

LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

REPORT FORM

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of species on the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC) Review List. The LBRC recommends the use of this form or a similar format when submitting records for review to assure that all pertinent information is accounted for. Attach additional pages or files as necessary. Please print or type for hard copy. For electronic copy, be sure to save this file to your computer before entering text. Attach field notes, drawings, photographs, or tape recordings, if available. Include all photos for more obscurely marked species. When completed (if hard copy), mail to Secretary, Louisiana Bird Records Committee, c/o Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216, or e-mail electronic copy as an attachment to Paul Edward Conover at zoiseaux@lusfiber.net .

1. English and Scientific names: Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage):
One juvenile, sex unknown.
3. Parish: Cameron Parish
Specific Locality: "LeBleu Camp Beach," or the beach that you would arrive at if you continued south on LeBoeuf Camp Road beyond Willow Island. 29.776585 N, -93.229628 W
4. Date(s) when observed: 1 October 2016
5. Time(s) of day when observed: 5:45 pm.
6. Reporting observer and address: Cameron Rutt, 632 Park Blvd, Baton Rouge, LA, 70806.
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): Van Remsen.
8. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s): None.
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): Light conditions were challenging as we were east of the bird and the setting sun. Fortunately, however, it was mostly cloudy so we were not looking into full sunlight. Furthermore, as the sun was still south of the beachfront, we were not looking into direct sunlight (or it's reflection off the water) when standing at the water's edge. This image that Van Remsen captured provides a good idea of what light conditions were like at the time I took the attached photos:
(<https://www.flickr.com/photos/126193733@N06/30038409556>).
10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Swarovski EL 8.5x42 binoculars, a Swarovski ST-80 scope with a 20-60x zoom eyepiece, and a Canon 60D with a 400mm f/5.6L
11. Distance to bird(s): Approximately 50 m (175 feet) at the closest.

12. Duration of observation: In all, 15-20 minutes.

13. Habitat: Sandy beachfront, immediately adjacent to a small channel cut into the saltmarsh marsh which, at the time, was full of Fat Sleepers (*Dormitator maculatus*) running up this cut and into the marsh.

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation):

After having been scoping the surrounding beachfront and the Gulf for some time, this bird suddenly “appeared” – thus, almost certainly flew in undetected – amongst a small group of nearby gulls (primarily Ring-billed and Laughing Gulls, but also 3-4 Lesser Black-backed Gulls and at least a single Herring Gull), terns, shorebirds, and egrets that were either bathing, feeding, or loafing on the west side of the small channel cut. The Great Black-backed Gull (GBBG) could be seen both standing in the water as well as on the beach itself, at times preening. It made one or two very short flights (during which I managed a couple of subpar images), but finally took off heading far to the southwest, appearing to join a large mass of gulls in the vicinity of a distant trawler.

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*):

A huge gull with a massive bill, dwarfing the surrounding larids, including ad/imm Lesser Black-backed Gulls (LBBG) and an immature Herring Gull (HERG). In profile, appears big and block-headed with a flat crown. Thick, all-black bill especially deep at the gonys. Plumage primarily black-and-white with relatively little brown tones. Head contrastingly pale and primarily white, with a thin, black eyebrow stripe. Fairly dark-backed (mantle, scapulars, and wing coverts) with black tertials and neatly-checked black-and-white greater secondary coverts. Primarily white below with mottled streaking along the neck and breastsides. Black primaries. Pink legs.

In flight and while preening, the distinctive tail/rump pattern could be seen well: a black-tipped tail, thickest and most solidly black in the middle, tapering towards the outer edges and becoming more like two rows of dark spots (“broken black distal band”). Photos clearly show distinct and extensive white bases to these outer *tail* feathers (and not simply the uppertail coverts). Uppertail coverts predominantly white with small black spotting and a white wedge that extends up the rump of this bird, well beyond the furthest reaches of the tertials.

16. Voice: Not heard vocalizing.

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

Separated from all North American species by the combination of its large body and bill size, in addition to the diagnostic tail/rump pattern of juvenile birds.

Specifically, from LBBG by conspicuously larger size (heavy, bulky body; taller; thicker

legs), very heavy black bill (much deeper than LBBG and especially so at the gonys), extensively and relatively clean white rump/uppertail coverts/tail with relatively narrow black terminal tail tip (widest in the middle and narrowing towards the corners), and black-and-white checkered secondary coverts. Photographed (preening) alongside three LBBG (an adult-type bird and two first/second-cycles) and an immature HERG (left) in ML36527131 (20161001-IMG_2058.jpg).

The specter of hybrids looms large, particularly with any of these immature, vagrant, large white-headed gulls. And while this possibility cannot be eliminated (especially presumed American HERG x GBBG), the very large size and bill structure of this bird (without indications of intermediacy) and the fact that it seems to fit within intraspecific plumage variation of GBBG lend us to be conservative here and not presume it to be of hybrid progeny. Finally, as Howell and Dunn have observed in their gull guide, immature American HERG x GBBG are not well-described.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): Four attached photographs that I took as well as three additional photos archived on the Macaulay Library, taken by Van Remsen (available here: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S31857839>)

19. Previous experience with this species: Extensive experience as I spent the majority of my birding career in the Northeast, where this is a common and abundant resident.

20. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):

a. at time of observation: None

b. after observation: Sibley and Gulls of the Americas

21. This description is written from:

<input type="checkbox"/>	notes made during the observation.	Are notes attached?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	notes made after the observation.	At what date?	2 Oct 2016
<input type="checkbox"/>	memory		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	study of images		

22. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain: Yes, aside from the unknown caveats of gull hybridization, which I believe in this case do not reach a sufficient threshold to be invoked.

23. Date: 11 December 2016
Time: 10:00 am

24. May the LBRC have permission to display in whole or in part this report and accompanying photos on the LOS-LBRC website and LBRC Facebook page?

_____ Yes _____

If yes, may we include your name with the report? _____ Yes _____



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