

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

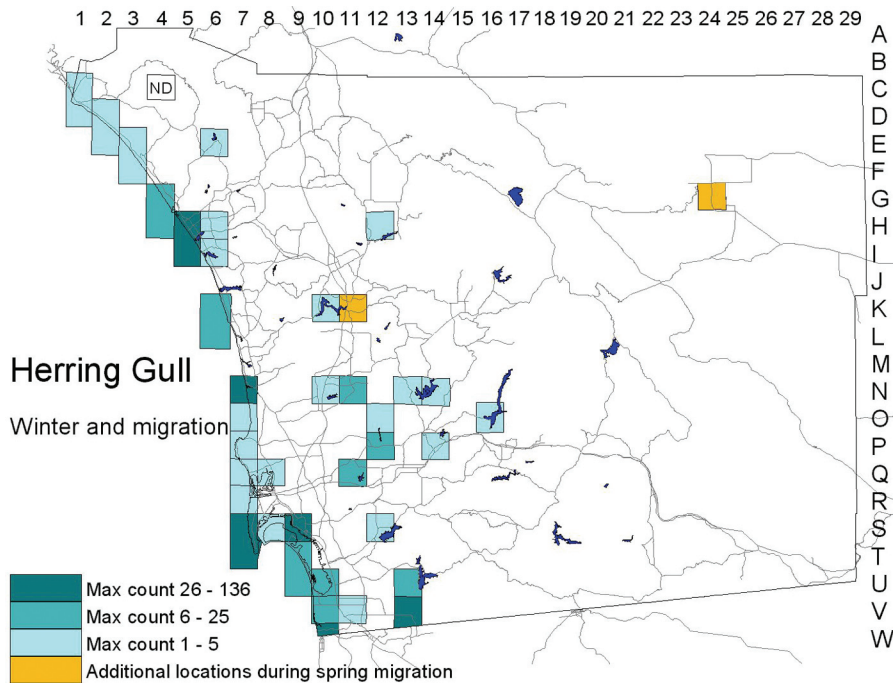
Of all of San Diego County’s gulls, the Herring Gull has been affected the most by the exclusion of gulls from the county’s landfills. Formerly an abundant winter visitor at the dumps, the Herring Gull is now uncommon to at best fairly common anywhere in San Diego County. In habitat it has the versatility of a wide-ranging scavenger, using ocean, beaches, coastal wetlands, and inland ponds and lakes.

Winter: Though widespread, the Herring Gull is more frequent along the coast than inland. Usually it constitutes a small minority of mixed flocks dominated by the Western, California, and Ring-billed Gulls. Concentrations as large as 100 at Point Loma (S7) 18 December 1999 (M. W. Klein), 55 at a pond on Otay Mesa (V13) 10 February 2001 (P. Unitt), and 136 at Border Field State Park (W10) 18 December 1999 (S. Walens) are now exceptional. In the north county our largest numbers 1997–2002 were 27 at Oceanside (H5) 27 December 1997 (D. Rorick) and 14 at the Santa Margarita River mouth (G4) 29 December 1999 (P. A. Ginsburg). During the atlas period wintering Herring Gulls were all in the coastal lowland, as far inland as Lake Wohlford (H12; one on 23 February 2002, P. Unitt)



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

May (Unitt 1984). Unusual records of migrants are of one at Lake Cuyamaca (M20) 25 April 1978 (AB 22:1055, 1978), and the only one for the Anza–Borrego Desert, an adult at the Borrego Country Club (G24) 3 April–9 May 1999 (P. D. Ache). Summer stragglers were one near Imperial Beach (V10) 22 June 1980 (AB 34:930, 1980) and up to five in the San Diego Bay salt works (U10/V10) through summer 1993 (Stadtlander and Konecny 1994).



Conservation: Stephens (1919a) called the Herring Gull “rather common”; Sams and Stott (1959) called it “fairly common.” An increase likely corresponded with the rapid increase of the county’s human population and the establishment of garbage dumps. The number tallied on San Diego County Christmas bird counts peaked at 7323 on 2 January 1966. Since 1985, however, the count has not returned more than 350, and it reached its all-time low of 18 on 16 December 2000. The decrease may not be restricted just to dumps: from 1973 to 1983 King et al. (1987) found an average of 1.3 Herring Gulls per monthly census at San Elijo Lagoon (L7), December–April. From 1997 to 2002 not one Herring Gull was reported from this site.

and El Capitan Reservoir (O16; one on 3 January 1998, S. Kingswood). The Herring Gull has also been noted at Lake Henshaw (G17) on two of 22 Christmas bird counts there 1981–2002, with a maximum of four on 21 December 1987.

Migration: The Herring Gull occurs primarily late October to early April, with extreme dates of 23 September and 17

Taxonomy: The only subspecies of Herring Gull nesting in North America is the pale-backed *L. a. smithsonianus* Coues, 1862, and only this subspecies has been recorded with certainty in California.