

## FIRST YEAR SLATY-BACKED GULL

The fact that all Slaty-backed Gulls identified in North America south of Alaska have been in subadult or adult plumage brings up a logical assumption followed by a relevant question: first-year birds must be getting here as well, and if so, how can we identify them? In general plumage, first-year Slaty-backed Gulls most clearly resemble first-year Herring Gulls, having fairly pale heads, backs, and breasts, which contrast distinctly with their darker primaries and rectrices. Three features that may help distinguish first-year birds of these two species are evident in these photographs of a Slaty-backed Gull: 1) the bill averages larger and is completely black, 2) the breast often has large smudges (in worn or moderately worn plumage), and 3) most importantly, the 4th to 7th primaries from the outside (or inside; p4-p7) have extensively pale inner webs, which contrast distinctly with the dark brown outer webs and subterminal marks, and tend to be paler than the innermost primaries, p1-p3. First-year Herring Gulls of most or all subspecies have smaller bills which can be black through mid-winter but otherwise are pale or bright pinkish at the base, smaller and/or less distinct breast spots, and outer primaries (p5-p10) which are mostly blackish with shorter, less distinct, and darker grayish "tongues" extending distally within the inner webs, and which contrast with paler inner primaries (p1-p4, sometimes extending to p5). These differing patterns to the primaries create the overall effect of first-year Slaty-backed Gulls having a pale wing panel toward the outer primaries, whereas this panel in first-year Herring Gulls is among the innermost primaries, closer to the center of the wing. This first-winter Slaty-backed Gull was photographed on Midway Atoll, Northwest Hawaiian Islands, on May 7, 1997.

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