



**Natural Heritage  
& Endangered Species  
Program**

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*Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife*

**Herring Gull  
*Larus argentatus***

State Status: **None**  
Federal Status: **None**

**SPECIES DESCRIPTION:** The Herring Gull is a medium-sized gull and adults are characterized by a white head and body, light gray back and wings, black wing-tips with white spots (mirrors), and pink legs. They also have a yellowish bill with a subterminal red spot.

**DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE:** The Herring Gull is a common species throughout the northeastern United States. In North America it breeds along much of the Atlantic Coast, the Great Lakes, and across a good deal of the Canadian Arctic and Alaska. In winter, Herring Gulls are primarily found in more southerly locations including the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific Coasts as well as inland areas in the United States.

The breeding populations in New England increased throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the Massachusetts population has experienced recent declines.

**HABITAT DESCRIPTION:** Herring Gulls often nests in large colonies that are located close to water and provide protection from predators (e.g., islands, abandoned piers). They typically lay clutches of three eggs in May and young fledge by mid- to late July.

Herring Gulls are an opportunistic forager that takes advantage of both natural and anthropogenic food sources. Specific food items include a variety of fish and invertebrates as well as waste food at garbage dumps and beaches.

**THREATS:** Like other island nesting species, the Herring Gull is vulnerable to sea level rise. Other threats include exposure to toxins, habitat degradation, and decline in food resources.



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**REFERENCES:**

- Melvin, S. 2010. Survey of Coastal Nesting Colonies of Cormorants, Gulls, Night-Herons, Egrets, and Ibises in Massachusetts, 2006-2008. Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program.
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- Walsh, J., and W.R. Petersen. 2013. *Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas 2*. Massachusetts Audubon Society and Scott & Nix, Inc.

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***A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan***

**Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife**

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Please allow the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program to continue to conserve the biodiversity of Massachusetts with a contribution for 'endangered wildlife conservation' on your state income tax form, as these donations comprise a significant portion of our operating budget.

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