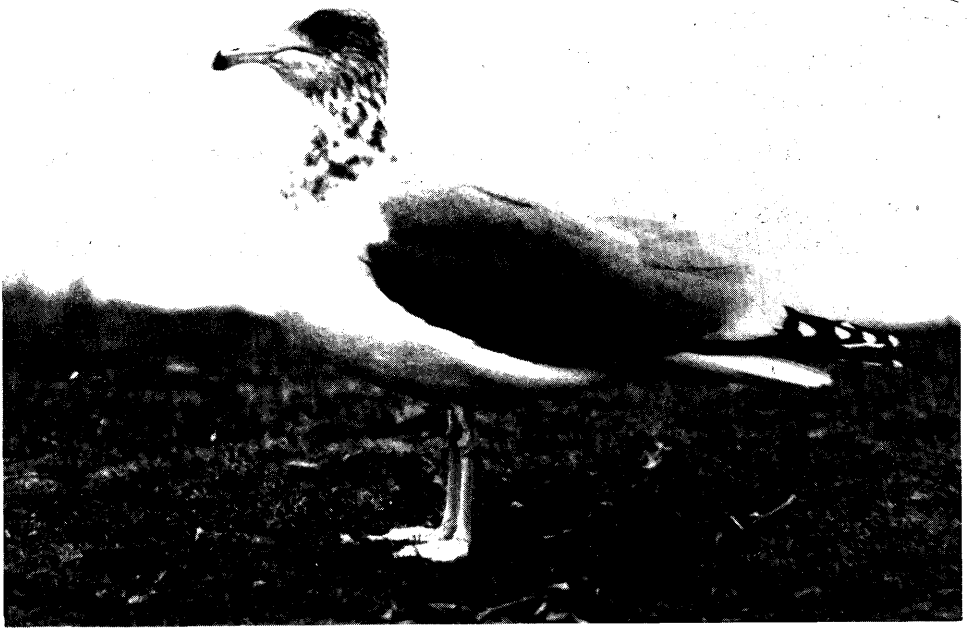




California Gull – Rockland Lake, Rockland Co.
October 1978 *Thomas H. Davis*

PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK STATE RARITIES
37. CALIFORNIA GULL

BERNA B. WEISSMAN



*California Gull – Rockland Lake, Rockland Co.
October 1978* *Harry Darrow*

The California Gull (*Larus californicus*), breeds on the interior northern prairies and Great Basin of North America, and winters mainly along the Pacific coast from southern British Columbia to Guatemala.

Between 1964 and 1978 there were at least eleven reports of this species east of its normal range, in Texas, Missouri, Michigan and Minnesota, with first records for the latter three states. Reports from the East coast, unsubstantiated by specimens or photographs, include an adult in Fairfax Co., Virginia, on February 22, 1967, and another at Brigantine, Atlantic Co., New Jersey, on August 12, 1967.

On April 15, 1978, an adult was photographed at Mullet Key, Pinellas Co., Florida, the first properly documented east coast record.

On October 4, 1978, driven by rain from the Hook Mt. hawk watch, I was sitting in my car at Rockland Lake, Rockland Co., morosely watching the Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) and

assorted waterfowl that had gathered to eye my lunch, when I noticed a gull that was markedly different from the others. An adult bird in basic plumage, it suggested a miniature Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*), with the bulky habitus of that species, although it was only slightly larger than the Ring-bills. The mantle and upper wings were decidedly darker gray than those of the Herring and Ring-billed, although not as dark as on a Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*); the head and neck were heavily streaked with gray-brown and the tail and underparts were white. The legs and feet were chalky green, the eyes dark brown with a dark red orbital ring, and the bill dull yellow, heavier than that of a Ring-billed and with a more pronounced gonydal angle. There was a black spot on the lower mandible at the gonys, with a smaller pale red spot proximally; a small wisp of black extended onto the upper mandible. Sacrificing my cookies to make the bird move, I noted that the wing tips both above and below were extensively black, with white tips on all the primaries and white "mirrors" on the first two. The gape and mouth lining were bright orange.

After studying it for more than 90 minutes, sometimes from as near as ten feet, I was convinced that it was a California Gull, the first recorded in New York State, and repaired to the telephone to summon help. Although it was seen and photographed by a number of people on the 5th and 6th, it was not until October 7 that its identity was confirmed by several observers previously familiar with the species. I need not have worried. Waxing fat on junk-food hand-outs, it remained that year at least until late December.

On October 3, 1979, I found the bird again at the same spot and last saw it that year on November 8. It reappeared on March 26, 1980, now in full breeding plumage with all of the soft parts more intensely colored and the head and neck pure white, and remained for five days.

On June 7 and 8, 1980, another California Gull, with only the molting secondaries showing signs of sub-adult plumage, was found near the Lake Ontario shore in Orleans Co. by Mary Ann Sunderlin, Warren Lloyd and Bob Thomen, and confirmed by Robert Spahn (pers. comm).

On October 3, 1980, the Rockland Lake bird and I kept our rendezvous for the third consecutive year.

I am grateful to Thomas H. Davis, Jr. for contributing information on previous records.

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