

Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* - A New Bird for Kent

David Walker

After days of appalling weather and mainly strong to gale-force south-westerly winds, the wind eventually changed to the south-east on 12th which resulted in a large southerly movement of seabirds off the Point at Dungeness. I was away over the weekend so missed the movement, but the following day I spent the morning of 13th January 2014 in my usual position - sheltering behind a fishing boat.

There was still quite a bit moving, although nothing of note, but enough for me to return for another session in the afternoon.

I returned at about 14:15hrs and had spent 15 minutes checking, amongst other things, through the hundreds of Guillemots (for Brunnich's) floating offshore. There was also a constant passage of gulls close inshore and as I took a rest from 'scoping' I saw a large flock of Black-headed Gulls almost straight out from me.

I almost casually lifted my bins to check them and was somewhat shocked to see a smaller, pale gull with a thin black neck collar in my view. After a brief double-take I realised that I was indeed looking at an adult Ross's Gull, *Rhodostethia rosea*. The bird continued past and was therefore quickly going away from me, which meant no chance of a photograph, but I was able to note most of the salient features. I alerted the locals shortly afterwards, once I could get a phone signal, but the bird was not seen again.

Distance ca.100m, i.e. briefly very close, but then going past and away from me.

Length of observation: ca. 1minute in total, but going away from me after initial observation.

Description:

Seen in direct comparison with Black-headed Gulls and Kittiwakes,

Size and shape:

Clearly smaller than the two species it was with, but larger than a Little Gull. The overall shape was quite distinct with a barrel shaped body, proportionately long wings, a long, full and wedge-shaped tail, and a rounded head with a short, dumpy black bill.

Plumage:

Basically it was a very pale looking small gull. Mantle and uppersurfaces of wings light grey, similar in shade to a Mediterranean Gull, and slightly paler than a Little Gull, and with a distinct pure white wedge formed by the secondaries and inner primaries. Outer primaries uniformly grey, i.e. not tipped or fringed with white as in Little Gull.

The underwing was not really determined as I was looking down on the bird, but certainly not black or dark grey. The head was white, but with a small blackish smudge around the eye, a light dove-grey shawl, a small, ill-defined black spot within it and most distinctive of all, a very narrow black neck-ring (collar).

The remainder of the body and tail were white.

Behaviour:

Flight action was not noticeably different to Little Gull under the conditions at the time.

The record was submitted to BBRC and accepted by them. This is the first Kent record.