

# LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

## REPORT FORM

1. English and Scientific names: California Gull *Larus californicus*

2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage):

1 2<sup>nd</sup> winter

3. Parish: Jefferson Davis Parish

Specific Locality: I-10 Frontage Road about ¼ mile W of Landfill Road

4. Date(s) when observed: 7 January 2023

5. Time(s) of day when observed: ca. 2: 50-2:58

6. Reporting observer and city/state address

Reporting observer: Paul E. Conover
City:
State:

9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light):  
Decent afternoon light. I think it was filtered through some clouds. It was bright enough to see details without the drawbacks of glare and heatwaves.

10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Nikon Fieldscope 20-60X, Samsun S22 Ultra phonecam

11. Distance to bird(s): Between 100 and 150 yds

12. Duration of observation: Probably about 8 minutes. I came across the bird preening its chest while it faced me during a scan and waited for it to lift its head. At that point I started filming. My video lasts for almost 6 minutes. I then studied its leg color for about a minute, and while I was doing so, the flock arose en masse.

13. Habitat: Large flooded field full of gulls resting near close by landfill.

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): Preening, taking off. I noticed the bird due to a heavy matting of brown streaking on its hind neck and forward part of mantle, and when it raised its head, I realized I needed to document. It was too far for DSLR and my phone screen can currently only be operated with a stylus, so I was uncertain if I could get onto the bird, but watching the video, luckily the bird moved a few feet into the center of where my camera was aimed. I filmed and waited for the gulls in front of it to move so that I could get footage of the legs, then returned to watching the bird through the scope so I could zoom up on the legs. The flock flew as I was studying the bird through the scope, allowing a snap, not great look at the tail as the bird can a couple of feet forward to lift off. Then the mass of birds became a blur. I was unable to locate the bird again, and I believe it left the area when it flushed.

15. Description (include only what was actually seen, *not what "should" have been seen*; include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species; body bulk, shape, proportions; bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species, *or for species that are known to hybridize frequently, stress features that help eliminate possible hybrids*):

Subadult white-headed gull with dense brownish streaking on back of head and neck onto mantle and sides of neck, and with an area of dark streaking around the eye. Mantle gray, slighter darker or more bluish gray than nearby Ring-billed Gulls. Wing coverts brownish, primaries blackish with no visible paler markings. Tail not seen well (only underside as bird flushed with several thousand other birds and disappeared in a blur), but some darkness apparent. Bill somewhat long and narrow with slight gonydeal angle, appearing pale yellowish with bluish tint (or dull yellowish or pale bluish depending on the angle) with irregular dark band near tip and slight orange tint bleeding from dark band on gonys. Gape distinct, with strong abrupt down curve, nasal feathering appeared to be acutely angled. Eyes dark. Leg color not easy to decipher, appeared pale flesh with bluish tibiae and tibial joint.

In size, bird larger and stockier than nearby Ring-billed Gulls, smaller than Herrings. Head appeared somewhat small for body, very noticeably so when neck was extended, giving the bird what I subjectively consider a goose-like build.

16. Voice: not heard

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation):

Ring-billed Gull and Herring Gull are the two closest in appearance locally. The combination of adult mantle color with brownish wing coverts would match 1<sup>st</sup> year Ring-billed, but 1<sup>st</sup> year RB would show dark tip to usually pink bill rather than ring on the color this bird had. The slight area of orange bleed on the gonys is also different from RB, as is the thin shape of the ring on bill, bill shape, the head shape (longer, more angular and more attenuated—broader orbital ridge angling to bill?--and less blocky on this bird than RB). The odd pale yellow color with bluish tint of the bill and pale flesh with blue tibiae of the legs is also very different from the brighter yellows of RBs with ringed bills, although I have seen a few RBs with bluish bill and legs. Mantle color was slightly darker but also a different somewhat richer, less silvery gray from RB.



Herring Gulls are so variable that close lookalikes in some regards are conceivable. However, the combination of dark eye, bill pattern and color, and leg color are correct for California, as is the small-headed, thin- and straight-billed morphology. A herring hitting all of those notes would be highly unusual. Subjectively speaking, this bird has the facial appearance and dumpy body type unique to California.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): Attached, by me. Also video if needed, but the stills capture the essence, I think.

19. Previous experience with this species: Extensive with most age groups out west, in both summer on the breeding ground and the non-breeding ground and in winter. In Louisiana I've seen several over the years, mostly 1<sup>st</sup> years or birds in adult or near adult plumage. I've had the opportunity to study several of those birds for extended periods of time, getting a good feel for the morphology of the species.

22. Are you positive of your identification? Yes. This is a pretty straightforward California, in my opinion.

23. Date: 8 Jan 2023



























