

California Gull

Larus californicus

A common winter gull of the West Coast, the California Gull breeds inland across large areas of the West. It can be found in parking lots and lakes from California to Manitoba.

Keys to Identification

Adult Description

- Medium-sized gull.
- Yellow bill with black ring near the tip and red spot on lower mandible.
- Head and underparts white.
- Back medium dark gray.
- Wingtips black with white spots.
- Legs yellow-green.

Immature Description

Juvenal Plumage:

Dark brown head and body, face and nape paler. Back brown with light edgings to feathers. Throat, breast, belly, and undertail barred gray-brown and white. Tail black, edged in white. Flight feathers on wing blackish. Inner primaries and secondaries gray-black. Greater wing coverts black. Bill black, base getting lighter over time. Legs brown to black. Eyes dark brown.

First Winter (Basic I):

Like juvenal, but head, throat, and breast whiter, and back is dusky gray with spots of brown. Belly is mainly white. Bill black with base becoming paler. Eyes dark brown.

First Summer (Alternate I):

Head, neck, throat, breast, and belly mostly white. Dusky mottling still on belly, sides of throat, lower nape, and around eyes. Back blue-gray with varying amounts of spotting. Wing feathers worn and paler brown. Rump white. Undertail a mix of white and barred feathers. Bill pale with black tip. Eyes dark brown.

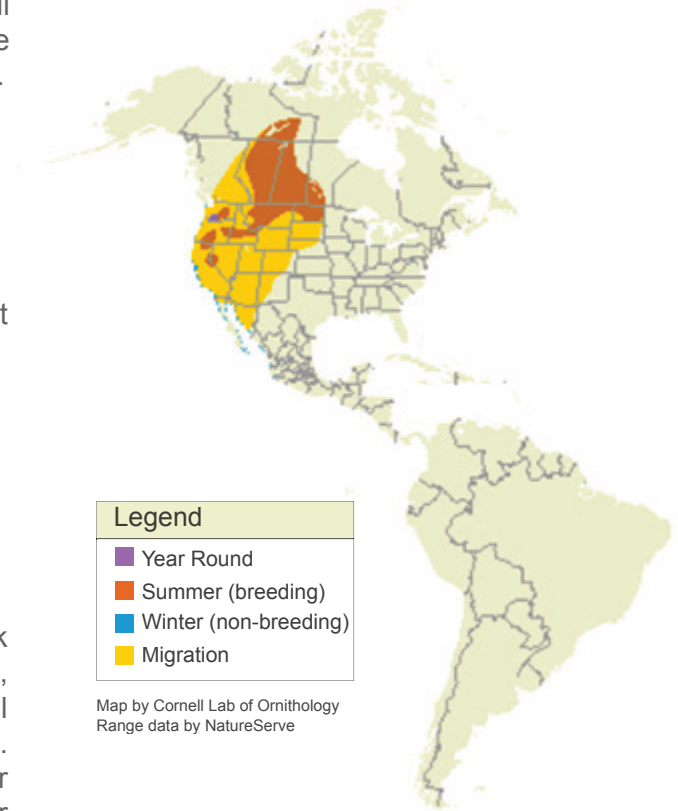
Second Winter (Basic II):

Head, throat, and belly mostly white. Dusky mottling on sides, sides of neck, and nape. Wing tips black, but outermost two feathers may have white spots. Back gray, wings mottled gray and brown. Rump and undertail white. Tail white at base with black outer half and white tip. Bill creamy white, with black band near white tip. Eyes dark brown. Legs bluish gray.

Second Summer (Alternate II):

Head and neck largely white, but most birds have some dusky markings on lower nape. Wing tips black, but outermost two may have white spots. Back gray, wings mottled gray and brown. Underparts mostly white, with some birds having dark feathers in center of belly. Bill cream to greenish to yellow, with black band and beginning of red spot on lower mandible. Eyes dark brown. Legs and feet variable, cream to gray to greenish to yellow.

Third Winter (Basic III):



Extensive grayish brown streaking on back of otherwise white head and neck. Back gray. Underparts white. Tail largely white with variable dark markings, usually toward the tip. Outer wing feathers (primaries) black with white subterminal spots on some. Bill yellow with black band and variable red spot. Eyes dark brown.

Third Summer (Alternate III):

Head and neck pure white or with some dusky markings. Back all gray. Underparts white. Tail white with some dark smudging. Bill yellow with black band and some red on lower mandible. Eyes dark brown. Legs light greenish.

Cool Facts

- The California Gull is the “seagull” that came to the aid of Mormon settlers in Utah, helping rid their crops of a plague of grasshoppers. A golden statue in Salt Lake City commemorates the event, and in recognition the California Gull was made the state bird of Utah.
- The California Gull, like most gulls, is an opportunistic feeder, eating anything it can catch or scavenge. It has an odd foraging strategy for catching alkali flies along the shores of salty lakes in the Great Basin. It starts at one end of a huge raft of flies sitting on the beach and runs through the flies with its head down and bill open, snapping up flies.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 18.5 - 21.3 inches
- Wingspan - 51.2 inches
- Weight - 15.2 - 36.9 ounces