

<b>Submission Date</b>	2012-12-18 10:25:37
<b>Observer's Name</b>	George Armistead
<b>E-mail</b>	armistead.george@gmail.com
<b>Observer's Address</b>	City: Philadelphia State / Province: PA Postal / Zip Code: 19146 Country: United States
<b>Names of additional observers</b>	Tom Johnson, Melissa Roach, Dave Wilton, Shannon Thompson, Chuck Chalfant
<b>Species (Common Name)</b>	Vega Gull
<b>Species (Scientific Name)</b>	Larus vegae
<b>Number of individuals</b>	1
<b>Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)</b>	1 adult
<b>Observation Date and Time</b>	12-15-2012 9:30 AM
<b>County</b>	Bucks
<b>Location (City, Borough, Township)</b>	Bristol, PA
<b>Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)</b>	Grows North Landfill
<b>Habitat</b>	landfill
<b>Distance to bird</b>	~60 feet
<b>Viewing conditions</b>	good light, the bird was surrounded by Herring Gulls, we had an unobstructed view for most of the observation which lasted perhaps 20 minutes
<b>Optical equipment used</b>	Leica ultravids 10x 42, Leica 82 mm telescope
<b>Description</b>	I believe the photos adequately document the bird's appearance. These photos lack any optical illusions or effects that misrepresent the bird. Photos are attached here, but also available at my flickr site here: <a href="http://www.flickr.com/photos/george_armistead/8281726994/in/photostream">http://www.flickr.com/photos/george_armistead/8281726994/in/photostream</a>
<b>Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)</b>	It spent its time loafing with the Herring Gulls until we purposely flushed it to photograph the wing pattern. Then it landed among another flock of gulls, before that flock then flushed when a Bald Eagle arrived on the scene.
<b>Separation</b>	

**from similar species (How you eliminated others)**

I suppose eliminating a dark-extreme Thayer's might be an issue, but I don't believe one could combine the array of features seen on this individual. Slaty-backed Gull should have a darker mantle, and a broader trailing edge to the wings, and show structural differences.

**Discussion – anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:**

I have listed this bird as *Larus vegae*, though as I'm sure you all know this bird has variously been lumped as part of the Herring or Lesser Black-backed gull complexes. Treatment at the species level is gaining popularity, and likely to gain wide acceptance soon I would imagine.

As for aging, I'm guessing this bird is in its 4th yr. If I've correctly identified p9 than it seems to lack a mirror which might be a result of it retaining some 3rd cycle feathers (though I'd expect most should show mirrors by their 3rd year).

Apparently the fact that this bird is still undergoing primary molt at this late date is a point in support of the identification as a Vega. This individual is unusual however in molting primaries at two points (looks like p10 & p7; making primary pattern harder to assess).

Alvaro Jaramillo emailed Peter Adriaens on our behalf:  
From: Alvaro Jaramillo  
To: 'George Armistead'; 'Peter Adriaens'; 'Tom Johnson'  
Sent: Monday, December 17, 2012 7:19 PM  
Subject: Gull molt - Vega etc.

Peter

See below for a link to photos of what may be a Vega Gull in eastern North America . Tom also has photos, but I misplaced the link.

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/george\\_armistead/8281729354/in/photostream/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/george_armistead/8281729354/in/photostream/)

There are two things to ponder. One of them is that it seems to show two molt areas in the primaries, with P10 growing in and also P7? Growing in. Have you seen this on your side of the Atlantic ? It is not something we see here, and wonder if it may help in the identification in any way?

The other thing to ponder is if you see anything wrong with this being a Vega?

Regards

Alvaro

Peter responded:  
Hi Alvaro,

cool photos. Certainly looks like a Vega Gull!

As a rule, adult gulls do not have two moult waves in their primaries, so this bird is an oddball in that respect.

Then again, it does not surprise me that much. P10 has probably been moulted out of necessity. Maybe it just got too worn or damaged during the trip across the (rough) ocean.

By the way, I have never seen so many gulls in a sorry state as in Choshi, Japan. I don't know why that is, but perhaps they just get greedy and careless with all the fish offal around, and then get hit by trucks or so.

I had to rescue one Black-tailed Gull and one Slaty-backed Gull together out of a container like this:  
<https://picasaweb.google.com/115659792470435170210/JapanMarch2012#5740301380841879666>  
They simply did not know how to get out anymore!

I can imagine that the Japanese fishermen are less soft-hearted with them...

I do not have photos of adult Vega Gull with two moult waves, but quite a few of birds still growing the outermost primary (or even outer two primaries) in early March.

A few birds with odd moult too; see attached:

- a bird that had arrested its moult at P7 in the left wing - 9 March 2012;
- a bird still growing P10 on both sides, and with P1 missing in the left wing. Also, I am not too sure, but it could be that P8 and P6 in the left wing have not grown to their full length.

Gretz,  
Peter

**Are you positive of your identification ? (Why or why not)**

A good question. I believe the most parsimonious conclusion is that this bird is a Vega Gull. There are people that would contend that a hybrid could show the combination of features that this bird does. That is probably true of most large white-headed gulls. I don't think one will find a better candidate for a Vega Gull than this bird.

**After**

<http://www.surfbirds.com/ID%20Articles/JapanGulls/>

**Supporting**

**evidence  
(check all  
that apply)**

Photograph

**Click to edit**

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<b>Submission Date</b>	2012-12-19 17:25:02
<b>Observer's Name</b>	Tom Johnson
<b>E-mail</b>	tbj4@cornell.edu
<b>Phone</b>	7175669875
<b>Observer's Address</b>	Street Address: 24 Meadowood Drive City: Hummelstown State / Province: PA Postal / Zip Code: 17036 Country: United States
<b>Names of additional observers</b>	George Armistead, Melissa Roach, Rick Mellon, Chuck Chalfant, Shannon Thompson, Dave Wilton
<b>Species (Common Name)</b>	"Vega" Herring Gull
<b>Species (Scientific Name)</b>	Larus argentatus vegae
<b>Subspecies (if known)</b>	vegae
<b>Number of individuals</b>	1
<b>Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)</b>	Adult in primary molt
<b>Observation Date and Time</b>	12-15-2012 9:45 AM
<b>County</b>	Bucks
<b>Location (City, Borough, Township)</b>	Tullytown
<b>Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)</b>	GROWS North Landfill, Waste Management property
<b>GPS coordinates of sighting</b>	40.160312,-74.777082
<b>Habitat</b>	A glorious, fetid mountain of trash
<b>Distance to bird</b>	About 30 feet until I flushed it for flight shots. Then very far.
<b>Viewing conditions</b>	Smelly but otherwise sunny (nice, direct lighting on the bird)
<b>Optical equipment used</b>	Two 1x human eyes, Leica 7x42 Ultravid, Swarovski ATS80HD 20-60x scope
<b>Description</b>	Melissa pointed out a dark-eyed adult Herring-type Gull that was standing along the near edge of a close flock of gulls inside the GROWS North landfill. I got on the bird, immediately thought "VEGA GULL!" based on the upperparts coloration, dark eye, and pink legs, and then got everyone else on the bird so that we could all

study it. This was a large gull, about the same size as the adjacent American Herring Gulls. It stood out dramatically because of its olive/ dark-spotted irides, gray upperparts darker than American Herring Gull but paler than Lesser Black-backed Gull, and heavy, blotchy brown hindneck/ chest markings. The white "tertial crescent" was bold, at least as wide as the widest of the adjacent Herring Gulls' crescents. Legs were medium-dark pink, but were somewhat obscured by mud. The orbital ring was indistinct, but close examination revealed a dark pink-red color. In order to secure flight photos, I flushed the bird - George Armistead and I both got dorsal and ventral photos of the spread wings in flight, revealing a Slaty-backed Gull-esque "string of pearls", or row of subterminal white crescents on the outer primaries. There is a substantial amount of black on the dorsal side of the primaries (normal for Vega, indicating that this wasn't an odd Thayer's Gull or other white-winged gull. The bird is undergoing an odd molt, with 2 centers of replacement; while this pattern is odd for any large gull, the timing (late) is good for Vega Gull.

**Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)**

This gull was standing on a mountain of trash with other gulls. Then I frightened it so that we could document its wing pattern, and it flew away.

**Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)**

Hybrids such as Herring x Lesser Black-backed Gull can be ruled out by considering eye, leg color, and the lack of intermediacy in phenotype between those possible parental species (with the exception of upperparts coloration).

**Discussion - anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:**

I could describe the bird in even more detail, but you probably just want to look at the photos and come to your own conclusions.

George Armistead also submitted documentation on this bird, including comments from a few others (Steve Howell, Peter Adriaens, Al Jaramillo). His flight shots show the details of the primary pattern better than do my photos.

**Are you positive of your identification ? (Why or why not)**

Nope, but it sure looks like a Vega Gull to me.

**During**

none

**After**

all of them

**Supporting evidence (check all that apply)**

Photograph

**Upload images, audio, video or drawings**

[IMG\\_0265.jpg](#)  
[IMG\\_0267.jpg](#)  
[IMG\\_0273.jpg](#)  
[IMG\\_0277.jpg](#)  
[IMG\\_0278.jpg](#)

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