

**SPECIES OF THE MONTH****LITTLE GULL****MAY 2024**

A Little Gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*), observed at Cochise Lake in Willcox, Cochise County, 6 to 8 February 2024, will be the third record for Arizona if accepted by the Arizona Bird Committee. The previous records were from the Lake Havasu area, Mohave County, in September 2010 and 2011. The smallest gull in the world, the Little Gull breeds primarily in northern Eurasia, with rare, irregular, or past nesting records around the Hudson Bay and the Great Lakes in North America. It is a rare migrant along the North American coasts and the Great Lakes and casual to very rare elsewhere in the United States.

The Willcox gull was a first-winter bird. It had a gray mantle, white base to the tail contrasting with a black terminal band, a pale head with a grayish wash over the nape with a smudgy cap, a small dark post ocular spot, and a slender straight black bill. Unlike the similar, but larger, Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus philadelphia*), with which it often associates, immature Little Gulls have dark caps, a thick black carpal bar, and extensive black to the leading edge of the primaries with the wing tips coming to a somewhat fine point. A dark bar across the secondaries rules out Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) and Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*). The immature Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*) is also small and similar in appearance. However, it lacks a dark cap and the large white wedge on the upper wing extends almost to the outer wing tip. Ross's Gull has yet to be reported in Arizona, although one was at the Salton Sea in California in 2006.



7 February 2024. Photos by Chris Benesh