

head mottled with leaden-grey; most of the wing-coverts have towards the end a spot of greyish-black, and the quills, large coverts, and tail-feathers are similarly marked, the markings on the tail forming a subterminal bar.

THE COMMON AMERICAN GULL.

†*LARUS ZONORHYNCHUS*, *Richardson*.

PLATE CCCCXLVI.—ADULT MALE, AND YOUNG IN WINTER.

No country can afford greater facilities for the migration of water-birds than the United States of America. Even the Gulls are enabled to traverse their whole extent from north to south, and in the contrary direction, without suffering from want of food or of proper resting places. The Gull that has been bred in Labrador, or still farther north, can reach the Gulf of Mexico without being seriously incommoded by the storms that now and then rage along the Atlantic coast. The broad waters of the St. Lawrence leads it to our great lakes, from which hundreds of streams conduct it to the head waters of the Ohio or the Mississippi, by following the windings of which it at length arrives in the warm regions of the Mexican Gulf, on whose waters the traveller can spend the winter. That these advantages are embraced by many species of Gull, there can be no doubt; and should you, as I have done, repeatedly visit our broad lakes, or the great rivers just mentioned, you would find there, at particular seasons, not only this species, but several others, as well as various kinds of Terns, but none of the genus *Lestris*. Lake Erie supplies with food the *Larus marinus*, *L. argentatus*, *L. atricilla*, and some others, as well as the Great, the Arctic, the Roseate, and the Black Terns, all of which pass at times over to the Ohio, and from thence to the ocean. During these inland movements, the birds seem to be peculiarly attracted by certain places, at which they remain for awhile. Thus, at the Falls of the Ohio, some species remain for weeks, and wherever much shipping occurs on that river or the Mississippi, Gulls are sure to be seen gleaning the garbage that has been thrown overboard, or seizing such fishes as rise incautiously to the surface of the water. In the months of September and October, Gulls and Terns might almost be said to abound on



Common American Gull. Ring-billed Gull

1. Adult 2. Young

Drawn from Nature by J. J. Audubon, F.R.S. F.L.S.

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our great streams, and many return thither during the spring months on their way northward. Nay, to some species of Tern, the beautiful sand-bars and rocky beaches that occur here and there, are so attractive as to induce a few to remain and breed there. This is especially the case with the Black Terns, some of which rear their young by the rapids of the Ohio below Louisville, amidst the roaring sounds of which may be heard their shrill and continued cries.

You must not suppose, however, that all the Gulls which migrate in that country take the same route; for thousands follow the sinuosities of our Atlantic coast, some of them perhaps proceeding as far south in that direction as those which follow our rivers. My opinion is, that the feebler individuals of the different species follow the inland route, while the older and more hardy birds keep along the shores of the ocean. The examination of numerous specimens on both of these extensive tracks has almost rendered this a matter of certainty, yet I should be much pleased to find this opinion corroborated by the observations of any other student of nature.

While on the coast of Florida, in the winter of 1832-33, I every day saw Gulls of many species, but among them all were no adult birds, with the exception of the Black-headed Gull of WILSON, which was very abundant. This greatly tended to strengthen my opinion, that the young Gulls are of more delicate constitution than their parents, which are better enabled to stand the rigours of the winter in the Middle States, where they are found equally abundant at that season. For similar reasons, I also feel assured that the oldest birds are those which go farthest north to breed, and that the older and stronger individuals are larger, with more purely tinted plumage, and with the colours of their legs, feet and bills, as well as of the circle around the eye, more vivid than those which, although found breeding, yet have not acquired their full maturity. In consequence of these circumstances, some species have been described as forming several, and the great difference between the plumage of the young and the old birds has led to similar errors.

Our Common Gull is seldom seen in the adult plumage of winter beyond the shores of Maryland southward, or in full summer plumage beyond the Bay of New York, and this rarely after the middle of April, as at that period they gather into flocks, and remove farther north to breed. The places to which this species resorts for that purpose, and which I have visited, are several islands between Boston and Eastport, another close to Grand Manan at the entrance of the Bay of Fundy, the great Gannet Rock of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and certain rocky isles in the deep bays on the coast of Labrador.

This species, although one of those most abundant on our coast, is so well acquainted with the artifices of man, that it keeps more than others beyond

the reach of the gun. While in our harbours or rivers it sails at a moderate height, sometimes mingling with the Silvery Gull, or even with the Great Black-backed. Its movements are graceful and easy, and it floats as it were in the air, whether proceeding in a direct line, or in irregular curves, when, suddenly checking its speed, it partially closes its wings, and descends with rapidity in a spiral manner. As it approaches the water, it allows its legs to hang, opens its bill, and while seizing its food, raises its wings erect and flaps them quickly to support its body. Now with loaded bill it sweeps off to some distance, alights, and devours its prey.

When in pursuit of a shoal of small fish, it assembles in flocks, keeps up a constant yelping noise, dips every instant among the fry, and continues to feed until so gorged as to be unable to fly. Alighting in groups, they float with great buoyancy, and it is pleasant to see them rising and falling alternately on the waves of a moderately agitated sea, the snowy whiteness of their under parts contrasting with the deep green water, and their elongated wings extending beyond the tail, giving the appearance of lightness and agility to their form.

The flight of this species is light and long sustained, and the circumstance of birds of this genus being able to find food almost anywhere, induces them at times to proceed far out to sea; and I have now and then been gratified by the sudden appearance of several birds of the present species to the lee of the ship, on whose deck I was with impatience watching for the sight of land. The winged pilgrims would no sooner come up than they also would express their pleasure by their cries, especially when they received from the passengers bits of bread or such garbage as might be at hand. Once fed, they would fly about us the whole day, and sometimes would be seen the next; and then perhaps all at once, as if made aware of the existence of land in a particular direction, they would fly off, and we would see no more of them.

When spring has fairly commenced, our Common Gulls assemble in parties of hundreds, and alight on mud flats or sandy beaches, in our eastern estuaries and bays. For awhile they regularly resort to these places, which to the Gulls are what the scratching or tooting grounds are to the Pinnated Grouse. The male Gulls, however, although somewhat pugnacious, are not very inveterate in their quarrels, making up by clamour for the deficiency of prowess in their tournaments. The males bow to the females with swollen throats, and walk round them with many odd gesticulations. As soon as the birds are paired, they give up their animosities, and for the rest of the season live together on the best terms. After a few weeks spent in these preparatory pleasures, the flocks take to wing, and betake themselves to their breeding places.

On an island within a few miles of Eastport in Maine, I found these birds breeding in great numbers in the beginning of May. Their nests were there placed amid the scanty tufts of grass. On the Gannet Rock, early in June, they were breeding on the shelves towards the summit, along with the Guillemots, while the Kittiwakes had secured their nests far below. The different species kept apart, but yet exhibited no antipathy towards each other. On the 18th of July, we discovered a low rocky island at the bottom of a bay ten miles from the open sea, opposite the harbour of Little Macatina, on the coast of Labrador, where we found upwards of two hundred nests, all containing eggs with the chicks more or less advanced. The number of eggs in each nest was three or four, more generally three. They resembled those of the Great Black-backed Gull in form and colour, but were much smaller, measuring two inches and three-quarters in length, by one and five and a half eighths in their greatest diameter. There was considerable diversity both in the tint of their ground colour, and in the number and size of the spots on them, as is the case with the eggs of most water-birds. In general, however, they were of a dull dark cream-colour, thickly blotched, sprinkled and touched with different shades of purple, umber, and black. When fresh, these eggs are delicious food, as I have had abundant occasion to know. The nests were in this place all situated on the bare rock, but in all other respects resembled those found among the grass or on more elevated rocks; they were formed of sea-weeds, well constructed, about six inches across within, and twelve in their greatest diameter. Some of the nests were much thicker and larger than others; many were placed within the distance of a foot from each other; and the whole place was covered with feathers and dung, which emitted a very disagreeable stench, proving to us that it was annually resorted to by these birds. To our surprise the birds were very shy. Among those killed by us were some having all the appearance of mature age, such as I have mentioned above. The number of individuals among them having the black ring on the bill was much greater than among those found near Grand Manan; some, however, were without this ring, and on others it was but partially marked. Some had no white on the tips of the primaries, and differences were also observable in the length of the tarsus and toes; but all had the same voice, and were actually of the same species. We also found considerable differences in their size and weight, even in individuals of the same sex, some weighing one pound, others four ounces more, and some so much as one pound ten ounces. The males, at an average, were larger than the females. Not a bird of any other species was found there, or on the grassy islands.

Whatever opinion may be held as to the synonyms of this Gull, I am perfectly assured of the above mentioned variations in the colour, size, and

markings of the younger and older birds. I am equally sure that no individuals acquire the full beauty of their plumage before the third spring. The young are at first of a dull greenish-yellow, spotted with dark brown on the head and rump. In a very few days they leave the nest, ramble about in its vicinity, waiting the arrival of their parents with food, and conceal themselves under stones or in crevices at the appearance of danger. When a few weeks old, they do not hesitate, on being pursued, to betake themselves to the water, where they swim with great lightness. When about the size of pigeons, they assume a brownish colour, each feather being broadly banded or tipped with light ferruginous and grey. At this season, the fishermen of Labrador and Newfoundland kill them in great numbers, and pack them in salt for winter use. I was much surprised one morning while at Labrador, to see one of the barges of the *Gulnare* come alongside of the *Ripley* after a long cruise, when officers and men were glad to have a good mess of these young Gulls in the bow of their boat, they having run short of provisions.

LARUS CANUS, *Mew or Common Gull*, Rich. and Swains. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 420.

LARUS ZONORHYNCHUS, *Ring-billed Mew-Gull*, Ibid., p. 421.

LARUS BRACHYRHYNCHUS, *Short-billed Mew-Gull*, Ibid., p. 422.

RING-BILLED MEW-GULL, Nutt. Man., vol. ii. p. 300.

COMMON AMERICAN GULL, *Larus zonorhynchus*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iii. p. 98; vol. v. p. 638.

Adult, 20, 48.

Common during winter from Texas, along the coast, to Maine. Up the Mississippi to Natchez. Breeds from Maine to Labrador, Hudson's Bay, and Arctic shores. Columbia river. Migratory.

Adult Male in summer plumage.

Bill shorter than the head, robust, nearly straight, compressed. Upper mandible with the dorsal line nearly straight at the base, arched and declinate towards the end, the ridge convex, the sides slightly convex, the edges sharp, inflected, arched, the tip rather obtuse. Nasal groove rather long and narrow; nostrils in its fore part, lateral, longitudinal, linear, wider anteriorly, open, and pervious. Lower mandible with a prominence at the end of the angle, which is long and narrow, the dorsal line then nearly straight and ascending, the sides convex, the edges sharp and inflected.

Head rather large. Neck of moderate length. Body rather full. Wings long. Feet of moderate length, rather slender; tibia bare below; tarsus somewhat compressed, covered before and behind with numerous broad scutella, the sides reticulated; hind toe very small and elevated, the fore toes rather long and slender, the fourth longer than the second, the third longest,

all scutellate above, and connected by reticulated entire membranes, the lateral toes margined externally with a narrow membrane. Claws small, compressed, slightly arched, rather obtuse.

The plumage in general is close, elastic, very soft and blended, on the back rather compact. Wings very long, rather broad, acute, the first quill longest, the other primaries rapidly graduated; secondaries broad and rounded, the inner elongated and narrow. Tail of moderate length, even, of twelve rounded feathers.

Bill marked opposite the angle with a broad transverse band of brownish-black, between which and the base it is light greenish-yellow, the tips orange-yellow. Edges of eyelids greenish-yellow; iris bright yellow. Feet greenish-yellow, the webs tinged with orange; claws black. The general colour of the plumage is pure white, excepting the back and wings, which are light pearl-grey. The first six quills are black towards their extremities, the first and second being almost entirely so, the sixth with only a small spot. The tips of these feathers are white, that of the first having merely a narrow margin of that colour, which gradually enlarges on the rest, the first moreover has near the end a long patch of white, the second a smaller one on the inner web. The proportional size of the white marks on the outer primaries varies in individuals. The other quills and secondaries are all white at the ends.

Length to end of tail 20 inches, to end of wings $22\frac{1}{4}$, to end of claws $20\frac{1}{2}$; extent of wings 48; wing from flexure $15\frac{1}{2}$; tail 6; bill along the back $1\frac{3}{4}$, along the edge $2\frac{5}{8}$, depth at the base $\frac{8\frac{3}{4}}{12}$, depth at the prominence $\frac{1}{2}$; bare part of the tibia $\frac{3}{4}$; tarsus 2; middle toe $1\frac{3}{12}$, its claw $\frac{2\frac{1}{2}}{12}$; hind toe $\frac{2\frac{1}{2}}{12}$, its claw $\frac{1}{12}$. Weight $1\frac{1}{2}$ lbs.

Young bird, after first moult, shot on 26th November.

Bill black, base of lower mandible and edges of upper towards the base, livid flesh-colour. Edges of eyelids livid blue; iris hazel. Feet purplish-grey; claws brownish-black. The general colour of the plumage is dull white, mottled with greyish-brown beneath, on the back with large brownish-black spots, the dark markings being central. Anterior to the eye is a crescent of greyish-black. The outer primary quills are black, the two first without white at the ends, the rest margined round the ends with that colour. The abdominal and tibial feathers are white; the lower and upper tail-coverts white, with brown spots.

Length to end of tail $18\frac{3}{8}$, to end of wings $20\frac{1}{2}$, extent of wings $44\frac{1}{2}$; tarsus 2; middle toe $1\frac{3}{12}$, its claw $\frac{2}{12}$. Weight 1 lb. 3 oz.

On a rocky island on the coast of Labrador, where this bird was breeding in great numbers, a comparatively small number of individuals only had the bill marked with the black ring, the others, although precisely similar in

other respects, wanted that mark. This bird, although in many respects precisely similar to that which is usually named *Larus canus* in Europe, differs greatly in the size of the bill, which even in young birds is much deeper than in the oldest individuals of that species.

Female, from Dr. T. M. BREWER. Mouth 1 inch 1 twelfth in width; palate with two very prominent papillate ridges, the space between which is covered with reversed papillæ, its anterior part with five prominent lines, and moderately concave; the posterior aperture of the nares oblong-linear, 11 twelfths in length. Tongue 1 inch 5 twelfths long, emarginate and finely papillate at the base; its sides nearly parallel as far as the middle, its breadth being 3 twelfths, then tapering to a narrow emarginate point, and trigonal. Œsophagus 7 inches long, extremely wide, its breadth being $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches; that of the proventriculus 1 inch 9 twelfths. The stomach is rather small, elliptical, 1 inch 5 twelfths long, 1 inch 2 twelfths broad; its lateral muscles distinct and of moderate size, the lower prominent, the tendons large, the epithelium dense, with very prominent large rugæ; the inner coat of the œsophagus is longitudinally plicate; the proventricular belt 1 inch in breadth, with six broad plates. Intestine 30 inches long, its width at the upper part 5 twelfths, diminishing to $2\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths, cœca 3 twelfths long, 1 twelfth broad, 3 inches distant from the extremity, rectum 5 twelfths broad, with a globular cloaca 9 twelfths in diameter. The duodenum curves at the distance of $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches, advances toward the liver in the usual manner, and is afterwards very regularly coiled in an elliptical form, with 10 bends. Trachea 5 inches long, from 3 twelfths to $2\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths in breadth, not flattened, its rings slightly osseous, 130. Bronchi wide, of 20 half rings. The lateral and sterno-tracheal muscles are slender, and a slip on each side extends to the last half-ring of the trachea.



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