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A Record of Thayer's Gull from Hatteras Inlet, Dare County, N.C.

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On 27 December 1983 at approximately 1630, I observed a first-winter Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*) at the north end of Ocracoke Island, at Hatteras Inlet, Hyde County, N.C. The bird was first noticed as it flew in and landed among a large group of gulls 65 m away. Bob Lewis, who was scoping gulls nearby, confirmed the identification. The bird was studied at leisure for several minutes and in direct comparison to similar-aged Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*). It was paler tan-brown and much more uniformly colored overall. The back and wing coverts had a marbled rather than blotchy pattern; overall the bird was less contrasty than any Herring Gull present (about 150,000; roughly half immatures). The folded primaries were unique, tan-brown in color and only slightly darker than the back. Each feather was boldly outlined with buff-white margins, including a mottled invasion of white onto the brown centers. The Thayer's Gull was slightly smaller than any Herring Gull nearby. The bill was as long as that of a Herring Gull but more uniform in thickness and with a gentler curvature at the tip. The color of the bill was mostly blackish with a dusky grayish-pink base.

Eventually I flushed the bird. In flight from above, the primaries were paler than the mantle except for the outer two or three, which were slightly darker, and the next four or

five, which had darkish tips. The only notable contrast in plumage was the dark brown tail. From below, all the flight feathers were distinctly white, contrasting notably with the tan under-wing coverts.

Two gull species pose potential identification problems and hence warrant discussion. Immature Herring Gulls are darker and generally show a great deal of contrasting dark and light blotches in the upper-wing coverts and back. The primaries and secondaries are blackish above and grayish below. The folded wing either lacks white in the tips or has white margins at the tips of each primary. Conversely, Thayer's Gulls generally show a whitish border that encircles and outlines each primary (Lehman 1980). In flight, the contrast of blackish flight feathers and lighter wing coverts in Herring Gulls differs markedly from the low-contrast pattern in Thayer's Gulls. Moreover, Herring Gulls are not white-winged from below. The tail band of a Herring Gull is dark and strongly contrasts with the paler rump but is not darker than the flight feathers. In Thayer's Gull the tail band is distinctly darker than any other part of the bird (Lehman 1980).

Immature Iceland Gulls (*L. glaucoides*) have posed identification problems (see Fussell et al. 1982) but usually in the form of Thayer's Gull misidentified as Iceland Gull (e.g. Amer. Birds 32:1030, 33:296). Iceland Gulls are usually much paler. However, the darkest Iceland Gulls and palest Thayer's Gulls may be similar. In such cases, Iceland Gulls are distinguishable by virtue of whitish primaries (but see Gosselin and David 1975), smaller size (especially the bill), and lack of a dark tail.

On the day of the sighting and perhaps for the previous week, an enormous Menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*) kill in conjunction with a severe cold front to the north attracted unprecedented concentrations of gulls. During 3 days of observations, approximately 750,000 gulls were present in the less than 1-square-mile area of Hatteras Inlet. In January 1980, I observed roughly 1,000,000 gulls from the Hatteras ferry, but they were more uniformly distributed throughout Pamlico Sound along the ferry route.

The literature indicates a single previous sight record of Thayer's Gull from North Carolina (Carlson 1973). However, there are some problems with the report. The bird described is either an adult or subadult whereas virtually every confirmed record for eastern North America is of an immature bird (Fussell et al. 1982). Second, the essentially single character basis of identification, a dark eye, is problematic in spite of statements to the contrary by unnamed "personnel at the National Museum of Natural History." We are not told if the bird is fully adult or if it is a subadult. This distinction has significance. On rare occasions, subadult or near-adult Herring Gulls apparently retain melanin pigment in the eye. For example, on 21 July 1976, at Alma, New Brunswick, Canada, Kevin Hintsa and I studied such a bird at great length. When the bird was perched, no immature plumage characters were noted. However, when the bird took flight, some brown markings on the back and tail were visible. The bird unmistakably had a dark, mahogany-brown eye and brownish eye-ring. Carlson (1973) mentions a dull reddish-brown eye-ring "close in tone to the brown iris." This further suggests a bird not yet fully adult, as the eye-ring color of an adult Thayer's Gull is purple-pink to rose, at least well into December (Gosselin and David 1975, Lehman 1980, personal observations). Carlson's bird was seen 26 October, which would represent an early date for the species. Unfortunately, the wing-tip pattern in flight was not observed. In the folded wing, Thayer's and Herring Gulls (adults) do not reliably differ enough for

primary markings to be diagnostic (Gosselin and David 1975, Lehman 1980). A number of authors (e.g. Gosselin and David 1975, Fussell et al. 1982) have stressed the need to "build a case for identification," using all field marks; but of particular importance is the need to see the white under-primary pattern. While it is likely that increased observer awareness will turn up more Thayer's Gulls, the vast majority should be immatures. This is consistent with findings throughout the East as well as adult-immature ratios of the more common "white-winged gull" species in North Carolina.

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First Spring Record of Western Kingbird from South Carolina Piedmont

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On 28 March 1982, I led a group from the University of Minnesota on a birding foray to Kings Mountain State Park in western York County, S.C. Most of the park, with the exception of creek bottomlands, is covered by mesic upland mixed hardwood/pine forest with rather limited understory and shrub growth.

While spotting ducks from the patio south of the Crawford Lake bathhouse, near the park's center, we saw a robin-sized bird fly onto a bare branch about 4 m above our heads. Based upon its size and erect posture, it appeared to be a large flycatcher (either a *Myiarchus* or a *Tyrannus*). At first glance I thought it was a Great Crested Flycatcher (*M. crinitus*) because of a yellowish cast to its belly. However, I noted a light-colored throat that contrasted with the yellowish belly, just the opposite effect of what is typical of Great Crested Flycatchers. As the bird moved slightly on its perch, it revealed white outer tail feathers. After the bird moved higher in the tree, we looked at it through 7X binoculars at a distance of 6 m for about a minute. At that time, two of the students said that the bird appeared to be a Western Kingbird (*T. verticalis*), and I concurred.

As a second party of observers approached, the bird flew to the north, and a second flycatcher which may have been perched nearer the lakeshore, joined it in a tree about 30 m from us in open woods. White outer tail feathers showed on both birds as they flew, and the second party agreed with our initial identification. Conditions were essentially perfect for observing. The sky was clear and the sun was low to our side as we looked at the first bird in partial shade at about 1000.