

and belly; however, the latter species has the violet-indigo color of the face extending under the chin. The Green Violet-ear has a green chin/gorget region. Unlike the Green Violet-ear, which has been recorded on a number of occasions north of Mexico, mainly in Texas, the Sparkling Violet-ear apparently does not wander extensively. There are no records of the latter species from the United States. In addition, the senior author has seen numerous Sparkling Violet-ears in Ecuador since the Asheville sighting, and believes that the Sparkling Violet-ear is considerably larger than the bird that showed up at the Asheville feeder.

The N.C. Bird Records Committee accepted the 1987 Green Violet-ear record to the Official List in 1990 (N.C. Bird Records Committee 1990), and it also accepted the 1995 record also (Chat, 60:139). The Committee considered whether the birds might have been escaped individuals, but as there are other reports of the species from north of Mexico, the Committee believed that both hummingbirds were legitimate vagrants to Asheville and to Burnsville. Color prints of both Green Violet-ears are in the photograph collection at the N.C. State Museum of Natural Sciences for permanent documentation.

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First North Carolina Record of Western Gull

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Beginning on the Christmas Bird Count of December 30, 1994 and continuing into January and February of 1995, many observers in the Cape Hatteras Point area (Buxton, Dare County, NC) reported seeing strange adult gulls resembling Herring Gull, but with oddly dark gray mantles that

did not fit Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*), Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*), or Great Black-backed Gull (*L. marinus*). At least one of those birds proved to be a Yellow-legged Gull (*L. cachinnans*) (Lewis 1996), and some others were probably hybrids of Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gull (see Post and Lewis, 1995 for a discussion of this hybrid form). Grant (1986) is the classic reference for European and North American gulls.



Figure 1: The spread wings on the bird display the classic Western Gull field marks: one white mirror on primary 10, outer three primaries otherwise black on both webs (except for white tips), dark primaries and secondaries on the under wing.

One of these birds in particular was encountered many times by several observers starting in early February. Of all the puzzling gulls, it had the darkest mantle, darker than the classic Lesser Black-backed Gull of the race *graellsii*, therefore similar in shade to most of the Lessers that are seen at Hatteras. However, in contrast to Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gull, this bird's mantle was a purer gray, with no bluish cast. It was about the size of a medium to large Herring Gull, had deep pink legs, sometimes looking grayish-pink, and a very white head with little or no of the gray streaking or smudging that always appears on the heads of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls in the winter. (However, many Herring Gulls attain white heads by early February.) The bill at first glance was unremarkable: all yellow with a red gonys spot. However, direct comparison with Herring Gulls showed the bill to be high at the base,

narrowing distally, swelling at the gonys, then terminating bluntly. Nonetheless, unless one looked carefully at it, the bill did not seem especially noteworthy.



Figure 2: Note mantle color, dark iris, and bill shape. Both photos by Robert H. Lewis

The iris looked dark from a distance. Closer examination showed it to be brownish or amber, with the black pupil clearly contrasting. The wings were relatively short and broad. The underwing showed dark primaries and secondaries. Above, the outer three primaries were almost entirely black, then the next three had a tapering amount of black. There was only one small white mirror, on the outermost primary. Both inner and outer webs of the outer three primaries were black. Primary 6 (fifth one from the end) showed a small white "tongue" near the tip. When standing with folded wings, the bird showed average sized white primary tips, with about three tips visible beyond the end of the tail. In addition, the white secondaries were visible below the gray wing coverts, producing a "skirted" effect. None of the species commonly occurring on the East Coast routinely show this. All of these features are visible on Figures 1 and 2, taken on March 14 and 15, 1995. March 15 was foggy.

The combination of features noted above eliminates all forms of Herring Gull (including the Siberian *heuglini*, *taimyrensis*, and *vegae*), Lesser Black-backed Gull, Slaty-backed Gull (*L. schistisagus*), Yellow-legged Gull, Yellow-footed Gull (*L. livens*), and Kelp Gull (*L.*

dominicanus). Every feature noted above, however, is fully consistent with Western Gull (*L. occidentalis*), and the bird has no field mark inconsistent with Western Gull. But before adopting that identification, we must consider the possibility of a hybrid. Lesser Black-backed X Herring is eliminated by lack of head streaking, mantle color, overall size and shape, iris color, leg color (would be pale yellow or flesh), and primary pattern (would have more mirrors on more primaries). In recent years, several Kelp X Herring hybrids have been observed in Louisiana. However, those birds have very different wing patterns than the bird in question here (Donna Dittmann, pers. comm.). A Slaty-backed X Glaucous-winged (*L. glaucescens*) hybrid would have a much paler mantle, head streaking, and different primary pattern. This leaves Great Black-backed X Herring as the only conceivable alternative to Western Gull.

The identification of Great Black-backed X Herring hybrids was discussed by Roger Foxall (1979). Compared to the Hatteras bird, that form has a different mantle color (paler and more bluish), much paler legs (whitish or pale flesh), a yellow iris, usually more head streaking, and more white on the primaries (more and larger white mirrors). Great Black-backed X Herring hybrid is therefore eliminated.

Several experienced West Coast observers concur with the Western Gull identification. Yet few of the people who saw the Hatteras bird thought it was a Western Gull (the first one who did was Derb Carter). The explanation for that is four-fold. First, so many odd gulls were at Hatteras that winter that confusion and talk of hybrids was inevitable. Secondly, common wisdom for years has been that Western Gull does not stray more than twenty miles or so from the Pacific Ocean. Thirdly, most of the people who saw the bird were understandably not very familiar with Western Gull. Fourthly, the bird does not show the "jizz" that most people associate with Western Gull, especially the massive bill (see for example photo 463 of Harrison 1987) and the prominent large eye. But like all large gulls, Western shows great variation in "jizz" among different individuals and between sexes. Females of all large gulls are smaller than males in all features. I visited San Diego in January of 1996 and stopped at many beaches between Los Angeles and San Diego. In closely observing a hundred Western gulls, I saw and photographed several with the same bill proportions and eye size as the Hatteras bird. All show the bill structure of the Hatteras bird: the bill is high at the base, narrows distally, flares at the gonys (becoming higher than the base), then ends at a blunt tip. The eye is not especially large. Among published photographs, the one on page 157 in the National Audubon Society Pocket Guide (1994) is of a bird virtually identical to the Hatteras individual.

This is the first substantiated report of Western Gull from the East Coast of North America.

Copies of the original photos will be submitted to the North Carolina State Museum at Raleigh.

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First North Carolina Record of Yellow-legged Gull

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Beginning on the Christmas Bird Count of December 30, 1994 and continuing into January and February of 1995, many observers in the Cape Hatteras Point area (Buxton, Dare County, NC) reported seeing adult gulls with gray mantles darker than Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) but paler than Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*), and with yellow or yellowish legs. Several of these birds were thought to be Yellow-legged Gulls (*Larus cachinnans*), but definitive evidence proved difficult to obtain.

Yellow-legged Gull is a recently recognized species that breeds around the Mediterranean Sea and east into Turkey and the Caucuses. The populations that comprise the species were formerly considered to be races of Herring Gull under the names *L. a. michahellis*, *atlantis*, and *cachinnans*. Good references for this complex situation are the well known book by Grant (1986) and the article by D. Gruber in the German magazine *Limicola* (1995). There are several North American records of the species, the best known being the bird that frequented Georgetown reservoir in Washington D.C. for several winters in the early 1990's (Wilds and Czaplak 1994).