

348-07-2001

Juvenile/1st summer Thayer's Gull
Florence NJ, April 14, 2001

At around 10:45 I spotted an interesting looking immature plumaged gull in the middle of the Delaware River from the public boat launch in Florence. The bird was with a large group of gulls of various species. It would drift a ways downriver then fly back upriver and land near the channel marker directly opposite the small park. It did this 3 times allowing excellent opportunities to study the bird both on the water and in flight. The duration of the observation was about 15 minutes. At it's closest point the bird was about 50 yards distant. It was breezy along the river, with a little chop on the water. Skies were mostly clear and the sun was bright and overhead. Optics; Leica televid APO scope with 32x eyepiece.

My first impression of this bird was simply that it was something interesting. I considered at first the possibility of a small worn Herring Gull (HEGU) but the overall paleness of the bird in combination with the build and structure seemed to rule that possibility out. The bird was slightly smaller than the smallest HEGU I was able to compare it to directly (N=50) and seemed smaller and more slightly built than all HEGUs observed closely on the river (N=400+). The wings seemed longer and overall the bird was more attenuated at the rear. The head was rounder and the expression "gentler". On the other hand the bird was slightly larger than either of the 2 Iceland seen this day and the overall coloration darker and browner. Both Iceland seen today were almost white. The apparent Thayer's did appear worn, and the fine marking on the scapulars and wing coverts washed out. But with this apparent wear in mind it seemed too dark for an Iceland Gull, especially on the remiges and tail.

DESCRIPTION

Bill: Black with some pale at the base of the lower mandible. The amount of pale coloration was small and it was difficult to discern the exact tone and extent. Most of the time the bill appeared all black.

Eye: Dark

Head: Pale gray/brown, palest on the back of head and nape where it was almost white. Head shape was intermediate between Iceland Gull and small HEGU. Head was more rounded than on most HEGU and lacked the flat top and peaked rear of crown characteristic of many HEGU. It was not as petite and round as on many Iceland Gulls.

Body: Gray/brown, similar to HEGU in tone but paler. There was the suggestion of fine markings on the scapulars and wing coverts but these seemed washed out by wear leaving only faint checkering, especially on the coverts.

Wings: The outer primaries were the darkest part of the wings. These were brown with a faint pale fringe. The tertials were similar in color with a more obvious broader pale fringe. The tertials were solid with no barring. In flight there was an obvious brown secondary bar, pale inner primaries and brown outer primaries. When the bird landed on the water it briefly held it's wings spread open. In this posture it was possible to see that the brown on the outer primaries was not solid and that the inner web of each feather was paler than the outer

348-07-2001

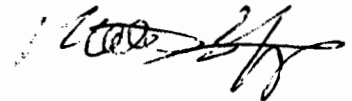
web. This was actually most obvious when the bird held the wing towards me and I was able to see the upper surface of the wing. From this angle it was clear that there was a difference in darkness of the inner and outer webs of each feather. Overall, the wing was fairly uniform in color differing only in degree of darkness on the feather groups described above. The under-wing was very uniform and pale approaching the pale creamy white of an Iceland or Glaucous Gull. There were some darker brown markings on the under-wing coverts, but these were paler than on HEGU.

Tail: In flight I could see an obvious brown tail band that was darker than the base of the rectrices, the upper-tail coverts and rump which were gray/brown like the upper-parts. There was some barring at the base of the outer rectrices. With the bird on the water it was possible to see that the under-tail coverts were barred.

Discussion: During the observation I was mainly considering the possibility of a worn HEGU. I tried to compare this bird to the palest HEGUs I could find on the river. In all instances the apparent THGU differed in overall size and structure and in the extent and degree of darkness on the tail and wings. In even the palest, smallest HEGU the wings were considerably darker with the secondaries and especially the outer primaries being blackish as opposed to brown. The dark flight feathers on HEGU contrasted more with the inner primaries and the wing coverts making the pattern of tonal differences more obvious. Both HEGUS and the apparent THGU shared the pattern of; pale coverts, darker secondaries, paler inner primaries, and darkest outer primaries. However on the HEGUs the dark on the outer primaries was solid with no apparent hint of the difference in tone of the inner and outer webs as on the apparent THGU. Also the tail on the HEGUs was more solidly dark than on the apparent THGU. On the apparent THGU the under-wing was much paler including the under-wing coverts. In terms of ruling out Iceland Gull, this bird seemed too WORN and DARK. After looking at this and the other gulls on the river this day it seems that wear actually can accentuate differences in these birds rather than obscure them, at least in the case of ICGU vs. THGU.

This description was written April 15 the night after the sighting and based on field notes taken at the time of the sighting. I proofed it on the 19th.

Matt Sharp
7135 Bryan St.
Phila PA
sharp@acnatsci.org



Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Ballot - Round One

Species: Thayer's Gull (Larus thayeri)

Date of Sighting: 14 April 2001 to 14 April 2001

Location: TULLYTOWN

County: BUCKS

Observer(s): Matt Sharp

Date of Submission: 2001

Submitted by: Matt Sharp

Written Description: Yes

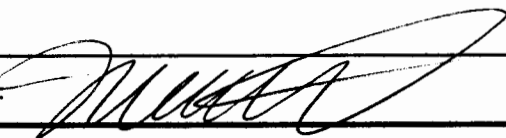
Photo: No

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			5	1				1
DECISION			X					

Comments: 5/1/1

Signature (Secretary): 

Date: 1/17/02