

General Field Notes

JAMES F. PARNELL, Department Editor

Department of Biology, University of North Carolina at Wilmington,
Wilmington, N.C. 28401

JULIAN R. HARRISON, Associate Editor

Department of Biology, The College of Charleston, Charleston, S.C. 29401

COMMITTEE REPORT

The CBC Records Committee reviewed the literature on the identification of "white-winged" gulls and voted to retain the Iceland Gull on the North Carolina Hypothetical List until a voucher specimen has been obtained. There are several Glaucous Gull specimens for the state. Examining series of white-winged gulls in various systematic collections further supports our belief that these species are often virtually impossible to distinguish in the field and in photographs. The popular American field guides do not indicate the amount of individual variation and, therefore, are not adequate to identify the species of many individual Glaucous and Iceland Gulls. The degree of competence of the observers is not questioned. The decision to require a voucher specimen prior to admitting Iceland Gull or Thayer's Gull (Chat 37:50-51) to either state list is a matter of necessity. We hope that bird students who have struggled with the problem of identifying white-winged gulls in the field will understand the dilemma. We continue to welcome detailed reports of sightings of white-winged gulls from the Carolinas. Several convincing reports are published in this issue of *The Chat*.

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Iceland Gull at Clemson, S.C.

HARRY E. LeGRAND JR.

Department of Zoology, Clemson University
Clemson, S.C. 29631

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On the morning of 3 February 1976 I observed a white-winged gull in flight at Lake Hartwell, Clemson, S.C. I identified it as an Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*) because of its dark bill and Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*) size, in addition to its overall whitish-buff coloration with white primaries. As the bird flew south over the lake, it encountered two Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*) and chased one of the Ring-billeds for several seconds. The Iceland appeared to be approximately 3 to 4 inches longer than the Ring-billeds.

On the afternoon of 3 February, and nearly every day through 8 February, the Iceland Gull was found in a large flock (about 60 birds) of Ring-billed and Herring Gulls at Lake Hartwell near the J.P. Stevens textile plant. The gulls were usually resting on mudflats and were studied in great detail by Sidney Gauthreaux, Bob Beason, Frank Moore, Paul Hamel, and me. Most of these observations were made with 20-40X scopes, and excellent size and plumage characters were noted among the three species. The Iceland was whitish-buff throughout, and its size was intermediate between the Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. However, it was a slender bird, its bulk being closer to that of the Ring-

billed. The folded wings projected about an inch beyond the tail. Its most distinctive field mark was the short and dark bill, scarcely two-thirds the length of the Herring Gull's bill, giving the bill a stubby appearance. Actually, the bill was bicolored, with the basal half dark gray or horn color and the distal half black. Nevertheless, at any distance and under most light conditions the bill appeared completely black. The legs were pink. The off-white color of the bird was intermediate in color between the first-year and second-year plumages as depicted in the major field guides. However, data supplied by Hume (British Birds, 1975, p. 24-37) indicate that the gull was likely a first-year bird because of the all dark bill. Photographs were taken of the Iceland Gull in comparison with the Herring and Ring-billed Gulls, but the birds were at too great a distance in the pictures to provide conclusive photographic documentation. Nonetheless, there was not the slightest doubt in any observer's mind that the white-winged gull was an Iceland.

This appears to be the third record of the Iceland Gull for South Carolina, the two previous records being single immatures seen by Burnham and Rhett Chamberlain near Mt. Pleasant on 7 January 1964 (Chat 28:49-51) and by E. Milby Burton near Charleston in late December or early January 1971-72 (Chat 37:60-61; further details not published). This is also the first inland report of the Iceland Gull for the Carolinas and undoubtedly one of the few inland records for the southeastern United States.

A Slight Record of the Iceland Gull from Charleston, S.C.

DENNIS M. FORSYTHE
Department of Biology
The Citadel, Charleston, S.C. 29409

On 15 February 1976, I observed an Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*) at the Charleston County Solid Waste Reduction Center, Romney Street, Charleston, S.C. The bird was first seen at 0800 loafing with Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*) and Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*) on the landfill 80 m from me. I was able to watch it closely for about 8 minutes in good light, with a 20X spotting scope, and to compare it with nearby Herring Gulls. The black eyes and bill, the relatively small bill and head, and the long wings that extended beyond the tail were clearly seen. The all-white primaries were observed when the gull flew off with the other birds toward the Cooper River. The black bill and all-white plumage indicated that this was a 2-year-old bird. I did not see the gull again.

Another Iceland Gull was seen during this period at Clemson by Harry LeGrand et al. (See above). Both birds probably came to South Carolina during a cold front that occurred on 1 February, as gull numbers in the Charleston area about doubled after the passage of the front (Forsythe, unpub. data). Iceland Gulls have been observed on two other occasions in South Carolina. Single immature birds were observed by Burnham and Rhett Chamberlain at Shem Creek, Mt. Pleasant, on 7 January 1964 (Chat 28:49-51) and by E. Milby Burton near the Carolina Yacht Club in Charleston in late December or early January 1971-72 (Chat 37:60-61). There is also a record of the species from the mouth of the Savannah River. A bird was collected by Ivan R. Tomkins on the Georgia side of the river (South Carolina Bird Life, 1970, p. 604).

These observations were made while conducting research on the attractiveness of milled solid waste to avian species potentially hazardous to aircraft supported by Grant No. 14-16-0008-2024 from the U.S. Department of the Interior and the U.S. Air Force Eco-System Technology Section.

[NOTE: Burton (Supplement, South Carolina Bird Life, 1970, p. 604) placed the Iceland Gull on the official South Carolina list despite the fact that only a single record was available at that time. This was done on the strength of the outstanding ability of the observers involved and the conditions under which the bird was seen. The three records reported in this issue of *The Chat* support Burton's judgment, but the acquisition of a voucher specimen still would be desirable for a species that is extremely difficult to identify in the field.—JRH]