

Thayer's Gull

Larus thayeri

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Location: east pier, Presque Isle S.P., Erie, Pa.

Date: February 12, 2012

Time: 11:10 to 11:20

Weather: cloudy, wind NW to 20 mph, temp. 20 F

Viewing distance: about 100 yards

Optics: Kowa TSN 4 from 30X to 50X and Zeiss 10 X 40 binocular

Details: Mike Weible had just called me say that he had just found a second cycle Iceland Gull at the west pier where he took some nice photos. He said he was going to drive around to the east pier where he thought he could get even closer. I was on my way to the east pier to see the Iceland Gull and as soon as I drove into the parking lot I looked up and saw a first cycle Thayer's Gull instead. I immediately started taking photos. Within minutes Mike drove into the parking lot and by this time the Thayer's had settled onto the water among a flock of scaup. We both took photos of it on the water and then it flew again while we continued to take pictures. We never did find the Iceland Gull again.

The Thayer's Gull looked like a pale version of a first cycle Herring Gull. The dark-light-dark wing pattern was obvious in flight and the photos I took clearly show the dusky outer webs and pale inner webs of the outer primaries. The under primaries were pale and unmarked. There was an obvious wide dark tail band that was the darkest part of the bird. The bill was all black. The upper parts were sharply mottled pale brown and the head was evenly colored with darker feathering around the eye. When the bird was resting on the water the folded primaries and the tertials were the darkest parts of the bird. The tips of the primaries were clearly edged in white. I took several photos of the bird on the water and on the wing and also some flight shots of the Thayer's Gull flying with a first cycle Herring Gull.

I have seen many Thayer's Gulls, especially adults and first cycle birds. I have also seen many first cycle Kumlien's Iceland Gulls that approach the darkness and patterns of Thayer's Gull, but the primaries and tertials are never this dark in Kumlien's Iceland Gull and when the primaries are darkish they are always broadly edged in white giving the appearance of the folded primaries as being only slightly darker than the plumage of the rest of the bird. Kumlien's Iceland Gulls tend to have a more petite rounded head and almost peaked at the center of the crown than Thayer's Gull. The face is usually cleaner and more evenly colored on Kumlien's Iceland Gull as well.