

Bill Etter
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February 23, 2005

Bill

The records committee voted unanimously not to accept your documentation (photos and description) of the Thayer's Gull at Lake Nockamixon State Park on March 31, 2001. All the committee members thought it was an interesting bird and possibly a Thayer's but there was not enough details in the photos or description, especially of the wings, to be certain. In my assessment I noted the following features which made me lean towards a small bleached Herring Gull, a species several other members could not definitely rule out:

- While small and round-headed the structure of the bird seems within the range of a female Herring Gull, though also ok for a Thayer's. While this is a somewhat subjective feature the bird appears on the chunky side for Thayer's, with more weight in the chest, and not as slim as Thayer's can be.
- The size of the bird is unclear. It is smaller than a Herring, but was not said to be larger or smaller than a Lesser Black-backed Gull.
- The contrast between the primaries and the tail, and the rest of the bird appears greater than is expected in Thayer's.
- The wing pattern as seen from below on the flight photo is very similar to a Herring Gull. From below the wing pattern on a Thayer's would be more similar to a 'Kumlien's' Iceland Gull.
- There is some evidence that the bird's upperparts are sun-bleached. The wing coverts and mantle are paler than the belly. The underwing appears much darker than the body. While most birds of this age would show wear at this time of year this individual seems particularly pale on the area most exposed to the sun.

All the above points may amount to nothing more than a recognition of the fact that the definitive ID criteria for non-adult Thayer's Gull are still being worked out. Note that 1 committee abstained on this report since they did not feel qualified to make an informed judgment. I think Thayer's Gull will become increasingly difficult to document successfully as more is understood of the species evolutionary history. The idea that Kumliens Gull is a hybrid population between Iceland Gull and Thayer's is gaining support and suggests that Kumlien's Gull is possibly even more variable than it already is known to be. At this point there has not been anything published quantifying the whole range of variation in young birds of either species and it is not very clear where the dividing lines are. Much has been written on tertials, size/shape, and wing-tip patterns but there seems to be much overlap in all these characters.

Thank you sending in the documentation. This is a case in which it is good to have documentation, even though the committee did not deem it sufficient for a certain identification. Your time and effort in the Lake Nockamixon area is inspiring and a benefit to all interested parties knowledge of the avifauna of PA. I hope you continue to allow PORC to review and archive your discoveries.

Sincerely

Matt Sharp
Chair: Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee.







Thayer's Gull

348-08-2001

Location: Lake Nockamixon marina, Nockamixon State Park, Haycock Twp, Bucks County, PA.

Date: 31 March, 2001. Seen one day only.

Found, photographed and reported by Bill Etter

Also observed by Jenn Fetter

Conditions: Overcast skies. Light good with no precipitation. Observed at approximately 3:00-3:30 PM

Optics: 10x24 binoculars, and spotting scope with 25x lens.

Description: I observed an unusual gull standing on the docks at the Nockamixon marina at approximately 3:00 P.M. The bird was subsequently viewed while standing, as well as in flight, from as close as 200 feet, for about 20-25 minutes. Other gulls in immediate proximity that served as size reference were Great Black-backed, Lesser Black-backed, Herring, and Ring-billed. The bird was closest in size to the Lessers; definitely smaller and slimmer than the Herrings with which it was most closely associated. The feature that first drew my attention was the round and very white head. The back was also frosty, with only a few brown and gray feathers visible upon the mantle. Sides, belly and lower breast had a mottled, creamy, barred appearance. Legs were pink, eyes were dark, as was bill, except for a touch of pink at its base. While standing, primaries appeared muddy (no black). In flight, underwing secondaries and tail band had a dirty-cream appearance. Primaries were translucent. Bird was seen standing alone on docks, then soaring over water with a group of mostly Herrings. It engaged briefly in a squabble over a dead fish, soared alone, then returned to the docks. Generally remained aloof from the hundreds of other gulls. Bird was lost in a kettle of gulls after the entire flock was disturbed by a dog.

Identification: After a considerable amount of research, I've concluded that the bird was a first spring Thayer's Gull. Its small size eliminates Glaucous and aberrant Herring. Herring is further eliminated by complete lack of black in pale muddy primaries, as well as by translucent quality of primaries. General stockiness of the bird coupled with darkness of primaries and banding under tail seem to eliminate immature Iceland gull.

Enclosed are a few photos. Due to quality of available light (possibly coupled with questionable skill of photographer?), they are a bit washed out, failing to bring out some of the described details.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round One

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

Date of Sighting: 31 March 2001 to 31 March 2001

Location: NOCKAMIXON STATE PARK

County: BUCKS

Observer(s): Bill Etter

Date of Submission: 2001

Submitted by: Bill Etter

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

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				
E. Witmer				X				
R. Leberman								X
M. Sharp						X		
TOTALS				2	2	2		1
DECISION					X			

Comments: 0/6/1

Signature (Secretary):



Date:

8/25/03