
 Others present: Jim Fuller
 Others before or after you: Louise Brian Blevins, Marylou Petersen, Ann Barker, Cal & Bernie Knight, Tom Kent, Don Moeller
 5. Describe the habitat the bird(s) was found in and the surrounding habitat:
Ice shelf along Mississippi River

6. Description: Describe in great detail (but only include what actually was seen in the field (the size, shape and color pattern of the bird(s)). Include a description of the bill, eye, legs, feet, tail, body and wings as well as other diagnostic characteristics.

Herring Gull sized birds seen in very close proximity to Herring Gulls. Bill yellow with red spot near tip of lower mandible, eye yellow, legs and feet pink, feet a bit brighter than legs. Tail white, head & body white but some brownish flecking on head & hind neck. Mantle dark grey with about 3 cm. white at trailing edge of wing. Wing tip black with white feather tips & white area on 2 outermost primaries in- from tip, white area also separating black tip & dark grey mantle to outer edge. Wing tip looked like this -



On 16 Feb. the underwing seen to be white or off white except light grey on underside of primaries & secondaries.

Species: Slaty-backed Gull Date seen: 14 Feb. 1984 Observer: P.C. Petersen 89-11

7. Similar species (explain how eliminated):

Lesser Black-backed Gull - legs & feet would be yellow
Western Gull - no white area between dark grey mantle & black
Great Black-backed Gull - size, plus same as Western, wing tip

8. Describe the bird's behavior:

standing on ice, sleeping, flying, feeding on
small gizzard shad.

9. Describe the song or call notes heard: Not heard distinguishably from
Herring Gulls

10. Viewing conditions:

Optical equipment used (type, power): 20X + 35X scopes, 10X40 Zeiss binocs
50X

Closest distance to bird (how measured): 100 m, est.

Lighting and weather: Thin overcast, sun behind observer

Was the bird photographed? yes By whom? me Attached?

11. Summarize previous experience with this species and similar species:

Saw this species at Alton dam in 1984

12. Other observers who did not agree with the identification (explain): None to my knowledge

13. List books and illustrations consulted and advice received. How did these influence this description?

Checked Geo. guide before & during observation
Seabirds by Harrison & Master Guide later. These books
helped rule out other species.

14. How long after observing the bird(s) before field notes completed? 30 min.

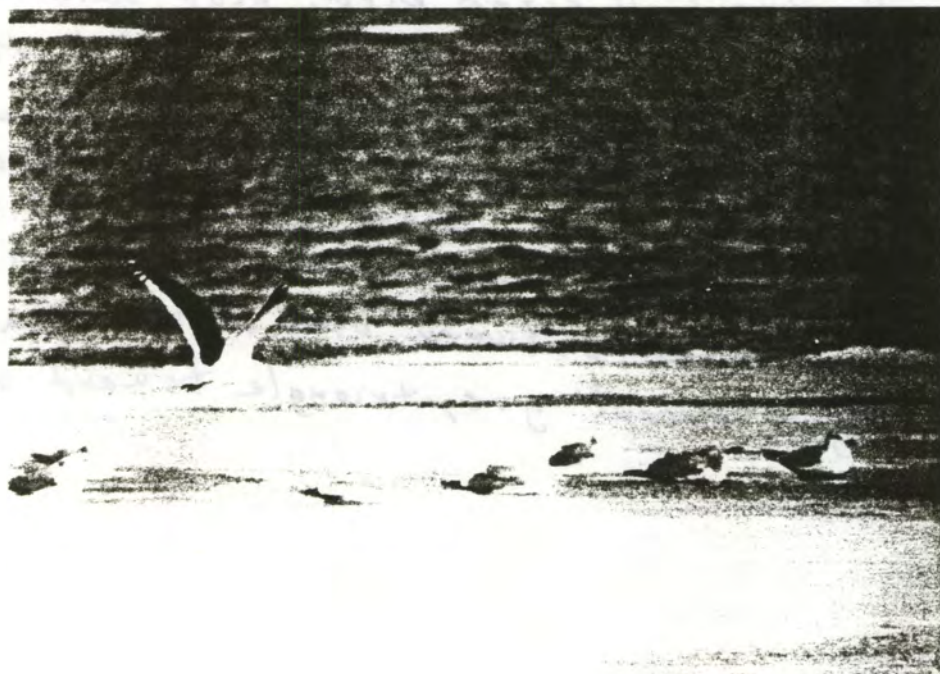
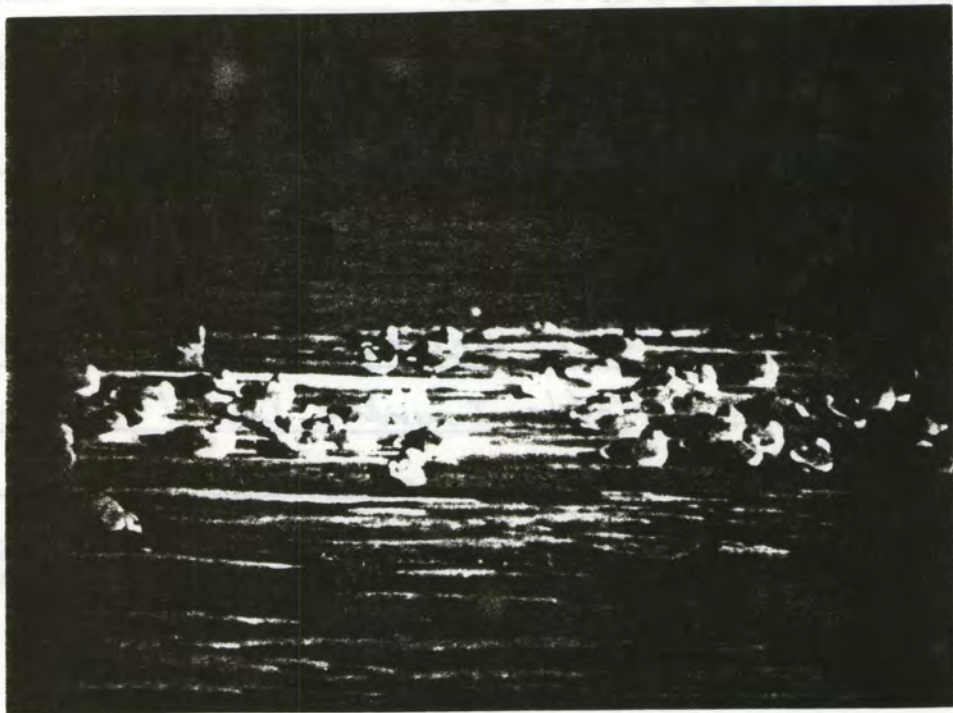
15. How long after observing the bird(s) before this form completed? 4 hours

Mail this completed form to:

Avian Ecology Program, Natural Heritage Division
Dept. of Conservation, Springfield, IL 62701

If you have observed a common bird species during a season of abundance, verification is achieved simply by returning there again in season. If, however, the observation involves a rare species, or a common species out of season or at an unusual location, and you wish to share this experience with the scientific community, special documentation is necessary.

An acceptable documentation consists of one or more of the following: a collected, diagnostic specimen; a diagnostic photograph; a diagnostic recording of the bird's voice; or, an accurate and detailed written description of the observation. It must be emphasized that a request for documentation is not an affront, but an effort to perpetuate a record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for all to examine. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation irrespective of the observer.



Sooty-backed Gull

2-14-89

Moline, IL

Photo: by P. C. Petersen

89-11

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1. Species: Slaty-backed Gull Number seen: 1
(If known) Age: adult Sex: ? Plumage: late winter
2. Location (including county): Le Claire, Scott Co. Iowa
3. Date(s): Feb. 18, 1989 Time of day: 8:45 AM to 9:00 AM
4. Observers -- Your name: Peter C. Petersen Phone: (319) 355-7051
Address: 235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport, Ia. Zip 52803
Others present: Walter Zuerdel, Daryl Tessen, Doug Rose - mob.
Others before or after you: mob.
5. Describe the habitat the bird(s) was found in and the surrounding habitat:
On floating ice on Mississippi River, about 150 yards from Iowa shore, S. edge of Le Claire

6. Description: Describe in great detail (but only include what actually was seen in the field (the size, shape and color pattern of the bird(s)). Include a description of the bill, eye, legs, feet, tail, body and wings as well as other diagnostic characteristics.

Herring Gull sized bird; head, body + tail white except some tan flecks on head. Legs ^{feet} pink. Mantle dark grey, wingtips black, wide trailing edge of white on wing, two outermost primaries with white "windows", tips of primaries white. An area of white between tip + mantle dark grey on 2-3 feathers along trailing edge of wing making a partial separation between black of tips + mantle. Underwing light except grey triangle toward wingtip.

Notes made 1 hour after observation, documentation 8 hours after obs.
Viewed with 10x40 zeiss binoculars, 30x80x60 scope - sun at 60° angle to bin
This was my closest Iowa observation. Had been seen Feb. 12
2 mi N. of Le Claire at about 500 yards, swimming with Herring Gulls.
See also Ill. observation documentation + photos.

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Slaty-backed Gull, 1 ad., 14 Feb 1989, Bettendorf, IA-Moline, IL.

Observer: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52240

Other observers: Jim Fuller, Pete Petersen (earlier in day); Don Moeller, Ann Barker, Cal and Bernie Knight, Mary Lou Petersen (at same time).

Time: 4:20 to 5:35 p.m.

Habitat: Mississippi River

Description: "A dark-mantled gull, reported earlier in day to me by Jim Fuller, found floating on ice, swimming in river, and flying. A very dark-mantled bird--nearly black, but slightly less black than the tips of the primaries as viewed on the standing bird. Size identical to Herring gull--could not detect any difference from multiple Herring Gulls it was with over a long period of time. The bill was flesh colored or yellow with a red subterminal mark on the lower mandible. The shape, size, and color of the bill was identical to the Herring Gulls. The head shape and head size also appeared the same as Herring Gulls. The eye was yellow. There was a smudge of gray through the eye, and some but not extensive streaking on the nape typical of a winter-plumaged gull. Otherwise the head and underparts were all white. The mantle was very dark black, although slightly lighter than the tips of the primaries. On the standing bird the trailing edge of the tertials was represented by a large white area; above this there was a second white area [scapular crescent], not as extensive, that goes all the way across the back. Tail all white. Legs definitely pink, identical in color to Herring Gulls, maybe a little darker pink. Posture and size similar to Herring Gull. When the bird was flying (we had multiple opportunities to see the bird in flight or raising its wings as it fed on multiple small fish), the outer primary had a large subterminal white spot and a small terminal white spot. All of the outer primaries had small terminal white spots, but the 3rd, 4th, and 5th, and may be the 6th, had subterminal white spots producing a white arc into the wing tip. The 2nd primary did not have a subterminal white mark. The under surface of the wing was much lighter than the upper surface--white except in the area of the flight feathers which were opaque gray, not black. I believe the same white marking were present in the primaries of the under surface of the wing, but I did not see those as well as the ones on the upper surface." I forgot to mention the broad white trailing edge to the secondaries as seen in flight.

Song: not heard.

Behavior: Not noticeably different from Herring Gulls.

Conditions: The bird was first seen at mid-river at about 100 yards. It flew from one side of the river to the other when flushed (we got the gulls up twice with the arm raising technique and an eagle flushed them once). Later it was seen on the near shore ice at about 50 yards. Used 10x binoculars, 20x scope from car, and Ann's Kowa (40x?). Overcast skies to dusk at 5:35.

Similar species: The appearance of this bird matches, almost to a fault, the descriptions of winter plumage in the National Geographic Guide and in Grant. Grant mentions that a small mirror is usually present on the second primary, but I saw this feather well and thought it lacked a mirror. The leg color and minimal difference in mantle and wing tip shades argue against Lesser Black-backed Gull. The size, slightly off-black mantle, and wing tip pattern exclude Great Black-backed Gull. Western Gull would be expected to have a more massive bill and head, darker under surface to the wing, and slightly less prominent trailing edge to the wing, in addition to the lack of subterminal marking on the 3rd-6th primaries. Yellow-footed Gull is excluded by leg color and other features of Western Gull.

Agreement: No one expressed disagreement.

Previous experience: I saw the bird at Alton Dam, IL-MO, on 6 Jan 1984, but not as well as I saw this bird.

References/time used: We looked at the National Geographic Guide and Seabirds during the observation period.

Time of notes/taped: Dictated as quoted above just after leaving the bird. Typed 2 days later.

Documentation of one Slaty-backed Gull (adult). Seen $\frac{1}{2}$ mile north of Le Claire IA, on a small island in the Mississippi River, on Feb. 15, 1989 from 4:40 P.M. to 4:50 P.M.. I was alone but the bird was being observed by Mr. and Mrs. Don Moeller from a different position. Peter Petersen had told me of the location.

The bird was sitting down on the ice but alert to things around it. I had a view of it's left side. It was in the company of ten Herring Gulls. The bill was yellow, with a red spot on the front of the lower mandible. The head was white as was the neck and breast. The neck had some faint vertical brown streaks on the lower portion. The back and wing was very dark gray (if I hadn't had the wing tips to compare color I would have called it black), the tone was darker than the bird shown on P. 154 of the Nat. Geo. Society Field Guide to Birds of N. America. (second edition) The "bird" refers to the Slaty-backed Gull. The wing tip was jet black with four white spots showing (folded wing). There was an area of white between the black wing tip and the dark gray of the rest of the body. I don't know if it was the rump or part of the wing. I couldn't make out eye color or marks on the head.

The bird stood up and I was able to see pink legs and feet.

The size and shape of the various body parts, ie: head bill, legs and body all looked comparable with the two Herring Gulls that was standing near-by.

The bird then lifted off the ice and I was able to view the top and underside of the wings, the tail and the back of the bird. The wing was dark gray, with black tips. The tip was partially separated from the gray by white. The trailing edge of the wing had a bold white band approx. $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wider than an accompanying Herring Gull. The underside of the wing caused my attention to lock on the wing for a couple beats, it was very pale gray (paler than the ill. in the N. G. S. Guide). The contrast was very sharp to the upperside of the wing.

(cont.)

Slaty- backed Gull cont.

The tail was white but I didn't notice the shape.

The back was the same shade as the wing.

I illuminated the following birds as possible by: I have seen many Great Black-backed Gulls and they are larger. Lesser Black-backed Gulls have yellow feet and legs. Western Gull, the N. G. S. Guide indicates no white separating the gray and black on the wing and the trailing edge is not as bold. It also notes the bill on the Western is very large.

I have seen the Greater Black-backed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. I have not seen the Slaty-backed or Western Gulls.

I did check the field guide before the sighting and was looking for leg color and identifying marks on the wings.

I was between the sun and the bird, the sky was 2/3 overcast with med. cloud cover, the 1/3 to the north was clear. The sun was behind the clouds.

I was approx. 150 yards from the Island which is well to the Iowa side of the river. I was using a Spacemaster scope at approx. 35X.

I talked to P. Petersen and Tom Kent before writing this description. I used the N. G. S. Guide, Audubon Master Guide and a book of Petersens about Gulls of the world (tittle?) Petersens book had a more accurate color of gray.

Notes were taken at sighting and contain key points of this documentation.

By: Gerald White Feb. 18, 1989

1505 E. 5th. St.

Muscatine, IA 52761

319/263-3464

Gerald White

P.S. Typed copie of report dated
Feb. 16, 1989 (G.W)

Slaty-backed Gull cont.

The tail was white but I didn't notice the blackish-brown band on the back as the wing.

February 5, 1960
 11:15 - 11:30 a.m. and 1:15 - 1:30 p.m.
 1:45 - 2:00 p.m.

East Boone, Illinois and
 Scott County, Iowa

Description:

General: A dark-backed gull generally the size of a Herring Gull, perhaps a little larger. In direct comparison.

Bill was bright yellow, deeper, brighter yellow than Herring Gull in direct comparison. Bright red dot at the gonysal angle. The gonysal angle was not prominent. The bill was slightly longer than Herring Gull and appeared thinner. Gape was dark red.

Head color was basically white with ochre streaking at the crown, nape, and sides of neck. Light eye was surrounded by dark smudgy-looking feathers which extended behind the eye into a short line.

Upperparts: Mantle was dark charcoal gray. Appearing black at a distance. Very much darker than Herring Gull in direct comparison: it was quite easy to pick out this bird even at a distance. Trailing edge was broad and white. A series of white dots forming a line led off of the trailing edge toward the tips of the middle primaries. This line of white separates the gray of the inner wing from the black of the outer primaries.

Underparts: Underparts and tail completely white. Underside of wing quite pale with dark gray, not black, primaries and outer secondaries. There was a darker area where the wing meets the body.

Legs and Feet: Legs and feet were bright reddish pink, much brighter than Herring Gull in direct comparison.

Behavior: This bird was seen at rest and in flight. When first spotted, it was sitting on the ice in company with several Herring Gulls. It flew upriver approximately one-quarter mile. It was then seen quite close, feet and eye color noted before it flew again upriver. The last observation was the longest, the bird preened

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and stretched its wings several times allowing us to see the white dots in the primaries and all other field marks described above.

Light: Sun diffused by high clouds--no harshness. No heat waves. Sun directly behind shoulder at best observation point.

Observer: Brief observation at 30 yards. More leisurely look at 175 yards.

Identifiers: Boss Gilcock, Alan Grenon. Both agreed with this identification.

Equipment: 7x26 binoculars
25 power scope.

Written from notes taken at time of sighting.

Tanya E. Bray
9708 Grover
Omaha, NE 68124

DOCUMENTATION FORM

For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

89-11

What species? SLATY-BACKED GULL How many? 1

Location? MISS. R. AT DAVENPORT, IA

Type of Habitat? RIVER WITH SOME EDGE ICE, 95% OPEN WATER

When? date(s): FEB 19, 1989 time: 2pm to 2³⁰pm (approx)

Who? your name and address: ROSS SILCOCK

Others with you: TANYA BAY, ALAN GRENON

Others before or after you: M.O.B. BEFORE (BIRD PRESENT SEVERAL DAYS)

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

GULL WAS SLIGHTLY LARGER THAN HERRING GULL, WITH BLACKISH MANTLE AND PINKISH LEGS, SEEN WHEN STANDING WITH HERRING. SIZE AND APPEARANCE AT THIS POINT ELIMINATES ALL BUT THE FOLLOWING POSSIBILITIES: SLATY-BACKED, GREAT BLACK-BACKED, WESTERN. GREAT-BLACK-BACKED DIFFERS FROM PRESENT BIRD IN BILL SIZE (THIS BIRD HAD A LONG, SLIM BILL WITH NO NOTICEABLE GONYS, AND A RED SPOT NEAR THE DISTAL POINT OF LOWER MANIBULUS), MANTLE BEING DETER THAN BLACK PRIMARY FEATHERS, AND SIZE. ~~GREAT-BLACK-BACKED~~ ALSO NOTICEABLE ON PRESENT BIRD WAS DARK OCULAR RING EXTENDING TO POINT TOWARDS REAR, A CHARACTER WHICH IS NEVER SEEN ON GR. BL. BAC OR WESTERN GULL. THE LATTER SPECIES IS MOST DIFFICULT TO ELIMINATE, BUT OCULAR RING, ALONG WITH RATHER SLIM BILL AND PALE EYE OF PRESENT BIRD ELIMINATES ESPECIALLY NORTHERN WESTERN GULL (DARK-EYED FORM). OCULAR RING + SLIM BILL ALSO ARE NOT CHARACTERISTIC OF SOUTHERN WESTERN GULL. THE MOST CHARACTERISTIC FEATURE OF SLATY-BACKED GULL IS THE APPEARANCE OF WHITE IN THE 10TH (OUTER) PRIMARY, AND ALSO ON INNER PRIMARIES (5TH-8TH), ALTHOUGH I COULD NOT DISCERN THIS FEATHER BY FEATHER, ONE CLOSE LOOK FROM BEHIND AS THE BIRD SPREAD ITS WINGS SHOWED WHITE SPOTS IN THE AREA WHERE

Similar species; how eliminated:

THE BLACK PRIMARY COLORATION FADED INTO THE DARK GRAY-TO-CHARCOAL MANTLE COLORATION.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? NO ~~AT LEAST ONE (BY 2000)~~
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

EXCELLENT - 3 VIEWS - (1) ON CONCRETE BREAKWATER IN CENTER OF RIVER, SEEN FROM PARK ON RIVER ROAD (14); (2) ON SHORE ICE SHELF JUST S. OF DEER PLANT BY PLAYGROUND - SEEN AT 30 FT OR SO AS FLUSHED (3) ON SHORE ICE SHELF NORTH OF 7TH ST DIKE -

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

NONE

AT LEAST 250 YDS.
USED ~~25X~~ 25X DIALSCOPE + 10X50 DISTANCE
ALSO CHICAGO GUY'S QUESTAR AT RIVER RD.

References and persons consulted before writing description:
AM BIRDS ARTICLE ON ST. LOUIS BIRD; NGS GUIDE.

How long before field notes made? NONE this form completed? 1 WEEK

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).

SLATY-BACKED GULL

Carl J. Bendorf
825 7th Ave.
Iowa City, IA 52240

21 February 1989
Mississippi River, Scott Co., IA
5:25 to 5:40 PM

Tom Kent and I arrived about 3:30 PM and first viewed the Mississippi River from the Moline side at about 3400 E. River St. There were several dozen Herring Gulls present. We then checked various access points upstream as far as Campbell Island and then returned to the original location and watched as gulls started arriving, mostly from upstream. By 5:15 PM, there were perhaps several hundred Herrings standing on the low string of rocks, etc. that run down the middle of the river at this point. We were carefully looking at all the sitting gulls and also trying to keep an eye on the birds that were steadily arriving. Suddenly, at 5:25 PM, I noticed one gull with a very dark mantle that stood out very easily. It was sitting on the rocks in the middle and the following description is from my notes taken during and immediately after the observation:

Overall size, shape, and build was virtually indistinguishable from Herring Gulls sitting within several feet. If there was any difference, this dark-mantled bird may have been less than 5% smaller than a Herring Gull, but essentially there was no noticeable difference.

The head and body were clean white with some brown streaking on the head and neck. There may have been a darker area of feathering around the eye. The tail was all white.

The mantle was very dark grey, almost as dark as the black wingtips, but not quite. On the sitting bird, there was a very large white tertial crescent and a smaller but still noticeable scapular crescent. These were proportionally much larger than the Herring Gulls. The mantle was otherwise quite uniform and did not have any brownish tones.

The bill appeared identical proportionally to a Herring Gull and appeared light but I could not see more detail than that.

The legs were bright pink and were much more noticeably pink than the Herring Gulls.

The bird sat preening most of the time, but did take flight several times for a very short distance as it moved to another rock.

In flight, the dark mantle was easy to pick out among the flying Herring Gulls. There was a very wide white trailing edge to the upper wing. Besides a blacker wing tip, I did see a large white mirror or white spot subterminally on the 1st or 2nd primary.

SLATY-BACKED GULL

BENDORF

Page 2

I estimated the distance at about 200 yards. The sky was partly cloudy but it was growing dark. I used 10 X 40 Zeiss binoculars and a 20 X scope on a window mount.

Discussion

This bird had been present for about a week and had been previously identified as a Slaty-backed Gull. The size, mantle color, and leg color were certainly very consistent with this species. Because of the distance and light, I was just not quite able to see the white subterminal spots on the 3rd through 6th primaries that are supposed to be diagnostic of this species. Tom Kent said he had seen this feature at much closer range four days earlier.

I also saw the Slaty-backed Gull at Alton Dam in 1984. As I recall, that bird had much more streaking on the head and also had a much larger head and bill compared to Herring Gulls. This would appear to be a different bird and might be a female with relatively smaller proportions.

No references were consulted before taking field notes. This form was completed the next day.

1. Species: Slaty-backed gull Number seen: 1
(If known) Age: Adult Sex: _____ Plumage: Win.
2. Location (including county): Moline riverfront, R.I. Co.
3. Date(s): 2-18-89 Time of day: Early afternoon - 30 seconds
4. Observers -- Your name: Michael J. Baum Phone: (309) 879 - 2581
Address: 390 Valleyview Cir, RR1, Dahinda, Ill. Zip 61428
Others present: _____
Others before or after you: M. ob.

5. Describe the habitat the bird(s) was found in and the surrounding habitat: Main channel of Miss. R. viewed from park upstream from I-74 bridge. Breakwater midstream.

6. Description: Describe in great detail (but only include what actually was seen in the field (the size, shape and color pattern of the bird(s)). Include a description of the bill, eye, legs, feet, tail, body and wings as well as other diagnostic characteristics.

A large gull with a dark gray mantle, a wide white trailing border to light feathers, + appearance of streaking on head.

Species: Slaty-backed gull Date seen: 2-18-89 Observer: M. Baum

7. Similar species (explain how eliminated): Lesser black-backed, Western would not have broad white trailing wing edge. G. black-back darker mantle.
8. Describe the bird's behavior: Fly-by only
9. Describe the song or call notes heard: —
10. Viewing conditions:
 Optical equipment used (type, power): 20X scope
 Closest distance to bird (how measured): 800' - guess
 Lighting and weather: Cloudy, calm, 20's°
 Was the bird photographed? ? By whom? ? Attached? —
11. Summarize previous experience with this species and similar species: My 1st. Have seen G + L-black-backed in Ill. Have never seen Western or other dark-mantled gulls.
12. Other observers who did not agree with the identification (explain): ?
13. List books and illustrations consulted and advice received. How did these influence this description? —
14. How long after observing the bird(s) before field notes completed? Notes in field
15. How long after observing the bird(s) before this form completed? 3-5-89

Mail this completed form to:

Avian Ecology Program, Natural Heritage Division
 Dept. of Conservation, Springfield, IL 62701

If you have observed a common bird species during a season of abundance, verification is achieved simply by returning there again in season. If, however, the observation involves a rare species, or a common species out of season or at an unusual location, and you wish to share this experience with the scientific community, special documentation is necessary.

An acceptable documentation consists of one or more of the following: a collected, diagnostic specimen; a diagnostic photograph; a diagnostic recording of the bird's voice; or, an accurate and detailed written description of the observation. It must be emphasized that a request for documentation is not an affront, but an effort to perpetuate a record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for all to examine. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation irrespective of the observer.

1. Species: Slaty-backed Gull Number seen: 1
 (If known) Age: adult Sex: ? Plumage: late winter
2. Location (including county): N. end of Smith's Island on ice between Isl. + Ia. shore
3. Date(s): March 14, 1989 Time of day: 2:20 PM to 2:35 P.M.
4. Observers -- Your name: Peter C. Petersen Phone: (319) 355-7051
 Address: 235 McClellan Blvd. Davenport, IA Zip 52803
 Others present: none
 Others before or after you: none in March
5. Describe the habitat the bird(s) was found in and the surrounding habitat:
On ice shelf at North end of Smith Island slough between island + Iowa shore.
6. Description: Describe in great detail (but only include what actually was seen in the field (the size, shape and color pattern of the bird(s)). Include a description of the bill, eye, legs, feet, tail, body and wings as well as other diagnostic characteristics.
- Herring sized gull - with Herring's. Bill chiefly dark grey, tip + ridge a super mar. yellow, some red near tip - very unlike Feb. observation - bill scooped to 50% and did not seem to be dirty on surface. Eye yellow, legs + feet pink. Head + body white with a few tan flecks on head + back of neck. Tail white. Mantle dark grey, wing tips black except wht at very tip of primaries + a white window on longest primary. Trailing edge of wing broadly edged white in area of secondaries. Much like Feb. bird except great difference on bill. Did not feel it was the same individual.
- Underside of wing off white except light grey along trailing edge of primaries.

89-11

Species: Slaty-backed Gull Date seen: Mar 14, 1989 Observer: P. C. Petersen

7. Similar species (explain how eliminated):

Lesser Black-backed Gull - this bird had pink legs & feet, not yellow
Western Gull - underside of wings too light in secondary area & bill too small
Great Black-backed Gull - size of bill, overall size.

8. Describe the bird's behavior: standing on ice, flushed twice to see flight pattern

9. Describe the song or call notes heard: call not distinguishable from Herring & Ring-bills.

10. Viewing conditions:

Optical equipment used (type, power): 10X40 binocs, 15-50X on scope

Closest distance to bird (how measured): 100 m. est.

Lighting and weather: thin overcast, bright conditions, sun 90° to side

Was the bird photographed? no By whom? _____ Attached? _____

11. Summarize previous experience with this species and similar species:

Have seen the St. Louis bird about 12 observations of Feb. 6th.

12. Other observers who did not agree with the identification (explain): _____

13. List books and illustrations consulted and advice received. How did these influence this description? Had checked the literature in Feb. - did not check.

14. How long after observing the bird(s) before field notes completed? 5 min.

15. How long after observing the bird(s) before this form completed? 2 hrs.

Mail this completed form to:

Avian Ecology Program, Natural Heritage Division
Dept. of Conservation, Springfield, IL 62701

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