

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*



Folk Name: Common Black-headed Gull

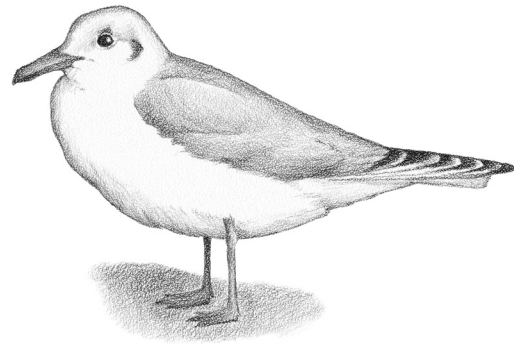
Status: Migrant

Abundance: Accidental

Habitat: Open water of lakes and rivers

The Black-headed Gull is a Eurasian gull that occasionally shows up in the Carolinas between early August and the end of April. It was first confirmed in North Carolina at Fort Macon on August 10, 1967, and was first confirmed in South Carolina at Huntington Beach State Park on October 29, 1970. It used to be called the “Common Black-headed Gull.” It is almost always seen with Ring-billed Gulls, although one Carolina ornithologist noted “that association may relate more to the abundance of Ring-billed Gulls in winter than any biological affinity between the two.” The Black-headed Gull is a rare but regular visitor along the coast of the Carolinas. There are only four records of this gull inland in the Carolina Piedmont. The first two records were of birds found at Jordan Lake on January 16, 2005, and at Falls Lake on December 9, 2010. The latest records are of two sightings here in the Central Carolinas.

At times, the discovery of a rare bird is often an exhilarating, but all too brief experience. On December 8, 2011, Ron Clark and Tom Sanders were observing a mixed flock of Ring-billed and Bonaparte’s Gulls at the McAlpine WWTP in the Town of Pineville. They soon noted one gull that looked a great deal like a Bonaparte’s, but was larger—almost the same size as the Ring-billed Gulls present. They closely examined this bird through both binoculars and a spotting scope and took note of some critical field marks: conspicuous red bill, red legs, and dark primaries showing on the underside of its wings. The two soon realized they had just discovered a Black-headed Gull, a life bird for both observers. They quickly photographed their find through their spotting scope and reported it to other birders. Taylor Piephoff immediately responded and confirmed their identification. Within a few minutes of his arrival, the entire flock of gulls flew in a spiral, high up into the air, and headed out of sight. The entire event transpired in only about 30 minutes, leaving these birders wanting more. Fortunately, the gull later returned to the site and lingered there into January. After



it was relocated, several groups of excited observers were allowed access into the wastewater treatment plant to see this special bird.

Remarkably, a second Black-headed Gull, an adult bird, was sighted in Mecklenburg County on Mountain Island Lake on December 16, 2012. Dennis Kent, John Scavetto, and Bill Rowse were scouring the lake during the Southern Lake Norman Christmas Bird Count when they found this bird. Kent noted: “this gull stood out because it was substantially bigger than the others and the undersides of the primaries were very dark. We could not distinguish bill color because the bird was a considerable distance from us.”



Black-headed Gull at wastewater treatment plant.
(Chris Talkington)