

## Gull Overview

Some 20 species of gulls have been reported in Indiana, but only about a dozen occur regularly, and only two breed. Abundances and abundance rankings are listed in the Gull Abundance Table.

The Ring-billed, Herring, and Bonaparte's Gulls are by far the most abundant gulls in Indiana; indeed, these three species comprise more than 99 percent of all gulls reported in the state. Additionally, it is almost certain that at least the first two of these three are grossly undercounted, as field observers searching for the rarer species frequently ignore them.

GULL ABUNDANCE TABLE							
Arranged in AOU order							
	Abundance Index	20-year mean	Rank		Abundance Index	20-year mean	Rank
Laughing Gull	17.2	9.2	9/9	Thayer's Gull	42.2	24.3	7/7
Franklin's Gull	240.2	107.1	4/4	Iceland Gull	13.2	7.3	11/10
Little Gull	8.8	2.7	13/13	Lesser Black-backed Gull	33.9	21.3	8/8
Black-headed Gull	0.9	0.4	15/15	Slaty-backed Gull	0.1	0.05	17/17
Bonaparte's Gull	11321.0	4434	3/3	Glaucous Gull	56.3	30.5	6/6
Black-tailed Gull	0.1	0.05	17/17	Great Black-backed Gull	81.9	50.6	5/5
Mew Gull	0.7	0.4	16/16	Kelp Gull	0.1	0.05	17/17
Ring-billed Gull	53234.4	31,587	1/1	Sabine's Gull	11.3	5.9	12/12
California Gull	3.0	1.8	14/14	Black-legged Kittiwake	14.6	6.8	10/11
Herring Gull	34920.0	19,292	2/2	Ross's Gull	0.1	0.05	17/17
Arranged by All-Time Abundance							
Ring-billed Gull	53234.4	31,587	1/1	Iceland Gull	13.2	7.3	11/10
Herring Gull	34920	19,292	2/2	Sabine's Gull	11.3	5.9	12/12
Bonaparte's Gull	11321	4434	3/3	Little Gull	8.8	2.7	13/13
Franklin's Gull	240.2	107.1	4/4	California Gull	3	1.8	14/14
Great Black-backed Gull	81.9	50.6	5/5	Black-headed Gull	0.9	0.4	15/15
Glaucous Gull	56.3	30.5	6/6	Mew Gull	0.7	0.4	16/16
Thayer's Gull	42.2	24.3	7/7	Black-tailed Gull	0.1	0.05	17/17
Lesser Black-backed Gull	33.9	21.3	8/8	Slaty-backed Gull	0.1	0.05	17/17
Laughing Gull	17.2	9.2	9/9	Kelp Gull	0.1	0.05	17/17
Black-legged Kittiwake	14.6	6.8	10/11	Ross's Gull	0.1	0.05	17/17
<b>Abundance Index:</b> = (100,000xnumber of individuals)÷Total of all individuals (i.e., 1000 times %)							
<b>20-year mean:</b> = total number observed (1985-2004) ÷20							
<b>Rank:</b> = Rank order based on: all-time total numbers/20-year means (1985-2004)							

A majority of the gull numbers listed in the abundance table came from the lakefront, where the birds congregate on Lake Michigan, especially in winter. The overall number of birds on the lakefront, however, changed significantly after spring 2002, when the last local landfill (adjacent to I-94 in LaPorte County) ceased operation.

One measure of population stability is available by comparing the rank order of all-time total numbers with numbers collected in the last 20 years (see Rank column in gull abundance table). For gulls, these rankings are very similar suggesting that historical observations closely match recent results.

The fourth ranked species, Franklin's Gull, was assisted in attaining this high status by a storm-driven influx in fall 1998, when more than 900 birds were reported in the state. The Great Black-backed Gull population (fifth ranked) is surging on Lake Michigan; in the last decade it has surpassed all other large (non-Herring) wintering gulls (e.g., Glaucous, Thayer's, and Iceland). Lesser Black-backed numbers are also increasing significantly.

With the exception of Sabine's Gulls, numbers of the smaller gulls appear fairly stable. Reported Sabine's Gull numbers increased significantly in the mid-1980s, when it was discovered that this species, along with Black-legged Kittiwake, is a regular fall migrant on Lake Michigan.