

Thayer's Gull  
29 Oct 1989  
IPL Ponds, Pottawattamie Co., IA  
A. Grenon, B. Padelford, Silcock  
through 11/5; IBL 60:15, 61:85

Record Number: 89-41  
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Alan G. Grenon, 29, 30 Oct  
Babs Padelford, 30 Oct  
Ross Silcock, 5 Nov

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:15  
Records Committee: IBL 61:85

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D: Excellent details.

A-D: Excellently described. Relative size overall and relative size and shape of bill help to separate from Herrings (along with wing patterns). Presence of noticeable browner band on terminal 1/3 of tail eliminates Iceland.

A-D: Excellent, convincing descriptions by Padelford, Grenon. I'm not sure whether Ross saw a different bird or just had distant views.

A-D: Good detailed description of the folded-wing suggests Thayer's. Although missed by two Silcock noted the whitish underwing primaries. The only non-supporting remark was that the bill appeared "long and slender". Thayer's should have relatively short bill compared to head size and to Herring Gull. Also no good size comparison to Herring Gull was available.

A-D: Grenon and Padelford descriptions adequate for this species while eliminating other possibilities. Flight descriptions with a little darker brown (not blackish) on upper secondaries and leading primaries along with unmarked very pale underwings indicates Thayer's Gull.

A-D: Good details and consideration of different gull species.

A-D: Based on Grenon and Padelford descriptions - I believe enough wing patterning (dark outer primaries with inner window) seen to eliminate Iceland, which would be most likely alternative.

## UNUSUAL SPECIES DOCUMENTATION

Thayer's Gull, Larus thayeri one in first winter plumage

29-30 October, 1989; 9:30 a. m. on the 29th, 11:30 a. m. to 12:15 p. m. and 2 p. m. on the 30th

Iowa, Pottawattamie County, south of Council Bluffs, the north pond of the Iowa Power and Light plant's ponds, two miles north of the county line (three miles north of the Bellevue exit on I-29), just east of Interstate highway 29.

sky mostly overcast both days, north winds and moments of sunlight on the 30th, 40's-50's (F.), bird to the south-southwest on the 29th, to the east on the 30th, sun to the south when sunlit on the 30th, giving diffuse to side-lit conditions.

optics used (by me; Babs also had binoculars and a spotting scope) were 7X35 binoculars and a 22X60 scope. On the 30th, we had a copy of Gulls, P. J. Grant, second edition, which we used during our observations.

I took notes during the observations on both days, but had closer and longer views on the 30th. The following is taken from those notes.

The bird rested on the water among and near the groups of hundreds to 1,000 Double-crested Cormorants, flew low over the water, and joined short-lived feeding flocks of Ring-billed Gulls, though no feeding was observed. This gull dominated the Ring-billed Gulls in interactions in flight, sometimes opening its bill as if calling, but no calls could be distinguished. It also rested for short periods on shore near the cormorants.

On the 29th: at 9:30 I noticed one immature gull larger than the Ring-billed Gulls next to it on the water and in flight. It was tan/light brown all over, the bill all dark, and thin, proportionately similar to the Ring-billed Gulls. At rest, the wing tips were darker than the rest of the plumage. In flight, the tail showed an area of light tan similar to the back and body, slightly darker than the rump or base of tail. In flight, the flight feathers seemed tan, similar to the rest of the upper parts. No particular wing pattern could be observed during the short flight observations. I relocated the bird several times during a 5 minute period, but then could not find it again during about 20 minutes of searching. At that time, I wrote, in order of what I considered its probable identity, "Thayer's/Iceland/Herring?"

At 11:30 on the 30th, upon reaching an area of the pond not yet searched that day, I quickly found the bird again. Babs Padelford was present, and we spent the next 45 minutes closely examining the bird at an estimated distance of 200 feet. The bill was all dark, and thin, matching my memories of Iceland

Gulls and Thayer's Gulls (the latter in California), the head and bill together appearing delicate (proportionately small). The feathers at the base of the bill were pale, perhaps causing the occasional impression of a pale area at the very base of the upper bill. The bird was light tan overall, w/ tan patterning on the back (upper parts). Wings: the primaries were darker than the body when at rest, still brown-tan, not black. In moments of full sunlight, the primaries had very thin pale tips, sometimes looking like a row of dots on the folded wing-tip. A slightly darker tan band (secondary bar?) could be seen on the side/back in front of the folded primaries. In flight, the underwings were pale tan, unmarked as far as I could see. Above, the wings were pale tan, with darker tan-brown outer primaries and the same color secondaries, contrasting slightly with the rest of the upperwing, including the light area in the inner primaries and outermost secondaries. The tail was mostly covered above (1/2 to 2/3) by a brown-tan wide "bar," contrasting slightly with the paler rump, back, and perhaps base of tail. There may have been a thin light terminal area. There were perhaps darker feathers on the face around and below the eye, but when the bird looked up into the light, this area was not noticeable, and so may have been only shadow. The legs were pale pink; the eye appeared dark. [We saw the bird again briefly when we looked at 2.]

My field sketches of wing and tail are too faint to copy well.

The most likely similar species are Iceland and Herring Gulls.

Iceland Gull (first winter) is eliminated by the combination of the following characters: wing-tip darker than body at rest; wing-tip and secondaries darker above than remainder of wing; tail marked above by a darker band covering most of the distal portion; a possible darker area around the eye.

Herring Gull (first winter) is eliminated by the combination of the following characters: wing-tip at rest brown-tan, not black; wing-tip and secondary bar tan in flight, not black; primaries with thin, pale tips; tail bar tan, not black; bill all dark; bill and head delicate; bill thin.

Glaucous Gull would have been larger relative to Ring-billed Gulls, with a massive bill light with a dark tip, large head, and wing-tips and secondaries would not have been darker than other upper parts.

California Gull (first winter) would have black or near-black primaries, secondaries, tail, and a mostly pale bill with a black tip. Glaucous-winged Gull and hybrids thereof eliminated by bill and head structure and body size all smaller/finer in this bird, tail and wing pattern. *AG*.

This analysis prepared 1 November, 1989.

I have considerable experience with all gulls mentioned except Iceland, of which I have seen several adults on the east coast, and Thayer's, of which I have seen two adults on the west coast.

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*Alan G. Grenon*

Babs Padelord  
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Documentation for Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*)

Location: Pottawattamie Co., Iowa Power & Light north settling pond.

Date & Time of Sighting: October 30, 1989; 11:30 - 12:15

Number Seen: one

Description of Bird: A tan colored gull, larger than Ring-billed Gulls present for direct comparison. Head, neck and breast were a warm tan color. There was a darker, smudgy area around the eye. Eye was dark. Bill was all dark, long and slender. It was larger than the bills of the Ring-billed Gulls, but did not appear to be bulbous or thickened on the tip as a Herring Gull's would be. There was light cream to buff feathering at the base of the bill. At rest, the background color of the wings was lighter than the neck and head, but had brownish speckling. In flight, the wings had dark gray outer primaries and the inner primaries were lighter. A thin, brown secondary bar was seen. The inner wing was a uniform tan except for the brown secondary bar. At rest, when folded thin whitish V's could be seen on the tips of the primaries. In flight, the underwings were pale. The tail was tan with a distinct brown band (approximately one-third length of the tail) on the tip. Legs were pink. The bird could easily be picked out of the flock of Ring-billed Gulls by its larger size and over-all uniform light tan appearance. This bird was determined to be a first-winter bird. → upper

Elimination of Similar Species: First-winter Iceland Gull was eliminated because of the dark primaries and the distinct brown tail band. First winter Herring Gull was eliminated by the more uniform overall lighter, tan appearance of the bird, less dark feathering in primaries, and the more delicate bill size.

Distance from Bird: approximately 200 feet at closest point.

Habitat Used: The bird was sitting on the water near the southwest shore with other gulls and Double-crested Cormorants. At times it would fly for short periods with the Ring-billed Gulls. Also used the shoreline to sit with other gulls and cormorants.

Behavior: The bird was active and did not remain in any area for more than a couple of minutes. Frequently it flew with the other gulls, usually when a cormorant would go into the

water presumably to feed. However, we did not see any of the cormorants or gulls catch any fish.

Light conditions: Mostly cloudy and overcast.

Optical equipment: Bushnell spotting scope - 25X

Experience with Species: None.

References Used: National Geographic, Birds of North America, 1st edition and Gulls, A guide to Identification, P.J. Grant used during observation.

Other observer: Alan Grenon. He also observed the bird on 10/29.

This report prepared from field notes taken with the bird in view.

October 31, 1989

Babs Padelgerd

**DOCUMENTATION FORM**  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

89-41

What species? THAYER'S GULL / ICELAND GULL How many? 1  
 Location? JPL NORTH POND, POTTAWATTAMIE CO., IA  
 Type of Habitat? ARTIFICIAL FRESH WATER IMPOUNDMENT  
 When? date(s): NOV 5, 1989 time: 12<sup>15</sup> to 12<sup>45</sup> (EST)  
 Who? your name and address: RESS SILCOCK  
 Others with you: B. J. ROSE, DAVE ROSE, 4 OTHERS (NAMES NOT KNOWN) FROM CEDAR RAPIDS?  
 Others before or after you: ? PAPERFOLDS HAD REPORTED A THAYER'S A WEEK  
BEFOREHAND

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

VERY PALE GULL (OFF WHITE TO CREAMY BUFF); ABOUT HEARLING GULL SIZE (A FIRST YEAR HEARLING GULL WAS IN THE VICINITY, ALONG WITH SEVERAL RING-BILLS WHICH WERE CLEARLY SMALLER, AND A 1ST WINTER GLAUCOUS WHICH APPEARED SIGNIFICANTLY LARGER WHEN SWIMMING NEAR THIS BIRD. BILL ALL DARK, FLEW BRIEFLY FROM WATER TO PERCH ON BANK WITH CA. 50 CORMORANTS. IN FLIGHT BIRD APPEARED UNIFORMLY PALE WITH VERY OBVIOUS WHITISH UNDERPRIMARIES. NO COLORATION (i.e. DARK GREY OR BLACK) ~~WAS~~ WAS DISCERNED IN PRIMARIES OR TAIL, ALTHOUGH DISTANCE MAY HAVE PRECLUDED SEEING ANY ~~BE~~ GREYISH OR PALE COLORATION. NO OTHER DETAILS COULD BE DISCERNED.

Similar species; how eliminated:

GLAUCOUS - SIZE COMPARISON (SEE ABOVE)

RING BILLED - " "

HEARLING GULL - BIRD WAS VERY PALE, TENDING TO ELIMINATE 1ST WINTER, 2ND WINTER NO MANTLE / BODY CONTRAST SEEN, ELIMINATING OLDER AGE CLASSES. COLORATION WAS UNIFORMLY PALE CREAMY TO V. LIGHT BUFF.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? NO ~~THOUGHT~~ THAYER'S POSSIBLE.  
 If yes, explain: DISTANCE WAS GREAT, AND ACCESS TO AREA IS CLOSED, SO COULDN'T GET CLOSER.

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.  
GOOD - WINDY, BUT LIGHT GOOD. BALSCOPE SR 25X SCOPE/TRIPOD.  
EST. DISTANCE 350 YARDS. (WE WERE AT NORTH END OF POND AND GULL WAS JUST NORTH OF WATER OUTLET ON A POINT OF LAND WHERE TRUCKS DUMP)

Previous experience with species and similar ones: HAVE SEEN A FEW THAYER'S IN IOWA, ALSO SEVERAL GLAUCOUS + MANY IMM. HEARLINGS.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

NONE

How long before field notes made? SAME EVENING this form completed? 1 WEEK

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).