

Iceland Gull

17 Nov 1995

Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA

*S. Dinsmore, *T. Kent, *J. Fuller

to 30 Nov; P-0473, P-0479, IBL 66:21, 96

Record Number: 95-66

Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATIONS

Stephen J. Dinsmore, 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames 50014 [*3/24/96]

Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

PHOTOGRAPHS

Stephen J. Dinsmore, 17 Nov 1995, P-0479

Thomas H. Kent, 18 Nov 1995, P-0473

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 66:21

Records Committee: IBL 66:96

Dinsmore, S. J. 1996. Iceland Gull at Saylorville Reservoir.

Iowa Bird Life 66:66-67.

VOTE: 7 A-P

A-P 1st basic P-0479, NA P-0473; The P-0473 gull appears to be a Thayer's Gull to me. It has a dark secondary band, a thick 1-1/2" (est) dark tail band, and a rather short bill in comparison to P-0479. The overall brown tone and especially the amount of black and dark in the primaries and primary coverts is much deeper than on a 1st basic Iceland Gull.

A-P, A white-winged gull with all black bill and faint subterminal tail band are seen in the photos. Descriptions substantiate size intermediate between Ring-billed and Herring gulls.

North American vagrant, the Ruff has been found with such consistency over the last 30 years that it is now considered regular in some East Coast states and California. There is now strong suspicion that a population breeds in the North American arctic.

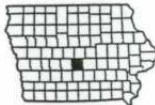
The number of Ruffs reported in Iowa has increased little over the last 20 years. The first record was a female collected in Louisa County in May 1940 (Dill, *Auk* 58:257, 1941). The 1980s saw two more records: 8-12 September 1982 in Fremont County (Silcock, *Iowa Bird Life* 53:87-90, 1983) and 1 September 1984 in Story County (Martsching, *Iowa Bird Life* 56:64, 1986). Previous to 1995, only one Ruff had been identified in Iowa in the 1990s: a female in Greene County on 26 May 1991 (*IBL* 61:92). This spring, in addition to the above bird, a female was identified in Fremont County on 31 March and 1 April (*IBL* 65:73). The Ruff, because of its many singular features and habits, is truly an exciting species and one Iowans should be prepared to find and identify.

810 North B Street, Indianola, IA 50125

ICELAND GULL AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

On 17 November 1995, I parked at the west end of the Saylorville dam in Polk County to scan some gulls feeding along the dam face. At 11:30 a.m., I noticed a very pale gull feeding with a small flock of Ring-billed Gulls off the east end of the dam. The great distance precluded careful scrutiny, but I initially assumed this was the first-basic Glaucous Gull I had seen here the day before. A few minutes later, I was watching the bird from a distance of about 200 m and noted the all-dark bill and smaller size, both of which were wrong for Glaucous Gull. I studied and photographed the bird from distances as close as 30 m until 1:10 p.m.



The bird was with about 25 Ring-billed, ten Herring, and one Franklin's gull. The bird was about 10% smaller than a Herring Gull. The bill was black, short, and straight. The bill was shorter than the bills of all Herring Gulls present, and lacked the pale area of variable extent. The eye was dark. The head and neck were white with extensive but faint gray/brown wash, especially on the crown and back and sides of the neck. The forehead was slightly paler than the crown. The mantle was white with very fine gray/brown speckling, although the overall appearance was still very pale. The underparts were white with extensive gray/brown wash, especially on the belly and flanks. The legs were pink, although the brightness as compared to Herring Gulls was difficult to determine. While on the water, the visible portion of the primaries and the mantle were the palest. The pattern of a pale mantle, darker, mottled tertials, and pale primaries was striking when the bird rested on the water. The wingtips extended well beyond the tip of the tail when the bird was resting. The upperwing coverts were pale and mottled light brown. The upper surfaces of flight feathers were slightly paler than the upperwing coverts. In flight, the spread primaries showed a narrow pale brown fringe on the outer portion of the outer web of each feather. This was visible only at close range; otherwise, the feathers appeared entirely pale. The wingtip, i.e., the proximal 1-2 inches of the outer primaries, was completely white. The underwing coverts were pale gray/brown, contrasting with the translucent undersides of all the flight feathers. The uppertail was white with very fine brown barring, especially on the coverts and outer rectrices. There was a diffuse, pale brown

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subterminal tail band, about 1-1.5 inches wide, which was the same color as the upperwing coverts and mantle. The undertail coverts were white with fine pale brown barring.

After careful study, I concluded that the bird was a first-basic Iceland Gull. The three most similar species are Herring, Thayer's, and Glaucous gulls in first-basic plumage. Glaucous Gull was eliminated by its larger size and longer, heavier, bicolored bill. First-basic Herring Gull is much darker overall with primaries darker than the upperwing coverts, a pale window on the inner primaries, and rectrices that are entirely black. First-basic Thayer's Gull is the most difficult to eliminate. Thayer's always show primaries that are as dark or darker than the rest of the wing. The dark tail band of Thayer's is always darker than the mantle and apparently matches the color of the wingtips (Kaufman 1990).

The bird was seen briefly the next morning, but could not be relocated later despite thorough searches of the lake. This represents the seventh record of an Iceland Gull in Iowa. The other records are: a first-basic from 13-16 March 1991 below the dam at Red Rock Reservoir (Kent 1992), at least three birds from 14 December 1991-13 February 1992 in the Davenport area (Kent 1992), a first-basic on 29 February 1992 at Saylorville Reservoir (Kent 1992), a first-basic from 16-30 January 1993 at Iowa City (*IBL* 63:49), an adult on 31 January 1993 at Lock and Dam 14, Scott County (*IBL* 63:49), and a first-basic on 14 February 1993 at Credit Island, Scott County (*IBL* 63:49). As birders continue to scrutinize gulls more carefully, records of this species in Iowa may continue to increase, especially in late fall and winter.

LITERATURE CITED

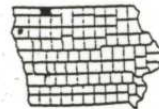
Kaufman, K. 1990. *Advanced Birding*. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, MA. 299 pp.
Kent, T. H. 1992. Iceland Gulls in Iowa. *Iowa Bird Life* 62:95-98.

4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames, IA 50014

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRDS IN DICKINSON COUNTY

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On the morning of 24 March 1995 I received a telephone call at work from Iowa DNR Wildlife Technician, Maury Muhm that he had seen one or maybe two Mountain Bluebirds at the Kettleton-Hogsback Wildlife Unit. He reported that they were on the fenceline that enclosed the area where Trumpeter Swans are to be released the next month. This area is along Highway 276 on the west side of Spirit Lake in Dickinson County about two miles north of the town of Spirit Lake.



After work I hurried to the area and, after about five minutes of scanning the fencelines with binoculars, I located two bluebirds. They were bluebirds but were they Mountain Bluebirds? With anticipation I grabbed my spotting scope and focused on the nearest bird. As the bird came into focus I found myself looking at a male Mountain Bluebird. I shifted the scope to the near fencepost and there sat another male Mountain Bluebird.

After watching them for a few minutes, I contemplated approaching them for a better look when all of a sudden they both flew. Luckily they flew toward me and



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Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA
17 Nov 1995 Steve Dinsmore 95-66

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X019 19-02 N2HNN-06RU 946

Iceland Gull P-0473
Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA
18 Nov 1995 T. H. Kent 95-66

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>018 19+00 N1HNN-10RU 391

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DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Iceland Gull

Number: 1 first-basic

Location: Saylorville Res., Polk Co.

Habitat: large reservoir

Date: 17 November 1995

Time: 11:30 a.m.-1:10 p.m.

Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50014

Others who saw bird: none

Description of bird(s): I was parked on the west end of the Saylorville dam when I noticed a very pale gull feeding with a small flock of gulls off the east end of the dam. The great distance precluded careful scrutiny, but I initially assumed this was the first-basic Glaucous Gull I had seen here the day before. A few minutes later, I was watching the bird from a distance of about 200m and noted the all-dark bill and smaller size, both of which were wrong for Glaucous Gull. I studied and attempted to photograph the bird from distances as close as 30m over the next hour and a half.

The bird was with about 25 Ring-billed, ten Herring, and one Franklin's Gull. I took the following notes with the bird under observation. Bird slightly smaller (by about 10%) than a Herring Gull. Appeared very pale, almost white, at a distance. The bill was black, short, and straight. The bill was shorter than the bills of all Herring Gulls present, and lacked the pale area of variable extent. Eye dark. Head and neck were white with extensive but faint gray/brown wash, especially on the crown and back and sides of the neck. Forehead slightly paler than crown. Mantle white with very fine gray/brown speckling, although the overall appearance was still very pale. Underparts white with extensive gray/brown wash, especially on belly and flanks. Legs pink, although brightness as compared to Herring Gulls was difficult to determine. While on the water, the visible portion of the primaries and the mantle were the palest. The pattern of a pale mantle, darker, mottled tertials, and pale primaries was striking when the bird rested on the water. Wingtips extended well beyond (i.e. at least 2") tail tip when resting. Upperwing coverts pale and mottled light brown. Upper surfaces of flight feathers slightly paler than coverts. In flight, the spread primaries showed a narrow pale brown fringe on the outer portion of the outer web of each feather (visible only at close range-feathers otherwise appeared entirely pale). The wingtip, i.e. proximal 1-2" of outer primaries, was completely white. Underwing coverts pale gray/brown, contrasting with the translucent undersides of all flight feathers. Uppertail white with very fine brown barring, especially on coverts and on outer rectrices. There was a diffuse pale brown subterminal tail band, about 1-1.5" wide, which was the same color as the upperwing coverts and mantle. Undertail coverts white with fine pale brown barring.

Similar species and how eliminated: The three most similar species are Herring, Thayer's, and Glaucous gulls in first-basic plumage. The latter was eliminated by its larger size and longer, heavier, bicolored bill. First-basic Herring Gull is much darker overall with primaries darker than the upperwing coverts, a pale window on the inner primaries, and rectrices that are all black. First-basic Thayer's Gull is the hardest to eliminate. Thayer's always show primaries that are as dark or darker than the rest of

the wing. The dark tail band of Thayer's is always darker than the mantle and apparently matches the color of the wingtips (Kaufman 1990).

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with overcast skies. Estimated viewing distance was 30-250m. I used 10x42 binoculars and a 20-60x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I have extensive experience with Herring, Thayer's, and Glaucous gulls, the species most likely to be confused with Iceland Gull.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America
Kaufman Advanced Birding
Grant Gulls: A guide to identification

How long before field notes made: written during observation
How long before this form completed: written 17 November 1995

The bird was with about 25 Ring-billed Gulls, and one Franklin's Gull. I took the following notes with the bird under observation. It was slightly smaller (by about 10%) than a Herring Gull. Appeared very pale, almost white, at a distance. The bill was black, short, and straight. The bill was shorter than the bills of all Herring Gulls present, and lacked the pale area of variable extent. Eye dark. Head and neck were white with extensive but faint gray-brown wash, especially on the crown and back and sides of the neck. Forehead slightly paler than crown. Mantle white with very fine gray-brown speckling, although the overall appearance was still very pale. Underparts white with extensive gray-brown wash, especially on belly and flanks. Legs pink, although brighter as compared to Herring Gulls was difficult to determine. While on the water, the visible portion of the primaries and the mantle were the palest. The pattern of a pale mantle darker, mottled tertials, and pale primaries was striking when the bird rested on the water. Wingtips extended well beyond (i.e. at least 2") tail tip when resting. Upperwing coverts pale and mottled light brown. Upper surfaces of light feathers slightly paler than coverts in flight. The outer primaries showed a narrow pale brown fringe on the outer portion of the outer web of each feather (visible only at close range-feathers otherwise appeared entirely pale). The wingtip, i.e. proximal 1-2" of outer primary, was completely white. Underwing coverts pale gray-brown, contrasting with the translucent undersides of all light feathers. Upper tail with very fine brown barring, especially on coverts and on outer rectrices. There was a diffuse pale brown subterminal tail band, about 1-1.5" wide, which was the same color as the upperwing coverts and mantle. Under tail coverts white with fine brown barring.

Similar species and how eliminated: The three most similar species are Herring, Thayer's, and Glaucous gulls in first-year plumage. The latter was eliminated by its larger size and longer, heavier, bifurcated bill. First-year Herring Gull is much darker overall with primaries darker than the upperwing coverts, a pale window on the inner primaries, and rectrices that are all black. First-year Thayer's Gull is the hardest to eliminate. Thayer's always show primaries that are as dark or darker than the rest of

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the wing. The dark tail band of Thayer's is always darker than the mantle and apparently matches the color of the wingtips (Kaufman 1990).

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Kaufman Advanced Birding
Grant Gulls: A guide to identification

How long before field notes made: written during observation

How long before this form completed: written 17 November 1995

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Iceland Gull; **Number:** 1 first-winter

Location: Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co., Iowa

Date: 18 November 1995; **Time:** 8:30 to 8:50 a.m.

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

Others before/with/after: found by Steve Dinsmore the day before

Habitat and circumstances: above dam on large reservoir

Description of bird: After about 30 minutes of looking over the thousands of Ring-billed and scattered Herring gulls that were resting on the water above the dam, I finally spotted the white-winged gull. It must have flown in, because later it could be picked out with the naked eye. It was intermediate in size between the many Ring-billed Gulls and a second-year Herring Gull in the same field of view. The head was larger than that of Ring-billed Gulls but smaller and more rounded than that of the Herring Gulls. The eye was dark. The bill was all black, of uniform thickness, and thinner and shorter than that of a Herring Gull. The bird was overall a very light tan color. The folded wings showed no darkness. The primaries extended at least one inch beyond the tail and were crossed. In flight, the under surface of the flight feathers was silvery to the wing tip. The upper surface of the wing was uniform light tan. The tail had a definite light brown sub-terminal band. I did not see the leg color. I was able to watch the bird on the water and had it in the scope when it flew. I switched to my camera as it flew in front of me and circled over the dam and returned in front of me to the water. After switching to my binocular and back to my camera, I lost the bird as it returned toward the water. I could not find it for a while, but then noticed it flying in from the north. I watched it on the water for a while and it flew up briefly one more time. I walked to the end of the parking area to take another photo, but lost the bird and did not find it again over the next two hours. The viewing conditions from the dam were as nice as I have seen, with good sunlight and practically no wind or waves.

Voice: not heard

Similar species: Glaucous Gull is eliminated by the size, small head and bill, all-black bill, and tail band. This bird differs from Thayer's Gull in having no darkness in the primaries as seen on the folded wing or in flight, a much fainter tail band, and overall very light color. The Iceland Gulls that I have seen in Iowa seem to have a daintier head and bill than Thayer's. Also, the crossed primaries on the resting bird impressed me, although maybe this is because I look for it on Iceland Gulls and may not on Thayer's.

Any one have reservations?: I did not talk to Steve Dinsmore, and, at this time, I do not know whether the bird was relocated by others. I thought the bird was a classic first-winter Iceland Gull.

Light: early morning sunlight looking north; **Distance:** 100 to 200 yards (guess); **Optics:** 10x binocular, 20x scope, 560 mm lens.

Previous experience: I have seen several first-year birds in Iowa.

References before/after viewing: none

Time of notes: during viewing period; **Final typing:** 1 day

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DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: ICELAND GULL (First year)

LOCATION: Cherry Glen Recreation Area, Saylorville Reservoir (Polk County)

DATE & TIME: 30 November (9:40-10:45 AM)

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

OTHERS: Chuck Fuller the previous day

DESCRIPTION: The bird was standing on ice about two hundred yards out on the lake with Ring-billed Gulls. It did not change location during the hour or so that I watched. Much of the time it was sleeping. I never did see the bird fly, or even raise its wings. The only direct size comparison was to Ring-billed Gulls around it, and it was a little larger than any of them. This bird was very light, but a tannish white, rather than white-white. It was pretty much the same color overall, although the tail and end of the folded wing were lighter. The bill was dark its entire length. The eye was dark. The legs were a grayish-pink.

SIMILAR SPECIES: It was too white, especially on the tail and wing ends for a first-year Thayer's Gull. It was too small and had an all-black bill when compared to a first or second-year Glaucous Gull.

OPTICS & CONDITIONS: It was mid-morning on a mostly sunny day. I was looking straight west, with the sun in the southeast. I was using a KOWA TSN-4 telescope (20-60 X), mostly at 20-25 X, at a distance of about 200 yards.

REFERENCES & FIELD NOTES: Field notes were made at the time, and this form was typed the same evening. National Geographic field guide was viewed after the sighting.