

*Little Gull at Carlyle Sewage Pond, Clinton County. 23 November 2007. Photo by Joseph Prorise.*



tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*). With dinner plans pending, I had to get home only to listen to Bill's phone message. With Carlyle Lake so close, I was able to eat as planned, make a quick trip back to the lake, and then home for leftovers by dark. I did manage to get a few photos and observed a second adult Little Gull within the larger flock of Bonaparte's Gulls at the sewage pond. A single adult stuck around for a few more days and was seen by many through 27 November.



*Slaty-backed Gull (center) at Carlyle Lake, Clinton County. 18 December 2007. Photo by Dan Kassebaum.*

My big thrill for the winter was the adult Slaty-backed Gull. Although this species seems to be more numerous around the Great Lakes and Maritime Provinces than in years past, I never expected to find one at Carlyle Lake. The weather for the weekend of 16 December was terrible. We attempted to run the Rend Lake CBC on 15 December, but cancelled by daybreak due to a snowstorm. Since I had been at Rend all night and geared up for a day of birding, I adjusted my plans and headed north to scout for the Carlyle Lake CBC, which was scheduled for 18 December. Locally the roads weren't so bad and getting home was slow, but not a problem. On 16 December, I was due at Lake Shelbyville for another CBC, but that too was cancelled due to the storm. Not wanting to waste the remainder



*Iceland Gull (second-cycle) at Carlyle Lake, Clinton County. 20 January 2008. Photo by Dan Kassebaum.*

*Mew Gull at West Access Marina, Carlyle Lake, Clinton County. 23 February 2008. Photo by Dan Kassebaum.*



of the weekend indoors, I cautiously made my way back to Carlyle for another day of scouting. Arriving just before ten, I set up on Saddledam No. 2 to scope from my truck. A large raft of Common Goldeneyes were feeding within a hundred yards of the shore, and with the no boat traffic, I had the lake to myself. Rafting near the goldeneye was a dark-backed gull which seemed too big for a Lesser Black-backed Gull and too small and pale for a Great Black-backed Gull. I watched and waited for almost an hour before the bird flew. Right away I could see the pink feet, but the wing tip pattern in flight was difficult to discern. I tentatively hot-lined the bird as an adult Slaty-backed Gull, or possibly a Western Gull (*Larus occidentalis*). By the time other birders had arrived, I was confident with the identification, but my photos that day were distant and inconclusive. By the CBC on 18 December, several others had seen the bird, and we were able to get more photos, including Josh Uffman's diagnostic flight shots. Much confusion followed the remainder of the week as there were several Lesser Black-backed Gulls present, and reports of the Slaty-backed Gull were muddled by misidentifications.

Iceland Gulls are not so rare in Illinois, but downstate and away from the locks and dams along the Mississippi River, there are few records. Prior to this winter, there were only two previous records for Carlyle Lake: 13 February 1997 and 5 January 2001. We observed an adult Iceland Gull on 23 December 2007, and first cycle birds on 2 January and 20-21 January 2008.

The Carlyle winter ended with another gull rarity on 23 February, a sub-adult Mew Gull. Luckily the bird was on the West Access Marina docks and very approachable. I took more than 100 photos before I picked up the phone. Bill Rudden arrived, and we took each other to task discussing the size of the bird and its sub-specific identification. With so much gull activity throughout the winter, I began traveling with a mobile library of Grant (1986), Olsen and Larsson (2004), and Howell and Dunn (2007). Rifling through the texts as you're observing a rare gull is a great lesson. The intent and focus produces a level of retained knowledge that far surpasses other approaches and can only be helpful, if not vital, to further discoveries. Bill, always pushing the envelope, introduced the possibility of 'Kamchatka' Gull (*Larus canus kamtschatschensis*). Within a few hours several other birders arrived with cameras in tow. The quality of photos is such that this bird is very likely a 'Kamchatka' Gull. An article in this issue describes the bird in more detail, but see Stotz (2008).

Aside from the relatively easy identifications of adult gulls are the