

Gulls of MacArthur Park

Abundant

Western Gull
California Gull

Uncommon/Scarce (usually only see 1-2 birds if present at all)

Glaucous-winged Gull
Herring Gull
Iceland (Thayer's Gull)

Hybrids

Cook Inlet - Glaucous-winged x Herring
Olympic - Glaucous-winged x Western
Ring-billed Gull

Rare

Short-billed Gull
Bonaparte's Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull

The default gull is either Western or California. We need to begin the ID process by getting familiar with Western and California Gulls. Even with the myriad of age-related plumages, we'll use bill size and shape, head shape and leg color to easily separate these 2 species.

From there, we'll carefully work through the flocks hoping to find a few other different species where we will use the following criteria:

Leg Color - very useful for ID if dealing with standing older birds

Mantle Shade - very useful for ID if dealing with older birds

Bill color - can be useful at all ages

Bill shape, size - can be useful at all ages

Head shape - can be useful at all ages

Ageing - It's usually not critical to age a gull in order to ID it. However, understanding how age changes the appearance is very useful and can help explain why a flock of the same species will look so different from bird to bird. It also makes it a little more interesting and satisfying when you can actually age the birds you are looking at. And there are occasions, however, when ageing will be critical to the ID, for instance when comparing Ring-billed (3yr gull) to California (4 yr gull).

Text and Photos by Andy Birch





WESTERN pink in all ages but note variable pink!

LEG COLOR

Is a very good place to start and in older gulls will get you most of the way there for the common LA Co species:

Western = pink all ages

California = green/yellow in older birds

Ring-billed = green/yellow older birds

Heerman's (coast only) = black all ages

Herring = pink all ages

Glaucous-winged, Thayer's = pink all ages



CALIFORNIA
pink in younger birds



CALIFORNIA
dull green to bright yellow
in older birds

WESTERN



WESTERN

HERRING

RING-BILLED

CALIFORNIA

In these adult gulls to the left note leg color and mantle shade. Western has darkest mantle, then California and in this pic the Herring and Ring-billed are very similar. But leg color is very different between these species!

BILL SIZE, SHAPE, COLOR & HEAD SHAPE

Text and Photos by Andy Birch



WESTERN - bill chunky with expanded tip. Young birds usually dark with some pale at base but not sharp contrast like California. Head shape has flat forehead - meaner looking



CALIFORNIA - bill slender, parallel sided. Young birds usually neatly bicolored. Head shape is smoother with softer face



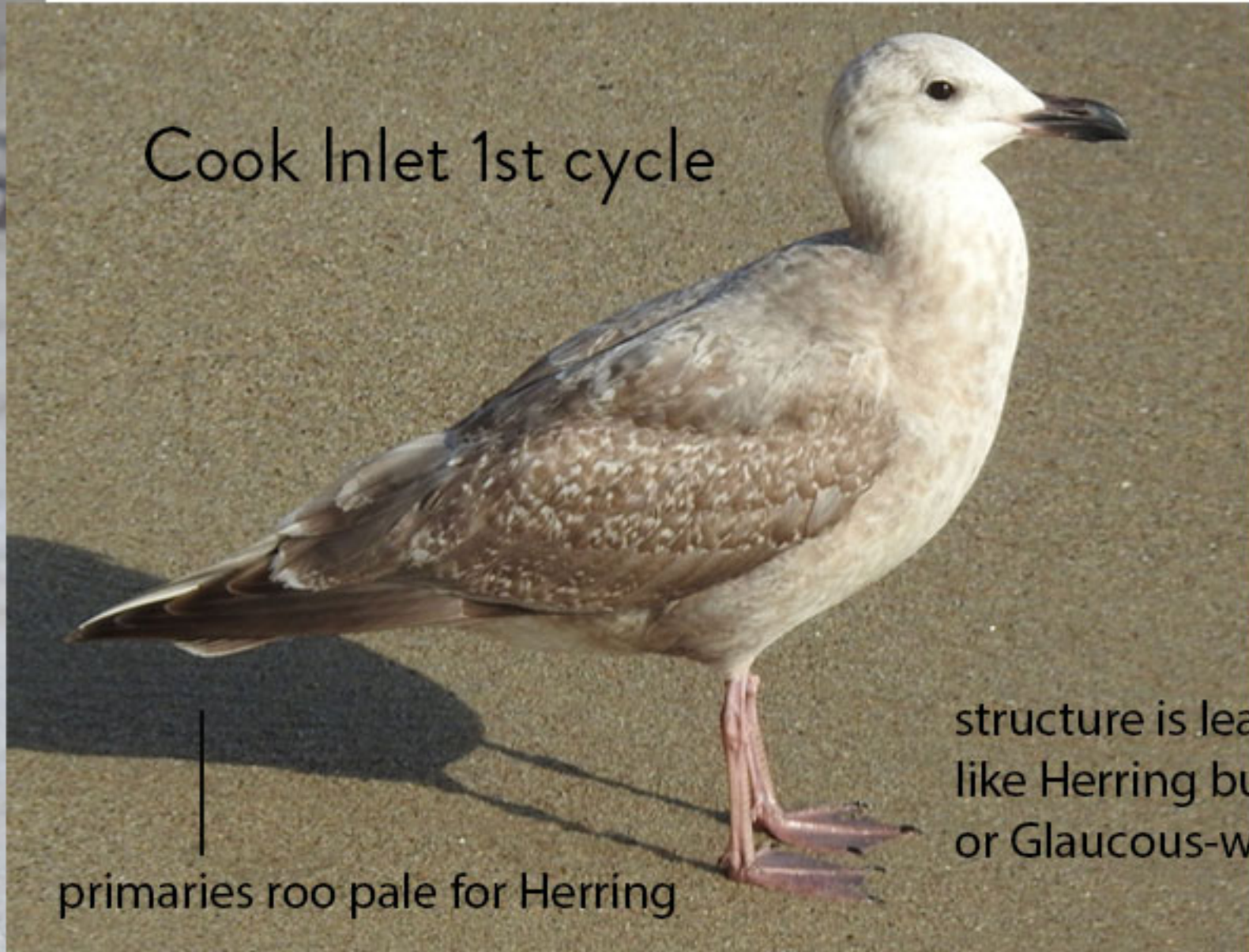
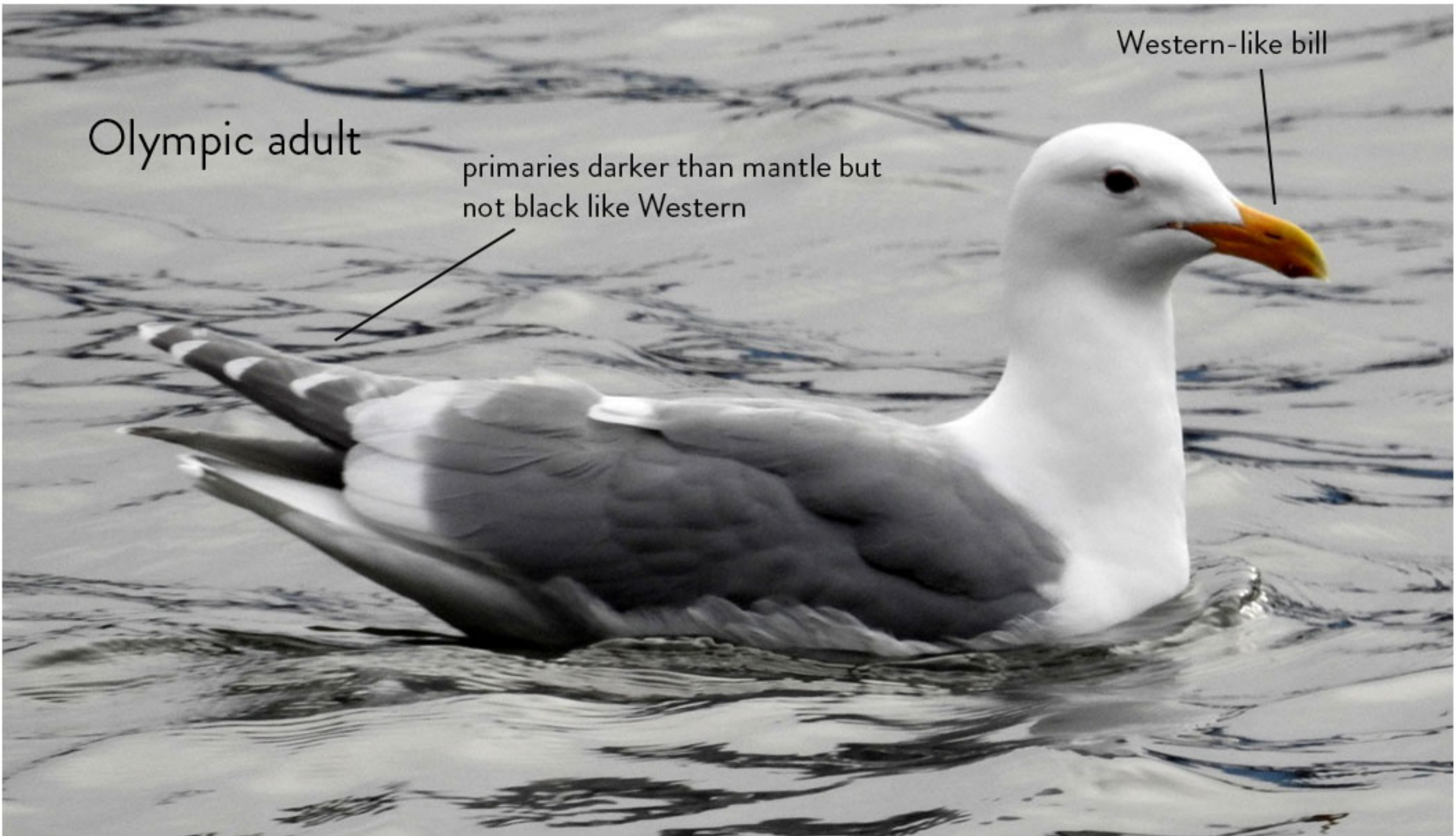
GLAUCOUS-WINGED - bill & head shape like Western. Bills of young birds usually nearly all dark



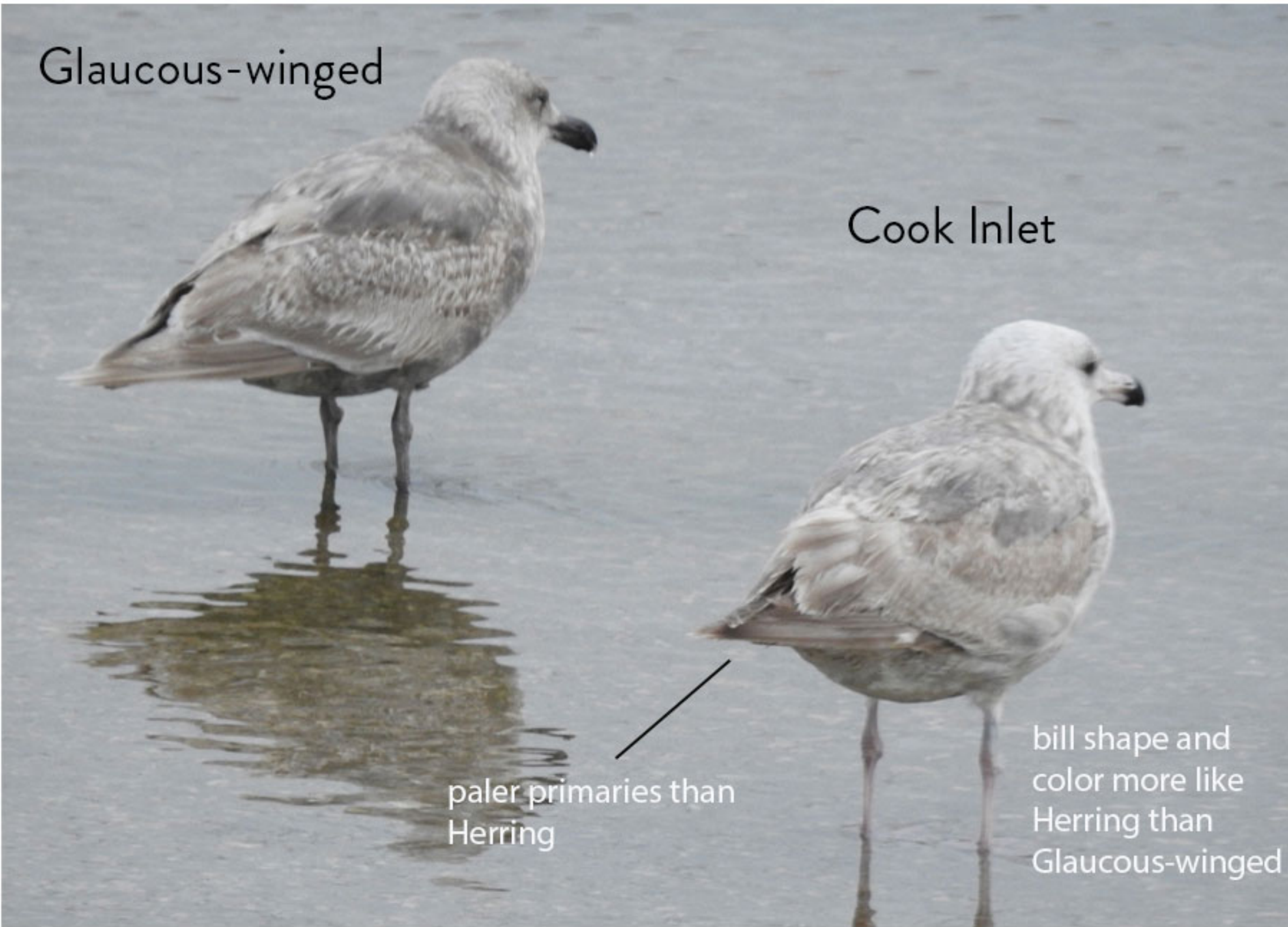
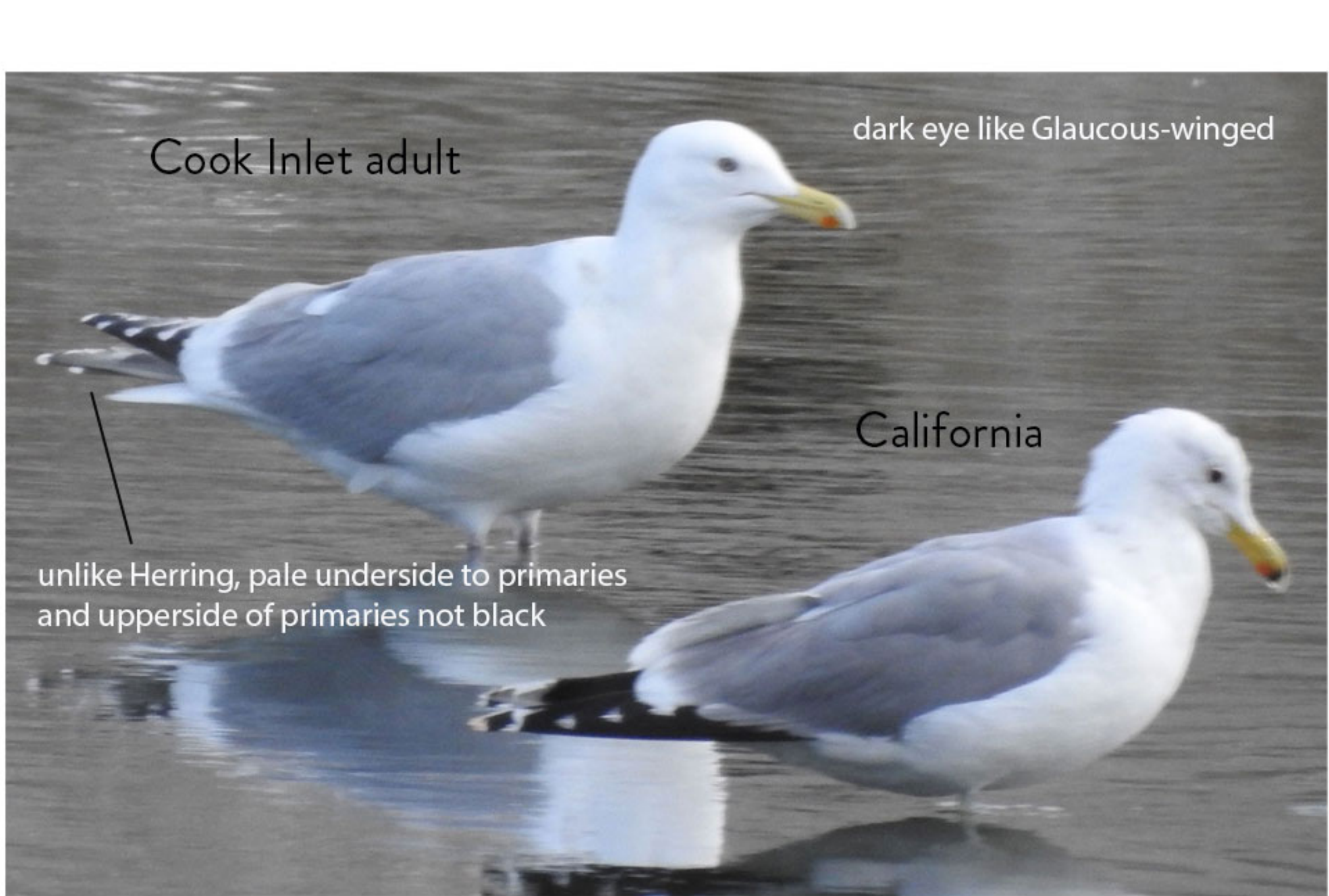
HERRING - bill & head shape like California. Young birds can often have bicolored bills

THAYER'S - bill shape like Herring but bills of young usually all dark & can often be smaller with also a gentler, softer "dove-like" head shape

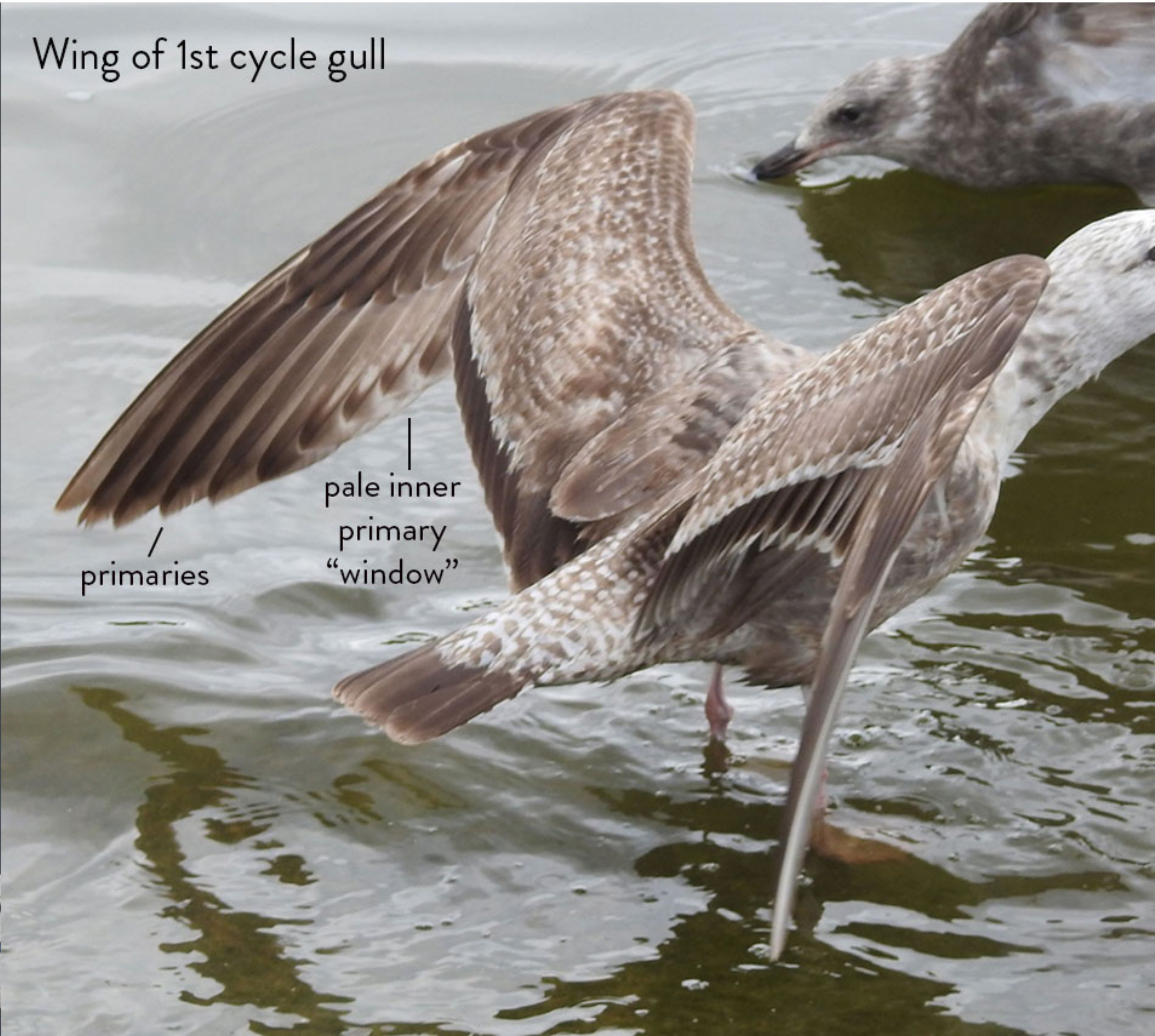
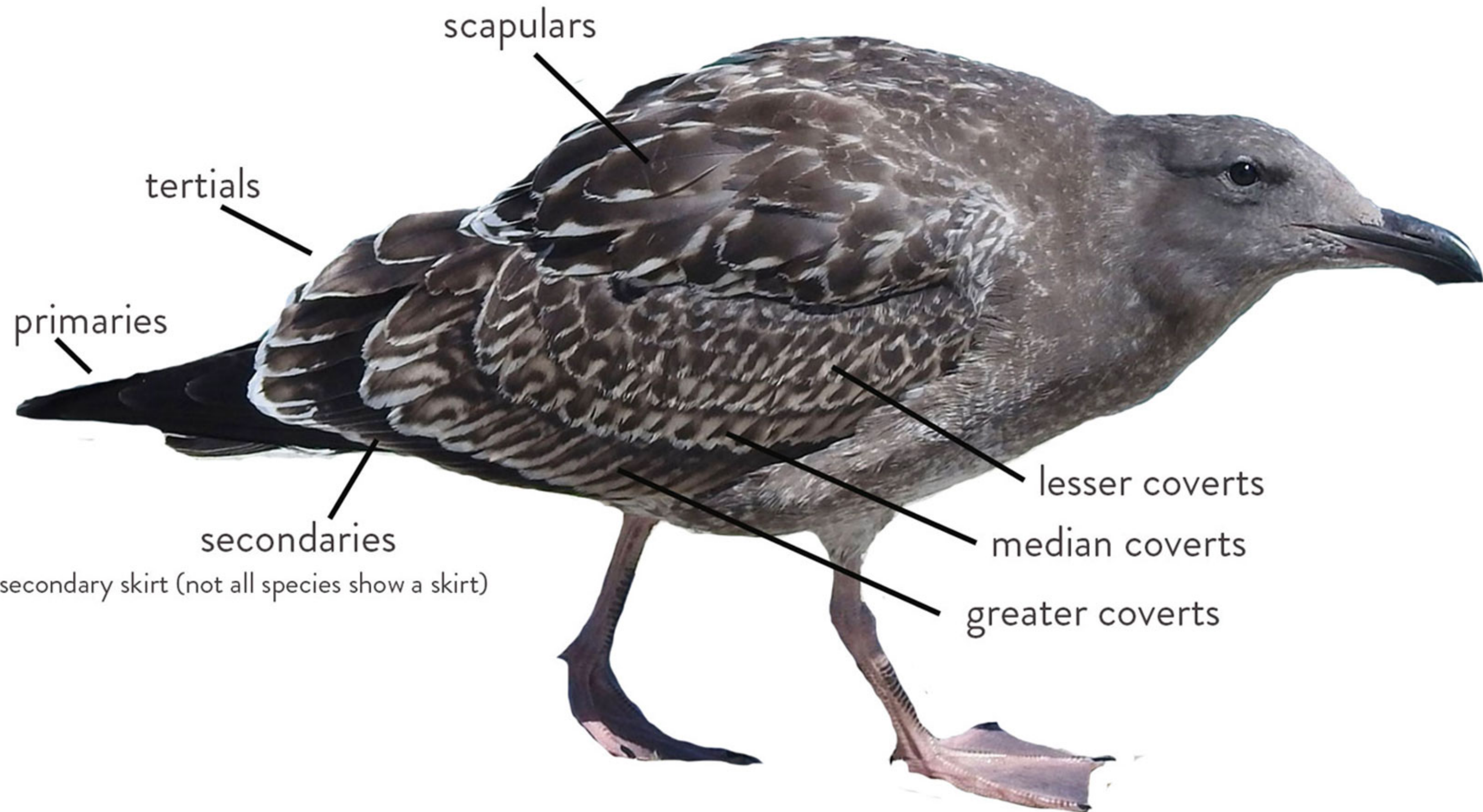
HYBRIDS “Olympic” Gull (Glaucous-winged x Western) chunky Western-like bill & head but primaries paler than Western



“Cook Inlet” (Glaucous-winged x Herring) can be more Herring-like but paler primaries and dirtier plumage than Herring. Very similar to many Thayer’s Gulls.



Important Parts of a Gull



Gulls are generally aged by looking at their wing coverts. See arrow on 1st & 2nd cycle pointing to where coverts are. In this example, we are assuming this gull was born in July (eg the Dec' banded 1st cycle was). A new cycle begins when the flight feathers begin to molt-see photo at bottom

1ST CYCLE (1st year of life, July to July)



2ND CYCLE (2nd year of life July to July)

Coverts are more marbled, “wavy” and less checkered than 1st cycle. Usually scapulars and coverts have more gray feathers, body plumage whiter



3RD CYCLE (3rd year of life, July to July). 4TH CYCLE and above is adult and not shown

look more adult-like on the wings but immaturity showing on the bill and around the head. Often some black in the tail

