

# IVORY GULL IN REGINA

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The Ivory Gull is the quintessential arctic bird, mainly remaining in the circum-polar high latitudes all year. Tuck notes that its breeding grounds are arctic islands and coasts.<sup>5</sup> Godfrey describes its Canadian summer habitat as arctic coasts and islands, permanent ice and open water, while it winters over arctic ice south to the arctic coasts, Labrador, pack ice off Newfoundland, and usually further south to the New England coast. It is rare elsewhere in Canada.<sup>1</sup> Peters and Burleigh inform us that the birds vary their marine food fare with krill, lemmings and other small rodents.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the Ivory Gull is a most improbable avian visitor to Regina but on 4 September 1989, a beautiful sunny day, while John Nelson and I were enjoying coffee on the deck of the Marina Cafe in Cascadia Park, we saw one. I was seated at a table in the shade of a poplar tree, facing north towards the cafe and John sat opposite. It was about 10:15 a.m. As I glanced upward a small white bird came sailing into view over the cafe, too high (about 10 m), and planed southwards, hardly moving its wings, until it passed from view behind the trees in my rear. I drew John's attention to the bird, which he saw from a different perspective. I was looking upward at an angle of about 45°.

What I saw was a small gull, about Franklin's Gull size, 35 to 40 cm long. Its upperparts were all white. It had no trace of a band on the end of its straight ended tail nor any black on the wings or head, and its bill was dark basally with yellow towards the tip. Just before it was lost to view I could see that its upper parts were all white. I did not notice the colour of



*Ivory Gull*

the legs. John's view, being more restricted, confirmed the white underparts and the straight-ended tail. There is only one gull that matches that description — an adult Ivory Gull.

While an Ivory Gull in Regina is almost incredible there are some records that confirm its occurrence far inland. Gollop reports an Ivory Gull northeast of Calgary on 17 May 1987;<sup>2</sup> Lahrman cites Fred G. Bard's sighting of five Ivory Gulls on Nemeiben Lake (near La Ronge, Sask.) on 16 September 1976.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>GODFREY, W. E. 1986. The birds of Canada. National Mus. of Canada, Ottawa. 595 pp.

<sup>2</sup>GOLLOP, J. B. 1987. The spring migration, March 1-May 31, 1987. Prairie provinces region. *Amer. Birds* 41:448-450.

<sup>3</sup>LAHRMAN, F. W. 1977. Ivory Gulls at Nemeiben Lake. *Blue Jay* 35:49.

<sup>4</sup>PETERS, H. S. and T. D. BURLEIGH. 1951. The birds of Newfoundland. Dept. of Natural Resources, Prov. of Newfoundland, St. John's. 431 pp.

<sup>5</sup>TUCK, G. S. 1978. A field guide to the seabirds of Britain and the world. William Collins, London. 292 pp.