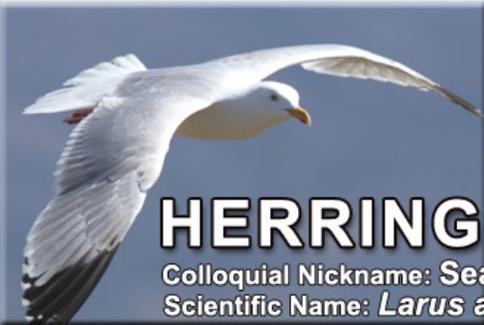


Uncommon Guide to Common Life on Narragansett Bay

A continuing series that describes the common fish, invertebrates, plants, water birds and marine mammals that share our Bay.



HERRING GULL

Colloquial Nickname: **Seagull**
Scientific Name: **Larus argentatus**



Field Markings: White body with pale gray wings and back; black wing tips with white spots; pink legs and feet. Bright yellow bill with an orange spot.
Size: 23 to 26 inches long, with a wingspan of 58 inches

Habitat: Ocean coasts, bays, beaches, piers, farmland, landfills.
Seasonal Appearance: Year-round, plus overwintering population

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES AND BEHAVIORS

Herring gulls are the most common gulls on the Atlantic coast. An adult is easily recognized by its overall white body with pale gray wings and back. Gulls can appear so similar, they are commonly lumped into one category called "seagulls." A "seagull" is not a specific species of bird, but rather a common term incorrectly used for all gull species.

Herring gulls do not acquire their distinctive adult plumage until they are four years old, which makes juveniles difficult to identify. In the first three years, their plumage varies from an overall brown with darker, brownish wings to a lighter gray color, gradually changing from season to season. The color of the bill, eyes and legs also changes with the age of the bird, from dark to yellow by the time they reach adulthood.

Most gull species feed on fish and shellfish; however, herring gulls have become so adapted to human society they will eat just about anything. They are amazing scavengers, eating garbage, carcasses, food scraps, shellfish, berries, eggs and other bird species. Herring gulls are pirates and will steal food from other birds whenever the opportunity arises.

Herring gulls nest in colonies on the islands of Narragansett Bay and off the coast, usually in areas inaccessible to ground predators. Colonies are formed on the ground near vegetation,

on rocky ledges or sometimes on grassy dunes. Pairs set up a territory around their nests and return to the site every year.

RELATIONSHIP TO PEOPLE

In 1990, there were over 6,000 herring gull nests detected in Narragansett Bay. More recently, annual nest numbers have ranged from 2,811 in 1998 to 2,286 in 2007. This population increase is likely due to the increase in landfills and the bird's ability to scavenge. Landfill closures and better trash management in Rhode Island are probably causes of the reduced Bay population.

Before 1918, the herring gull population may have been controlled by humans hunting their eggs. Increased populations are a threat to other sea birds, such as terns and smaller gulls. Herring gulls drive birds away from their nesting sites, steal food and prey on chicks and even small adults. Managing and covering landfills so they are not a ready food source is one measure that helps control rising gull populations.

HOW TO GET YOUR OWN COPY

RISAA members can purchase their own copy of *The Uncommon Guide To Common Life on Narragansett Bay* for \$15 from the RISAA Merchandise Committee. Stop by the committee table at any monthly RISAA meeting.



CHOOSE RELIABLE. REPOWER WITH THE EXPERTS!

ocean house marina

YAMAHA



GARMIN Sweetwater *Bluebeam* REGULATOR
Aqua Patio MARTINE *Spirit* BOATS Sanpan *Rossiter*

WWW.OCEANHOUSEMARINA.COM | GO TOWN DOCK RD | CHARLESTOWN, RI 02813 | 401-364-6040

Don't Settle for Less

State-of-the-Art

Rescue Towboats

Based in:

Narragansett Bay • Point Judith • Block Island

SAFE/SEA

401-295-8711 www.safesea.com

