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From: KEE0440@aol.com  
 Date: Wed, 29 Sep 1999 18:16:20 EDT  
 Subject: Fwd: Yellow-footed Gull  
 To: westwings@sisna.com, shedges@mail.netutah.com  
 CC: KEE0440@aol.com

I was asked by a Michael Patten, Univ. of Calif., for photos of the Yellow-footed Gull I reported from Bear River Refuge last Oct. Dr. Patten believes it was a Lesser Black-backed Gull -- see lengthy details in enclosed letter.

Is the Utah Records Committee active? Who is on that committee?

If you have Merrill Webb's e-mail address please forward this to him.

Steve, I just sent in my revised article on Utah Gulls (Don Paul and Merrill Webb provided good info which I incorporated). I didn't change the Yellow-footed Gull section -- but do indicate that the record is under review. Should it be up-dated with some of this (enclosed letter) info?

I understand that a Yellow-footed Gull was photographed at Lake Powell this spring, do you know where I can get prints of some of these photos to compare with mine?

Both the Yellow-footed and Lesser Black-backed Gull would be "lifers" for me, but it would be great to know which one to record. Thanks. Keith

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Return-Path: <[patten@citrus.ucr.edu](mailto:patten@citrus.ucr.edu)>  
 Received: from rly-zb02.mx.aol.com (rly-zb02.mail.aol.com [172.31.41.2]) by air-zb04.mail.aol.com (v60.28) with ESMTP; Mon, 27 Sep 1999 15:29:29 -0400  
 Received: from navel.ucr.edu (navel.ucr.edu [138.23.225.12]) by rly-zb02.mx.aol.com (v61.9) with ESMTP; Mon, 27 Sep 1999 15:28:54 -0400  
 Received: from Annex ([138.23.133.160]) by orange.ucr.edu with SMTP  
                   for KEE0440@aol.com; Mon, 27 Sep 1999 12:29:54 -0700

Message-Id: <[3.0.5.32.19990927123046.007b92c0@citrus.ucr.edu](mailto:3.0.5.32.19990927123046.007b92c0@citrus.ucr.edu)>  
 X-Sender: patten@citrus.ucr.edu (Unverified)

X-Mailer: QUALCOMM Windows Eudora Light Version 3.0.5 (32)  
Date: Mon, 27 Sep 1999 12:30:46 -0700  
To: KEE0440@aol.com  
From: "Michael A. Patten" <patten@citrus.ucr.edu>  
Subject: Re: Yellow-footed Gull  
In-Reply-To: <5f17d5aa.251d1460@aol.com>  
Mime-Version: 1.0  
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1"  
Content-Transfer-Encoding: quoted-printable

Dear Keith,

As promised, I showed the gull photographs to a bunch of friends this weekend to get their objective opinions. I did not tell any of them the date, location, or circumstances in advance, to ensure that they would not be biased in their response. I also instructed each of them to make only one choice, and some were more firm in their choices than others. As you can see from the opinions listed below, in only one case did someone suggest a Yellow-footed Gull, and he was fairly tentative.

Person=09=09=09=09Opinion  
N. Bruce Broadbooks=09=09Yellow-legged Gull (tentative)  
Jon L. Dunn=09=09=09Lesser Black-backed Gull  
Matthew T. Heindel=09=09Lesser Black-backed Gull  
Andrew Howe=09=09=09Yellow-legged Gull (tentative)  
Vernon Howe=09=09=09Lesser Black-backed Gull (tentative)  
Guy McCaskie=09=09=09Lesser Black-backed Gull  
Joseph Morlan=09=09=09Lesser Black-backed Gull (tentative)  
Gary H. Rosenberg=09=09Yellow-footed Gull (tentative)  
Scott B. Terrill=09=09Heuglin's Gull (tentative)  
John C. Wilson=09=09Lesser Black-backed Gull (tentative)

I polled another 110 people, none of whom were certain enough (or brave enough!) to have an opinion on the bird. This poll was obviously informal, so you shouldn't quote any of the above opinions in print without getting permission from that person.

In any event, despite the variation in opinions, I think it is clear that the bird is not a Yellow-footed Gull. Indeed, if I may offer my own subjective assessment of the knowledge/skill levels of the various people I polled, Dunn, Heindel, McCaskie, and Morlan are amongst the best and most knowledgeable birders I have ever met. All stated that they felt the bird

was a Lesser Black-backed Gull (though Morlan was a bit tentative). Rosenberg and Terrill are also extremely good and extremely knowledgeable, and both quickly conceded that the bird best fit a Lesser Black-backed once I made my announcement (and expressed my own opinion) at the end of my poll. Between Dunn, Heindel, McCaskie, and myself, we have collectively seen thousands of both Lesser Black-backed and Yellow-footed gulls (and I wrote the Birds of North America account for the latter).

I have already given you some of the reasons why I believe the bird was a Lesser Black-backed Gull. Below I outline those reasons again to ensure that you are comfortable with them, and I present a more detailed analysis of them.

(1) Orbital color. Both the Western and Yellow-footed gulls have yellow to orange-yellow (sometimes orange in high breeding) orbital rings. I am unaware of either species ever showing a red orbital. Indeed, a red orbital narrows the field of potential dark-mantled species to a) Lesser Black-backed Gull, b) Slaty-backed Gull, c) Heuglin's Gull, d) Yellow-legged Gull. The mantle is too dark for any subspecies of Yellow-legged Gull, including *Larus cacchinans michahellis* and *L. c. mongolicus*, the two most likely vagrants to North America (only the unlikely *L. c. atlantis* has supposedly been recorded).

(2) Leg/foot color. The evenly colored, rich straw-yellow legs and feet are entirely consistent with a Lesser Black-backed Gull. The Slaty-backed Gull never shows anything other than pink legs and feet. The coloration is too bright for most Kelp Gulls, particularly in Basic plumage, and is too yellow for a Heuglin's Gull of the central Siberian subspecies *L. heuglini taimyrensis*, the only subspecies likely to reach North America (it is as yet unrecorded) given that it winters in southeastern Asia and regularly reaches Japan. The Yellow-footed Gull almost always has a pink/orange

tinge to the legs, such that they contrast with the feet; and neither the legs nor the feet are pure straw-yellow.

(3) Head streaking. Amongst the large, dark-mantled gulls, the Western, Yellow-footed, and Kelp gulls tend to lack head streaking in winter. Some Westerns, particularly of the nominate (northern) subspecies, acquire a dull gray hood in winter, but none look streaked. The amount of streaking on the head of an adult Basic Yellow-footed or Kelp is minimal indeed. Of the yellow-legged species, distinct head streaking is present on Basic Lesser Black-backed, Yellow-legged, and Heuglin's gulls.

(4) Mantle coloration. I am amazed at the range of variation in mantle color shown in the three photographs. Still, I assume the two closer photos show the truer mantle color (i.e., dark gray, contrasting distinctly with the black primaries). The Yellow-footed Gull generally has a darker mantle than what is shown. Indeed, to my eye the mantle color looks perfect for a *L. fuscus graellsii* Lesser Black-backed Gull, the subspecies that accounts for 99% of the North American records of this species.

(5) Iris color. Although the Yellow-footed Gull does have dull gray-yellow eyes when adult, this species does not show the distinct "staring" (clear) yellow eyes of a Lesser Black-backed Gull (which is essentially the same as on a Herring Gull). The eye color of your bird is a great fit for a Lesser Black-backed, but lies outside the range of variation in my experience.

(6) Head/bill shape. One of your photos shows the bill as being quite heavy, but it still lacks the distinct bulbous tip and extremely heavy appearance of a Yellow-footed Gull bill. Also, the head shape, with the more rounded profile and steeper forehead (and relatively large eyes), does not fit a Yellow-footed/Western, which tend to have angular foreheads and flat crown (and relatively small eyes).

(7) Primary spot. The field identification of Heuglin's vs. Lesser Black-backed gull is still being explored, but one of the best means of distinguishing them is the large, wide white mirror on p10 (the outermost primary). I can see an extensive white mirror in one of your photos, and you noted this mark in your description as well, so it too points to a Lesser Black-backed. Note that this species may or may not show a small mirror on p9 (I cannot see p9 in any of the photos).

(8) Gonydeal spot. A classic mark of an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull is that the red spot on the gonys (the angled part of the lower edge of the bill) is elongated or ellipsoid, not mostly circular like it is on other large Larus. Your bird has a distinctly elongated red spot on the gonys.

(9) Wing length. The Lesser Black-backed Gull is a long-winged bird, making it look rather sleek compared to a Herring or other large Larus (though it is not too different from a California Gull). Your bird does not look particularly long winged to me, but note that all large Larus exhibit strong sexual dimorphism in size, with males being consistently larger, with heavier bills, more angular heads, and shorter wings.

In closing, between the orbital color, eye color, head streaking, leg/foot color, mantle shade, gonydeal spot, and the extent of the white mirror on p10, I feel that your bird can confidently be called an L. f. graellsii Lesser Black-backed Gull. Given the wing length and bill size, it was undoubtedly a male.

I hope that you find this information interesting and useful. As I stated previously, it is a significant record regardless, so I am thrilled that you are writing a paper about it for Utah Birds. Also, please feel free to quote me as much as you wish, or to share any portion of this letter or my previous ones with other interested parties, including the Utah Bird

Records Committee.

Thanks a million for the opportunity to review this record. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or comments.

Cheers,  
Michael

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