

# Frolicking with the Gulls

*Photo Captions and Identification Tips by Christopher L. Wood*

Thanks to organizers Jim Landing, David B. Johnson and others, the Annual Gull Frolic held the past three years in February at Winthrop Harbor, Lake County, has become a bustling, crowded affair with birders, neophyte and advanced, enjoying the gulls that visit Illinois during the colder months. The Illinois Ornithological Society along with the Chicago Audubon Society, DuPage Birding Club, Will County Audubon Society, Kane County Audubon Society, Evanston North-Shore Bird Club, Wild Bird Center and Chicago Ornithological Society have financially supported this event. The 2005 Gull Frolic will be held Saturday, February 19 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

To prepare for this year's Gull Frolic, we feature some photos from last year as well as details on how to identify these birds in black and white, written by American Birding Association's Christopher L. Wood. Lucky for Illinois birders, Chris has recently moved to our prairie state. Note that Chris prefers the term first-cycle rather than first-winter and directs readers to see two recent articles by Steve N.G. Howell in *Birding* for more details on molt terminology. (Vol. 35 No. 5 October 2003, All You Ever Wanted to Know About Molt, Part 1 and Vol. 35 No. 6, December 2003, All You Ever Wanted to Know About Molt, Part 11).

## First-cycle Kumlien's Iceland Gull

*Photo by Robert Hughes.*

First-cycle Kumlien's Gulls are similar to both Glaucous Gull and Thayer's Gull. Compared with a first-cycle Glaucous Gull, note this bird's mostly dark bill (Glaucous would have a dark tip) and this bird's relatively long wings. Differentiating Thayer's Gull from Kumlien's Gull is notoriously challenging. Note here the very pale wings that are paler than the body, and the pale and heavily patterned tertials. Also note the rounded head and body that along with the short bill and legs, give the bird a rather dumpy appearance.



## Second-cycle Kumlien's Iceland Gull

*Photo by Jerry Kumery.*

This bird's extensively white wings are too pale for even the palest of Thayer's Gulls. The bird's dark bill tip may suggest Glaucous Gull, but note the darker feathers on this bird's upper-wing coverts, which along with the date show that this bird is either in its second or third winter (that these are still mostly white suggest a bird in its second-cycle). By the time Kumlien's Gulls have molted in adult-like wing coverts, the extent of black on the bill is usually quite limited and more similar to a Glaucous Gull. Size is a big help in differentiating the two species at this age, but the scaup in the background isn't close enough to be much help. Note, however that at least the outer two primaries are somewhat darker than the rest of the wing. This should be enough to convince us this is a Kumlien's Gull.



*These photos were either taken at the February 2004 Gull Frolic in Winthrop Harbor, Lake County or during winter 2003/2004 at Montrose Harbor, Cook County.*