

FIRST RECORD OF LITTLE GULL FOR OKLAHOMA

BY JOHN G. NEWELL

From 1 to 11 December 1990, a number of people had the rare experience of viewing an adult Little Gull (*Larus minutus*) in winter plumage at Lake Hefner in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma. The lake covers about four square miles and the small gull was usually out over the water, far from shore. Under such conditions, I feel fortunate to have ever noticed it. When I first spotted it in the cove east of my house, the diminutive gull was actively feeding with a group of 15 or more Bonaparte's Gulls (*Larus philadelphia*). They were attempting to steal fish from a group of eight Red-breasted Mergansers (*Mergus serrator*) that were feeding in the channel running from a concrete drainage canal into Lake Hefner. The channel was visible only because of the very low level of the lake. The distance from my patio to that area is approximately 700 feet. Even so far away, and facing the morning sun, I could discern the blackish underwings of this bird. My wife Dorothy and I hurriedly contacted several other area bird observers, but none came that day to see the rare little gull. We feared that it might move on before others had a chance to see it.

The next day, I saw the Little Gull while standing by the dam wall on the west side of the lake. Again, the bird was feeding in the company of a loose flock of foraging Bonaparte's Gulls well out over the lake. Because it was so small, the Little Gull was readily lost from view among the waves where the other gulls were drifting along,



LITTLE GULL

Fig. 1. Note blackish undersurface and white trailing edge of the short, rounded wings (wingspan over six inches shorter than a Bonaparte's). Both photos taken at Lake Hefner, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on 8 December 1990; Fig. 1 by Jim Vicars, Fig. 2 by Mitchell Oliphant.

apparently following and diving into a school of fish. As it flew just above the water, the smaller gull frequently picked tidbits from the surface, even diving into the lake at times, and seemed to be more active than the larger gulls. I was reminded of my ocean trips and the little petrels, flying like butterflies over the waves, feeding as they moved.

On 6 December, I relocated the unusual gull, this time along the north shoreline of Prairie Dog Point on the west side of the lake. It was alternately fishing and resting near shore with a flock of about 35 Bonaparte's Gulls. On this date, the wind was from the north, blowing about 30 miles per hour, and the temperature was about 45° F. Several persons searched the lake for the Little Gull the next day, but apparently no one located it.

Oklahoma City Audubon Society members, preparing for the annual Christmas Bird Count to be held the following week, sponsored a field trip to Lake Hefner on 8 December. Having learned of the Little Gull, several people from other cities, including Bartlesville, Muskogee, Tulsa and Norman, were on hand, all desiring to find it. As far as I know, no one was disappointed. Everyone saw it well as it fed over slightly wind-rippled water at the north end of the lake with Bonaparte's and Ring-billed (*Larus delawarensis*) gulls and, surprisingly, an immature Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*). Jim Vicars took several photographs of it, as had Mitchell Oliphant earlier in the day (see cover photos). I located this extraordinary gull again on 9 December and finally again on the 11th. Each time seen, it was predictably associating with the larger gulls.

The foregoing constitutes the first documentation for this species in the state of Oklahoma. The Little Gull commonly breeds through much of Eurasia and since 1962 in the Great Lakes region and adjacent Canada. During winter, it occurs in the same general regions as well as along the U.S. Atlantic Coast and western Eurasia. It is "casual . . . in the interior . . . south to the Gulf coast (Texas east to western Florida), reported west to Colorado, Kansas and Missouri . . ." (American Ornithologists' Union, 1983, Check-list of North American birds, 6th ed., Lawrence, Kansas, p. 214).

In adjacent states during this same time period, single Little Gulls were reported from southwestern Arkansas (third state record; Amer. Birds 95:284, 1991) and Waco in central Texas (Amer. Birds 95:291, 1991), where it is considered to be "accidental" (Texas Ornithological Society, 1984, Checklist of the birds of Texas, 2nd ed., Austin). Hubbard (1978, Revised check-list of the birds of New Mexico, New Mexico Ornithol. Soc. Publ. No. 6) did not list it from New Mexico, nor did Thompson and Ely (1989, Birds in Kansas, Vol. 1, Univ. Kansas Mus. Nat. Hist. Public Educ. Ser. No. 11) in Kansas (but see AOU quote in above paragraph).

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PRE-MIGRATORY ROOSTING BEHAVIOR OF SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHERS IN OKLAHOMA

BY JAMES H. WITTHGOTT

Premigratory roosting behavior of the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) is not thoroughly documented in the ornithological literature, despite the fact that it occurs regularly and provides a thought-provoking spectacle. I studied a roost containing nearly 900 birds in the late summer of 1990 in Wagoner, Muskogee