



For a Better Quality of Life



*Living with
Ring-billed Gulls*



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Living with Ring-billed Gulls

Ring-billed Gulls, which can be seen in department store parking lots, around restaurants and in parks, have become increasingly fond of life in the city. At the same, however, city dwellers are becoming less and less tolerant of these birds. Some even place all the blame for gull problems on the birds themselves, as if we humans did not somehow contribute to the problem.

A Winged Opportunist

The Ring-billed Gull feeds, breeds and lives in our cities. This species has adapted to human activities so well that household refuse makes up more than a third of its diet. These birds rarely ever turn their beak up at anything; they are major opportunists when it comes to food resources. Ring-billed Gulls nest in colonies containing hundreds or thousands of pairs, in open areas near bodies of water. Upon the arrival of winter, the gulls set off for the east coast of the United States.

From Visitor to Resident

A native of Western Canada, the Ring-billed Gull was an infrequent visitor here at the start of the century. In the 1930s, these birds were common in the Montreal area. It wasn't until 1953, however, that the first nest was discovered in Montreal. Since then, the species has gradually spread eastward, along the St. Lawrence River, reaching the Québec City area in the 1970s. Today, the Ring-billed Gull population in Québec consists of some 100,000 pairs.



Ring-billed Gull (Larus delawarensis)
Yellow bill
Black ring
Yellow or greenish feet

Colonies in Québec

Ring-billed Gulls are present all along the St. Lawrence River, on the North Shore and even as far inland as the Abitibi region. The largest colonies are located in southern Québec.

Blamed for many problems, Ring-billed Gulls have often been considered a nuisance. The media have contributed to the gulls' bad image by employing epithets such as 'winged rats'. Yet, this gull species plays a positive and highly beneficial role in the ecosystem by keeping certain insect populations under control. Perhaps we should weigh our words when referring to Ring-billed Gulls.



Nevertheless...

The Ring-billed Gull does cause some very real problems:

- risk of bird-aircraft strikes near airports;
- degradation of water quality in swimming areas;
- conflicting uses in public places, particularly parks and other spots where people feed these birds;
- damage to small fruit crops;
- nesting on rooftops.

Displacing the Problem is no Solution

The Ring-billed Gull is protected under Canadian law by the *Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994* and therefore cannot be hunted. However, the Canadian Wildlife Service issues permits to control gull numbers in situations where this is warranted. Before taking any kind of action, it is important to understand that when gulls are driven away from a site, they don't actually disappear for good. They will merely settle in another location, where they may cause even more problems.



S. V. P.
NE PAS NOURRIR
LES MOUETTES
ELLES PEUVENT DEVENIR
NUISIBLES - MERCI!

Joining Forces to Find a Solution

Ring-billed Gulls are so fond of our cities that it can be difficult to persuade them to leave. They get used to disturbances quickly, and therefore adapt to control measures readily. The best approach is to outwit them by employing a diversity of methods. In seeking to identify the best solution to problems of co-existence, Canadian Wildlife Service always gets the people affected by the problem to participate, such as municipal officials, company representatives and members of the public.



SOLUTIONS OFFERED

No Feeding

Ring-billed Gulls will go anywhere there is a readily available food source. Parks, where people feed them, and landfill sites, which offer up a feast for gulls, are especially popular feeding areas. Simple steps can make a difference, such as using rigid garbage pails with a lid! Wire mesh installed like a treillis above fast-food restaurants can help keep gulls from begging for food.

No Water Access

Ring-billed Gulls are essentially sea birds and they are fond of water bodies and public beaches, and these are their favourite places for overnight roosting. As soon as a few birds begin showing up in these spots, it is important to chase them away, so they don't get into the habit of congregating there.

Keep Them on Their Toes

Although scaring devices, such as sirens and cannons, may repel gulls the first few times, their effectiveness decreases over time. These techniques should be used at irregular intervals and combined with other control methods. Keep in mind, too, that the loud noises may annoy your neighbours!



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Using dogs to scare birds is a relatively quiet and inexpensive approach that does not require special equipment. The dog is allowed to roam the site on a regular basis, so the birds will fly off to a safer place though it must be made sure that the dog does not capture nor injure any birds.

EXCEPTIONAL SOLUTIONS THAT REQUIRE A PERMIT

Canadian Wildlife Service can issue a permit for controlling Ring-billed Gulls under certain conditions and if it judges it appropriate. For information, please phone the CWS – Québec Region, at 1 800 463-4311.

When All Else Fails...

Although using firearms to scare Ring-billed Gulls may help to reduce their numbers initially, once this treatment is discontinued, the gulls will come back. Keep in mind also that firearm use is regulated in urban areas. One must use non-lethal control methods before resorting to firearms.

Reduction in Offspring

There are two ways to achieve this goal: gull eggs can be sprayed with mineral oil to prevent gas exchange and asphyxiate the embryo, and nests can be destroyed. Egg spraying is a method that is used only in gull colonies and only as a last resort. Nest destruction is the approach recommended for gulls nesting on a roof or on any other artificial structures.