

# Occurrence of Black-headed Gull at Cleveland, Ohio

by Ray Hannikman

At approximately 9:30 a.m. on July 23, 1978 an adult Black-headed Gull was observed at White City Lagoon. The bird was resting with Bonaparte's and Ring-billed Gulls in the shallow waters at the north side of the lagoon. I had just happened to glance at the gulls and noticed this gull with a red bill. I looked closer, saw the brown hood, and noticed the slightly larger size of the bird (when compared with Bonaparte's Gulls). I called Dave Corbin over to verify the sighting. As I was about to depart to begin calling people about this bird, the gull took off and I thought it would never be seen again. Luckily, I was wrong for the Black-headed Gull was again found that Sunday afternoon at the Northeast Yacht Club which is adjacent to White City. Here the gull was observed resting with Bonaparte's Gulls both on the breakwall and on the boat moorings of the yacht club. During this observation, all diagnostic field marks were noted: red bill, brown hood that did not extend as far as back on the head as a Bonaparte's black hood does, dark underwings, and the somewhat lighter gray mantle color. This latter characteristic was especially noticeable when the Black-headed Gull was seen with Bonaparte's Gulls.

While I observed the Black-headed Gull at the Northeast Yacht Club on the evening of July 24, all sightings thereafter were from the area behind the bathhouse and boat-launching ramps at Gordon Park. Here the best time to locate the gull was in the early evening. The gull was still present on July 31. ( Editor's Note: The Black-headed Gull was seen at least thru 4 August 1978 at Cleveland.)

The Black-headed Gull was almost invariably seen with its new world first cousin, the Bonaparte's Gull. Excellent comparisons between the two species could easily be made. The gull spent much of its time doing what gulls most like to do -- preening, loafing on wire railings, boat moorings, and floating logs, and taking short flights. When the Black-headed Gull was observed in flight, its heavier and more labored flight could be observed for this species is not as graceful on the wing as the Bonaparte's Gull. This is the first summer sighting of this European vagrant in the Cleveland area and very probably the State of Ohio.