

Your name

Email

Bird identification

Great Black-backed Gull (1 third-year bird, transitioning from 3rd summer to 3rd winter plumage)

Date(s)

November 30, 2019

Time of Day

Approx. 1:45 PM

Location

Coffin Butte Regional Landfill, Benton County. Seen from adjacent annex of E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area.

The gull was resting on a geotextile-covered landfill slope near an active-tipping area with exposed fresh garbage.

Lighting and Weather Conditions

Overcast but with good diffuse light. Weather was chilly (approx 35 F), calm to light breeze, did not note wind direction. Viewed at approximately 120 m using Swarovski 10x42WB binoculars, looking WSW. The gull was facing toward the ESE, offering an oblique frontal/side view, roughly straight across on the same level as where I was standing.

Details

While scanning a flock of 500+ gulls, mainly large, pink-footed species, I noticed one (also pink-footed) that was noticeably larger than the others, standing near the top of the geotextile-covered slope. I estimated that the body length (breast to start of tail) was 15% to 20% larger than two nearby Glaucous-winged x Western Gulls, and confirmed this as the larger gull walked a short distance down the slope, passing next to one of those.

The gull had a massive bill, yellowish with a black band across the tip . The head was angular/blocky (flat crown rather than rounded head), white with hint of faint dark streaking on nape (not fully clean white). It was dark (similar to dark Western Gull) on the sides of the mantle but with mottled brownish on the wings below that, with a few darker blotches similar to the mantle color. Tail details not noted.

No vocalizations heard. The gull did not have any particular interactions with nearby gulls during the 2 to 3 minutes that I spent watching it. The bird did not fly while I was watching it. Having significant recent experience with Great Black-backed Gull (see below), I did not have any doubt as to what I was looking at, so did not wait around for the bird to fly to show wing markings.

Similar Species

Other large gull species including Glaucous-winged were present but noticeably smaller and with less massive bills. 3rd-winter Western Gull or Slaty-backed could have generally similar plumage but would be close in size to the other pink-footed gulls that were present.

Anything else you want to add?

I have had frequent experience with Great Black-backed Gull from 3 years' residence in Sweden and ongoing work in the Nordic countries. During this year I spent a total of 5 days near Reykjavik in Iceland (4 days in April and one day in early October), observing mixed flocks of gulls including many dozens of Great Black-backed Gulls alongside of Herring Gulls and smaller gulls, in a full range of plumage. GBBG is thus a very familiar species and one that I regard as easily recognizable based on size and general structure .