

April's mystery species is obviously a gull. As with a number of previously described At A Glance waterbirds, initially establishing a bird's age and precise stage in its plumage sequence can go a long way toward making a correct identification. In this case, the gull is clearly an immature bird due to the narrow terminal band on the tail and the dark carpal bar running diagonally across the upper wing. These characteristics are typical of the majority of immature small gull species in North America.

A close look at the pictured bird's head shows a dark spot behind the eye. This spot suggests that the bird is one of the species that acquires a dark hood when in breeding plumage. The unhooded Black-legged Kittiwake also shows a dark ear spot; however, the kittiwake can be eliminated by the absence of solid black primaries and the presence of a dark bar across the nape. At this point, the options are limited to the immature plumages of the Common Black-headed, Bonaparte's, and Little gulls.

Immature Little Gulls in first winter plumage are tiny, and they characteristically possess a very broad black carpal bar, tend to show solid black primaries similar to those of an immature kittiwake, and have a dusky patch on the nape. The pictured gull shows a narrow carpal bar, has the suggestion of a wedge of white on the outer primaries and a dark trailing edge to the wing, and no dusky patch on the nape. These features reduce the choices to Bonaparte's Gull and Common Black-headed Gull. Common Black-headed Gulls in first winter plumage have a strongly bicolored yellowish bill with a dark tip, more extensive dusky markings on the upper wing surface than a Bonaparte's Gull, and grayish-black underprimaries which contrast with the white of the inner portion of the underwing. The absence of these characteristics, particularly the delicate black bill and pale underprimaries, indicates that the mystery photograph depicts an immature Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus philadelphia*) in first winter plumage.

The Bonaparte's Gull in the picture was photographed by the author in August near Eastport, Maine.



AT A GLANCE

Photo by Simon Perkins



Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

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