

Submission Date	2012-12-18 10:25:37
Observer's Name	George Armistead
E-mail	armistead.george@gmail.com
Observer's Address	City: Philadelphia State / Province: PA Postal / Zip Code: 19146 Country: United States
Names of additional observers	Tom Johnson, Melissa Roach, Dave Wilton, Shannon Thompson, Chuck Chalfant
Species (Common Name)	Vega Gull
Species (Scientific Name)	Larus vegae
Number of individuals	1
Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)	1 adult
Observation Date and Time	12-15-2012 9:30 AM
County	Bucks
Location (City, Borough, Township)	Bristol, PA
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	Grows North Landfill
Habitat	landfill
Distance to bird	~60 feet
Viewing conditions	good light, the bird was surrounded by Herring Gulls, we had an unobstructed view for most of the observation which lasted perhaps 20 minutes
Optical equipment used	Leica ultravids 10x 42, Leica 82 mm telescope
Description	I believe the photos adequately document the bird's appearance. These photos lack any optical illusions or effects that misrepresent the bird. Photos are attached here, but also available at my flickr site here: http://www.flickr.com/photos/george_armistead/8281726994/in/photostream
Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)	It spent its time loafing with the Herring Gulls until we purposely flushed it to photograph the wing pattern. Then it landed among another flock of gulls, before that flock then flushed when a Bald Eagle arrived on the scene.
Separation	

from similar species (How you eliminated others)

I suppose eliminating a dark-extreme Thayer's might be an issue, but I don't believe one could combine the array of features seen on this individual. Slaty-backed Gull should have a darker mantle, and a broader trailing edge to the wings, and show structural differences.

Discussion – anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:

I have listed this bird as *Larus vegae*, though as I'm sure you all know this bird has variously been lumped as part of the Herring or Lesser Black-backed gull complexes. Treatment at the species level is gaining popularity, and likely to gain wide acceptance soon I would imagine.

As for aging, I'm guessing this bird is in its 4th yr. If I've correctly identified p9 than it seems to lack a mirror which might be a result of it retaining some 3rd cycle feathers (though I'd expect most should show mirrors by their 3rd year).

Apparently the fact that this bird is still undergoing primary molt at this late date is a point in support of the identification as a Vega. This individual is unusual however in molting primaries at two points (looks like p10 & p7; making primary pattern harder to assess).

Alvaro Jaramillo emailed Peter Adriaens on our behalf:
From: Alvaro Jaramillo
To: 'George Armistead' ; 'Peter Adriaens' ; 'Tom Johnson'
Sent: Monday, December 17, 2012 7:19 PM
Subject: Gull molt - Vega etc.

Peter

See below for a link to photos of what may be a Vega Gull in eastern North America . Tom also has photos, but I misplaced the link.

http://www.flickr.com/photos/george_armistead/8281729354/in/photostream/

There are two things to ponder. One of them is that it seems to show two molt areas in the primaries, with P10 growing in and also P7? Growing in. Have you seen this on your side of the Atlantic ? It is not something we see here, and wonder if it may help in the identification in any way?

The other thing to ponder is if you see anything wrong with this being a Vega?

Regards

Alvaro

Peter responded:
Hi Alvaro,

cool photos. Certainly looks like a Vega Gull!

As a rule, adult gulls do not have two moult waves in their primaries, so this bird is an oddball in that respect.

Then again, it does not surprise me that much. P10 has probably been moulted out of necessity. Maybe it just got too worn or damaged during the trip across the (rough) ocean.

By the way, I have never seen so many gulls in a sorry state as in Choshi, Japan. I don't know why that is, but perhaps they just get greedy and careless with all the fish offal around, and then get hit by trucks or so.

I had to rescue one Black-tailed Gull and one Slaty-backed Gull together out of a container like this:
<https://picasaweb.google.com/115659792470435170210/JapanMarch2012#5740301380841879666>
They simply did not know how to get out anymore!

I can imagine that the Japanese fishermen are less soft-hearted with them...

I do not have photos of adult Vega Gull with two moult waves, but quite a few of birds still growing the outermost primary (or even outer two primaries) in early March.

A few birds with odd moult too; see attached:

- a bird that had arrested its moult at P7 in the left wing - 9 March 2012;
- a bird still growing P10 on both sides, and with P1 missing in the left wing. Also, I am not too sure, but it could be that P8 and P6 in the left wing have not grown to their full length.

Greetz,
Peter

Are you positive of your identification ? (Why or why not)

A good question. I believe the most parsimonious conclusion is that this bird is a Vega Gull. There are people that would contend that a hybrid could show the combination of features that this bird does. That is probably true of most large white-headed gulls. I don't think one will find a better candidate for a Vega Gull than this bird.

After

<http://www.surfbirds.com/ID%20Articles/JapanGulls/>

Supporting

**evidence
(check all
that apply)**

Photograph

Click to edit

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