

Utah Rare Bird Report

SPECIES: Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*) 1 juvenile

DATE: 10 September 1995

LOCATION: Quichapa Lake, Cedar Valley, Iron Co., Utah

REPORTING OBSERVER: Steve Summers, 2146 N. Chandler Dr., Cedar City, UT 84720

OTHER OBSERVER(S): Steven Hedges (later in the day)

DESCRIPTION: I first saw the bird sitting on the water at the north end of the lake. Sitting on the water it appeared to be a very small dark gull on the upperparts with white underparts. The back, nape and top of head were gray-brown with slightly paler edges making the bird look slightly speckled. The forehead was white with a white ring-like area around the eye. In flight the diagnostic triangular wing pattern was well seen. The black outer primaries extended up to the bend of the wing with a large white triangular wedge extending across the inner primaries and secondaries up to the bend of the wing. The upper wing coverts were the same color as the back. The tail was white with a black terminal tail band and fairly deeply notched. For some reason the black terminal tail band is not visible in the photos where it looks like it should. The bill was small, short and all dark. I never got a clear look at leg color.

ELIMINATION OF SIMILAR SPECIES: Two other North American gull species show a similar triangular wing pattern. First winter Black-legged Kittiwakes (*Rissa tridactyla*) have a very similar pattern except the black of the primaries also extends from the bend of the wing diagonally down across the upper wing coverts. This gives the appearance of a "M" across the back. Kittiwakes are also larger and have a distinctive black patch behind the eye and a black nape collar. They also lack the brownish cast to the plumage. First winter Little Gulls (*Larus minutus*) also shows a similar wing pattern but as in the kittiwake they also have a black stripe across the upper wing coverts. They are also smaller than a Sabine's Gull and have a square tail. A Little Gulls head pattern is also different with a black spot behind the eye and a blackish cap.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF OBSERVATION: I first found the bird at the north end of the lake around 10:00 a.m.. It was sitting on the water and for a long while did not fly. Since the distance when I first found it was great I tentatively identified it as a Sabine's Gull. When it finally did fly it was obvious that it was a Sabine's Gull. Over the next hour the bird was constantly in view any time I wanted to look. It would alternate between periods of resting on the water and "pattering" over the water as if looking for food. I observed the bird with 8X42 binoculars and a 30X spotting scope. The photos were taken with a 300mm lens on a doubler.

Steve Summers