

## Black-headed Gull at Lake Springfield

On March 23, 2017 I was watching 100–200 Bonaparte's Gulls flying over cormorants and Red-breasted Mergansers from the Lincoln Greens Golf Course looking west toward the opening of the Warm-Water Ditch. It was windy and there were bouts of drizzle. After a while, I spotted a possible Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*). I had been searching for this gull for 47 years and this would make my 18<sup>th</sup> species of gull for Sangamon County. The gull I saw about 0900h was larger than the Bonnies and had dark under primaries with a small light area near the tip. The head appeared black, and very few Bonnies had the complete black head as yet. The flight was slower, more deliberate, and not as tern-like as the many Bonnies present. I lost sight of the bird, but refound it about a half hour later – again it was flying. I could see the white slash on the upper wing, which seemed slightly narrower than on the Bonnies. The tail and underparts were white. The mantle color was lighter than nearby Bonnies. The bill color was still not determined and I lost the bird again, when it again flew behind a tree. This time I could not find it for a long while and I even drove around the Lake, but the houses made it difficult to see on the west side. I went back to the golf course and started checking not only the flying gulls, but the distant sitting gulls also. I finally noted one with a lighter mantle and a dark head. I brought up the power to 70X, the head now looked dark brown – not black, and there were white eye-arcs. It was one of a very few smaller gulls that appeared to be in alternate plumage (they acquire it earlier than Bonnies). The primaries at rest looked all black with no white. Still the bill looked concolorous with the dark head, but when the gull put the bill against its white breast I could see red color (the bill is apparently more obviously red in the more white plumaged basic birds). I did not see the leg color. Finally, at about 1300h, I was satisfied this was a Black-headed Gull and took some nearly useless distant photos. The bird flew in fairly close and did a nice bank showing its dark under wings, but my camera failed to lock on. This is the first record of this species for Sangamon County. The weather probably put the gull down at Lake Springfield. After putting the sighting on IBET, several other observers saw and photographed this bird. It was not seen the next day.

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