

**LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE
RARE BIRD DOCUMENTATION**

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Species: California Gull, *Larus californicus*

Location: West Irene Road Impoundments, East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana

Date: 1 December 2020*

Age and sex: First cycle, sex unknown

Molt status: some replaced mantle feathers, perhaps actively molting

Number of individuals: One

Other observers: Dan Lane, Van Remsen, Cameron Rutt, Robb Brumfield

Original observer: Oscar Johnson

Circumstances: We were birding this site with special legal advance permission. Robb and I had split off from the rest of the group and were perched atop a tall metal structure, scanning both lakes. I noticed this bird while scanning through a large flock of Ring-billed Gulls, and mentioned to Robb that I thought it looked a bit like a California. We both watched it through the scope, but given the distance (~500 meters) we weren't convinced of the ID. A few minutes later we headed over to the shoreline to get closer to the bird, but that put it in poor light, and it remained sleeping in the midst of the Ring-bills. At this point Dan, Van, and Cameron came over and saw the bird, but no one was sure of the ID. I gave up on the bird at this point and went off in search of land birds. About an hour later I got a text from Van that the bird had gotten closer and in better light and that it was definitely a California. I joined them a few minutes later and we all watched the bird at our leisure, including getting many photographs on the ground and in flight. The bird eventually flew off to the dump. The weather was quite pleasant, temps in upper 40s, calm, clear. eBird list, including photographs taken by others:
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S76962764>

Description: A mostly brown juvenile gull, although a few replaced formative mantle feathers, so more appropriately a first cycle (formative). Compared to a juvenile Herring, this bird was a bit smaller (closer in size to Ring-billed Gull), longer winged, lankier, and with a thinner and longer bill. Wing coverts were well patterned, but not as much as in a Herring, and with some extensive darker brown areas at base of greater coverts, which formed a dark bar across the wing coverts. The bill was bright pink with a contrasting black tip, with slightly more extensive dark on the mandible than the maxilla. In flight it showed only a hint of a paler area in the base of the primaries, as is typical of a juvenile California, and not nearly as pale as on a juvenile Herring.

Discussion: A tricky ID, evidenced by the amount of time that it took us to finally agree on the ID as a California. The main species that we struggled to separate this bird from was Herring Gull. The structure of the bird is telling, however, and is one of the first things that I noticed about the bird from a distance, namely the long wings and smaller size. Additionally, the bright pink bill with a sharply defined black tip, the dark bar across

the base of the greater secondary coverts, and the inner primaries only slightly paler than the outers, are all typical of California, and are wrong for Herring. This is a species that I am extremely familiar with from many years spent birding the California coast.











*LBRC follow-up report. This California Gull continues as of 4 January 2021. Additional photos from yesterday attached.

Oscar



