

From: azfo@azfo.org
Subject: ABC Report of Little_Gull observed on 10_September_2011 by David Vander_Pluym
Date: September 17, 2011 at 5:35 PM
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Little_Gull (Other)

Date observed: 10 September 2011

Initial observer(s): Original Finders: David Vander Pluym and Lauren Harter
Circumstances: Lauren Harter and I arrived just after dawn at a hill on the AZ side of Lake Havasu that we (and others) frequently use to scan the north end of Lake Havasu. After scanning for about an hour and not seeing much, suddenly a few Black Terns started to trickle in and I thought I would take just one last scan when I spotted a Sabines Gull. We decided to stay a while longer and I scanned along the reed beds at the north end where the Colorado River enters the lake. At about 0745 I noticed a small gull feeding with some Black Terns and I at first took it as the Sabines Gull, but when I noticed that it had a full black M on the back (not the bold tricolored), was smaller, and that it lacked the bold white on the secondaries I started to think Little Gull. I called it out and quickly got Lauren on the bird and we watched as it fed near Black Terns along the reed bed (this the southernmost reed bed of the river delta area, is right at the stateline and the bird was on both sides of it. The bird would swoop low and pick things off the surface of the water acting like a slightly larger more aerobatic Black Tern. I went to the car to remind us of all the field marks of a Little Gull as the bird was ¼ of a mile away (at its closest it was still about a half mile away in the afternoon) and showed no signs of getting closer. When I got back the bird was still feeding in the same area. A little while after the bird started flying south close to the California shoreline. It landed briefly on a floating mat of vegetation before continuing out toward the middle of the lake flying by a Sabine's Gull before being lost in the sun. We headed to Pittsburgh Pt to see if the bird would fly by there, which it didn't. In the afternoon we headed back to the north end and scanned from the same hill. In three hours we had 2 brief observations of the bird on the AZ side of the lake. The first was around 5:00 PM, when Lauren spotted the bird flying fairly close (but in bad light) with a Sterna sp (about the same size, though the gull was heavier looking) to the south of us and quickly disappeared in the sun. Just after 6 PM as Mark Stevenson and Molly Pollock were walking up the hill Lauren spotted the bird fairly close, they were able to see it mostly flying away, though Molly saw the dark m pattern. In the morning we had the bird in view for about 20 minutes and were able to check and look for the field marks, despite the distance. In the afternoon/evening we had the bird in view for under 2 minutes and idable looks for less than a minute. Lauren possibly had the day before and the bird was possibly seen by Bud Johnson several days later, it was only definitively seen on this date.

Exact location: North end of Lake Havasu on the state line.

County: Mohave

City: Lake Havasu City

Elevation:

Submitted by: David Vander Pluym.

Number observed: 1

Age: juvenile

Sex: unknown

Time observed: ~0745

Duration of observation: ~20 minutes and then a couple minutes in the afternoon around 5PM and 6PM

Minimum distance from bird: ~3/4 of a mile, at its closes was .5 miles away

Optics used: We viewed the bird with Swarovski's scopes, mine a Habicht at 80.

Position of sun: Sun was behind us

Habitat: Lake, open water, and near reed beds

Others who observed this bird:

Anyone known to disagree: Please provide name and contact information (if known)

Was the bird identified before consulting any guides: yes

Identification guides used:

Were notes taken before or after the observation: After

How well was the bird seen: OK

Detailed description:

Very small size, about half way between the size of a Black Tern and a Sabines Gull (slightly closer to a Black Tern) which we had direct comparisons to. Body and tail seemed short with longish wings (wingspan close to twice the body/tail length) that weren't sharp and pointed like a tern, more rounded, but still with a little point to them. When the bird landed briefly it looked very small, with a small head and short legs. The bird was always distant and we saw it almost exclusively in flight. The one time it landed it looked wholly dark on the upperparts and I was able at this time to see a dark crown (but only this one time could I see it), multiple times I was able to see a dark hindcollar that came down about halfway to the chest. The tail looked white, but I was able to see the black tail tip twice. The underparts and underwings looked wholly white or light gray. From above the primaries and primary coverts looked all black. A bold black bar extended from the carpal joint diagonally toward the rump. This bar was thick maybe about a quarter of the width of the wing. Above and below the bar (more was below) looked dark gray. The back looked black in some instances but also gray in others (so I think there was mix though the exact extent and how they were I couldn't be sure). The low back was the main part that looked darkest and contrasted strongly with the tail. The hind collar and the black in the back indicate that the bird was a juv, but if it was fully still in juv aspect or molting it was too distant to say. The small size, bold black m on the wing, lack of contrasting white secondaries, dark hind collar, black outer primaries all rule out other species of gulls and terns.

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Vocalizations:

None

Behavior:

The bird would swoop low and pick things off the surface of the water acting like a slightly larger more aerobatic Black Tern. See also above the circumstances in the initial observer's part.

What similar species were considered and why were they eliminated:

The small size ruled out pretty much any other gull, as did the dark m pattern, which also rules out terns. Black-legged Kittiwake went through our minds as well, but again the birds small size, overall dark upper wings, with bolder dark m, black on the back, and lack of bold white on the secondaries rule out that species. Sabine's Gull was my first brief thought, but that was quickly ruled out as the bird did not show the bold tricolored pattern, brown back of a juv, or white secondaries. Bonaparte's Gull is ruled out by the small size, bold m pattern, lack of bold black secondaries, and head pattern. A remote possibility Ross's Gull is ruled out by the lack of white secondaries similar to a Sabine's Gull.

Experience with species:

I've only seen one Little Gull previous

Experience with similar species:

seen hundreds of kittiwakes, 1 Ross's Gull and thousands of Sabine's and Bonaparte's Gulls

Was the bird photographed: No

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Url:http://www.azfo.org/ArizonaBirdReview/SubmittedHtml/Little_Gull_Lake_Havasu_City_Vander_Pluym_10_September_2011.html

