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THAYER'S GULL
(*Larus thayeri*)

On Saturday January 13, 1990 while standing at Gull Point on Presque Isle State Park, I observed hundreds of gulls flying southwest along the lake shore and congregating at the south side of the channel. I noted a high percentage of Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) in basic I plumage and with them at least 4 Glaucous Gulls (*Larus hyperboreus*). Ed Kwater soon joined me and we decided to go to the foot of East Avenue, (which is where we had seen them feeding.) We arrived there and were fortunate to see the gulls feeding in close proximity to the shore with many more gulls resting on the ice farther out. Within moments of our arrival Ed Kwater spotted a Thayer's Gull in basic I plumage no more than 100' from us resting on the edge of the ice with Herring Gulls in basic I plumage. I noted the following details of the bird, beginning with the bill working down to the tail.

- Bill--black with some flesh pigmentation at the very base. Compared to nearby Herring Gulls the bill was noticeably shorter and narrower at the gony.
- Head--buff or light brown finely streaked. Dusky patch directly behind the eye and partially covering the eye. Very rounded head unlike flat-top head of Herring Gull. Length of head from base of bill to nape shorter than Herring Gull.
- Overall body--uniform pale brown or buff with intricately patterned mantle, scapulars, and wing coverts. Paler than any Herring Gulls in basic I plumage, of which there were at least 3 or 4 standing near it for direct comparison.
- Folded wings--intricately patterned coverts, tertials slightly darker, (in Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*) basic I plumage the tertials are as pale as coverts) Primaries light greyish-brown, much paler than Herring Gull in basic I plumage, but primaries were the darkest feathers on the bird. The tips of the folded primaries were edged with white forming pale crescents, (even Herring Gulls in fresh basic I plumage do not show white crescents, though some occasionally have white tipped primaries.)
- Open wings--outer primaries paler than when wings were closed, but still darker than wing coverts. Inner primaries were as pale as wing coverts. Secondaries were as dark as outer primaries giving a dark-light-dark pattern to the wing. Underside of wings entirely pale with outermost primaries showing dark tips forming a narrow dark line.
- Legs--pink noticeably richer pink than Herring Gulls in basic I plumage.
- Tail--viewed when in flight, outer 2/3 of tail uniform light brown and slightly darker than primaries and secondaries. Bases of retrices were pale and mottled. Undertail coverts heavily barred--more so than Herring Gulls in basic I plumage.

The Thayer's Gull was paler than Herring Gulls, and overall smaller and less bulky, (more closely resembling Iceland Gull in shape.) Folded wings slightly longer than Herring Gull. I might also add that Iceland Gull was eliminated, because Iceland Gulls in basic I plumage never show dark-light-dark pattern of flight feathers formed by dark outer primaries, pale inner primaries, and dark secondaries. Iceland Gulls occasionally show slightly dusky primaries with white crescents on folded primaries, but the white crescents are much broader and extensive. Iceland Gulls never show a solid broad tail band, but the occasional Iceland will show a solid narrow band in the outer half of the tail which upon closer inspection will reveal closely compacted spots rather than solid pigmentation.

Shortly after studying this bird I found a second Thayer's Gull also in basic I plumage sharing the same characteristics as the above described bird. The differences between this one and the first one were that the eye patch was very faint, and the primaries, secondaries, and the tail were slightly darker on the second bird.

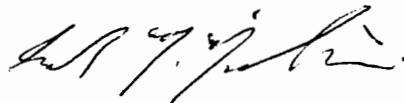
Other rarities we saw on this day which can be expected when Thayer's Gulls are found were 1 Iceland Gull in basic I plumage, 2 Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*Larus fuscus*) with 1 in basic definitive and 1 in basic II plumage.

The observation time of each Thayer's Gull was approximately 10 minutes under variably cloudy skies (stratus and stratocumulus). The wind was northwesterly at 12 MPH and the temperature was approximately 20 to 25 degrees F. I was using a Zeiss 10 X 40 Binocular and a Bushnell 25X Spotting Scope.

My experience with this species includes seeing at least 6 or 7 at Niagara Falls in nearly all plumages with one bird identified by Peter Grant and another by Harold Axtell. I have also had the privilege to examine study skins at the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh. Below is a list of Thayer's Gulls I have seen all in the Presque Isle area. Of the 19 birds seen here, I have observed 17 of them.

- 1 basic I--Dec. 24, 1982; Jan. 14, 22, 23 & Feb. 23, 1983
- 1 basic I-- Dec. 8, 1983
- 1 basic I--Dec. 11, 16, 31, 1983
- 1 basic I--Jan. 22, 1984
- 1 basic I--March 10, 1984
- 1 basic I--Feb. 17, 1985
- 1 basic I--Dec. 14, 1985
- 1 basic I--Feb. 16 & 23, 1986
- 1 probably prealternate I--April 4, 1987
- 1 probably prebasic I--Nov. 11, 1988
- 3 basic I--Dec. 4, 1988 to Jan. 21, 1989
- 1 basic II--Dec. 17 & 26, 1988
- 1 basic III--Jan. 2 & 7, 1989

Jerry McWilliams



Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # / of

Species: **Thayer's Gull**

Date of Sighting: **January 13, 1990**

Observer(s): **Jerry McWilliams**

Date of Submission: **1990**

Submitted by: **Jerry McWilliams**

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V		
					A	B	C
E. Kwater			X				
B. Haas			X				
F. Haas			X				
R. Leberman			X				
G. McWilliams			X				
S. Santner			X				
P. Schwalbe			X				
TOTALS			7				
DECISION			X				

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

B. Haas

Date:

8-15-71