

Laughing Gull

Leucophaeus atricilla

Swirling over beaches with strident calls and a distinctive, crisp black head, Laughing Gulls provide sights and sounds evocative of summer on the East Coast. You'll run across this handsome gull in large numbers at beaches, docks, and parking lots, where they wait for handouts or fill the air with their raucous calls. Laughing Gulls are summer visitors to the Northeast and year-round sights on the coasts of the Southeast and the Gulf of Mexico.



Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Laughing Gulls are medium-sized gulls with fairly long wings and long legs that impart a graceful look when they are flying or walking. They have stout, fairly long bills.

Color Pattern

Laughing Gulls are medium gray above and white below. Summer adults have a crisp black hood, white arcs around the eye, and a reddish bill. In winter, the hood becomes a blurry gray mask on a white head. The legs are reddish black to black. Immatures are much browner and more subtly patterned than adults; they take 2-3 years to gain adult plumage.

Behavior

Laughing Gulls eat almost anything, including food they catch or steal, handouts, garbage, and discards from fishing boats. They often congregate in parking lots, sandy beaches, and mud bars. Listen for their nasal, strident calls in flight, while feeding, and at rest.

Habitat

Laughing Gulls are a coastal species and are only occasionally seen very far inland. Look for them in plowed fields, garbage dumps, parking lots, and shorelines. They nest, often in large numbers, on islands near the shore but safely isolated from terrestrial predators.

Cool Facts

- The adult Laughing Gull removes the eggshells from the nest after the eggs hatch. If the shells are not removed, a piece can become lodged on top of the slightly smaller unhatched third egg and prevent it from hatching.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 15.4 - 18.1 inches
- Wingspan - 36.2 - 47.2 inches
- Weight - 7.2 - 13.1 ounces