

Iceland Gull

1st yr

Record Number: 92-03

4 Jan 1992

Classification: A-P

Lock and Dam 14 to 15, Scott Co., IA

*Kent, *Cecil, *Fuller, *Johnson

*Petersen, *Cummins, *Pinkston; IBL 62:55, 63:69, Kent 1992

DOCUMENTATIONS

Thomas H. Kent, 4 Jan, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

Bob Cecil, 17 Jan, 1315 41st St., Des Moines, IA 50311

Jim Fuller, 31 Jan, 6 Longview Knoll, Iowa City, IA 52240

Ann Johnson, 2, 9 Feb, 532 120th Ave., Norwalk, IA 50211

Peter C. Petersen, 3 Feb, 235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport, IA

52803

Ray Cummins, 8 Feb, 609 S. Main St., Centerville, IA 52544

Randall Pinkston, 9 Feb, 526 Reno St., Iowa City, IA 52245

PHOTOGRAPHS

T. H. Kent, 4 Jan (P-0324) and 3 Feb (P-0326)

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 62:55

Kent, T. H. 1992. Iceland Gulls in Iowa. IBL 62:95-98.

Records Committee: IBL 63:69

VOTE: 2 A-P, 5 A-D; 4 thought Petersen bird same, 2 different, and 1 no comment.

A-D, Same bird.

A-D, Good details of plumage, white wing tips, small bill size and comparative shape, and overall configuration of this bird from all observers. I cannot seem to remember which records the pictures go with, therefore, you have my permission to change any appropriate record to A-P. I do remember that the pictures clearly showed completely white wing tips eliminating Thayer's Gull, and I seem to remember that some gave a size comparison with nearby gulls. Pete's record of a 2nd year bird in which I am cited as one of the observers should go with the other 2nd year records even though he does not mention the gray mantle. I don't know why he would omit this because it was obvious. Ross and I were there with him when this bird was observed; it was so noticeable, in fact, that we did, at first, believe this to be an adult bird, or very nearly an adult. It was only when I returned home and checked Grant that I decided it was a 2nd-year. I believe, though I cannot say with certainty, that this is the same bird Pete reported as an adult.

A-D, Despite some disagreement about the age of this bird, the information provided supports the ID as a first-winter Iceland Gull.

A-P, The documentors collaborated each other on the key field marks such as white primaries, 1"+ primary extension, smaller and thinner bill than Herring gulls, rounded head, and smaller size than Herring Gulls.

A-P, Petersen described a first-year gull not a 2nd year.

A-D, 1 bird. All indications are of diagnostically marked 1st winter Iceland Gull. Petersen documentation is description of 1st winter unless he left out a lot of detail or left the reviewer to fill in between the lines?

A-D, Good details and description of Iceland Gull provided. Petersen's gull obviously seems like different gull. I would like more details but could go A-D on 2nd year Iceland Gull on Petersen's sighting.

REVOTE: 7 A-P

A-P, The image of the bird is not as large as one would like but does clearly show a pigeon-headed gull with small black bill, white primaries, and, on one photo, I think I can discern the wings extending beyond the tail. The above along with the beige mottling on wings and mantle support identification of first-year Iceland Gull.

A-P, Photo showing wings raised clearly eliminates Thayer's Gull, which should show darkening in primaries, or, at least, uniform color. Too dark for Glaucous.

A-P, AP 1st winter Iceland Gull.

A-P, 1st winter Iceland Gull. 1/4/92. The photos clearly show a 1st year bird. All documentations are those of a 1st year Iceland Gull, including Petersen's. Petersen appears to have misaged this bird according to his documentation. The comments from the second reviewer of the first round are curious. Do we accept this as additional information for Petersen's bird? Or do we judge the record on the evidence as presented in the documentation? Maybe the second reviewer should have documented the bird themselves to help Petersen's case. As it stands right now I will stay with the assumption that there was one bird and that Petersen misaged the bird as his documentation indicates.

A-P, Good photos. They appear to me to be two different 1st winter Iceland Gulls from Jan to Feb sightings.

During the identification process, other small doves of comparable size were ruled out. The Ruddy Ground-Dove does not have scaling anywhere on its body. The Inca Dove is scaled, but has a longer tail, an entirely black bill, a light belly with black stripes, and lacks the black areas on the wing.

Although not always easy to find, the dove did remain in the same area for about two weeks, allowing a large number of birders to view this first state record. The last sighting was on 2 November during an early season blizzard.

A Common Ground-Dove was recorded at Waconda Country Club in Des Moines on 10 June 1922 (C. H. Pangburn, *The Ground Dove in central Iowa*, *Auk* 39:566, 1922). The author, who claimed to be familiar with this species, speculated that it might be an escaped cage bird. Because of this and lack of description, the bird was not accepted to the state list.

In recent years, a pattern of vagrancy for this species has become apparent (Figure 2). The monthly distribution of sightings is as follows: March (1), May (2), June (1), July (1), August (3), September (4), October (14), November (10), and December (7).



Figure 2. Breeding range (dark area) and recent vagrant records of Common Ground-Dove by state. The numbers indicate the number of records for each state.

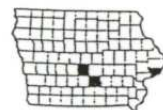
The Cedar Rapids bird, officially Iowa's first, fits the vagrancy pattern of this species well for both date and location. It is interesting that another bird of this species showed up at Whitefish Point in northern Michigan on 21 October 1991 (*American Birds* 46:93), just two days after the Iowa bird was first sighted.

6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, IA 52240

ICELAND GULLS IN IOWA

THOMAS H. KENT

A first-winter/first-summer Iceland Gull at Red Rock Reservoir from 13 to 16 March 1991 provided Iowa's first accepted record of this species. Previous reports of this species had occurred over the years, but the sightings were brief or not recorded in sufficient detail to be sure of the identification, or may have been in Illinois. Here I report on the spring 1991 record and four more records from the winter of 1991-1992.



On 13 March 1991, Tim Schantz found a white-winged gull below the dam at Red Rock Reservoir in Marion County. The bird was intermediate in size between Ring-billed and Herring gulls, but closer to the latter. On the standing bird, he noted gleaming white primaries that protruded about one inch beyond the tail. In flight, the flight feathers were all white from above and below. The rest of the bird was a mottled or indistinctly flecked off white or very light gray-brown. A mottled tail band was noted. The bill was mostly dark with a light base, the eye dark, and the legs pink. Nine other observers documented this bird over the next three days, and I took photos (Figure 1a and 1b).

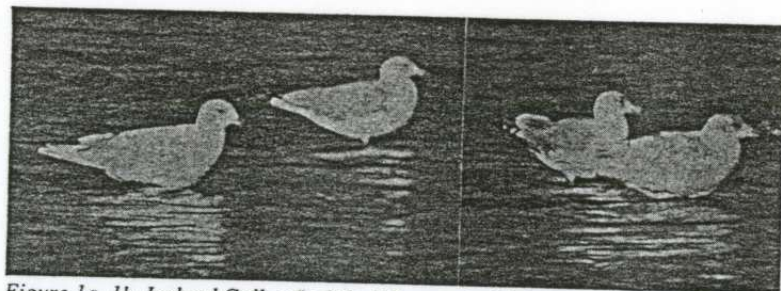


Figure 1a, 1b. Iceland Gull at Red Rock Reservoir, 14 March 1991. Note the more rounded head shape in 1a.

The following details are added from a composite of the other observers. The bill was shorter and thinner than that of Herring Gulls with a smoothly curved distal culmen and minimal gonyl prominence. There was more light color in the lower mandible than the upper, and the demarcation with the black distal part of the bill was indistinct. Some described the head as rounded, others thought it was not. There was a smudge around the eye and some streaking on top of the head. The upper back and upper breast, neck, and parts of the head lacked mottling and appeared white. One observer noted some pale brown on the outer side of the shaft of the distal four or five primaries. The mottled tail band was just slightly darker than the rest of the bird and occupied the distal half of the tail except for a paler, thin terminal band.

Several of the documentors were uncertain of the identification because of the white-headed appearance (suggesting Herring Gull), tail band (more typical of Thayer's Gull), and head shape (better for Herring or Thayer's). The possibilities of leucistic Herring Gull or a hybrid were suggested. The documentations and

photographs were reviewed by Kevin J. Zimmer, the author of a recent article on Iceland Gull with many excellent photographs (Zimmer 1991), who provided explanations for some of the troublesome features. He noted that head shape depended on posture (Figure 1a vs. 1b), and in some photos the shape was within the range of Iceland Gull. He also pointed out, "The individual variation in incredible, and I've seen many an unquestioned Iceland Gull (presumably males) that were as flat-crowned and large-billed as adjacent Herrings, while others look more like doves." Zimmer suggested that the white appearance of the upper body and neck were due to molting of these feathers to first-summer plumage. The tail band was not a problem at all, because Zimmer's article illustrates that many Iceland Gulls have a light tail band. According to Zimmer, "Points against Thayer's Gull include overall paleness, whiteness of the folded primaries, uniform checkering of the tertials [solid brown in Thayer's], absence of secondary bar, paleness of spread wing tip, and amount of contrast at the base of the bill." A leucistic Herring Gull would be expected to have some features other than the white head and neck to suggest that species. To identify a hybrid, one would have to find features of each parent -- a difficult task. The proposed lumping of Iceland and Thayer's gulls into one species would make the possibility of Iceland-Thayer's hybrid moot.

In the next three paragraphs, I describe three different Iceland Gulls, two in first-winter and one in second-winter plumages. Presumably these were the same birds seen by many observers in Bettendorf and Davenport in January and early February 1992.

On 31 December 1991, I went to Lock and Dam 14 in Scott County in an attempt to add some species to my last-day-of-the-year list. From the lock area, I found a very pale gull flying below the dam. On the flying bird, I noted the following: slightly smaller than Herring Gulls; overall off-white on the wings, body, and tail; light brown, poorly demarcated, subterminal tail band about one-fourth the length of the tail; and all-dark bill. The tail band was similar to that on the Iceland Gull photographed in Scott County on 8 February by Tim Schantz (Figure 2). The underwing was all light, with the flight feathers lighter than the coverts. The upper wing was very uniform and without a hint of a secondary bar. I concluded that it was a first-winter bird because of the uniform coloration without gray on the back or wings and that it was not a Glaucous Gull because of the overall size and all black bill. I was less secure in excluding Thayer's Gull because of the tail band and slight brownish edge to the upper side of the outer two or three primaries that I detected using a telescope. Eventually the bird landed on a pillar and later a Herring Gull landed beside it. Compared to the Herring, the bird was 10% smaller; had a smaller, more rounded head with shorter neck; had a bill three-fourths as long; and had a primary extension of about 1 inch and equal to that of the Herring Gull. On the standing bird, the primaries were light colored and the wing and tail coverts appeared finely vermiculated. Based on the wing tip and faintness of the tail band, I argued against Thayer's Gull. Shortly thereafter, at Lock and Dam 15, I viewed a first-winter Thayer's Gull that was quite different in that it was overall darker, had dark wing tips, and had a much darker and more prominent tail band. I saw the Iceland Gull again on 1 January 1992, still flying below the dam, and it was seen the next day by Jim Fuller, who said that it was easy to pick out because of its "ghostly" appearance. Neither of us saw the leg color well. The eye was dark.

I returned to Lock and Dam 14 on 4 January and found two Iceland Gulls that appeared to be different birds from the one seen on 31 December and 1-2 January. The first was a first-year white-winged gull that I saw around a small area of open water in the backwater, rather than flying below the dam and sitting on pillars as had occurred on the previous days. As I moved up taking photographs, the bird flew away. I did not detect any tail band, but one of my photographs (Figure 3) later showed a faint, broken, narrow, light brown, subterminal tail band. I had noted the overall similarity of size and shape (compared to Herring Gulls) to the bird seen three days before, and also noted pink legs, projecting crossed primaries, and indistinct lightness in the base of the bill. One or more first-winter Iceland Gulls were seen farther south in Scott County from Lock and Dam 15 to Bettendorf/Moline by many observers at least to 9 February.

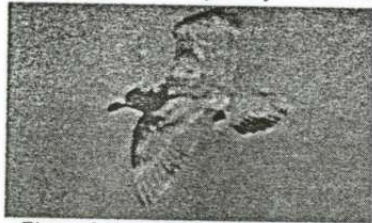


Figure 2. Iceland Gull in Scott County, 8 February 1992. Note the definite light brown tail band. Photograph by Tim Schantz.

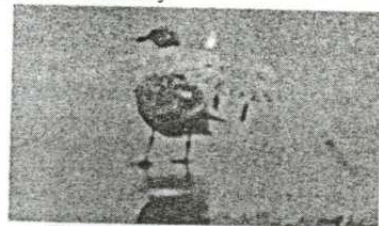


Figure 3. Note the minimal brown edging in the distal tailfeathers of this flying first-winter Iceland Gull at Lock and Dam 14 on 4 January 1992.

On 4 January, after flushing the first-year Iceland Gull, I moved up to look at the gull flock resting on the ice of the backwater. I was surprised to find two white-winged gulls. The second bird had a uniform light-gray back and scapulars and a bill that was dark at the tip and light at the base. In flight, the light gray of the back and scapulars contrasted with the off-white of the upper wing surface. I also noticed a light, smudgy, gray-brown, subterminal tail band that occupied about one-fourth of the tail. Otherwise, this second-year Iceland Gull was similar in size, shape, and proportions to the first-winter bird. I did not see this bird again, but others reported a second-year bird downstream, and Tanya Bray (personal communication) saw a second-year bird on 3 February at Bettendorf/Moline.

On 29 February 1992, Bob and John Cecil and I were driving by the marina at Saylorville Reservoir when Bob saw a white-winged gull on the shoreline. We had heard of a Glaucous Gull being seen earlier in the day, but this bird was not much larger than the Ring-billed Gulls it was with and the bill appeared to be of uniform thickness and all dark. It was slightly longer and distinctly bulkier bodied than the Ring-billed Gulls. Overall it was very light brown with white primaries extending beyond the tail. Bob noted faint scaling on the wings and barring on the tail coverts. We left briefly to get Bob Myers and Maridel Jackson. Cecil and Myers thought the legs had a yellowish cast, but I judged them to be pinkish. I climbed down the bank to photograph the bird (Figure 4) and it eventually flew, revealing all light wing surfaces above and below. Cecil noted that the wings were broader than those of Ring-billed Gulls. I did not hear of any further reports of this bird.

How could I see five and photograph four Iceland Gulls in Iowa in less than one year's time? Did this same phenomenon occur in nearby states? Iceland Gulls

were reported in small numbers along all of the Great Lakes in the winter of 1991-92 (*American Birds* Regional Reports).

Having minimal experience with Iceland Gull prior to these sightings, I was under the impression from reading that identification might be difficult. The recent article by Zimmer was very timely and helpful with some difficult field marks. Zimmer emphasizes the extremely variable tail band in first- and second-year birds. The illustrations are helpful in translating concepts, such as rounded head and long primary extension, into real situations; however, these marks are still not easy to interpret. When comparing my photographs of the March 1991 bird at Red Rock Reservoir with Zimmer's photos, I was unsure whether the head



Figure 4. First-winter Iceland Gull at Saylorville Reservoir on 29 February 1992.

shape fit or not, but Zimmer, with his experience, thought they did. In looking at the isolated Iceland Gull on the pillar at Lock and Dam 14, I could not decide about head and bill shape until a Herring Gull landed next to the bird in question; only then did these field marks become obvious by comparison. With each succeeding sighting, the identification became easier and more obvious. I was also impressed that these birds were cooperative and seen by many observers; whereas, past reports of this species were fleeting and not described in detail.

Both Thayer's and Iceland gulls nest in the eastern nearctic region, and undoubtedly there is some interbreeding. Most Thayer's Gull migrate to the West Coast, but some, especially first-year birds, migrate/winter across the entire United States. Most Iceland Gulls migrate to Europe or the East Coast of North America, but a few of any age occur on the Great Lakes each year, and there are rare scattered individual records farther west.

These observations of the Iceland Gull may soon be moot. It is rumored that Iceland and Thayer's gulls are about to be deemed one species. The Kumlien's subspecies of Iceland Gull is very similar to adult Thayer's Gull, presenting a significant identification problem, particularly in Eastern United States. In Iowa, first-year birds may be more likely and are more easily separated.

What will these "new" birds be called. We may have to speak of "Thayer's-type first-winter Iceland Gulls" or just call them all Iceland Gulls and lose all the valuable information we are getting from the careful documentations by many Iowa observers. I hope we will still consider each gull individually, judging its age and describing each of its feathers and soft parts. Let the species fall where they may!

LITERATURE CITED

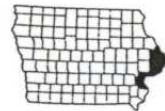
Zimmer, K.J. 1991. Plumage variation in "Kumlien's" Iceland Gull. *Birding* 23:254-269.

211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

LATE FALL AND WINTER BIRDING ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER IN EAST-CENTRAL IOWA

PETER C. PETERSEN

The Mississippi River in the Quad-City area has been a great attraction for gulls in recent years during the winter months. In January and February 1992, nine gull species were recorded just in the Quad-Cities. This article describes some of the best locations to check from November to March



for gulls as well as waterfowl and other winter birds. The route starts at Lock 17 and proceeds north to Lock 12 (Figure 1). All along the route, the Mississippi River is a good reference point to help keep you oriented. However, keep in mind that the river does not always flow south. Between Muscatine and Clinton it flows west or southwest, making it easy to get disoriented.

From the Illinois side of the Mississippi, Lock 17 (1) is reached by going north from New Boston on the Great River Road and turning west at the Lock 17 sign about one mile north of New Boston. Lock 17 is not a good concentration point for gulls or diving ducks, but dabbling ducks often linger into late December. They feed in the corn fields and are usually seen late in the day. Bald Eagles are present in good numbers at the lock and west end of Route 17 in New Boston.

On the Iowa side of the Mississippi River, Mark Twain National Wildlife Refuge lies adjacent to Lock 17. Access is limited during the waterfowl season in November and December. For access, check with the refuge personnel at the refuge office, R. R. #1, Box 75, Wapello, IA 52653, (phone 319-523-6982).

Lock 16 (2) is reached by going east from IL 92 just on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River bridge at Muscatine. The lock can also be viewed in Iowa from the southern end of Park Street on the east side of Muscatine. Take Route 92 across the river into Muscatine and turn right at the intersection with Routes 22 and 61. In a few blocks this road angles to the left and becomes Park Street. Lock 16 is not a gathering spot for gulls, but often has large numbers of Bald Eagles. A good location for woodland and coniferous species in Muscatine is Greenwood Cemetery (3), 1814 Lucas Street. Stay on Route 61 to where it intersects the Muscatine bypass. Follow the bypass to the west and south. Shortly after it crosses Route 22 it intersects Lucas Street. Proceed into town on Lucas; the cemetery is on the right in about 1.5 miles. Pine Grosbeaks have been found here, and Winter Wrens are often found in the cemetery's ravines.

From Muscatine, proceed toward Davenport on Route 22 which leaves Park at Washington Street. About eight miles east of Muscatine turn left on the county road marked for Wildcat Den State Park (4). At the park, the trail along Pine Creek from the ranger's house to the creek picnic grounds, about one mile long, is usually the most productive. Birds expected in winter include Winter and Carolina wrens, Wild Turkey, and Pileated Woodpecker.

Return to Route 22 and continue toward Davenport. Watch for Bald Eagles along the river to the Davenport city limit at Utah Avenue. Turn right (south) on Utah to South Concord Street and then proceed east along the river and Credit Island Harbor (5), watching for ducks, gulls, and Bald Eagles. To reach Fairmont Cemetery (6), an area similar to Greenwood Cemetery in Muscatine, turn left on Route 61 and proceed to Rockingham Road (Route 22). Turn right (east) and drive toward the city about four blocks to the cemetery. The



92-03

Iceland Gull
Moline, IL ~~Co., IA~~
3 Feb 1992 T. H. Kent

Iceland Gull 92-03 P-0326
Bettendorf/Moline, Scott Co.
3 Feb 1992 T. H. Kent

92-03

Iceland Gull 92-03
Lock and Dam 14, Scott Co., IA
4 Jan 1992 T. H. Kent

Iceland Gull P-0324
Lock and Dam 14, Scott Co., IA
4 Jan 1992 T. H. Kent

92-03

Iceland Gull
Moline, IL ~~Co., IA~~
3 Feb 1992 T. H. Kent

Iceland Gull 92-03 P-0326
Bettendorf/Moline, Scott Co.
3 Feb 1992 T. H. Kent

Iceland Gull P-0324
Lock and Dam 14, Scott Co., IA
4 Jan 1992 T. H. Kent

92-03

92-03
92-04

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Iceland Gull *Number:* 2.

Location: Lock and Dam 14, Scott Co. Iowa

Date: 4 January 1992 *Time:* 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

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

Others before/with/after: alone

Habitat and circumstances: Mississippi River

Description of bird: First-winter and second-winter white-winged gulls were on the frozen backwater near the lock with Herring Gulls but not with each other. I saw the first-winter bird first with a few Herring Gulls around a small bit of open water. I noticed it when it flew up because of the uniform very light milky tan upper wing, tail, and body. The primaries and secondaries from below in flight were white and underwing coverts darker. When standing or swimming it was just smaller than Herring gulls with a smaller head and shorter bill. Next to Herrings, the rounded top of the head and delicate look could be appreciated. The bill was mostly black, but the base had some indistinct lighter areas. The bill was three-fourths as long as the Herring's and thinner and more uniform in thickness throughout. The primaries appeared nearly white compared to the very light tan vermiculated appearance of the other wing feathers. The tertials were the same color as the wing coverts. The primaries protruded about an inch beyond the tail and crossed. The eye was dark and legs pink. In flight, I could not appreciate any tail band, which suggested that this bird was not the same as the one seen by me below the dam on 31 December and 1 January. When I moved up to look at the main flock of resting gulls, I was surprised to find another white-winged gull. I knew it was a different bird because the mantle was a uniform light gray and the bill was dark at the tip and light at the base. When bird flew away from me, I noticed a light smudgy gray or gray-brown subterminal tail band that was from one-fourth to one-third as wide as the tail length. This tail band was not sharply demarcated and did not have the vermiculated appearance of the tail band on the first-year bird seen three days before. Other than the bill, mantle, and tail, this bird was quite similar to the first-year bird as to size, head shape, bill length and thickness, and wings. I saw both of these birds in flight several times and watched them on the ice next to many Herring Gulls.

Voice: The first-year bird opened its mouth and made gull sounds that I could not distinguish from those of the other gulls.

Similar species: The overall size, head size, bill size, and lack of dipped-in-ink effect on the bill tip exclude Glaucous Gull. I excluded Thayer's Gull because both of these birds had very light primaries (not dark webs on the outer primaries). Neither had a secondary bar or in fact any distinctive marking on the wings. The lack of tail band in the first year bird also excludes Thayer's Gull. I was impressed by the paleness of the gray mantle in the second-year bird, but have too little experience with older Thayer's Gulls to make a comparison.

Light: Heavy overcast with soft gray lighting. *Distance:* 40 to 150 yards. *Optics:* 10x binocular, 20x scope.

Previous experience: I have seen a number of first-year Thayer's and Glaucous Gulls. One adult Glaucous Gull was over the river earlier in the morning and it was larger than Herring Gulls. I have limited experience with Iceland Gull (3 sightings).

References before/after viewing: none for last three days.

Time of notes: 10 minutes after viewing. *Final typing:* 4 hours.

#3

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

92-03

What species? Iceland Gull(?) First winter How many? 1

Location? Lock and Dam 15, Davenport Iowa. Rusty Pelican Restaurant

Type of Habitat? River

When? date(s): Jan 17, 1992 time: 10:00 AM to 10:15 AM

Who? your name and address: Bob Cecil 1315 41st St. Des Moines, IA

Others with you: NO

Others before or after you: About everyone

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, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

I am submitting this account even though they are not sufficiently complete to be diagnostic.

Gull, very pale, almost white overall, similar in coloration to 1st winter Glaucous Gull. It was different from first winter Glaucous Gull in that there was faint darkening at the wingtips, the tail (band), and along the trailing edge of the secondaries when viewed from above. Specifically, the wing darkening involved a very slight darkening along the leading edge of the first three or four primaries. The under surface of the wingtips appeared white.

The tail band and the secondary bar were very faint. If one did not specifically look for them, they would have been missed, giving the impression of all white wings and tail, as one would expect of a Glaucous.

The bird's bill was all dark. The eye appeared dark, but this was difficult to judge.

Although there were other gulls present (Herring, Ring-bills, and an adult Thayer's or Iceland), I was unable to get a side-by-side comparison with them. I got the impression that the subject bird's head was more rounded, petite, and pigeon-shaped than that of Herring or Glaucous Gull. Similarly, my impression was that the bill was smaller, including less pronounced gonyes than on accompanying Herrings. I was unable to determine relative size.

Similar species; how eliminated:
This bird was much more pale than any 1st Winter Thayer's I have seen. Darkening of wingtips, secondary bar, and tail band eliminates Glaucous Gull, as does relatively small bill.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? N.A.
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.
10x binocs, and 20x scope. Distance from 50' to 100 yards. Lighting to back and side, but, overall, pretty good.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Iceland would be life bird. Seen several first winter Thayer's and Glaucous Gulls.

References and persons consulted before writing description: None

How long before field notes made? at time this form completed? 48 hours

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).

DETAILS FOR UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTING

Additional details for Iceland Gull

On 1/31/92 I was looking at gulls from the Moline, Illinois waterfront near the JI Case Company plant. Two gulls were very close (about 40 yards) standing on the ice and detached from the large group of gulls in the area. One bird was an adult Herring Gull, while the other was smaller and matched the description of the Iceland Gull that I had seen on several previous occasions during the previous month. This bird was in Illinois, but previous sightings were in both Iowa and Illinois. What struck me about this observation that I had not noticed previously was the comparatively small and rounded head, as well as a bill which was less bulky (at least when compared to the Herring Gull). During previous sightings, the bird in question had been in flight, and the size of the head and bill did not seem to stand out like they did on this standing bird.

Jim Fuller, see also 91-47

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification?
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment, fox binocs, and box scope. Distance from 20' to 100 yards. Lighting to back and side. Date, overall, pretty good.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Iceland would be life bird. Seen several first winter Thayer's and Glaucous Gulls.

References and persons consulted before writing description: None

How long before field notes made? 2 1/2 hrs
AB Notes

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species: Iceland Gull - first winter

Location: Mississippi River, Scott Co., IA and Rock Island Co., IL

Habitat: Open river with ice floes

Date: 2 February 1992

Time: 17:00 to 17:15

9 February 1992

14:00 to 17:25 (intermittently)

Name and Address: Ann Johnson, 532 120th Avenue, Norwalk, Iowa 50211

Other observers: None the first time; both first winter and adult birds have been reported on the birdline; bird was also observed on 9 February by Beth Brown, Randy Pinkston, and Dan Dorrance.

Description of bird: This gull was amidst a number of Herrings and was first distinguished by its white primaries. It was smaller than all of the nearby Herrings, considerably so in comparison to some but only slightly smaller than a few others. On 9 February I observed it with flocks of ring-bills where it looked larger. The bird was primarily white and mottled, barred, or checked with gray. The type of pattern went successively from overall mottling on the head to barring and blotchiness on the mantle and wing coverts to checkering on the tertials. Although the patterns were different, there was still a uniformity in coloration with a bit less gray on the head and neck. The cold gray was very prominent on the mantle and upper wings with the scapulars showing a bit broader gray edges than the rest. In a sitting position the outer primaries appeared very white and extended beyond the tail approximately 1.5 bill lengths. Each successive row of wing coverts was finely edged in gray, giving a barred look. The tertials were checkered gray and white, a mark I specifically looked for after reading Kevin Zimmer's article in Birding. The head and breast were a mottled and blotchy light gray and there was a slight smudge around the dark eye. The distal two-thirds or so of the bill was black while the base was lighter. This was only apparent after careful observation and when the bill was well illuminated; at first glance it appeared entirely black. Structurally the bill was more delicate than the Herrings and was between one-third and one-half the length of the head. The head was slightly rounder than the Herrings and the entire bird looked "less chesty" than a Glaucous.

During observation time the bird was doing a considerable amount of raising its wings and pouncing on fish in the water. From below the flight feathers were a translucent white and the underwings were darker, motley gray. The vent area was heavily barred. The bird flew a short distance a couple of times and the tail and upperwings were briefly visible. A dusker color extended into the inner primaries and secondaries. Except for the outer primaries, the overall coloring was fairly consistent with no secondary bar noted. The rump and tail appeared finely barred with gray. Some internal gray mottling was evident, particularly in the inner retrices, towards the terminus of the tail creating a light gray band of the same color as the mantle and wing barring. The legs and feet were pink.

Similar species and how eliminated: A small Glaucous Gull was eliminated based on size in comparison with a large number of Herring gulls; size, structure and color of the bill; tail band; and general structure.

Thayer's Gull was eliminated based on whitish outer primaries; lack of any secondary bar; extremely pale tailband; overall washed out appearance; and checkered tertials. Interestingly enough I observed a possible Thayer's earlier in the afternoon which may well have been a Thayer's/Iceland intergrade as it had darker primaries but no secondary bar. Feather conditions which would warrant consideration of a worn bird of another species were not noted.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about identification? No

Viewing conditions (lighting, distance, optics): Bird was observed at an estimated 500 yards near the old seawall in both Iowa and Illinois. Observation was through telescope with zoom lens, used primarily at 25-30x. Sun was setting to the left and there was no direct sunlight on the bird although the sky was still bright enough for good observation. Bird was observed at about 100 feet under overcast skies on 9 February.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: First winter bird was seen at Red Rock Reservoir in March 1991. This bird was similar but with a less contrasting tailband. It was very much like a first winter bird seen at Grand Marais, Minnesota in November 1991.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Grant's Gulls; Harrison's Seabirds; Kevin Zimmer, "Plumage Variation in 'Kumlien's' Iceland Gull, Birding, October 1991.

How long before field notes made? Notes taken during observation
How long before this form completed? On return home same evening with additions made on 9 February

ILLINOIS DOCUMENTATION FORM FOR EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTINGS

I.O.R.C. RECORD NUMBER

92-03

1. Species: Iceland Gull Number seen: 1
 (If known) Age: 2nd year Sex: ? Plumage: _____
2. Location (including county): Ice flow between Bettendorf IA + Mo Ave. Ia
Scott Co. R. Ia Co.
3. Date(s): Feb. 3, 1992 + Feb. 9 Time of day: 9:05 AM to 9:15 AM
9:15 AM to 9:25 AM
4. Observers -- Your name: Peter C. Petersen Phone: (319) 355-7051
 Address: 235 McClellan Blvd. Davenport, IA Zip 52803
- Others present: Dan Donanceau 2/3, Ross Silrock + Tanya Bury on 2/9
- Others before or after you: Ana Johnson, Pete Wickham
5. Describe the habitat the bird(s) was found in and the surrounding habitat:
On ice shelf + in Miss. River along channel just E of I74 bridge
6. Description: Describe in great detail (but only include what actually was seen in the field (the size, shape and color pattern of the bird(s)). Include a description of the bill, eye, legs, feet, tail, body and wings as well as other diagnostic characteristics.

Plumage whitish-tan-flecked with tan, very light at wingtips. Bill flesh color with black tip, legs pink. Spread wings twice, otherwise walking or swimming. Wings extended well past tip of tail when standing. Bird standing with Herring Gull + seemed slightly smaller.

Species: Ice Land Gull Date seen: Feb. 3, 1992 Observer: P. C. Petersen

7. Similar species (explain how eliminated): Glaucous Gull. This bird too small head rounded, crown not flat, bill a bit shorter than Herring & not heavy, wings extended well past tail when at rest.

8. Describe the bird's behavior: standing on ice, swimming, walking & wing flapping

9. Describe the song or call notes heard: no heard

10. Viewing conditions:
Optical equipment used (type, power): 10X40 Zeiss binocs - 35-45X⁶⁰ Swift scope

Closest distance to bird (how measured): 400 m - est

Lighting and weather: thundercast, light source behind obs.

Was the bird photographed? no By whom? _____ Attached? _____

11. Summarize previous experience with this species and similar species:
Have seen on several previous occasions in fact see Jumbo.

12. Other observers who did not agree with the identification (explain): none

13. List books and illustrations consulted and advice received. How did these influence this description? Checked Geo guide + Gulls - Grant 2 ed. They did not influence description.

14. How long after observing the bird(s) before field notes completed? 30 min

15. How long after observing the bird(s) before this form completed? 3 hrs

Mail this completed form to: Avian Ecology Program, Natural Heritage Division
Dept. of Conservation, Springfield, IL 62701

If you have observed a common bird species during a season of abundance, verification is achieved simply by returning there again in season. If, however, the observation involves a rare species, or a common species out of season or at an unusual location, and you wish to share this experience with the scientific community, special documentation is necessary.

An acceptable documentation consists of one or more of the following: a collected, diagnostic specimen; a diagnostic photograph; a diagnostic recording of the bird's voice; or, an accurate and detailed written description of the observation. It must be emphasized that a request for documentation is not an affront, but an effort to perpetuate a record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for all to examine. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation irrespective of the observer.

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF
AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

97-03

Species: Iceland Gull (first-year) Number: 1

Location: Mississippi River between lock 15 & 14

Observer: Ray Cummins 609 S. Main St. Centerville, IA. 52544

Others before/with/after: Tim Schantz

Date: 2-08-92 Time Bird Seen: 12:15am to 12:25am

Habitant & circumstances: I had been looking at gulls between lock & dam 15&14 since around 8:30am and was looking at an adult and second/year Glaucous Gull and an adult Greater Black-backed Gull floating on an ice flow across the river from the e. Moline bridge when Tim Schantz pulled up an piont out a first/year Iceland Gull.

Description: A pale buffy white gull as large as some of the Herring Gulls.

It did extend it's wing so I got a good look at the dorsal wing and tail and the setting bird. At rest the buffy white overall color was quite different from the white opaque color of a near by second/year Glaucous Gull. The primaries extended beyond the tail 1" at rest. The primaries were shiny white compared to the buffy white body. The unfolded wing also showed white primaries and tail compared to the buffy white inner wing and body. The wings showed no noticeable secondary bar. Other details not noted because of distance and viewing angle.

Description of voice: N/H.

Similarly appearing species: Thayer's Gull eliminated by white outer primaries and tail with no secondary bar. Glaucous Gull by less bulky body and comparative longer wings than near by Glaucous Gulls.

Distance (how measured): 400yds estimated on a river width of 950yds.

Optical equipment: 20X x 60X Kowa spotting scope.

Light: Sun at back excellent light

Previous experience with species: First sighting.

Any one have reservations?: No.

Books and references: none

Time of field notes: during observation. Final typing: 7 days.

Signature: _____ Address: 609 S. Main St.
Date: 02-15-92 Centerville, Ia. 52544

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE SPECIES (ILLINOIS)

Iceland Gull, Larus glaucoides
First-winter plumage

Date: 9 February 1992 Time: Mid-afternoon

Location: Mississippi River below Lock & Dam 14, Moline waterfront, Rock Island County, Illinois

Description: Same bird observed and no doubt reported by others.

Large pale gull with white primaries. Overall size, including bill, similar to nearby Herring Gulls (Larus argentatus).

Primary projection beyond tail quite long, approximately equal to bill length.

General ground-color of plumage a pale café au lait.

Distinctly mottled above, barred on rump and undertail coverts.

Rectrices concolor with upperparts, pale-tipped. No distinct tail band. Some faint barring noted on outer webs of outer rectrices.

Primaries folded and in flight virtually all-white, distinctly paler than remainder of wing. Perhaps a suggestion of very pale color on innermost of these. Secondaries on folded wing finely mottled with irregularly-shaped markings. Tertials appeared solidly marked internally with mottling around the edges. From below, remiges translucent white. Underwing coverts pale café au lait.

Bill color ~~black~~ dirty pinkish or amber on basal half blended very gradually into black of distal half. Much like Figures 2 and 7 in Zimmer (1991).

Eye color dark. Legs pink.

Behavior: Among many Herring and Ring-billed Gulls (Larus delawarensis) near river bank. High-riding posture on water. Frequently taking flight to join small groups of Herring Gulls quarreling over fish.

Voice: None heard.

Conditions: Partly cloudy, sunny, cool. Observed off-and-on for about an hour from 15-200 meters with Zeiss 10x40 binoculars and various telescopes.

Similar Species: Overall pale plumage and entirely white primaries rules out all but two possibilities: Glaucous Gull (Larus hyperboreus) and leucistic or bleached Herring Gull. First-winter Glaucous observed nearby during same observation period: Obviously larger than all nearby Herring Gulls; massive bill, clearly larger than Herring Gull's, with bright pink base sharply demarcated from "dipped-in-ink" black tip; primary projection beyond tail shorter than bill. Leucistic or bleached Herring highly doubtful given normally pigmented soft parts, (dark eyes and bill, pink legs), but cannot be absolutely ruled out.

Previous Experience: None with Iceland Gull. Half a dozen first-winter Glaucous Gulls observed in Texas and Iowa over the past eleven years.

(over)

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE SPECIES (ILLINOIS)
Iceland Gull, *Larus glaucoides*
First-winter plumage

References

Zimmer, K.J. The Thayer's Gull complex. pp.114-130. In K. Kaufman. 1990. A Field Guide to Advanced Birding. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston.

Zimmer, K.J. 1991. Plumage Variation in "Kumlien's" Iceland Gull. Birding 23:254-269.

From same location, (Iowa side of "sea wall")...

adult Great Black-backed Gull, Larus marinus
February 2, 1992
Huge black-mantled gull eating a fish on ice floe.
Flanked by two Herring Gulls which were dwarfed by comparison. Massive cheese-colored bill with dime-sized red spot at gonydeal angle. Pink legs.

first-winter Glaucous Gull
February 9, 1992
Huge all-white gull. Larger than Herring Gulls. Massive bill with bright pink base sharply demarcated from "dipped-in-ink" black tip. Pink legs.

--Randall Pinkston
526 Reno Street
Iowa City, IA 52245-3039
Ph. (319) 351-0592

Previous Experience: None with Iceland Gull. First-winter Glaucous Gull observed in Texas and Iowa over the past 15 years.