

# First Record of Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*) for Western North Carolina

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On 18 December 2011, the authors observed a first-winter Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*) among several thousand Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*), Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) and Bonaparte's Gulls (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) occupying the late afternoon Mecklenburg County gull roost in the Davidson Creek channel of Lake Norman, NC. At times, the gull was seen as close as 50 feet from Wright's pontoon boat. It was viewed from approximately 4:30 to 5:30 PM using 10 X 42 and 8 X 42 binoculars. Both authors have prior experience with first-winter Thayer's Gull: Talkington from years on Lake Erie and Wright from multiple winter birding trips to the West Coast.

The gull was loosely associating with young Herring Gulls, although it tended to drift away from other gulls after the flock would regularly flush and resettle. The bird allowed the authors to approach more closely than any of the other gulls. Talkington obtained good, identifiable photographs, one of which was published (Southern 2012). As the authors scanned the flock, they were immediately struck by the much paler overall color of the Thayer's Gull in direct comparison to the adjacent first-year Herring Gulls. The Thayer's was approximately the same size as some of the smaller Herring Gulls present (slightly smaller than most of the Herrings), but slimmer and without the robust chest of a Herring.

The tail of the Thayer's Gull appeared marginally longer, giving the bird a more attenuated look. Its overall coloration was a warm, fairly uniform, pale brown. The primaries were a much darker brown (not black). The feather pattern on the dorsal side of the Thayer's was fine, uniform at a distance and pale brown, contrasting with the young Herring Gulls. On closer inspection, the pale brown feathers were fringed in an even paler creamy brown. The uniform pattern extended down the tail and there was a dark brown (not black) tail band. In flight, a dark brown bar was visible on the secondaries.

The bill was short, straight (no bulging gonys), and entirely black. In direct comparison with first-year Herrings, the Thayer's head was rounded with a steep forehead, giving it a "gentle" face, as opposed to the flat-crowned, long and sloping forehead of the "fierce" aspect to a Herring Gull.

There are numerous records for this species from the North Carolina coastal area, but this sighting represents the first known occurrence of Thayer's Gull in Mecklenburg County and the farthest inland sighting in the Carolinas. The Birds of North Carolina: their Distribution and Abundance website ([www.carolinabirdclub.org/ncbirds/accounts.php](http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/ncbirds/accounts.php)) lists no records

from the mountain province, and just three previous state records from the Piedmont, all from landfills in Wake County. These are one first-winter bird on 4-6 Feb 1994 (Davis 1995) and one of unspecified age on 16 Dec 1995 (Davis 1996) at a landfill in eastern Raleigh, and an adult at a different landfill site in north Raleigh on 11 Feb 2006 (Davis 2006).

### References

- Davis, Ricky. 1995. Briefs for the files. *Chat* 59:34.  
Davis, Ricky. 1996. Briefs for the files. *Chat* 60:162.  
Davis, Ricky. 2006. Briefs for the files. *Chat* 70:51.  
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Thayer's Gull, 18 December 2011, Lake Norman, Mecklenburg County, NC. Photo by Chris Talkington. Note: A different photo of this bird taken by Chris Talkington was published in the Spring 2012 issue of *The Chat* (*Chat* 76:58).