

348-02-1991

Adult Thayer's Gulls in Erie County

by Ted Flovd

I saw 2 alternate plumage adult Thayer's Gulls (*Larus thayeri*) at the Erie Public Dock on 5 March 1991. This species is classified as a "rarity" in Pennsylvania (Kwater 1990), although it does occur annually in Erie County. However, reports of adult birds are rare (G.M. McWilliams, personal communication). I will describe in detail only the first bird that I observed.

Both birds were associated with a flock of approximately 800 gulls which were feeding on a large kill of Gizzard Shad (*Dorosoma cepedianum*). This flock was comprised almost entirely of alternate plumage adult Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*). In addition, approximately 3000 Herring Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*) and 1 Iceland Gull (*L. glaucooides*) were present in the general vicinity of the Erie Public Dock.

The Herring Gull flock in which the Thayer's Gulls were located permitted very close approach which allowed for careful comparison of the 2 species. I saw the first Thayer's Gull at 12:45 P.M., and I observed it continuously until 1:35 P.M. Initially, it was feeding by itself on a Gizzard Shad which had been washed ashore. I approached to within 3 meters of the bird. I was struck immediately by its uniformly dark brown iris surrounded by a dark purple orbital ring. These characteristics are usually sufficient to distinguish Thayer's Gulls from similar species; however, Herring Gulls and Iceland Gulls may show a very similar combination of marks (Lehman 1980). Therefore I examined this bird for additional characteristics.

At rest the bird closely resembled nearby Herring Gulls. (I was not able to compare directly this bird with an Iceland Gull.) The bird's mantle was as dark as, or darker than, the Herring Gulls'. The bird's bill was sligher than the Herring Gulls', and its head was rounder. I could discern no difference in leg color between the 2 species. Also the color pattern of the wing tips of the standing bird was indistinguishable from the Herring Gulls'. The bird called frequently, but I could discern no difference from the Herring Gulls' vocalizations.

In flight the bird differed considerably from flying Herring Gulls. From above and from below the bird's wing tips showed much less black than did other flying Herring Gulls'. However, this bird's wing tips contained more black than have any Iceland Gull's that I have seen.

I am aware that extreme caution should be exercised in separating Thayer's Gull from Iceland Gull and Herring Gull.

Gosselin and David (1975) and Lehman (1980) review the differences. There is great morphological variation among these species, and even very well observed birds may be impossible to identify. My claim here is that the physical characteristics of the bird which I have reported conform most closely to published descriptions of Thayer's Gull.

literature cited:

Gosselin, M. and N. David. 1975. Field identification of the Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*) in eastern North America. *American Birds* 29:1059-1066.

Kwater, E. 1990. Official list of the bird of Pennsylvania. *Pennsylvania Birds* 4:51-53.

Lehman, P. 1980. The identification of Thayer's Gull in the field. *Birding* 12:198-210.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # of

Species: **Thayer's Gull**

Date of Sighting: **March 5, 1991**

Observer(s): **Ted Floyd**

Date of Submission: **1991**

Submitted by: **Ted Floyd**

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. McHas

Date:

11-6-91