

Lesser Black-backed Gull

On 2/4/16 I observed a dark gull about 4 miles west of McMinnville among a flock of some 300 +/- gulls, and this was the only one with yellow legs, as there were no California, Ring-billed or Mew gulls in the flock.

My immediate thoughts were Lesser Black Backed Gull because of the dark color, yellow legs, and slightly smaller size as compared with the rest of the pink-legged gulls, at times in close vicinity. After viewing it, taking pics, I could also see dark streaking on the neck, less so around the head, some smudging in the eye area.

The day was overcast, and the distance to the gull was at least 100 yards at the closest, then after it flew it was even farther, maybe 150-200 yards. I called [REDACTED] who came out within 15 minutes. He had brought along some field guides, which puts both California and LBBG at 21 inches, the size of which seemed about right when comparing the pink legged gulls nearby which were 25-26 inches, more or less. We could never determine if the eye color was yellow, but we assumed at that distance this might not be distinguishable. The bill did have a reddish gony on the lower part near the end, and the upper part did have a dark feature just above the red gony, so I think we assumed that part was a good fit for a California Gull, and labelled it such, and so posted it as such on OBOL. However, many of the gulls present were probing for worms, so in my mind there was allowance made that this could easily have been mud, something [REDACTED] vocalized as well.

I did see it fly once, and noted one small white spot at the end of what I would consider the first primary. The contrast between the black primaries and the rest of the upper wing was not great, and certainly not near the contrast of what is seen on the typical California Gull. I did not pay attention to the underside of the wing, a feature in hindsight I wish I did. There are a few more pics on my blog at: <http://falconslamanddarkgull.blogspot.com/>

I have to admit I was never satisfied that this was a California Gull, and my conscience bothered me afterward. It was simply "too" dark. I sent some pics to  who felt it is more likely to be a LBBG, and so with that encouragement, I send this pics. I am sorry for the quality, but with an I-phone through a scope at 100+ yards, this is the best I could do.

The main points of ID were:

- 1) The dark color.
- 2) The size is right, when compared to the pink legged gulls with which it was photoed.
- 3) Yellow legs
- 4) The right shape

I don't remember ever seeing a California Gull so dark, so if they don't get so dark what was this gull if not a LBBG? Nine days later I returned there and photoed a California Gull which is included here (the last one). It certainly is not as dark as this gull, and appears smaller as well, but there may not be enough details of other gulls in the pic to judge fairly. Have fun with it.