

# LITTLE GULL SIGHTED AT BUFFALO LAKE, ALBERTA

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On 25 May 1992, I observed a Little Gull flying along a peninsula at Buffalo Lake in central Alberta. I estimate I had seen over 800 Franklin's Gulls in the peninsula area, when I heard a strange call above me. I looked up and saw an unfamiliar gull which was smaller than and different in plumage from the Franklin's. As the adult gull flew eastward along the peninsula, I noted it had a black head, red legs, white abdomen, black underwings and gray-white upper wings. I saw no black markings on the upper wing. The gull soon landed on the peninsula where I briefly observed it through a 15-45x spotting scope. I noted that the black on the head extended down to its nape and its bill was black or black-red. I later consulted a field guide and concluded my observations matched no other gull than the Little Gull. Unfortunately, I cannot verify this sighting with a photograph.

The Little Gull, a Eurasian species, was first documented breeding in North America (in southern Ontario) during 1962.<sup>4</sup> It has since been found breeding in northern Ontario, Quebec, northern Manitoba, Wisconsin, Michigan<sup>4</sup> and Minnesota.<sup>9</sup> In Alberta, the Little Gull is considered to be a vagrant or wanderer.<sup>3</sup> The bird I observed at Buffalo Lake is Alberta's seventh known Little Gull. The first confirmed record was of two individuals at Namaka Lake in 1985.<sup>5,8</sup> Sightings of a single bird at Namaka Lake two days after the initial sighting and of two birds at nearby Eagle Lake a week later (J.B. Steeves pers. comm.) were probably the same birds. Another Little Gull was seen at Namaka Lake in 1988.<sup>1</sup> Single individuals were also seen at Beaverhill Lake (1986),<sup>6</sup> near Cooking Lake (1988)<sup>10,11</sup> and the Glenmore Reservoir in Calgary (1991).<sup>2,7</sup>

The Little Gull seen at Buffalo Lake is of interest not only as a first sight record for this lake but also because it appeared in southern parts of the Prairie Provinces. The Little Gull occurs less frequently in spring than in fall.<sup>10</sup>

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