

GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL AND THAYER'S GULL

At Calgary, Alberta

by D. V. WESELOH* and VIRGINIA LANG**

While making observations at several of the Sanitary Landfill Sites in Calgary, Alberta during the spring of 1972, we observed an adult Glaucous-winged Gull as well as what later proved to be an immature Thayer's Gull.

On the morning of May 3, 1972, the senior author located the adult Glaucous-winged Gull sitting on a dirt mound at the Forest Lawn Sanitary Landfill Site in east Calgary. The bird was sitting with a small group of California, Ring-billed and Herring gulls.

While the identification of gulls can indeed be a frustrating and difficult task at times, the features of this bird were distinctively seen and compared with those of the other three gull species present. The adult Glaucous-winged Gull was characterized by a dark iris, flesh-pinkish legs, a large massive bill marked only by a red spot on the lower mandible and, as observed in flight and when sitting, the complete lack of black on the wing, wing-tips or mantle. The mantle and the entire wing, except for the slight leading and trailing edge of white, were pearly gray.

The dark iris (eye) separates this gull from all other white-headed gulls on the west coast except the smaller California and Mew gulls. The leg and bill characteristics are shared only by the Herring and Glaucous gulls, while the lack of black in the wing-tips is duplicated only in the Glaucous Gull.⁸

This gull was observed from 11:45 a.m. to 14:30 p.m. at distances of less

than 100 yards through a 20-40X binocular telescope. It was present at the Forest Lawn site on at least May 3 and 4, 1972, and was observed by Hattie Boothman, Rob Owens and Paul Whitney, in addition to the authors, during this time. Photos confirming the absence of black in the wing-tips have been deposited with Professor W. Ray Salt, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

The history of the Glaucous-winged Gull in Alberta is hazy at best. There is questionable evidence that an immature specimen was collected near Calgary sometime before 1936.¹⁵ This specimen, however, is not present in the Edmonton, Calgary or Ottawa collections. Conclusive proof of the Glaucous-winged Gull in Alberta was provided when immature specimens were secured from Bear Lake in September, 1958 and August, 1959. In addition, during the fall of 1959, 10 - 12 second-year Glaucous-winged Gulls were also observed in the Bear Lake area¹². In 1960 an immature banded Glaucous-winged Gull was recovered and later released near Therien Lake at St. Paul, Alberta⁷. The gull had been banded as a chick the year before at Christie Islet, Howe Sound, B.C.

Stirling reported an adult Glaucous-winged Gull at the Valley View Alberta, garbage dump in the Peace River District, 65 miles east of Grande Prairie.¹⁴ Rand makes no mention of the Glaucous-winged Gull in his survey of the Birds of Southern Alberta. The present record thus represents at least the sixth occurrence of Glaucous-winged Gulls in Alberta, only two of which have involved adult birds and perhaps only one of which has occurred in the southern half of the

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province. This heavily biased distribution of sightings in favour of the north-central portion of the province appears to add credence to Merilee's speculations on this gulls' avenue of arrival in Alberta (see below).

The Glaucous-winged Gull is a bird of the Pacific Northwest Coast; inland records are rare indeed. Godfrey considers the gull as accidental in Alberta.⁵ R. W. Campbell of the British Columbia Provincial Museum (*in press*) states: "The status of the Glaucous-winged Gull in interior B.C. is sketchy at best." He adds that there is a recent record of a Glaucous-winged x Herring Gull pair breeding in the Okanagan in the summer of 1972. Merilees (*in press*) reports that he has never seen nor does he know of any reports of Glaucous-winged Gulls in the Castlegar-Nelson area of British Columbia, though he feels,

... it [the Glaucous-winged Gull] was possibly a regular visitor in the past before all the dams put a stop to the salmon runs which came up as far as the Kootenay River and south Slokan and up the Columbia past Revelstoke. The first records for Alberta were in the Peace River Country which possibly supports my contention as these gulls quite likely followed up the Fraser [River] and the route of the spawning salmon.

R. W. Campbell relates two cases in which birds of this species were captured as pets on the Pacific coast, taken inland more than 500 miles and then released.⁴ He also tells of a dead Glaucous-winged Gull recovered in Iowa which may have been transported here atop a railroad freight car which came from the Pacific Northwest. While it is difficult to attribute the wanderings of birds outside their normal range to any single cause, the above instance suggests that human interference cannot be ruled out.

Approximately 2 weeks later, on May 19, 1972, while observing gulls at the Spy Hill Sanitary Landfill Site in northwest Calgary, we observed and later collected an immature gull of uncertain species. Upon initially sighting this bird, we observed that it possessed the plumage characteristics of an im-

mature Glaucous-winged Gull and, in fact, it was collected as such.

Upon examination of the specimen, W. E. Godfrey (*in press*) confirmed the similarity in coloration with the Glaucous-winged Gull but noted that "the bill is too slender and short for that species and the tarsus also is not long enough." He identified the specimen as an immature Thayer's Gull.

The gull was initially observed during mid-morning as it sat loafing with Herring, California and Ring-billed gulls. It was viewed repeatedly by both authors during the course of the morning and, later in the afternoon, by Rob Owens. The lack of any black or dark brown in the wing-tips, the overall light colouration (as compared to second-year Herring Gulls) and the large size made it possible to locate the bird at will during the day. The gull remained in close proximity to second-year Herring Gulls for most of the day and was clearly discerned from them.

Perhaps owing to the long-time status of Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayer's*) as a subspecies of the Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*, see below), sightings of this species have not been reported from Alberta. The only previous record of Thayer's Gull in Alberta was related to us by Professor Salt (*in press*, from Rowan¹⁰) and revised by Rowan and Hohn¹⁰).

" '*Larus argentatus thayeri*, 1 record identified by J. Dwight from specimen (coll. Beaver Lake, October about 1928).' Rowan had a habit of calling Beaverhills Lake, Beaver Lake, and I suspect that this specimen was taken at Beaverhills Lake."

In light of this record, Thayer's Gull had not been reported from Alberta for approximately 44 years.

Thayer's Gull was first described and named by Brooks² but had been known to the early explorers of its range by various names. Its taxonomic position has almost always been in a continuous state of flux. Until recently it was most often considered to be *L. argentatus thayeri*, a subspecies of the Herring Gull.¹ However, information

from Salomonsen¹¹ and later MacPherson⁶ and Smith¹³ show that the two species, *L. argentatus* and *L. thayeri*, breed sympatrically (their ranges overlap but they do not interbreed) and that they differ behaviourally and anatomically. Godfrey⁵ and Salt (*in press*) thus treat them as distinct species.

Godfrey lists the breeding range of Thayer's Gull as the Canadian Arctic from Banks Island to north and central Baffin Island and from central Ellesmere Island south to northern South Hampton Island.⁵ It is casual on Lake Athabasca in northwestern Saskatchewan in the summer and winters in coastal B.C.

Brown recently reported Thayer's Gulls wintering off the coast of western Newfoundland and speculated that perhaps those Thayer's Gulls breeding at the eastern edge of their range winter on the Atlantic coast rather than the Pacific.³

We wish to express our appreciation to W. Ray Salt and W. Earl Godfrey for their efforts in tracing the early history of both these gull species in Alberta.

¹AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION. 1957. *Checklist of North American birds*. Fifth edition, Baltimore. 691 pp.

²BROOKS, W. S. 1915. *Notes on birds from East Siberia and Arctic Alaska*. Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool. 59: 361-413 (not seen, from MacPherson, 1961).

³BROWN, R. G. B. 1972. *Thayer's Gull wintering off western Newfoundland*. Can. Field-Nat. 86: 294.

⁴CAMPBELL, R. W. 1971. *Misleading Glaucous-winged Gull recovery from Iowa*. Bird Banding, 42: 127-129.

⁵GODFREY, W. E. 1966. *The birds of Canada*. Nat. Mus. Can. Bull. 203, Queen's Printer, Ottawa. 428 pp.

⁶MACPHERSON, A. H. 1961. *Observations on Canadian Arctic Larus gulls, and on the taxonomy of L. thayeri Brooks*. Arctic Inst. North Amer., Tech. Papers, No. 7: 1-40.

⁷MERILEES, W. J. 1961. *First Alberta record for the Glaucous-winged Gull*. Can. Field-Nat., 75: 170.

⁸PETERSON, A. H. 1961. *A field guide to western birds*. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. 366 pp.

⁹RAND, A. L. 1959. *The birds of southern Alberta*. Nat. Mus. Can. Bull. 111. Biol. Series 37. Ottawa. 105 pp.

¹⁰ROWAN, W. (undated). *A provisional list of the birds of Alberta*. Revised by W. Rowan and E. O. Hohn, 1950 (not seen, cited by W. R. Salt *in litt.*).

¹¹SALOMONSEN, F. 1950-1951. *The birds of Greenland*. Parts 1-2. Copenhagen, Ejnar Munksgaard. 608 pp. (not seen, from MacPherson, 1961).

¹²SALT, W. R. 1966. *Some unusual bird records from the Peace River District*. Can. Field-Nat. 80: 114.

¹³SMITH, N. G. 1966. *Evolution of some Arctic gulls (Larus): An experimental study of isolating mechanisms*. Ornithological Monographs No. 4. American Ornithologists' Union.

¹⁴STIRLING, D. 1967. *Sight record of a Glaucous-winged Gull for Alberta*. Blue Jay, 25: 131.

¹⁵TAVERNER, P. A. 1936. *Preliminary list of the birds of Alberta, checked and annotated by F. L. Farley and Ray Salt*. Autumn 1937. (not seen, cited by W. R. Salt, *in press*).

WHITENESS IN AN AMERICAN WIGEON

by MOE MARESCHAL*

On July 7, 1972, I made an observation of an American Wigeon (Baldpate) that is of interest. My family and I were at Waskesiu, Saskatchewan, and as that particular day was rainy, my 4-year old daughter suggested we go to the Heart Lakes to feed the ducks.

We did so, and perhaps the entry in my field book will better convey what we saw:

7/7/72 Cool- approx. 65° - nimbostratus - light rain - no wind. Went to Heart Lakes - saw the usual mallards - was baldpate there that was different than usual - cheek patches and throat were white instead of grey. Took 3 pictures with Kodak.

I have looked through my available sources but have not found reference to the white throat and cheeks.^{1 2 3 4} The bird's plumage was normal, including the green eyestripe, with the exception of the above characteristics.

A close examination of Audubon's painting and Peterson's drawings, shows that the grey of the cheeks and upper neck are due to a mixture of separate dark and white feathers. It is

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