

Iceland Gull

2nd yr

Record Number: 92-04

4 Jan 1992

Classification: A-P

Lock and Dam 14, Bettendorf, Scott Co., IA

\*Kent, \*Petersen

IBL 62:55, 63:69, Kent, 1992, P-0325

#### DOCUMENTATIONS

Thomas H. Kent, 4 Jan, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

Peter C. Petersen, 2-3 Feb, 235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport, IA  
52803

#### PHOTOGRAPH

T. H. Kent, 4 Jan, P-0325

#### REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 62:55

Kent, T. H. 1992. Iceland Gulls in Iowa. IBL 62:95-98.

Records Committee: IBL 63:69

VOTE: 1 A-P, 3 A-D, 2 A-D and A-D, 1 A-D and NA; 2 thought the birds were the same, 3 thought they were different, 1 was unsure, and 1 had no comment.

A-D, same bird.

A-D, 2 year.

A-D, Kent. It would be helpful to have had two separate documentation. NA, Petersen. Adult Thayer's Gull, which had been present in about the same location, was not considered, and was not eliminated. There was no discussion of the wingtips, a key consideration. I couldn't tell from the description whether the bird was completely white, including the wingtips, or whether the wingtips were simply not considered or not well seen. I don't understand the assignment of number here. 92-04 (2nd winter) was obviously a different bird than Pete's adult, also assigned 92-04. It seems to me that Pete's should have been assigned 92-05.

A-D, I am voting A-D second/year Iceland Gull and A-D adult Iceland Gull. I think 92-04 is two different birds. The black tipped bill with a pink base is describing a second/year Iceland Gull, while the yellow bill with a red area would be an adult Iceland Gull.

A-P, The age of the bird described by Petersen depends on what he means by mantle. If back and scapulars, then this is a 2nd year gull. All yellow bill hard to interpret.

A-D, 1 bird. Excellent description of 2nd year bird. Petersen description describes 2nd yr bird better than it does an adult, except yellow bill, and is consistent with the other (Kent) documentation.

A-D on Kent's 2nd winter bird. A-D on Petersen's adult bird. Good details and comparison provided for Tom Kent's 2nd winter Iceland Gull. On the adult Iceland Gull I wish more details had been provided, but the details provided point to an adult Iceland Gull.

REVOTE: 5 A-P, 2 A-D

A small image (the arrow helps) but white primaries, grayish back, size comparison with nearby Herring Gulls (smaller size and much smaller bill), and longish wings support identification of

second-winter Iceland Gull.

A-P, While this is a distant photo of the subject, I feel it is diagnostic for Iceland. It appears too pale for Thayer's, and too small for Glaucous, based on comparison with nearby gulls.

A-D, I cannot determine the age (2nd year or adult) of this bird from the two photos. However, Kent saw the photographed bird at 40 yds, and described a light based dark tipped bill and visible subterminal band. I am voting AD 2nd yr Iceland Gull based on this.

A-P, Size, white primaries, gray mantle provide identification and age.

A-P, NA on the Petersen documentation. 1/4/92. The photos are from a distance but show the light gray back and some buffy color in the wings and belly area, tail appears light buff color also. I agree with the third reviewer on 92-04 first round that Thayer's Gull not eliminated as a possibility and in fact was not mentioned as a possibility at all in the Petersen documentation. This appears to be a separate individual from Kent's 2nd year bird but leaves out too much detail to say whether it was an Iceland or a Thayer's Gull.

A-D, The bird is too far away for me to see the necessary details well.

REVOTE: 6 A-P, 1 A-D

A-P Iceland Gull, A-D 2nd yr Iceland Gull. I cannot determine the age (2nd yr or adult) of this bird from the two photos. The size, small bill, and all shiny white primaries supports Iceland Gull. The all white primaries seems to me to eliminate any age of Thayer's Gull. However, Kent saw the photographed bird at 40yds, and described a light based dark tipped bill and visible subterminal tail band. I am voting AD 2nd yr Iceland Gull based on this.

A-D, The comments of the reviewers on the second round were evaluated and considered. The photos are just too distant and vague for me to consider voting this record A-P. I feel an A-D vote on this record is the best category for me and is a fine category for this record.







photographs were reviewed by Kevin J. Zimmer, the author of a recent article on Iceland Gull with many excellent photographs (Zimmer 1991), who provided explanations for some of the troublesome features. He noted that head shape depended on posture (Figure 1a vs. 1b), and in some photos the shape was within the range of Iceland Gull. He also pointed out, "The individual variation in incredible, and I've seen many an unquestioned Iceland Gull (presumably males) that were as flat-crowned and large-billed as adjacent Herrings, while others look more like doves." Zimmer suggested that the white appearance of the upper body and neck were due to molting of these feathers to first-summer plumage. The tail band was not a problem at all, because Zimmer's article illustrates that many Iceland Gulls have a light tail band. According to Zimmer, "Points against Thayer's Gull include overall paleness, whiteness of the folded primaries, uniform checkering of the tertials [solid brown in Thayer's], absence of secondary bar, paleness of spread wing tip, and amount of contrast at the base of the bill." A leucistic Herring Gull would be expected to have some features other than the white head and neck to suggest that species. To identify a hybrid, one would have to find features of each parent -- a difficult task. The proposed lumping of Iceland and Thayer's gulls into one species would make the possibility of Iceland-Thayer's hybrid moot.

In the next three paragraphs, I describe three different Iceland Gulls, two in first-winter and one in second-winter plumages. Presumably these were the same birds seen by many observers in Bettendorf and Davenport in January and early February 1992.

On 31 December 1991, I went to Lock and Dam 14 in Scott County in an attempt to add some species to my last-day-of-the-year list. From the lock area, I found a very pale gull flying below the dam. On the flying bird, I noted the following: slightly smaller than Herring Gulls; overall off-white on the wings, body, and tail; light brown, poorly demarcated, subterminal tail band about one-fourth the length of the tail; and all-dark bill. The tail band was similar to that on the Iceland Gull photographed in Scott County on 8 February by Tim Schantz (Figure 2). The underwing was all light, with the flight feathers lighter than the coverts. The upper wing was very uniform and without a hint of a secondary bar. I concluded that it was a first-winter bird because of the uniform coloration without gray on the back or wings and that it was not a Glaucous Gull because of the overall size and all black bill. I was less secure in excluding Thayer's Gull because of the tail band and slight brownish edge to the upper side of the outer two or three primaries that I detected using a telescope. Eventually the bird landed on a pillar and later a Herring Gull landed beside it. Compared to the Herring, the bird was 10% smaller; had a smaller, more rounded head with shorter neck; had a bill three-fourths as long; and had a primary extension of about 1 inch and equal to that of the Herring Gull. On the standing bird, the primaries were light colored and the wing and tail coverts appeared finely vermiculated. Based on the wing tip and faintness of the tail band, I argued against Thayer's Gull. Shortly thereafter, at Lock and Dam 15, I viewed a first-winter Thayer's Gull that was quite different in that it was overall darker, had dark wing tips, and had a much darker and more prominent tail band. I saw the Iceland Gull again on 1 January 1992, still flying below the dam, and it was seen the next day by Jim Fuller, who said that it was easy to pick out because of its "ghostly" appearance. Neither of us saw the leg color well. The eye was dark.

I returned to Lock and Dam 14 on 4 January and found two Iceland Gulls that appeared to be different birds from the one seen on 31 December and 1-2 January. The first was a first-year white-winged gull that I saw around a small area of open water in the backwater, rather than flying below the dam and sitting on pillars as had occurred on the previous days. As I moved up taking photographs, the bird flew away. I did not detect any tail band, but one of my photographs (Figure 3) later showed a faint, broken, narrow, light brown, subterminal tail band. I had noted the overall similarity of size and shape (compared to Herring Gulls) to the bird seen three days before, and also noted pink legs, projecting crossed primaries, and indistinct lightness in the base of the bill. One or more first-winter Iceland Gulls were seen farther south in Scott County from Lock and Dam 15 to Bettendorf/Moline by many observers at least to 9 February.



Figure 2. Iceland Gull in Scott County, 8 February 1992. Note the definite light brown tail band. Photograph by Tim Schantz.

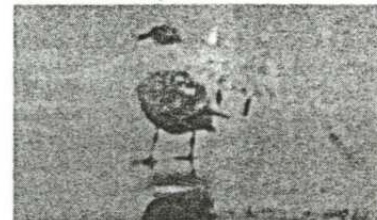


Figure 3. Note the minimal brown edging in the distal tailfeathers of this flying first-winter Iceland Gull at Lock and Dam 14 on 4 January 1992.

On 4 January, after flushing the first-year Iceland Gull, I moved up to look at the gull flock resting on the ice of the backwater. I was surprised to find two white-winged gulls. The second bird had a uniform light-gray back and scapulars and a bill that was dark at the tip and light at the base. In flight, the light gray of the back and scapulars contrasted with the off-white of the upper wing surface. I also noticed a light, smudgy, gray-brown, subterminal tail band that occupied about one-fourth of the tail. Otherwise, this second-year Iceland Gull was similar in size, shape, and proportions to the first-winter bird. I did not see this bird again, but others reported a second-year bird downstream, and Tanya Bray (personal communication) saw a second-year bird on 3 February at Bettendorf/Moline.

On 29 February 1992, Bob and John Cecil and I were driving by the marina at Saylorville Reservoir when Bob saw a white-winged gull on the shoreline. We had heard of a Glaucous Gull being seen earlier in the day, but this bird was not much larger than the Ring-billed Gulls it was with and the bill appeared to be of uniform thickness and all dark. It was slightly longer and distinctly bulkier bodied than the Ring-billed Gulls. Overall it was very light brown with white primaries extending beyond the tail. Bob noted faint scaling on the wings and barring on the tail coverts. We left briefly to get Bob Myers and Maridel Jackson. Cecil and Myers thought the legs had a yellowish cast, but I judged them to be pinkish. I climbed down the bank to photograph the bird (Figure 4) and it eventually flew, revealing all light wing surfaces above and below. Cecil noted that the wings were broader than those of Ring-billed Gulls. I did not hear of any further reports of this bird.

How could I see five and photograph four Iceland Gulls in Iowa in less than one year's time? Did this same phenomenon occur in nearby states? Iceland Gulls



were reported in small numbers along all of the Great Lakes in the winter of 1991-92 (*American Birds* Regional Reports).

Having minimal experience with Iceland Gull prior to these sightings, I was under the impression from reading that identification might be difficult. The recent article by Zimmer was very timely and helpful with some difficult field marks. Zimmer emphasizes the extremely variable tail band in first- and second-year birds. The illustrations are helpful in translating concepts, such as rounded head and long primary extension, into real situations; however, these marks are still not easy to interpret. When comparing my photographs of the March 1991 bird at Red Rock Reservoir with Zimmer's photos, I was unsure whether the head



Figure 4. First-winter Iceland Gull at Saylorville Reservoir on 29 February 1992.

shape fit or not, but Zimmer, with his experience, thought they did. In looking at the isolated Iceland Gull on the pillar at Lock and Dam 14, I could not decide about head and bill shape until a Herring Gull landed next to the bird in question; only then did these field marks become obvious by comparison. With each succeeding sighting, the identification became easier and more obvious. I was also impressed that these birds were cooperative and seen by many observers; whereas, past reports of this species were fleeting and not described in detail.

Both Thayer's and Iceland gulls nest in the eastern nearctic region, and undoubtedly there is some interbreeding. Most Thayer's Gull migrate to the West Coast, but some, especially first-year birds, migrate/winter across the entire United States. Most Iceland Gulls migrate to Europe or the East Coast of North America, but a few of any age occur on the Great Lakes each year, and there are rare scattered individual records farther west.

These observations of the Iceland Gull may soon be moot. It is rumored that Iceland and Thayer's gulls are about to be deemed one species. The Kumlien's subspecies of Iceland Gull is very similar to adult Thayer's Gull, presenting a significant identification problem, particularly in Eastern United States. In Iowa, first-year birds may be more likely and are more easily separated.

What will these "new" birds be called. We may have to speak of "Thayer's-type first-winter Iceland Gulls" or just call them all Iceland Gulls and lose all the valuable information we are getting from the careful documentations by many Iowa observers. I hope we will still consider each gull individually, judging its age and describing each of its feathers and soft parts. Let the species fall where they may!

#### LITERATURE CITED

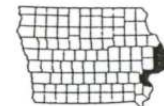
Zimmer, K.J. 1991. Plumage variation in "Kumlien's" Iceland Gull. *Birding* 23:254-269.

211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

## LATE FALL AND WINTER BIRDING ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER IN EAST-CENTRAL IOWA

PETER C. PETERSEN

The Mississippi River in the Quad-City area has been a great attraction for gulls in recent years during the winter months. In January and February 1992, nine gull species were recorded just in the Quad-Cities. This article describes some of the best locations to check from November to March



for gulls as well as waterfowl and other winter birds. The route starts at Lock 17 and proceeds north to Lock 12 (Figure 1). All along the route, the Mississippi River is a good reference point to help keep you oriented. However, keep in mind that the river does not always flow south. Between Muscatine and Clinton it flows west or southwest, making it easy to get disoriented.

From the Illinois side of the Mississippi, Lock 17 (1) is reached by going north from New Boston on the Great River Road and turning west at the Lock 17 sign about one mile north of New Boston. Lock 17 is not a good concentration point for gulls or diving ducks, but dabbling ducks often linger into late December. They feed in the corn fields and are usually seen late in the day. Bald Eagles are present in good numbers at the lock and west end of Route 17 in New Boston.

On the Iowa side of the Mississippi River, Mark Twain National Wildlife Refuge lies adjacent to Lock 17. Access is limited during the waterfowl season in November and December. For access, check with the refuge personnel at the refuge office, R. R. #1, Box 75, Wapello, IA 52653, (phone 319-523-6982).

Lock 16 (2) is reached by going east from IL 92 just on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River bridge at Muscatine. The lock can also be viewed in Iowa from the southern end of Park Street on the east side of Muscatine. Take Route 92 across the river into Muscatine and turn right at the intersection with Routes 22 and 61. In a few blocks this road angles to the left and becomes Park Street. Lock 16 is not a gathering spot for gulls, but often has large numbers of Bald Eagles. A good location for woodland and coniferous species in Muscatine is Greenwood Cemetery (3), 1814 Lucas Street. Stay on Route 61 to where it intersects the Muscatine bypass. Follow the bypass to the west and south. Shortly after it crosses Route 22 it intersects Lucas Street. Proceed into town on Lucas; the cemetery is on the right in about 1.5 miles. Pine Grosbeaks have been found here, and Winter Wrens are often found in the cemetery's ravines.

From Muscatine, proceed toward Davenport on Route 22 which leaves Park at Washington Street. About eight miles east of Muscatine turn left on the county road marked for Wildcat Den State Park (4). At the park, the trail along Pine Creek from the ranger's house to the creek picnic grounds, about one mile long, is usually the most productive. Birds expected in winter include Winter and Carolina wrens, Wild Turkey, and Pileated Woodpecker.

Return to Route 22 and continue toward Davenport. Watch for Bald Eagles along the river to the Davenport city limit at Utah Avenue. Turn right (south) on Utah to South Concord Street and then proceed east along the river and Credit Island Harbor (5), watching for ducks, gulls, and Bald Eagles. To reach Fairmont Cemetery (6), an area similar to Greenwood Cemetery in Muscatine, turn left on Route 61 and proceed to Rockingham Road (Route 22). Turn right (east) and drive toward the city about four blocks to the cemetery. The





Iceland Gull  
Lock and Dam 14, Scott Co., IA  
4 Jan 1992 T. H. Kent

92-04

Iceland Gull 92-04 P-0325  
Lock and Dam 14, Scott Co., IA  
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F-STOP 03029 N1ND0

Iceland Gull 92-04 P-0325  
Lock and Dam 14, Scott Co., IA  
4 Jan 1992 T. H. Kent

92-04

MADE IN GERMANY

92-03  
92-04

## DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

*Species:* Iceland Gull *Number:* 2.

*Location:* Lock and Dam 14, Scott Co. Iowa

*Date:* 4 January 1992 *Time:* 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

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

*Others before/with/after:* alone

*Habitat and circumstances:* Mississippi River

*Description of bird:* First-winter and second-winter white-winged gulls were on the frozen backwater near the lock with Herring Gulls but not with each other. I saw the first-winter bird first with a few Herring Gulls around a small bit of open water. I noticed it when it flew up because of the uniform very light milky tan upper wing, tail, and body. The primaries and secondaries from below in flight were white and underwing coverts darker. When standing or swimming it was just smaller than Herring gulls with a smaller head and shorter bill. Next to Herrings, the rounded top of the head and delicate look could be appreciated. The bill was mostly black, but the base had some indistinct lighter areas. The bill was three-fourths as long as the Herring's and thinner and more uniform in thickness throughout. The primaries appeared nearly white compared to the very light tan vermiculated appearance of the other wing feathers. The tertials were the same color as the wing coverts. The primaries protruded about an inch beyond the tail and crossed. The eye was dark and legs pink. In flight, I could not appreciate any tail band, which suggested that this bird was not the same as the one seen by me below the dam on 31 December and 1 January. When I moved up to look at the main flock of resting gulls, I was surprised to find another white-winged gull. I knew it was a different bird because the mantle was a uniform light gray and the bill was dark at the tip and light at the base. When bird flew away from me, I noticed a light smudgy gray or gray-brown subterminal tail band that was from one-fourth to one-third as wide as the tail length. This tail band was not sharply demarcated and did not have the vermiculated appearance of the tail band on the first-year bird seen three days before. Other than the bill, mantle, and tail, this bird was quite similar to the first-year bird as to size, head shape, bill length and thickness, and wings. I saw both of these birds in flight several times and watched them on the ice next to many Herring Gulls.

*Voice:* The first-year bird opened its mouth and made gull sounds that I could not distinguish from those of the other gulls.

*Similar species:* The overall size, head size, bill size, and lack of dipped-in-ink effect on the bill tip exclude Glaucous Gull. I excluded Thayer's Gull because both of these birds had very light primaries (not dark webs on the outer primaries). Neither had a secondary bar or in fact any distinctive marking on the wings. The lack of tail band in the first year bird also excludes Thayer's Gull. I was impressed by the paleness of the gray mantle in the second-year bird, but have too little experience with older Thayer's Gulls to make a comparison.

*Light:* Heavy overcast with soft gray lighting. *Distance:* 40 to 150 yards. *Optics:* 10x binocular, 20x scope.

*Previous experience:* I have seen a number of first-year Thayer's and Glaucous Gulls. One adult Glaucous Gull was over the river earlier in the morning and it was larger than Herring Gulls. I have limited experience with Iceland Gull (3 sightings).

*References before/after viewing:* none for last three days.

*Time of notes:* 10 minutes after viewing. *Final typing:* 4 hours.



## ILLINOIS DOCUMENTATION FORM FOR EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTINGS

I.O.R.C. RECORD NUMBER

92-04

1. Species: Ice Land Gull Number seen: 1  
 (If known) Age: ad. Sex: ? Plumage: winter
2. Location (including county): Miss. River between Bettendorf, IA, & Moline, IL. <sup>Scott Co. R.I. Co.</sup>
3. Date(s): Feb. 2 + 3 1992 Time of day: 2/2 10:15 AM to 10:21 AM  
2/3 8:50 AM to 9:10 AM
4. Observers -- Your name: Peter C. Petersen Phone: (319) 355-2051  
 Address: 235 McClellan Blvd. Davenport, IA Zip 52803
- Others present: Dan Dorrance.
- Others before or after you: m.o.b.
5. Describe the habitat the bird(s) was found in and the surrounding habitat:  
2/2. on ice shelf along FL. shore, flushed by Eagle, flew past me & landed in Miss. Channel downstream.  
2/3 - On sea wall near channel of Miss. R.
6. Description: Describe in great detail (but only include what actually was seen in the field (the size, shape and color pattern of the bird(s)). Include a description of the bill, eye, legs, feet, tail, body and wings as well as other diagnostic characteristics.
- Plumage white except for pale grey mantle.  
Bill yellow, shorter than nearby Herring's & not heavy,  
a bit to Fred's lower mandible. Legs pink. Head shape  
rather rounded. Some tan flecks on head.  
Flight was buoyant, not heavy. Overall size about  
that of Herring Gulls standing next to it.



9204

Species: Iceland Gull Date seen: 1 Observer: P. C. Peterson

7. Similar species (explain how eliminated): Glaucous Gull - this bird too small as compared to Herring Gulls near it, bill too short + fine, flight not ponderous like Glaucous, head rounded, not "flat" like Glaucous.
8. Describe the bird's behavior: standing on ice, flying over ice & swimming
9. Describe the song or call notes heard: not differentiated from other gulls
10. Viewing conditions:  
Optical equipment used (type, power): 10X80 Zeiss Binocs, 30-40X60 Swift Scope  
Closest distance to bird (how measured): 120m, est.  
Lighting and weather: 2/2 - full sun behind obs. 2/3 - thin cloud cover light behind obs  
Was the bird photographed? no By whom? \_\_\_\_\_ Attached? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Summarize previous experience with this species and similar species:  
Have seen on several occasions previously in the Arctic.
12. Other observers who did not agree with the identification (explain): none to my knowledge.
13. List books and illustrations consulted and advice received. How did these influence this description? Checked Geo guide + Gulls - Grant, 2 ed. to confirm points as I did. They did not influence I.D.
14. How long after observing the bird(s) before field notes completed? 30 min
15. How long after observing the bird(s) before this form completed? 3 hrs.

Mail this completed form to: Avian Ecology Program, Natural Heritage Division  
Dept. of Conservation, Springfield, IL 62701

If you have observed a common bird species during a season of abundance, verification is achieved simply by returning there again in season. If, however, the observation involves a rare species, or a common species out of season or at an unusual location, and you wish to share this experience with the scientific community, special documentation is necessary.

An acceptable documentation consists of one or more of the following: a collected, diagnostic specimen; a diagnostic photograph; a diagnostic recording of the bird's voice; or, an accurate and detailed written description of the observation. It must be emphasized that a request for documentation is not an affront, but an effort to perpetuate a record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for all to examine. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation irrespective of the observer.