

Thayer's Gull  
10 Dec 1985  
Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA  
\*Bendorf\*\*\*\*\*

Record Number: 85-22  
Classification: A-P

P-0190 Moore, P-0191 Kent, P-0192 Bendorf; IBL 56:43, 59, Bendorf 1986

#### DOCUMENTATIONS

Carl J. Bendorf, 10 Dec  
Thomas H. Kent, 10 Dec  
Beth/Mark Proescholdt, 11 Dec  
Dennis Thompson, 11 Dec  
Francis L. Moore, 14 Dec  
Bob Myers, 14 Dec

#### PHOTOGRAPHS

T. H. Kent, 10 Dec, P-0191  
Carl Bendorf, 10 Dec, P-0192  
Francis Moore, 14 Dec, P-0190

#### REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 56:59  
Bendorf, C. J. 1986. Thayer's Gull at Red Rock Reservoir. IBL 56:94.

Records Committee: IBL 56:43

VOTE: 3-I-P, 2-III, 1-IV, 1-abstain

III, good description

I-P, Documentations give good rundown on the combination of field marks needed for identification of this difficult species. I think the observers have adequately described Thayer's Gull from their observations and from the photographs with the documentations.

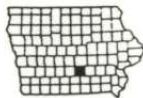
I-P, While this is a most difficult I.D., I believe the wing and tail descriptions do eliminate possible Herring or Iceland Gull.

III, I'm puzzled by the mention of Iceland Gull as a possible ID by some observers. Who? Did they document their ideas? I would like more information on the upperwing pattern, as I am not totally convinced that the pattern described here eliminates Kumlein's Iceland Gull. Translucent under primaries does not eliminate Kumlein's. No indication of wing length relative to tail on resting bird. Darkness of bird could be subjective, but is used as separating from Kumlein's, as is dark tail band. I vote III, but would not be surprised to be proven wrong (again!). Check photo IBL 51:73 (bottom right-I agree that other three are of Herring Gulls).

I-P? or III if photos not useful. Well I've duly looked up Thayer's Gull. One reference cautions that black and white photos of Thayer's-like gulls can't be used to identify them. The bird looks as much like a Thayer's as anything we're likely to have reported. Iceland is certainly ruled out. Herring is harder to eliminate. The dark-light-dark upper wing pattern that's supposed to be on Thayer's seems to be visible on Tom's photo. However, it seems visible on photos I've looked up of Herrings. What the hell--III. And please, everyone, when you see one of these find something else to look at.

## THAYER'S GULL AT RED ROCK RESERVOIR

CARL J. BENDORF



On December 10, 1985 I made a trip to the tailwater area below Red Rock Reservoir dam in Marion County in order to look for a white-winged gull found two days earlier by Darwin Koenig. I arrived at 2 p.m. and found 200 Herring Gulls and 12 Ring-billed Gulls flying, feeding, or resting on several sand bars. Soon, Tom Kent arrived and we spent some time studying and photographing a first-winter Glaucous Gull. While scanning the main group of gulls on a sand bar I noticed a first-winter Herring type bird that was lighter and slightly smaller than the 1st winter Herring Gulls.

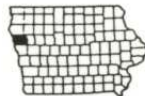
The bill was smaller in proportion (both length and depth) than that of a Herring Gull. It was all black and did not have a pronounced gonys. The eye was dark. The legs appeared dark, perhaps with a slight reddish cast especially on the back side of the legs. The body was uniform light brown and finely mottled. The mottling was a bit coarser on the wings and the mantle. The exposed primaries on the folded wing were a darker shade of brown. The overall color was both lighter and more uniform than nearby first-winter Herrings; however, compared to the first-winter Glaucous, this bird was closer in color to the Herrings.

After about 15 minutes, I flushed the resting gull flock and followed the bird in question with binoculars as it circled at 50 to 150 yards. From below the secondaries and all of the primaries were uniform silvery-white. I did not see any dark in the primaries, even at the tip. The upperwing surface was uniformly colored over the whole length of the wing and was the same color as the back. From above the outer primaries and trailing edge of the wing were a little darker than the rest of the wing. The tail had a terminal band similar to that of first-winter Herring Gulls, except the color was lighter than a Herring, similar to the rest of the body of the bird. The bird was flushed twice on this heavily overcast day. Both Tom Kent and I took photographs of the bird.

825 7th Ave., Iowa City, IA 52240

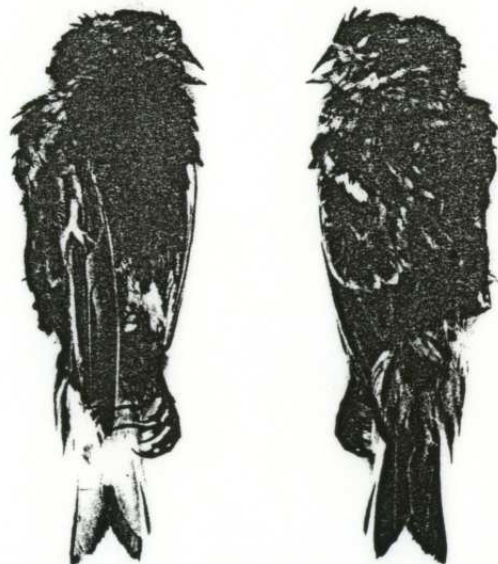
## CHESTNUT-COLLARED LONGSPUR IN WOODBURY COUNTY

DICK BIERMAN



On 15 April 1986, I was traveling down Iowa Highway 31 in Woodbury County after a spring blizzard, so there was snow on the ground. On the shoulder of the highway, large numbers of birds were gathering. About two miles north of Smithland, I noticed some unusual birds flare from the edge of the road and alight again as we passed. I turned around and drove back slowly, parked, and watched the eleven birds from about fifty feet with my 7 x 35 binoculars. They were sparrow-size with short tails and stocky bodies. The breast, sides and bellies were black. The nape was rust-colored. They had a yellowish throat that was separated from the black by a thin white necklace. Above the eye was a white eyebrow. The crown was black. The black on the tail formed an inverted "V" as the birds flew. I had seen this species at Felton Prairie in Clay County, Minnesota last summer and knew them to be Chestnut-collared Longspurs. The next day, as I passed the same location, I drove slowly and was able to find a road-killed specimen, which confirmed my sighting. The specimen has been sent to Iowa State University. I feel that the strong storm had pushed the birds east of their normal migrational path, which is to the west of Iowa.

901 Harris, Cherokee, IA 51012



Chestnut-collared Longspur specimen. Photos by J. J. Dinsmore.

8522

## BIRD DOCUMENTATION FORM.

85-22  
CARL J. BENDORF  
825 7TH AVENUE  
IOWA CITY IA 52240

SPECIES: THAYER'S GULL (*Larus thayeri*)                      NUMBER: 1  
LOCATION: RED ROCK RES. TAILWATER                              COUNTY: MARION  
DATE: 10 DECEMBER 1985    TIME: 2:15 PM TO 2:45 PM

**DESCRIPTION:** I arrived at about 2 PM and found approximately 200-300 Herring Gulls and perhaps 12 Ring-billed Gulls either flying around over the tailwater area or resting on several sand bars. Tom Kent arrived shortly and we spent some time studying and photographing a 1st winter Glaucous Gull. After finishing with the Glaucous, I was scanning the main group of gulls sitting on a sand bar and almost immediately noticed one 1st winter Herring type bird that looked a little different from the rest, mainly due to its overall lighter color compared to the rest of the 1st winter Herring Gulls. After pointing out this bird to Tom, I studied it with my 20-45X scope and noted the following details at about 75 yards:

**Size:** This bird was noticeably smaller than the adjacent Herring Gulls; about 85 to 90% as large in overall body size when sitting.

**Soft parts:** The bill was smaller in proportion (bulk and length) compared to the Herring Gulls. It was all black and did not have a pronounced bulge or gonydeal angle. The eye was dark. The legs appeared dark, perhaps with a slight reddish cast especially on the back side of the legs.

**Overall coloration of sitting bird:** The body was a uniform light brown color and was finely mottled. The mottling was a bit coarser on the wings and the mantle. The exposed primaries on the folded wing were a darker shade of brown. The overall color was both lighter and more uniform than nearby 1st winter Herrings, however compared to the 1st winter Glaucous, this bird was closer in color to the Herrings.

After about 15 minutes, I flushed the resting gull flock and followed this bird with 7X binoculars as it circled about at approximately 50 to 150 yards. In flight the bird still appeared more uniform and lighter than 1st winter Herrings. As the bird flew I tried to concentrate on three main features: underwing pattern, tail pattern, and upperwing pattern. The bird landed again briefly and we flushed it again to watch it fly.

**Underwing pattern:** This was the feature most striking to me and I probably looked at it more than the other flying features. All of the flight feathers from the secondaries all the way out to the outermost primary appeared to be a uniform silvery-white color, almost translucent. I could not see any darkening in the primaries, even at the tip.

**Tail patterns:** The tail had a noticeable tail band of approximately the same size and pattern as that of a 1st winter Herring, except that the color of the tail was the same quality of brown as the rest of the bird, just more concentrated and thus a little darker. It did not seem to have a blackish or chocolate brown element as do most 1st winter Herrings.

**Upperwing pattern:** This was the feature I probably concentrated on less than the others when the bird was flying. The upperwing surface appeared to be quite uniform over the whole length of the wing. The color was about the same as that of the mantle. I did note that there was little noticeable darkening in the outer primaries like that on a 1st winter Herring. The secondaries or the inner trailing edge of the wing may have been a bit darker brown.

The light was that of a medium bright but solid gray overcast winter day, without any shadows being cast by the sun. It was beginning to snow at the end of the observation time.

**AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT OF OTHERS:** Tom Kent was present and in agreement. Joe Schafenbuel and Darwin Koenig were also present but their actual agreement or disagreement not specifically discussed.

**PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND SIMILAR SPECIES:** Have seen adult Thayer's in both Chicago and St. Louis. Have never seen Iceland.

**FIELD NOTES MADE?** Notes of field marks dictated into tape recorder during and immediately after observation. Field notes transcribed and reorganized next day. This form and analysis written from 3 to 5 days afterward. Sketches made day after observation while transcribing field notes and are intended to illustrate the points made in the description and are not sketched from life.

**SIMILAR SPECIES--COMMENTS:**

Thayer's Gull is a difficult bird to identify. In researching this problem, I have found several helpful sources in addition to the standard field guides and I have tried to understand what it takes to know a Thayer's Gull when you see one. Nearly every reference makes it clear that Thayer's cannot be identified on the basis of one or two positive field marks. It takes a combination of characters to come to a conclusion of any certainty.

In discussing this particular observation, I will examine each of the fieldmarks and compare and contrast to similar species with liberal reference to the literature, especially Lehman (1980). The most likely similar gulls in this case are 1st winter Herring and 1st winter Iceland (Kumlien's). The Kumlien's form is the darker form of the Iceland Gull and is the form that breeds in the Baffin Island area and winters mainly on the Atlantic coast. Lehman's article deals mainly with Kumlien's.

Several similarly sized and possible but unlikely candidates can be eliminated rather quickly. A 1st winter California should not have an all dark bill and would show much darkening in the primaries in flight. Lesser Black-backed Gull could be about the right size, but in flight a 1st winter bird should show darker primary and secondary coverts, more extensively dark primaries, even compared to Herring Gull. A 1st summer Slaty-backed Gull is also light uniform brown with an all dark bill, but it should exhibit extensive darkening in the primaries on the upper wing. A 1st winter Glaucous-winged Gull would be very similar to Thayer's but should be larger, with a larger bill, and less mottling to the body color. Except for the first two, one would probably not consider the likelihood of their occurrence in Iowa to be very great. One hybrid, Glaucous-winged X Western, might be similar but should have a quite heavy bill.

**Size:** Lehman cautions that as in most gull species, Thayer's is variable in size, "but the average individual is slightly smaller than Herring Gull and slightly larger than Iceland. Smaller individuals (females?) may approach the size of California Gull, ... while larger birds may be the size of Herring Gulls." Thus size alone cannot be used as a solid field mark; on the average it may help to pick out a possible Thayer's. The size of this bird is consistent with Thayer's.

**Bill:** Lehman states " Bill-size and -shape are often fairly distinctive: proportionately short (shorter than in Herring Gull), rather slender (almost delicate), with a gently curving culmen and no apparent thickening toward the tip." He also suggests that along with the bird's size and the shape of the head that the size and shape of the bill is the most important field mark in separating Thayer's from several west coast species, including Herring. However, Iceland can have a bill shaped much like a Thayer's, some individuals can have even a slighter bill. The bill I describe is good for Thayer's and weighs against Herring without ruling out Iceland.

The color of the bill is somewhat important: "All first-winter Thayer's Gulls have all-blackish bills." (Lehman) This bird had an all dark bill, but so do most 1st winter Herring Gulls. 1st winter Iceland should have a predominantly dark bill with some showing a paler base to the bill. " Beginning in early February, some first year [Thayer's] begin to show a small amount of pale coloration at the base of the bill. I have never seen a first year Thayer's with anything but an all-black bill throughout January..." (Lehman).

**Eye color:** All 1st winter birds (Thayer's, Herring, Iceland) have dark eyes.

**Leg color:** "Leg-color is always pink, although some observers believe that Thayer's legs are often a deeper pink that are those of Herring..." (Lehman). This is consistent with the dark perhaps reddish legs I observed, but is not conclusive for Thayer's.

**Head Shape:** Lehman makes mention of the usefulness of head shape as an indicator of Thayer's. He says the shape is "often quite round (although some individuals' heads may appear more pointed or peaked). This, in combination with its more delicate bill, gives the bird an overall 'pigeon-headed' look...". Thayer's should have a rounder head profile than Herring, with less of a flattened forehead. However, Lehman cautions against relying too heavily on this field mark due to the individual and sexual variations in head shape among gulls.

This is one feature that I did not pay too much attention to when observing this bird.

**Overall coloration:** The overall color of 1st winter bird is not a diagnostic feature. Eckert states, "some 1st winter Thayer's get so pale they resemble Iceland's". However, this bird was much closer in shade of brown to the adjacent 1st winter Herrings than to the 1st winter Glaucous, also in the immediate area. The color of darker Thayer's can match that of Herrings, but is usually more uniform. At best, the overall color of a Thayer's can serve to draw attention to a possible candidate. After that, one must rely on other field marks. On sitting birds, one should usually not notice darker primary tips on Iceland Gulls, but the white primaries of Iceland can appear somewhat darker when the wing is folded. As Gosselin and David explain in speaking of Iceland,

"When the bird is at rest, its primaries are often distinctly paler than the wing coverts and back feathers, even when the primaries are marked with pale drab smudges as is often the case. Such paler primaries are diagnostic as they never occur in [Thayer's]. ...On the other hand, [Thayer's] has grayish-brown, brown, or occasionally deep brown primaries averaging darker than those of [Iceland] and lighter than those of [Herring]. A very dark [Thayer's] is practically indistinguishable from [Herring] as its primaries are much darker than its body."

**Wing patterns:** "The pattern of the flight-feathers is one of the principal fieldmarks use to identify Thayer's Gull". (Lehman). This emphasis on the importance of the wing patterns is echoed by nearly every reference on Thayer's Gull. This is where the possibility of this bird being a Herring Gull begins to fall by the wayside.

**Upperwing surface:** Herring Gulls in 1st winter plumage always show a significant darkening of the primaries toward the tip of the wing. As Gosselin and David state, "The obvious field mark of [Herring Gull] is its dark brown or blackish primaries sharply contrasting with the lighter back and wing coverts...". I did not see this type of darkening in the primaries in this bird. This is also noted by Eckert when he says of 1st winter Thayer's that "always the outer primaries, secondaries and wing coverts are all about the same shade (on the upper wing surface) of gray or brown, while the inner primaries usually conspicuously paler (Herring's outer primaries blackish and obviously darker than the rest of the wing)." This certainly is some evidence against this bird being a Herring Gull. To summarize and also to begin the discussion of the underwing surface, let's quote again from Lehman: "...Herring Gulls have flight feathers which appear

darker than those of Thayer's when seen from above and which appear much darker when seen from below, especially the outer primaries".

**Underwing surface:** "When seen from below, the flight feathers of Thayer's Gull are silvery-white throughout, including the wing tips; this color pattern is also shown by Kumlien's. These light wing-tips [are] most obvious when the bird is in flight. In contrast, Western, Herring, and California Gulls show a great deal of dark coloring on the under-surfaces of the flight feathers." (Lehman). This is one more strike against the Herring Gull. I don't believe that the all whitish flight feathers I saw on the underwing could have been due to the lighting conditions. The day was completely overcast and the sun was not direct enough to cause any shadows or any artificial translucence through the wing. This underwing lightness was visible at any lighting angle, whenever the underwings were seen.

**Comment on wing patterns:** One source of difficulty in identifying Thayer's Gulls in 1st winter plumage has been the reliance on a "window" in the wing as a field mark. This window is a lighter area on the base of the inner primaries which contrast with the darker primary tips and secondaries. This is, in fact, a good feature of Herring Gulls. As the Master Guide to Birding says of the Herring Gull, "the outer primaries are mainly black, contrasting with 4 clear gray inner primaries that produce a pale, translucent patch that is obvious in birds overhead." This is seen in both 1st and 2nd winter birds. The Thayer's can also show a similar light area, but this is apparent only on the upper wing surface. As Eckert says in the Master Guide of the 1st winter Thayer's "The outer primaries and secondaries, although pale, are still nearly the same color as the upper wing coverts; they are a shade darker than the whiter inner primaries, giving the flight feathers a dark-light-dark pattern". This is the window that one can sometimes see on a 1st winter Thayer's. It cannot be seen on the underwing surface because the entire underside of the flight feathers are already whitish and a pale area on the upperwing is not apparent from below, even on a bird overhead. This is shown very nicely in an photo from below a 1st winter Thayer's with sunlight shining through the wings on p. 205 of Lehman's article. The same article illustrates the window effect on the upper wing surface on p. 204.

I did not notice this dark-light-dark effect on the upperwing, but I did see that the secondaries appeared a bit darker than the rest of the otherwise uniform appearing upper wing. This darker secondary area can be present on the Thayer's, but is also present on the Herring. However, all of the flight feathers of Kumlien's should be white; no darker secondaries should be present. If I noticed the slightly darker secondaries and if the bird was a Herring, I should also have seen other darker areas on the upperwing such as the primaries. I did not see this.

**Tail pattern:** The broad uniform colored terminal tail band I described is consistent with Thayer's Gull. The color was not too different a shade of brown from the rest of the body and was without the blackish element that Herring Gulls at this age usually exhibit. However, the broad uniform color does indicate against a Kumlien's Iceland Gull which is usually not so uniform in color. As Lehman says, "In Iceland Gull, the tail is largely mottled with white, so it appears paler than it does in Thayer's. The tails of some darker Kumlien's may approach the pattern of Thayer's, but a close look should reveal that Kumlien's apparent tail band is not so uniformly colored as is Thayer's. This tail-pattern is an important field mark in distinguishing first year Thayer's and Kumlien's." A pale Thayer's may not have a distinct uniform tail band, so that would be a problem. Luckily this bird did have a nice tail band and this should eliminate Kumlien's Iceland Gull.

**Summary:** Of the most likely similar species, 1st winter Herring Gull and 1st winter Kumlien's Iceland Gull, each is eliminated by one or more of the features discussed above. The wing pattern is especially damaging to the possibility of Herring, along with the bill shape and size. Iceland is ruled out by the presence of the noticeable tail band and by the darker secondaries on the upper wing. To identify a Thayer's Gull, one must see a combination of field marks. I feel that the bird I saw at Red Rock is consistent on every point.

**Literature Cited:**

*Field identification of Thayer's Gull (Larus thayeri) in eastern North America*, Gosselin, M. and David N., American Birds vol. 29, pp. 1059-1064. December 1975.

*The identification of Thayer's Gull in the field*, Lehman, P., Birding vol. 12, pp. 198-210. December 1980. A Birder's Guide to Minnesota, Eckert, K., Second Edition 1983.

The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding (2 Gulls to Dippers, Farrand, J. (editor) 1983.

**Other References:**

Field Guide to the Birds (National Geographic Society), 1983.

Seabirds, Harrison, P., 1983



THAYER'S TYPE GULL

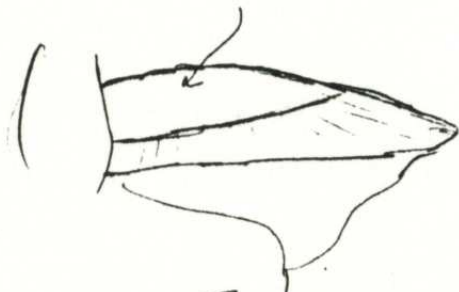
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Red Rock

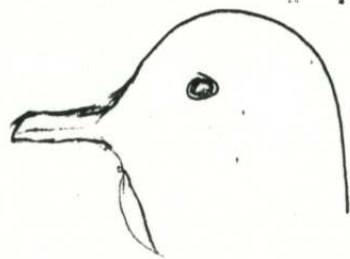
85-22

UNDERSIDE OF WING  
COLOR PATTERN

BROWN LIKE BASIC  
BODY COLOR



THIS AREA UNIFORM  
WHITISH OR TRANSLUCENT



ROUGH SKETCH OF IMPRESSION  
OF BILL SIZE & SHAPE

BILL NOT REALLY BULGED AT  
TIP AND WITHOUT MUCH OF  
A GONYPHEAL ANGLE. APPEARED  
ALL BLACK.



UPPER TAIL  
SURFACE

COLOR OF BAND WAS  
SAME QUALITY OF  
BROWN, JUST DARKER

NOTE:

SKETCHES MADE NEXT DAY  
WHILE TRANSCRIBING NOTES TO  
ILLUSTRATE GENERAL IMPRESSIONS.  
NOT DONE FROM LIFE

CARL J. BENDORF

THAYER'S GULL

SKETCHES TO ILLUSTRATE COLOR  
PATTERNS, NOT SIZE OR  
SHAPES OF WINGS OR TAIL

## DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Thayer's Gull 1 first year, 10 Dec 1985, Red Rock Res., Marion Co, IA  
 Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52240  
 Other observers present: Carl Bendorf, Joe Schaufenbuel, Darwin  
 Koenig.

Time: 2:25 to 2:50 PM

Habitat: Des Moines river below reservoir, outlet area; mostly open  
 water but some ice, reservoir frozen above dam.

Description: "2:25...[description of first year Glaucous Gull]...  
 There is another bird that I am looking at that is small, perhaps in  
 the range of the smallest Herring Gull. It has a small thin bill with  
 a little light in the basal part of the bill. The bird is overall very  
 light gray; distinctly darker than the Glaucous Gull and grayer. The  
 Glucous Gull is a pinkish gray, whereas this bird is a grayish gray.  
 It has a slightly darker area around and behind the eye, sharply cut  
 off before it gets to the nape. Leg color is difficult to judge. It  
 seems to have shorted legs than the adjacent second year Herring Gull.  
 The primaries in the sitting bird are slightly dark. We haven't seen  
 the bird in flight well yet. Perhaps a Thayer's Gull."

Later: "Carl was able to get the bird to fly [using arm raising  
 technique described by Jim Tucker]. I kept it in my scope for several  
 minutes, getting good looks at it. The underwing is silvery white from  
 the secondaries to the tip of the primaries. The upper surface of the  
 wing appears to be uniformly brown, maybe slightly darker at the outer  
 edge of the primaries. The bird is overall the same color. I didn't  
 get a great look at the tail, but saw the underwing silvery pattern  
 very well."

Later "2:50 I'm leaving Red Rock. It started to snow heavily. Carl,  
 Joe Schaufenbuel, and Darwin Koenig were there. I took pictures of the  
 Thayer's Gull. Carl saw the tail and said it had a banded darker tip,  
 the tip was the same color as the rest of the bird. The outstanding  
 features as far as I was concerned was the uniformity of the upper  
 wing surface, except for slight darkening on the trailing edge of the  
 distal primaries; the undersurface, however, showed the bright silvery  
 light color extending all through the secondaries and primaries to the  
 tip of the wing. On the sitting bird we were impressed by the  
 relatively small size compared to the Herrings; thin straight bill,  
 mostly dark, perhaps some lighter flecks at the base; small head size;  
 and gray patch around the eye, cut off behind the eye."

I forgot to mention the uniformity of color of the head, neck, and  
 breast without the mottling seen in the first year Herring Gulls. The  
 bird was lighter than the lightest first year Herring, but not as  
 light as the only other first year Thayer's I saw at Alton Dam. The  
 light that I saw at the base of the bill may have been a reflection,  
 as Carl did not see it.

Photographs (in order taken):

1. Bird standing among Herring Gulls appears smaller with smaller head  
 and shorter, thinner bill; underparts lighter and plainer than  
 immature Herrings. These birds flew and we think this is the same bird  
 as in the next photo. The color difference could be due to different  
 reflection from the background. 750 mm Celestron lens with 2x extender.
2. Bird sitting on ice facing camera. Shows gray appearance that we  
 noted. The gray face patch was well seen when this bird turned its

- head. I followed this bird for several minutes with my window mounted telescope when it took off from this position. Celestron lens.
3. This is the first shot I took of the flying bird after switching lenses and stepping from the car. The adapter ring was not set correctly so the picture was underexposed. The silvery primaries contrast with the underwing coverts. There is a hint of darkness at the tip of the tail.
  4. Bird flying away against snow covered dam, slightly out of focus. The upper wing surface appears to be of very uniform color and the tip of the tail is darker than the base.
  5. Bird in water with fish, wings raised. The silvery primaries of the right wing appear to be lighter on the medial side of the feathers.
  6. Side view of flying bird with wings raised, slightly moved or out of focus. White primaries with darker wing lining, light body, darker tip to tail are seen.

**Behavior:** similar to other gulls--resting on snow and ice and feeding over outlet area. In flight the bird appeared a little smaller and slimmer than the Herrings, although this was subjective. I spent the minutes I followed the bird in the scope concentrating on the wing pattern.

**Conditions:** Overcast, turning to snow, about 20 F, not much wind. Bird seen at 25 to 75 yards (estimate) with 10x binoculars, 20x scope, and 1500 and 420 mm camera lenses. Flying photos taken with 210 mm zoom lens with 2x extender using 1000 ASA film at about 1/1000 second, resting photos with 750 Celestron lens with 2x extender at about f 11 and 1/1000 sec.

**Similar species:** The entirely light flight feathers from below, uniform upper wing surface, head and bill size, gray face patch seem to separate this bird from first year Herring Gulls. The darkness of the bird and dark tip to tail exclude Iceland Gull. The uniform upper wing and dark bill exclude California Gull.

**Agreement:** Carl was most certain. I did not get a definite opinion from Joe and Darwin. I understand the bird was seen later by Beth and Mark Prescholdt.

**Previous experience:** I have previously misidentified two first year Herring Gulls as Thayer's and seen one first year Thayer's at Alton Dam. I have been studying Herring Gull carefully the past few years in hopes of finding Iowa's first Thayer's Gull. I have not seen a first year Iceland Gull.

**References/time used:** Looked at field guides and gull books two days before, used National Geographic Guide during observation, looked at Lehman's article before final typing and after viewing photos.

**Time of notes/typed:** Dictated during and immediately after observation as quoted above. Photos described while typing this report four days later.

What species? Thayer's Gull (Larus thayeri) How many? 1 in 1st winter pl.

Location? At dam of Red Rock Reservoir, Marion County, Iowa

Type of habitat? Flying around the open water area below the spillway of the dam

When? date(s): December 14, 1985 time: 1:05 pm to 2:pm

Who? your name and address: Francis L. Moore, 336 Fairfield St., Waterloo, IA 50703

others with you: Bob Myers, Perry

others before or after you: Tom Kent, Steve Dinsmore, mob.

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

We noticed the bird after being at the spillway area for about 1 hour; watching two Glaucous Gulls for about 30 minutes before this gull came into view. One of the Glaucous was a white bird, probably a second winter bird and the other was a creamy-buff color, probably a first winter bird. When we first noticed the Thayer's type gull it had flaired after catching a small fish from the water. The underwing linings were of a very light brown color with no contrasting areas seen. The sun was somewhat behind the bird and the primaries and secondaries looked translucent. The underside of the primaries were all one single light brown color with no darkness showing toward the outer feathers. The bird was slightly smaller than the Herring's that were flying nearby most of the time. It also had a smaller looking head and smaller bill. The bill was black. The feet were pink. The eye was dark. The upper surface of the bird was a medium brown color and was lighter looking than any of the Herring's present. The head, back, saddle area and upper wing surface was a darker shade of brown than the front of the neck and breast and belly. The primaries were definitely a darker brown than the rest of the upper wing, but not nearly as dark as the Herring's were. When it sat on a sand bar across the river the primaries of this bird was about half as dark as the lightest of the Herring's. The tail had a darker subterminal band than the rest of the tail and upper tail coverts. The tail band was also quite wide, maybe one-half or more of the tail. The bird was basically the same color overall with very little contrast between any areas except the upper surface of the primaries and the subterminal tail band. The bird was closest in size to the Herring's close by and definitely smaller than the two Glaucous near by.

Similar species and how eliminated: Darker tail band and darker upper surface to the primaries eliminates Iceland Gull. Very light underwing surface with no contrasting coloration in the primaries and a lack of contrast from the back to the upper tail area helps to eliminate Herring Gull.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? Yes  
One or more observers thought the bird to be an Iceland Gull.

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: Bright and sunny, excellent viewing conditions. Seen from about 50 or 60 feet at closest using 10X40 Leitz binoculars, 25X Bushnell telescope and Celestron C90 33X telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: No previous experience with Iceland or Thayer's Gull (One documentation not accepted), somewhat familiar with Herring Gull. References and persons consulted before writing description: NGS Field Guide and Grant, Harrison notes dictated on tape recorder at time of sighting.

How long before field notes made? time of sighting this form completed? 4 days

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

What species? Thayer's Gull (Larus thayeri) How many? 1 - 1st. winter bird

Location? Red Rock Reservoir - Marion Co., Iowa

Type of habitat? Spillway area below main dam - open water

When? date(s): Dec. 14, 1985 time: 11:45 AM to 11:47 AM  
1:00 PM to 2:00 PM off/on - still there when we left

Who? your name and address: Bob Myers R.R. 2, Box 153 Perry, Iowa 50220

others with you: Francis Moore

others before or after you: mob.

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Basic size + shape = Very similar to herring gull

Color = Medium brown (lighter <sup>or as light as</sup> than lightest 1st. winter herring gull present) with darker brown primaries (on dorsal side) - Tail had darker brown wide terminal band. I first saw bird in bright sun and it appeared almost as buffy (beige) as a 1st. winter glaucous gull also present. I later decided this shade was due to light and bird was actually some darker. The underside of wings appeared white with no dark markings showing thru primaries. Eye was dark. Bill was dark (black).

Other than the darker dorsal primaries and tail band the gull was very uniform med. brown. Did not show a lighter (whitish) rump as hennings often do.

The gull was definitely smaller than the two glaucous gulls ~~and~~ also present. I could not see size difference between this bird and the 5 or 6 hennings also there.

Similar species and how eliminated: Lack of contrasts (no white <sup>light</sup> rump) and white underside of wings eliminate herring gull. Tail band and darker upper primaries eliminate Iceland

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? Yes

If yes, explain: I believe at least one observer thought bird was an Iceland gull

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Bright sunny day - closest observation was about 50'-60' ft. - used 10x40 binocs and 25x scope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: No experience with Iceland or "accepted" Thayer's. I am somewhat familiar with herring gulls.

References and persons consulted before writing description: NGS guide + Grant

How long before field notes made? on the spot this form completed? 3 days

What species? Thayer's Gull, 1st winter How many? 1Location? Red RockType of habitat? below spillway, with reservoir above frozenWhen? date(s): December 11, 1985 time: 2:25 to 2:40Who? your name and address: Beth & Mark Proescholdt, Liscomb, Iowaothers with you: Eugene & Eloise Armstrong, Denny Thompsonothers before or after you: Carl Bendorf, Bob Myers, Francis Moore, Tom Kent

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

When Armstrongs and Denny Thompson first called our attention to this bird we saw a 1st winter gull flying, the size of a Herring Gull, but lighter than 1st winter Herring Gulls and darker than the Glaucous Gull we had been watching for an hour. This bird had an overall uniform light gray-tan color across the mantle and upper primaries, but the under flight feathers were a silvery-white, almost translucent appearing, - a sharp contrast to the rest of the tan underparts. A broad uniform tail band was a dark chocolate brown of the same quality of brown as the body, only darker - contrasting with the blacker Herring Gulls' tail bands. There was a dark smudge around the eyes. The bill was dark although we didn't compare size & shape of bill & head with Herring Gulls, as we saw it only in flight. There is no doubt it was our minds that this was a 1st winter Thayer's Gull.

Similar species and how eliminated: Herring Gull, Glaucous Gull - see aboveDid any one disagree or have reservations about identification? reservations, yesIf yes, explain: After reading everything we could find, we are certain it was a Thayer's Gull

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

full sun; approx. 20 yds at close range to 50 yards; binoculars (we saw it only as it flew so didn't use scopes)

Previous experience with species and similar ones: never a Thayer's, a Glaucous only that day - Herring of courseReferences and persons consulted before writing description: National Geog guide, Robbins guide, Audubon's Master Guide, Birding, Dec 1980, article by Paul Lehman; Amer Birds, Vol 29, #6, 60How long before field notes made? at once this form completed? Dec 21, 1985

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

not reviewed  
(85-22)

1. Species Thayer's Gull 2. Number: 1  
 3. Location Tailwaters of Red Rock Dam Marion Co. Ia  
 4. Date: 12/11/85 5. Time Bird seen: 1:30 to 2:00

6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern (describe in great detail all parts of the plumage, and beak and feet coloration, in addition, to the diagnostic characteristics, but include only what actually was seen in the field): Uniformly brown gull.

Appeared to be the same shade of chocolate-brown on both the body & wings. Tail was darker with no subterminal band. No black in the wings. Underside of primaries was much lighter than rest of wing, appearing translucent when bird was overhead. At times appeared to be a few lighter feathers on upper primaries and in secondaries, but only in certain light. Bill was all dark. Size of a herring gull. Couldn't get eye on  
 7. Description of voice, if heard: key color.

8. Description of behavior: Feeding with herring gulls below the dam, occasionally lighting in the water.  
 9. Habitat - general:  
 specific:

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain: Stuck out from 1st-year herring gulls by lack of black in the primaries. Also had a uniform brown body plumage, while herring gulls appeared darker on back, "splotchy looking". Much darker than young Iceland or Glaucous

11. Distance (how measured)? As close as 10 yds. 12. Optical equipment: 20X scope 7x35 binos

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): Good sun. Looking north, west, & east, so got several light angles on the bird.

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: Primaries always appeared lighter.  
None with Thayer's, much with Herring.

15. Other observers: Gene & Eloise Armstrong. Mark & Beth Proeschwoldt.

16. Did the others agree with your identification? Gene & Eloise did. Mark & Beth still looking at it when we left.

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: Tom Kent mentioned possible Thayer's on 12/17.

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description: Used Harrison's Seabirds while watching the gull. Bird looked darker than Harrison's illustration, more closely resembles dark-phase on p. 152 of Nat'l Geographic guide.

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 3 days.

Dennis Thompson Address: 2019 44th ~~St~~ ~~Ia~~  
 Signature

Date: 12/15/85 City, State: Des Moines Ia

I know this is a tricky identification. Bird was different<sup>85-221</sup>  
from the herring gulls it was feeding with. The uniform body color was  
obvious, as was the lack of black in wing-tips. When watching the ~~the~~  
"brown" Herring gulls, could always see black in the wingtips. Lost  
~~Whenever~~ we quit watching the bird, could always pick it up  
again when it came it came within range, so it stuck out fairly  
easily. Couldn't get structure of the bill. Every time I'd concentrate  
on it, my eyes would water up. (It was cold!)

Also had 10 Gray Partridge feeding at the base of Saylorville  
Dam on 12/8/85, my first for Polk Co.