

GREATER MANCHESTER'S GULLING BONANAZA OF WINTER 2007/2008

by Ian McKerchar



Glaucous Gull at Heaton Park Reservoir, January 2008

During the winter of 2007/2008 the north-west of England in line with other parts of the UK experienced an influx of 'white-winged' gulls, firstly Glaucous Gulls and then Iceland Gulls assisted by suitable weather conditions during the period. The north-west of England at least, also encountered numbers of Caspian Gulls never previously experienced and it was exiting if not a little relieving that Greater Manchester cashed in on this overall gull bonanza, recording its best period for rare and scarce gulls.

During the period, Greater Manchester added no fewer than a further four Caspian Gulls and a single Kumlien's Gull to the county list, a list that only included two and one previous respective records for the county ever! 'White-winged Gulls' were seemingly at every roost for those who ventured out to check them and on occasion up to three Glaucous or three Iceland Gulls could be found together, with a largest single site 'white-winged' roost of four birds present on several occasions at Heaton Park Reservoir.

It is unfortunate however that reports from Heaton Park Reservoir (the most productive county site during the period) were forbidden to be disseminated due to permit restrictions and that due to this, most county birders (and beyond) never actually realised just how good gulling was during this period within Greater Manchester.



Above: Glaucous Gull at Audenshaw Reservoirs, December 2007 by Rob Adderley



Above and below: The very distinctive 'hooded' 1st-winter Glaucous Gull at Heaton Park Reservoir, February 2008 (above) and again in early March (below) and again in early March 2008 (right), both by Rob Adderley

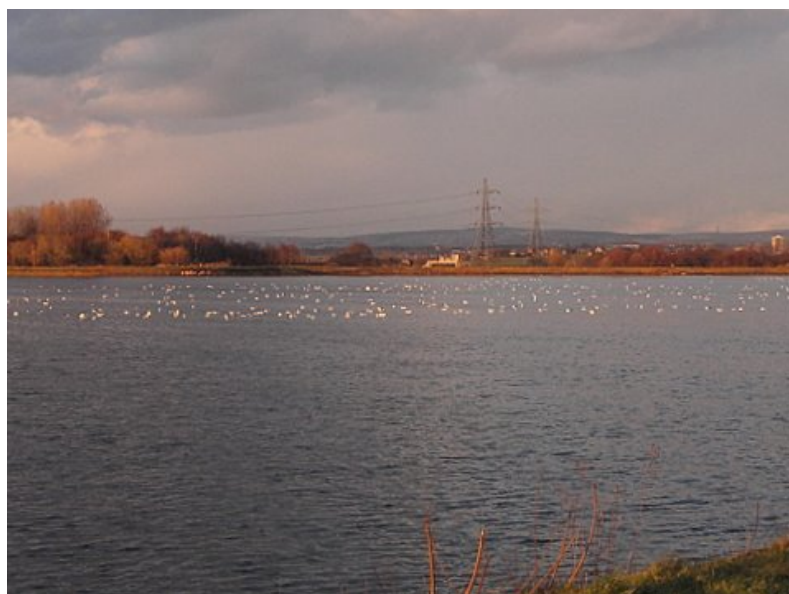




Above: Iceland Gull at Heaton Park Reservoir, February 2008 by Rob Adderley



Above and below: Top gulling! The Heaton Park Reservoir roost in full force five blizzard one minute (top) and then calm, clarity the next (below). Both photos taken 24th March, less than three minutes apart by Ian McKerchar



Full diary of noteworthy gulls in the county during the winter of 2007/2008

In this article it is my intention to list all the day to day occurrences of these interesting gulls during the covered period and to analyse that information and although several 'white-winged' individuals roosted on and off at their respective roosts for various periods of time and also roamed widely to other sites, I have attempted to track those individuals with the assistance of Rob Adderley and Pete Berry, so that we can obtain a clearer picture of just how many of these birds were present in the county. In our assessment of individuals and their movements we have used close study of individual plumages from field observations and photographs and have clearly aired on the side of caution, being realistic as to their apparent wandering nature in search of food from refuse tips, so the totals are as true as seems reasonable, although if anything they could well have been higher, especially considering that during March and April tracking these gulls, especially the juvenile Iceland Gulls was very difficult indeed and at one point we decided that unless a particular individual showed a distinctive plumage characteristic which we could track, then we would not consider it to be a new individual to the county.

Note also that dates with no sightings do not necessarily infer that no such gulls were present in the county but on some occasions the respective roosts etc. where simply not checked.

* indicates a confirmed new individual, countable in the tables below

DECEMBER 2007

6th: Juvenile **Iceland gull** *, Audenshaw Reservoirs roost

11th: Adult **Caspian Gull*** and juvenile **Iceland Gull*** (paler individual than on the 6th), Audenshaw Reservoirs roost

12th: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same individual as on 11th January) and juvenile **Glaucous Gull***, Audenshaw Reservoirs roost

13th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same individual as on 12th January), Audenshaw Reservoirs roost

14th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same individual as on 12th January), Audenshaw Reservoirs roost

15th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same individual as at Audenshaw Reservoirs on 12th January), Heaton Park Reservoir briefly during the day and in the roost

30th: 2nd winter **Iceland Gull***, Pennington Flash roost

31st: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull*** (different individual to that on the 12th January), Audenshaw Reservoirs roost

JANUARY 2008

1st: Adult **Iceland Gull***, Pennington Flash roost

2nd: 2nd winter **Caspian Gull***, Heaton Park Reservoir roost

4th: 2nd winter **Caspian Gull** (same individual as on the 2nd January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

5th: 2nd winter **Caspian Gull** (same individual as on the 2nd January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

9th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull***, Heaton Park Reservoir roost

10th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same individual as on the 9th January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

11th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same individual as on the 9th January) and 1st winter **Caspian Gull*** (probably same bird as seen at Richmond Bank, Cheshire previously and Fishmoor Reservoir, Lancashire subsequently), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

12th: 512 **Great Black-backed Gull** (new site record), Ashworth Moor Reservoir roost

14th: 2nd winter **Caspian Gull** (same individual as on 2nd January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

15th: 2nd winter **Caspian Gull** (same individual as on 2nd January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

17th: 1005 **Great Black-backed Gull** (new county record), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

19th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull*** (heavily 'dark hooded' individual), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

20th: 358 **Great Black-backed Gull** (new site record), Pennington Flash roost

22nd: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull*** (different bird to that on 19th January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

23rd: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same individual as on 22nd January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

24th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same individual as on 22nd January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

25th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same individual as on 22nd January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

26th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same individual as on 22nd January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

27th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same individual as on 22nd January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

28th: Juvenile **Iceland Gull***, Pennington Flash

30th: Two Juvenile **Glaucous Gulls*** (1 bird the same individual as on 22nd January, 1 new individual), Heaton Park Reservoir roost, Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (probably the individual from Pennington on 28th January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

31st: Two Juvenile **Glaucous Gulls** (same individuals as on 30th January) and Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same individual as on 30th January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

FEBRUARY 2008

2nd: 2nd winter **Iceland Gull***, Pennington Flash roost. Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (one of the individuals from the 30th January) and two juvenile **Iceland Gulls*** (one new individual with distinctly two toned bill and the individual from the 30th January also present) and 3rd winter **Kumlien's Gull*** (almost certainly the same bird as seen previously in Derbyshire and subsequently in South Yorkshire), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

3rd: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (seems most likely to have been one of the individuals from Heaton Park Reservoir on 30th January), Pennington Flash roost. Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same distinctly two-toned billed individual from 2nd February), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

4th: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (probably the individual from Heaton Park Reservoir on 2nd February off bill pattern), Pennington Flash roost. Three Juvenile **Glaucous Gulls** (two individuals probably from the 30th January and the individual from 19th January) and juvenile **Iceland Gull** (probably the all dark-billed individual from the 2nd February), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

5th: Three Juvenile **Glaucous Gulls** (same individuals as the 4th February) and juvenile **Iceland gull** (same individual as on 2nd February), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

6th: Three Juvenile **Glaucous Gulls** (same individuals as the 4th February) and juvenile **Iceland gull** (same individual as on 2nd February), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

7th: Three Juvenile **Glaucous Gulls** (same individuals as the 4th February) and juvenile **Iceland gull** (same individual as on 2nd February), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

9th: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same individual as on 2nd February), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

11th: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same individual as on 2nd February), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

18th: 3000 **Herring Gulls** (largest count of the winter in the county), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

21st: 2nd winter **Caspian Gull** (same individual as on 2nd January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

24th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull*** (a noticeably small individual), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

26th: 2nd winter **Caspian Gull** (same individual as on 2nd January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

MARCH 2008

1st: Two Juvenile **Glaucous Gulls** (the 'hooded' individual and probably one of the individuals last seen 7th February), Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (probably the 'non-two-toned' billed individual from the 2nd February), adult **Caspian Gull*** (most probably the same individual as seen at Withnell Landfill Site, Lancashire on the 25th February 2008), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

2nd: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same individual as on 1st March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

3rd: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same individual as on 1st March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

4th: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same individual as on 1st March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

7th: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** and juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (both same individuals as on 1st March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

8th: Adult **Iceland Gull***, Pennington Flash. Third winter **Kumlien's Gull** (seen earlier the same day at Arpley Tip in Cheshire and almost certainly the same bird as visited Heaton Park Reservoir in early February) and juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same as on 1st March) Heaton Park Reservoir roost

9th: Adult **Caspian Gull** (same individual as on 1st March) and three juvenile **Glaucous Gulls*** (one same individual as on 1st March and two new birds, both very pale and one of which quite a small bird), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

10th: Adult **Iceland Gull** (same individual as on 8th March), Pennington Flash

11th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same small bird as on 9th March) and juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same individual as on 1st March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost.

12th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (possibly same small individual as on 24th February, certainly not the bird from the 9th march), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

13th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (possibly the same larger individual as last seen on 1st March) and 2nd winter **Caspian Gull** (same individual as on 2nd January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

14th: Adult **Caspian Gull** (same individual as seen on 1st and 9th March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost (also seen at Arpley Tip, Cheshire on the morning of the 15th March)

15th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same individual as last seen 12th March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

17th: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same individual as on 15th March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

18th: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (probably not a new individual, most likely the same individual as last seen on the 7th March at Heaton Park Reservoir), Pennington Flash. 2nd winter **Caspian Gull** (same as on 2nd January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

19th: 2nd winter **Caspian Gull** (same individual as on 2nd January), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

22nd: 3000 **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** (highest count of the period in the county), juvenile **Iceland Gull** (probably same individual as on 7th March) and juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same 'hooded' individual as seen 1st March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

24th: Two juvenile **Iceland Gulls** (one same individual as on 7th March, the other being unable to ascertain positively to if it was a previous individual but not considered to be a new individual) and juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (smaller individual same as on 12th & 15th March), Pilsworth Landfill Site. Single juvenile **Iceland Gull** and **Glaucous Gull** (same individuals as seen earlier at Pilsworth Landfill Site), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

26th: Adult **Iceland Gull** (same bird as on 8th and 10th February), Pennington Flash roost. Juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same bird as on 12th and 15th March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

28th: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (not considered to be a new individual to the county), Scotmans Flash. Third winter **Kumlien's Gull** (same individual as first seen on the 2nd February, also seen again the previous days at Arpley Tip/Moore Nature Reserve, Cheshire), juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same bird as on 24th March), four **Yellow-legged Gulls** (highest single roost count of the winter 2007/2008 period), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

APRIL 2008

1st: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same individual as 24th March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

2nd: Two juvenile **Iceland Gulls*** (one same as on 24th March, the other a new, very coarsely marked individual) and juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (same individual as on 12th March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

4th: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same new individual as 2nd March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

6th: Two juvenile **Iceland Gulls** and juvenile **Glaucous Gull** (all considered to not be new to the county and most probably the same as those on the 2nd March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

10th: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same as 2nd March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

11th: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same as 2nd March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

12th: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same as at Heaton Park Reservoir previous two days), in a field at Simister late morning (very close to the aforementioned site) and the same juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same individual as 2nd March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost. Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (not considered to be a new individual to the county and possibly the same bird from Heaton Park Reservoir on 24th March), Whitehead Landfill Site, Astley

15th: Juvenile **Iceland Gull** (same birds as on 2nd March), Heaton Park Reservoir roost

21st: Juvenile **Glaucous Gull*** (considered to certainly be a new individual), Audenshaw Reservoirs

If anything, the one striking feature about the log of gulls above is not only the fact that there were so many individuals present on so many occasions but perhaps that the presence and re-occurrence of individuals in the roost varied so massively. Birds came and went from day to day with quite often never the same individual on consecutive days but often re-appearing sporadically it would seem. Perhaps there was some pattern to it but if there were then only the gulls themselves knew it!



Above: Iceland Gull at Pennington Flash, March 2008, both by John Tymon



Above: Glaucous Gull at Heaton Park Reservoir, January 2008 by Rob Adderley



Above: Glaucous Gull at Heaton Park Reservoir, March 2008 by Rob Adderley



Left: Sometimes, in fact quite often, a gull appears that defies your expectations, doesn't quite fit the mould or is just plain weird! This apparent 1st-winter Lesser Black-backed Gull was no exception, exhibiting third calendar year plumage characteristics but a seemingly fully adult type bill, causing the photographer more than a little head-scratching! Taken at Audenshaw Reservoirs during early April 2008 by Rob Adderley.

The third-winter Kumlien's Gull; proof of the wandering of the beast!



Above: The 3rd-winter Kumlien's Gull (bottom left individual) that graced Heaton Park Reservoir for all but about 15 minutes in the gloom of February, touring Derbyshire both before and after this sighting and re-appeared at the Heaton Park Reservoir roost again, twice in March! The grey in the primaries can just be made out on this image, February 2008 by Rob Adderley

The ability of gulls to wander tip to tip, county to county, has never been in doubt and is often a much-discussed subject whilst county gullers wait for the beasts to make their way into roosts and often we get the chance through so called 'marker birds' to prove the theory. These marker birds are individuals with unusual or particularly individual plumage traits or those with dyed or other semi-permanent plumage colouration (most often picked up from feeding on refuse tips) but whilst these birds can be relatively easily tracked within our own county, tracking their occurrences in neighbouring counties is often very difficult owing to the largely unavoidable deficiency in the passage of information within gullers county to county. Occasionally though, a bird fulfilling the former requirements and which is also rare enough that it's presence is not only highly likely to be the only one in that region but so that it's attendance at nightly roosts is broadcast nationally occurs, allowing us to track its route to some extent.

Such a bird was the third-winter Kumlien's Gull which was present in Greater Manchester three times during the early 2008 winter period and whilst it does not intend to be completely comprehensive, the list below gives you an idea of the majority of its movements at the very least. The same third-winter Kumlien's Gull was present at the following locations on the following dates during 2008:

24th January: Ogston Reservoir, Derbyshire

26th January: Broomhead Reservoir, South Yorkshire

2nd February: **Heaton Park Reservoir, Greater Manchester**

3rd February: Broomhead Reservoir, South Yorkshire

6th February: Langsett Reservoir, South Yorkshire

9th February: Broomhead Reservoir, South Yorkshire

8th March (am): Arpley Tip/Moore Nature Reserve, Cheshire

8th March (pm): **Heaton Park Reservoir, Greater Manchester**

26th March: Wigg Island, Cheshire

27th March: Arpley Tip/Moore Nature Reserve, Cheshire

28th March: Arpley Tip/Moore Nature Reserve, Cheshire

29th March (am): Arpley Tip/Moore Nature Reserve, Cheshire

29th March (pm): **Heaton Park Reservoir, Greater Manchester**

Below: The 3rd winter Kumlien's Gull at Heaton Park Reservoir on its second visit during March 2008 by Ian McKerchar



The second winter Caspian Gull at Heaton Park Reservoir and its sporadic appearances



Above: The 2nd winter Caspian Gull at Heaton Park Reservoir by Ian McKerchar

Another gull with a puzzling pattern of occurrences was the second-winter Caspian at Heaton Park Reservoir. As a very distinctive bird it was originally found on the 2nd of January 2008 but its occurrences within the county spanned three months as sporadic as they were, those appearances in the roost at Heaton Park Reservoir are listed below.

January

Present: 2nd, (roost not checked on the 3rd), 4th, 5th, 14th and 15th

February

Present: 21st and 26th

March

Present: 13th, 18th and 19th

Yet another 'marker bird' it could be relatively easily found amongst the gull roost and although it may very well have been missed on one or two occasions (usually due to overwhelming numbers or an attention diversion like the finding of something equally interesting) the fact that the Heaton Park Reservoir roost was covered so regularly and with such care we can be sure that on the clear majority of occasions it was simply not present. Given the large gaps in its appearances in the county, where could it have been meantime? The bird was apparently not found at any other sites in the north-west, although it seems possible that it could have gone unnoticed at the large, busy landfill sites of Arpley, Withnell and Whinney Hill at least but either way, with a month in between all the three groups of sightings it must have been somewhere!

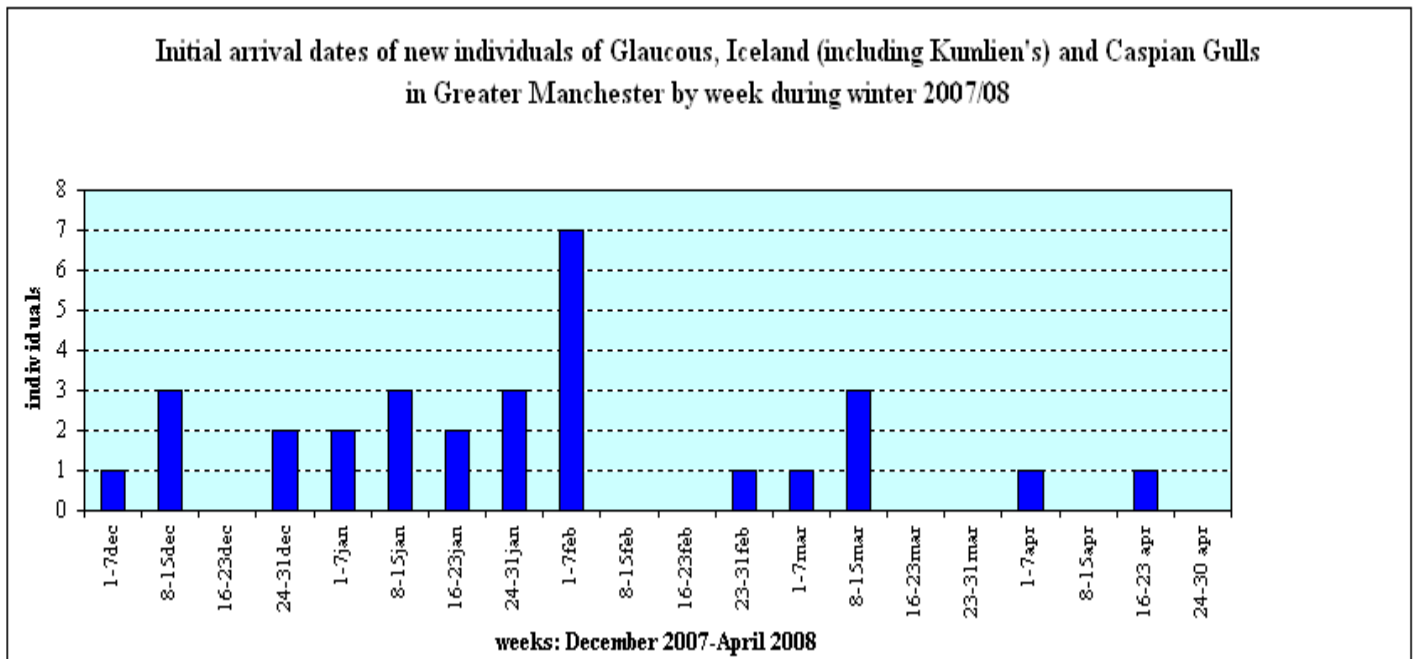
Analysis of gulls in the county during the period winter 2007/2008

Table 1 below: Total individuals present within Greater Manchester during the winter 2007/2008

Species	Total individuals	Individual ages
Iceland Gull	10	juvenile- 5, 2nd winter- 2, 3rd winter (Kumlien's)-1, adult- 2
Glaucous Gull	10	juvenile- 10
Caspian Gull	4	1st winter-1, 2nd winter-1, adult-2

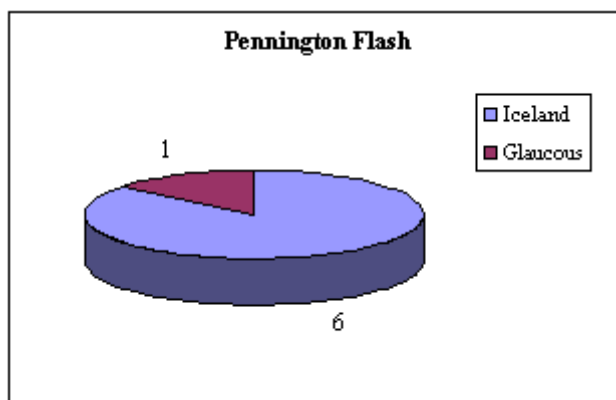
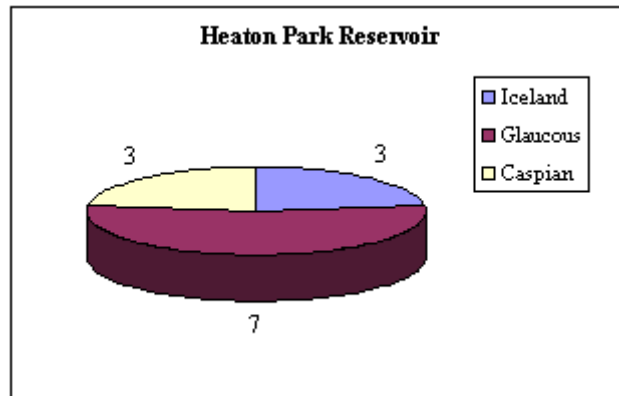
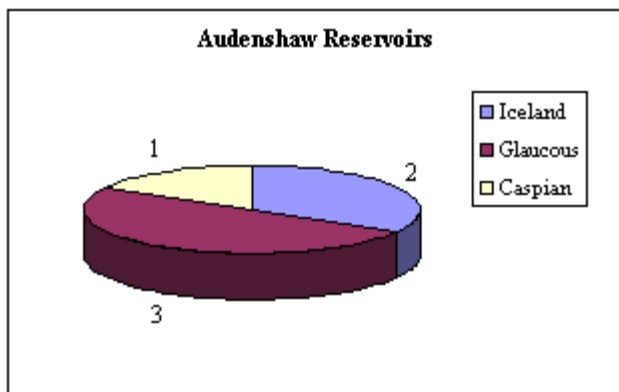
*Kumlien's Gull remains currently regarded as a race of Iceland Gull

Table 2 below: Initial arrival dates of all new individuals in Greater Manchester by week, winter 2007/2008



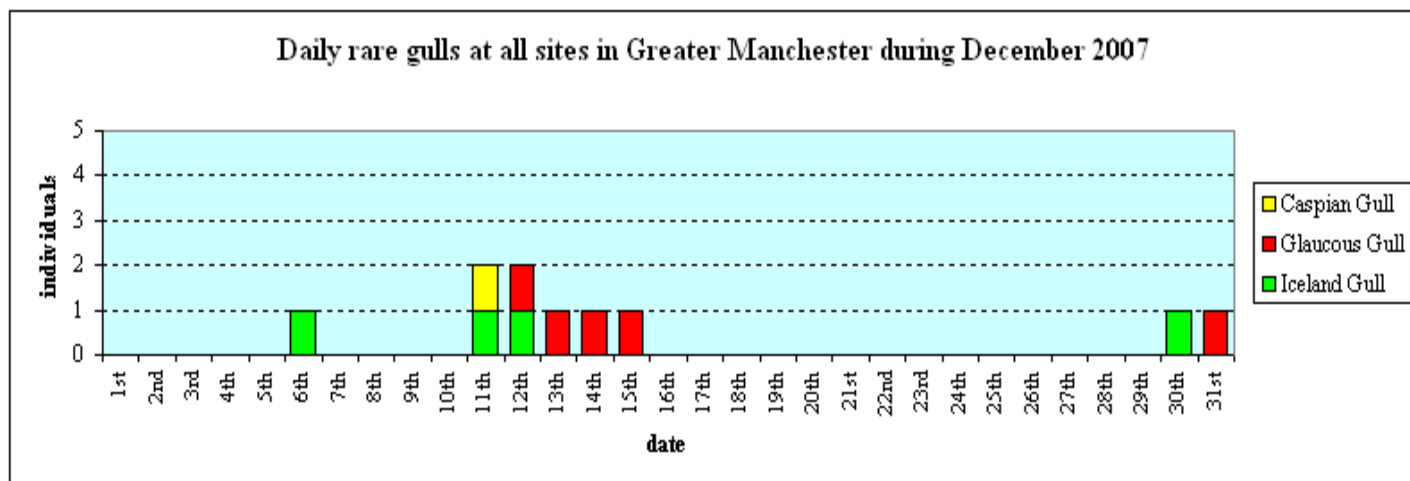
Tables 3-5: Individuals of each species at sites with more than 1 record in Greater Manchester, winter 2007/2008

Please note that all the gulls represented in the charts below are considered to be new individuals to the county (not duplicates), other than the Pennington Flash chart where both a single Iceland Gull and the Glaucous Gull were considered to be duplicates of birds that had been seen at other sites in the county previously.

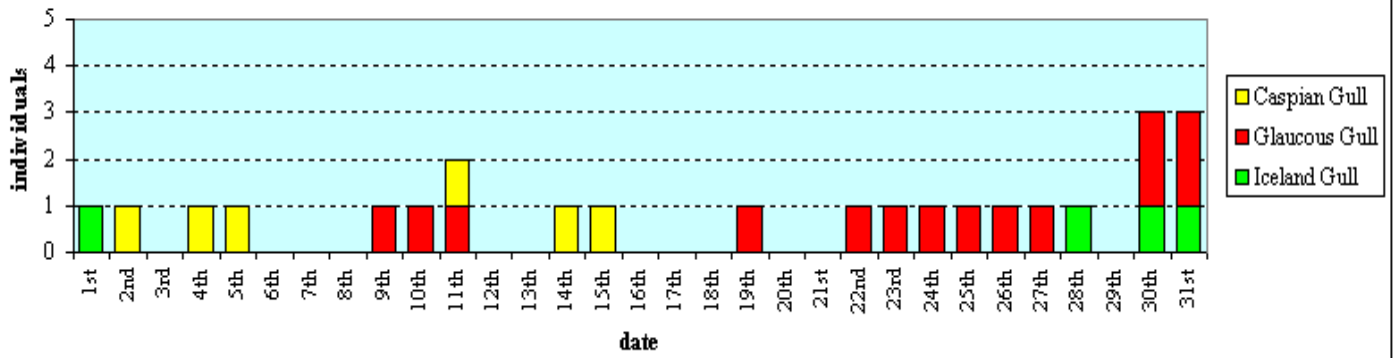


Tables 6-10 below: Daily rare gulls present at all sites in Greater Manchester by month, winter 2007/2008

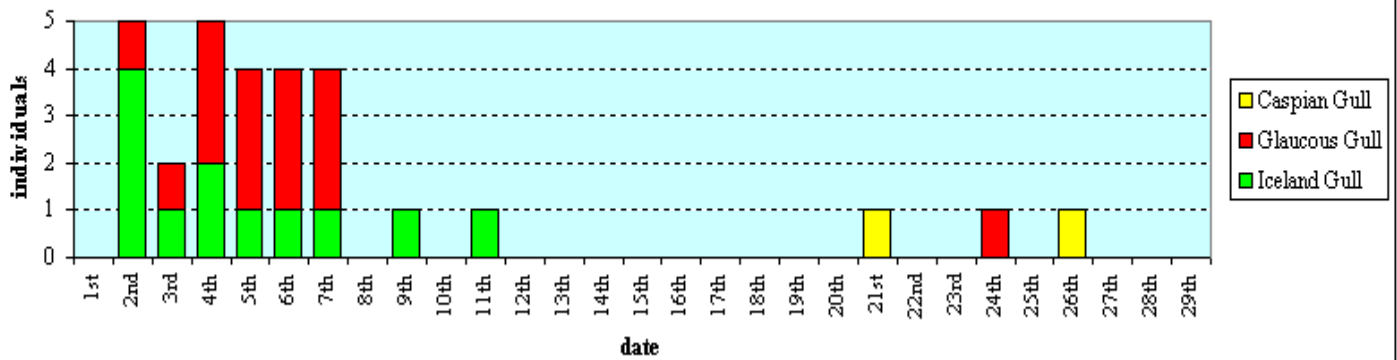
Please note that these tables represent all individuals seen in the county on those dates, both new birds and duplicates and that dates with no sightings do not necessarily infer that none were present but on some occasions the respective roosts etc. where simply not checked.



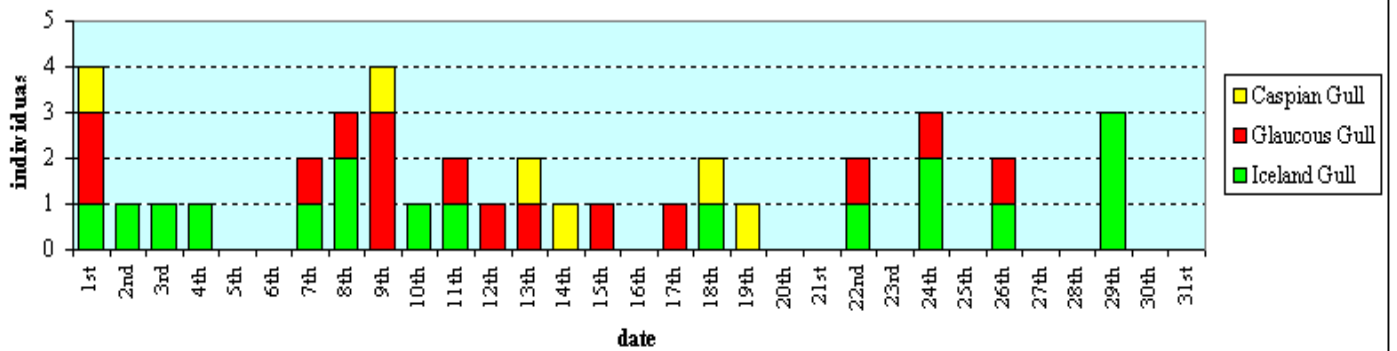
Daily rare gulls at all sites in Greater Manchester during January 2008



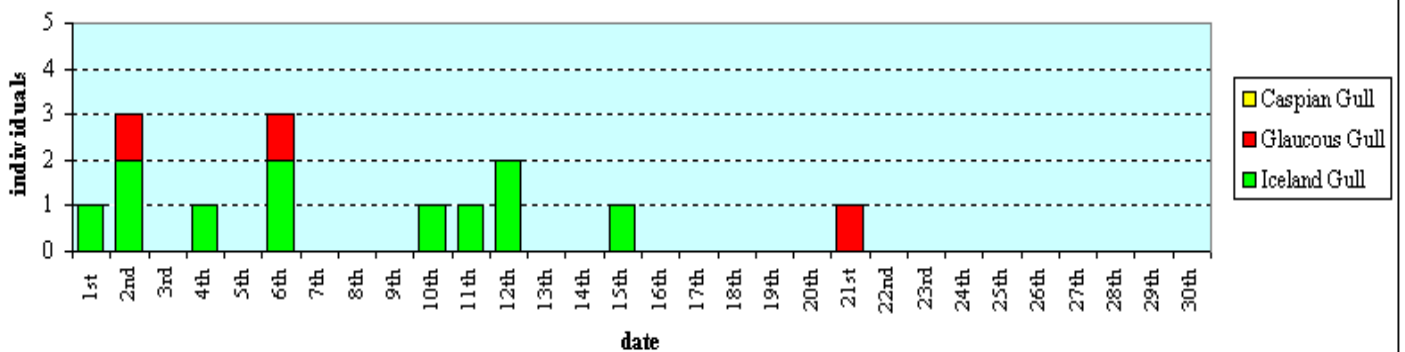
Daily rare gulls at all sites in Greater Manchester during February 2008



Daily rare gulls at all sites in Greater Manchester during March 2008



Daily rare gulls at all sites in Greater Manchester during April 2008





Iceland Gulls at Heaton Park Reservoir, February 2008 (above) and March 2008 (below) by Rob Adderley



Above: Iceland Gull at Heaton Park Reservoir, March 2008 by Ian McKerchar



Left: Glaucous Gull at Heaton Park Reservoir, March 2008 by Ian McKerchar



Above: Iceland Gull at Heaton Park Reservoir, March 2008 (different dates but probably the same bird) by Ian McKerchar.



Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Rob Adderley and Pete Berry for their essential assistance with this article, namely our usual lengthy and lively gull discussions but especially for assisting me with the identification and tracking of individuals during the period and to those birders who got out there in those cold evenings (although some more fortunate souls encountered these gulls during the 'warmer' days too!) and found the birds in the first place. They are (in no relevant order), John Tymon, Dave Broome, Simon Hitchen, Mark Rigby, Peter Alker, Sean Sweeny, Barry Hulme, Andy Makin, Rob and Sonia Adderley, Pete Berry, Simon Warford, Roger Haughton, Andy Isherwood, Paul Heaton, Simon Johnson, Paul Hammond and Phil Rhodes. My thanks are also to the photographers Tom McKinney, Rob Adderley, John Tymon and Pete Berry whose images were most often obtained in poor light as birds came into roosts 'right at the death' and the fact that some were useable at all is testament to their skill, patience and persistence.



The Heaton Park Reservoir roost right 'at the death' when gullers will still be picking out 'white wingers' despite the apparent pitch darkness! Photo by Ian McKerchar

Ian McKerchar, April 2008

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