

PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE
210 Welcome Ave. Norwood, PA 19074

13 February 2002

Jerry McWilliams
3508 Allegheny Road
Erie, PA 16508

Dear Jerry,

Four of your submissions that did not fare well with the committee. I'll try to summarize the results carefully:

King Eider, Presque Isle, 18 December 1999: The vote was two favoring acceptance (Couchman, Ickes) and five not favoring (Armistead, Hess, Reid, Sharp, Rodewald).

Armistead spoke for us all in emphasizing a healthy respect for your experience, but those who voted against acceptance felt that female Common Eider was not ruled out conclusively -- partly as a result of the bird's distance away.

Various members listed characters they considered necessary for diagnostic identification, especially details of the bill morphology. Some also expressed the view that features such as entirely reddish-brown plumage, neck thickness, and rounded head were not sufficient, even combined, to be diagnostic.

Speaking only for myself, I thought the white underwing coverts were the sole character likely indicating King, but another member considered the extent of pale feathering on the underwing to be "variable and hard to determine."

A majority of the committee was willing to go no further than "eider sp."

Pomarine Jaeger, Presque Isle, 7 December 1997: This went two rounds, as you may recall. The final vote was yours favoring acceptance, five not in favor, and one abstaining.

The dissenters expressed a variety of reasons for declining to accept the Pomarine ID as conclusive. Hess and Rodewald commented that the description of the head shape seemed to indicate Parasitic rather than Pomarine. Armistead and Couchman felt that a skua species was not ruled out. Reid felt that the description did not include enough information for him to evaluate. Abstaining, Ickes deferred to the others' views.

Jerry, I just read your description again and though some aspects do indicate a Pom to me, I still don't think it is entirely consistent with Pomarine. Your description of the forehead and crown shape didn't seem correct to me, but your second-round comments were so firm that I began to have doubts. After I looked again at the Olsen & Larsson *Skuas and Jaegers*, my conclusion was that neither one of us should have set down a diagnostic difference in the forehead/head shape between Pomarine and Parasitic. In at least a couple of dozen photos, the variation is such that each of our views of Pom and Parasitic head shape is randomly shown both species. Maybe the standard head shapes we've both been talking about aren't of value to support either ID.

Armistead commented: "Certainly the most likely candidate seems to be a Pomarine Jaeger, and observer experience is compelling, but I too would like to have had some attempt at ruling out (the albeit much more unlikely) skua sp. I've seen over-anxious observers call young, dark Poms Skuas and I imagine it could happen the other way around as well."

At any rate, most members had considerable uncertainty about accepting the identification as conclusive.

Parasitic Jaeger, Presque Isle, 28 October 1999: This also went two rounds, with a final vote of three favoring acceptance (Armistead, Rodewald, Sharp) and four not in favor (Couchman, Hess, Ickes, Reid).

Couchman, Hess and Reid believed that despite the white wing flashes Long-tailed could not be eliminated conclusively through 35X at several hundred yards. Ickes felt that he lacked enough information for a judgment.

It may be carrying conservatism too far, but I'm beginning to wonder whether any jaeger except a typical adult with fully grown retrices can be accepted without a photograph.

Thayer's Gull, Presque Isle, 23 January 1998: On second round, the vote was four in favor (Couchman, Ickes, McWilliams, Rodewald) and three not in favor (Armistead, Hess, Reid). As for the dissenters:

Armistead placed it in IV-B, commenting: "I find the description insufficient for a bird that is as variable as it is. The mantle should be darker than sypical *smithsonianus* and the primary pattern described overlaps with the pale extreme of Herring Gull."

I changed my first-round acceptance and placed it in IV-A for two reasons that seemed to me did not separate it from Herring with certainty: 1. the gray mantle and forewings "equal in tone" to Herring. Under nearly all lighting conditions except extremely bright sun, the gray of Thayer's has appeared slightly darker to me. 2. ventrally, the "large white mirror showing through near the tips of the outer two most primaries." I cannot recall ever seeing exactly this effect in a Thayer's-type, nor could I find it in checking a number of reference photos.

Reid also placed it in IV-A, commenting: "Probably correct, but I have trouble accepting a very tricky bird to identify when it is at least 1/4 mile away."

This case is interesting and somewhat unusual, in which Herring rather than Iceland kept two of us a little uncertain. Considering your experience with this species and the respect we have for your knowledge in general, George and I especially emphasized that we don't feel dogmatic about our opinions.

Best regards,



P.S. I'm holding the Band-rumped Storm-Petrel record (which has not been accepted) for a third round. I'll send you a separate letter on this.

Record Nos. 145-02-1999 (King Eider), 332-01-1997 (Pomarine Jaeger), 333-01-1999 (Parasitic Jaeger), 348-01-1998 (Thayer's Gull)

348-01-1998

THAYER'S GULL

Larus thayeri

Location: Presque Isle Bay, Erie County, PA

Date: January 23-25, 1998

Time: 2:00-2:15 PM on 1/23 and 9:30-10:30 AM on 1/25

Weather: Viewing conditions good.

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

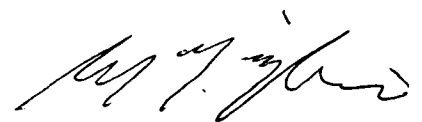
Optics: Kowa TSN 4 at 40X

Viewing distance: At least 1/4 mile away

Details of sighting and description:

I was searching through several thousand Herring Gulls and a few Great Black-backed Gulls that were flying over the bay above a feeding concentration of Common Mergansers when I spotted a Thayer's Gull in basic definitive plumage. It was similar to an adult Herring Gull showing light grayish rather than black ventral outer primaries. When it banked showing the dorsal surface I could see blackish outer primaries with the black being more reduced than any of the numerous Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*). I had observed. The gray across the mantle and forewings of this bird appeared to be equal in tone to the gray across the mantle and forewings of Herring Gulls. This characteristic eliminated the very similar Iceland Gull (*L. glaucooides kumlieni*) which is always a paler gray across the mantle and forewings than Herring Gull. The nape and head were mostly white with some brown streaking. As I studied the gull, I was able to obtain additional field characteristics. The ventral surface of the primary tips were grayish with a large white mirror showing through near the tips of the outer two most primaries. The only black visible was near the very tips (the tips of the primaries were white) of the outermost primaries forming a thin dark submarginal line and along the outer web of the outermost primary. On the dorsal surface of the primaries, black was limited to the outer webs of the outer primaries (appearing as black fingers) except where the black narrowly crossed over the inner web bordering the white primary tips. There were two large mirrors about 2/3 way up on the outer two primaries.

On January 31 to February 13, I saw three more Thayer's Gulls in about the same circumstances as the bird described above. The only difference was that two of the birds were in alternate definitive plumage which means that plumage characteristics were identical to the basic plumaged birds except that these two birds had almost completely white heads and necks.



Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round One

Species: Thayer's Gull (Larus thayeri)

Date of Sighting: 23 January 1998 to 25 January 1998

Location: PRESQUE ISLE BAY

County: ERIE

Observer(s): Jerry McWilliams

Date of Submission: 1998

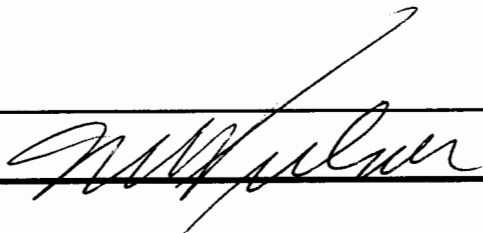
Submitted by: Jerry McWilliams

WRITTEN DESCRIPTION YES PHOTO No SPECIMEN No REWARDING No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
D. Couchman				X				
T. Floyd								X
P. Hess			X					
R. Ickes			X					
J. McWilliams			X					
B. Reid				X				X
P. Rodewald			X					
TOTALS			4	2				1
DECISION			X					

Comments: 4/2/2 2ND ROUND

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 9/28/00