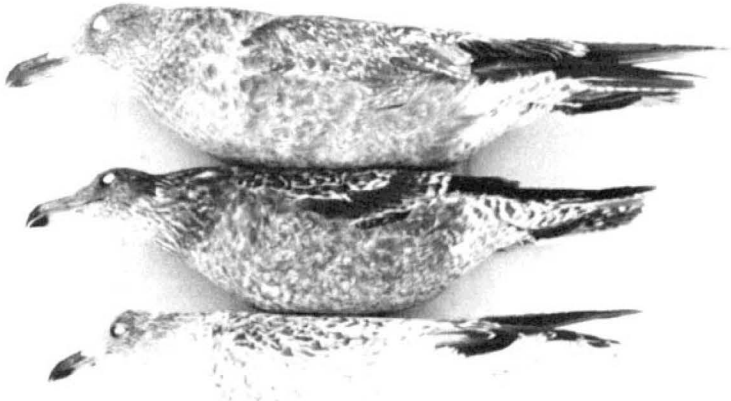


THE CALIFORNIA GULL IN OKLAHOMA

BY JOSEPH A. GRZYBOWSKI

The California Gull (*Larus californicus*) breeds in much of central Canada and the northwestern United States and winters along the Pacific Coast from Washington to Guatemala (1957, A.O.U. Check-list of North American birds, pp. 222-223). In Colorado, this gull was rare prior to 1950 (Bailey, A. M., and R. J. Niedrach, 1965, Birds of Colorado, Denver Mus. Nat. Hist., Denver, Colorado, pp. 379-380), was first recorded nesting in Weld County in 1963, and is now fairly numerous on the northern reservoirs of that state. The species is casual in occurrence along the Gulf Coast of Texas during winter (Oberholser, H. C., 1974, The bird life of Texas, Univ. Texas Press, Austin, p. 383). Because Oklahoma lies in the path between its breeding grounds and the Gulf Coast, the California Gull is expected to occur sporadically in Oklahoma during migration.

On 9 September 1978 at 0845 hrs, I discovered an immature California Gull along the southwest shore of Lake Hefner, Oklahoma County, central



GULLS IN FIRST WINTER PLUMAGE

From top to bottom: Herring Gull (UOMZ 7908), California Gull (UOMZ 13515), and Ring-billed Gull (UOMZ 13822). Note two-tone bill of California Gull. Photo by Joseph A. Grzybowski.

Oklahoma, adjacent the Lake Hefner Golf Course. It stood among a group of about 30 Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*) and two Franklin's Gulls (*L. pipixcan*). During the next two hours, the California Gull moved several times between this location and Prairie Dog Point about one-quarter mile to the west. It spent some of this time foraging offshore. It associated with groups of Ring-billed Gulls but was chased by Ring-billed Gulls when flying near and/or attempting to land among them. The California Gull responded by landing 30-50 m away from a group of gulls and then walking to them. At about 1045 hrs, I collected the gull. This specimen represents the first substantiated record of California Gull for Oklahoma.

The specimen (UOMZ 13515) is a male in first winter plumage. It is very similar to first-year Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*), having a mottled dusky gray-brown plumage. Some remnants of a darker and browner juvenal plumage are present around the neck, and incoming feathers on the back are grayer than the rest of the plumage. The most distinctive character is the bill, which, unlike the dark bill of the first-year Herring Gull, is dusky on the terminal third and was pale flesh color (in life) on the basal two-thirds. The legs and feet also were pale flesh color. The bird weighed 734 g, and was moderately fat. Its wing, culmen, and tarsal measurements are 383, 46, and 63 mm, respectively. These are within the range for male California Gulls, but outside that for male Herring Gulls and Mew Gulls (*L. canus*) given in Godfrey (1966, Birds of Canada, Bull. 203, Biol. Ser. No. 73, pp. 178, 182) and Ridgway (1919, The birds of North and Middle America, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 50, Part VIII, pp. 613, 633).

Previous California Gull records in Oklahoma are unsubstantiated. Nice (1931, The birds of Oklahoma, Publ. Univ. Oklahoma Biol. Surv. 3:96) mentioned a banded bird taken at Altus in Jackson County, southwestern Oklahoma, on 29 October 1928. It was banded as a chick at Chase Lake, North Dakota, on 13 July 1928 by Mrs. Marjorie Lee Guest. The identification of this bird was probably based on that made by the original bander. Since Mrs. Guest's basis of identification is unknown, this record is open to question. An immature California Gull was reported on 14, 21, and 28 October 1956 by C. H. Mayhood, Jr. at Lake Murray (1957, Audubon Field Notes, 11:36), but no details concerning these observations were given.

While it is possible to identify California Gulls in the field, extreme caution should be exercised. Identification should be based on careful comparison with other gulls nearby when possible, and specimens or photographs should be obtained. The California Gull is intermediate in size between the smaller Ring-billed Gull and the larger Herring Gull. By late summer, the two-tone bill is a useful character for identifying most California Gulls in first-winter plumage. However, one must be careful when using this character. Second-year Herring Gulls also possess a two-tone bill, and bills even of Herring Gulls late in their first year may show some flesh coloration proximally. A second field mark that may be used is the rate of

wing-beat. In light winds or under calm conditions, the rate of a California Gull's wing-beat is more like that of a Ring-billed Gull than that of a Herring Gull. However, in moderate to strong winds, gulls beat their wings irregularly.

Second-year California Gulls are most easily confused with second-year Ring-billed Gulls. At this age, both have dark subterminal bands on the tail. However, the tail band of a California Gull is decidedly wider than that of a Ring-billed Gull (Godfrey, *op. cit.*, p. 180). The California Gull is also larger, but identification is still difficult. Both species have dark subterminal bands on their bills. Adult California Gulls are most readily identified by their greenish or yellowish legs and yellow bill. The bill bears a red spot near the tip of the lower mandible often, but not always, accompanied by a black spot. The irides of the adult are usually brown (sometimes gray) in contrast to the yellow irides of adult Ring-billed and Herring gulls (Godfrey, *loc. cit.*).

Because the Herring Gull does not normally occur in Oklahoma before 1 October (Sutton, G. M., 1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. of Oklahoma, Norman, p. 18), any dark gull observed in the state from August through October should be scrutinized carefully. It could well be an immature California Gull.

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## GENERAL NOTES

**First fall record for Purple Gallinule in Oklahoma.**—At 0745 on 10 September 1977, while Randy Hiatt and I were hunting teal on the north shore of Lake McMurry in Noble County, north-central Oklahoma, Hiatt noticed a dark rail-like bird alighting in a dense stand of smartweed (*Polygonum* sp.) that grew in a shallow cove about 50 meters (55 yards) from our blind. As we approached the spot at which the bird had alighted, it took flight, moving off slowly. I shot and retrieved it, finding it to be an immature Purple Gallinule (*Porphyryula martinica*).

Buffy brown suffused the specimen's head, neck, and sides, there being no white stripe on its side like that which parallels the edge of the folded wing in an immature Common Gallinule (*Gallinula chloropus*). The upper part of the body was glossy olive-green, while the outer vanes of the primaries, greater primary coverts, and alular quills had a purplish blue iridescence. The eyes were bright yellow, the legs and toes pale yellow except for a dull olive-green tinge on the frontal scutes of the tarsometatarsi. The maxilla was dark brown proximally and yellowish brown distally, the mandible yellow, lighter toward the tip than throughout the proximal half. Measurements were: total length (slightly stretched) 295 mm., wing (chord) 150, tail 69, culmen 39. The specimen proved to be a female.

Sutton (1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 13) listed no fall record for the Purple Gallinule in Oklahoma. The three specimens of the