

ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

Keith Hansen began birdwatching in the sixth grade in Maryland and illustrating birds in high school. He is currently working on the fourteenth book that he has illustrated, among which are *Discovering Sierra Birds*, *Checklist of North American Birds*, *The Natural History of the Point Reyes Peninsula*, and *More Tales of a Low-rent Birder*. He has watched birds all over North America, Central and South America, and many islands of the tropical Pacific. He spends time on the Farallon Islands and at Point Reyes Bird Observatory. The Keith Hansen Wildlife Gallery in Marin County, California (address: P.O. Box 332-A, Bolinas, CA 94924, telephone 415-868-0402), includes nearly a hundred original works of art, western waterfowl identification cards, wildlife T-shirts, and wildlife stationary. The Red-shouldered Hawk on the cover is courtesy of *The Distributional Checklist of North American Birds*, by David DeSante and Peter Pyle.

AT A GLANCE *August 1995* _____ *Wayne R. Petersen*

Gull photographs tend to elicit strong emotion, either because the reader enjoys gulls and views identifying them as an intellectual challenge or because he/she dislikes them and recoils at the thought of trying to unravel their often complex plumages.

There are two aspects of the August gull photograph that make its identification relatively straightforward. First, the bird has a complete dark hood, a feature shared by only six North American gull species: Laughing, Franklin's Little, Common Black-headed, Bonaparte's, and Sabine's. And second, because the hood is complete and there are no dusky markings on the end of the tail, it is fair to assume that the bird in the picture is an adult in breeding plumage. Adult dark-hooded gulls lose their hood in winter, while immatures either lack a hood altogether or else have one that is incomplete.

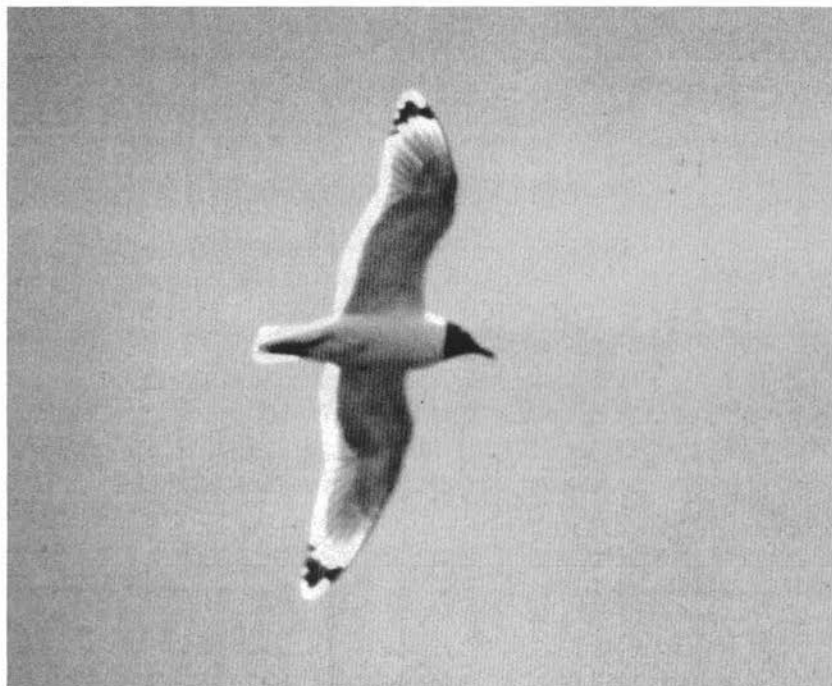
Because the picture gives a clear view of the underside of the wings, it is possible to get a pretty good idea of what the primary pattern looks like, which is crucial in determining the identity of the mystery gull. Common Black-headed Gull and Little Gull each show blackish under their wings in breeding plumage. In adult Little Gulls, the entire underwing surface is blackish, while in Common Black-headed Gulls, the blackish coloration is confined to the underside of the primaries. Clearly, neither of these features exists in the gull in the photograph. Sabine's Gull, while having white underwings like the pictured

gull, has a notched tail and primaries that are totally black all the way to the bend of the wing, in sharp contrast to white and gray panels making up the inner portions of the wing.

With only Laughing, Franklin's, and Bonaparte's gulls remaining, it is possible to further narrow the choice to one between Laughing and Franklin's gull. Bonaparte's Gull can be eliminated because it displays a narrow white wedge on the lead edge of the wing, and has the primaries black-tipped, not conspicuously tipped with white as shown in the photograph.

Adult Laughing Gulls have outer primaries that are totally black, including the tips. The pictured gull, however, shows primaries that are largely gray with only a little black near the ends of the white-tipped outer primaries. In addition, a prominent white band completely separates the black outer portion of the flight feathers from the gray of the rest of the wing. These characteristics serve to identify the mystery bird as a Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*). A final feature supporting this identification is the presence of gray central tail feathers just barely visible beyond the end of the folded legs.

In Massachusetts, the Franklin's Gull is a very rare or casual spring and fall visitor along the coast. The bird in the picture was photographed on its North Dakota breeding grounds.



Franklin's Gull

Photograph by Wayne R. Petersen

AT A GLANCE

Photo by Wayne R. Petersen



Can you identify this bird?

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