

Herring Gull (American Birds:47, p. 263).

Leg color is always yellow in adult lesser black-backed and pink in the other three. The brightest pink is found in slaty-backed; the palest in great black-backed. Western is somewhere in between.

When comparing western and slaty-backed, the most similar dark mantled gulls in adult plumage, note the broad white trailing edge of the wing on the slaty. Wing tip differences include more black on the western especially on the underside and lack of white dividing spots on the third to sixth primaries (not always visible in the field). The western is also generally more heavily built than the Slaty-backed Gull and has a rather blob-ending bill. The slaty's bill is actually deeper at the tip than at the base.

Immature Plumages

The mid-winter gull populations along the upper Mississippi River are predominantly adult. Immatures are most likely during late fall and early spring. The third winter plumage for all four is much like the adult plumage except the bill and tail have subterminal black areas of variable extent. Also, wingtips show less white and there is more extensive brown flecking on the head. The legs of a third winter plumaged Lesser Black-backed Gull are a very dull yellow or gray.

Second Winter Plumage

The second winter plumage differs greatly from the adult plumage for all four species. Common characteristics are black subterminal bill bands and tails that are either very dark or with dark bands.

The Lesser Black-backed Gull looks much more like a herring than when older but should show some dark gray on the mantle. Legs can be



Slaty-backed Gull with Herring Gulls, 6 Feb., 1989, Moline. There are only three accepted records for the species in Illinois. Photo by Peter Petersen.

yellowish to flesh color. The species in this plumage has a continuous blackish tip along the wing's trailing edge.

Westerns have very dark wings and a wide dark tail band. Slaty-backed Gulls feature a pale inner wing area. The species in this plumage is not as dark as western. Great Black-backed Gull should be getting some black back feathers at this stage. The observer can also use this species' large size and heavy flight at this age as a guide.

First Winter Plumage

The first winter plumage probably poses the most difficult identification problems. The lesser black-backed is very similar to first winter herring, although it is a bit smaller. The head and belly are paler and the upper parts feature feathers with a

more distinctly black and white checkerboard.

Westerns are quite dark winged and very dark overall. Slaty-backed is paler than western and herring although photographs in Grant (1986) show great variation. They show a double dark bar along the trailing edge of the wing like a California Gull and differ from those shown in Scott (1987).

The Great Black-backed Gull has a rather pale head and body, the checkerboard look of the much smaller lesser black-backed, and a nearly white rump.

Resources

Before going out to search for wintering dark-mantled gulls in Illinois, review all four species in Grant (1986) and Harrison (1983). Grant is perhaps the best overall reference for

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