

Thayer's Gull
16 Feb 1991
Keokuk, Lee Co., IA
*Reid Allen
IBL 61:57, 62:71

Record Number: 91-13
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION:

Reid Allen, 1601 Pleasant St., West Des Moines, IA 50265

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 61:57
Records Committee: IBL 62:71

VOTE: 2-A-D, 5-NA

A-D, Document seems a little short on some details but appears to be acceptable.

NA, Possibly, even probably a Thayer's gull but this documentation lacks details that would confirm identification of this difficult and variable species.

NA, This is an excellent location to see this species, and the description was suggestive of Thayer's gull. However, this is a difficult to identify species, and Herring Gull is highly variable. To conclusively separate from Herring, some additional features should be looked for, including slightly smaller size, head same color as back/mantle (not lighter), light tail band, smudge at eye (sometimes), and a general uniformity of color of head, back, mantle, tail, and wings to darker primary edges. I'm sure you felt your description of brown "overall" covered these bases, but a lot of people would call a 1st winter Herring brown overall. With regard to the translucent underwings, I think this field mark, at least from personal experience, is over-rated. In the right (or wrong) light, a Herring Gull can exhibit the same characteristic. I recommend you dig out Carl Bendorf's article from several years ago. It is simple, but very helpful with this species.

A-D, This documentation omits supporting details which needs to be noted, like bill shape and color, tail description, rough overall size comparison to Gulls present, leg color, and degree of color difference between primaries and rest of wing and mantle. However, the mention of dark primary edges and wingtips eliminates Iceland, Glaucous, and Glaucous-winged Gulls. The mention of grey-brown to carmel brown overall color eliminates the other juvenile U.S. Gull which would be darker and have black in their primaries.

NA, The acceptance of this record for a bird seen at close range rests almost entirely on the description of the wing tip. No size comparison is given. The head shape and bill are not described, nor is the tail. Overall "grey-brown to carmel brown" doesn't fit Thayer's Gull. The wing tips from below "seemed almost transparent". The primaries are not necessarily the same as the wing tip. No mention is made of a secondary bar. Why didn't the other observers document this bird?

NA, Primaries were described to be fairly uniform in color except dark edges. How did the color of the primaries compare to the rest of the upper wing and the mantle? Wing tips seemed

almost translucent -- was this just the wing tips or the primary area? Tail and tail coverts were not described. What was the size comparison with other gulls (Herring, others) nearby. I do not think that the description as given is enough to be beyond doubt.

NA, More details of the gull's plumage are needed for me to consider, Reid. While this may be a Thayer's, more information is needed on upper wing patterns of coloring, tail coloring and tail band color, bill color, head color in comparison to body color, and leg color. There is an excellent article in Iowa Bird Life (vol. 56, No. 3 -- Summer 1986) on identifying first winter Thayer's Gulls. Please send in more documenttion and observations!

DOCUMENTATION FORM

91-13

SPECIES: **Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*)**

HOW MANY: One (1)

LOCATION: Lock & Dam #19 - Keokuk, Iowa

HABITAT: River channel with open water below dam extending 3/4 mile from dam

DATE: February 16, 1991

TIME & LENGTH OF OBSERVATION: 10:30 A. M. for about 20 minutes

FIRST OBSERVATION MADE BY: Eugene Armstrong

DOCUMENTER'S NAME & ADDRESS: Reid Allen, 1601 Pleasant Street, West Des Moines, IA 50265

OTHERS WHO SAW BIRD: Pam Allen (West Des Moines, Ia), Eloise and Eugene Armstrong (Booneville, Ia.)

DESCRIPTION OF BIRD: A large gull, grey-brown to caramel brown generally overall. Under-parts were slightly lighter than back and top of wings. As this gull was flying throughout the observation, the wing-tips were easily seen. The primaries appeared fairly uniform in color, but with dark edges on each primary. When observed from below, the wing tips seemed almost translucent.

SIMILAR SPECIES AND HOW ELIMINATED: First-winter Herring gulls (many were present) had blackish wingtips. Juvenile Iceland gull wingtips lack dark edging on primaries as do those on Glaucous-winged Gull.

VIEWING CONDITIONS AND EQUIPMENT: Viewing conditions were good as to light. Cloudy skies provided uniform lighting. Viewed from a distance of 10-300 yds. Viewed with 8x36 Bushnell Custom binocular and unaided eyes.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH SPECIES: None

REFERENCES CONSULTED: SEABIRDS, AN IDENTIFICATION GUIDE; Peter Harrison, 1983. THE AUDUBON SOCIETY MASTER GUIDE TO BIRDING, Vol. 2, Gulls to Dippers; John Farrand, Jr., Editor, 1983. GULLS: A GUIDE TO IDENTIFICATION, second edition, P. J. Grant, 1986.

HOW LONG BEFORE FIELD NOTES MADE: Same day

HOW LONG BEFORE THIS FORM COMPLETED: March 2, 1991