

Seagulls



By Heather Aiken

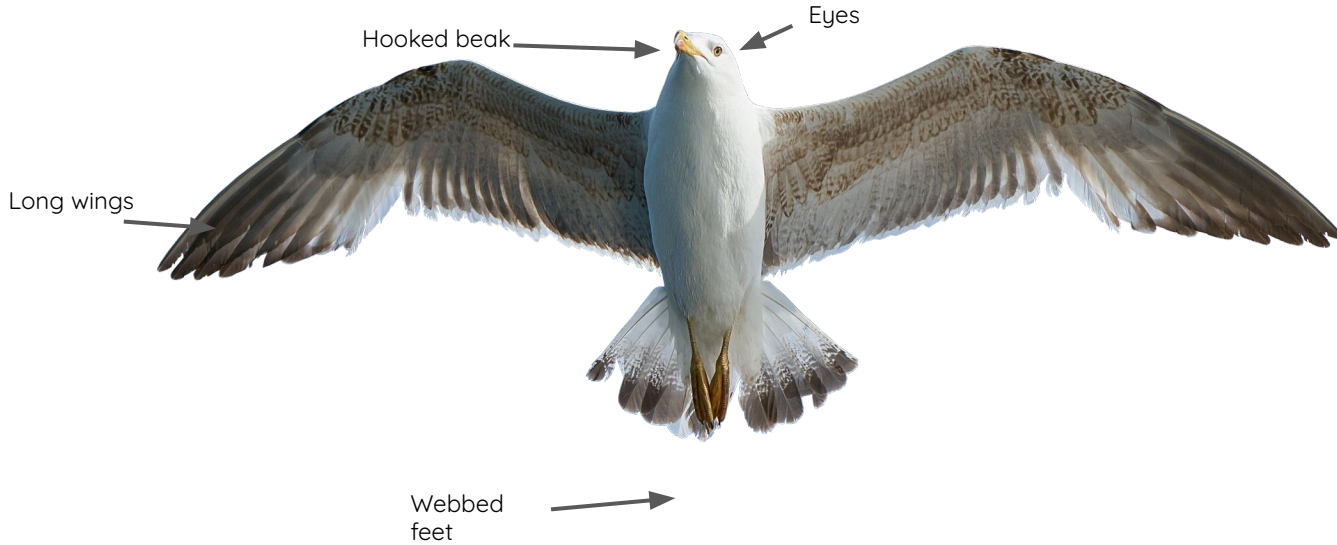
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What's in a name?

These birds are usually called seagulls. Ornithologists (people who study birds) call them sea gulls (with a space) because not all gulls live by the sea. Whatever name you use for them, gulls are fascinating creatures.



Appearance

Most seagulls are white with black markings, but some are gray or black.

Their long wings make them excellent fliers. They use the wind to quickly change directions, swooping from one direction to the next.

Seagulls have excellent eyesight and can see better than humans. Unlike most birds, they can move their eyes in their sockets.



Seagulls come in many sizes. The Great Black-Backed Gull is the largest gull. It has a wingspan of 5 feet 7 inches.

The smallest gull is the Little Gull. This gull typically weighs less than six ounces. It lives in Europe.



Food

Seagulls are omnivorous, meaning they eat just about anything. They eat seafood, fish, human food, seeds, fruit, eggs, and even other birds.

Gulls are very smart. They have developed strategies to help them get food.

Some gulls use breadcrumbs to catch fish.

Other gulls have figured out how to get to the clam inside a clamshell. Since gulls can't pry open the shell, they fly high in the sky with the shell and drop it on a hard surface to break it open.

They even steal food from picnic baskets left on the beach.





Seagulls can drink salt water but prefer freshwater. They have a special gland behind their eyes that eliminates, or gets rid of, extra salt in their body. This allows them to fly far out to sea to search for food without worrying about finding water to drink.

Family life

Seagulls typically mate for life. A breeding couple will build a cup shaped nest on the ground or on cliffs that are difficult for predators to reach.

A female gull lays a clutch, or group, of one to three eggs. Both the male and the female take turns keeping the eggs warm.

A group of gulls will work together to scare away predators and protect the young.





Sea gulls are capable of many amazing things! Next time you see some, watch to see them soar, problem solve, cooperate, play, and communicate.

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Purple level
Multisyllabic Words
Four syllable words

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