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FIRST RECORDS OF THE GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL IN UTAH

David L. Fischer¹

ABSTRACT.—First occurrences of the Glaucous-winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*), and hybrids between it and the Western (*L. occidentalis*) and Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*), in Utah are documented. Sightings of 14 individuals over two winters (1984–86) may represent an inland expansion of the winter range of this species.

The Glaucous-winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*) is a coastal species of western North America that breeds from the southern Bering Sea and southeastern Alaska to northwestern Oregon (A.O.U. 1983). In the southern portion of the breeding range, it hybridizes frequently with the Western Gull (*L. occidentalis*, Hoffman et al. 1978). Hybridization with the Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*) occurs infrequently in south-coastal and southeastern Alaska (Williamson and Peyton 1963, Patten and Weisbrod 1974). In migration and winter, it occurs as far south as Baja California and casually inland in Alberta, Idaho, and western Arizona. Extreme inland records are known from Manitoba and Oklahoma (A.O.U. 1983). In the Mountain West Region as defined by *American Birds* (Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada), the species has previously been reported only from southern Nevada (Lake Mead), but it occurs there regularly (H. Kingery, personal communication). This note documents the first occurrences of the Glaucous-winged Gull, and probable hybrids of it and the Western Gull and the Herring Gull, in Utah.

On 20 November 1984, I encountered the Glaucous-winged Gull, a first-winter individual, at a small pond near the Provo City Dump, Utah County, Utah. The bird was perched on a narrow mud bar along with several first-winter Herring Gulls, one first-winter Thayer's Gull (*L. thayeri*), and many of the California (*L. californicus*) and Ring-billed gulls (*L. delawarensis*). It was noticeably paler than the other first-winter gulls, and its wing tips (folded primaries) differed from them in being no darker (essentially the same pale gray color) than the remainder of the

wing. The tips of the folded primaries were edged with white (as in first-winter Thayer's), and the upperparts were a very uniform grayish tan. The wing coverts lacked the "marbling" or "scaley" pattern typical of *thayeri* or *argentatus*. It was the largest gull present, and its completely black bill was noticeably thicker and more bulbous toward the tip than that of any of the Herring Gulls. In flight its greater size and stockier build relative to the Herring Gull were even more apparent. The underside of the primaries was immaculate white, while the dorsal surfaces of the primaries and tail were pale gray, concolorous with the remainder of the upperparts. When perched, the folded wings did not extend much beyond the tail, giving the bird a "stubby" look toward its posterior when viewed from the side. I was able to show the bird to two other experienced birders, Merrill Webb on 21 November and Michael Tove on 15 December, both of whom corroborated the identification. Efforts to locate the bird between these dates and after 19 December were unsuccessful. I obtained several good photographs during the initial sighting that have been reviewed and verified by the Utah Field Ornithologist's Records Committee, the regional and Christmas bird count editors of *American Birds*, and the authors of a newly revised checklist of Utah birds (Behle et al. 1985).

On 7 December 1984, I found a second immature Glaucous-wing 12 km NW of the initial sighting at the Orem City Dump, Utah County. This bird was even heavier-billed and paler than the first, but was smaller, appearing no different in length (though stockier in build) than the Herring Gulls with which it

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associated. The color of the wings and tail was similar to the Provo bird.

On 19 January 1985, Michael Tove and I observed two Glaucous-winged Gulls and one Glaucous-winged x Western hybrid at the Salt Lake City Landfill, Salt Lake County. One of the Glaucous-wings appeared to be the same individual seen earlier in Orem. The other was a first-year bird about as large as the Provo bird, but browner, with a more scaley pattern on the upper wing coverts. The Glaucous-wing x Western hybrid, also a first-year bird, was basically similar to the latter Glaucous-wing, but differed in that: (1) the upper surface of the outer primaries was noticeably darker than the remainder of the wing, (2) the tail was bicolored with an obvious dark band toward the tip, (3) the general body color was a shade darker, and (4) the gonycal bulge of the bill was even more pronounced. The general effect was that of a large Thayer's Gull with an oversized bill. We observed a second Glaucous-winged x Western hybrid, in the company of the first, at the same location on 2 February.

I observed two more first-year Glaucous-winged Gulls late that season, one on 26 February at the Bountiful Area Refuse Dump on the south shore of Farmington Bay of the Great Salt Lake, Davis County, and one on 30 March at a flooded area 0.5 km SE of the Provo Dump. Both birds exhibited worn plumage and appeared extremely pale. Based on body size, bill size, and plumage, each was thought to be a different individual from earlier sightings.

During the winter of 1985-86, I observed four additional Glaucous-winged, two Glaucous-winged x Western, and one Glaucous-winged x Herring gulls during monthly surveys of gulls present at the Provo, Orem, Salt Lake City, and Bountiful landfills. One of the Glaucous-wings was a second-year bird; the remainder were first-year birds. The Glaucous-winged x Western hybrids were an adult at Salt Lake on 19 December and a second-winter immature at the same place on 1 February. The Glaucous-winged x Herring was a first-winter bird observed at the Bountiful Landfill from 7 December to 25 March. Its wing and tail pattern appeared very similar to a pale Thayer's Gull. Identification as Glaucous-wing x Herring rather than Glaucous-wing x Western was based on the following

criteria: (1) body size was the same as a Herring Gull, (2) the bill was just slightly thicker than a Herring Gull's, and (3) during late winter, the bird molted in adultlike back feathers that were, in a side-by-side comparison, no darker than those of adult Herring Gulls.

To summarize, over two seasons (1984-86), I observed a minimum of 9 Glaucous-winged Gulls, 4 Glaucous-winged x Western hybrids, and 1 Glaucous-winged x Herring hybrid. Eleven of these birds were first-year immatures; 2 were second-year immatures, 1 was an adult. Sightings were made at each of four landfills along the Wasatch front from Provo to Bountiful.

Although the Glaucous-winged Gull has not previously been recorded in Utah, based on the number of sightings reported here, it appears now to be a regular migrant and winter visitant to the state. To what extent it has occurred but gone undetected in the past is unknown, but there is reason to believe the current proliferation of sightings represents a real change in status. Gull populations in the western United States have increased dramatically in recent years, possibly as a result of increased food in the form of edible human garbage and the creation of new nesting habitat in the form of large reservoirs (Conover 1983). The Glaucous-winged Gull, formerly thought to be strictly a coastal species, now breeds up to 412 km inland in Oregon and Washington (Conover and Thompson 1984). The recent sightings in Utah may represent the beginning of expansion of the winter range into the eastern Great Basin.

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