

Articles

European Herring Gull in Ontario

Michel Gosselin and Ron Pittaway

Introduction

An unidentified first year gull in juvenal/first basic plumage was collected by the National Museum of Natural Sciences (now Canadian Museum of Nature) in Ottawa, Ontario, on 11 November 1974. When Pierre Devillers, of the Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles (Brussels), visited Ottawa in 1986, he identified the bird as a Herring Gull of the European subspecies group *Larus argentatus argentatus/argenteus* (Pierre Devillers, pers. comm.). He thought it was more similar to nominate *argentatus*, but he could not eliminate *argenteus* without access to comparative skins. His assessment, however, is consistent with the information in Golley and Elliott (1993). This specimen is the first record of a European Herring Gull in Ontario and the first specimen for Canada. It is specimen number CMN 62001 in the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa. It was determined to be a female through dissection by Richard Poulin of the Museum. Measurements of the specimen are: wing chord 419 mm, exposed culmen 49 mm, tarsus 61.5 mm. Figures 1 and 2 show dorsal and ventral views of the European Herring Gull (in

the middle) compared with two American Herring Gulls (*L. a. smithsonianus*).

Discussion

Comparing same age and plumage, the European Herring Gull from Ottawa is distinguished from American Herring Gulls by the combination of whiter and less vermiculated bases to its tail feathers (creating a more defined subterminal tail band), whiter upper tail coverts and rump, coarser and sparser dark markings on the undertail coverts, paler and more checkered upperparts (including wing coverts and tertials), and a more streaked breast (Grant 1986, Dubois 1997). It differs from the Pontic/Yellow-legged Gull complex (*L. cachinnans/michahellis/atlantis*), and from the Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*), by its heavily marked greater secondary coverts, more notched tertial edges, and paler inner primaries (Grant 1986, Garner and Quinn 1997). It is distinguished from the Vega Herring Gull (*L. a. vegae*) of Siberia and western Alaska mainly by its lighter underparts in direct specimen comparison (Pierre Yésou, pers. comm.).



Figure 1. Dorsal view: (left) large female *Larus argentatus smithsonianus* from Ottawa, 6 November 1974, CMN 61999; (middle) female *L. a. argentatus/argenteus* from Ottawa, 11 November 1974, CMN 62001; (right) small female *L. a. smithsonianus* from Ottawa in mid-October 1982, CMN 84198. Photo by Michel Gosselin.



Figure 2. Ventral view: (left) large female *Larus argentatus smithsonianus* from Ottawa, 6 November 1974, CMN 61999; (middle) female *L. a. argentatuslargenteus* from Ottawa, 11 November 1974, CMN 62001; (right) small female *L. a. smithsonianus* from Ottawa in mid-October 1982, CMN 84198. Photo by Michel Gosselin.

Conclusion

European Herring Gulls of the nominate subspecies *argentatus* breed in Denmark and Scandinavia east to Kola peninsula, and the subspecies *argenteus* breeds in Iceland, the British Isles, and the North Sea coast from France to West Germany (Cramp 1983). In all likelihood, birds nesting in Greenland also belong to one of these two subspecies (Boertmann 1994). European Herring Gulls have been reported several times and photographed in Newfoundland (Mactavish 1995, 2000), and once in Nova Scotia (Ian McLaren, pers. comm.). A few may occur regularly in Ontario. Over the last 10 years, occasional individuals showing the characters (slightly darker mantle and reduced black in wingtips) of adult northern European Herring Gulls of nominate *argentatus* have been seen on the Niagara River of Ontario and New York State (Ron Pittaway, pers. obs.). Here we report the first record of a European Herring Gull for Ontario and the first specimen for Canada.

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