

23-92-83
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GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL - Larus glaucescens

DATES: March 31, 1989.

TIME OF OBSERVATION: 3:45 P.M. to 4:30 P.M. - MST.

LOCATION: Jumbo Reservoir.

NEAREST TOWN: Crook.

COUNTY: Logan/Sedgwick.

OTHER OBSERVERS WHO INDEPENDENTLY IDENTIFIED THE BIRD:

Wade Leitner - 10993 West 38th Place, Wheat Ridge, Colorado 80033

OPTICAL EQUIPMENT: 10X50 Bushnell Binoculars; 15X-60X B/L Zoom Telescope.

WEATHER CONDITIONS: Partly cloudy; Wind, Southwest 5 MPH; 65°.

BIRD/SUN ORIENTATION: During most of the time that the bird was under observation, the sun was directly upon the bird coming from observer's left side.

DISTANCE FROM BIRD AND HOW MEASURED: 50' up to 400'-500', estimated.

NUMBER OF BIRDS SEEN: One.

SEX: Unknown.

PLUMAGE: First-winter immature.

BEHAVIOR AND DEMEANOR: First observed sitting on the water attempting to devour a rather large fish, which after some difficulty it succeeded in doing despite continuing harassment from several Herring Gulls (Larus argentatus). It then began a vigorous bathing activity on the water, alternately plunging its head under the water followed by rising up almost out of the water shaking itself profusely by flapping its wings and tail. Bathing continued for about 15 minutes. When it was finished the bird took to the air flying directly and passing over me about 20 feet away. It then circled back again passing directly overhead finally coming to rest on a small log floating on the water. For the next 20 minutes or so, the bird meticulously groomed itself all the while floating along on the log, displaying individual feathers on the wings and tail to the observer. After completing its preening, the bird again took flight, circling overhead again and finally coming to rest about 50' from the face of the southeast dam. I drove over and parked on the dam for an excellent closer look at the gull which by now was associating with some 10-15 Herring Gulls. While swimming about at this location, the Glaucous-winged Gull crouched low, its head extended forward as if skulking, the head and bill barely above the surface of the water. It remained in this posture during the remainder of the period it was under observation. Nearby Herring Gulls on the other hand were not observed portraying this posture. Instead, they proceeded to swim about with their necks and heads fully extended upward as if on the alert. The flight of the Glaucous-winged Gull was noted as labored, direct and quite ponderous compared to the Herring Gulls. It reminded one of the flight of a Glaucous Gull (Larus hyperboreus).

HEAD AND NECK: Head and neck were an even pale grayish-brown but showing a bit more white with minor mottling than the rest of the body parts due most likely to partial molting or wear.

GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (Larus glaucescens) continued:

EYES AND LORES: The eyes were dark with a faint smudge around the eyes.

LOWER AND UPPER MANDIBLES: The bill was very large and thick with a sharp upturn at the gonys. The bill was black for its entire length.

LEGS AND FEET: Bright pink.

UPPERPARTS: All upperparts were a very pale, uniform grayish-brown, the mantle being the same color and shade as the tail and wings.

UNDERPARTS: All underparts were also a very pale, uniform grayish-brown with the breast area showing a bit more white with some minor mottling (as noted about the head and neck) which was due possibly to a beginning molt or to wear over the winter.

RETRICES: Tail was short and square and the same color and shade as the wings and mantle - very pale, uniform grayish-brown and lacking any sub-terminal band on the upperside. Individual retrices were easily seen when the bird was preening-very pale grayish-brown but edged and tipped with pale white which when taken together formed a faint, very narrow pale terminal on the uppertail.

WINGS: The wings were fairly short, barely extending beyond the tail when the bird was at rest providing it with a rather blunt appearance. Upperwings were the same color and shade as the mantle and uppertail. Individual primaries, secondaries and wing coverts were a pale, even grayish-brown but edged and tipped with whitish particularly noticeable in the primaries. The entire underwing, linings and flight feathers were silvery, very similar to the underwings of a first-winter immature Thayer's Gull (Larus thayeri). (I have miscalled first-winter Glaucous-winged Gulls as first-winter Thayer's Gulls because of this on several occasions in winter along the California and Washington coasts until further close scrutiny proved otherwise).

VOCALIZATION: The bird was observed uttering a call when nearby Herring Gulls approached as it sat on the water, but I could not single it out because of the constant crying and wailing of the Herring Gulls.

HABITAT: Fresh water reservoir on the eastern high plains.

ELIMINATION OF SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES:

THAYER'S GULL (Larus thayeri): First-winter birds of this species are quite variable in plumage, but they are noticeably smaller in size (much less bulky) with a smaller, more rounded head and considerably smaller bill which overall gives a much daintier appearance. Typically, there is always a pronounced contrast in the upperwing pattern of Thayer's Gulls due to the much darker (sometimes chocolate brown) primaries when compared to the rest of the upperwing and mantle. Also, typical first-winter Thayer's Gulls have a broad, brown subterminal uppertail band. The flight of the Thayer's Gull is more buoyant and less direct. When sitting upon the water, Thayer's Gulls' wings extend well beyond the end of the tail.

GLAUCOUS GULL (Larus hyperboreus): First-winter Glaucous Gull is considerably paler overall, has a two-toned bill (pale at the base with a dark tip) and translucent primaries.

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GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (Larus glaucescens) continued:

ICELAND GULL (Larus glaucoides): First-winter has all black bill, but is noticeably smaller overall. Has very long wings that extend well beyond the tail when at rest. Like the Glaucous Gull this species has translucent primaries.

HYBRIDS: Hybrids are always a possibility and Glaucous-winged Gulls are known to hybridize regularly with Western Gulls (Larus occidentalis), but the bird at Jumbo Reservoir appeared so uniformly pale overall, it would appear to rule out that it was a Western/Glaucous-winged hybrid. Certainly the upperwing primaries would show some darker contrast with the rest of the wing if it were a hybrid. The same would no doubt be true of the mantle. I draw the same conclusion if this was a Herring/Glaucous-winged hybrid. Therefore, I believe that the evenness/uniform plumage of the Jumbo Reservoir gull negates the possibility of it being a hybrid.

PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES:

GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL: Have seen literally thousands of all ages and plumages during the past 30 years along the Pacific coast from California to British Columbia as well as along the coast of Alaskan mainland, the Pribilof Islands and Attu Island in the Aleutians. Found and identified one immature at Antero Reservoir, Park County on July 24, 1981 (which was originally identified as an Iceland Gull!) for the only other record of this species in Colorado.

GLAUCOUS GULL: Seen a few nearly every winter (adults and immatures) on the eastern high plains of Colorado since 1968. Seen less than ten times along the central California coast in winter.

ICELAND GULL: Have seen but a few times off Long Island, New York in winter plus one bird at Churchill, Manitoba in June 1984. Have never seen in Colorado where it has never been satisfactorily recorded.

THAYER'S GULL: Have extensive experience with this variable species in winter (all ages and plumages) in winter in Colorado since 1971. Also observed at Churchill, Manitoba in June 1984 and several times over the years in winter on the Monterey Peninsula in California.

THIS REPORT WAS WRITTEN FROM NOTES MADE DURING OBSERVATION.

OBSERVER MAKING THIS REPORT:

Jack Reddall - 4450 South Alton Street, Englewood, Colorado 80111

Jack Reddall

DATE: April 4, 1989