

YOUR NAME	david haupt
YOUR EMAIL	dhaupt@tbjUSD.org
BIRD IDENTIFICATION	Lesser-blacked Gull, likely 3rd cycle, nearly adult plumage, one (1) individual
DATE(S) OF OBSERVATION	December 11, 2021 - December 18, 2021
TIME OF DAY	10:00 AM
LOCATION	Klamath County, Klamath Falls, Veterans Park boat launch
LIGHTING AND WEATHER CONDITIONS	Light snow, overcast, mid 30 degrees
DETAILS	<p>Initially detected by darker mantle than other gulls nearby. Full gray value darker than California Gull, approximating mantle color of Western Gull. General structure was a gull the size of nearby Herring Gulls. Body, however, was more slender with longer legs and primary projection. At least two of the primaries brownish, yet to molt into adult mode of black with white mirrors. Underparts, face, and head bright white with a minor amount of brown streaking on nape. Tail had some black in terminal edge.</p> <p>Legs long and dull pinkish. Bill quite long, generally dull yellow with black smudge on outer third of culmen and red spot below. Base of bill washed out, almost creamy white. Eye appeared amber in color with some minor flecking in the iris. Behaviorally, it roosted on dock most of time during observation. Didn't react to feeding of human food by local residents. Bird was very approachable as I walked on adjacent dock to capture photos. Didn't seem particularly aggressive to other birds. Often it hopped down into water to swim and drink. Would leave dock area to loaf on lake with other gulls.</p>
DO YOU HAVE ANY PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH THIS SPECIES?	Yes. Have seen species in the United Kingdom in 2000. More recent observation was a second winter bird seen in January of the same year in the same location.
SIMILAR SPECIES	Locally in Klamath Falls, all gulls are pale-gray mantled. The darkest-mantled gull seen regularly is California. This bird was much darker and larger. Shape and jizz eliminated the possibility of Western Gull.
DO YOU HAVE PHOTOS?	Yes

YOUR NAME	Nick Mrvelj
YOUR EMAIL	nickmrvelj@gmail.com
BIRD IDENTIFICATION	One sub-adult Lesser Black-backed Gull. Likely a taimyrensis LBBG, but possibly a heuglini LBBG.
DATE(S) OF OBSERVATION	10/27/21 and 10/29/21
TIME OF DAY	4:20 PM
LOCATION	Harbor View Park in Portland, Oregon. This area borders the Willamette River.
LIGHTING AND WEATHER CONDITIONS	On 10/27 it was overcast, slightly rainy, and approaching the end of the day, with general low levels of light. On 10/29, it was partly sunny, with good levels of bright, diffuse lighting.
DETAILS	I've included a heap of details into the word document below, including how I eliminated similar species, why I think its a taimyrensis/heuglin's LBBG as opposed to a graellsii, and why I believe this same gull showed up in Klamath Falls a month after I found it. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cfrZV6wkH0dRR7AJY_dI6xmLFTPJSXCJPGdr4smX108/edit?usp=sharing
DO YOU HAVE ANY PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH THIS SPECIES?	I have a decent amount of experience with graellsii Lesser Black-backed Gulls, between seeing them in Ohio, Florida, and Oregon. I've never seen a taimyrensis/heuglin's LBBG before though.
SIMILAR SPECIES	Refer to the above word document.
DO YOU HAVE PHOTOS?	Yes

**Thank you
for
submitting
your
sighting to
the Oregon
Bird
Records
Committee!
Is there
anything else
you would
like to add?**

Here are my two eBird checklists for reference:

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S96853447>

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S96790165>

After careful consideration, and heaps of research, I feel comfortable calling this gull one of two things: either a somewhat large, mildly dark mantled taimyrensis Lesser Black-backed Gull (Taimyr Gull) or otherwise a paler mantled heuglini Lesser Black-backed Gull (Heuglin's Gull). If I had to put money on it, I would favor the former, but field identification away from breeding grounds is challenging and the data is unfortunately lacking in certain areas. Either way you slice it, I feel confident this is a LBBG of Asian origin. Before we get into why it is a taimyrensis/heuglini LBBG, let's talk about why it isn't any of the more expected dark backed taxa in the ABA area.

Graellsii Lesser Black-backed Gull?

Why isn't this a graellsii Lesser Black-backed Gull, the subspecies generally considered to be present in North America? Three main features are off for a graellsii. The first is that this bird doesn't show any significant or even minor streaking on the head, crown, and face. In looking through dozens of images of sub-adult LBBG taken in North America throughout October and December, none of them were lacking streaking in the areas aforementioned. The second issue for a graellsii LBBG is the mantle color. Although there is a range for graellsii, especially amongst sub-adults, this gull would be toward the extreme pale side for a graellsii. The third main issue with this being a graellsii is the timing of the primary molt. This gull was still molting its outer 3-4 primaries in late October and early November. Furthermore, this molt appeared to be ongoing as it was relocated in Klamath Falls in late November and early December (more on that later). Of all subspecies of LBBG around the world, only high arctic breeders like *L. f. fuscus* and *L. f. heuglini* are expected to still be molting this many outer primaries at such a late date. The reason for this late molt timing has a lot to do with when they can successfully return to their breeding grounds, flying in some cases up to 6,000 miles and not returning well into late June. This is also the reason for the long winged, somewhat robust appearance.

Appledore Gull?

Owing to the slightly paler mantle coloration and pinkish leg coloration, one may make a case that this is a graellsii LBBG x smithsonianus HERG, also known as an "Appledore Gull". Although this hybrid combination would be exceptionally rare this far west in the United States, there are a few things off for an Appledore Gull. The first is the iris coloration, which is a dusky yellowish-olive hue. Owing to the fact that both HERG and graellsii LBBG should have pretty bright yellow irises by this age, I would expect their offspring to have a similarly vibrant iris as well. The second issue I see with this, is that this gull's structure doesn't give off any obvious HERG traits. The bird looks somewhat long winged (a LBBG trait), long billed, and decently long legged. The streaking looks off for anything with smithsonianus HERG in it as well, as I'd expect some streaking on any combination of the head, nape, face, breast, throat, front of the neck, etc. Lastly, the timing of the molt is off for an "Appledore Gull", as I'd expect an offspring of both parent species to have finished molting its outer primaries by November-December. Finally, sub-adult LBBGs don't always have yellow/yellowish legs, especially birds of Asian origin. This would help explain the unusual leg coloration.

So What Is It?

Without getting too much into it, this gull is not any other of the expected species with similarly dark saddles; i.e. it's not a California Gull, a Short-billed Gull, and a Western Gull. So what is this gull? That has been the question I've been pondering for several weeks, and I finally feel satisfied with the answer. For me, this seems most likely to be a taimyrensis LBBG, currently considered to be a form by eBird/Clements. A form is defined as such: *"The following birds, listed in the eBird taxonomy as "forms", are not formally recognized by the Clements taxonomy and thus do not have official taxonomic status and do not have official taxonomic names. In some cases we create a name, while in others we use published names that have yet to gain formal acceptance. At least a few of these have been described and may soon be updated to species rank. "*

So if taimyrensis is not officially recognized as a subspecies, and instead a form, what exactly is it? Well, the answer to that is murky, but many authorities treat it as the eastern form of the subspecies *L.f.heuglini*, which is sometimes itself treated as a full species (Heuglin's Gull). There has also been speculation that taimyrensis is a hybrid swarm of *L.f.heuglini* and *L.a.vegae*. More research is needed before we can fully understand what (or if) taimyrensis is, but for now, I will refer to it as a form of heuglini LBBG.

Heuglin's LBBG?

Speaking of heuglini, in doing research about the LBBG complex in Eastern Asia (Korea/Japan), I found that vagrant Heuglin's LBBGs, especially adults of the paler complexion, can pose quite the ID challenge when trying to separate them from darker Taimyr Gulls. Heuglin's Gulls have been described as long legged and large sized. In contrast, many of the (presumed) Taimyr Gulls of far eastern Asia have been described as somewhat small, short legged, shorter billed, and paler mantled than the average Heuglin's Gull. Without going too much more into it, through my research, I've found conflicting accounts of the phenotypic limits of Taimyr Gulls, and an incomplete understanding of the wintering range of Heuglin's Gulls (and Taimyr Gulls for that matter). As for the gull in question, to me, it looks somewhat long legged, and was decently large in size (similar to a smaller GWGU). From personal experience, I don't put a ton of stock into the relative sizes of various Larus species, especially when accounting for sex, individual variation, and posture, but found it interesting that this bird looked decently large and robust in the field.

Unlikely Asian Candidates

Why not *L.f.barabensis*, or Steppe Gull? For one, a Steppe Gull on North American soil would be heinously out of range. They breed in the steppes of Central Asia and winter primarily in Southwest Asia! Beyond extreme improbability, a sub-adult Steppe Gull typically should not still be molting so many outer primaries in November-December. Furthermore, the average Steppe Gull would not show so much dense, dark spotting/streaking on the nape and back of the neck. Another most unlikely candidate, but one worth mentioning due to superficially similar attributes, is a Caspian Gull. Unbelievably long journey aside, I wouldn't expect a Caspian Gull to be so dark saddled, even those of the most eastern populations (which average darker above). Also, I wouldn't expect such a delayed molt from a Caspian Gull on the remiges. Finally, a Mongolian Gull (considered a subspecies of Herring Gull by eBird/Clements), can be eliminated by the darker mantle, blobby streaks on the neck, darker iris, and overall similarities to a LBBG instead of a HERG.

Other Thoughts

Amar Ayyash shared that the greenish wash to the base of the bill is indicative of Asian origin (specifically in regard to LBBG/HERG). This bird seems to exhibit such features. I've also read that the dense streaking on the nape and hindneck, largely limited to that region, is another commonality many LBBG/HERG from that part of the world share. Additionally, the bill shape, head shape, and combination of iris color, mantle color, and leg color are just supremely novel for any gull I've seen on American soil. On a final note, Taimyr Gulls are common Fall/Winter visitors to parts of eastern/northeastern Asia. Its not too much of a stretch imagining them continuing to stray eastward over the Bering Strait and eventually heading southeast toward where this individual eventually wound up. Heuglin's Gulls, for their part, are much more uncommon in the same parts of Asia, but not unheard of. Identification challenges do abound in said areas.

The Klamath Falls Connection

On November 28th, 2021, Dave Haupt found a Lesser Black-backed Gull on Lake Ewauna in Klamath Falls. As of writing this, the bird has been seen through December 11th, 2021. After careful examination, I am convinced this is the same bird as the one I found in Portland. Here are my reasons why:

- upperparts color same hue
- shape and length of the bill identical
- coloration of the bill identical
- iris color identical
- streaking on nape and back of neck identical
- leg color the same
- overall size and proportions the same
- age the same
- open wing shows nearly identical molt
- rectrix similar (with a few being replaced from the last images in Portland)

Here are some checklists with photos. I made side by side images, including of the open wings, and feel that the probability of a different bird presenting with such a uniquely similar set of features would be beyond infinitesimally small. To me, the Portland bird and the Klamath Falls bird are unequivocally the same bird.

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S98767030>

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S98291562>

<https://ebird.org/pnw/checklist/S98476711>

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S98221901>

In Conclusion

I feel this gull is best identified as simply a Lesser Black-backed Gull. That said, the reason I've spent so much time laying all this out, is because I don't feel this is a *graellsii* LBBG. Furthermore, I feel there is much evidence to support that claim, and am confident about it. Unfortunately, the answer to what this bird is is much more complex. After many weeks of digesting all sorts of information and research, and seeking opinions from birders/gullers from around the world, my best classification for this bird is a *taimyrensis*/heuglin's LBBG.

Research and Helpful Links

http://www.birdskorea.org/Birds/Identification/ID_Notes/BK-ID-Taimyr-Gull.shtml

<http://gull-research.org/heuglini/05cyjan.html>

<http://gull-research.org/heuglini/03cydec.html>

http://www23.tok2.com/home/jgull/a_heuglini.html

<http://birdingkyoto.blogspot.com/2015/07/taimyr-gull-spring-adults.html>

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/>

[253952505_Taimyr_Gulls_Larus_taimyrensis_evidence_for_Pacific_winter_range_with_notes_on_morphology_and_breeding](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/253952505_Taimyr_Gulls_Larus_taimyrensis_evidence_for_Pacific_winter_range_with_notes_on_morphology_and_breeding)

http://www.birdskorea.or.kr/Birds/Identification/ID_Notes/BK-ID-Herring-Gull-Page3.shtml

Philip Kline

to me

Treesa:

I would like to submit my checklist to add to the entry for the Lesser Black-backed Gull submitted by Nick--LBBG-2021-26. My checklist includes some good spread-wing shots that I think would be helpful for the analysis of this record.

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S96853200>

Philip

LBBG-2021-26
Three photos by David Haupt



Three photos by Nick Mveji



Note: This is the 1st round voting for what was LBBG-2021-27 submitted by Dave Haupt and has now been combined under LBBG-2021-26.

LBBG-2021-27 (Lesser Black-backed Gull)

1st round vote – May 10, 2022

Accepted: 8
Not Accepted: 1

ACCEPTED, verified

As discussed on OBOL, this appears to be the same bird that Nick Mrvelj found in the Portland area. Bill coloration, nape streaking, and other plumage characteristics are identical to the Portland bird. Additionally, it seems more plausible that the bird simply moved south rather than there being two identical looking weird LBBGs in Oregon. I continue to be convinced that this individual is a LBBG. See first round vote on Nick's report for more in depth comments.

No comments

As mentioned below, this bird is the same one as LBBG-2021-26, which I voted to accept in the first round of voting. [Another committee member] was concerned that Slaty-backed Gull wasn't completely ruled out. However, I think that the overall smaller size of this bird compared to Glaucous-winged Gulls and GW/Western hybrids clearly eliminates Slaty-backed Gull. I also believe that the long primary projection and the yellowish/pink legs also eliminate Slaty-backed Gull. The precise subspecies of this Lesser Black-backed Gull is debatable, but Nick Mrelj thoroughly reviewed that situation in his report of this bird when it was in Portland. Dave Haupt's report says that the bird was first observed on Dec. 11, 2021. However, that is incorrect. He first reported the bird to OBOL on Nov. 28, 2021.

Certainly appears to be the same bird recorded as LBBG-2021-26 and seen in Portland a couple months prior. An odd bird and quite likely a Siberian subspecies of Lesser Black-backed Gull.

I am of the opinion that this gull and the gull from LBBG-2021-26 are one and the same. Therefore, I think that it makes sense to combine the two reports. That being said, the same reasons I accepted that gull as a LBBG are the same I am accepting this as one. I don't think this is a typical *graellsii* LBBG, and believe it to be either a *taiyrensis* LBBG or a *heuglini*'s LBBG, but a Lesser Black-backed Gull nonetheless. The unique combination of overall shape and proportions, mantle color, iris color, leg color, and streaking confined largely to the nape, are pretty unique for a gull in Oregon.

No comments

I think I am persuaded that this is the same individual gull as in LBBG-2021-26, amazing as that may be. So I likewise feel that it is an LBB Gull and likely a *taiyrensis*/*Heuglini*'s form, as Nick has proposed, rather than the typical *graellsii*. If we as a committee feel confident it is the same bird, then the two records should be combined.

Nice photos.

I think there is a very strong probability that this is the same bird reported from Portland earlier in the year (LBBG-2021-26, now in the 2nd round). I'll refer to my detailed comments on that record as to my reasons for

believing this to be a LBBG of the heuglini/taimyrensis group. Under the current AOS taxonomy, I accept this as a LBBG. My question is: If we agree that this is the same individual as the Portland bird, should we combine the two records?

NOT ACCEPTED

As incredible as it may seem, it appears that this is the same bird as Nick's LBBG-2021-26 found in Portland several weeks earlier! Therefore I support combining the two records. My concerns are the same as I have for LBBG-2021-26. This is clearly not a typical ABA area gull. The size and wing pattern (as brought up in the LBBG-2021-26 record) are sufficient for me to Not Accept as a Lesser Black-backed Gull at this time.

LBBG-2021-26 (Lesser Black-backed Gull)

2nd round vote – May 10, 2022

Accepted: 8
Not Accepted: 1

ACCEPTED, verified

While this individual may not be of the expected *graellsii* subspecies, I continue to be convinced that this is a Lesser Black-backed Gull.

As mentioned below, this bird is the same one as LBBG-2021-27. Craig Miller was concerned that Slaty-backed Gull wasn't completely ruled out. However, I think that the overall smaller size of this bird compared to Glaucous-winged Gulls and GW/Western hybrids clearly eliminates Slaty-backed Gull. It seems to be a little bigger than a California Gull overall. I also believe that the long primary projection and the yellowish/pink legs also eliminate Slaty-backed Gull. There is no sting of pearls coloration on P6 to P10 as one would expect for a Slaty-backed Gull. The mantle color seems on the light side for what I would expect for a Slaty-backed Gull. The precise subspecies of this Lesser Black-backed Gull is debatable, but Nick Mrvelj thoroughly reviewed that situation in his report and his conclusions seem reasonable to me.

I remain convinced this is of the Siberian *heuglini/taimyrensis* taxon, currently considered part of the Lesser Black-backed Gull complex. We may need to revisit in the future if taxonomy changes and this taxon is considered its own species. I ruled out Slaty-backed Gull based on structure (appears fairly slim and long-winged compared to nearby GWGUs with no pot-bellied look), legs too pale, and mantle also too pale. There also appears to be too much black on P4 for a Slaty-backed Gull. Note the *heuglini/taimyrensis* also generally show white tongue tips on black-tipped primaries although not as extensive as Slaty-backed. Also, while the bird is admittedly in heavy molt, it does not show the broad white tertial and scapular crescents that are distinctive in Slaty-backed Gull.

well researched report, have nothing to add

Not a whole lot more to say on this one....a Lesser Black-backed Gull, though I am not sure on the subspecies. Slaty-backed is eliminated by thinner bill and longer wingtip projection past the tail, among other nuances.

I have nothing to add to my first-round comments. In response to Craig's concerns, I think that Slaty-backed Gull can confidently be ruled out, as well as any other similarly dark-backed taxa. As to the possibility of a hybrid, given the propensity to hybridization in most of the *Larus* gulls, we may rarely be able to completely rule out some introgression of another's taxon's genes, but in this case, I really don't see anything that screams hybrid. In my opinion, the bird aligns well with the *taimyrensis/heuglini* group, and as long as this group is considered part of the Lesser Black-backed Gull species, I am comfortable accepting this bird as such. In case of a future split/reassignment of the taxon, we can always revisit this record.

I continue to feel this individual is a LBBG, and either a *taimyrensis* or *heuglini* LBBG at that. To address some concerns about why it isn't a SBAG, I would expect a sub-adult SBAG to: - be larger, shorter legged, and not as long winged. Structure is off for that species. - have more streaking on and around the face. - have an even darker mantle. - have completed its outer primary molt, or at least be in a more advanced state - have a subtly different bill shape. In regard to other feedback I got about this gull, there was a fair amount. Not enough room to share it all. I will share what Amar Ayyash said about it though. He shared these comments on 10/28/22, before it was relocated and better photos were taken. He did not comment on the bird again unfortunately: "I too suspect something in the *taimyrensis/vegae* complex. It appears to be a 3rd cycle

(retained outer primaries and most tail feathers are 2nd generation?). It might be a 4th cycle type (which in turn would make the retained outer primaries and tail 3rd generation). The longish green bill looks right for a subadult Asian bird. An open wing would be helpful."

I appreciate the caution expressed by Craig on this record, as it may indeed be impossible to say with certainty precisely what this gull is. Maybe we cannot completely rule out a hybrid, but I struggle to specify what hybrid combination it would be, exactly. Given that, and Nick's extensive research, I still feel most comfortable categorizing the bird as a Lesser Black-backed of some persuasion, though if further evidence and discussion can make a good case for a hybrid combination, I'd be happy to entertain that.

This was a well documented and thoroughly researched bird. I see no evidence of a hybrid or misidentification. If the record does not pass this round I look forward to a discussion with the entire committee.

Excellent documentation

NOT ACCEPTED

I'm not quite ready to jump on the LBBG bandwagon yet as I did not see any of my first round concerns addressed. Since *taimyrensis* would be a novel ABA form/subspecies, I think it might be informative to seek the opinion of recognized gull authorities, such as Amar Amash and Alvaro Jaramillo.

LBBG-2021-26 (Lesser Black-backed Gull)

2nd round vote on COMBINED records – July 16, 2022

Accepted: 9

Not Accepted: 0

ACCEPTED, verified

No further comments other than I believe it is the same bird as LBBG-2021-25? (the Portland bird from a month earlier) and thus combining those two records is the correct recourse.

My opinion remains unchanged about this bird. I have no problem with accepting this record as a Lesser Black-backed Gull.

These reports were thoroughly discussed in the first round of voting. Craig Miller brought up the possibility that this bird might have been a Slaty-backed Gull. I think that the bird's smaller size relative to Glaucous-winged Gulls and GW/Western hybrids and the bird's yellowish leg color eliminate Slaty-backed Gull. I agree with Craig that it would be reasonable to get additional input from gull experts on the identification of this bird.

Although I voted not to accept in the first round based on some of the details on the Mrvelj bird, that bird has been Accepted by the committee. I am convinced that the Haupt record is of the same bird, and therefore to be consistent must also be Accepted.

I believe there is very strong evidence that this is the same bird seen in Portland earlier in the year, and I still feel very strongly that this is one of the Eastern Asian taxa currently included under *Larus fuscus*. I have nothing to add to my reasoning outlined in my first-round comments.

It is my opinion this bird was the same individual seen a month prior in Portland (LBBG-2021-25) and will thus be combined with that record (as the committee agreed upon while voting was already underway with this report). I accept for the same reasons I accepted the aforementioned record. (see comments from previous rounds of voting)

Continue to feel this is the same individual as the Portland bird, and that it is an Asian taxon of LBB Gull.

Lots of research and photo documentation to demonstrate that this bird is the same individual that showed up at Portland and Klamath Falls.