

We were joined a few minutes later by Joe Fahey, one of the neighbor children, who is a budding birder. I was so happy that I was able to share this chance sighting with him. He declared it the most beautiful bird he had ever seen. The bird continued to drink at the puddle for a few minutes, then flew into the maple tree, where he remained for another ten minutes. He then flew across the street to Cindy's yard, where she observed him for another 20 minutes.

Bohlen (1989) lists this species as a rare vagrant in Illinois, seen only 11 times in the state between 1916 and

1955. A Western Tanager was seen in Illinois in 1992, and then not again until 1996 (Meadowlark 5:155).

Literature Cited

Bohlen. H.D. 1989. The birds of Illinois. Indiana University Press. Bloomington, IN.

Meadowlark, A Journal of Illinois Birds. Field Notes Spring Migration. Vol. 5 No. 4. 1996.

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Kane County Kittiwake

My phone rang at about 10 p.m. on Saturday, 3 May 1997. Mike Madsen called to say that two Marbled Godwits had been seen throughout the day in a flooded field in Kane County. We decided to skip the usual May weekend warbler search and try for the godwits, a species I had seen only once in northern Illinois during my 12 years of birding.

I next called Rick Seibert to tell him about the change in plans. By 7 a.m. on 4 May, the three of us were out looking for the godwits. After about an hour of trying to turn Greater Yellowlegs into godwits, a task made harder by the color of their legs, we were forced to admit the godwits had left the fields around the Dundee Middle School. We were about to leave after counting six Killdeer, nine Greater and 18 Lesser Yellowlegs, one Pectoral Sandpiper, and 15 Common Snipes. But then a small- to medium-sized gull flew over the wet field. Naturally, the gull was totally backlit by the sun, so no markings were visible. It then landed in a spot that necessitated us looking directly into the sun. Mike thought it might be a Bonaparte's Gull, due to the wing pattern he could see, but Rick thought it was more Ring-billed Gull sized.

We managed to position ourselves so that the sun was no longer a problem, but then the gull decided to fly again. It circled twice and landed in approximately the same spot it had just left. We saw the "M" on the upper wings, but couldn't be sure that it had a trailing edge on the wing, like a Bonaparte's Gull would have while molting. I thought I could see part of a black collar, but decided a May Kittiwake in a farm field was asking too much. We tried to see leg color, but the gull was now standing in water up to its body, which made it hard to tell if it even had legs, let alone what color they were. While we tried to figure out how to convince the gull to stand on dry land, the gull did just that, although the land it was now standing on was behind a ridge. We still couldn't see the leg color. This was proving to be a very difficult bird!

Finally, our problems were solved by four Ring-billed Gulls which landed nearby and caused the problem gull to move away from them to a place where we could see it much better. It had black legs! Now that the secret was out, the gull became much more cooperative. It flew around two or three times, giving us good looks at the "M" on the upper wings, which did not have a trailing edge, and the black collar, which was full-sized, although no longer solid black because new feathers were coming in.

The bird was roughly equivalent in size to the Ring-billed Gulls, clearly too large for a Little or Bonaparte's Gull. Its bill had changed to mostly yellow, with a few black areas remaining. Because of the bill color, the new, non-black feathers in the "M" on the wings and the black collar, we felt that this Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) was changing from first winter to first summer plumage.

Bohlen (1989) lists the Black-legged Kittiwake as a rare migrant and winter resident in Illinois, noting that the immature plumage is more distinctive than the adult, and that practically all kittiwakes observed in Illinois are immatures. Spring records are much fewer than fall; recent records include one seen at Rend Lake in southern Illinois on 5 April 1987 (Bohlen 1989).

As a veteran November gull watcher at Gillson Park along Lake Michigan (Cook County), I've seen my share of Kittiwakes, but this was my first in spring and my first away from Lake Michigan. We did not find the Marbled Godwits, but as the Rolling Stones once sang, "You can't always get what you want, but if try real hard, you get what you need."

Literature Cited

Bohlen. H.D. 1989. The birds of Illinois. Indiana University Press. Bloomington, IN.

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