

## Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*



**Folk Name:** Sea Gull

**Status:** Migrant, Winter Resident

**Abundance:** Common to Abundant

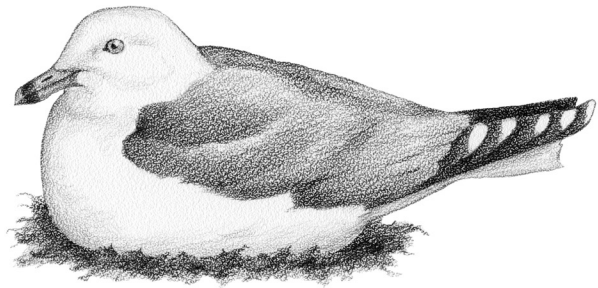
**Habitat:** Open water, lakes, ponds, rivers, landfills, shopping centers

The Ring-billed Gull is the most widespread and abundant gull found in the Central Carolinas. If you see a gull in this region, expect it to be a Ring-billed Gull until you can prove yourself wrong. This gull breeds in the Midwestern United States and north into Canada. Many begin to arrive in this region in September or October and almost all have departed by May. It does not breed anywhere in the Carolinas, but we do have records of Ring-billed Gulls present every month of the year. Summering birds are usually reported to be immature birds. As might be expected, this gull gets its common name from the dark ring circling the yellow bill in adult birds.

The earliest Ring-billed Gulls reported in this region were a pair seen by Larry Crawford on High Rock Lake between 25 July and 11 August in 1948. Thom Blair reported a group of 50 in Stanly County on February 7, 1953, and from that year onward they were regularly reported in the county. The earliest Ring-billed Gulls found in Mecklenburg County showed up at the Charlotte city garbage dump during the winter of 1957. A flock of 107 was counted there on the Charlotte CBC held on December 27, 1958, and 117 were counted the following year.

An analysis of Ring-billed Gull banding records, published in the journal *Bird-Banding* in 1972, indicates the number of both Ring-billed and Herring Gulls found inland in the Carolina Piedmont began noticeably increasing around 1957. At the time, open trash piles at landfills provided an abundant food supply for these scavengers. When the City of Charlotte began burying its trash in the late 1960s, this reduced the bird's food supply and the number of Ring-billed Gulls found foraging at the Charlotte dump in the winter declined dramatically. Only five were found there on the Christmas count conducted on December 30, 1968.

Despite the loss of these landfill "lunch-sites," numbers of Ring-billed Gulls wintering on inland lakes in the Carolinas gradually increased throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and, by the early 1980s, counts in the thousands were a regular occurrence. Numbers continued to increase into the twenty-first century. An analysis of the number of birds recorded per party-hour on the Charlotte



Christmas Bird Count indicates the Ring-billed Gull rose from 21st in the early years of the count to the 7th most common bird found on counts today.

Some inland flocks in the North Carolina Piedmont have now been estimated at more than 20,000 birds. On January 26, 2013, David Wright reported what he believed was the largest single count of Ring-billed Gulls ever recorded on Lake Norman. He and his boat crew estimated that somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 birds were roosting on the lake that evening and that most were adults. This large gull roost has been well documented for 30 years. It is located in the Davidson Channel, just north of land along Torrence Creek Road in the Town of Cornelius.

Recent band returns have shown that at least some of the gulls wintering in the Carolina Piedmont are from the Midwest. Fledgling Ring-billed Gulls banded in their nests in Chicago on the shore of Lake Michigan, have been confirmed in winter along the Catawba-Wataree River corridor in South Carolina.



Ring-billed Gull in Charlotte. (Gary P. Carter)