

Utah Rare Bird Report

Species: **MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD** (*Fregata magnificens*)

Number: One juvenile (probably first stage)

Date(s): 31 May 1999

Location: Minersville Reservoir, Beaver Co., Utah

Time-length-distance: mid-morning from close range (200ft.) to far for about 10 mins.

Observers: Steve and Priscilla Summers, 2146 N. Chandler Dr, Cedar City, Utah 84720.

Photos: Video taken by Priscilla. Photos on this report captured from that video.



Description: A large long and slender winged bird with a long forked tail. Seen flying and being harassed by California Gulls which this bird dwarfed. Upper-parts very dark looking, black at the distance we observed the bird. In good light a light area could be seen on the upper-wing which I couldn't be sure of its location. The under-wings were entirely dark. Head wholly white. Tail blackish. Bill pale bluish-gray. Under-parts: Flanks, sides of breast and vent area black. Belly up through throat white and continuous with the white head. The black of the upper breast extended into the white breast in a wedge shaped pattern making the shape of the white belly a diamond or triangular shape. In some flight positions the side of the white belly came to a point as in the photo below.



Elimination of Similar Species: Frigatebirds are unique and distinctive making them easy to identify as frigatebirds. In all probability any Frigatebird which should happen to show up in Utah would be a Magnificent. However there are two records of Great Frigatebird (*Fregata minor*) for the U.S. from Oklahoma and California so that species needs to be considered here. According to Harrison in *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*, 1983 Magnificent Frigatebird juveniles in first stage plumage have the dark wedge-shaped spurs on the sides of the breast whereas Great Frigatebirds do not. It isn't until the second stage that the juveniles of both species have similar shaped breast and belly patterns. Since this bird does have those dark extensions Great Frigatebird can be ruled out. Other juvenile frigatebirds lack the entire white head having some sort of color or spotting that would be seen at the distances we saw the bird.



Other details of observation: This bird was first reported on 26 May. I don't know exactly how long after that it stayed but I don't think it was more than a week after our sighting. We watched the bird fly back and forth about three times along the wooded (willows and cottonwoods) section of the reservoir. Apparently it would perch out of view from shore on the water side of this wooded section. The water level of the reservoir was very high with many of the trees flooded. As it flew by it was often harassed by the numerous gulls in the area. At one point it swooped down and picked a fish out of the reservoir (see picture below). It was immediately "ganged" up on by the gulls and lost the fish.

