

LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

REPORT FORM

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 first-cycle
3. Locality: Parish: Terrebonne
Specific Locality: (West) Raccoon Island
4. Date(s) when observed: 16 March 2015
5. Time(s) of day when observed: 1540-1628 CDT
6. Reporting observer and address: Robert C. Dobbs
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s):
8. Other observers who *independently identified* the bird(s):
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): Bright afternoon sunlight (clear sky), but was able to observe and photograph the bird with the sun to my back virtually the entire time; some variation in brightness of photos due to the bird's position relative to the sun, and background.
10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Swarovski 80mm scope (good), Swarovski 8x30 binos (good), Nikon 300mm f4 lens (good)
11. Distance to bird(s): As close as 50 m
12. Duration of observation: 48 min
13. Habitat: Barrier island beach and tidal flat
14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): Initially resting/loafing w/ mixed gull-tern flock on Gulf-side beach, then flushed (and observed in flight); subsequently re-found bird resting/loafing w/ mixed gull-tern flock on bay-side tidal flat, and then eventually flushed (and observed in flight again)
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):

Medium-sized, white-headed gull, larger and more barrel-chested than Ring-billed Gull (direct comparisons, see photo), and slightly smaller than (nearly similar in size to) Herring Gull (direct comparisons). Pink legs. Dark eye. Nearly whitish head, neck, and breast, becoming creamy with faint, pale brownish barring/marbling on belly. Generally whitish and pale-brownish marbling/mottling on upperparts.

Head/bill size and shape: Relatively short bill w/ noticeable gonydeal angle/expansion. Bill dark reddish color on basal half and black on distal half (appeared all dark at distance). Sloped forehead.

Primaries: At rest, primaries appeared pale beige. In flight, primaries were light/pale brownish with strong contrast between whitish inner webs and brownish outer webs (with pale edges) on P6-P10 (esp. prominent on P6-P8; see photos). Note that primary tips were very worn.

Secondaries: In flight, secondaries notably darker than greater secondary coverts, due to brownish inner webs and/or centers, resulting in a somewhat of a brownish bar through secondaries.

Tertials: Tertials appeared to be pale-brownish, particularly in feather centers, at rest (folded wing). Pale brownish color is more apparent, in photos, on left wing than right wing (at rest)--possibly due to different position of the bird relative to the sun in different photos.

Tail: Fairly distinct, solid brownish band on tail.

Upperwing coverts: Pale brownish marbling/mottling on lesser and median upperwing coverts; more extensive and darker brown marbling/mottling on underwing coverts and axillaries. Primary coverts with brown outer webs, particularly dark along rachises and near tips.

16. Voice: Not vocal

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

The primary alternative candidate for consideration is Kumlien's (Iceland) Gull. For the characters generally considered to most reliably distinguish first-winter Thayer's from Kumlien's, I think that the bird falls more on the Thayer's end of the gradient. Most of this evaluation is based on information summarized by Howell and Dunn (2007). These characters include:

(1) strong contrast between whitish inner webs and brownish outer webs (with pale

edges) on the outer primaries (P6-P10). Kumlien's typically show less inner-outer web contrast in the outer primaries.

(2) solid, dark distal tail band, with particularly dark brown tones on the inner webs of R3-R6. Kumlien's generally do not have a complete dark band, but rather fine darker barring on mostly white tail.

(3) dark secondary bar. Although not pronounced in many of the photos, those photos of the bird in flight against a darker (less harsh, bright) background, show that the secondaries are darker than the greater coverts, particularly the inner webs and/or along the rachises, resulting in a fairly distinct secondary bar. First-winter Kumlien's should not show a dark secondary bar.

(4) mostly pale-brownish tertials, particularly the centers of the feathers. This is apparent on the birds left side, in photos where the bird is looking left, and is not as noticeable at other angles, presumably due to effects of sun angle. Kumlien's should show paler, finely-patterned tertials.

Additional, but less compelling, characters also suggest Thayer's (as opposed to Kumlien's):

(5) sloping forehead. The bird's forehead sloped gradually onto the culmen, and it did not look round-headed or "dove-headed," as is typical of Kumlien's.

(6) size. The bird was only slightly smaller than Herring Gull (I saw it standing adjacent to one, and relatively close to another, Herring Gull). This is consistent with Thayer's (50-63.5 cm length), which is typically smaller than, but approaching, Herring Gull size (56-67 cm length). Kumlien's (48-62 cm length) are generally smaller than Thayer's, and thus should generally be notably smaller than the average Herring.

The bird's overall whitish aspect is assumed to be an effect of bleaching. Severe bleaching is consistent with the bird's very worn condition (esp. primaries), late-winter date (mid-March), and sunny environment (Gulf coast). At rest, the bird looks very similar to the bleached first-cycle Thayer's Gull portrayed in photo 36-18 in Howell and Dunn (2007).

Other species for consideration:

First-cycle Glaucous Gull is perhaps superficially similar, but would be larger (larger than Herring Gull), w/ larger and distinctly bi-colored bill (pink base, black distally), and whiter primary outer webs. A bleached first-cycle Herring Gull would have more evenly dark outer primaries (showing virtually no pale edging or inner-outer web contrast), darker secondaries, and a heavier bill with more pronounced gonydeal expansion, among other differences.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? Attached?): Photos by Robert C. Dobbs, attached

19. Previous experience with this species: Minimal... a handful of Thayer's Gulls out west (UT, NV... all significantly darker overall than this bird), and the November 2013 – January 2014 Iceland Gull at Mandeville

20. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):

a. at time of observation: Sibley

b. after observation: Howell and Dunn 2007. Gulls of the Americas; Olsen and Larsson 2003. Gulls of North America, Europe, and Asia; Steve Hampton's Gull ID website (<www.tertia.us/gulls/gulls.htm>), Don Roberson's website discussing Thayer's-Kumlien's gulls (<creagrus.home.montereybay.com/ORA_kumliens.html>),

21. This description is written from: X notes made during the observation (notes attached?); notes made after the observation (date:); memory.

22. Are you positive of your identification if not, explain:

I initially identified this bird as Kumlien's (Iceland) Gull, based largely on the bird's overall whitish aspect and some photos of the bird in flight that suggested minimal brownish tones in the flight feathers. I flipped my ID to Thayer's after spending a significant amount of time reading up on the Thayer's-Kumlien's-Iceland complex, reviewing others' photos (and all my own photos more carefully), and investigating perspectives of folks having extensive experience with identification of Thayer's-Kumlien's gulls. I feel like some of the characters on the bird in question here are intermediate, and certainly debatable, but that, overall, most of the critical characters are on the Thayer's end of the Thayer's-Kumlien's-Iceland gradient.

23. Date: 24 June 2015 Time: 2240 CDT









