

OBA Field Trip- Portland Gulls with Nick Mrvelj  
Trip Report, December 2, 2023

The morning of December 2nd, 2023 was cold and moderately wet. Over twenty brave souls ventured out to the banks of the Willamette River in Portland to hopefully catch close-up glimpses of gulls. Gull field trips are always a bit challenging, as there are no guarantees that gulls will be present at a given location when you want them to be. This field trip was no exception. We had to park in a University of Portland parking lot and then walk 200 meters or so to the river. But before we could even get to the river, a train blocked our way! Even worse, beyond the train, there were very few gulls to be seen, and almost none on our side of the river. Uh-oh. Not a good start to a gull identification field trip, especially when some folks had traveled more than three hours to get there!

As if hearing our collective pleas, the conditions began to rapidly improve. The train obliged us and moved out of the way. And the gulls slowly began trickling into the area and moving over to our side of the river. It was game on.



*Hardy gullers at Harbor View Park, Portland. Photo by Jenny Jones*

We ended up spending over three hours along the Willamette River that day, and saw several hundred gulls. The main goal of the trip, outside of actually tracking down gulls, was to focus on how to identify the main gull species and hybrids that frequent much of Western Oregon each fall and winter. To that end, it was a pretty successful field trip. We saw the "expected seven" and even had plenty of the two main kinds of Glaucous-winged Gull hybrids. This means we saw:

- California Gulls
- Glaucous-winged Gulls
- Herring Gulls
- Iceland Gulls
- Ring-billed Gulls
- Short-billed Gulls
- Western Gulls
- Cook Inlet Gulls (GWGU x HERG)
- Olympic Gulls (GWGU x WEGU)



Best bird of the day? Likely Kumlien's Iceland Gull. Photo by Nick Mrvelj

Unsurprisingly, the most abundant species we saw were Glaucous-winged Gulls. We spent a fair amount of time not only learning how to identify each species, but also how to recognize the various ages (1st winter, 2nd winter, 3rd winter, etc) The best gull we saw that day was a beautifully frosty, 1st winter Iceland Gull that was more than likely a *Kumlien's* Iceland Gull.

Photos and a complete bird list from the day can be found here:

[eBird Checklist - 2 Dec 2023 - Harbor View Park - 32 species \(+6 other taxa\)](#)

Thanks to everyone that came out and made it through three hours of straight gull watching! It is no small feat. A special thanks to Jenny Jones for organizing the trip, Conor Scotland, and Karthik Murali for constantly scanning the gulls, and to the Oregon Birding Association for making the whole thing possible.

Good gulling,  
-Nick Mrvelj (Portland)