

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE SPECIES
IOWA CITY CBC

Species: Thayer's Gull, first-winter

Date: December 19, 1993

Time: 10:45-11:15 a.m.

Location: Coralville Reservoir ($\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ mile southeast of Jolly Roger Marina), Johnson County, Iowa

Description: Pale brown gull near size of Herring Gulls, perhaps very slightly smaller. Observed sitting on the water and aggressively chasing close behind a Herring Gull. Entire plumage cafe au lait in color, distinctly paler and browner than nearby first-winter Herrings'. The Herrings' also displayed whiter foreparts typical of that species. By contrast, the head, neck, and chest of the Thayer's were concolor with the remainder of the body. It did not appear to have a dark smudge around the eye. The bill was all-black, and similar to the Herrings' in size and shape. Seen in flight, the entire underparts were the same mottled pale brown color, especially the underwing which was "translucent" except for slightly browner primary tips with backlighting. Without backlighting, the primaries were entirely pale grayish-brown. The upperwing was the same pale brown with slightly darker secondary bar and outer primaries. The folded primaries collectively were medium brown, slightly darker than the folded tertials, which were slightly darker than the mottled pale brown upperparts. The tertials appeared solid in color. Several first-winter Herrings' floating nearby showed black folded primaries and tertials. The tail in flight had a broad, pale, solid brownish band. The legs flashed pink in flight.

Conditions: Cloudy, calm. Observed from 50-100 meters with Zeiss 10x40 binocular.

Similar Species: Contrasted with first-winter Herring Gull above. First-winter Iceland typically much paler, especially the uppersurface of the primaries which are paler than the rest of the mantle, and Iceland should show mottling in the tertials and tail band. I suppose I cannot exclude a heavily-pigmented "Kumlien's" Gull or an Iceland-Thayer's intergrade as described in Kevin Zimmer's Birding article. Both species are apparently highly variable.

Previous Experience: I saw a first-winter Thayer's Gull at the Red Rock dam last month. Both birds displayed the key diagnostic marks of this variable species but this December bird was much paler overall. I have seen first-winter Iceland Gulls in Iowa the last two winters.

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