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First record of the Great Black-backed Gull for Oklahoma

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At the Lake Keystone Dam on the Arkansas River 13 km west of Sand Springs, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, on the morning of 14 January 1997, we observed a large gull sitting on the rocks with a Herring (*Larus argentatus*) and several Ring-billed (*L. delawarensis*) gulls. This bulky gull was noticeably larger than the Herring and approximately twice the size of the Ring-billed Gulls. The white-headed appearance of the bird when sitting and flying was obvious. The head was slightly, and the hind neck heavily, streaked with brown. The large bill was entirely black (shiny) with a prominent gonydial angle. The eye was dark with a dark smudge in front and behind the eye; its sloping forehead was similar to that of a Herring Gull and not as rounded as that of a Ring-billed Gull. The legs were flesh colored.



Fig. 1. Great Black-backed Gull at Keystone Dam. Photograph by Steven H. Metz on 17 January 1997.

We noted a strong contrast between the mantle and the rest of the body plumage. The underparts were grayish white with brown streaking on the breast and along the sides of the belly. The back was dark with a checkered appearance. The tertials were brown with narrow whitish edges and had no apparent internal markings. The greater wing coverts were brown, edged with white, and their light internal markings gave a barred look. The primaries extended beyond the tail to a length about equal to that of the bill.

In flight the gull showed modest contrast between the mantle and the flight feathers of its broad wing. The primaries and the sub-terminal bar of the secondaries were uniformly dark and darker than the wing coverts, scapulars, and mantle. The tail appeared white with a dark sub-terminal band and a narrow white terminal band. There were dark spots almost in rows proximal to the sub-terminal band and some spots on the light undertail. The white of the tail continued on the upper tail coverts and rump and encroached onto the posterior border of the mantle. The underwing appeared two-toned with the secondaries lighter than the coverts and a faint light window on the inner primaries.

We identified this gull (Fig. 1) as a first-winter Great Black-backed Gull (*L. marinus*) based on its size, white-headed appearance, light underparts, massive bill with accentuated gonydial angle, and the lack of internal markings on the tertials. We eliminated the first-winter Herring Gull based on the mantle's contrast with the paler body, the combination of white terminal and dark subterminal bands (the latter with a fractured proximal edge) on the tail, and the lack of prominent light windows in the primaries on the upper wing.

The gull was aggressive with the American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) and the other gulls that were fishing in the water being released through the generating turbines of the dam. On 16 January 1997 we were observing this gull when a first-winter Glaucous Gull (*L. hyperboreus*) appeared, floated on the river for a short time, and then flew to the rocks where the Great Black-backed Gull was eating a fish. A direct comparison showed that the Great Black-backed Gull was larger and bulkier bodied. The Great Black-backed Gull did not often mix with the Herring Gulls who in turn did not aggressively harass it for its fish.

Photographs were obtained by Kamp, Steven Metz, and Joseph Grzybowski on 14–17 January 1997. The bird was last reported on 11 February 1997. Based on the photographs and written description of the gull, the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee accepted this record on 6 December 1997 as the first Oklahoma record of the Great Black-backed Gull. The committee recognized that the bird appeared slightly darker mantled and had more distinct tail bands than typical Great Black-backed Gulls, but felt that these characters fell within acceptable limits of individual variation as judged from published photographs (e.g. Grant 1986).

The Great Black-backed Gull is primarily a coastal species. In North America it ranges in eastern Labrador, southeast Quebec, the Maritime

Provinces, and along the Atlantic coast southward to North Carolina, regularly wandering to large rivers and lakes of the interior United States. It winters from Labrador south along the Atlantic seaboard to Florida and in the Great Lakes (Terres 1980, Good 1998).

Among neighboring states, there are no records of the Great Black-backed Gull for Arkansas (M. Parker, pers. comm.) or New Mexico (P. Snider, pers. comm.). In Colorado there were 12 accepted records through 1995, with one or two sightings a year since 1995 (six in 1996–97; B. Lisowsky, pers. comm.; our tabulation from *American Birds* and *Field Notes*). In Kansas, Thompson and Ely (1989) cite two records for the Great Black-backed Gull, both in Barton County in the central part of the state in 1973 and 1974. There are four south central Kansas records, all in Sedgewick County, in 1992–98; these records have been of either first- or second-year individuals except for one adult reported in 1998 (D. Rintoul, pers. comm.; our tabulation from *American Birds* and *Field Notes*). In Nebraska, there were two records of Great Black-backed Gulls in 1904 and 1952 (Bray et al. 1986). Since 1986 there have been ten documented records, possibly representing seven birds that were immatures and adults and in both summer and winter plumage. Seven records were from southwestern Nebraska and three from eastern Nebraska (R. Silcock, pers. comm.).

In Missouri, the Great Black-backed Gull is a casual transient and winter resident along the Mississippi River. The first state record was 1 January 1945 on the Mississippi River in Cape Girardeau County in southeastern Missouri. This was the only record in Missouri outside of the greater St. Louis area through 1992 (Robbins & Easterla 1992). The Great Black-backed Gull now occurs almost annually in small numbers along the Mississippi River in the St. Louis area, with at least 30 records since the late 1980s, although it is still considered accidental elsewhere in the state (B. Rowe, pers. comm.). First-winter birds are most commonly seen in Missouri. The Illinois River, which feeds into the Mississippi River, probably acts as a conduit for Great Black-backed Gulls from Lake Michigan (Rowe, pers. comm.). In Texas, there are 28 currently accepted records of the Great Black-backed Gull and five records under review by the Texas Bird Records Committee. All Texas records except one are coastal. The one interior record was in Marion County in northeastern Texas in the winter of 1992–93 (G. Lasley, pers. comm.).

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6736 EAST 28TH STREET, TULSA, OK. 74129 (JL); 6422 SOUTH INDIANAPOLIS PLACE, TULSA OK. 74136 (MBK). Received 20 February 1999, accepted 27 February 1999.

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First nesting record of the Tricolored Heron for Oklahoma

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The Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*) breeds primarily along the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico coastlines in estuaries, salt marshes, mangrove swamps, and river deltas (Frederick 1997). Since the mid to late 1970s, the Tricolored Heron has expanded its breeding range. Tricolored Herons have been reported breeding in western and north central Texas (Oberholser 1974, Runnels 1980), central Kansas (Thompson and Ely 1989), South Dakota (Skadsen 1986, Meeks et al. 1996), and North Dakota (Schmidt 1979). Prior to 1998, the Tricolored Heron had not been documented to breed in Oklahoma and had been recorded as only a "very rare" visitor in the nonbreeding season (Sutton 1967, Baumgartner and Baumgartner 1992).

While studying the mixed-species heron rookery on Ralston Island, Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge, Alfalfa County, Oklahoma, during summer 1998, Feirer discovered a pair of Tricolored Herons and a nest with two eggs, situated 1.8 m high in a small mulberry tree. The nest was