

MEET OUR COVER ARTIST

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THE COVER ILLUSTRATION Ring-billed Gull

Back in 1925 Edward H. Forbush (*Birds of Massachusetts and Other New England States*) described this species (*Larus delawarensis*) in New England as an uncommon migrant and an irregular winter resident along the coast and a locally and irregularly common to rare or casual migrant inland. Its status then was apparently due to the fact that it was easily driven off its breeding grounds by human activity and seemed to prefer to breed in more remote and unsettled regions. That scenario six decades ago has obviously changed, for Ring-billed Gulls have enjoyed over the past several years a large population increase and range expansion. In Massachusetts now, they are considered an abundant migrant and locally common winterer along the coast.

In the northeastern part of their range, Ring-billed Gulls breed on grassy and sandy inlets or on islands in fresh water lakes locally from Lake Ontario, Lake Champlain (NY), and Lake Umbagog (NH) to Maine, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland. They winter along the Atlantic Coast from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Florida.

Although many of us now associate Ring-billed Gulls with fast-food parking lots and, foggy athletic and agricultural fields, Arthur C. Bent in his 1921 account in *Life Histories of North American Gulls and Terns* seemed to regard this species more ethereally when he wrote

The ring-billed gull is a highly gregarious species, . . . congregating in large flocks of its own species and associating with a variety of other species, with all of whom it seems to live in perfect harmony. Except for its cowardly, egg-robbing habits, it is a gentle and harmless creature. . . . During the winter months much of its time is spent at sea following the coastwise vessels in company with other gulls in search of such morsels as it may pick up, hovering in clouds about our harbors where garbage is dumped, or resting in large flocks on sand bars or mud flats at low tide -- a season of rest and recreation, with freedom to roam where it will.

Bruce Hallett