

Submission Date	2012-12-19 17:25:02
Observer's Name	Tom Johnson
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Observer's Address	Street Address: 24 Meadowood Drive City: Hummelstown State / Province: PA Postal / Zip Code: 17036 Country: United States
Names of additional observers	George Armistead, Melissa Roach, Rick Mellon, Chuck Chalfant, Shannon Thompson, Dave Wilton
Species (Common Name)	"Vega" Herring Gull
Species (Scientific Name)	Larus argentatus vegae
Subspecies (if known)	vegae
Number of individuals	1
Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)	Adult in primary molt
Observation Date and Time	12-15-2012 9:45 AM
County	Bucks
Location (City, Borough, Township)	Tullytown
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	GROWS North Landfill, Waste Management property
GPS coordinates of sighting	40.160312,-74.777082
Habitat	A glorious, fetid mountain of trash
Distance to bird	About 30 feet until I flushed it for flight shots. Then very far.
Viewing conditions	Smelly but otherwise sunny (nice, direct lighting on the bird)
Optical equipment used	Two 1x human eyes, Leica 7x42 Ultravid, Swarovski ATS80HD 20-60x scope
Description	Melissa pointed out a dark-eyed adult Herring-type Gull that was standing along the near edge of a close flock of gulls inside the GROWS North landfill. I got on the bird, immediately thought "VEGA GULL!" based on the upperparts coloration, dark eye, and pink legs, and then got everyone else on the bird so that we could all

study it. This was a large gull, about the same size as the adjacent American Herring Gulls. It stood out dramatically because of its olive/ dark-spotted irides, gray upperparts darker than American Herring Gull but paler than Lesser Black-backed Gull, and heavy, blotchy brown hindneck/ chest markings. The white "tertial crescent" was bold, at least as wide as the widest of the adjacent Herring Gulls' crescents. Legs were medium-dark pink, but were somewhat obscured by mud. The orbital ring was indistinct, but close examination revealed a dark pink-red color. In order to secure flight photos, I flushed the bird - George Armistead and I both got dorsal and ventral photos of the spread wings in flight, revealing a Slaty-backed Gull-esque "string of pearls", or row of subterminal white crescents on the outer primaries. There is a substantial amount of black on the dorsal side of the primaries (normal for Vega, indicating that this wasn't an odd Thayer's Gull or other white-winged gull. The bird is undergoing an odd molt, with 2 centers of replacement; while this pattern is odd for any large gull, the timing (late) is good for Vega Gull.

Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)

This gull was standing on a mountain of trash with other gulls. Then I frightened it so that we could document its wing pattern, and it flew away.

Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

Hybrids such as Herring x Lesser Black-backed Gull can be ruled out by considering eye, leg color, and the lack of intermediacy in phenotype between those possible parental species (with the exception of upperparts coloration).

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

I could describe the bird in even more detail, but you probably just want to look at the photos and come to your own conclusions.

George Armistead also submitted documentation on this bird, including comments from a few others (Steve Howell, Peter Adriaens, Al Jaramillo). His flight shots show the details of the primary pattern better than do my photos.

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

Nope, but it sure looks like a Vega Gull to me.

During

none

After

all of them

Supporting evidence (check all that apply)

Photograph

Upload images, audio, video or drawings

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