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BIRD IDENTIFICATION	Lesser Black-backed Gull (<i>Larus fuscus</i>). 1 bird. 3rd-cycle or advanced 2nd-cycle.
DATE(S) OF OBSERVATION	24 October 2021
TIME OF DAY	2:15 PM
LOCATION	Below the John Day Dam, Sherman County, OR
LIGHTING AND WEATHER CONDITIONS	Cool, cloudy, subdued gray lighting; perhaps very slight breeze, no precipitation at time
DETAILS	<p>David Mandell and I were sorting through gulls and looking for scoters and loons below the John Day Dam, from the Oregon shore near the tribal fishing access area building. We'd each scoped past a tight group of gulls on a very distant small rocky island (in Washington waters) several times when we realized that we'd each been noticing an apparently darker-backed gull in the middle of the flock. It looked promising for Lesser Black-backed, but we couldn't be sure. We trekked downriver to get closer and to obtain better angles, but then we couldn't refind the bird. A bit shaken, we concluded we must have been mistaken, and headed back toward our cars. Fortunately, when we got near our original viewing spot, we spotted a bird that looked exactly like the bird we'd been chasing, and it was now gallivanting about close to shore directly in front of where we HAD been standing! For the next 10 minutes, we enjoyed decent views by binoculars, scopes, and naked eye, as the bird perched on a rock, sat in the water, and flew about, generally in the vicinity of California and Ring-billed Gulls. My photos are not great, but I obtained 15 worth keeping, and cropped versions of the most useful ones are included in this submission and also in our eBird list here: https://ebird.org/checklist/S96664452. The photos show pretty well the various field marks we noted in the field, which were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roughly the size of a California Gull, but very slightly bulkier-looking than most of them. Notably larger than surrounding Ring-bills and notably smaller than nearby Glaucous-wingeds. Fairly elongated primary extension. • Mantle color slightly but noticeably darker than California Gulls, and also of a different character: more dusky or slate-colored, with

brownish tones mixed in.

- Definitely a pale iris, apparently yellowish or whitish.
- Blackish-brown smudgy streaks generously spread across head, neck, sides of breast, and flanks.
- Streaks were most concentrated near eye and behind eye, giving the bird a slight smudgy-masked look.
- Bill pinkish at base, dark at tip. Intermediate in shape & heft; smaller than a Glaucous-winged's but heftier than a Ring-bill's.
- Legs were intermediate in color between pink and yellow. The appearance seemed to vary a bit with lighting/angle/distance, but they seemed closer to pink, yet with a definite orangey sort of hue, thus different than the purely pink legs of a Herring, Thayer's, GW, or Western.
- In flight the bird had some heft but also looked somewhat long-winged.
- A couple of the photos, although not in great focus, adequately show details of the wing plumage. Note the mix of browns and dusky slate-gray, and the blackish primaries without white tips. We each felt that the overall darkness of the mantle was most apparent when the bird was flying directly away from us. Although not well-captured in the photos, the underwings also seemed noticeably dark when we got glimpses of them.
- The tail was mostly white with some blackish feathers mixed in. We had no field guides with us during the observation, but briefly consulted the Natl. Geo and Sibley guides before posting on WhatsApp and OBOL, and I also consulted the Howell & Dunn gull book at night once I got home. I'm not positive about the bird's age, and this might in fact require a careful analysis of molt; separating 3rd-cycle from advanced 2nd-cycle birds can be tricky; e.g. see Figs. 27.34 and 27.36 in Howell & Dunn, p. 195. If accepted by the OBRC, this would add to the burgeoning number of records of this species in recent years, particularly from this stretch of the Columbia River Gorge.

DO YOU HAVE ANY PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH THIS SPECIES?

I have seen dozens of this species in all of its age classes in several eastern-U.S. states, as well as in Europe and Trinidad, and have viewed two in Oregon.

SIMILAR SPECIES

California Gull is ruled out by the pale eye, the darker mantle, and a host of supporting field marks as detailed above. The bird was not large enough for Western Gull or Slaty-backed or Great Black-backed, along with plumage differences from those species; and it was larger and differently plumaged than smaller species such as Ring-billed, Short-billed, Franklin's, Laughing, etc.

DO YOU HAVE PHOTOS?

Yes