

354-01-2003

ADULT GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL  
ON DELAWARE RIVER FROM FLORENCE NJ  
March 1, 2003

SIGHTING DETAILS

Around 11:15 I spotted this gull from the public boat ramp in Florence NJ. The bird was very distant (@.5 mi.) I could see that it was a large bird, slightly larger than Herring Gull and being most similar to Glaucous Gull in size. It had an extensive tan/light brown hood and apparently uniform wings without the black tips of a Herring Gull or the white tips of a Glaucous Gull. I watched the bird for 3-5 minutes until I decided to try for a better view from a closer vantage point. I drove up to Williams Ave which offers another view of the river from atop the tall, steep riverbanks. After about 10 minutes I relocated the bird and got a much better view for about 3-4 minutes before the bird took flight upriver towards the Tullytown landfill and into PA. At it's closest point the bird was probably 75-100 yards away on the NJ side of the river.

The bird was in the same field of view with Herring Gull allowing for direct comparison to that species. The elevation at the Williams Ave. vantage point is about 60' above the river so the view is from above looking down on the upper-parts of the birds. The bird was observed in a resting or alert swimming posture and in flight. In flight it circled around once or twice gaining altitude from the water before heading more or less directly away from me at about eye level. I was able to get pretty good looks at the wings from above and below while in flight. The sky was mostly overcast making for very good conditions to compare mantle tones, there was only a slight breeze and overall viewing conditions were excellent.

OPTICS

Leica APO 70mm scope with 32x eyepiece.  
Swarovski EL 8x32

FIELD NOTES:

Big as HEGU slightly bulkier, broader across chest

Bill long as HEGU expanded slightly at tip making it look drooped a little. Yellow with red/dark gonyx spot

Mantle like HEGU or slightly darker

Head washed tan down neck across sides of breast

Eye appeared dark at distance where yellow iris of HEGU could be seen

Short-winged at rest on water @2 A-spots past tail, 4-5 past tertials

On water, wing-tip nearly uniform with mantle, slightly darker

In flight wingtips contrast very slightly and only on the outer most primaries

Broad white tips to secs. forming broad trailing edge to wing

Wings broad based, thick necked compared to HEGU, flat-headed

1<sup>st</sup> seen from boat ramp nearly ½ mile at which dist. Head/neck streaking obviously different from surrounding birds.

Small white tips on scaps

Also see the I sketch made immediately after sighting. Note that the sketch is representational and not accurate in terms of relative proportions of body parts.

### DESCRIPTION

#### AT REST ON WATER

##### **Size and Structure:**

Slightly larger and bulkier than HEGU. Most similar to Glaucous Gull but obviously short-winged looking on water with only 2 primaries beyond tail. The bird was large and flat-headed with the bill similar in length to HEGU but with a greater bulge at the gonys making the bill look drooped at the tip.

##### **Bare Parts:**

Bill, yellow with a red gonys spot. Iris appeared dark but was too distant to tell actual color. Legs were not seen well.

##### **Upper-parts and body:**

The upper-parts and upperwing were blue-gray, similar in tone to Herring Gull or perhaps slightly darker. The tertials were broadly tipped white, the rear scapulars also had small white tips. Under-parts and tail were white

##### **Head:**

One of the most distinctive features of the bird was the tan or light brown hood. The markings on the head were much more diffuse than on HEGU and paler and warmer. The markings covered the top and back of the head, being fainter in the auriculars and lacking from the lores and chin which were white. The streaking extended down the neck and upper breast to the waterline.

##### **Primaries:**

Large white apical spots framed by gray. The gray in the wingtips seemed very similar to the rest of the upper-parts though less blue-gray and more smoky gray.

## IN FLIGHT

### **Wings from above:**

In flight the gray in the wingtip contrasted a little more strongly with the upper-wings than when the bird was on the water. It also appeared darkest on the outermost primaries (Ps8-10?). Perhaps because of the lack of black in the wingtips I was unable to clearly see the exact distribution on white in the primaries, for instance I am unable to say whether there were white mirrors on primaries 9 or 10. From the rear the white tips to the secondaries formed an obvious white trailing edge. The wings were also broader-based in comparison to HEGU.

### **Wings from below:**

Underwing coverts were white. The underside of the flight feathers were gray similar to Great or Lesser Black-backed but much paler.

### Discussion and Separation from other Species:

This bird appeared to be in definitive basic plumage indicating that it was at least 4 years old. The lack of black wingtips narrows down the list of possibilities considerably. Essentially it leaves an aberrantly plumaged bird, a hybrid, Iceland, Glaucous, or Glaucous winged Gull. In direct comparison to HEGU this bird was obviously larger, appearing as large as Glaucous Gull. It was simply too big for an Iceland Gull in my experience, especially the structure of the head and bill. Even the largest Iceland Gulls I have seen which approach the size of small female HEGUs have more rounded heads, and thinner, more evenly tapered bills. The bulging bill tip of this bird was fairly obvious, and that in combination with the flat head, and overall bulkiness was way beyond the range of variation found in the build of Iceland Gull.

I have never seen anything, on the web, in photos, in museum drawers, in the literature, or in life to suggest that adults of any of the 4 named subspecies of Glaucous Gulls have anything other than white wingtips. On the water it was quite obvious that this birds' wing-tips were gray. Glaucous Gulls also, as far as I know, always have yellow irises.

Glaucous-winged Gulls are known to interbreed with at least 3 other species. The most well know hybrid combination involves Western Gull, and specifically the paler mantled nominate northern race. According to Sibley, Grant, and the National Geographic Guide third edition, this hybrid sometimes, referred to as "Olympic Gull", should show dark blackish-gray in the wingtips. On this bird the wingtips differed only slightly from the gray of the upper-parts and it differed more in shade, being less blue-gray and more smoky gray than in tone. Also "Olympic Gull should be as dark above as Laughing Gull or only slightly paler (Howell 2003) and not the same tone or slightly darker than HEGU.

Glaucous-winged Gulls are also known to hybridize with both Herring and Glaucous Gulls. The lack of any dark blackish-gray in the wingtips should rule out a hybrid with Herring. Ruling out a hybrid with a Glaucous seems more difficult. In the 1 illustration of this combo I could find (Sibley Guide) the wing tips should appear considerably paler than shown by this bird. The broad wings, bulkiness, and bulbous bill

all seem more consistent with Glaucous-winged than a hybrid as does the amount of gray in the wing-tip, the mantle tone and the dark iris.

In general none of the characters seen on this bird appeared intermediate as would be expected of a hybrid. Though I have very limited experience in the field with Glaucous-winged Gull this bird appeared to show all the field marks of that species. Almost by definition a hybrid should appear intermediate between the presumed parent species and that was not the case here.

With the exception of complete albinism, most abnormally plumaged birds show some degree of asymmetry in the lack of pigmentation. This bird appeared normally pigmented and symmetrically patterned. The one possibility being that it was lacking normal pigmentation only in the wing-tips, showing gray instead of black. However this alone seems highly improbable and is even more so given that the size, structure, bare-part coloration, and plumage other than the wing-tips appeared consistent with Glaucous-winged Gull.

Given that I was able to view this bird in excellent conditions and at fairly close range with good optics I feel fairly certain it was in fact an adult Glaucous-winged Gull. I admittedly have little experience with this species in life and am drawing my conclusion mainly on published field characters. I can say confidently that I have not seen a bird like this in the past 4-5 years of extensive gull watching at this location.

#### References

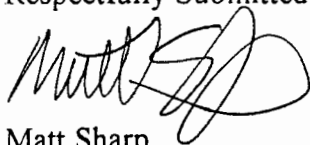
Grant, P.J. 1986. *Gulls a Guide to Identification*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.

Howell, S. 2003. *Advances in Field Identification of American Bird, Shades of Gray: A point of Reference for Gull Identification*. *Birding* 35(1) 32-37

National Geographic Society 1987, *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.

Sibley, D. 2000. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*

Respectfully Submitted

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Sharp', with a stylized, overlapping loop at the end.

Matt Sharp  
7135 Bryan St  
Philadelphia PA 19119

Del River from Florence (Williams St.) 3/1/03

↳ nearly concolorous

-w- mantle/back

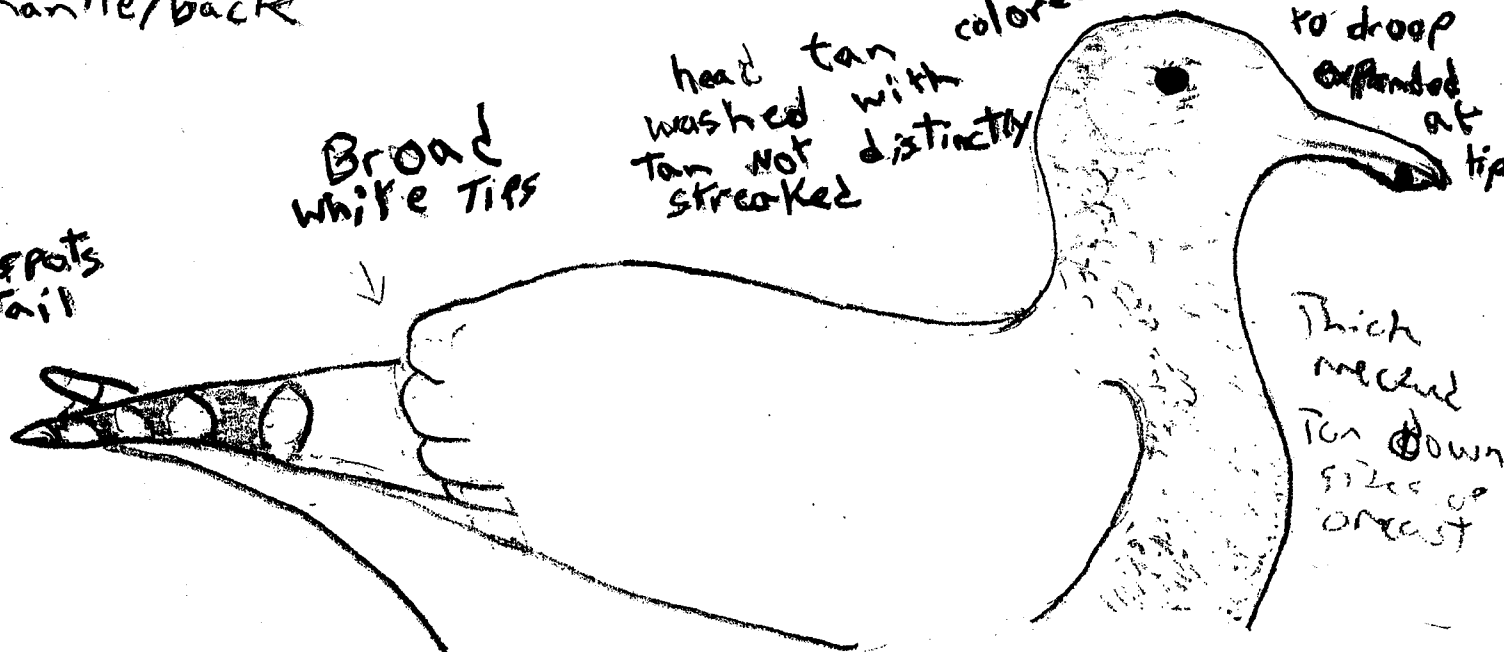
mantle = HFCV or slightly darker

bill seemed to droop expanded at tip

head tan colored washed tan with distinct streaks

Broad white tips

2 spots past tail



Thick necked tan down sides of breast

broad based wings in flight wing-tips showing only slight contrast appeared uniform

from below in form gray slightly contrasting shape like a small deer

very little  
gray in wing

3/1/03 cont...

underside

white

gray/r

LBBC

broad  
based

blackish

Heru

white

# Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

## Voting Tabulation – Round Two

Species: Glaucous-winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*)

Date of Sighting: 1 March 2003 to 1 March 2003

Location: TULLYTOWN

County: BUCKS

Observer(s): Matt Sharp

Date of Submission: 2003

Submitted by: Matt Sharp

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut			X					
D. Heathcote				X				
P. Guris				X				
J. Stanley			X					
E. Witmer			X					
R. Leberman			X					
M. Sharp								X
TOTALS			4	2				1
DECISION				X				

Comments: 4/2/1 on 2nd round

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

2/21/05

# Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

## Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Glaucous-winged Gull (Larus glaucescens)

Date of Sighting: 1 March 2003 to 1 March 2003

Location: TULLYTOWN

County: BUCKS

Observer(s): Matt Sharp

Date of Submission: 2003

Submitted by: Matt Sharp

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

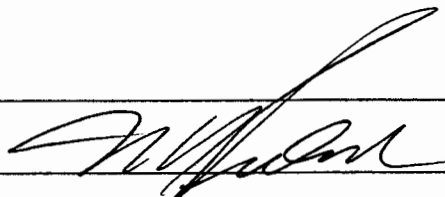
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
G. Armistead			X					
D. Heathcote				X				
P. Guris				X				
J. Stanley			X					
E. Witmer			X					
R. Leberman								
M. Sharp								X
TOTALS			3	2				1
DECISION				X				

Comments: 3/2/1 - Go to 2ND Round

Signature (Secretary)



Date: 4/1/04