

WV BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE REPORT FORM

Please Type or Print Legibly

Species: Number: (leave blank)
Location: Date: Time:
Bird Seen: To: Age/Sex:

Description: In lieu of physical material substantiating a record (e.g., specimen, diagnostic photograph, vocal recordings) a complete written description can serve as verification for the biological record. Please be as thorough as your field notes allow. Do not feel constrained by the space provided. Additional supporting descriptions/illustrations may be attached. Note that photographs or recordings WILL NOT BE RETURNED but become part of the permanent record for the observation.

Structure: (Overall size and shape plus details on the head, feet, tail, etc.)

Large white-headed gull. Intermediate in size between Herring and Great Black-backed both of which were numerous and in direct approximation. Head was flattened. Bill was pink with a black tip. Bill was large and straight though smaller and lacking the bulbous tip of Great Black-backed. Eye was black and small for head size. Body was stout. Legs were pink. Feet were pink. The bird appeared bulky and powerful at rest on the ice floes. Wings appeared narrower while in flight than Iceland. At rest, the primary tips extended beyond the tail but that extension was not as impressive as in Iceland.

Plumage: (e.g. markings, coloration, molt)

The bird was a 1st winter individual. The head was pale, creamy brown and densely streaked giving off a more solid appearance at distance. Back was of a similar but slightly lighter pale, creamy brown. Back was patterned but less so than Iceland. Underparts were mottled creamy, brown almost smudgy in appearance. Undertail coverts were barred more finely than Iceland. Wings were very pale overall especially at the tips, appearing nearly white from underneath.

Description of any vocalizations, if heard:

No vocalizations heard.

Description of behavior:

Bird was seen roosting on ice floes in direct approximation with Great Black-backed, Iceland, Herring, Lesser Black-backed and Ring-billed Gulls. Bird was also seen in flight and actively hunting/fishing. No behavioral characteristics stood out as distinctive.

Habitat: (General and Specific)

General: Large river with lock and dam system creating back up of small ice floes up river and open water down river.

Specific: Pike Island Lock and Dam on the Ohio River north of Wheeling, WV

Circumstances of observation: (Include details of distance to bird, optics employed, lighting in relation to observer and the bird)

Bird was observed from a distance of 10-500yards during the course of observation. Kowa TSN 883 Prominar scope with 20-60x zoom eye piece and Swarovski Swarovision 10x42 EL binoculars used in addition to photographic equipment. Weather was overcast and view was unobstructed. Viewed from recreational area along the Ohio side of the Pike Island Lock and Dam complex. Bird was evenly lit and views were good and in direct approximation to similar species for direct comparison of size, shape, and color.

Previous experience with this species:

Seen several times previously in other states along the coast, always in winter. Also seen several times later in the same year with other experienced birders. Multiple individuals of this species were seen at this same location covering 1st, 2nd, and full adult plumage cycles.

Experiences with similarly appearing species which are eliminated by your description: (Please be specific)

Have no experience first hand with Glaucous-winged Gull though that is fairly easily eliminated. Have seen Iceland several times including several times this same year at the same location with Glaucous. More experience with other Larus species more frequent to WV all of which are easily eliminated based on plumage and structure.

Other observers: (Names, Addresses, E-mail please)

If the others agree with your identification they can sign this form here. If they care to provide additional details they can submit their own report.

This species was seen by numerous well-respected birders this winter with multiple individuals seen. On the day of this observation I was alone. I did return however later in the season with other excellent birders (LeJay Graffious, Matt Orsie, etc.) and we were also able to observe all reported Gull species including Glaucous though on that occasion the individual was a 2nd winter bird.

Additional observer signature:

Additional observer signature:

Additional observer signature:

Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and especially how did these influence this description:

The Sibley Guide to Birds, Gulls of the Americas by Howell & Dunn, and various internet sources were referenced for confirmation. Photographs and field impressions matched with the best knowledge available for identification of Glaucous Gull.

How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?

2 and half months for writing this report. Field notes were entered into ebird on the day of observation though.

Name:

Derek D. Courtney, MD

Address:

[Redacted]

Date:

4/20/15

Signature:

[Redacted]

Mail to: WV Bird Records Committee
Attn: Wendell Argabrite
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Huntington, WV 25705
Or E-mail to: wargabrite@aol.com

Please use the space below to add any appropriate details you feel were missing from the above form or to expand on any answers whose allotted space was insufficient for a complete response:

Photos will be attached along with this submission for review by BRC members to support.

For the sake of the thoroughness, a brief discussion on elimination of other common gull species.

- This individual was obviously larger than surrounding Ring-billed Gulls with a different body structure particularly in the head/bill where the flat head and large bicolored bill gave a completely different expression to this bird. The Glaucous Gull lacked any purely gray tones and its creamy brown mottling was too pale for a normal Ring-billed of the same age. Wing tips were paler than the body as well. Structure of the head/bill eliminated a washed out individual.
- This individual was somewhat larger than surrounding Herring Gulls and bulkier/more stout in appearance. This bird lacked any gray tones to the mantle and its wing tips were very pale. Bill was bicolored eliminating a 1st year Herring and complete lack of gray tones and pale wingtips eliminate a washed out 2nd year bird.
- This individual was far too light and small-billed for Great Black-backed of any age. Structure and plumage were completely off.
- This individual was larger than Lesser Black-backed Gulls and had paler mottling overall. No streaking was noted on the breast. Overall coloration was far too pale and wing tips were too light for a normal Lesser Black-backed. Pattern on the back and underparts were off as well for a washed out Lesser-backed Gull. Wings were not as long/sleek as would be expected for Lesser Black-backed.
- This individual was larger than the Iceland Gull present with a larger bill. Bill was also bicolored whereas an Iceland would show all black. Head was too flattened for Iceland. Wing tips did not extend as far beyond the tail when roosting as nearby Iceland. In flight the wings did not have the broad-based shaped that Iceland has. Size and structure eliminate even nominate Iceland subspecies.
- Thayer's Gull could be a confounder for this species, but it is even darker at the wing tips than Iceland whereas this individual was decidedly pale. Similar structural differences also apply here as detailed above with Iceland differentiation.
- Glaucous-winged Gull would be an extreme rarity this far east. Nevertheless, 1st winter Glaucous-winged Gulls have all black bills and primaries that are of similar tone to the body not paler as with this individual. This bird was too creamy for normal Glaucous-winged as well. 2nd winter birds should also have some gray tones to the mantle.

It should also be noted that the appearance of this bird coincides with an influx of uncommon winter gulls due to the freezing of the Great Lakes. Iceland, Great Black-backed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were all present as well with multiple individuals of each recorded. Glaucous-winged would be an astonishing record this far east.

It should also be noted that I was not the first person to report or document this species at this location this winter. List-serv should be checked and the original finder and documenter(s) given credit for their efforts.



2015-6