

2008

## Gulls of North America, Europe, and Asia

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### Recommended Citation

Gochfeld, Michael and Burger, Joanna (2008) "Gulls of North America, Europe, and Asia," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 33 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb/vol33/iss1/7>

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**GULLS OF NORTH AMERICA, EUROPE, AND ASIA.** Klaus Malling Olsen and Hans Larsson. 2003. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N. J. 508 pp. \$55.00.

This appears to be an American version of the Olsen-Larsson book, "Gulls of Europe, Asia, and North America." It covers 43 species of gulls, leading these reviewers to wonder why the authors didn't add about ten additional Southern Hemisphere species to have a complete guide. The emphasis of this book is on field identification, and the introductory material includes valuable discussion of molt, wear, timing, and variability. Field issues, such as judging size and color tone under different viewing and lighting conditions, are valuable. A series of introductory plates covers the overall patterns and wing tips of the large white-headed gulls. There are 96 color plates by Larsson, and over 800 color photographs.

The bulk of the text is the 43 species accounts, beginning with detailed identification notes that provide the plumage characteristics of adults, then juveniles, first winter, first summer, etc. plumages. Voice, not much use in distinguishing gull species, is described only briefly. Molt is described in moderate detail, taking the reader through the growth and annual cycles. This is followed by very long and detailed descriptions, which include the Kodak Gray Scale (white = 0, black = 20) for adult mantle color as well as feather-by-feather wing tip descriptions. No plumage part is left undescribed and both hybrids and aberrations, as well as subspecies, are mentioned.

Measurements (range, mean and sample size, but not standard error) are provided for adult males and females, and other age/sex classes, juveniles for wing, bill size (including length, depth and gonys length), and tarsus. These are described in the introduction, but not illustrated. A brief mention of adult weight (not much use in the field but of potentially greater interest to banders) is included.

The section on distribution and migration gives an estimated global population and locations of breeding and wintering areas, including population changes. Extra-limital occurrences get relatively more space than the main range. The large range maps indicate breeding and non-breeding ranges, but not extra-limital records. Unfortunately, the maps

have been given a yellow-green background shading, no doubt aesthetically pleasing, but confusing when certain ranges are plotted in green and yellow. Most maps have been well-constructed to illustrate the general range, but not details, but the American Herring Gull map is much too broad (Kamchatka to Britain) to be useful.

Each account has one or more elegantly painted color plates of the main plumage stages, at rest and in flight, and two or more pages of photographs, well chosen for identification purposes. Citations are inconsistent and the species accounts in *The Birds of North America* series were apparently not consulted. A disproportionate attention is given to field notes on extra-limital records, with often annoying detail. It is here that the strong European bias is most obvious, for the authors provide many citations to European records, but few to North American vagrant records with which we happen to be familiar, and some maps indicate directions of local migration in Europe. Moreover, American ranges are painted with a broad brush, while in Europe more detailed distributions are evident.

There is surely no group of familiar, well-known birds whose systematic relationships and taxonomy are as vexing as the gulls, particularly the large white-headed species. The taxonomic differences from our review of gulls of the world (Burger and Gochfeld 1996) reflect some important new developments, particularly in the taxonomy of the large white-headed gulls revealed by molecular techniques. It is gratifying that Thayer's Gull (*L. thayeri*) is still recognized as a distinct species. Olsen and Larsson split the Mew Gull (*L. brachyrhynchus*) of western North America from the Common Gull (*L. canus*) of Europe, but do not split the Kamchatka Gull (although they provide separate photos). Heuglin's gull (*L. heuglini*) is separated from Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*), based on overlapping ranges without interbreeding; however, the authors note that they may soon be re-lumped. Only brief details are provided on the rationales for the recent splitting (or non-splitting). We recognized in addition to Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*), the Yellow-legged (*L. cacchians*) and Armenian gulls (*L. armenicus*). Olsen and Larsson also separate the Caspian Gull (*L. cacchians*) from the Yellow-legged (now *L. michahellis*), and the Vega Gull (*L. vegae*), but not the Mongolian or Steppe gulls (*L. [c.] mongolicus* and *L. [c.] barabensis*), although

each of these gets a separate plate. The American Herring or Smithsonian Gull (*L. smithsonianus*) is now considered a separate species, and based on molecular evidence is not particularly close to the European Herring Gull. Since the gull studies by Niko Tinbergen formed the basis for much of our understanding of bird behaviour, indeed of animal behaviour, it would be nice to know if there are behavioural differences between these very similar appearing species.

This book begs comparison with the newer (and cheaper) "Gulls of the Americas" by S. N. G. Howell and J. Dunn (2007), likewise aimed at the field birder. That book is rich in photographs, but not measurements. It offers a substantial emphasis on hybrids. That notwithstanding, this is a lovely book that any gull or seabird aficionado will want to have. The detailed plumage descriptions and the measurements will be valuable for banders who work with gulls. For example, it might help target an unusual gull for trapping in a colony or netting at a roost site. The fact remains that there will be unusually-plumaged gulls representing hybrids or aberrations that simply can't be identified.

## LITERATURE CITED

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Herring Gull  
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