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**YELLOW-FOOTED GULL AND OTHER RARITIES IN UTAH DURING FALL,
1998**

By Keith Evans

This report documents observations of Yellow-footed Gull, Ruddy Turnstone, Greater Scaup, White-winged Scoter, Semipalmated Plover, Baird's Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Sabine's Gull, Blue Jay, Northern Parula, and Western Bluebird. Photos are included for Yellow-footed Gull, Ruddy Turnstone, Baird's Sandpiper, and Short-billed Dowitcher.

A Yellow-footed Gull (*Larus livens*) was observed by George Barrowclough, Cole Crocker-Bedford and me at about 4:00 pm on October 4, 1998 at Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. George is Associate Curator, American Museum of Natural History, New York and Cole works for the Forest Service in Alaska. The three of us were on a field trip sponsored by the Raptor Research Foundation. The enclosed photos were taken by me with a Canon A2E camera attached to a Leica Televid 77 spotting scope -- the result is an 800mm telephoto. Original photos are on Kodachrome 200 slide film. The enclosed prints were copied, from the slides, onto Kodak Gold negative film, then printed.

The Yellow-footed Gull was spotted in the canal along the north-south road on the east side of Unit 2 at Bear River Refuge. The gull was about two-thirds the distance from the restroom, at the old refuge headquarters site, to where the road turns west. The GPS coordinates were 41° 27' North and 112° 17' West. The gull spent time on the canal bank eating a dead fish and in the canal swimming with California and Ring-billed Gulls. Yellow-footed Gulls nest on islands in the Gulf of California and occasionally travel north as far as the Salton Sea in California during the post-breeding period. As far as I know, this is the first record of Yellow-footed Gull in Utah.

George Barrowclough and I discussed the identifying characteristics while observing the gull. I first thought it was a Western Gull and remarked that Western Gulls were rare in Utah. George said it was not a Western as it had yellow feet. I then suggested a Lesser Black-backed Gull. George is familiar with Lesser Black-backed Gulls from the east coast and said it was too big and the yellow on the feet and legs was too bright. We then determined from a Peterson Field Guide of Western Birds that it was a Yellow-

footed Gull. Enclosed are three photos. These photos were taken on a cloudy day with intermittent rain and sleet falling. The colors are not as pronounced as they looked during our observations through binoculars and the spotting scope.

Photo #1 shows the yellow legs, feet, and bill with the red spot on the lower mandible. The yellow was actually much brighter and what we described as "sunflower yellow" during our observations. Photo #2 shows the Yellow-footed Gull with a winter plumage California Gull. This photo is included to document the dark mantle on the Yellow-footed Gull and the size difference -- the Yellow-footed Gull being much larger. Photo #3 is a side view showing additional characteristics of the gull.

I observed several other uncommon birds during Utah's fall migration period. On September 8, 1998, I observed a lone Ruddy Turnstone in the marina area at Antelope Island. The bird was with Black-necked Stilts, Killdeer, and Wilson Phalaropes. Backlighting made photography difficult, but the enclosed photo is sufficient for documentation -- showing the size, neck marking, and red legs.

Other interesting observations include the following. On October 27, 1998, Jack Rensel and I observed a lone male Greater Scaup just across the road from the Antelope Island marina where the causeway joins the Island. The Greater Scaup was in good afternoon light which was to our backs. Lesser Scaup, Eared Grebes, and the Greater Scaup were within 30 yards of shore. We could easily see the green sheen on the head and neck as well as the head shape difference from the Lesser Scaup.

Just an hour or so prior to our Greater Scaup observation, we were hiking above the Buffalo Point parking lot on Antelope Island when we observed, with binoculars and scope, a female Western Bluebird on the large rocks in the area. The bluebird was calling frequently, so we could rely on voice and sight for identification. The bird had the characteristic gray throat and rusty breast of a female (or possibly young male) Western Bluebird. This was the first Western Bluebird observation for either Jack or me in northern Utah, although we have seen them in Idaho. We also noted the late date of October 27, 1998 for this observation. There were insects observed and flowers still

blooming, therefore a "hard" frost had not occurred on the Island yet.

Jack Rensel, Arnold Smith, and I observed a White-winged Scoter on September 22 at the Antelope Island marina. The scoter had been reported earlier. We observed a Sabine's Gull on the south side of the Causeway at about 4:00pm on September 22, 1998. Several Semipalmated Plovers observed along the south side, east end of the causeway on September 18. On November 11, 1998, Jack, Arnold, and I observed two Black Scoters, one Surf Scoter, and two Oldsquaws along the causeway. Before traveling to Antelope Island on November 11, we went to Pleasant View to observe the two Blue Jays visiting Ingrid Payne's feeder. We did get a good view. We seem to be getting more and more records of Blue Jays in northern Utah, an indication that they continue to expand their range westward.

Also on September 18, 1998, Jack, Arnold, and I traveled the road below Willard Bay dam near the Harold Crane Waterfowl Management area. We observed many interesting species, including Bonaparte's Gull, Common Tern, Black Tern, and Forster's Tern, but of special note were three Short-billed Dowitchers and several Baird's Sandpipers. Photos are enclosed for these two species.

Jack Rensel and I heard about the reported Northern Parula at the Willard Bay State Park campground. So, on November 18, 1998, we went to Willard Bay in search of this warbler. The Northern Parula was interesting in two ways -- its rarity in Utah and the late fall date for a warbler to still be in northern Utah. Although we got a brief view earlier, our best views were shortly after noon in and near a crabapple tree at unit #1 in the campground. The Northern Parula was with a small flock of Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Black-capped Chickadees, Dark-eyed Juncos, and one Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. We got good views of the split eye ring, the bluish head, white wing bars, and yellow throat.

This concludes my observations of bird specialties for Utah during the fall of 1998. Many factors are involved in the fall migration patterns of birds. Some fall migrations seem to include a larger diversity of birds than during other years. The fall of 1998, in northern Utah, was unusual as we experienced very few weather fronts bringing north winds and extreme drops in temperatures. Most of the storm

systems passed either to our south or north creating mild temperatures and many days with south winds. For example, Barn Swallows remained in northern Utah until mid-October. We also noted an abundance of mosquitoes even as late as an October 28, 1998 field trip.