

Birds of Coastal Georgia



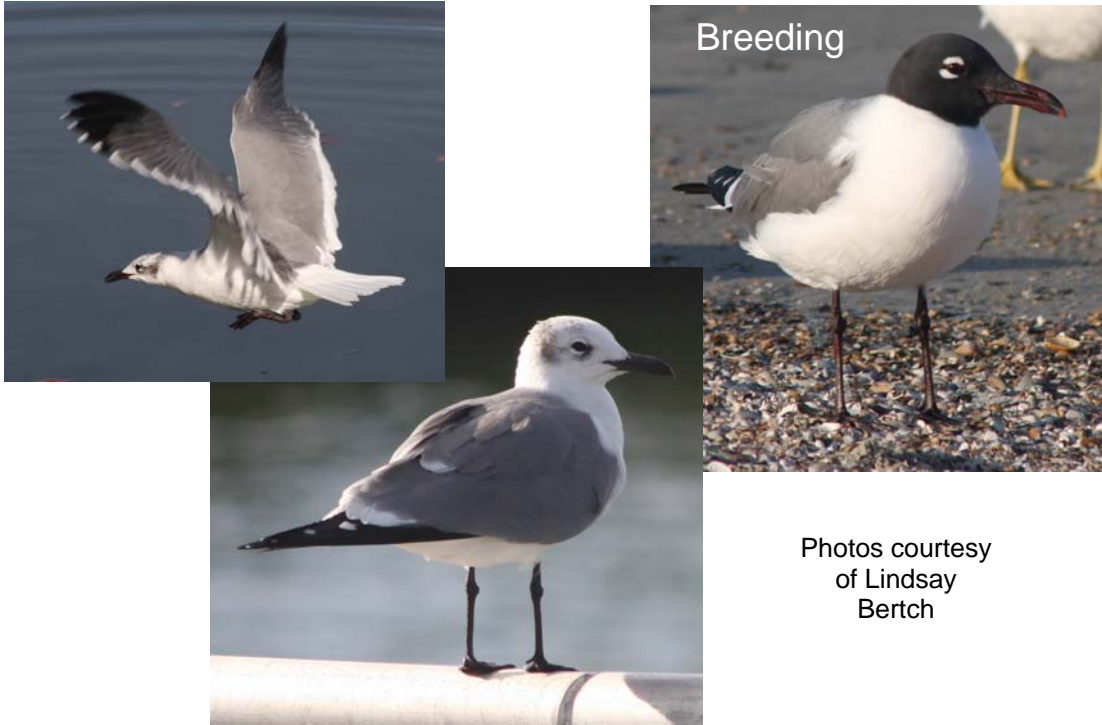
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Gulls & Terns

UGA Marine Education Center & Aquarium
www.marex.uga.edu/aquarium

Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*)



Photos courtesy
of Lindsay
Bertch

Size: 17" from beak to tail tip

Description: A small gull with a dark gray back, black wing tips, black legs, and white rear edges of the wings. In the breeding season, adults have a black head and a dark red bill; in the winter the bill is black and the head is white/gray.

Similar Species: The **ring-billed gull** is larger, has yellow/green legs, and a yellow bill with a black ring. The **herring gull** is much larger and has a yellow bill with a red spot.

Behavior: Most common summer gull. May be perched on docks or pilings, or flying overhead. Often follows boats, especially when trawling. When calling, makes a laughing-like sound.

Ring-Billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*)



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 19" from beak to tail tip

Description: A medium-sized gull with a gray back, yellow/green legs, and white belly. Wings tips are black with white spots. Note unique black ring around bill.

Similar Species: The **laughing gull** is smaller with black legs and a black beak. The **herring gull** is larger and has a red spot on its bill.

Behavior: Most common winter gull. Frequently seen perched on docks or pilings, floating in the estuary water, or flying overhead. Also seen inshore around fast food restaurants and parking lots. May be seen "stomping" as it feeds in shallow tide pools or near the water's edge on the beach.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)



Photo courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 23-26" from beak to tail tip

Description: A large gull with a gray back, pink legs, and white belly. Wing tips are black with white spots. Bill is yellow with a red spot on the lower mandible.

Similar Species: The herring gull is much larger than the **laughing gull** and **ring-billed gull**. Other gulls also lack the red spot and pink legs.

Behavior: Usually seen in the winter near the ocean floating at the water's surface or flying overhead. May be seen "stomping" as it feeds in shallow tide pools or near the water's edge on the beach.

Forester's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*)



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch



Photo courtesy of
Fran Lapolla



Size: 15" from beak to tail tip

Description: A small tern with a gray back and light gray/white wing edges. Grayish deeply forked tail. Summer: head has a black cap, beak is orange with a black tip, legs are orange. Winter: black beak, black legs, and black patch over eye.

Similar Species: The **royal tern** is larger, has an all orange bill, and usually has less black on the head.

Behavior: Can be seen plunging head first into coastal waters or perched atop crab pot buoys.

Royal Tern (*Sterna maxima*)



Photos courtesy of
Lindsay Bertch



Photo courtesy of Tasha Turvey



Size: 18-21" from beak to tail tip

Description: A large white tern with a gray back and a deeply forked tail. Note orange beak, white forehead, and partial black cap. Some royal terns may have a full black cap during breeding season.

Similar Species: The **forester's tern** is smaller, has black on the bill, and always has black over its eyes.

Behavior: Usually seen soaring around estuaries and the ocean.

Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*)



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch



Size: 16-20" from beak to tail tip

Description: A gull-sized bird that is black above and white below. The bill is thick with the lower mandible larger than the upper. Feet are orange.

Similar Species: The **oystercatcher** has a completely black head, a slender bill without any black, and a red eye ring.

Behavior: Seen perched on the beach or flying low over the ocean's edge dipping the lower half of its bill into the water. May be seen fishing at night. Nests on beaches.

References

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