

Cowbird 10, Orchard Oriole 5, Northern Oriole (Baltimore Oriole) 1, House Finch 58, American Goldfinch 24, House Sparrow 4.

Total 97 species, 2578 individuals.

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General Field Notes

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NOTICE

Publication of any unusual sightings of birds in the Field Notes or Briefs for the Files does not imply that these reports have been accepted into the official Checklist of Birds records for either North or South Carolina. Decisions regarding the official Checklists are made by the respective State Records Committees and will be reported upon periodically in THE CHAT.

First Record of a California Gull for North Carolina

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At approximately 1400 h on 29 January 1993, we observed an adult California Gull (*Larus californicus*) at the Carteret County landfill, located southwest of Newport, North Carolina. We were birding the northwest corner of the landfill when Fussell called our attention to a slightly darker-mantled gull resting with hundreds of other gulls, mostly Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*). We immediately recognized the bird as an adult California Gull. We were able to observe and photograph the bird for the nest half hour at distances of 75–100 m. At 1430 the bird suddenly flew south over the dump and we were not able to relocate it over the next 2 hours.

The following is a detailed description of the bird, much of it written immediately after the sighting. The bird was slightly smaller and slimmer than the numerous Herring Gulls surrounding it. The bill was similar in shape to the bill of a Herring Gull, though the gonys was less pronounced and the bill was thinner. There were obvious red and black subterminal spots, with the red spot slightly above and posterior to the black spot. The head was mostly white, with a hint of brown streaking, particularly on the nape where it formed a partial collar. The eye was dark brown. The underparts and tail were white. The mantle and upperwing were dark gray, a shade darker than those of a Herring or Ring-billed Gull (*L. delawarensis*), but noticeably paler than a nearby Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*). The upperwing was the same color as the mantle. The wing tip pattern was not studied closely because the bird flew unexpectedly. However, we did note that the bird seemed to have less white in the primary tips than a Herring Gull. Also, the black color in the primaries seemed more extensive than that of a Herring Gull. We did not determine the exact locations of the white mirrors in the primaries. In flight, there was a narrow white trailing edge to the flight feathers. The legs were dull yellow-green and not nearly as bright as the legs of adjacent adult Ring-billed Gulls. Leg length was proportionately shorter than that of a Herring Gull. Based on the bill pattern, wing pattern, and unmarked tail, we aged the bird as an adult California Gull in basic plumage (see Grant 1986).

Confusion with other larids and the possibility of a hybrid were considered. California Gull is most easily confused with Herring, Thayer's (*L. thayeri*), and Lesser Black-backed gulls due to the similarity in size and mantle color. However, Herring Gull has pink or flesh-colored legs, a pale eye, and slightly paler gray mantle, and is noticeably larger than a California Gull. Lesser Black-backed Gull also lacks the dark mark on the bill, has a pale eye, and has a slightly darker gray mantle.

The California Gull was seen again on 30 January by several birders, but could not be found on later dates. This represents the first record of a California Gull for North Carolina. Dinsmore observed an adult California Gull at Hatteras Inlet on 22 March 1992, though the report has yet to be reviewed by the North Carolina Records Committee. This species is a frequent vagrant to the Atlantic seaboard with at least 45 records cited in *American Birds* since 1980. Birds have appeared in nearly every month, though there is a distinct peak in December-February. Most records are of adult birds. Based on the general increase in records of western larids in the Eastern United States, future records of California Gull for North Carolina can be expected.

LITERATURE CITED

Grant, P. J. 1986. *Gulls: A guide to identification*. Buteo Books, Vermillion, SD. 352 pp.