



**Natural Heritage  
& Endangered Species  
Program**

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*Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife*

**Laughing Gull  
*Larus atricilla***

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

**SPECIES DESCRIPTION:** Small coastal gulls, Laughing Gulls are 16 to 17 inches in length. Adults in breeding plumage have a black head, dark gray back and wings, black wing tips, and white tail. The call is a strident laugh: *ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-haah-haah-haah*.

**DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE:** Laughing Gulls occur along much of the Massachusetts coastline from April through November, but currently nest in a single colony on South Monomoy Island, Chatham, where 1,200 pairs nested in 2003. A former colony on New Island in Eastham was recently abandoned after natural processes of shoreline migration connected it to Nauset Spit, allowing access by mammalian predators. Numbers of breeding Laughing Gulls in Massachusetts have declined substantially over the past 60 years, down from over 20,000 pairs as recently as the early 1940s.

**HABITAT DESCRIPTION:** This gull nests colonially on sandy islands and the remote ends of sand spits. It forages along the shore and in coastal bays and inlets and channels of salt marshes, feeding on crustaceans, other invertebrates and small fish.

**THREATS:** Primary threats to Laughing Gulls are loss of secure nesting habitat because of competition from Greater Black-backed and Herring Gulls; mammalian predation; and oil spills. The continued presence of Laughing Gulls as a breeding species in Massachusetts is threatened by the species' declining abundance and increasingly limited number of nesting colonies in the state.

**REFERENCES:**

- Burger, J. 1996. Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 225 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.
- Petersen, W.R., and W.R. Meservey. 2003. *Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas*. Massachusetts Audubon Society and University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, Massachusetts.
- Veit, R., and W.R. Petersen. 1993. *Birds of Massachusetts*. Massachusetts Audubon Society, Lincoln, Massachusetts.

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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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