Maryland Ornithological Society

Maryland / District of Columbia Records Committee
Skins Workshop
14 February 2009

Edited by Phil Davis, MD/DCRC Secretary

1. General

On 14 February 2009, the Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee (MD/DCRC) held its annual Skins Workshop at the Division of Birds, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Our host was Roger Clapp of the US Geological Survey – Biological Resources/Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. Roger is resident at the museum. The committee wishes to thank Roger for the time he dedicated to our workshop.

The agenda and taxa to be reviewed during the workshop included the following:

Band-rumped Storm Petrels
Eastern/Western Meadowlarks
Lark Bunting winter plumages
Mountain/Eastern Bluebirds
Thayer's/Kumlien's Gull
Western/Eastern Wood Pewee

Note that the official museum database and specimen tag abbreviation for the Smithsonian is "USNM," based on its original name, United States National Museum.

2. Attendees

Committee members in attendance were: Paul O'Brien (Chair), Phil Davis (Secretary), Tyler Bell, Paul DeAnna, Bill Hubick, Ellen Lawler, Fred Shaffer, and Leo Weigant.

Figure 2-1. (L-R) Members Paul DeAnna, Paul O'Brien, Leo Weigant, and Tyler Bell studying Band-rumped Storm Petrels.

Figure 2-2. (L-R) Members Tyler Bell, Bill Hubick, Paul DeAnna, Paul O'Brien, Fred Shaffer, and Ellen Lawler studying meadowlarks.

3. Skins Studies

We began the workshop at 10 am, following our security check-in. We assembled in the Bird Division specimen case area on the 6th floor. Our objective was to study specimen skins related to sighting reports that are currently in review or are expected to be reviewed over the next year or skins that relate to potential identification problems for Maryland and DC. The findings from the skins we examined are summarized below.

Figure 3-1. Tools of the trade for studying and measuring Band-rumped Storm-Petrels.

Figure 3-2. Bill Hubick references his on-line Lark Bunting images.

3.1 Band-rumped Storm Petrels (*Oceanodroma castro*)

Account by Paul O'Brien

3.1.1 Background

DC Records of Band-rumped Storm-Petrels, *Oceanodroma castro*. The taxonomic status of *O. castro* has undergone a surprising revolution over the past ten years. Once thought to be a single species breeding in both Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, it is now being argued that there could be as many as six species, with four in the Atlantic. In 1998, Portuguese biologist Luis Monteiro of the University of the Azores published a paper documenting the existence of two distinct populations of *O. castro* breeding in the Azores in either hot or cool seasons and exhibiting significant phenotypic differences. The reference is:

> Monteiro LR, Furness RW. 1998. Speciation through temporal segregation of Madeiran storm petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*) populations in the Azores? *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* Series B-Biological Sciences 353: 945-953.

Tragically, the next year Monteiro was killed in a plane crash while continuing his studies. Colleagues carried out further surveys and found hot and cold season breeders in the Madeira and Cape Verde Islands. Vicki Friesen and colleagues then carried out extensive mitochondrial DNA analyses and discovered that the two Azores populations were probably distinct species as were the hot season breeders from Madeira and all the specimens from the Cape Verde Islands. Finally, full species status for all four populations was confirmed by Magnus Robb who recorded their distinctive vocalizations on their respective breeding grounds:

Robb, M., Mullarney, K. & The Sound Approach. *Petrels Night and Day: A Sound Approach Guide*. 2008. Dorset, UK: The Sound Approach. 300 pp., includes 2 CDs.

Band-rumped Storm-Petrels off the East Coast. The field characteristics of these four taxa are summarized below, with information gleaned from Robb, et al. (2000) and from Monteiro and Furness (1998). **Caution**: Molt timing of first year birds has not been described.

1) Grant's Storm-Petrel (no scientific name assigned yet). Between 3000-5000 pairs breed from August to March on the Azores, Berlengas, Canary Islands, Madeiran Archipelago and Selvagens. Egg-laying is from early October to November.

Characteristics: Narrow white uppertail covert band, not much wider than black tips and ~30-40 percent of projecting tail length, narrow wings, inconspicuous tail notch (3.64 mm) so that tail generally appears square. Large with shorter wings and tail than Monteiro's. Primary molt from February to early August so birds show ~2 faded outer primaries in May/June.

2) Monteiro's Storm- Petrel (no scientific name assigned yet) Approximately 300 pairs breed March to September on the Azores. Egg-laying is from May to early July.

Characteristics: Wings longer than Grant's and broad to the tip, which may be somewhat rounded. Tail obviously notched (7.73 mm) and also longer than Grant's. Carpal bar more pronounced and extensive than in other Band-rumped. Rump band variable in width. Primary molt from August to February so none is apparent in May/June.

3) Madeiran Storm- Petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*) Approximately 2000-4000 pairs breed from March to October on Canary Islands, Madeiran Archipelago and Selvagens. Egg-laying takes place from June to July.

Characteristics: Smaller than Grant's and Monteiro's, chunky with heavy bill. Slight tail notch sometimes visible, narrow rump band. Primary molt ~August/September to February, so none is apparent in May/June.

4) Cape Verde Storm- Petrel (*Oceanodroma jabejabe*) Possibly thousands breed from October to June on Cape Verde Islands.

Characteristics: Smaller than Grant's and Monteiro's with a proportionately long bill and possibly no tail notch. Wings broader than Grant's. Uppertail covert band wider than Grant's, much wider than black tips and ~40-50 percent of projecting tail length. Primary molt from ~March to December so in May/June molt is apparently retarded by 1-2 primaries compared with Grant's.

Rough Key to May/June Birds:

A) Primary molt seen in Grant's or Cape Verde. In Grant's the molt is more advanced, the wings and the rump band are narrower than Cape Verde's.

B) No primary molt seen in Monteiro's or Madeiran. Monteiro's is larger and has an obvious tail notch. Madeiran is chunky with a heavy bill and a slight tail notch, if visible at all.

3.1.2 Findings

Museum Specimens. Two specimens of Band-rumped Storm-Petrels collected in DC following tropical storms were examined to attempt a determination of taxon based on the new taxonomy. A third specimen from Delaware was also examined as were two breeders from Madeira. Crude measurements were made of tail fork (outer rectrix less central rectrix) and the width of the white rump band. In addition the primaries were examined for evidence of molt.

USNM 154436 - DC Navy Yard Bridge 29 Aug 1893 - female See Figure 3.1.2-1, bottom. Rump band 2.0-2.5 cm, tail fork 3-4 mm, primaries all fresh, P 10 still growing in. This bird is probably not Monteiro's which has a tail fork in the 7.7 mm range and probably not Madeiran which should only be initiating molt. Grant's should just be finishing primary molt in Aug. whereas Cape Verde molts from ~March to December. Based on these metrics the specimen is likely to be a Grant's Storm-Petrel, the taxon most commonly seen off Hatteras.

USNM 567674 - DE 14 Aug 1975 collected by Richard A. Rowlett - male Rump band ~2 cm, tail fork 3-4 mm, primaries fresh, P10 barely shorter that P9. This bird is very similar in all aspects to the above DC bird and is also probably Grant's. The two specimens can be seen in Figure 3.1.2-1 with the DE bird above and the DC bird below.

Figure 3.1.2-1. Band-rumped Storm-Petrel specimens (probably Grant's). Top: USNM 567674 (DE) 14 Aug 1975. Bottom: USNM 154436 (DC) 29 Aug 1893.

USNM 293176 - DC 30 Aug 1893 collected on Capitol Hill a day after USNM 154436 - female. This specimen is shown in Figure 3.1.2-2. Rump band ~1.5 cm, tail fork ~1-2 mm, primaries fresh. Again, the metrics, especially the very narrow rump band, point to Grant's.

Figure 3.1.2-2. Band-rumped Storm-Petrel. USNM 293176 (DC) 30 Aug 1893.

The two breeding Madeiran Storm-Petrels show the extent of sexual dimorphism, the male being substantially larger (3 cm longer) and with a heavier bill than the female These birds were collected just as the primary molt was beginning.

USNM 189860 - Porto Santo, Madeira 14 Oct 1902 - male. Rump band ~1.5 cm, tail fork ~3 mm, outer primaries old and worn.

USNM 189861 - Porto Santo, Madeira 12 Sep 1902 - female. Rump band ~1.5 cm, tail fork negligible, outer primaries old and worn.

Summary. The narrow rump bands and slight tail forks along with completed primary molts indicate that all three local specimens are probably Grant's Storm-Petrel, a name suggested by Steve Howell in honor of Peter Grant.

3.2 Western Meadowlark (Sturnella neglecta) vs. Eastern Meadowlark (S. magna)

Account by Ellen Lawler

3.2.1 Background

Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta)* is a reviewable species throughout the state of Maryland. The MD/DC Records Committee has recently reviewed two reports (MD/2006-115 and MD/2006-116) of Western Meadowlark (WEME) and there are two additional reports ready for review by the committee (MD/2008-064 and MD/2008-065). The committee is likely to receive more reports considering that many states and Canadian provinces in the east have accepted records for this species; some PA records are of individuals found very close to the MD border. Most of the accepted WEME records are for singing individuals in spring and in fact, WEME is listed as a probable breeder in New York State. There are a number of plumage characteristics that can be used to separate WEME from the very similar Eastern Meadowlark

(*S. magna)* but each of these is fairly subtle and shows variation, particularly between subspecies of each species. At the extremes are Lilian's Meadowlark (*S. magna lilianae)*, a particularly pale subspecies of EAME found in the southwest and the dark *confluenta* subspecies of WEME found in the Pacific Northwest.

With regard to vocalizations, the songs of these two species are learned and, although rare, some instances of each species singing the other species' song have been documented. On the other hand, the distinctive call notes are instinctive; no instances of one species giving the other's call note have been recorded. For this reason, documentation of observers hearing the distinctive "chuck" call of the WEME played an important role in the committee decisions on the two Maryland WEME reports already reviewed; one was accepted (MD/2006-115), the other not (MD/2006-116).

3.2.2 Findings

The committee examined numerous study skins of both WEME and EAME; as there is an abundance of skins of both these species in the collection, the committee concentrated on skins collected in March and August/September. Among the field marks studied, most fit the patterns described for the two species in field guides, but variation was seen in all these characteristics. In addition, the time of year appeared to play a role in that, in both species, August birds were generally paler than those collected in March. Overall, the crown stripes were paler and more mottled in WEME than EAME and the yellow of the throat extended further into the malar region in the WEME (See Figures 3.2.2-1, 3.2.2-2 and 3.2.2-3).

Figure 3.2.2-1. Comparison of the crown stripes of Western Meadowlark (female, *S. n. confluenta*, left), with Eastern Meadowlark (*S. magna*, right). Photo by Bill Hubick.

Figure 3.2.2-2. Western Meadowlarks (*S. neglecta*) showing yellow malar region and paler, more mottled crown stripes than on Eastern Meadowlarks. Photo by Ellen Lawler.

Figure 3.2.2-3. Eastern Meadowlark (*S. magna*) showing white malar region and darker, less mottled crown stripes than in Western Meadowlark. Photo by Ellen Lawler.

The two characteristics that impressed committee members as most distinctly different between the two species were the flank pattern and the barring pattern on the tertials and rectrices. The flank pattern of the WEME appeared as a series of distinct dark spots on a pale background as compared to the more streaked appearance of the EAME. (See Figure 3.2.2-4).

Figure 3.2.2-4. Western Meadowlark (*S. n. confluenta*) showing the spotted flank. Photo by Bill Hubick.

The upperparts of most WEME had a paler appearance than that of the EAME as a result of the more pronounced buffy edges and reduced amount of rufous and black in the upper back feathers of WEME. And although within species variation was seen, the tertials and rectrices of the WEME, were usually more narrowly and evenly barred than those of the EAME. The bars of these feathers in EAME frequently “bled” or widened as they neared the central shaft; this was much less common in the WEME. (See Fig 3.2.2-5).

Figure 3.2.2-5. Comparison of the feathers of upper back, tertials and rectrices of Eastern Meadowlark (*S. magna*, left) and Western meadowlark (*S. n. confluenta*, right). Photo by Ellen Lawler.

However these characteristics were less consistent among birds of the *confluenta* subspecies of WEME; many *confluenta* had darker backs and had tertials and rectrices with barring that approached that of EAME. (See Figure 3.2.2-6). However all the *confluenta* birds examined, could be separated from EAME by the crown stripes and amount of yellow in the malar region. (See Figure 3.2.2-1).

Figure 3.2.2-6. Comparison of Western Meadowlark (*S. n. confluenta*) in center bracketed by two Eastern Meadowlarks (*S. magna*). Photo by Bill Hubick.

Summary. Careful observation of a number of characteristics is vital in distinguishing WEME from EAME as there is no one or two characteristics that clearly separate these two species in every case. Especially important to note are the flank pattern, details of the barring in the rectrices and tertials as well as the crown stripe and malar region. Hearing vocalizations, in particular the instinctive "chuck" call of the WEME, remains the single most consistent difference between these two species.

3.3 Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) winter plumages

Account by Tyler Bell

3.3.1 Background

On January 2, 2009, a Lark Bunting was reported on eBird (online bird sighting database). The location was listed near Union Bridge, Frederick County; however, in reality the sighting was in Uniontown, Carroll County, a mapping glitch in eBird. David Yeany posted on MDOsprey (Maryland bird discussion listserv) noting the sighting had popped up on his Google Gadget (reports birds that don't pass the eBird filters). As one of the Maryland reviewers for eBird, I logged on and found the report and sent a pre-packaged request for more information to the reporter. Deanna Baker Ferrell, the reporter, sent me back two photographs of what was clearly a juvenile/female-type Lark Bunting. The bird persists at the time of this write-up (late February, 2009).

Due to the request by Ms. Ferrell, the bird was not broadcast on MDOsprey but spread by word of mouth and emails. There was some discussion offline about the sex and age of the bird and no real agreement was reached. Phil Davis, MD/DCRC Secretary, sent out requests to Mark Lockwood, Secretary of the Texas BRC, and Ron Martin, past president and current member of

the North Dakota BRC. Mark is familiar with wintering birds while Ron is familiar with breeding and recently fledged birds. Mark's opinion was that the bird was a hatch year male while Ron felt that the bird was a HY female.

3.3.2 Findings

The Smithsonian has several trays of LARB specimens. During the workshop, we pulled those that most closely pertained to the date of the bird in Carroll County. Birds examined were immature and mature females and immature hatch year males mostly ranging in dates collected between late December and late February.

Identification. There was a lively discussion about what might be an important plumage characteristic to determine age and sex. Pyle's *Identification Guide to North American Birds, Part 1* (1997) shows that the underside of rectrix 6 (outermost tail feather) can be used to separate HY males and females based on the amount of white in the distal tip (Figures 3.3.2-1 and 3.3.2-2). HY females have buff feather edges on the wing coverts (Figures 3.3.2-3 and 3.3.2-4) compared to HY males which lack buff edging.

Figure 3.3.2-1. Undertail of immature female Lark Bunting, 12 Sep 1976. Photograph by T. Bell.

Figure 3.3.2-2. Undertail of immature male Lark Bunting, 8 Dec 1914. Photograph by T. Bell.

Figure 3.3.2-3. Immature female Lark Bunting showing extensive buff feather edging, 11 Feb 1932. Photograph by T. Bell.

Figure 3.3.2-4. Immature female Lark Bunting spread wing, 12 Sep 1976. Note lack of black in the primaries. Photograph by T. Bell.

That leaves separation of HY males from AHY/ASY females. Pyle states that AHY/ASY females have no black feathers with the exception of the chin. This was the consensus reached by the committee members present that females were basically brown (Figure 3.3.2-5) while HY males showed distinctly black primaries (Figure 3.3.2-6). SY males showed much more extensive black (Figure 3.3.2-7).

Figure 3.3.2-5. Adult female Lark Bunting, side view, showing brown primaries, 29 Dec 1938. Photograph by T. Bell.

Figure 3.3.2-6. Immature male Lark Bunting, side view, showing black primaries, 8 Dec 1914. Photograph by T. Bell.

Figure 3.3.2-7. Ventral view of a range of Lark Bunting AHY males showing moderate to extensive black body feathers. Photograph by T. Bell.

Conclusion. Hatch year males and female should be readily distinguishable in the field. Separation of HY males from AHY females is a bit more problematic but good side views of the primaries should easily distinguish between the two based on the presence or absence of black.

3.4 Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*) vs. Eastern Bluebird (*S. sialis*) in female plumage

Account by Bill Hubick

3.4.1 Background

Maryland has two accepted records of Mountain Bluebird, one bird from Oldtown, Allegany Co. (23 Dec 1970) [MD.1985-024] and one female from Bayside Point, Assateague Island, Worcester Co. (8 Nov 2003) [MD/2003-137]. There is also an unreviewed report in research status from Washington Co. during winter of 1995 [MD/2003-321] and a reviewable report from Rock Creek Park, Washington, D.C. (12 Nov 2000) [DC/2000-058].

Mountain Bluebird is a rare vagrant to the East Coast from October to April with a majority of records in November and December. Other East Coast states with records include Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania, most of these with multiple records.

Although adult male Mountain Bluebirds are striking and distinctive, females and immature birds are more difficult to distinguish from Eastern Bluebirds. The committee decided to spend some time becoming more familiar with details of female plumages, focusing on specimens from fall and winter. Juvenile plumages were not studied in depth due to the lower probability of an East Coast vagrant in juvenile plumage.

3.4.2 Findings

The committee compared specimens of female Mountain Bluebirds and female Eastern Bluebirds collected between October and December. Several plumage details were striking in the hand, but it was noted that some could be challenging under field conditions.

Starting with overall impression, female Mountain Bluebirds tended to appear slightly larger, much drabber, and much grayer than female Eastern Bluebirds. The Mountain Bluebird specimens were a uniform light gray, suffused very slightly with light blue and rusty orange, sometimes more noticeably rusty orange on the breast. Even when most obvious, Mountain Bluebird breast coloration did not approach the brightness of Eastern Bluebirds. All Eastern Bluebirds had rich rusty orange feathers on the breast and flanks.

Both species showed similar extents of blue in the flight feathers, rump, and tail. However, the committee was impressed by how consistent and distinctive the shades of blue were between the two species. Mountain Bluebirds showed a bright cerulean blue, almost turquoise. Eastern Bluebirds showed a deeper, darker shade of blue that might be described as "royal blue." When the trays of specimens were returned, a tiny blue feather remained on the table. We were amused when all present agreed that the color clearly suggested Mountain Bluebird. As color descriptions are only slightly less difficult to convey than sound descriptions, please see Figures 3.4.2-1 to 3.4.2-4. The difference in primary extension is also significant. In Eastern Bluebirds, the primary extension is approximately equal to the length of the tertials. In Mountain Bluebirds, primary extension is nearly double the length of the tertials. (See Figure 3.4.2-2.)

The backs and crowns of the Eastern Bluebirds were darker and more suffused with light blue and rusty, chestnut-colored feathers. Both species showed white bellies and undertail coverts, as well as very limited white in the throat. Differences in white eye rings between the two species were not striking. Mountain Bluebird bills were thinner, but this field mark is probably difficult to judge in the field.

Figure 3.4.2-1: Eastern Bluebirds (left two) and Mountain Bluebirds (right two). Photographs by Bill Hubick.

Figure 3.4.2-2: Mountain Bluebirds (left two) and Eastern Bluebirds (right two). Note the ratio between length of primaries and length of tertials in each species. Photographs by Bill Hubick.

Figure 3.4.2-3: Eastern Bluebird (above) and Mountain Bluebirds (below). Photographs by Bill Hubick.

Figure 3.4.2-4: Eastern Bluebirds (left two) and Mountain Bluebirds (right two). Photographs by Bill Hubick.

Summary. Additional Mountain Bluebird records are expected in Maryland. Observers should carefully study fall and winter bluebirds, particularly at migration hot spots such as Assateague Island. When observing female bluebirds, special attention should be paid to subtle plumage

details, including shades and extents of gray, blue, and rusty orange. A detailed description of any vocalizations is also very valuable.

Acknowledgment. Thanks to Matt Hafner for sharing background details on his November 2003 sighting, as well as additional fine identification points.

3.5 Immature Thayer's/ Kumlien's Gull (*Larus thayeri / glaucoides kumlieni*)

General observations of immature Thayer's Gulls with notes on pale extreme 1st winter Thayer's Gulls

Account by Fred Shaffer

3.5.1 Background

Of particular interest to several members of the committee was the pale extreme of 1st winter Thayer's Gull. Most Thayer's Gulls recorded in Maryland are 1st winter birds, therefore the identification of this age group is particularly relevant to area birders and committee members. In recent years, area birders have observed and photographed 1st winter gulls that appear to be at (or beyond?) the pale extreme for first winter Thayer's Gulls, raising the issue of possible Thayer's x Kumlien's hybrids. The recent *Gulls of the Americas* by Howell and Dunn (2005) includes a thorough analysis of both Thayer's Gulls and Kumlien's Gulls, as well as possible Thayer's Gull x Kumlien's/Iceland Gull hybrids.

3.5.2 Findings

The committee examined and photographed a tray of immature Thayer's Gulls ranging in age from 1st winter to several as old as 3rd cycle. The remainder of this account includes workshop specimen photos of two 3rd cycle Thayer's Gulls and several pale first winter Thayer's Gulls, notes and observations, and a discussion on pale 1st winter Thayer's Gulls.

General Notes and Observations on 3rd Cycle Thayer's Gulls

The committee studied and photographed pale 1st winter birds along with two older birds (see Figures 3.5.2-1 through 3.5.2-5).

Figure 3.5.2-1. Pale 1st winter Thayer's Gull (dorsal view). Photo by Fred Shaffer.

Figure 3.5.2-2. Pale 1st winter Thayer's Gull (ventral view). Photo by Fred Shaffer.

The specimen shown in Figures 3.5.2-1 and 3.5.2-2 was collected on 10 Mar in Klawak Bay, Alaska. This is a fairly heavily marked individual, with dense brown streaking on the head, sides of the throat, and flanks. It also exhibits a pale gray mantle estimated to be a 5 or 6 on the

Kodak Gray Scale, although the darkness appeared to vary depending on the angle of the viewer (see Figures 3.5.2-1, 3.5.2-3, and 3.5.2-4). This is perhaps a shade darker than the typical American Herring Gull, although the distinction is probably extremely difficult to discern in the field except with fairly close, side by side comparisons of both species from multiple angles. This specimen also shows a parallel edged bill with a relatively small-to-moderate gonydeal expansion typical of the species. Also of interest was the color and pattern of the folded primaries. The Thayer's Gull displayed slaty-gray (blackish) primaries, a shade or two lighter than found on American Herring Gulls. While the color of the primaries was dark, it was not the full, dark black found on American Herring Gulls. Also, the 3rd year Thayer's Gull exhibited significantly more white in the primaries than a correspondingly aged typical American Herring Gull.

Figure 3.5.2-3. Third-cycle Thayer's Gull. Photo by Fred Shaffer.

Figure 3.5.2-4. Third-cycle Thayer's Gull. Photo by Fred Shaffer.

Figure 3.5.2-5. Third-cycle Thayer's Gull. Photo by Fred Shaffer.

A second third-cycle Thayer's Gull specimen was also photographed (see Figures 3.5.2-3 through 3.5.2-5). This bird exhibited many of the same features described above. However, it was less heavily marked on the head and flanks, and the folded primaries appeared to be a

shade lighter then the earlier bird photographed (compare with Figures 3.5.2-1 and 3.5.2-4). There are several notable differences between this specimen and the one in Figures 3.5.2-1 and 3.5.2-2. The specimen shown in Figures 3.5.2-3 through 3.5.2-5 retains immature feathers in the greater coverts (see Figure 3.5.2-3), has paler, more slaty-blackish primaries, and includes even more white in the folded wing (see Figure 3.5.2-4). Figure 3.5.2-5 shows particularly well the bill shape and size characteristic of the Thayer's Gulls that the committee looked at during the workshop. Both birds retained a significant amount of black in the bill, but displayed a yellow base bleeding towards the middle of the bill and a yellow tip to both the maxilla and mandible. The shape and size of the bill seen in Figure 3.5.2-5 was also fairly consistent with the Thayer's Gulls viewed in the collection. The bill was relatively parallel edged with a slight to moderate gonydeal expansion. None of the birds in the collection approached the more "petite" or "delicate" bill more typical of Kumlien's Gulls. Figure 3.5.2-13 shows the similar bill structure of the two 1st winter gulls examined.

Pale Extreme 1st year Thayer's Gulls

The committee also studied several 1st winter Thayer's Gulls, paying particular attention to the extremely pale birds in the collection. As with other gull species, 1st winter Thayer's Gulls are most likely to appear pale and bleached from mid- to late-winter due to fading and wear. Extremely pale or worn birds can be confused with Kumlien's Gulls.

Howell and Dunn include an account and excellent photographs of possible Thayer's x Kumlien's/Iceland hybrids. Of course, any discussion regarding hybrids and possible hybrid birds is necessarily conjectural, and much remains to be determined regarding the range of variation of worn 1st winter gulls for both Thayer's and Kumlien's Gulls. Similarly, much needs to be determined in the taxonomy of the Iceland Gull complex including defining the variation within each species.[i] Thayer's x Kumlien's hybridization is documented; however, the degree of which is unknown. Hybridization has been reported in the low Canadian Arctic on Southampton Island of North Hudson Bay and South Baffin Island. [ii] Howell and Dunn also report that small numbers of presumed Thayer's x Kumlien's hybrids may occur in the wintering range of the parent species and that presumed hybrids may be occurring in even higher proportions relative to parental species in geographical intermediate regions in the mid-west. [iii] Interestingly, the palest bird in the tray of immature Thayer's Gulls that the committee examined was collected in Texas, which is intermediate between the usual wintering locations of Thayer's and Kumlien's Gulls.

Figure 3.5.2-6. Pale Thayer's Gull (front), typical Thayer's Gull (rear). Photo by Fred Shaffer.

Figure 3.5.2-7. Pale Thayer's Gull (front), typical Thayer's Gull (rear). Photo by Fred Shaffer.

Figure 3.5.2-8. Pale 1st winter Thayer's Gull. Photo by Fred Shaffer.

Figure 3.5.2-9. Pale 1st winter Thayer's Gull. Photo by Fred Shaffer.

As expected, hybrids typically display intermediate characteristics between the two parent species. Determining what constitutes a "pure" Thayer's Gull or Kumlien's Gull as opposed to a hybrid is particularly difficult with extremely pale 1st winter Thayer's Gulls and dark Kumlien's Gulls. The palest of the Thayer's Gulls that the committee looked at was an extremely worn 1st year bird. The bird was collected at Port Aransas, Texas in March 1976. The Texas Gulf Coast is an area where Thayer's Gulls are listed as rare to very rare,[iv] while Kumlien's Gulls are casual.[v] The bird was labeled as *thayeri*/*kumlieni* (see Figure 3.5.2-9). Figures 3.5.2-6 and 3.5.2-7 show the extremely pale bird in the foreground with a more typical Thayer's Gull in the rear. The difference in the overall coloration is noticeable, with the paler bird having lighter, less dense markings above, more bleached and worn coverts, and a paler tail band and primaries.

The rear Thayer's Gull in Figures 3.5.2-6 and 3.5.2-7 is closer to the typical darkness for a 1st winter bird. However, it may also be on the pale side, and this gull was also labeled as *thayeri*/*kumlieni* in the collection. It was collected on 24 Mar 1985, but is not as pale or worn as the previous bird. It shows the more typical coloration, pale edged primaries, and dark centered tertials typical of the species. Figure 3.5.2-10 shows the overall color, darkness, and pattern of the upperparts, while Figure 3.5.2-11 and 3.5.2-12 show the medium-brown tail band and pale tipped, medium brown primaries, similar in color to the tail band. While this bird is pale, it probably falls within the range of a "pure" late winter Thayer's Gull.

In general, when looking for possible hybrid gulls, observers are told to look for intermediate characteristics or field marks between the two species. However, what are some of the field marks that may point towards a possible Thayer's x Kumlien's hybrid? Howell and Dunn note that fresh plumage, gulls structurally similar to Thayer's Gulls but with medium to pale-brown wingtips and a poorly defined or missing secondary bar may indicate a possible hybrid. On the other end of the spectrum, pale birds with pale brown primaries, a frosty overall appearance, but with relatively coarse upperparts may also be possible hybrids. Of note on both the pale 1st winter gull in the Smithsonian collection (Figures 3.5.2-6 through 3.5.2-9) and the pale bird seen around Upper Marlboro (Figures 3.5.2-13 through 3.5.2-15) were the pale brown primaries and the light tertials showing only a hint of a darker center. The gull in the Smithsonian was in extremely worn condition, but the Upper Marlboro gull was seen in mid to late January and in fresher plumage, as indicated by the presence of the pale fringe to the folded primaries.

Figure 3.5.2-10. Darker 1st winter Thayer's Gull. Photo by Fred Shaffer.

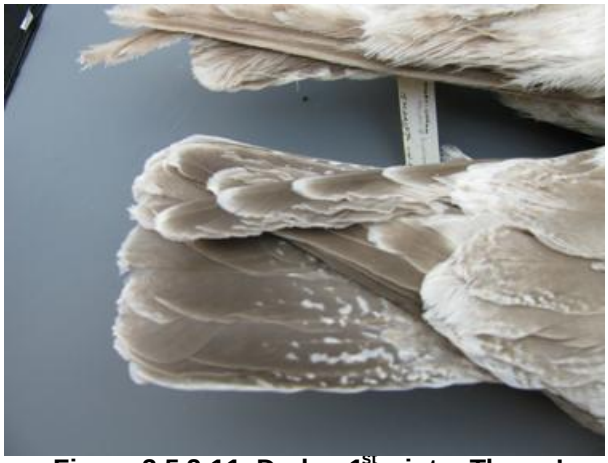

Figure 3.5.2-11. Darker 1st winter Thayer's Gull. Photo by Fred Shaffer.

Figure 3.5.2-12. Darker 1st winter Thayer's Gull. Photo by Fred Shaffer.

Figure 3.5.2-13. 1st winter Thayer's Gulls, pale (front), darker (rear). Photo by Fred Shaffer.

Notes on Darker 1st winter Thayer's Gull (Figures 3.5.2-6, -7, -10, -11, -12, -13)

- Medium gray-brown overall
- White streaks/blotches on crown, nape, and wing coverts
- Tertials pale to medium brown with white edges
- Folded primaries dark brown with white fringes
- Dark brown tail band similar in color to primaries
- All black bill, parallel edged with moderate gonydeal expansion

Notes on Pale Extreme 1st winter Thayer's Gull (Figures 3.5.2-6, -7, -8, -9, -13)

- Pale overall, white base color, blurry tan streaks on head, mantle, coverts
- Extremely worn appearance with much bleaching
- White rump with medium light tan barring
- Medium brown tail band
- Medium brown primaries, extremely worn with little or no pale fringe showing
- Tertials worn, darker centers evident, but lighter than primaries and tail band

Figure 3.5.2-14. Thayer's Gull. Schoolhouse Pond, MD. 31 Jan 2009. Photo by by George Jett.

Summary

As noted earlier, occasionally pale 1st winter gulls show up in Maryland that appear to be intermediate in structure and plumage between "pure" Thayer's Gulls and Kumlien's Gulls. These birds have paler tertials and primaries than typical Thayer's Gulls, but still appear a shade or so too dark for a "pure" Kumlien's Gull. It can be difficult if not impossible to determine where a pale "pure" Thayer's Gull ends and a hybrid begins. A gull seen and photographed by several observers in the Upper Marlboro area in January 2009 was a fairly pale bird for a Thayer's Gull at that time of the year. The pale Thayer's Gull was first seen by Fred Shaffer and Jim Stasz on 15 Jan. The gull was photographed by Joel Martin at Depot Pond on 18 Jan (Figures 3.5.2-15 and 3.5.2-16) and by George Jett at Schoolhouse Pond on 31 Jan (Figure 3.5.2-14).

The Schoolhouse Pond gull had relatively pale, medium brown primaries with tertials only slightly darker, if not concolorous with the rest of the upperparts. The primaries were darker than the rest of the upperparts, but still paler than would be typically expected for a Thayer's Gull in mid-winter. The size and structure of the gull appeared consistent with a 1st winter Thayer's Gull, but the overall pale color (particularly of the mantle, coverts and tertials) is near the pale end of the spectrum for Thayer's Gull for the time of year the bird was seen. Perhaps Howell and Dunn best summarize the status of the pale bird in the Smithsonian collection and the pale bird photographed at Schoolhouse Pond in their caption for Photo H5.3, "Relatively pale overall for a Thayer's Gull at this season (for example medium-brown primary bases, pale tertial centers), although structure typical of Thayer's. Whether birds like this represent pure Thayer's Gulls remains to be determined."[vi]

Figure 3.5.2-15. Pale Thayer's Gull (by Joel Martin), 18 Jan 2009, Depot Pond, Upper Marlboro, MD. Photo by Joel Martin.

Figure 3.5.2-16. Pale Thayer's Gull, 18 Jan 2009, Depot Pond, Upper Marlboro, MD. Photo by Joel Martin.

Literature Cited

Alderfer, Jonathan and Dunn, Jon. 2006. *Complete Birds of North America*, National Geographic Society.

Malling-Olsen, Klaus and Larsson, Hans, 2004. *Gulls of North America, Europe, and Asia*, Princeton University Press.

Sibley, David Allen. 2000. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, Alfred A. Knopf Publishing, New York.

Endnotes

[i] Howell and Dunn, page 462
[ii] Olsen and Larson, page 234
[iii] Howell and Dunn, page 488
[iv] Howell and Dunn, page 472
[v] Howell and Dunn, page 463
vi Howell and Dunn, page 291

3.6 Western Wood-Pewee (*Contopus sordidulus*) vs. Eastern Wood-Pewee (*C. virens*)

Account by Bill Hubick

3.6.1 Background

There are two USNM specimens identified as Western Wood-Pewee that were collected in Maryland. Both birds were collected by Chan Robbins in Ocean City, Maryland, one on 13 Sep 1961 (USNM #478783) and one on 1 Sep 1967 (USNM #530823). A possible specimen from the District of Columbia was later proven by measurements to be an Eastern Wood-Pewee. The two Maryland specimens have received much attention over the years, but conclusive identifications have been elusive.

The first thorough treatment of the subject by the MD/DCRC was completed by Chan Robbins and Claudia Wilds after the MD/DCRC Skins Workshop in February 1991

(http://www.mdbirds.org/mddcrc/pdf/rcskins1991.pdf). During the February 1991 session, Van Remsen reviewed the two Maryland specimens and concurred with their identification as Western Wood-Pewees.

In March 2003, Jonathan Alderfer completed measurements of the two Maryland specimens and analyzed them against a paper by Hubbard (2002). Citing the 2003 MD/DCRC Skins Workshop minutes, "USNM #478783 [MD/1997-362] did not key cleanly at 100 percent confidence, but comparing the ranges of the measurements, it tended toward Western. USNM #530823 [MD/1997-361] likewise did not key cleanly but was closer to Western measurements."

In June 2006, a tissue sample was removed from USNM #478783 [MD/1997-362] to complete DNA analysis. Unfortunately, the testing was not successful and did not permit identification to species. It is unknown whether further attempts to identify these specimens by DNA analysis might be successful.

3.6.2 Findings

The committee enabled new members to study one of the Maryland specimens (USNM #478783). Although no new measurements were taken, it was an opportunity to review the specimen and compare it with collections of both Eastern and Western Wood-Pewee specimens. The committee discussed the history of the two Maryland specimens and, of course, the joys of wood-pewee identification.

Figure 3.6.2-1: Maryland wood-pewee specimen (USNM #478783). Photograph by Bill Hubick.

Figure 3.6.2-2: Maryland wood-pewee specimen (USNM #478783). Photograph by Bill Hubick.

Figure 3.6.2-3: Maryland wood-pewee specimen (right) with three Western Wood-Pewee specimens. Photograph by Bill Hubick.

Figure 3.6.2-4: Maryland wood-pewee specimen (right) with three Western Wood-Pewee specimens. Photograph by Bill Hubick.

Figure 3.6.2-5: Maryland wood-pewee specimen (right) with three Eastern Wood-Pewee specimens. Photograph by Bill Hubick.

Figure 3.6.2-5: Maryland wood-pewee specimen (right) with three Eastern Wood-Pewee specimens. Photograph by Bill Hubick.

4. Adjournment

The Workshop ended at approximately 2 pm.

5. Acknowledgements

Thanks to the species account authors.

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