

Herring Gulls — Nature's Garbage Disposals

What are they?

Herring gulls are one of four kinds of gulls that make the Chesapeake Bay their home. They are one of the largest gulls, with bodies about 20 inches long. Like all other birds, their bodies are covered with feathers, they have wings and a tail, and a beak. Gulls also have hollow bones, making them weigh less than creatures their same size that have more solid bones.

What do they look like?

Adult herring gulls have white heads, necks, bellies, and breasts, with gray backs and upper wings. Young gulls are a mottled kind of brown that makes it easy for them to hide from predators.



Photo Source: Gerald and Buff Corsi, Cal Images

Where can you find them?

Herring gulls can be found in many places, including the sandy beaches around the Bay. They also will go inland. They like to follow along as farmers plow their fields to eat the grubs that are turned up. They prefer to build their nests together in a colony, as they are very social birds. They choose a variety of sites for their nests, but they always build them close to a body of water.

How do they behave?

Most herring gulls seem to be very aggressive. They will drive other gulls away from their nests and seem to fight over any morsel of food they find. However, they make good parents. They will carefully turn the eggs in their nests over so that the baby inside grow well. When they return to the nest with food, the young birds peck at the adult's bill until it regurgitates the food into the baby gulls' mouths.

What do they eat?

Herring gulls will eat almost anything, but they prefer fish—either living or dead—and other water animals, like crabs, and clams. They sometimes take their hard-shelled prey into the air and let it fall on a parking lot or other hard surface to crack open the shell. They sometimes eat other birds, small mammals, and insects.

These scavengers will also eat fair amounts of garbage, and often hang out at garbage dumps and landfills.

What eats them?

Gulls sometimes steal the eggs from other gulls' nests and eat them. They also eat the very young gulls of their neighbors.

Creature Feature

Herring gulls can live up to 30 years.

