

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Thayer's Gull; Number: 1 first-winter

Location: Iowa City, Johnson Co., Iowa.

Date: 19 January 1993; Time: 11:40 to 11:50 a.m.

Name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

Others before/with/after: seen by Jim Fuller on 17, 18 January

Habitat and circumstances: partially open Iowa River

Description of bird: I picked the bird out as it was standing on the ice with many Herring Gulls because of its overall light tan coloration and slightly smaller size than the Herring Gulls. The first-winter Iceland Gull that I had seen two days before was about 10 feet away from this bird. The Thayer's Gull was smaller than any Herring and had a smaller head (about 10%). It was the same size as the Iceland; the head was the same size also, but the forehead was flatter than the Iceland's. The bird was overall uniform light tan, definitely lighter than any of the several first-year Herrings that were present nearby and darker than the whitish appearing Iceland Gull. The bird appeared to have very fine markings. The bill was black, shorter than the Herring's bills and less bulbous. The eye was dark with a smudge through and behind the eye. The primaries on the standing bird were dark brown and the tertials were slightly darker than the rest of the bird. The legs were pink. I walked closer to the river bank and many of the gulls flew. The Thayer's had a rather uniform upper wing surface with the outer 3 or 4 primaries dark brown (not black) and lighter inner primaries. I did not detect a secondary bar, but I could have missed this. The underwing had translucent whitish flight feathers including all of the primaries and slight darker and more opaque coverts. The tail had a medium brown subterminal band occupying about half of the tail. The wing span was definitely shorter than Herring Gulls. I watched the bird from take off as it flew down stream and circled high off to the west.

Voice: Not heard.

Similar species: I distinguished this bird from Herring Gull based on smaller body size, smaller head and bill, shorter wing span, uniform light tan coloration, medium brown (not black) outer primaries, translucent primaries from below, and medium brown tail band. I distinguished it from Iceland Gull by the brown outer primaries, relatively more tan coloration, and medium brown tail band.

Any one have reservations?: No.

Light: Sunny with side lighting, variable back to side lighting when in flight;

Distance: 50 to 100 yards (est); Optics: 10x binocular.

Previous experience: Have seen about 10 in Iowa.

References before/after viewing: none.

Time of notes: none; Final typing: 1.5 hours.