

were present. At the same time, however, there was a notable increase of gulls farther south, along the Illinois River, the Mississippi River, and the Ohio River (although I wasn't aware of it at the time). Having birded Lake Michigan for some 40 years, I felt that the lack of gulls on that January day was a void of unusual moment. Gulls have always been a part of daily life in Chicago. Their absence lasted several weeks, then they slowly trickled in again as the weather warmed.

Gulls have increased in Illinois the last 50 years both in numbers and the reports of unusual species. Records of Ivory, Glaucous-winged, Ross', Mew, California, Common Black-headed, and Slaty-backed Gulls have all been added the past two decades to the Illinois list, and the Lesser Black-backed Gull is now approaching a very frequent status. Still, there are only three species of gull commonly found in Illinois: Ring-billed, Herring, and Bonaparte's Gulls, the latter being distinctly seasonal. Since 1968 the ring-billed has nested in the Lake Calumet area of southeast Chicago, and the herring soon joined them. At the present time the Chicago gull colony must comprise some 20,000 birds.

This increase in numbers did not happen by accident. As excellent scavengers, gulls thrive in degraded environments and are attracted to the worst examples of land use and human habit known. It is this writer's belief that their increase in Chicago attests to the decline in the quality of life in the Windy City through increased air, water, and land pollution.

## Why Bird for Gulls

Many good reasons exist to develop an interest in gulls. Gulls are large, frequently found in large numbers, mix easily, and are slow-moving enough to allow good study. They are congenial and easily attracted by throwing bread or crumbs, birdseed, or other food. They provide interesting study of plumages. Gulls all have recognizable plumages which change twice a year until they reach adulthood which, for large gulls, may take four to six years.

Gulls are strong and powerful flyers, so chances of finding a rare gull in Illinois is very high. Finally, gulls are an indicator species for the state of our environment. Large increases in gull population, not due to migration or weather, may signal a decline in the quality of our water, air, and land. Gulls are successful scavengers and are attracted by degrading envi-

ronments. People in this country are providing gulls with plenty of these.

## When to Find Gulls

The greatest number of gull species would be expected in the fall and through the winter months in Illinois. Each species has its own peculiar distribution (see Table 1), although Ring-billed and Herring Gulls might be found on almost any day. Anyone sincerely interested in gulls would not want to miss birding extensively between September and March.

## How and Where to Find Gulls

Finding gulls in Illinois should be little problem. The state is well connected by rivers and streams, and dotted with lakes which gulls frequent. In urban areas the birds can be

**Table 1: Gull Records for Chicago and Illinois 1978-1993**

Note: Excludes Ring-billed Gull and Herring Gull. Numbers represent the number of days gulls were recorded

Species	Total	JAN	FEB	MA	AP	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OC	NOV	DE
Bonaparte's	506	11	1	9	83	47	10	20	68	56	66	85	50
Thayer's	250	54	32	25	10	0	0	0	0	1	5	44	79
Glaucous	190	65	31	16	9	0	1	1	0	1	1	10	55
Franklin's	56	0	0	3	2	3	7	14	7	8	5	7	0
Great Black-backed	53	19	10	11	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	10
Iceland	46	10	12	5	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	13
Lesser Black-backed	20	2	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	8
Little	19	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	7	7
Laughing	17	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	5	6	0	0	0
Black-legged Kittiwake	8	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
Ivory	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Glaucous-winged	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Mew	3	1	1*	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Slaty-backed	2	1*	1*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
California	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1*	0	0	0	1	0
Common Black-headed	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2**	0	0
Ross'***	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Sabine's	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1*	0	0	0

\* Seen in Illinois but not in the Chicago area

\*\* Both records in Illinois but only 1 for Chicago area

\*\*\* Illinois records probable only; other record for Missouri

Source: The writer's personal records

Other gulls reported in Illinois: Western Gull