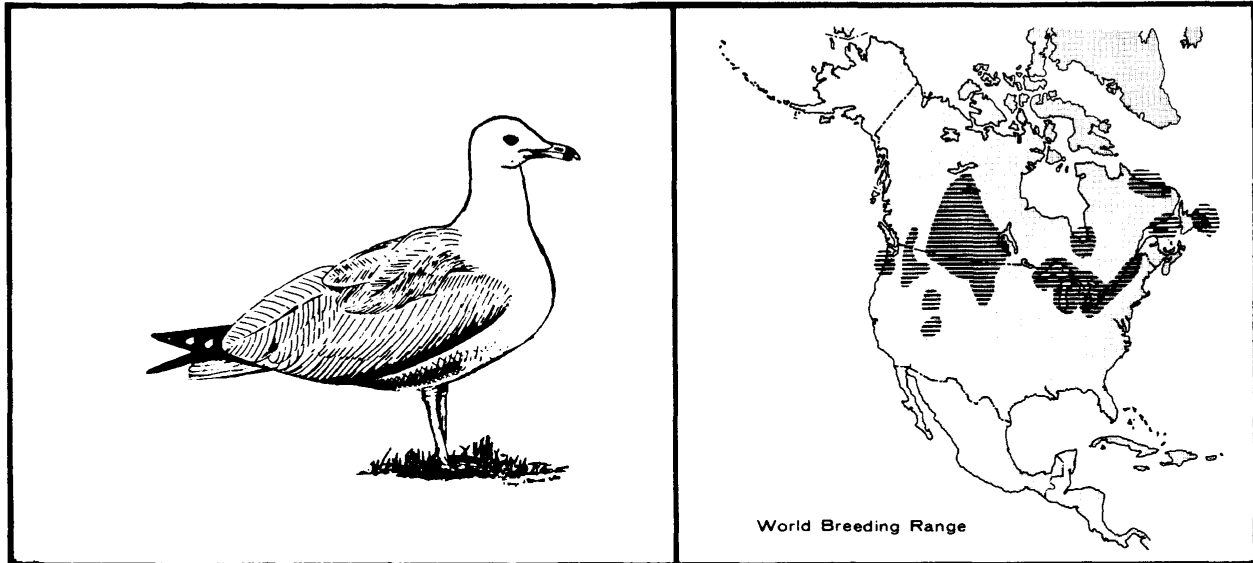


Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*)

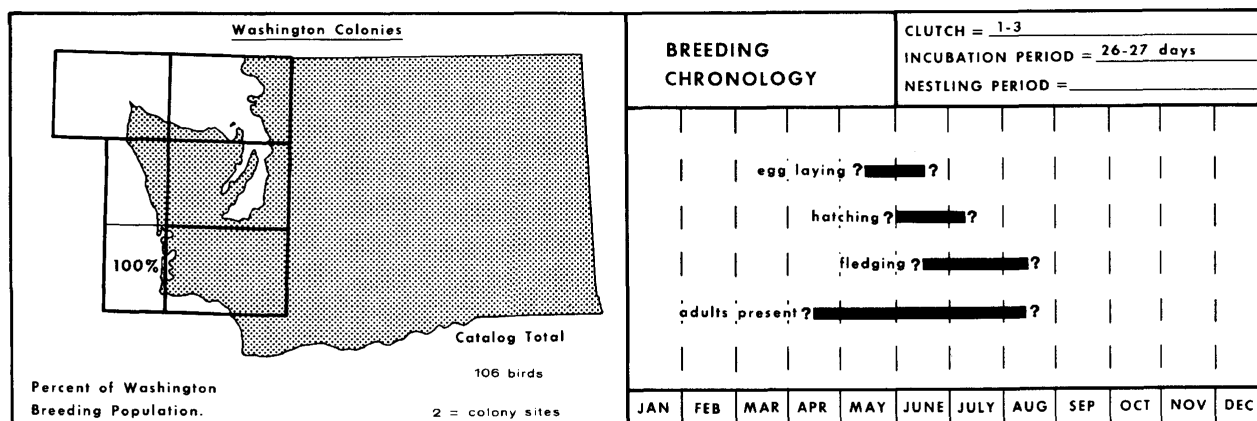


Ring-billed Gulls nest throughout much of inland North America, but they are a relatively recent addition to the list of seabirds nesting in marine habitats in Washington. They nested in the Columbia Basin areas in central Washington as early as 1930 (see Jewett et al. 1953) but have been recorded nesting in Willapa Bay only since 1976 (Penland and Jeffries 1977). This light-mantled, black wingtipped gull with yellow legs is a relatively common migrant in inland marine waters in Washington. Ring-billed Gulls nest colonially offshore on low-lying sandy islands that are relatively secure from land-based predators and disturbance. They have shown less adaptability in nest site selection than Glaucous-winged and Western Gulls and are much more restricted in breeding range in Washington.

Like other gulls, Ring-billed Gulls feed on almost anything, including fish and other aquatic organisms, and insects and grubs foraged in plowed fields, sewage, and garbage. They may land in trees to eat fruit. This species is more often seen in fields during the winter in western Washington than in marine habitats.

WASHINGTON COLONIES

Ring-billed Gulls on Gunpowder Island nest in a densely packed group in the middle of the Glaucous-winged Gull colony near Caspian Terns. Penland and Jeffries (1977) noted birds nesting in the tern colony itself on Ellen Sands. The existing colony is somewhat precarious as are all those on the exposed, low-lying sandy islands in Willapa Bay



and Grays Harbor, which may be altered or destroyed by winter storms. The estimate of numbers of breeding birds in western Washington is likely quite accurate at the time of the most recent survey. The species may also nest at Sand Island, though their recent status there is unknown.

HISTORICAL STATUS AND VULNERABILITY

Like other species of "large" gulls, Ring-billed Gulls are gregarious, adaptable, and opportunistic. They have increased in numbers as garbage and sewage from human populations have increased, and have exploited new food supplies resulting from agricultural operations and the

prey populations of insects and other animals provided by massive irrigation projects in what were deserts prior to the 1930's.

Ring-billed Gulls are sensitive to disturbance on nesting sites, though these sites at present are generally secure in western Washington because of relative inaccessibility to humans. Like other species using the accreted sand and gravel spits, they can be severely impacted during nesting by storm waves flooding nests or even obliterating nesting islands.

While studies to date have not determined the extent of competition for nest sites with larger Glaucous-winged and Western Gulls, this may limit the population growth of this species in western Washington.