

Louisiana Ornithological Society**Bird Records Committee****Report Form**

Species: Thayer's Gull, *Larus thayeri*

Number: 1 adult, alternate plumage

Locality: Rutherford Beach, Cameron Par., La.

Date: May 4, 2003

Time: 9:00 (approx.)

Reporter: David P. Muth,
1617 Charlton Drive, New Orleans, Louisiana 70122

With Reporter: Paul Conover

Other Observers: none

Light: very good, morning light, sun behind us as we looked west

Optics: Zeiss Dialyt 10x40

Distance: 150 feet on beach (from vehicle); <100' during fly-by

Duration: two minutes

Habitat: gulf beach

Behavior: loafing in mixed species flock; took off when flock spooked, flew partly out to sea, then turned east, curved back towards shore and flew far down the beach, until I lost sight of it, in the loose company of 3-4 Herring Gulls.

Description: A small Herring-class gull in adult alternate plumage. Head rounded, on the small delicate extreme for Herring Gull. Eye was dark. Overall size on the small extreme for Herring as well. Bill fairly short and not very deep, yellow, with red gonydeal spot. Legs intense pink, much deeper pink than Herring gulls present.

Head, under-parts, tail, white; no streaking on nape. Upper wings and mantle light slate gray, a half-shade darker (slightly bluer?) than nearby adult Herring Gulls. In flight, I got a decent look at the primary pattern as it flew past us heading east.

I can't give you a primary by primary description, but I did see a pattern entirely consistent with Thayer's, and inconsistent with Herring. The upper side of the outermost primaries showed the wedge pattern typical of large gulls, but the black wedge was not solid. In other words, the primary shafts were bi-colored, not solid black as in Herring. They were the same gray as the mantle with only the outer vanes and tips a very dark gray or black, most extensive on the outermost 3-4 primaries, diminishing inward, creating a fairly limited darker wedge; there were sub-apical white spots on p10 and (I think) on p9; these white spots continued but diminished inward, created a small white strip of "pearls" between the gray shaft and the darker tip on the remaining outer primaries. Underside of primaries not well seen by me. (see feeble sketch on 3x5 card)

Voice: Not heard.

Similar Species: Herring Gull is ruled out by primary pattern described above, and, to a lesser extent, by combination of overall size, shape, eye and leg color, and mantle color. California Gull ruled out by primary pattern and leg color. Wingtips too dark for Iceland, Glaucous-winged, etc. I can think of no likely hybrid that would produce such a bird.

Photos/Videos/Recordings: none

Previous Experience: I have seen several 1st year birds in Louisiana, and one or two suspected adults in basic or extremely worn plumage. This is the only crisp alternate-plumaged adult I've seen.

Aids: none; looked at Sibley later.

Circumstances of Description: written from memory

Confidence Level: very high given age and plumage condition .

Signature:



David P. Muth

Date:

6/15/03

Thayer's Gull
upper wing



LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

Report Form

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of species on the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC) Review List. The LBRC recommends the use of this form or a similar format when submitting records for review (to assure that all pertinent information is accounted for). Attach additional pages as necessary. Please print or type. Attach xerox of field notes, drawings, photographs, or tape recordings, if available. Include all photos for more obscurely marked species. When completed, mail to Secretary, Louisiana Bird Records Committee, c/o Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216.

1. English and Scientific names: Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*)

2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage): one, in definitive alternate plumage

3. Locality: LOUISIANA: (parish): Cameron

Specific Locality: Rutherford Beach, about 4 or 5 miles W of village [Muth probably has a better idea of mileage]

4. Date(s) when observed: 5/4/03

5. Time(s) of day when observed: mid-morning

6. Reporting observer and address: Paul Conover, 501 Adrienne St., Lafayette, LA 70506

7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): David Muth

9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): The sun was to our back, with morning light providing excellent viewing conditions.

10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Zeiss 10x40 binos, Kowa 20-60 scope

11. Distance to bird(s): perhaps 40 yards at closest point perched, then a bit less as the bird flew past us.

12. Duration of observation: a few minutes, perhaps 5.

13. Habitat: beach, in a mixed flock of Herring, Ring-billed, Laughing Gulls, and terns.

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation):

David saw the bird land at the far [western] edge of the flock as we were scanning. He noted the darker mantle than those of adult Herrings present, and we began working toward the bird to see if the color difference was real. We approached, stopping at intervals to get better looks. As we approached within collecting range, the previously complacent flock suddenly erupted and all of the birds, Thayer's included, took off. The bird flew to the east, crossing by us over the water, and then behind us and well down the beach. We never relocated it.

15. Description (include only what was actually seen, *not what "should" have been seen*; include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species, body bulk, shape, proportions, bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species):

We first noted the slightly darker mantle of the bird, and then as we neared, the round head which was completely unlike the classic Herring Gull shape. The eye was dark even when viewed through the scope zoomed to 60X. The bill was on the small side for a larger gull, yellow with red on the gonys. The legs were a deeper or perhaps darker pink than nearby Herrings. The round head and dark eye gave the bird a completely different feel than that of the surrounding Herrings, making it appear somewhat small-headed. The bird was about the size of a small Herring.

As the bird flushed, its wingtips clearly showed the typical and diagnostic Thayer's pattern, with extensive white proximal to the black banding of the outer 4 or so primaries, as in Franklin's Gull. This was very striking and obvious, something that David and I both saw clearly. We didn't have to ask one another if we had seen the clinching field mark, or lobby or convince; it was plain from our reactions that we had both seen the same thing.

We watched the bird as it crossed us flying east, seeing the wingtip pattern displayed with every wingstroke. The bird flew a few miles down, and we were unable to find it again.

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation):

Herring Gull would be the most common similar species. We had dozens of Herrings to compare it to, and had been watching Herrings of all ages all the way down the beach. This bird was structurally different from Herrings in its head shape, which—if nothing else—after watching Herrings all morning was not difficult to notice. The dark eye on a bird in definitive alternate plumage, and the wingtip pattern also distanced it from Herring.

The only other similar species that comes to mind is Iceland Gull, but this bird had distinct black wingtips.

19. Previous experience with this species: none in life, extensive study of photos, and much experience with locally common species for reference point.

22. Are you positive of your identification if not, explain: Yes. Although I have my doubts about the validity of Thayer's as a species, it's definitely a recognizable form in the field, and this bird was classic textbook Thayer's.

23. Signature of reporter: _____

Date: _written May 5, '03. typed Sept. 5, '03.