

Iceland Gull  
27 Dec 1985  
Le Claire, Scott Co., IA  
\*Mark Brogie/P. Wickham, \*Martsching  
IBL 56:44; 57:77

Record Number: 85-24  
Classification: NA

## DOCUMENTATIONS

Mark A. Brogie/Peter P. Wickham  
Paul Martsching

## LETTERS

Bruce Peterjohn to Tom Kent, 22 Aug 1986, 6 Oct 1986

## REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 56:44  
Records Committee: IBL 57:77

## VOTE: 2-III, 3-IV, 1-V, 1-abstain

[Note from Secretary: At the last meeting we voted to separate two Iceland Gull reports that were closer together than these two; now two members combined the two sightings and another suggested that we do so. Help!]

V, The observers seem confused about the aging of gulls and terminology ("subadult", "light-phased"). The bird was not seen in direct comparison with Herring or Glaucous. All of the birds could have been first year Glaucous Gulls with the usual variation in size and coloration. A second year Iceland Gull is very unlikely and not at all substantiated here.

IV, There are a lot of subjective type statements in the documentation which are hard to put into perspective unless an observer has had experience with a species. I can not tell from the documentation if this is the case with these observers or if the bird in question is a symptom of "you see what you expect to see." At the end of the documentation was a statement that an Iceland Gull was recorded on the Davenport Christmas Bird Count 5 days before this sighting. The documentation is very well done and does describe an Iceland Gull, in my limited research on this species. I would rather have seen two separate documentations on this bird instead of this combined documentation; they would have given two opinions instead of one. With my limited research I can not ascertain if lack of any gray in the mantle in a second winter white winged gull, as the documentation noted, helps prove an Iceland or makes the bird a 1st or 2nd winter Glaucous. I am confused.

abstain, same bird as above, also seen 12/28 same loc Steve Dinsmore. Paul Martsching.

III, Almost certainly same bird as above. I suggest combining the sightings.

IV, Sounds like a second-winter Iceland Gull but I don't feel confident that small Glaucous has really been ruled out by what's written here. Likely Iceland, though. Leucistic darker gulls ruled out by all-white remiges seen in flight.

[see continuation of this record 85-24\*]

Iceland Gull  
27 Dec 1985  
Le Claire, Scott Co., IA  
\*Mark Brogie/Peter Wickham \*P. Martschin  
second review on this memo; 3

Record Number: 85-24  
Classification: \*NA

[continuation of record 85-24]

REREVIEW with added documentation from Martsching and outside reviews by Peterjohn, Eckert, Scheider, and Stroyls.

REVOTE: 2-II, 1-III, 2-IV, 1-V, 1-not received

'V, The report from Brogie/Wickham is troublesome. We have been given a finished article with no indication of its relation to any notes taken in the field. It apparently is a joint description, but who saw what? How long did they observe it sitting next to other gulls and how far away were they at the time? How long after the observation were the details written down? The size is given as the same as the Herring, but this is very possible for Glaucous. The head and bill are described as "less robust in shape than the Glaucous..." I'm not sure what this means. This is not very helpful. Most of the rest of the description is given to the differences in plumage between two ages of white-winged gulls. Martsching only saw a bird in flight with not enough detail to begin separation from Glaucous.'

'IV, Wickham is an experienced observer, but I can't tell how much he wrote down, if any. Martsching only saw a flying bird at 200 yards with 7x binoculars for 1/2 minute.'

'IV, There is a probability of the bird described being an Iceland Gull but the possibility of the bird being a small Glaucous or hybrid has not been completely eliminated. The descriptions of the above two birds do describe what could be Iceland Gulls but due to the difficulty in separating Iceland from small female Glaucous or even from a possible hybrid between Glaucous and another species, these possibilities are not completely eliminated and therefore cannot rate above a Class IV. To be a first state record we need definitive proof without any doubts as to the birds identity. This is a highly variable and hard to identify species and without diagnostic photographs or a specimen we should be extremely cautious when examining the evidence we have available.'

'II, (same bird as above)? Because of proximity of sightings and dates I have treated all documentations as of same bird.'

'II, Where is doc. Dinsmore gave you in Cedar Falls? Same bird as above. Should be considered one record 12/22-12/28.

## ICELAND GULL IN SCOTT COUNTY, IOWA

On 27 December, 1985 we observed an Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*) along the Mississippi River approximately one-half mile north of the Interstate 80 bridge in Scott County, Iowa. The bird was viewed for a period of approximately 20 minutes as it frequented the open water and adjacent sheet ice in this area. It was observed in flight and at rest on the water under optimum light conditions using 10x40 Zeiss binoculars and a 15-60X Bushnell spotting scope.

The bird was in the company of several Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) and three subadult Glaucous Gulls (*Larus hyperboreus*). Two of the Glaucous Gulls were light plumaged birds lacking a gray mantle and, since eye color was not noted, may have been either first or early second winter birds. The third Glaucous was quite buffy and was undoubtedly a first winter bird. The Iceland Gull was first observed being chased by a light-phased Glaucous and was distinctly smaller and lighter colored. It also flew with a faster wingbeat and had a more buoyant flight than that of the larger bird. Glaucous Gulls were also observed chasing Herring Gulls but at no time was intraspecific chasing observed. During several instances two Glaucous Gulls were observed resting on the water or sitting on the ice together, but the Iceland always remained isolated from these birds.

At one point the Iceland Gull circled overhead at a distance of approximately 40 yards in the company of a light-phased Glaucous and an immature Herring Gull, and characteristics between the species were well noted. The plumage of the Iceland was wholly white with a faint buffy tinge, yet distinctly whiter than the Glaucous Gull. The size difference between the Glaucous and the other two species was apparent as the Iceland and Herring were of approximately equal size. The head and bill of the Iceland Gull appeared less robust in shape than the Glaucous although both species had a bicolored bill with a flesh colored base and dark tip. The legs and feet of the Iceland Gull were flesh colored while the wings appeared translucent and lacked any dark markings. The brown barring of the undertail coverts of the Iceland appeared heavier and more noticable than in its white-winged congeneric counterpart, and contrasted particularly with the whitish tail. No evidence of a gray mantle was apparent on the Iceland Gull, but based on other characteristics this bird was most likely in early second winter plumage. An Iceland Gull in this plumage was recorded on the Davenport Christmas Bird Count five days prior to this sighting.

Mark A. Brogie, Box 316, Creighton, NE 68729

Peter P. Wickham, 2201 5 Av SE, Cedar Rapids, IA 52403

85-24

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Iceland (?) Gull 2. Number: one  
 3. Location near Le Claire, Iowa on the Mississippi River  
 4. Date: 28 Dec 1985 5. Time Bird seen: 1:30 pm to 1/2 min.

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):

Slightly smaller than an immature Herring Gull flying very close to it; also head and bill was slightly smaller in proportion to the rest of the bird, as compared with the Herring Gull; the wing "ends" or tips were longer and narrower than the Her. G.'s wing "ends". Overall color - white wd best describe it; yet the primaries were distinctly whiter than the rest of the wing immediately adjacent to them. The part of the wing next to the primaries I wd describe as being extremely pale brownish cream. No obvious markings on the bird from the distance I was observing it. Beak appeared darkish, but then the bird wasn't all that close & it was cloudy.

top side of wing

7. Description of voice, if heard:  
 8. Description of behavior: flying upstream; general impression of wing beats was that they were somewhat faster & deeper than Herring Gulls.  
 9. Habitat - general:  
     specific: Mississippi River  
 10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:  
 Glaucous Gull is bigger, with a much more massive head & beak.  
 Don't know of any other gull of this size that has white wing tips devoid of any markings.

11. Distance (how measured) 150-200 yds - wild guess 12. Optical equipment:  
     7 x 35 binoculars  
 3. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):  
overcast  
 4. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:  
Saw a Glaucous Gull about 20 years ago in southwestern Michigan.  
 5. Other observers: have never seen Iceland Gull.  
Steve Dinsmore; was seen by several on days previously.  
 6. Did the others agree with your identification?  
yes  
 7. Other observers who independently identified this bird:

8. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description  
A Field Guide To The Birds - RT Peterson  
Birds Of North America - Golden Press  
National Geographic Bird Guide

Would have liked to have gotten a better look at this bird, but the process of elimination throws out all other possibilities.  
 9. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?  
A few notes immediately; the rest the next morning.

Carl Marzelay Address: 1120 Marston  
 Signature  
 Date: 28 29 Dec 1985 City, State: Ames, Iowa 50010