

# Kansas Ornithological Society

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**Thayer's Gull in Riley County: First Documented Occurrence in Kansas** — On the afternoon of 15 January 1985 a Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*) in first winter plumage was discovered by Cable on the Big Blue River below the Tuttle Creek Reservoir dam. The bird was observed by several local birders, and was photographed on the following day by Rintoul. These photographs (Figures 1 and 2) are particularly noteworthy in that they clearly depict all of the relevant field marks necessary to separate this species from other, similar species.

This Thayer's Gull can be distinguished from a first-year Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) by its: 1) overall buffy-grey coloration, 2) relatively short and slender bill, 3) smaller body size, and 4) the light colored primaries which were only slightly darker than the rest of the wing and mantle. This latter field mark is crucial, and is especially obvious when looking at the underside of the primaries (Gosselin and David 1980, *Birding* 12:198-210).

The possibility that this individual could be an Iceland Gull (*Larus g. glaucoides*) is eliminated by the observation that the primaries were slightly **darker**, not lighter, than



Figure 1. Thayer's Gull in flight, from above, showing coloration of the primaries and tail pattern.



**Figure 2. Thayer's Gull in flight, from the side, showing head coloration and underside of primaries.**

the rest of the wing. The darker race of the Iceland Gull, known as Kumlein's Gull (*Larus glaucooides kumleini*) can have wing tips which are concolor with the mantle and rest of wing; however, they usually have dusky subapical spots on the primaries. As can be seen from the photographs, this bird lacked such spots. The best field mark for separating first year Kumlein's Gulls from Thayer's is the difference in tail patterns. The Thayer's tail is a **uniform**, dark (it is the darkest part of the plumage) brown color. Contrasted with the mottled tail coverts, it appears to be a dark, subterminal tail band. Even in the darker Kumlein's race, Iceland Gulls' tails are mottled with white, thereby forming a paler, and less distinct, "tail band" (Gosselin and David 1980. *Birding* 12:198-210).

It is interesting to note that Lehman (1975. *Am. Birds* 29:1059-1066) mentions that some observers have suggested two additional possible field marks to separate first year Herring and Thayer's Gulls. These are: 1) many first year Herrings have a "white-headed" appearance in contrast to the remainder of the plumage, and 2) Thayer's Gulls often show a "dark smudge" near the eye, while Herring Gulls do not show such a smudge. Figures 1 and 2 confirm that this individual's plumage is consistent with these observations.

Although there have recently been several sight records of Thayer's Gulls in Kansas, there had been no physical evidence gathered to substantiate their occurrence in the state (M. Schwilling, pers. communication). These photographs, therefore, provide the first documented record of a Thayer's Gull in Kansas.

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**House Finch in Riley County** — On 14 April 1984 a female House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) was observed at a feeder just north of the city limits of Manhattan, KS (Riley Co.). The bird was photographed (Figure 1) and stayed in the vicinity for the remainder of the day. The photograph shows a streaked finch with a heavy beak and no distinct eyebrow streak, which distinguishes the House Finch from the Purple Finch (*C. purpureus*) and the Pine Siskin (*Carduelis pinus*). Additionally, the bird had fine streaking



**Figure 1. Female House Finch, showing facial coloration and bill size.**

on the breast and a squarish tail; both of these characters aid in discriminating the House Finch from the Purple Finch. House Finches are commonly reported on Kansas winter bird counts in the western half of the state (Zimmerman, 1984, Kansas Ornithol. Soc. Bull. 35:1-19). During 1984 sight records for this species were obtained for Harvey County in central Kansas and Johnson County in eastern Kansas (M. Schwilling, pers. communication). This photograph is the first documentation of the House Finch in the eastern half of Kansas and the first record for Riley County.

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#### **IN MEMORIAM: AMELIA J. BETTS**

She was small of stature and burdened with many infirmities, but she was mighty in courage, spunk and perseverance. She had strong convictions and was relentless in striving to uphold them.

In her declining years she set as her self-appointed goal the placing of permanent self-explanatory signs near the seven DAR markers on the old Santa Fe Trail that wanders through the southern part of Douglas County, Kansas. At the time of her death, she had succeeded in placing two, one at the town site of old Palmyra and the other at Trail Park just north of Baldwin. Since her death, two more have been erected in her memory, one at the trading center known as Brooklyn and the other in Black Jack Park east of Baldwin which alerts all travellers who stop in the park to partake of the beauty of the virgin prairie just to the south where the marks of the old Santa Fe Trail are still plainly visible.

She was very methodical and kept volumes of information in files and notebooks and

thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of answering thought-provoking questions proposed by friends and relatives.

In 1953 she was elected secretary of the Oakwood Cemetery in Baldwin City and served in that capacity for eleven years. During her term of office she did extensive research in making an up-to-date map and listing of all the burials in the cemetery.

Amelia J. Betts was born on 31 October 1907 at Elsmore, Kansas, the daughter of William and Birdie McPherson Betts. She died on 27 May 1984 in the Lawrence Memorial Hospital. She received her grade and high school education in Harveyville, Kansas. She entered Baker University in 1928. While at Baker she was a member of the Baker Band, worked on the Baker Orange, and upon graduation in 1932 was elected to Alpha Delta Sigma, the Honor Society of Baker University. Following graduation, she entered the University of Kansas and received her Masters degree in Journalism in 1933.

Shortly after graduation she entered the business world and became the owner and operator of the Betts Paint and Wallpaper Store in Baldwin. She, with the help of her youngest brother Donald Betts, continued to operate that business until the store was destroyed by fire in 1974. She disseminated much information about birds along with her paint and wallpaper for many of her customers and friends who would come to her for information on feeding birds, building bird houses and the identification of birds they had seen at their feeders.

She was a charter member of the Kansas Ornithological Society and one of its earliest Life Members as well as being secretary for five years. When this office was divided into recording and membership secretaries, she continued on in the capacity of the membership branch and served thirteen more years in that office.

Amelia was a "stickler" for accuracy and spent much time and thought in seeing that the KOS Constitution and By-laws were as accurate and concise as possible.

She was an early member, but not a charter member, of the local Baldwin Bird Club. She served as treasurer of this organization for 31 years. She was also, at various times, secretary, vice-president and reporter. Using her journalistic training, she wrote an interesting and very comprehensive history of the Baldwin Bird Club.

Amelia did not confine her interest in birds just to Kansas, but she was a member of the Nebraska, Missouri and Oklahoma organizations as well.

Miss Betts, sometimes referred to as one of the "Bird Ladies" of Baldwin, was interested in encouraging youth to be aware of birds. The Memorial Fund, which was established by KOS for the education of young folks, would have pleased her very much.

*Katharine B. Kelley, Box 43, Baldwin City, KS 66006.*

### BOOK REVIEW

*Birding with a Purpose: Of Raptors, Gaboons and Other Creatures.* Frances Hammerstrom. Iowa State University Press, Ames, IA 50010. 1984. viii + 130 pages. Illustrated. Hard Cover \$13.95. ISBN 0-8138-0228-8.

I am convinced that you will like this book. You may not envy Fran Hammerstrom in all her adventures while banding raptorial birds, but you will be able to identify with many of them — consternation from the non-birding public, run-ins with police officers, the hazards of travel to places where only flying birds should go. And you will enjoy her telling of each and everyone of them, from the great Hawk Owl expedition and the eagles of Petenwell Dam to Operation Snowy Owl and the inter-tribal Pow-Wow. The book is also a glimpse into the life of one ornithologist, but more importantly, an ornithologist whose life spans the period in our history when the science rapidly broadened in its scope from a narrower systematic orientation and at the same time became more rigorous in its discipline and demand for objective evidence. This was also the period when birding became a socially acceptable avocation for thousands of people and no longer just the domain of zealots like the Rockford Bunch (you'll probably recognize some KOS members among them too). So this book is also history, a personal history and a history of science as well. You will also learn some things about birds, bird-trapping, birders, and other kinds of people.

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