

## Kumliens Gull *Larus glaucoides kumlieni* – The first for Madeira

On the 7<sup>th</sup> August during one of my regular checks of the excellent website Birding Madeira <http://madeira.seawatching.net/> I came across some photographs of Iceland Gulls taken at Funchal Madeira in February by Alan Burkin. Having a keen interest in the Iceland Gull complex I studied the photograph which showed four different individuals closely in the vain hope of identifying a vagrant Kumliens Gull. By accident I noticed the head of another gull at the bottom of the page which immediately looked interesting due to the mantle colour which was distinctly paler than the adult Yellow Legged Gulls in the picture. On blowing the picture up it was clear that the bill pattern, gentle round head shape and mantle colour pointed the identification of this bird in the direction of Iceland Gull but rather more interesting to me was that the eye appeared dark. Dark eyes are a feature of adult Kumliens Gull and this immediately set the alarm bells ringing but although the photograph was good quality it wasn't sharp enough to be 100% certain that this feature was real.



Typical Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*) bill colour and size, head shape and mantle colour similar to Argenteus Herring Gull (*Larus Argenteus*) although no direct comparison possible. The bird appears to have a dark eye and this alone would point to identification of Kumliens Gull (*Larus glaucoides kumlieni*). Funchal harbour, Madeira, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2009. Photo: Alan Burkin, UK.

I contacted Niklas Holmström and asked did he have full size files and or any other photographs. Niklas sent the full size files that he had and also contact details for Alan Burkin. To be absolutely sure of the identification of Kumliens Gull a view of the primaries was essential so more in hope than expectation I contacted Alan and asked him did he have any other photographs especially of the gull at the bottom of the picture. I had my fingers crossed that he hadn't overlooked it!

On the 13<sup>th</sup> August I received an email from Alan saying that he had just returned from holiday and that he would forward pictures that he had but rather more promisingly he wrote:

“I do have one other shot of that bird, which had an injured wing, and having consulted the BWP DVD I think that you may well be right.”

A short time later I received the first picture and when opening it I could scarcely believe my eyes. There in the picture was an adult Kumliens Gull! Alan had the picture of the primaries that was needed to be 100% sure of identification. I quickly contacted Alan and Niklas and told them the exciting news.



A photograph of the primaries was vital if a firm identification of Kumliens Gull (*Larus glaucooides kumlieni*) could be made. This is a very well marked individual with grey on the outer primaries P7-P10. Funchal harbour, Madeira, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2009. Photo: Alan Burkin, UK.

On further examination of further photos Alan provided it was apparent that two other birds a third winter and a first winter also showed features of Kumliens Gull but specific identification was not possible as examination of the primary pattern was not possible. These two birds will have to remain as possible only unless other photographs come to light. We would ask if any other people visited Madeira at this time and have pictures of Iceland Gulls taken at that time could they forward them to Niklas.



This picture has three Iceland Gulls (*Larus glaucooides*), two first winters and a third winter. The first winter in the foreground appears to show brown wash on the outer primaries and is a good candidate for a Kumliens Gull (*Larus glaucooides kumlieni*). The third winter also shows grey wash on the primaries and again is an excellent candidate for a Kumliens (*Larus glaucooides kumlieni*). However better quality photographs preferably showing the spread wing pattern are required and these two birds have to remain as possible only. Funchal harbour, Madeira, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2009. Photo: Alan Burkin, UK.

Alan takes up the story of the circumstances regarding the find:

"On 20 February I was on holiday on Madeira with my wife, daughter and son-in-law. We were walking along the promenade in Funchal by the harbour when I noticed some Iceland Gulls on a concrete breakwater. Realising that these were potentially unusual I stopped to take some photographs, mainly as personal record shots. The result was that I lost contact with the family and, on realising this, moved on rather quickly, thus perhaps missing the opportunity to take some more useful shots. After returning to the UK I submitted some of the photos to the Birding Madeira website, recognizing that Iceland Gulls were eminently reportable. I must admit that the possibility of Kumliens Gull had not crossed my mind, both because this is not a gull with which I was familiar and because it didn't cross my mind that a rare bird from the Canadian arctic could be showing on Madeira. I'm very relieved that Derek Charles picked up the Kumliens ID for I fear that otherwise this Madeira first would have been missed."

There was an unprecedented influx of Kumliens Gulls into Southern Europe in the early part of 2009. Numbers involved are difficult to gauge but as many as ten could have been recorded in Spain where previously only two birds had been recorded before. Others were recorded in Belgium and Portugal, with a single adult also seen on the Azores [http://azores.seawatching.net/bigpic.php?filename=lar\\_gla23.jpg&id=2043&spid=654](http://azores.seawatching.net/bigpic.php?filename=lar_gla23.jpg&id=2043&spid=654) The reason for this influx is unclear but probably involved weather systems pushing birds further south than usual. This influx was not mirrored in the UK or Ireland. A species of nearctic gull on Madeira is an exciting event and this bird constitutes the first record for Madeira

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