

LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

REPORT FORM

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of species on the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC) Review List. The LBRC recommends the use of this form or a similar format when submitting records for review (to assure that all pertinent information is accounted for). Attach additional pages as necessary. Please print or type. Attach xerox of field notes, drawings, photographs, or tape recordings, if available. Include all photos for more obscurely marked species. When completed, mail to Secretary, Louisiana Bird Records Committee, c/o Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216.

1. English and Scientific names: *Slaty-backed Gull, Larus schistisagus*
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage):
One adult
3. Locality: Parish: *Acadia* _____ Specific Locality:
Rural Acadia Parish _____
4. Date(s) when observed: *22 December 2022*
5. Time(s) of day when observed: *1020-1205 CST*
6. Reporting observer and address: *Robert C. Dobbs, Lafayette, LA*
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): *Paul Conover (also discovered bird, previous day), Dan Lane, Van Remsen*
8. Other observers who *independently identified* the bird(s): *Mac Myers, Dave Patton*
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): *under overcast sky of mid-late morning light, thus fairly bright, but “muted” light (e.g., no strong shadows)*
10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): *Swarovski 8x30 binos (good condition), Pentax PF-80EDa spotting scope (good condition), Nikon AF-S 300 mm 1:4 D camera lens (good condition)*
11. Distance to bird(s): *As close as 50 m at dump site (for 3-4 min), but I failed to get good photos at that time, except for in-flight at further distance. Subsequently as close*

as 80 m (my best photos) when we walked down levee (with landowner permission) to approach the bird in a flooded field just outside landfill gate.

12. **Duration of observation:** About 5 min at landfill (in flight and on ground among 100s of other gulls), and then for 1 hour in flooded field adjacent to landfill (standing, walking, and preening).
13. **Habitat:** The bird spent time between a flooded field free of emergent veg (crawfish, presumably, but no traps, etc.), and the garbage dumping site at the adjacent landfill.
14. **Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation):** Observed the bird in flight (initially), standing on the ground among many other gulls at the landfill's active garbage-dumping site, where preening (possibly feeding, but I didn't note that specifically), and standing and walking in flooded field, where preening, loafing, and occasionally interacting with other gulls (Herring Gull showed some aggression toward Slaty-backed Gull by walking toward it, calling, forcing Slaty-back to raise wings and walk away).
15. **Description (include only what was actually seen, *not what "should" have been seen*; include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species, body bulk, shape, proportions, bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species):** A large (four-year) white-headed gull with a dark slategray mantle and upperwings, brownish streaking on the neck, notable dark feathering around the eye, and pink legs. It was larger than nearby Lesser Black-backed and Herring gulls, but did not appear massively larger than Herring when standing on the ground. The bird did, however, appear very large, barrel-chested, and powerful in flight, more so than Herring Gull, though I did not have a side-by-side comparison of it and Herring Gull in flight (that I recall or noted at the time). The dark slate-gray color of mantle and upperwing was similar to that of nearby adult Lesser Black-backed Gull (at least in the ambient light of this day), and darker than that of nearby Laughing Gulls (see photos and photo captions at end of this report).

The bill was larger than Herring Gull, and notably larger than Lesser Black-backed (see first photo, below), but fairly straight-sided and lacking a bulbous tip. The bill was yellow with a reddish gonydeal spot. Legs were pink, but the ambient light under the overcast sky made it difficult for me to judge the brightness of the pink. Iris was yellow.

The head, neck, and breast were whitish with heavy brownish streaking, and darker feathering was concentrated around the eye, giving the bird a "mean" or somewhat masked appearance. Belly white. Tail was all-white. The upper wings were dark slaty gray, similar to that of Lesser Black-backed Gull, and the blackish primary tips had a series of subterminal white spots or pale inner primary web tongue tips ("string of

pearls”), large subterminal white mirrors in P9 and P10, and a notably wide white trailing edge of the wing (secondaries and inner primaries).

*My photos were all taken at a distance; I failed to take any decent photos when we had the bird at close range. Others’ photos at that close distance may show better detail.

16. Voice: **Not vocal**

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation): A number of other large, white-headed and dark-backed gull species must be considered, but all (as adults) can be eliminated by the *combination* of Slaty-backed Gull’s primary tip pattern (string of pearls), heavy brownish neck streaking, dark feathering around the eye, and pink legs. Lesser Black-backed Gull shares this bird’s brownish neck streaking, but may be easily eliminated by its smaller size and smaller bill (direct comparison), yellow legs, and lack of string of pearls primary pattern. Great Black-backed Gull may be eliminated by it’s larger size (would have appeared much larger than Herring Gull, and, by proxy, Slaty-backed Gull), darker (“black”) mantle and upper wings, larger bill with bulbous tip, and absence of string of pearls primary pattern. Western Gull shares the dark upperparts and pink legs of Slaty-backed Gull, but would lack the heavy brownish streaking on the neck and the dark feathering around the eye, and would lack the “string of pearls” primary pattern. Other large white-headed and dark-backed gull species (e.g., Kelp Gull) and relevant hybrid combinations (e.g., Herring x Lesser Black-backed Gull) would also be eliminated by the combination of size, bill size/structure, neck streaking, leg color, and primary tip pattern seen in Slaty-backed Gull.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? Attached?): Photos by Robert C. Dobbs attached (note: timestamps on photos are advanced one hour; i.e., not adjusted for change from daylight savings to standard time); see also photos by Paul Conover, Dan Lane, and Van Remsen

19. Previous experience with this species: **None**

20. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):

a. at time of observation: **None**

b. after observation: **Howell and Dunn 2007 Gulls of the Americas**

21. This description is written from: notes made during the observation (____notes attached?); ____notes made after the observation (date:____); ____memory; images taken during the observation.

22. Are you positive of your identification if not, explain: Yes

23. Date: wrote 90% of report 12/23/2022; added photos and finished report 2/08/2023 Time: 1400 CST

24. May the LBRC have permission to display this report or portions of this report on its website? Yes If yes, may we include your name with the report? Yes



Slaty-backed Gull in center-right among (mostly) Ring-billed Gulls; compare size, mantle color, and bill size with those of adult Lesser Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull on left side of image.



Slaty-backed Gull with spread wings, reacting to aggressive Herring Gull (to it's left). Also compare with Ring-billed Gull (lower front) and Laughing Gull (far right side of image). Note diagnostic “string of pearls” formed by subterminal white spots on blackish primary tips, and exceptionally broad white trailing edge of wing.



Slaty-backed Gull images showing large bill, dark feathering around eye, streaking on nape, and (upper image) pink legs.



Slaty-backed Gull in flight (when first seen, flying into landfill from adjacent field), showing “string of pearls” and pink legs.