

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

RING-BILLED GULL

Larus delawarensis

Family: LARIDAE

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

B214

Written by: M. Rigney

Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt

Edited by: R. Duke

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common to abundant, yearlong resident of California coastal areas, the Central Valley, Salton Sea, Colorado River, and northeastern plateau. It is the most abundant and widespread inland gull. In summer, it is far less abundant in most areas, with breeding individuals migrating north to the northern Great Basin and Canada. Breeds marginally in northeastern California, but largely withdraws from this area in the winter. Prefers dumps, wet croplands and pastures, lacustrine and riverine habitats, and emergent wetlands. Small numbers are found at the Salton Sea, and nonbreeders are found year-round in coastal regions of southern California (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Fairly common in northeastern California from late March through October near alkali lakes and nearby croplands (Cogswell 1977). It is rarely seen in pelagic marine habitat (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Forages in croplands, garbage dumps, and wetlands. Gleans, searches, dives for fish, and catches insects in the air (Mueller and Berger 1965). The diet is extremely variable and includes, fish, insects, earthworms, crustaceans, and garbage (Jarvis and Southern 1976). Also eats grain, mice and other small rodents, amphibians and reptiles, and carrion. Also consumes a large volume of plant material early in the breeding season (Vermeer 1970).

Cover: Rests or roosts on levees, dikes, or small islands near feeding areas.

Reproduction: Nests are placed on the ground in the open, or partially concealed by rocks and boulders, around the margins of lakes, or on islands in lakes.

Water: Bathes in and drinks fresh water.

Pattern: Most abundant near garbage dumps with adjoining croplands or water.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Adults arrive at breeding areas in northeastern California from late April through early May. Some individuals 1 and 2 yr old may remain on wintering grounds through breeding season. Juveniles begin arriving in Central Valley and coastal areas in late July (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Breeding adults return to these areas August through October.

Home Range: Has been reported foraging an average of 11 km (6.7 mi) from nesting colony (Baird 1977).

Territory: Defends an area of 1-5 m² (11-56 ft²) (Vermeer 1970). Vermeer (1970) reported inter-nest distances of 0.3 to 5.2 m (1-17 ft), with an average of 0.6 m (2 ft).

Reproduction: This species breeds from April through mid-August, with a peak late May through June. Clutch size averages 2.8 to 2.9 eggs; range 1-5. Four and 5-egg clutches, usually infertile, may have been laid by 2 females functioning as a pair (Ryder and Somppi 1979, Conover et al. 1979). Both members of pair incubate eggs. Incubation period is 28-29 days. Young are capable of flight 37 days after hatching. Usually begins breeding in 3d yr.

Niche: Commonly harasses other fish-eating birds and steals their catches.

REFERENCES

- Baird, P. A. 1977. Feeding ecology of ring-billed and California gulls (*Larus delawarensis* and *L. californicus*). *Pacific Seabird Bull.* 4:16-17.
- Bent, A. C. 1921. Life histories of North American gulls and terns. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 113. 345pp.
- Cogswell, H. L. 1977. Water birds of California. Univ. California Press, Berkeley. 399pp.
- Conover, M. R., D. E. Miller, and G. L. Hunt. 1979. Female-female pairs and other reproductive associations in ring-billed gulls and California gulls. *Auk* 96:1-5.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Jarvis, W. L., and W. E. Southern. 1976. Food habits of ring-billed gulls breeding in the Great Lakes region. *Wilson Bull.* 88:621-623.
- Mueller, H. D., and D. D. Berger. 1965. Ring-billed gulls feed on flying ants. *Auk* 82:504.
- Ryder, J. P., and P. L. Somppi. 1979. Female-female pairing in ring-billed gulls. *Auk* 96:1-5.
- Vermeer, K. 1970. Breeding biology of California and ring-billed gulls. *Canadian Wildl. Serv., Ottawa. Rep. Ser. No. 12.* 51pp. The distribution of the birds of California. *Pac. Coast Avifauna No. 27.* 608pp.

B214

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. California's Wildlife. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.