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348-04-2000

THAYER'S GULL AT TULLYTOWN DUMP 12/15/00

Observers: George L. Armistead
Marshall J. Iliff

Observer writing this account:

George L. Armistead (11/18/00)
523 E. Durham St.

Phila. PA 19119

HYPERLINK "mailto:georgearmistead@hotmail.com" georgearmistead@hotmail.com
215)248-4120

Background:

On 12/15/00 Marshall Iliff and I arrived at the boat ramp in Florence, NJ that overlooks the Delaware River and the Tullytown Dump across the river in PA. We arrived at about 1:30pm and stayed until near dark. It was about 3:30 when Marshall spotted a juvenile-plumaged bird on the water about 4/5 mile up the river on the PA side. While the bird was indeed at a considerable distance, we instantly recognized it as a candidate for Thayer's Gull. It was an overcast day and though the light was low, it was good for comparing plumage and structural characters to the surrounding Ring-billed, Herring, Great Black-backed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. The bird was observed sitting for most of duration of our study but I personally observed it in flight twice and also watched it raise and stretch its wings a couple times as well. I used my Questar telescope to observe the bird (alternating between viewing it at 80x and 40x) until the bird took flight at about 4:15. At that point I switched to my 8x42 Bausch & Lomb Elites to watch the bird fly past the boat ramp and up over the dump out of sight. Marshall was using his Swarovski 20-60x zoom telescope throughout the observation. The description that follows comes from mental notes taken the fifteenth but were written on 12/20/00.

Description:

Size- The bird was noticeably smaller than surrounding Herring Gulls, but only just slightly larger than a nearby adult Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Shape- It was quite similar in overall shape and proportions to an Iceland Gull (we had seen one juv. ICGU earlier in the afternoon). It is my own opinion that Iceland's have a more attenuated appearance towards the posterior and that Thayer's are a little more stocky in that region. This seemed to be the case on this bird. Head shape was similar to Iceland, with perhaps the only difference being that the head seemed slightly more full, so that the bird seemed not quite as pin-headed as Iceland's. The bird clearly lacked girth compared to adjacent Herring Gulls.

Bill- Appeared black throughout. The bill was finer than nearby Herrings, and not as heavy or blob-tipped as the Herrings.

Plumage- A juvenile-plumaged bird with a grayish-tan overall appearance. We couldn't determine eye color or leg color given distance but the eye appeared dark. At rest, the darkest part of the bird (aside from the black bill) were the primaries and the bases of the tertials which were con-colorous and a darker brown than the rest of the body. The tertials showed slightly more bold contrast than I am accustomed to seeing on Thayer's Gull. The pale outer fringes on this bird's tertials was more broad than I think is typical of Thayer's Gull and heightened the contrast between the solid brownish bases. That said it seemed within what I consider the range of variation in Thayer's Gull. The mantle had a checkered appearance that extended down into the secondary coverts. On several occasions the bird raised its wings while it

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was sitting and seemed to reveal the "venetian blinds" effect that are seen on the spread wing of a Thayer's Gull. Even at the distance we were, I thought I could make out the dark outer webs and pale inner webs of the primaries as the bird sat there .8 m away stretching and raising its wings. At that distance though it is tough to say for certain, but the 80x option on my scope did provide a better view than I had thought it might.

In Flight- The bird came closest to us when it finally lifted up and flew past us (~.4m away) down the river and finally out of sight over the dump. When in flight, the bird looked liked a white-winged gull but was basically a uniform grayish-tan in color as opposed to the grayish-whites or whites shown in the various plumages exhibited by young Glaucous or Iceland Gulls. The tail was entirely creamy tan and the uppertail was paler than either the mantle or tail with weak barring across it. There was a paler patch in the inner primaries that contrasted with the darker secondaries and outer primaries.

Previous experience- I've seen adult and first winter Thayer's Gulls on several occasions. I've seen both plumages at Cape Hatteras, NC on multiple occasions. I've seen adults in Churchill, Manitoba and once I saw a 1st winter at Conowingo Dam, MD. Just three weeks prior to the date of this siding I saw what may have been the same individual bird at Florence but that bird sat on a slack tide right in front of me and Evan Obercian for about 40 minutes on the NJ side off the river.

CORRECT DATE IS
12/16/2000

13 Feb 2001

Thayer's Gull at Florence/Penn Manor, PA, 16 Dec 2000

On 16 Dec 2000 George Armistead and I visited Florence, NJ, to look for unusual gulls among the thousands resting and bathing along the Delaware River across from the Penn Manor landfill. We arrived at about 2:00 p.m. to find thousands of gulls, including a first-winter Iceland and up to 60 Lesser Black-backed Gulls. At about 3:10, I noticed a first-winter gull facing us far downriver that seemed exceptionally pale and somewhat smaller than the nearby Herrings. I told George that I had an Iceland or Thayer's and gave him directions. He found the bird quickly and easily, and we watched the bird as it eventually turned to display dark-centered tertials and dark primaries. The views were distant but we both agreed that the bird looked like a fairly straightforward Thayer's Gull. We watched the bird for about 30 minutes as it fed, bathed, and occasionally took short flights. At about 3:45 it took off with several other gulls and flew straight downriver towards us, eventually banking north and disappearing behind the landfill mound. At no point did we think it crossed to the New Jersey side of the river.

Description: [The below description was compiled 13 Feb 2001 from memory]

A fairly large gull, slightly smaller than smaller Herring Gulls in direct comparison and significantly larger than Ring-billed Gulls. Its wings at rest were not noticeably long, proportionally similar to the wing projection of Herring Gulls. By contrast, the Iceland Gull seen earlier seemed exceptionally long-winged. The head was dovelike and very smoothly rounded, without the flat-topped appearance shown by Herring Gulls. The bill appeared fairly small.

The bill appeared entirely black. At that distance I do not think we would have discerned a small pale base to the lower mandible, but the two-toned bills of 1st-winter Ring-billed Gulls and 2nd-winter Herring Gulls were easy to discern.

The plumage was overall a smooth pale brown or tan, without noticeable contrast in the body plumage at rest. The head was about the same color as the back or very slightly paler. The breast was somewhat paler than the back and wings, accentuating its pale appearance when it was facing us. The only noticeable contrast on the bird were the tertials and the primaries. The tertials had prominent medium-brown (not dark brown) centers which contrasted obviously with the rest of the body plumage, even at the great viewing distance. The primaries were medium brown, only slightly darker than the tertials. They were noticeably paler than the primaries of all the 1st-winter Herring Gulls nearby, all of which appeared to have blackish primaries. The appearance of paler primaries was an easy way to pick the birds out from among the Herring Gulls. Although I looked carefully, the distance was too great to discern whether the primaries had pale fringes.

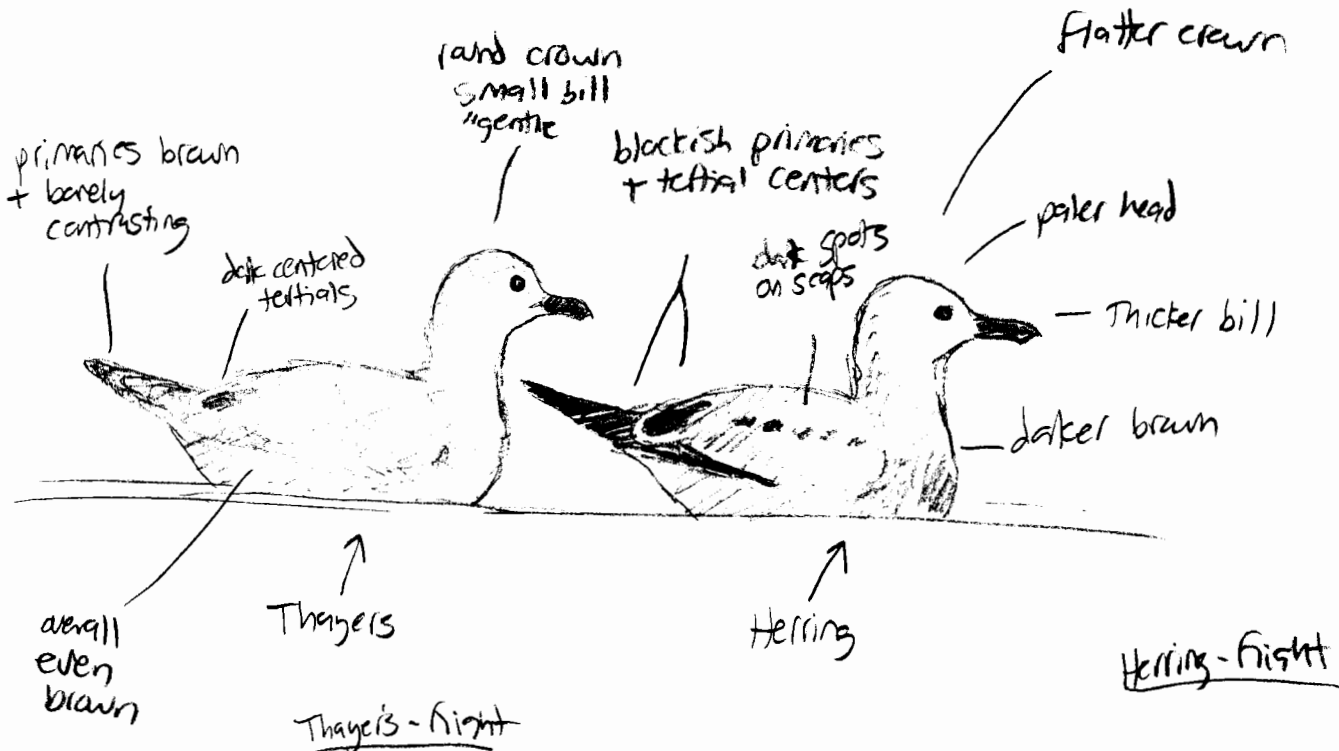
The bird was seen in flight several times and at all times looked like a "white-winged" gull, or in other words, lacked the strong contrast of dark primaries and secondaries shown by first-winter Herring Gulls. The bird appeared overall tan without any areas of high contrast. The darkest area on the bird were the secondaries, outer 5 primaries, and tail, all of which were a comparable medium-brown and contrasted slightly with the body plumage. From below the underwings appeared silvery. I do not recall noting the "venetian blind" appearance formed by the dark outer webs and pale inner webs to the primaries, but would have needed very good views at that distance to discern that field mark. The tail was entirely medium-brown, but far paler than on Herring Gull. Overall, the in-flight appearance was of a washed out Herring Gull with paler body plumage and reduced contrast between the body and the primaries, secondaries, and tail, and with silvery underwings.

Conditions: The day was overcast but still fairly bright. The bird was at least ½ mi distant. For those familiar with the location, most of our views were of the bird sitting just outside the channel (PA side) just after the river makes a sharp bend to the north. We were looking to our right (upriver). We had no opportunity to photograph the bird. I used a Swarovski ST-80 scope w/ 20-60x zoom eyepiece for most of the observation (40x used most often). George had a Questar which I also looked through at times.

Observer experience: I have been birding since 1987 and have long been especially interested in gulls. I have seen Thayer's Gulls in Maryland on about 10 occasions (all 1st-winters except for 2 adults), in North Carolina once (adult), in Virginia once (1st-winter), in Texas five times (2 adults, 3 first-winters), and in Colorado four times (two adults, two first-winters). I have seen about 50 Iceland Gulls as well as a few Iceland/Thayer's types that I have been unwilling to identify. The Florence bird fit well within what I consider "typical" for Thayer's.

Respectfully submitted, *Marshall Iliff* 2-13-01

Marshall Iliff
901 Crystal Spring Farm Rd.
Annapolis, MD 21403
miliff@aol.com



Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round Two

Species: Thayer's Gull (Larus thayeri)

Date of Sighting: 15 December 2000 to 15 December 2000

Location: TULLYTOWN

County: BUCKS

Observer(s): George Armistead, Marshall Iliff

Date of Submission: 2000

Submitted by: George Armistead, Marshall Iliff

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead								X
D. Heathcote			X					
P. Hess				X				
J. Stanley				X				
B. Reid				X				
R. Leberman				X				
M. Sharp		X						
TOTALS		1	1	4				1
DECISION				X				

Comments: 2/4/1

Signature (Secretary): 

Date: 12/28/02

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Ballot - Round One

Species: Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*)

Date of Sighting: 15 December 2000 to 15 December 2000

Location: TULLYTOWN

County: BUCKS

Observer(s): George Armistead, Marshall Iliff

Date of Submission: 2000

Submitted by: George Armistead, Marshall Iliff

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

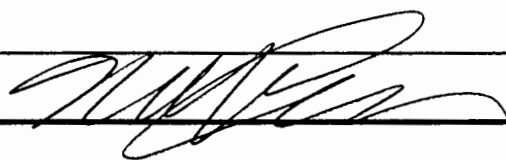
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead								X
D. Couchman								X
P. Hess			X					
J. Stanley		X						
B. Reid				X				
R. Leberman				X				
M. Sharp		X						
TOTALS		2	1	2				
DECISION								

Comments: 3/2/2 - 2ND ROUND

Signature (Secretary):



Date:

5/2/02