

First Mississippi Records of Lesser Black-backed Gull

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On 2 March 1983, Mickey Baker, Marianne Towell, and I observed and photographed a basic-plumaged adult Lesser Black-backed Gull (Larus fuscus) on the beach in Gulfport, Harrison County, for the first record of the species in Mississippi. The photographs are on file in the ornithological collections at Mississippi State University.

The bird was larger than the Ring-billed Gull (L. delawarensis), and slightly smaller than the Herring Gull (L. argentatus), noted through direct size comparison. Other aspects not readily visible in the photographs are the red orbital ring, and the slight contrast between black primaries and blackish-dusky remainder of the upperwing. In all observations made in middle to late March, the dusky head streakings were less obvious, with the head appearing entirely white.

This gull was seen almost daily from 2 to 31 March 1983; easily located by its dark plumage and large size. It was consistently found along an 8 km stretch of beach, often in company with Herring, Ring-billed, and Laughing (L. atricilla) gulls, and frequently joining mixed flocks when passers-by tossed bread to the gulls.

What may have been the same individual was found again on 12 November 1983, in the same area as the original sighting. It remained in that vicinity until at least 27 March 1984. Again, on 25 October 1984, a winter-plumaged adult Lesser Black-backed Gull was found in the same location and was seen repeatedly along the same stretch of beach as all previous sightings, until at least 18 March 1985.

In addition to the above records, I saw and photographed a Lesser Black-backed Gull in second-winter plumage in the same general location as prior sightings of the adult bird, on 30 January 1985. It remained only a few hours.

The Lesser Black-backed Gull breeds in western Europe; there are three subspecies, adults of which are recognizable in the field. I identified the adult gull discussed above as *L. f. graellsii*, that subspecies believed to be more common in North America (Harrison 1983), and lighter in mantle and wing color than the other subspecies. It breeds in Iceland, the Faeroes, the British Isles, the Netherlands, Brittany, and southwest Spain (Grant 1982).

The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding (Farrand 1983) includes this assessment of the Lesser Black-backed Gull: "... a rare European visitor, has been seen in North America with increasing regularity, especially among flocks of migrating and wintering gulls that gather around beaches, harbors, and landfills of the Great Lakes and East Coast."

Although its presence along the northern Gulf Coast is still considered accidental, it has been recorded along the Florida panhandle and on the coasts of Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas nearly annually.

Immature-plumaged Lesser Black-backed Gulls may go unnoticed unless searched for, but the frequency of sightings along the northern Gulf Coast suggests that they should be anticipated and keyed out whenever possible. Adults are unmistakable.

A number of birders contributed their observations, and I wish to acknowledge Malcolm F. Hodges, Jr., Jerome A. Jackson, Evelyn Johnson, Dalton King, Joseph McGee, and Gerry Morgan.

Literature Cited

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