

Iceland Gull
16 Apr 1993
L. Macbride, Johnson Co., IA
*Jim Fuller
IBL 63:75, 64:69

Record Number: 93-12
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City 52240 [2/23/94]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 63:75

Records Committee: IBL 64:69

VOTE: 4 A-D, 3-NA

NA, With one exception, all characteristics given could apply to Thayer's Gull. The description of underwing as "shiny" and "somewhat silvery" is vague. Without description of primaries, I don't believe Thayer's can be eliminated.

NA, According to Harrison (Seabirds) there can be a slight size difference between small Glaucous and large Iceland Gull, while Herring Gull overlaps both. Subsequently, the observation that this bird is about the size of a Herring Gull is not that helpful. This leaves bill color. The description of its being lighter at the base does not really eliminate Glaucous Gull.

A-D, Although more description of the upper wing surface would have been helpful, the faint tail band and bill description are sufficient to identify this bird.

A-D, Again, there is no definitive description of the primaries on the standing and flying bird. In three minutes one could have compared the head and bill with Herring Gulls. The tail and implied white primaries, however, make this an Iceland. The bill excludes Glaucous.

NA, This species should still be considered on a combination of field marks because of its rareness in the state and the difficulty in separating it from the other similar gull species. The description of some key field marks are described in little or no detail and does not completely exclude Thayer's. The only mark described that suggests Iceland is the very faint tail band. The back, upper and lower wing surfaces, upper and lower primaries, head, tail, overall appearance compared to Herring and Ring-billed Gulls nearby was not discussed. These need to be described in more detail if at all possible in a species this rare in Iowa. Even the wash was casually described as brownish; what shade of brown? I need to have a better description and elimination of similar species on this one.

REVOTE: 2 A-D, 5 NA

NA, Other NA's convinced me.

NA, This bird was probably an Iceland Gull, but to accept it, I would have to make assumptions that are not clear in the documentation. Does "about the size of a Herring Gull" mean that the bird was definitely smaller than a Herring Gull? Does a "dark bill except for the base which was lighter" mean that at least 2/3 of the bill was black? As one NA commented, there is no description of head size and shape, wing length, or bill size.

A-D, This was not a Thayer's Gull. Thayer's never gives a first impression of being white, as described by Fuller. 1st win. Thayer's is brown -- at first glance much more similar to 1st winter Herring. Upon revisiting this, I think it's an Iceland. I have never seen a 1st winter Glaucous with a tail band, and the bill, although not well described here, is sharply two-toned, not simply lighter at the base. The observer is aware of this difference.

NA, No description of primary color in comparison to body color. Thayer's Gull not eliminated.

NA, I think the combination of faint tail band and bill color are probably indicative of Iceland Gull, but too much of the description; i.e., primary color, is left to inference. Maybe it's time for lumping!

NA, I agree with other NA voters that small Glaucous or even Thayer's not completely ruled out. We need more description for this species.

DOCUMENTATION OF UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTING

SPECIES: Iceland Gull (First year).

LOCATION: Short rock jetty from south shore of south arm of Lake MacBride (Johnson County).

DATE & TIME: 16 April, 1993 (4:39-4:42 PM).

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240.

OTHER OBSERVERS: None

BACKGROUND: I had just located an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull on another part of Lake MacBride. It had flown, and I was trying to relocate that bird, so was scoping a flock of about 50 gulls loafing on a rock jetty, when I picked out an almost all white bird in the group. I drove closer, and scoped it at 50 yards for about three minutes, when all the gulls took flight and did not return.

DESCRIPTION: This bird was very light in color over its entire body, although there was a brownish wash to the whiteness. The general size was about that of nearby Herring Gulls, and larger than nearby Ring-billed Gulls. It had a dark eye, and a dark bill, except for the base which was lighter. The legs were a grayish-pink. When the bird flew, I could see a very faint tail band, and the underwings were entirely shiny, and somewhat silvery, as compared to the brownish washed upperwing.

SIMILAR SPECIES: First year Thayer's Gull is generally darker, with noticeably darker tail and primaries. First year Glaucous Gull is larger with a two-toned bill.

VIEWING CONDITIONS & OPTICS: I was looking west to northwest in late afternoon of a sunny day. Viewing conditions were good, because I was looking slightly downward, and not up at the sky. I was using KOWA TSN-4 telescope with 20-60X zoom lens on a car window mount.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen up to five first year Iceland Gulls in the state in the past two years.

FIELD NOTES and REFERENCES: Field notes were made immediately, and this form was typed on April 22. No field guides were checked until the evening of the sighting.