

Black-legged Kittiwake

Rissa tridactyla

A small, cliff-nesting gull, the Black-legged Kittiwake breeds along northern coasts and winters out at sea.

Keys to Identification

Adult Description

- Medium-sized to small gull.
- Small, unmarked yellow bill.
- Head and underparts white.
- Back medium gray.
- Wingtips black, without white spots, as if dipped in ink.
- Legs black.

Immature Description

Juvenile with white underparts, gray back, gray patches on nape and crown, dark spot at the ears, black collar, black wingtips, and a dark bar across the wing. Wings show a dark “M” pattern in flight. Tail white with a black tip. Legs black.



Cool Facts

- The hind toe on the foot of the Black-legged Kittiwake is reduced to a tiny bump, giving the bird its scientific name *tridactyla*, meaning “three-toed” (instead of four on each foot).
- The Black-legged Kittiwake typically nests on cliff ledges, but will occasionally use man-made structures. It has been known to nest on buildings and shipwrecks.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 15.1 - 16.1 inches
- Wingspan - 37 inches
- Weight - 10.8 - 18.5 ounces