

RARE BIRD DOCUMENTATION

Species: Thayer's Gull, Larus thayeri, first-winter immature

Date: 13 November 1993

Time: 10:15-10:40 a.m.

Location: Lake Red Rock dam, Marion County, Iowa

Description: Jim Fuller was immediately struck by the paleness of this gull as it flew in and landed on a sandbar in the Des Moines River downstream from the dam. As it was sailing in, I also noticed the pale "translucent" primaries all the way to their tips, above and below. There was no black anywhere on the wings. The inner primaries were especially pale, forming an even paler "window" in the upper wing between the browner outer primaries and secondaries. The tail was similarly brown, not black, unpatterned, and darker than the remainder of the upperparts.

It landed beside two first-winter Herring Gulls with which it was compared. The Thayer's was very slightly smaller. Its bill was similar in size and shape, and all-black. The eye was dark. There appeared to be a dark smudge around the eye at some angles, but not at others. Overall its plumage was mottled grayish-buff, similar to the Herrings' but distinctly paler. The head and neck region was somewhat whiter than the rest, like the Herrings'. The mantle was also mottled pale grayish-buff in what could be described as a checkered pattern. I thought the Herrings' also showed a checkered pattern, though much darker. Distinct grayish-buff barring was present on the under- and uppertail coverts.

The folded primaries were medium brown with bold buff crescents around the tip of each. The folded tertials were also solid brownish, patterned at the edges, but the brown was a shade paler than the folded primaries. Both folded primaries and tertials were darker than the remainder of the upperparts.

Throughout most of the observation, the Thayer's Gull rested on the sand with its feet concealed. At one point it got up, walked over and displaced one of the Herring Gulls by pecking it on the head, then sat back down to rest.

Conditions: Overcast, cold north wind; observed at approx. 50 meters with Zeiss 10x40 binocular and Bausch and Lomb 30x telescope.

Similar Species: Compared with first-winter Herring Gull above. Pale Thayer's may be confused with same-aged Iceland Gull, but Iceland typically much paler than this individual. Iceland should also show pale, mottled tertials and tail which are concolor with the upperparts. This bird's tertials and tail were unpatterned (except at the edges of the tertials) and darker than the remainder of the upperparts. Iceland's folded primaries are paler than the remainder of the mantle, not darker as in this bird. Slaty-backed, Glaucous-winged, and Glaucous-winged X Western hybrid Gulls all larger, have more massive bills, less likely in Iowa.

(over)

Previous Experience: One previous sighting of Thayer's Gull in November 1980 near Flagstaff, Arizona.

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Principle reference: Advanced Birding by Kenn Kaufman

Tom,
Thayer's and "Kumlien's" Iceland Gulls
may be, may already be, lumped but I
haven't seen anything official yet.
For now I'm counting it as a species.

Randy

Condition: Overcast, cold north wind; observed at approx. 20 meters with
later 10x40 binocular and Sanyo and Lomb 30x telescope.
Similar Species: Compared with first-winter Herring Gull above, this
Thayer's may be confused with same-aged Iceland Gull, but Iceland
typically much paler than this individual. Iceland should also show
pale, mottled tailfeathers and tail which are conspicuously with the upperparts.
This bird's tailfeathers and tail were unpigmented (except at the edges of
the tailfeathers) and darker than the remainder of the upperparts. Iceland's
tailfeathers are paler than the remainder of the mantle, not darker
as in this bird. Black-backed, Glaucous-winged, and Glaucous-winged X
Glaucous-winged Gulls all larger, have more massive bills, less likely in
Iowa.