

Huntington Beach State Park. Although there are approximately 10 previous South Carolina records for the Glaucous Gull (see Chat 42:12-13), there is only one previously published record of the Lesser Black-backed Gull for the state (Forsythe, Chat 44:42).

About midmorning, I was scanning a group of gulls on the beach at the northern tip of the park where I noticed a dark-backed gull essentially similar in size to nearby Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*). I mentioned the possibility of Lesser Black-backed Gull to Jim Orgain and Bob Lewis, who were nearby, and we each carefully studied the bird through our scopes. Within a matter of seconds we had positively identified the gull as a Lesser. During the next 30 to 45 minutes, the gull was observed in detail by over 25 birders, as close as perhaps 150 m and through scopes reaching 130X magnification. The most obvious field marks were the slaty blackish back and the overall size, slightly smaller than the Herring Gulls. Actually, the mantle was black near the wing tips and slaty black elsewhere (as noted in flight), somewhat like the color and pattern of the Laughing Gull (*L. atricilla*): the Great Black-backed Gull (*L. marinus*) has a mantle that is entirely black. The yellow bill, with some dark coloring at the tip, was slightly thinner than that of the Herring Gull. Another outstanding mark was the dusky brown streaking on the face and especially on the nape, a distinguishing mark from the Great Black-backed, which has an essentially unmarked white head in adult winter plumage. Supposedly the best field mark for the lesser is the yellow legs, as opposed to the flesh-colored legs of the Great. Even though the Lesser did have pale yellowish legs, this color was seen clearly only at close range, and well after the bird had been identified by the group. The gull was not seen in the afternoon, despite a considerable search by other birders, and no photographs were taken.

The Glaucous Gull was first noted by Bob Lewis, only several minutes after I had spotted the Lesser Black-backed. The Glaucous was seen in flight with a large number of the commoner gulls, and it was quickly picked out by its overall buffy white plumage. This gull, apparently a first-year individual, was also studied carefully over the remainder of the morning by all of the birders in the group. The Great Black-backed Gull size, whitish color with white primaries, and flesh-colored bill with a black tip were easily noted. At one point during the morning both of the rare gulls rested on the same sandbar in Murrells Inlet, with several hundred other gulls, though the two were never in the same field of vision through the scope. The Glaucous was seen as closely as 100 m, and it was also seen in the afternoon on the beach along the southern portion of the park.

[NOTE: The Lesser Black-backed Gull has also been reported from Georgia (Oriole 43:32). Full details for a bird observed at Charleston in January and February 1979 (Am. Birds 33:273, Lesser Squawk 30(6):7 and 30(8):6) have not been published; consequently, this species remains on the South Carolina hypothetical list.—JRH]

Lesser Black-backed Gull in the Carolinas

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The Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*), a breeding bird of the British Isles, Scandinavia, and northern Russia, has long been known as an unusual winter visitor to the northeastern United States. Reports of its occurrence in the Carolinas have accumulated in the past decade, but few detailed reports have appeared in print. This paper reports two sightings by the author and discusses field marks not normally emphasized. Only adult-plumaged birds will be discussed.

On the morning of 23 December 1979 I was working the west end of Shackleford Banks near Beaufort, Carteret County, N.C., as part of the Morehead City Christmas

Bird Count. The sky was overcast; there was little wind. Several hundred gulls and terns were resting on four sandbars roughly 300 yards offshore. While scanning the flocks with my 80X Questar telescope, I discovered a small dark-mantled gull and walked to within 200 yards of it.

The bird was smaller and slimmer than most of the surrounding Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*), some of which may have been approximately the same size, and larger than all the nearby Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*). The bird's yellow bill seemed considerably more slender than that of a Herring Gull. The head plumage was white except for a few small brownish streaks on the nape. The legs were a faint washed-out yellow, paler than those of Ring-billed Gulls. The dorsal color, at first glance black, was slightly paler than that of the Great Black-backed Gulls (*L. marinus*). I did not notice any obvious contrast between the overall mantle color and the wing-tip color. The bird did not take flight while I was present.

I identified the bird as a Lesser Black-backed Gull. There are at least seven previous reports of this species for North Carolina and at least three for South Carolina. All Carolina reports are from mid-September to early April. The first North Carolina record was by Micou Browne on the Bodie Island Christmas Bird Count of 30 December 1968 (Potter 1970). In South Carolina, the species was first sighted 16 September 1976 in Charleston County (Forsythe 1980).

On the afternoon of 2 February 1980, Allen Bryan and I examined a large flock of gulls and terns resting next to the big tidal pond at Hatteras Point, Dare County, N.C. The sky was clear and the sun was behind us. After several hours of searching I discovered a Lesser Black-backed Gull and pointed it out to Bryan.

The bird's mantle was a deep slate color, closer to black than gray, but probably not as dark as that of the Beaufort bird. Its bill was compact and stubby, not long and slender. The leg color, seen clearly only by Bryan, was yellow. The white head was finely and delicately streaked with gray on the crown, nape, and around the eye, giving an almost cow-like appearance. This streaking was much more extensive than on the Beaufort bird.

The definitive work on *L. fuscus* and *L. argentatus* in northern Europe was done in the late 1960s by E.K. Barth of Norway. His papers, in particular "The Circumpolar Systematics of *Larus argentatus* and *Larus fuscus* . . ." (Barth 1968), are required reading for anyone wishing to appreciate the complexity of the systematics of the gulls of the northern Holarctic. The superspecies Barth studied includes the Herring, Glaucous-winged, Thayer's, and Iceland Gulls of North America as well as the Lesser Black-backed, Herring, Iceland, Thayer's, and yellow-legged Herring Gulls of the Palearctic. A less technical and far more accessible discussion can be found in Fisher and Peterson (1969, p. 93-95).

In his extensive specimen studies, Barth identified three races of Lesser Black-backed Gulls: *L. f. graellsii*, of Iceland and Great Britain; *L. f. fuscus*, of northern Norway, Finland, and Russia; and *L. f. intermedius*, of western Norway, southwestern Sweden, and Denmark. The races are all smaller than Herring Gulls. They have dark mantles and yellowish legs. From the field worker's point of view they are best distinguished by mantle color, size, leg color, and bill shape. *L. f. graellsii* are the palest, having a gray mantle only a little darker than that of a Herring Gull. Their bills are proportionately similar to those of Herring Gulls. They are the heaviest of the three races, weighing only a little less than Herring Gulls. *L. f. fuscus* are the darkest; indeed, according to Barth their mantles are actually darker than Great Black-backed's and sometimes show a brownish hue. They are the lightest in weight and have long slender bills. Their legs are the brightest yellow of the three races. *L. f. intermedius* is intermediate in weight and mantle color, being typically a dark slate gray, lighter than or equal to the shade of a Great Black-backed. Many individuals have pale yellow legs. Their bills are as slender as those of *L. f. fuscus*. In the winter, adults develop brownish or grayish streaks on the head and nape, reminiscent of Ring-

billed Gulls. The streaking is more intense in *L. f. graellsii* than in the other two races. Leg color may fade to whitish in the winter. Occasionally, orange-legged birds are seen (Barnes 1953).

The bird pictured in the field guide of Bruun (1970, p. 145) is *L. f. graellsii*. The photograph in the *Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds* (Bull and Farrand 1977, p. 73) is of either *L. f. fuscus* or *L. f. intermedius*. The birds pictured on page 93 in Fisher and Peterson (1969) are either dark *L. f. graellsii* or light *L. f. intermedius*. The bird on page 95 is *L. f. fuscus*.

Barth reports that *L. f. intermedius* and *L. f. graellsii* are common birds. Significantly for North American observers, these two races have similar migration routes, southwest and south from their breeding grounds. This is in marked contrast to *L. f. fuscus*, which leaves Finland and Norway in a south and southeasterly direction. Thus, *L. f. fuscus* seems unlikely to appear in eastern North America, but the other two races are likely candidates for north Atlantic strays.

P.J. Grant (1980), in a comprehensive article on gull identification, accepts Barth's classification of three races for the Lesser Black-backed Gull. The following quote from that article is relevant here:

There is a good deal of intergradation in mantle colour in some breeding colonies in Scandinavia (between *fuscus* and *intermedius*) and western Europe (between *intermedius* and *graellsii*), and in west European and west African wintering populations, nowhere more obvious than in Britain, where a proportion of individuals apparently match *fuscus* in their blackness. While typical examples of the three subspecies are readily distinguishable in the field (especially the distinctively pale-backed *graellsii*), fairly close-range observation, with good light (preferably not full sunlight) from behind the observer, is usually necessary for a correct assessment of colour tones.

In summary, it seems reasonable to conclude that a wide range in darkness of mantle color can be expected in North American Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Although field identification of subspecies is risky, bird students should be aware of the species' variations in mantle color, bill shape, and head streaking. Comparison of the birds I saw at Beaufort and Hatteras suggests that more than one race may be found along the western North Atlantic coast even though only one, *L. f. graellsii*, is currently recognized as occurring in North America (Binford 1978).

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