



Gulls are fascinating; here's 10 reasons why.....

1. Gulls have the ability to learn, remember and even pass on behaviours, such as stamping their feet in a group to imitate rainfall to trick earthworms to come to the surface.
2. Gulls are attentive and caring parents. Living up to 20 years, the male and female pair for life and they take turns incubating the eggs, and feeding and protecting the chicks.
3. Irish fishermen believed that gulls were the repositories of the souls of dead seamen and therefore should not be harmed in any way.
4. Gulls can drink both fresh and salt water. Most animals are unable to do this, but seagulls have a special pair of glands right above their eyes which is specifically designed to flush the salt from their systems through openings in the bill.
5. The largest gull on earth is the Great Black-backed Gull, which resembles a small eagle—its wingspan is 1.5 metres (about 5 ft). They can be very aggressive when defending their eggs and chicks and can knock an intruding person over! By contrast, the smallest gull (the Little Gull) has a wingspan about one-third that size at just over 0.5 metres (2 ft) and looks and behaves like a tern.
6. The chicks of most species of gulls like Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull peck the red spots on the tips of their parent's bills, to stimulate them to regurgitate food.
7. Kittiwakes are one of the most numerous seabirds in the world; they are also the most numerous breeding species of gull in Ireland – approx 50,000 pairs nest on Irish cliffs.
8. In winter, Black-headed Gulls are the most numerous gulls in Ireland: many of them have come here from countries surrounding the Baltic Sea.
9. The Mediterranean Gull is a recent colonist: prior to 1995 they were very rare visitors and now this attractive gull nests in Counties Wexford and Down with a few pairs in the west. Larger numbers spend the non-breeding season here and they can be commonly seen foraging for worms in parks and playing fields in the greater Dublin area.
10. In the mid-nineteenth century, the eggs of Black-headed Gull eggs were collected in large numbers for food, and sold in Dublin markets.

Sources of information:

- Anderson, G., Birds of Ireland: facts, folklore & history. 2008. The Collins Press.
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