

High Numbers of Glaucous Gulls at Lake Calumet

Thousands of gulls rest on the ice and feed at the landfills near Lake Calumet in winter. From February through early March, Lake Calumet also serves as a staging area for gulls returning northward as waters farther south begin to thaw. Searching through the large flocks at these times can produce high numbers of the less common gulls that visit Illinois.

On 11 Feb. 1996, my wife, Christine, and I visited the Lake Calumet area. From the southern edge of the lake, we saw thousands of gulls standing on the ice and swimming in the open water on the lake. Unfortunately, the areas where the gulls were congregating were quite distant from our vantage point, but we were nonetheless able to pick out three Glaucous Gulls (*Larus hyperboreus*) as well as two Great Black-backed Gulls (*L. marinus*). The large size and distinctive plumage of these species made them stand out, even at a distance.

Hoping to see some of the rarer winter gulls closer, we also checked all other nearby open water areas including the main body of the lake. At the mouth of the Calumet River, we spotted one more Glaucous Gull. The big find, however, was when we checked the slip of water just south of the lake. Feeding on the ice there were six more Glaucous Gulls, all at close distance. One more Glaucous Gull we observed at the O'Brien Lock and Dam on the Little Calumet River brought our total of Glaucous Gulls for the day to 11.

Previously reported occurrences of 10 or more Glaucous Gulls in Illinois include the following sightings: 4 March 1995, Christine and I observed 12 Glaucous Gulls in Chicago, including 10 at Lake Calumet; 12 March 1994 an astounding 22 Glaucous Gulls were counted on Lake Calumet by several observers (Chapel 1994) (shortly before this date on 2 March 1994, I tallied 21 Glaucous Gulls at Lake Calumet). In addition, 11 Glaucous Gulls were recorded the winter of 1983/84 in the St. Louis area (Bohlen 1989); while 9 to 12 were seen on 30 Dec. 1980 and at least 10 during January 1971 (Mlodinow 1984).

Literature Cited

Bohlen, H. D. 1989. The birds of Illinois. University of Indiana Press. Bloomington, IN.

Chapel, R. Field Notes: The 1994 Spring Season: Meadowlark 3:150.

Mlodinow. 1984. Chicago area birds. Chicago Review Press. Chicago, IL.

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Lake County Barrow's Goldeneye

On 20 Jan. 1996, while checking the Lake Michigan harbors in Lake County, Illinois, I discovered an adult male Barrow's Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*) at Winthrop Harbor. The bird was inside the jetty at the NorthPoint Marina with at least a dozen Common Goldeneyes (*B. clangula*) and at least six Buffleheads (*B. albeola*). All of these birds were in a small area of open water just south of the outlet to Lake Michigan.

As I was scanning the diving ducks in the small patch of open water, I noticed that one of the male goldeneyes appeared to be darker than the rest. Upon further inspection, I noted that the white facial lores were crescent-shaped rather than the oval shape on the other birds. The bird's sides showed more black than the rest of the goldeneyes present. These characters distinguish Barrow's from the Common goldeneyes (Madge and Burn 1988).

As I approached for a closer look, all the diving ducks took flight and circled a few times before heading south. As they circled, I noted that the Barrow's Goldeneye displayed darker upperparts compared with the Common Goldeneyes.

An adult male Barrow's Goldeneye was seen at the same location the winter of 1995 (Johnson 1995). Mlodinow (1984) listed only 11 dates since 1955 for this rare winter visitor in the Chicago area.

Literature Cited

Johnson, D. 1995. Meadowlark 4: 106. Madge, S. and Burn, H. 1988. Waterfowl: an identification guide to the ducks, geese and swans of the world. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston, MA.

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