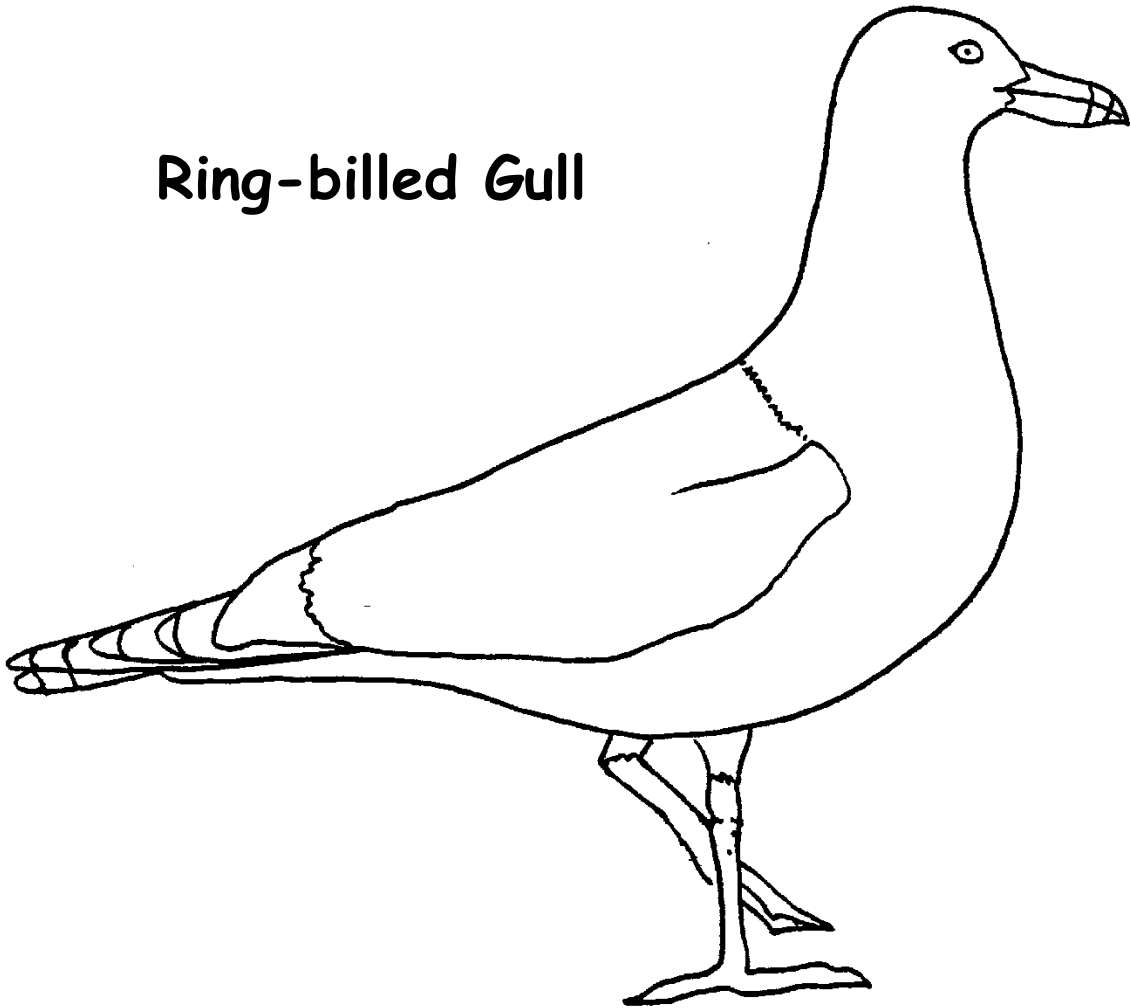


Ring-billed Gull



Coloring instructions:

Yellow - the legs, feet, eye, and bill (except for the black ring around the bill)

Black - the tips of the wings and the black ring around the bill

Gray - the back and wings

White - the rest of the bird

Ring-billed Gull

Length: 16"

Wingspan: 49"

Habitat: Resident in lakes, ponds, parking lots, garbage dumps, beaches, and fields.

Field marks: A white and gray gull with a black ring around the yellow bill.

It's easy to identify a bird as a "seagull." These whitish, wonderful soarers are distinctive at a great distance. You might see them scavenging on a dead salmon cast up on the shore or soaring high and then dropping down onto some small fish on the river, or feeding at a garbage dump, or on a lawn. Gulls are **generalists**; they feed on all sorts of food in a variety of settings.

What gets complicated, however, is the many different species of "seagull." Many gull species look quite similar and often the distinctions are in the color of the eye, the color of the feet, or the patterns on the bill. People usually overlook these subtle differences. Gulls don't. Studies were done where colored contact lenses were put on their eyes to change the color. The gulls within the colony noticed the eye color change and treated the gull with the contact lenses differently.

To make it even more complicated, coloration often changes as a gull matures. A Ring-billed Gull, for example, has pinkish legs as a juvenal and yellow legs as an adult. Eye color also changes as the birds become adults. This occurs in many bird species, not just gulls. And gulls, which take several

years to mature, change the color of their feathers with each molt until the beautiful whites and silver grays of the adult are fully grown in.

The Ring-billed Gull is so named because it has a black ring around its upper and lower bill. Most gulls have distinctive markings on their bills. These markings have a purpose. Gull babies are in between **altricial** and **precocial**. Upon hatching, they have down and can see and walk. However, they stay at the nest and are fed by their parents. This is because the young eat food that can only be gotten by flying.

But the chicks don't open their mouths and have food stuffed in them like altricial birds do. Instead, when the parent returns, the babies peck at the markings on the bill. This stimulates the parent to regurgitate the food onto the ground and the baby then eats this mush. The babies of each species instinctively peck at the bill coloring mark that is specific to their species. By pecking at the mark on the bill, the baby says, "Open the hatch and cough up the food, I'm ready for dinner."

Ring-billed Gull Challenges

Put a check mark in the box when you have completed the challenge.

- Identify a Ring-billed Gull. The adult has a black ring around the bill and yellow legs.
- Notice the difference between the white adult gulls and the brown or gray immature gulls.
- See these gulls inland, far away from coastal areas.
- Hear the loud, high-pitched, screaming cries of the gulls.
- See a gull perched on top of a light pole in a parking lot, especially if a fast food restaurant is nearby.

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