

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

THAYER'S GULL

Larus thayeri

Family: LARIDAE
B217

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Incompletely studied because of its recently recognized status as a separate species from the herring gull (Gosselin and David 1975, Lehman 1980). It is considered a fairly common, but irregular mid-winter visitor along the entire coast of California (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Cogswell 1977). The largest numbers have been recorded at the periphery of San Francisco Bay (McCaskie et al. 1979), and at estuaries and dumps of the San Diego and Santa Maria areas, where it arrives in October and departs by April or early May (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Also rare, but regular, at the Salton Sea and the Channel Islands (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Elsewhere inland, an uncommon visitor to the Central Valley where it concentrates at dumps (Cogswell 1977).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Feeding pattern similar to herring gull. Both species forage for surface fishes, waste from sewage outlets, garbage at dumps, and marine invertebrates (Terres 1980). In Baja California, has been observed feeding on marine mammal carcasses, fish offal, and pelagic crabs (Devillers et al. 1971).

Cover: When not feeding, roosts on open ground at dumps, bays, and sandy beaches. Usually observed in flocks loafing with herring gull and other species (Devillers et al. 1971, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

Reproduction: Breeds in northern Canada and western Greenland (Lehman 1980). Nests in colonies on cliffs with Kumlien's gull, glaucous gull, and other species (Terres 1980). Nest is a large, deep cup of mosses and other plant materials (Harrison 1978).

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Primarily frequents coastal waters, beaches, estuaries, and, less commonly, inland dumps (Cogswell 1977).

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity. Few data are available on activities, but habits apparently are similar to those of the closely related herring gull (Bent 1921, Terres 1980).

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Long-distance migrant from arctic breeding areas to wintering grounds, principally on the Pacific Coast of the U.S. (Dwight 1925, Terres 1980). Arrives in California in October and departs by April or early May.

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: No data found.

Reproduction: Nesting begins in late May or early June. Clutch usually contains 2-3 eggs (Harrison 1978). Incubation lasts about 26 days, and newly hatched young are semiprecocial. Young are tended by both parents (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Most frequently observed where herring gull concentrates at shorelines, flooded fields, and refuse disposal sites (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Life histories of the 2 species are extremely similar (Terres 1980).

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- Terres, J. K. 1980. The Audubon Society encyclopedia of North American birds. A. Knopf, New York. 1100pp. Colonies. Clutch size 1-3 eggs; usually 3 (Kadler and Drury 1968). Indeterminant layer; can compensate for early egg losses by additional laying (Parsons 1976b). Single-brooded (Harrison 1978); incubation 30 days, or less (Pierotti 1982). Young semiprecocial and tended by both parents (Harrison 1978). Juveniles reach adult size at 30-40 days (Harris 1964), and fly 42-49 days after hatching (Terres 1980).

Niche: Perhaps the best known and widely studied gull of North America and Europe (Bent 1921, Tinbergen 1953). New England populations have increased dramatically since the early 1900s resulting from greater availability of food at harbors, sewage outfalls, and dumps (Kadlec and Drury 1968). Colonies with human disturbances have reduced hatching success (Hunt 1972). Sources of chick mortality include cannibalism and predation by other gulls and corvids (Harris 1964). Erwin (1971) noted reduced nesting success when nesting occurred in close proximity to great black-backed gulls. DDT was suggested as a factor that reduced reproductive success in Lake Erie (Morris and Haymes 1977). A probable herring x glaucous gull hybrid was collected in San Diego (Jehl 1971), and additional evidence of hybridization is given by Terres (1980).

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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.