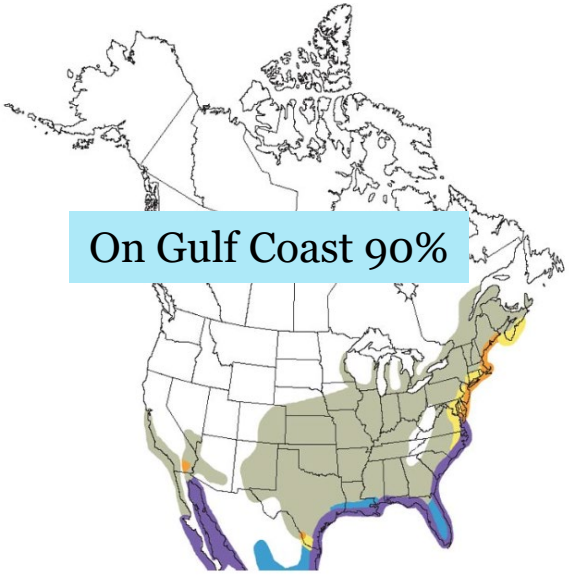
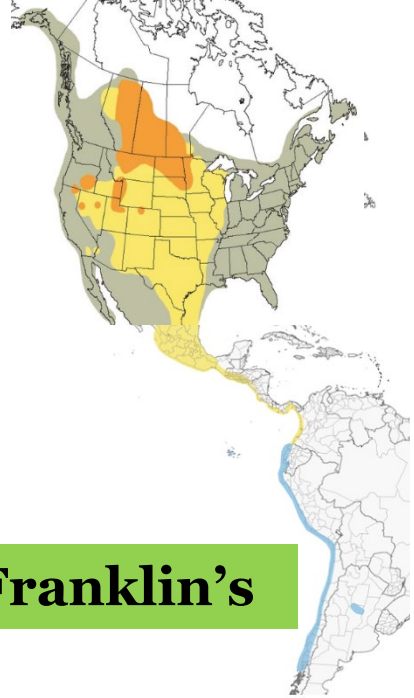
The Texas Hex

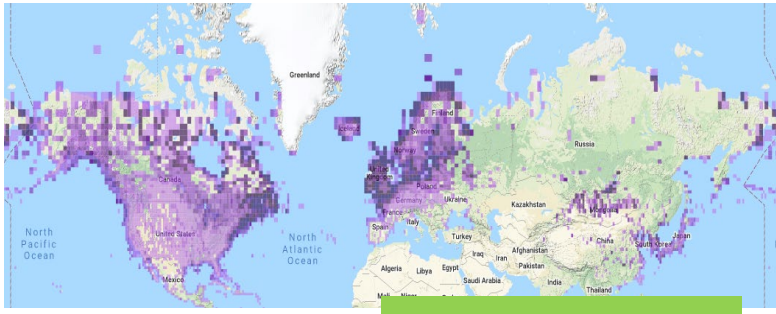


On Gulf Coast 90%

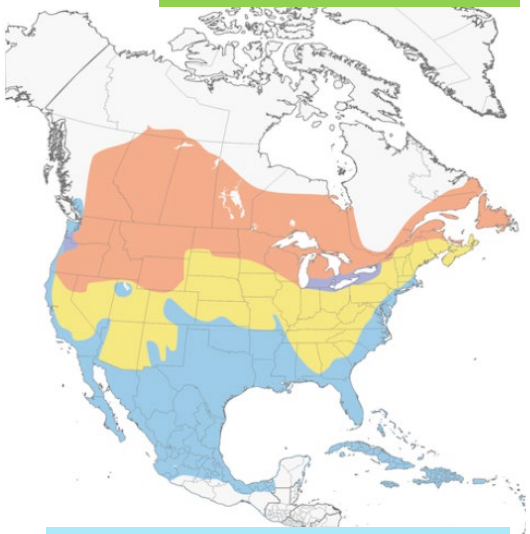
Laughing



Franklin's

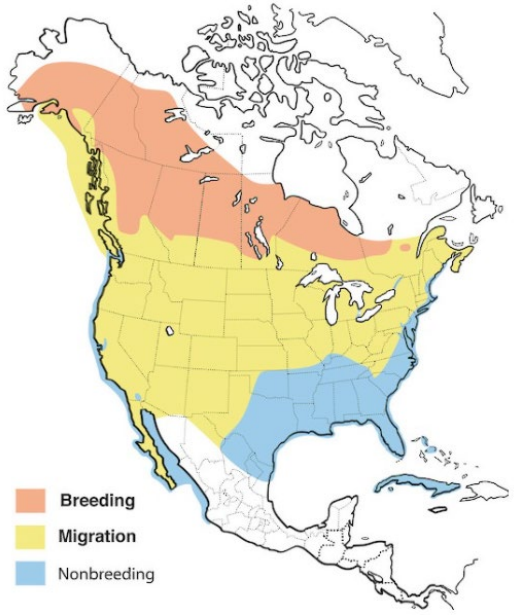


Herring

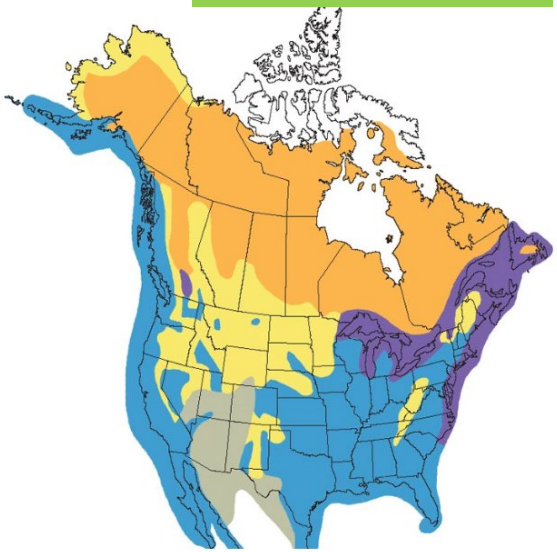


Inland Texas
in winter 90%

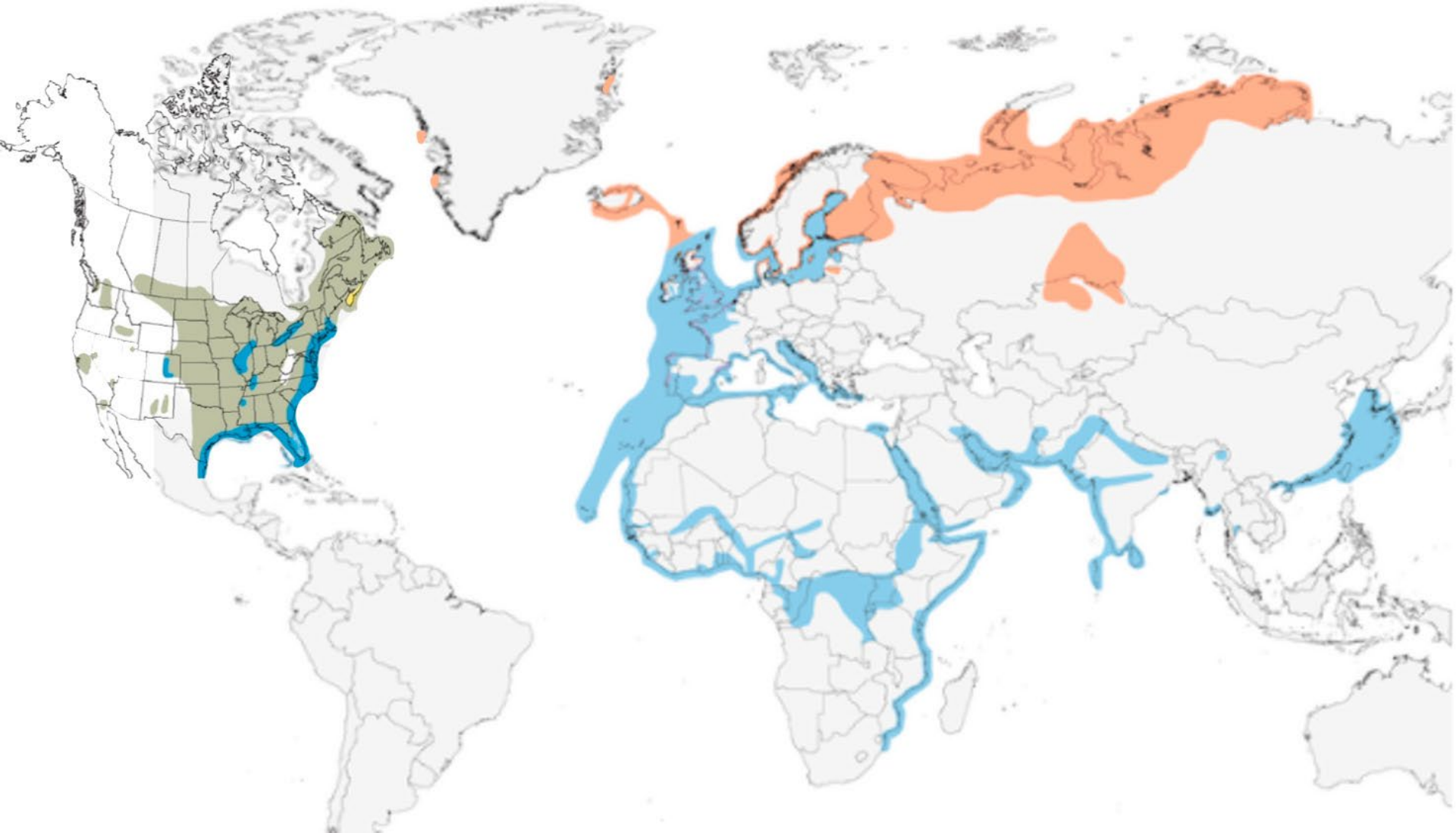
Ring-billed

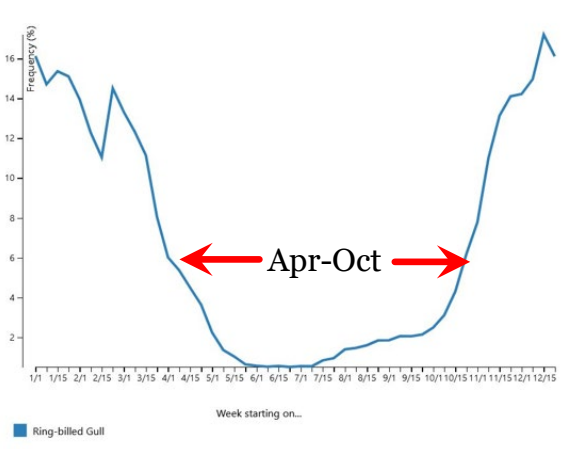


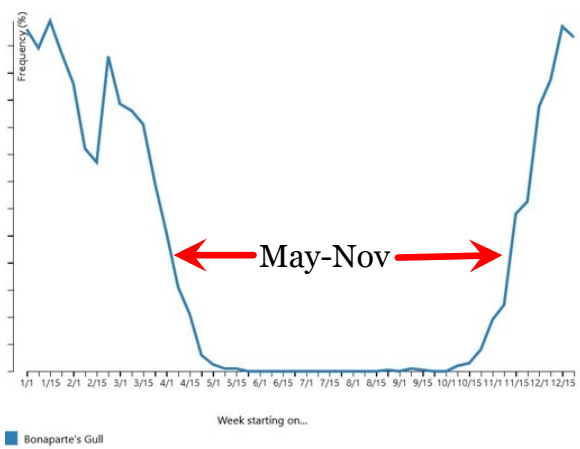
Bonaparte's

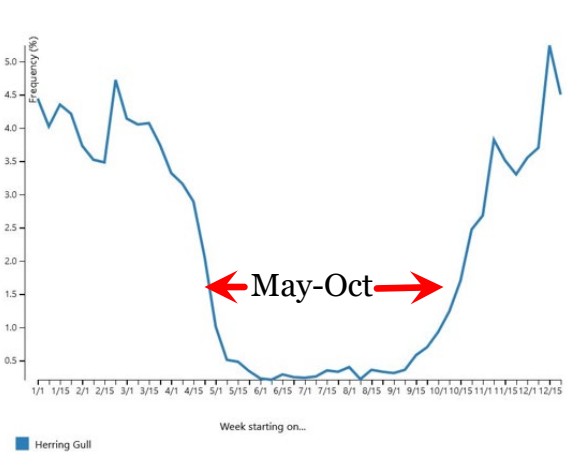


LBBG









Ring-billed

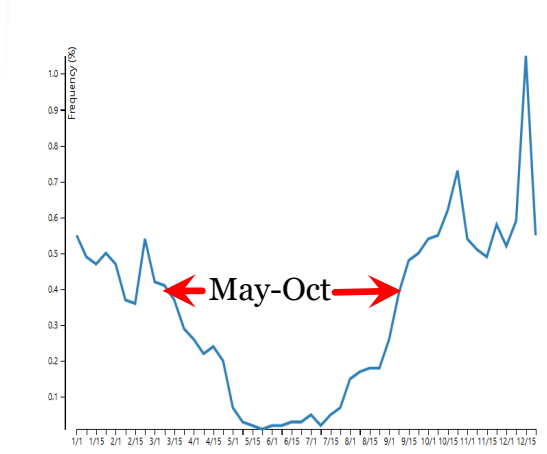
Bonaparte's

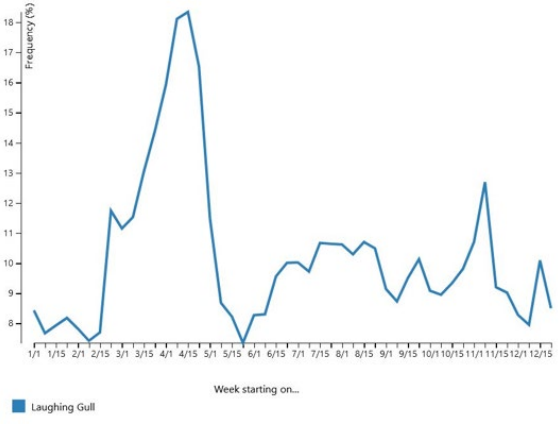
Herring

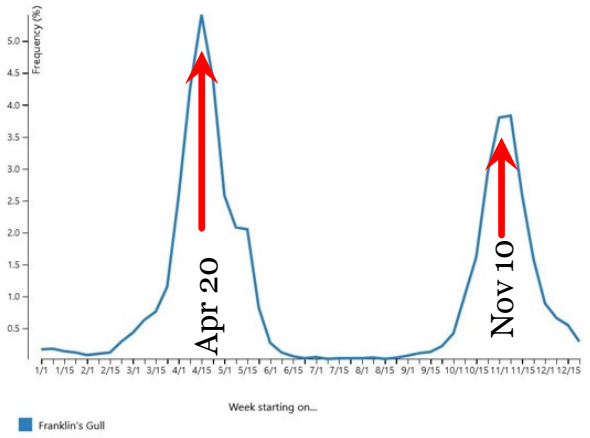
Timing The Texas Hex

(Ebird 1900-2020)

Winter is the gull-ing season in Texas !!!







LBBG

Laughing

Franklin's

THE TEXAS HEX DISTRIBUTION

TEXAS LOCATION			TEXAS SEASON		
			SUMMER	WINTER	MIGRATION
COAST	Ring-billed		Rare	Common	
	Herring		Rare	Common	
	Laughing		Abundant	Abundant	Abundant
	Bonaparte's			Uncommon	
	Franklin's		Rare	Uncommon	Frequent
	LBBG			Common	
INLAND	Ring-billed		Rare	Abundant	
	Herring		Rare	Uncommon	
	Laughing		Rare	Rare	Rare
	Bonaparte's			Common	
	Franklin's		Rare	Uncommon	Frequent
	LBBG			Uncommon	Rare

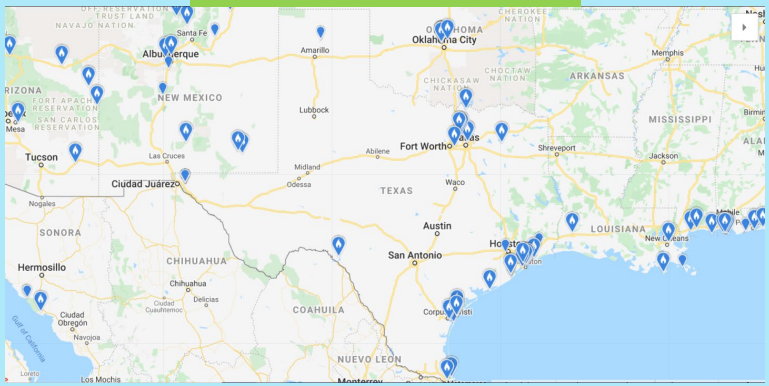
Place this carefully in your head and **LEAVE IT THERE !!!**

Jeff's Texas-Gull Rule

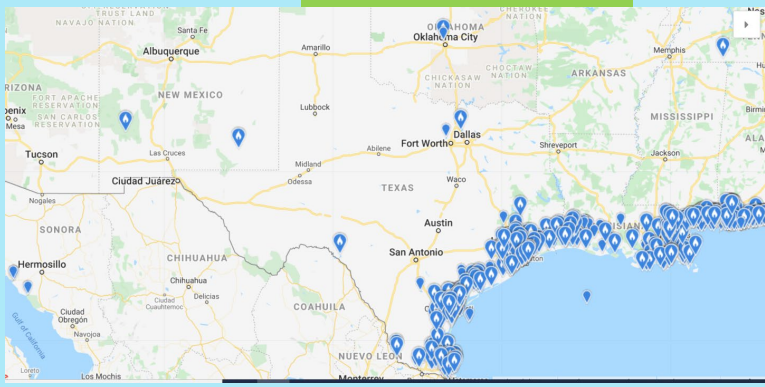
1) Coast year-round – think **Laughing** first
2) Inland in winter – think **Ring-billed** first
3) Migrating overhead – think **Franklin's** first
4) If it's a bigg-un – think **Herring** first
5) Black back – think LBBG first

JUNE 2021

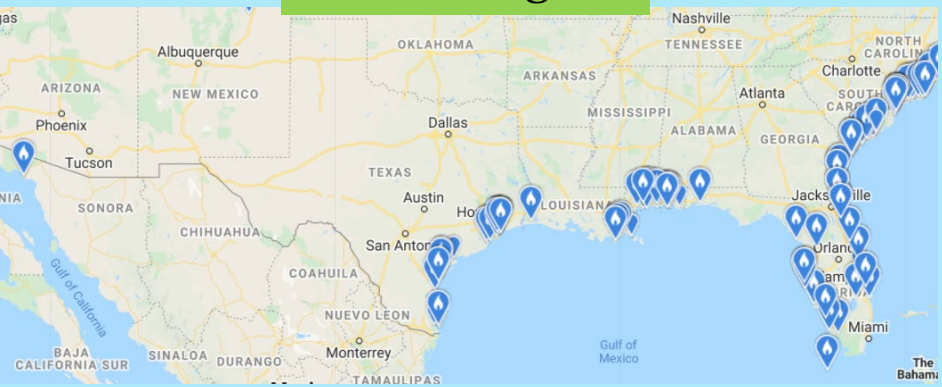
Ring-billed



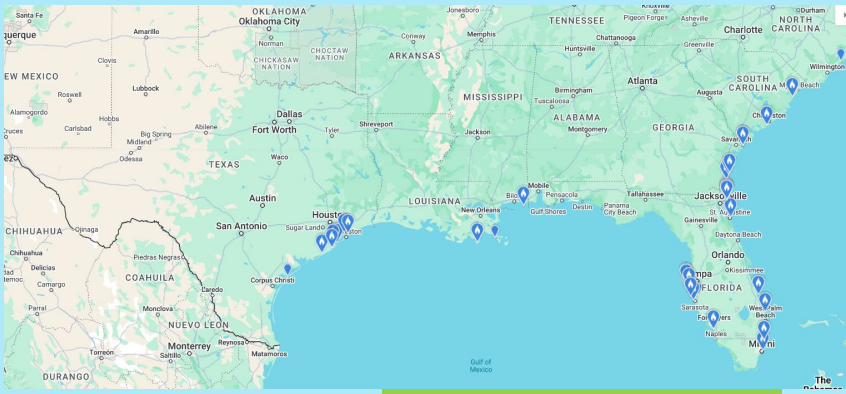
Laughing



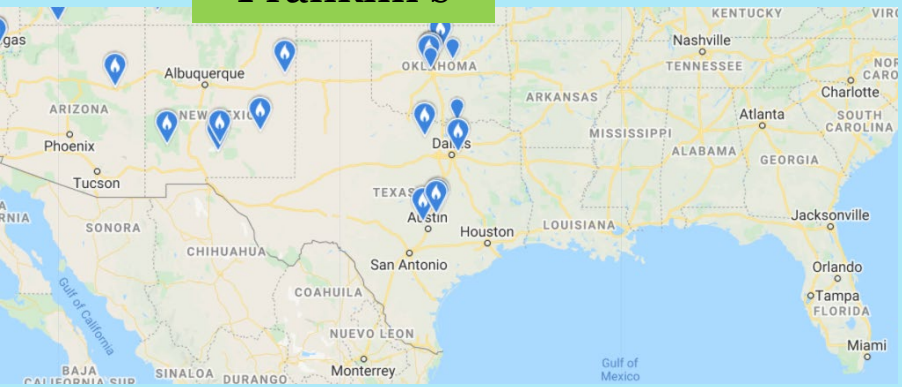
Herring



LBBG



Franklin's



Bonaparte's



Herring

JUNE 2021



Photo by Cin-Ty Lee

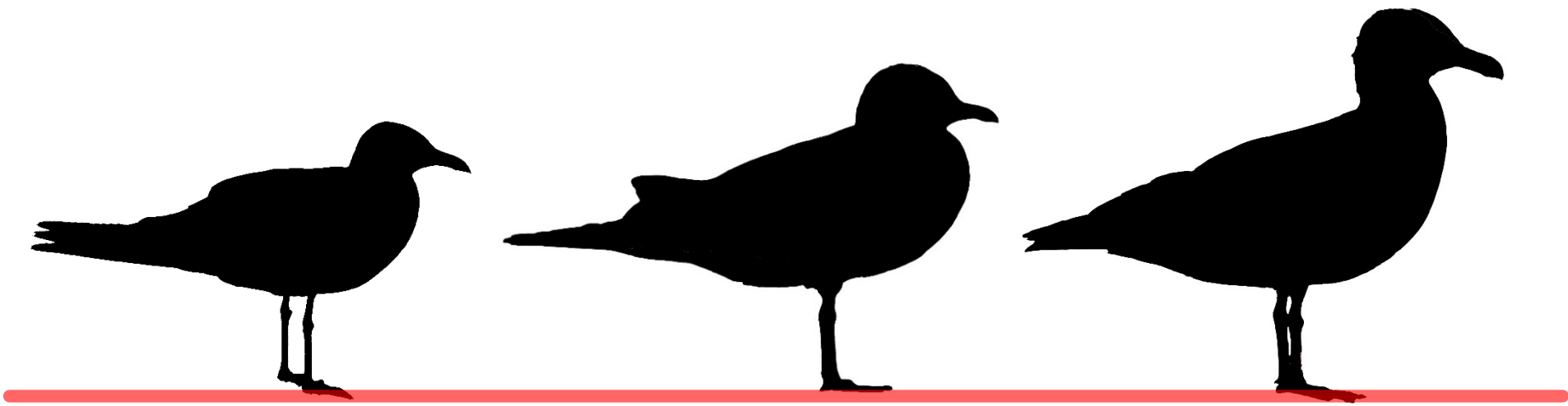
THE TEXAS HEX

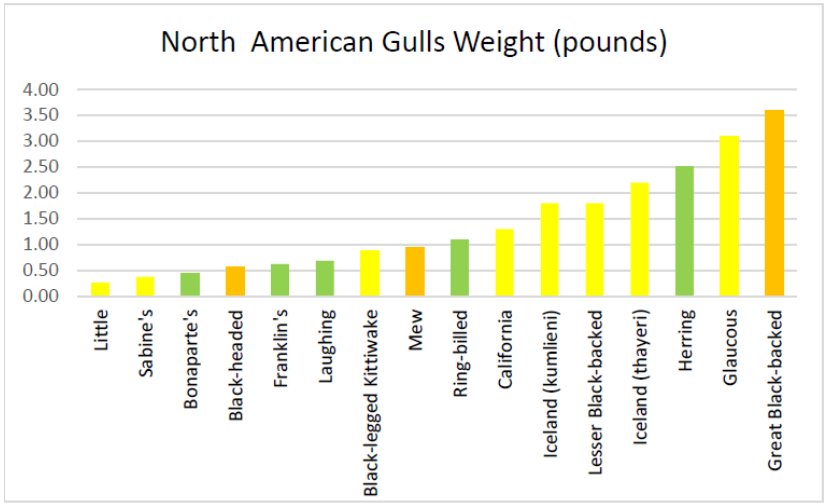
- Name them ?
- What is Jeff's Texas Gulls rule?

RING-BILLED
REFERENCE BIRD

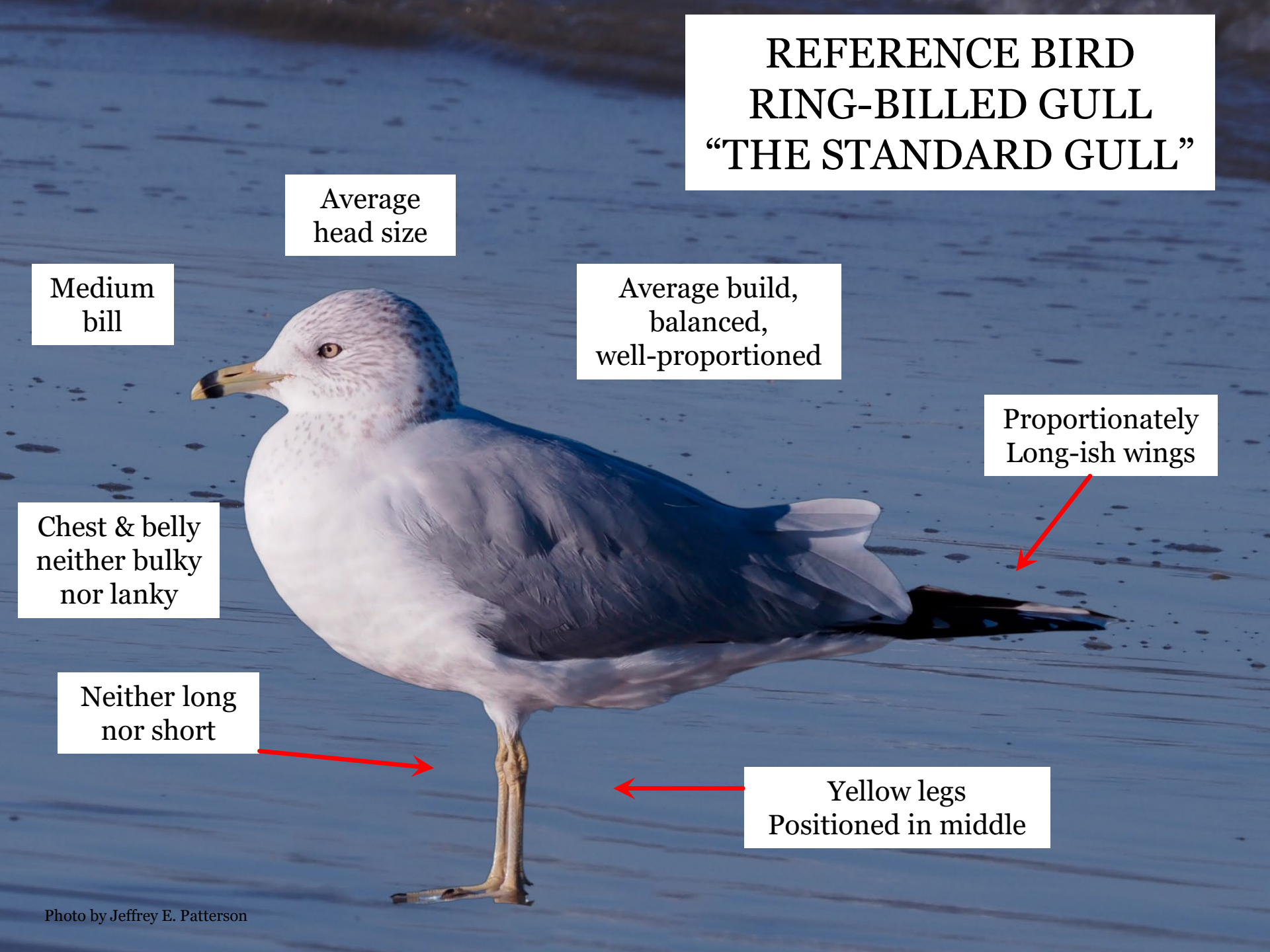
SIZE COMPARISON

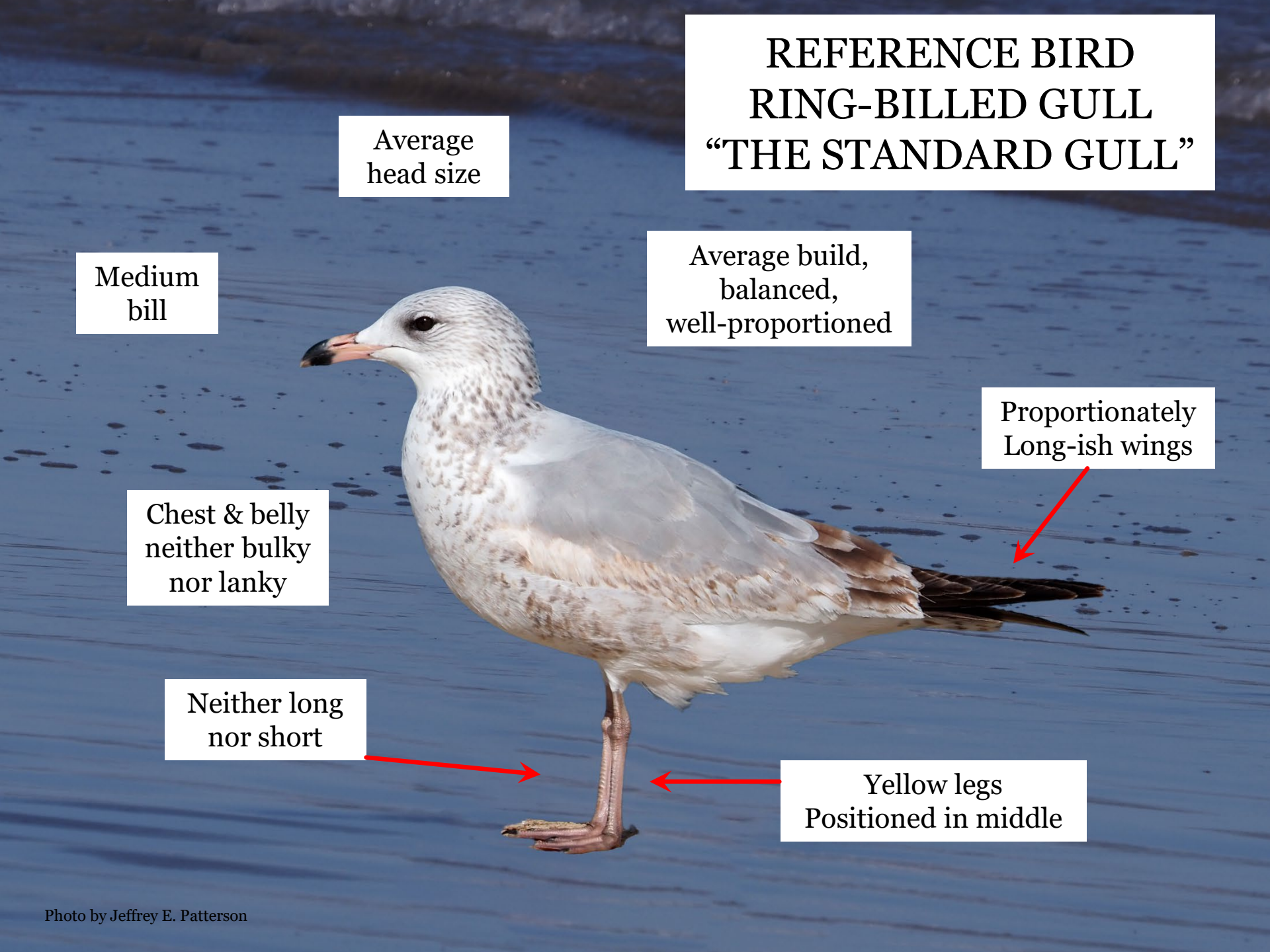
Laughing **Ring-billed** **Herring**





Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson


REFERENCE BIRD
RING-BILLED GULL
“THE STANDARD GULL”
Average head size
Medium bill
Average build, balanced, well-proportioned
Proportionately Long-ish wings
Chest & belly neither bulky nor lanky
Neither long nor short
Yellow legs Positioned in middle
Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson


REFERENCE BIRD
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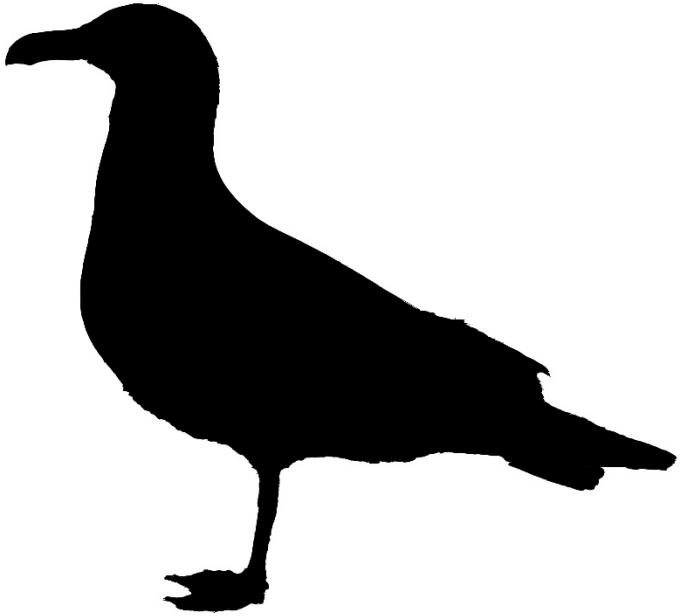
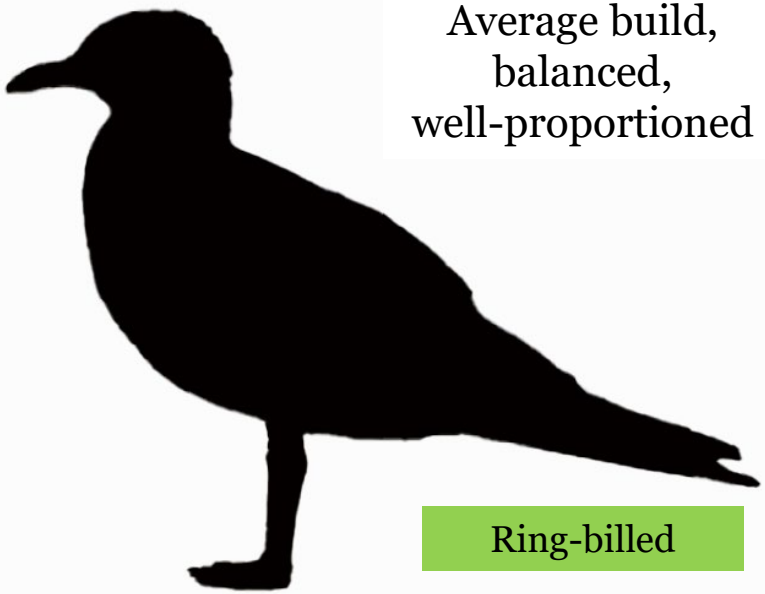


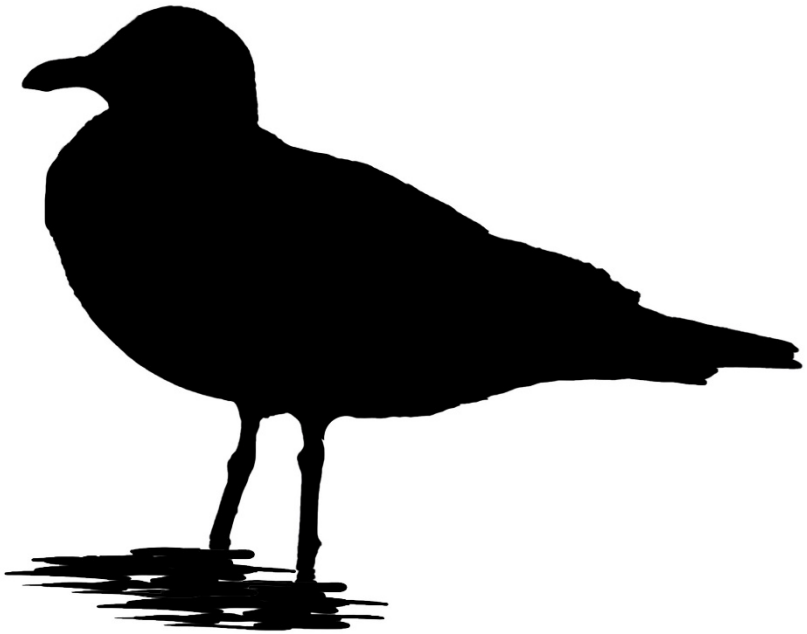


Average build, balanced, well-proportioned

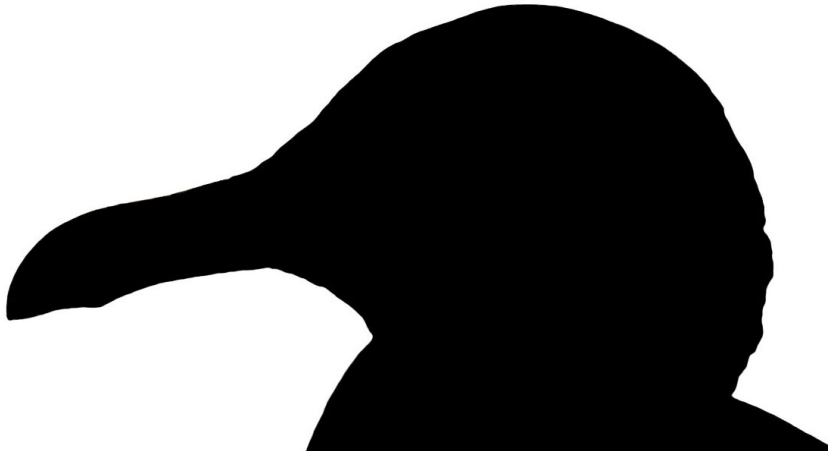
Ring-billed

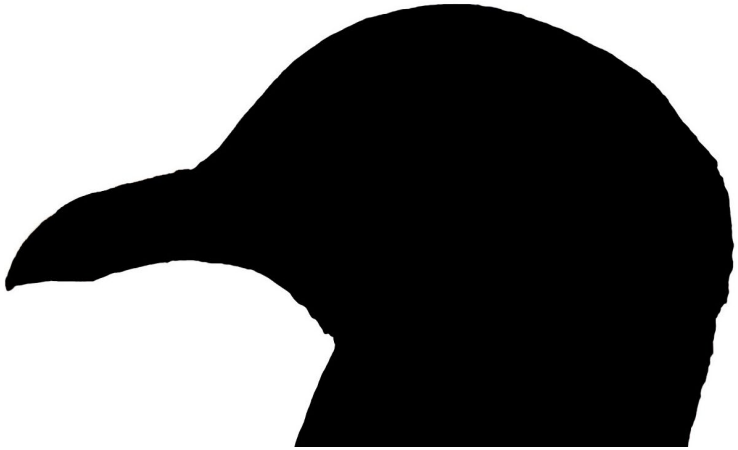
Find the Ring-billed





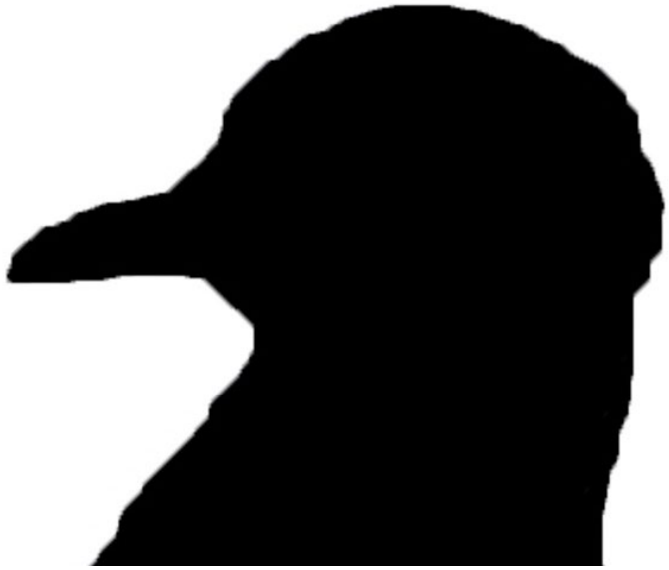
Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson





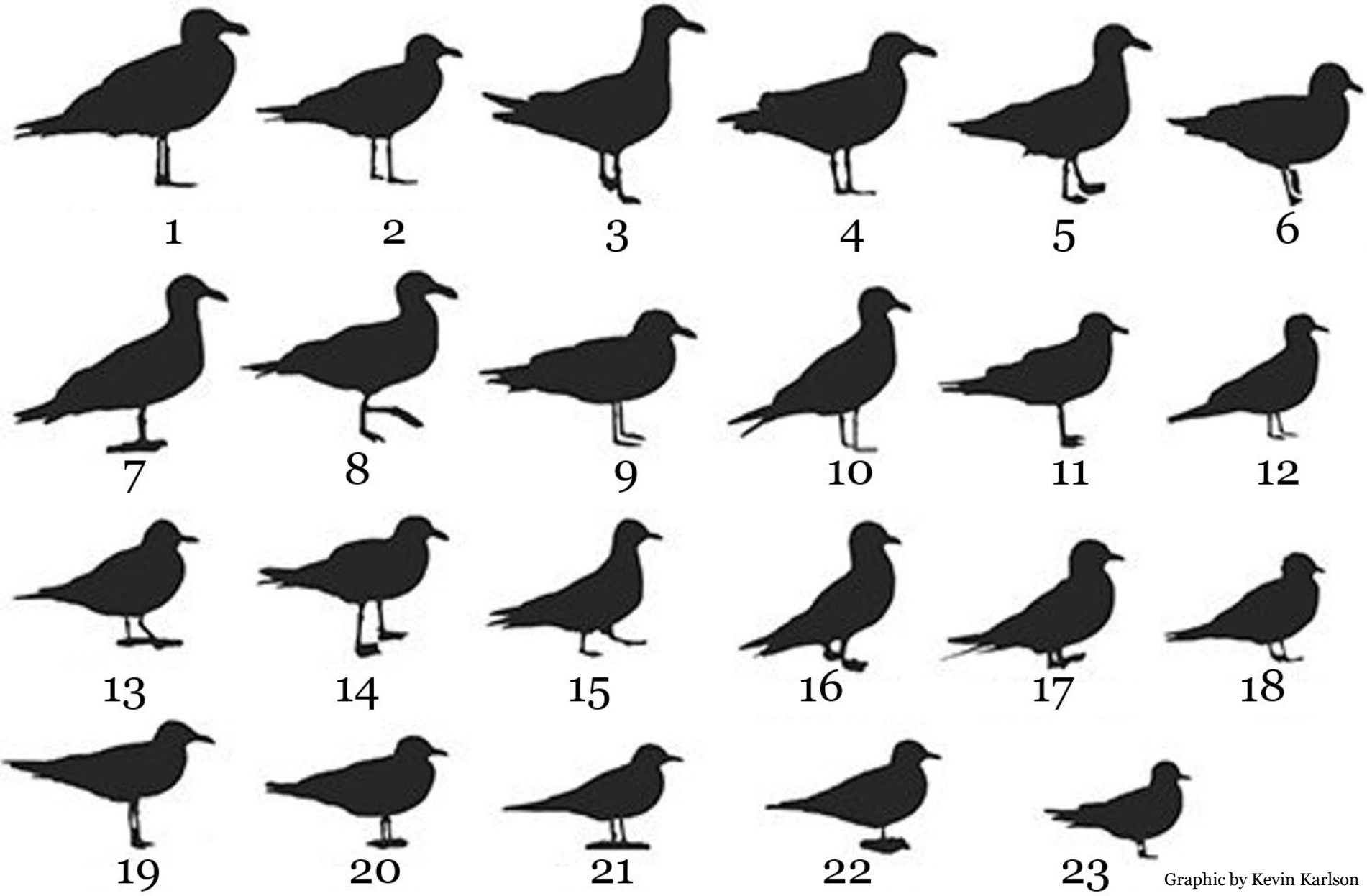
Ring-billed

Find the Ring-billed



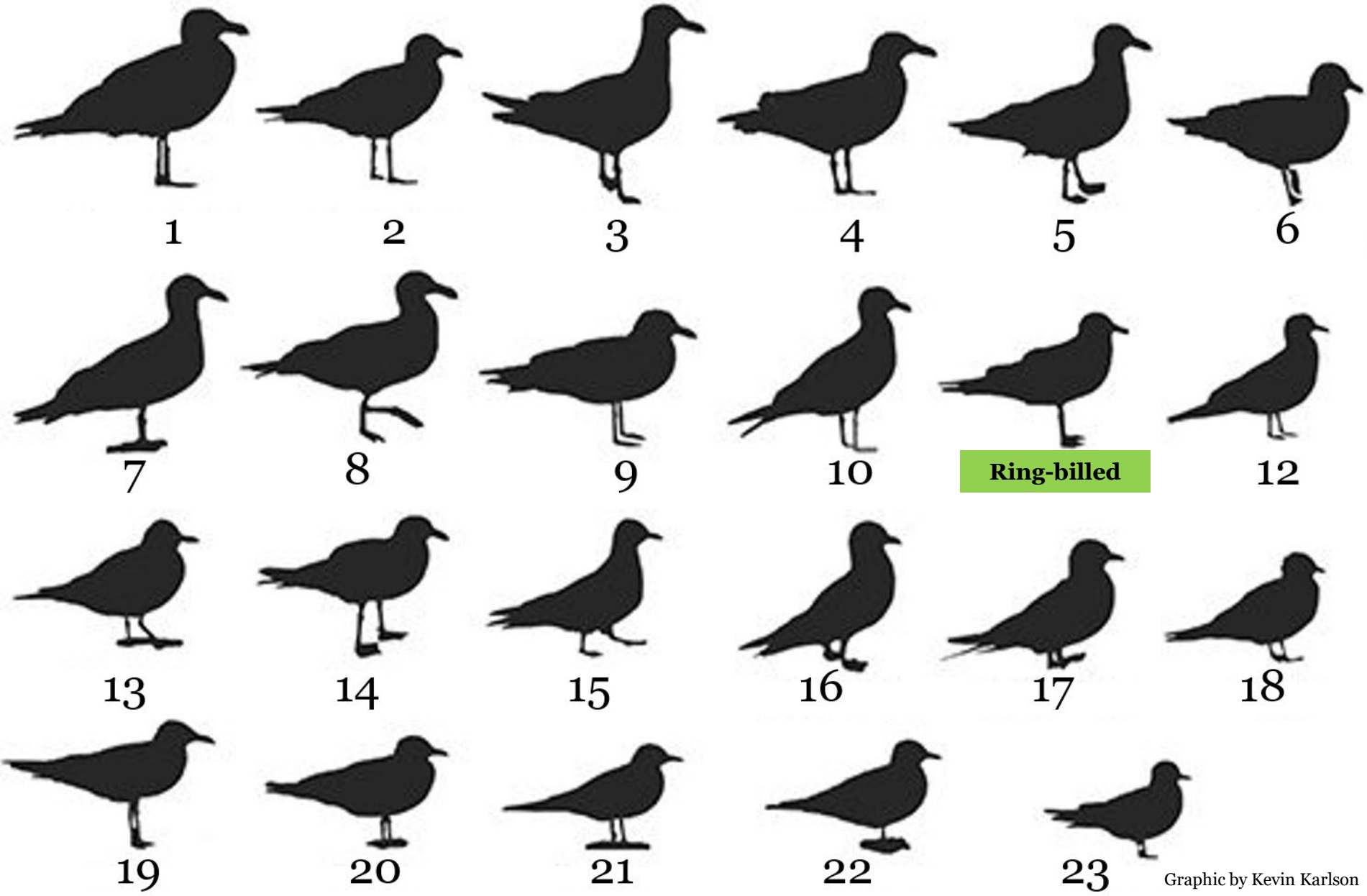
Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

FIND THE RING-BILLED
WHICH OTHER ONES STAND OUT?
WHY?



Graphic by Kevin Karlson

FIND THE RING-BILLED
WHICH OTHER ONES STAND OUT?
WHY?



Graphic by Kevin Karlson

AGING RING-BILLED

Immature



Photo by Daniel Jauvin

Sub-adult



Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

Adult



Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

HEAD & BILL
RING-BILLED – ADULT NONBREEDING

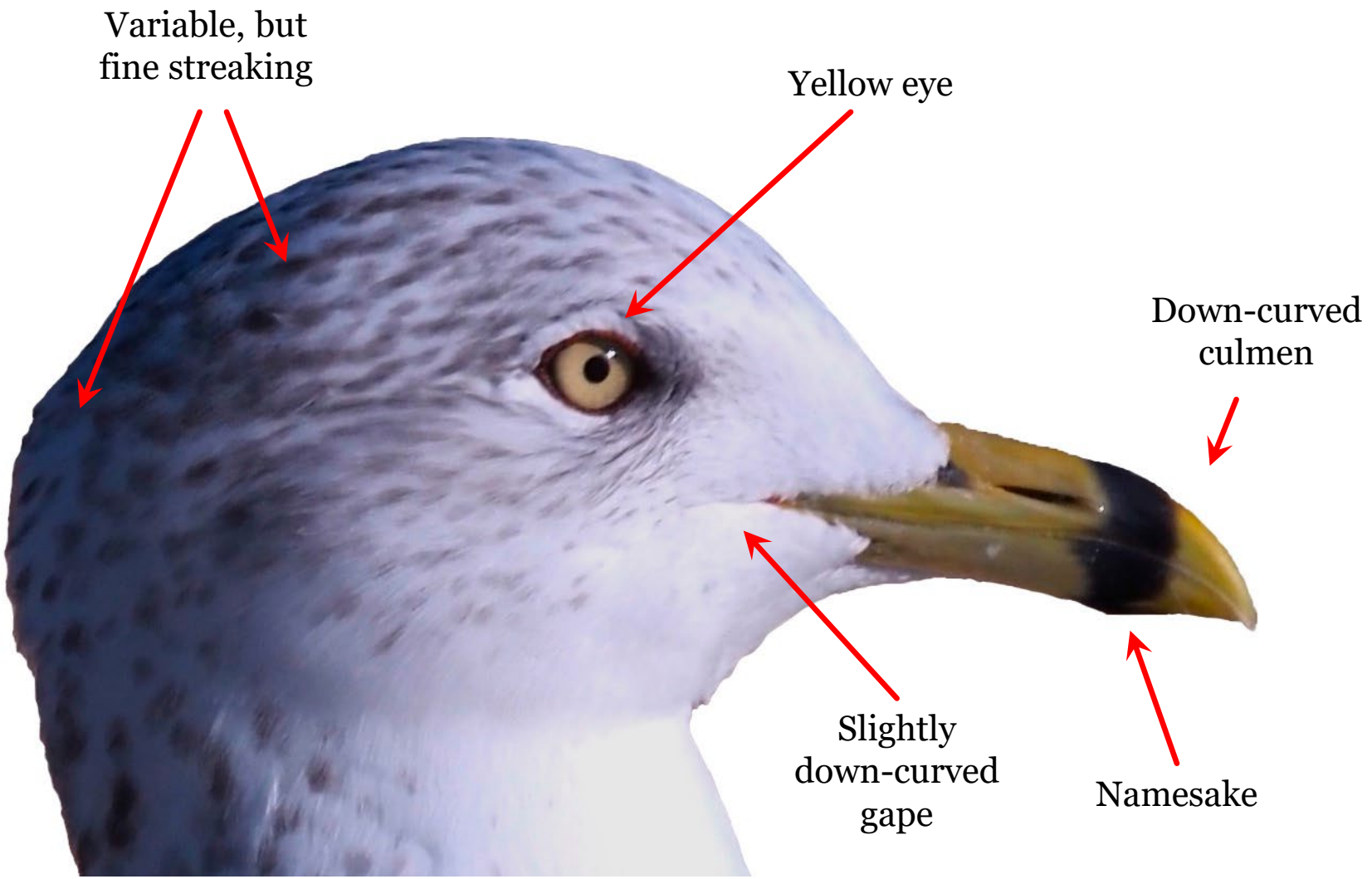
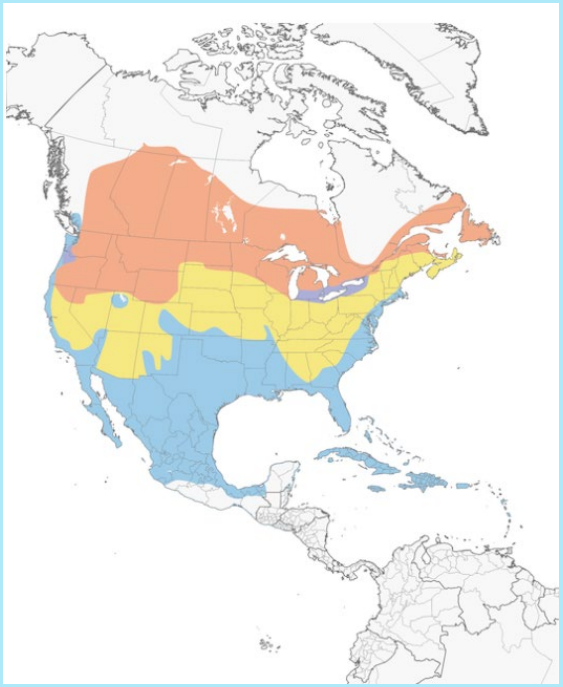


Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

AGING RING-BILLED
BILL COLOR/EYE COLOR



Juvenile



Photo by Amando Guercio

Sub-adult

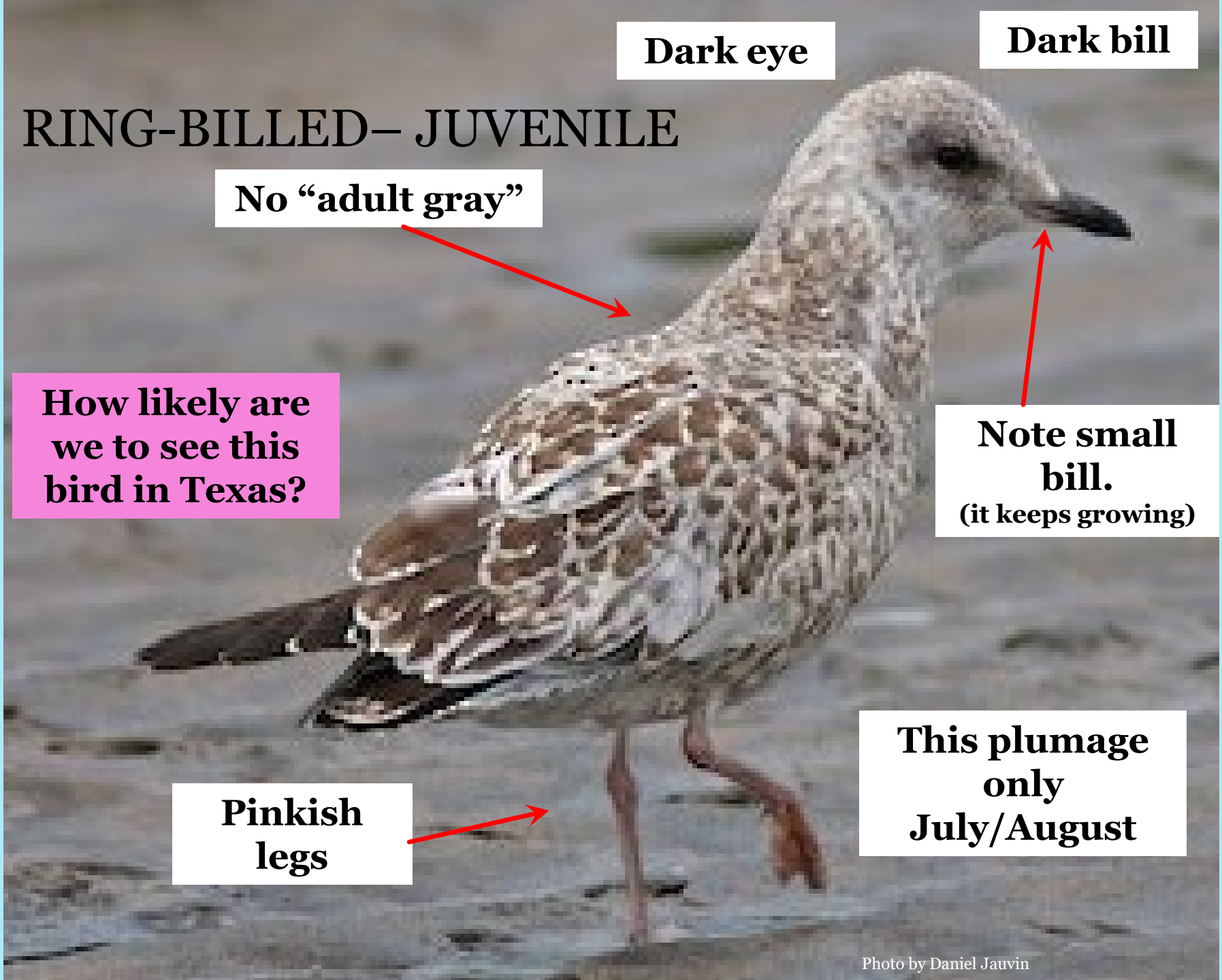


Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

Adult



Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson


Dark eye
Dark bill
RING-BILLED– JUVENILE
No “adult gray”
How likely are we to see this bird in Texas?
Note small bill.
(it keeps growing)
This plumage only July/August
Pinkish legs
Photo by Daniel Jauvin

RING-BILLED – SUB-ADULT

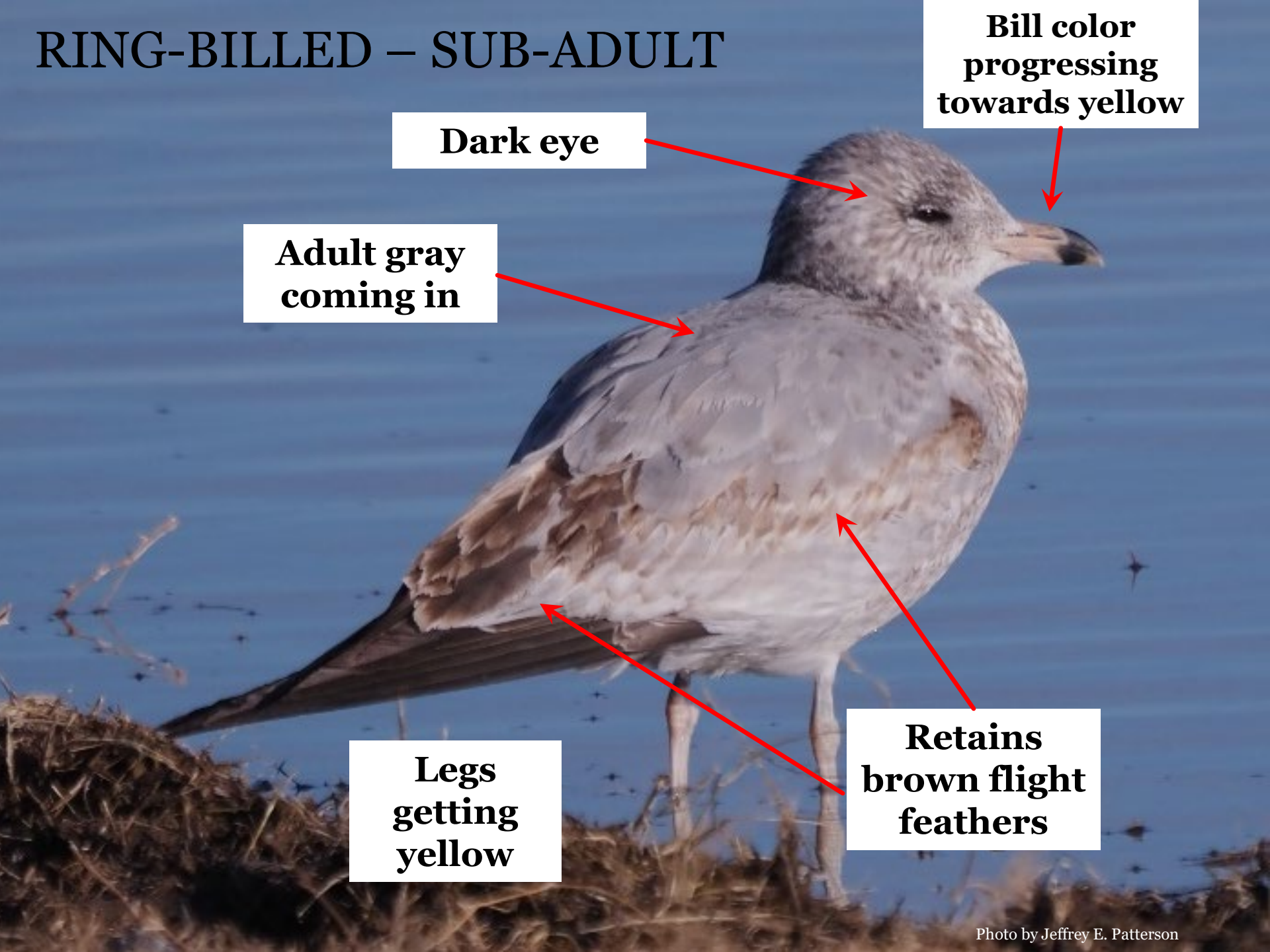
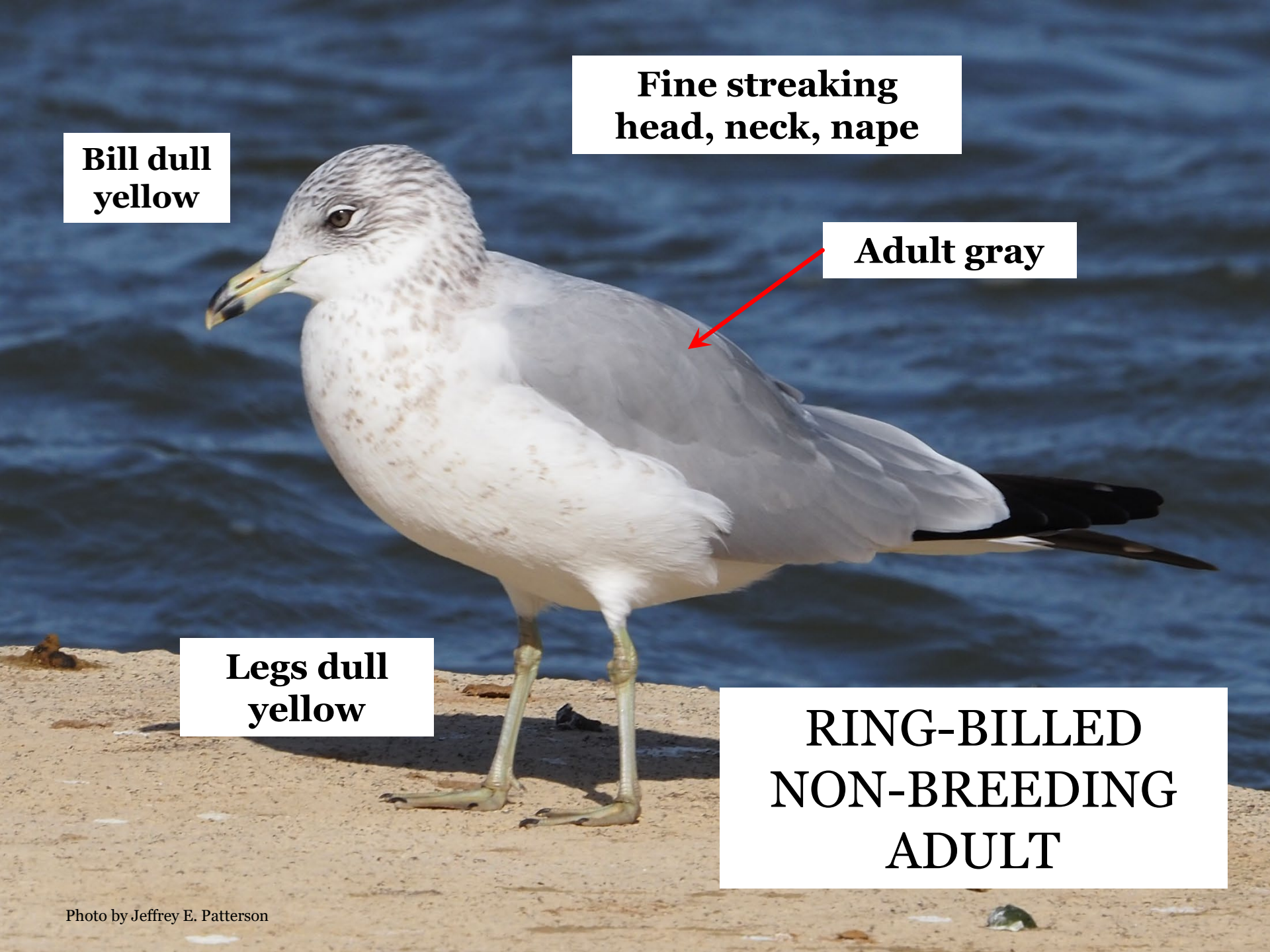
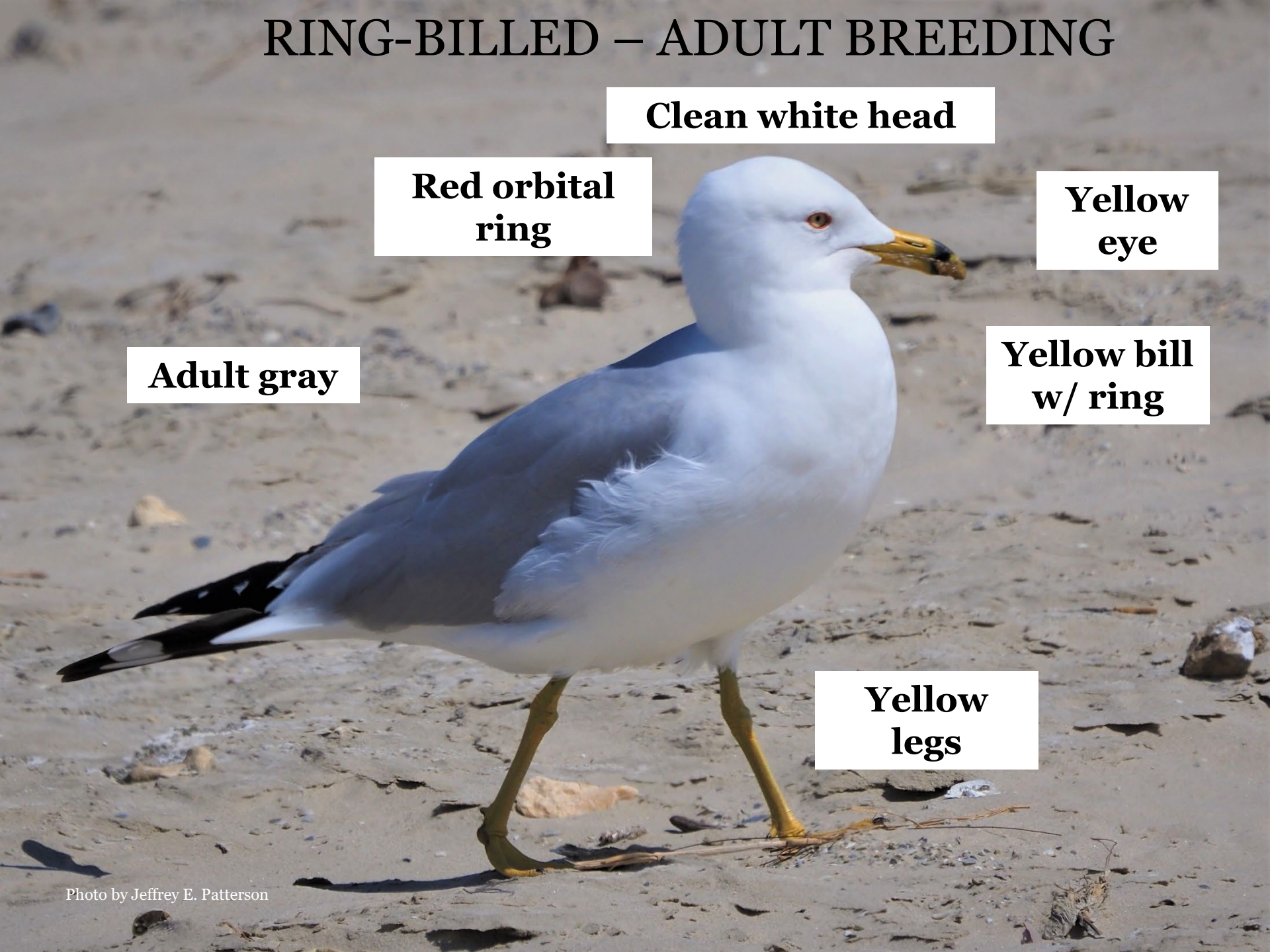


Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson


Fine streaking
head, neck, nape
Bill dull
yellow
Adult gray
Legs dull
yellow
RING-BILLED
NON-BREEDING
ADULT
Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

RING-BILLED – ADULT BREEDING



GULLS WITH "RINGS" ON BILLS

Ring-billed



Herring



California



Glaucous



Iceland



Photo by Blake Matheson

LBBG



Other Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

GULLS WITH "RINGS" ON BILLS

Short-billed



Photo by Timothy Reeves

Western



Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

Black-tailed



Photo by Brian Sullivan

Slaty-backed



Photo by Blake Matheson

Glaucous-winged

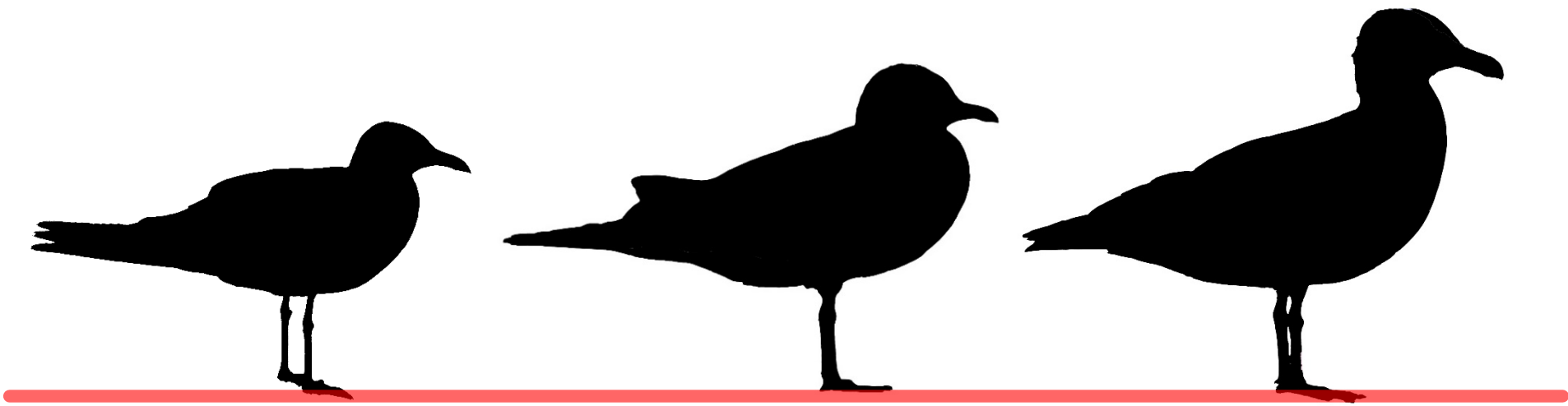


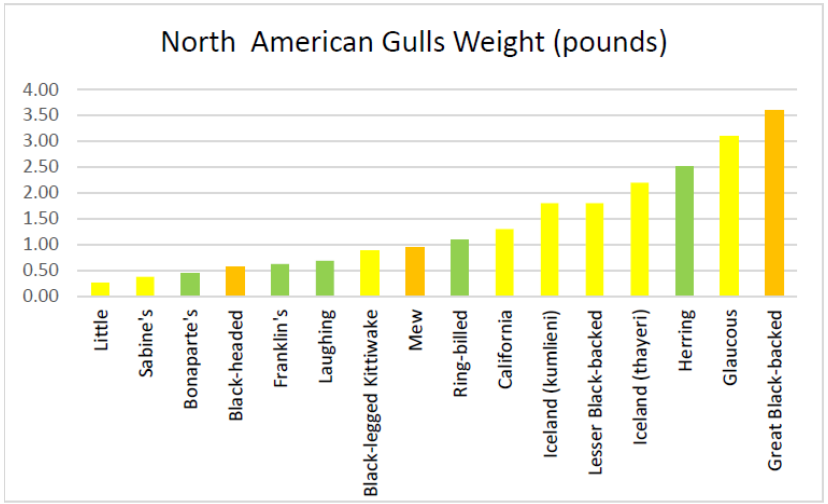
Photo by Alex Lamoreaux

LAUGHING
REFERENCE BIRD
GULF COAST

SIZE COMPARISON

Laughing **Ring-billed** **Herring**





Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

WHY IS THIS NOT A RING-BILLED?

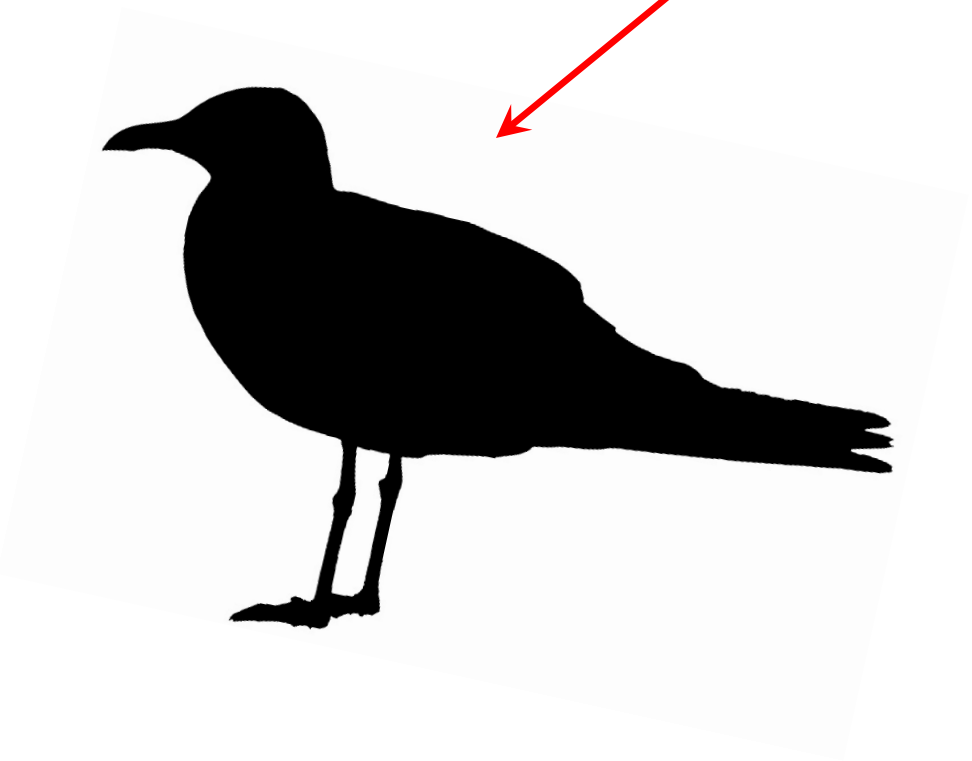
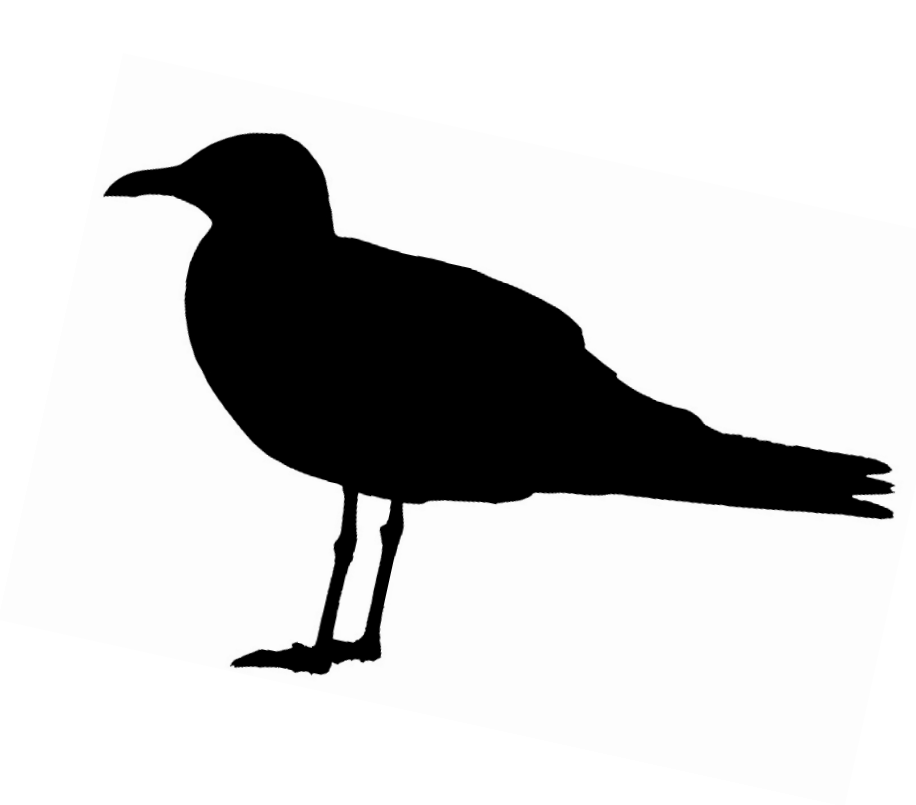
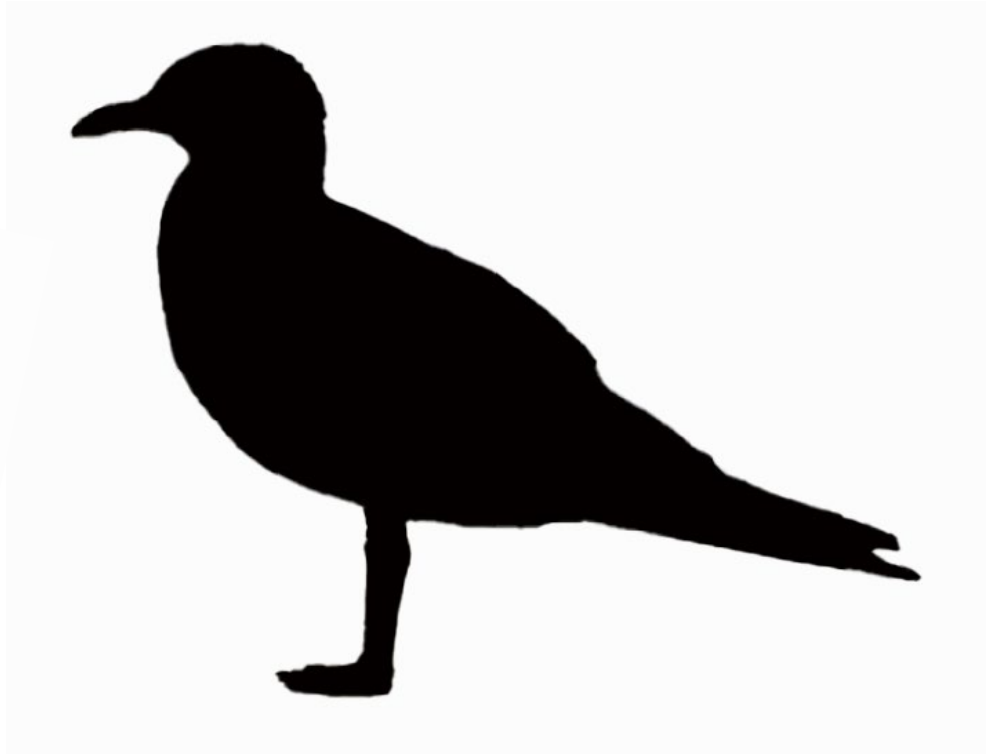


Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

WHY IS THIS NOT A RING-BILLED?





Laughing

Ring-billed

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

WHY IS THIS NOT A RING-BILLED?

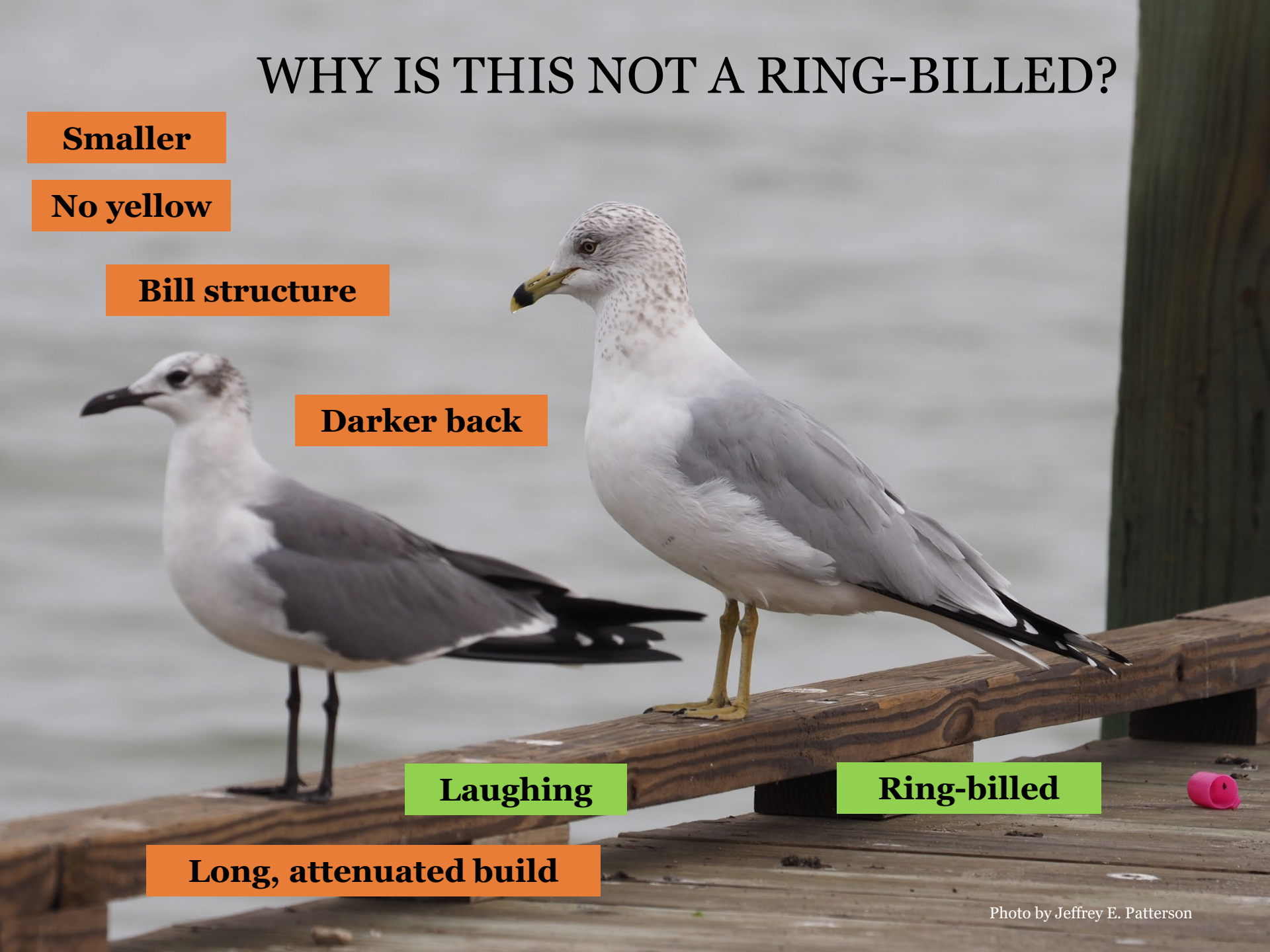
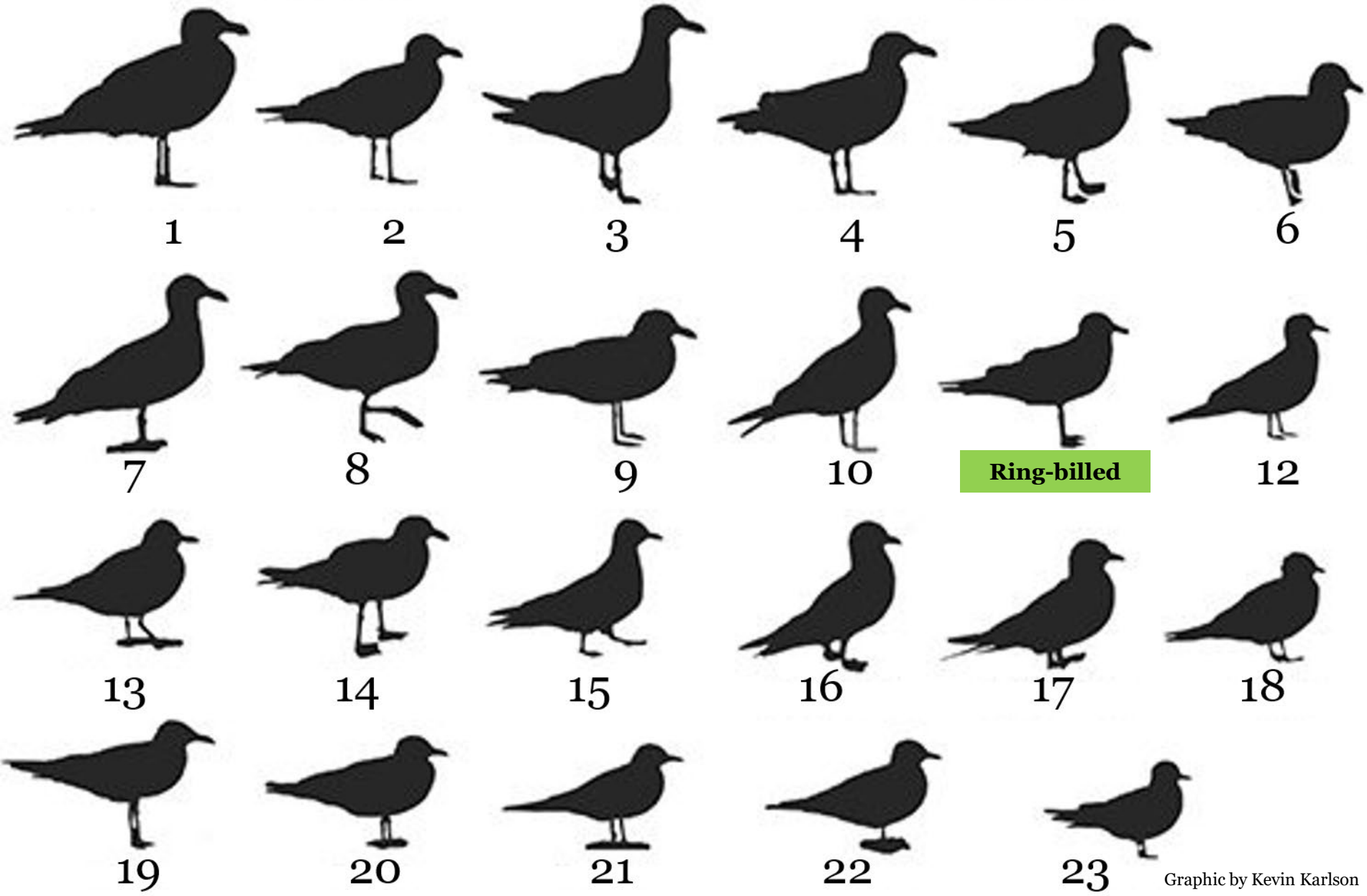


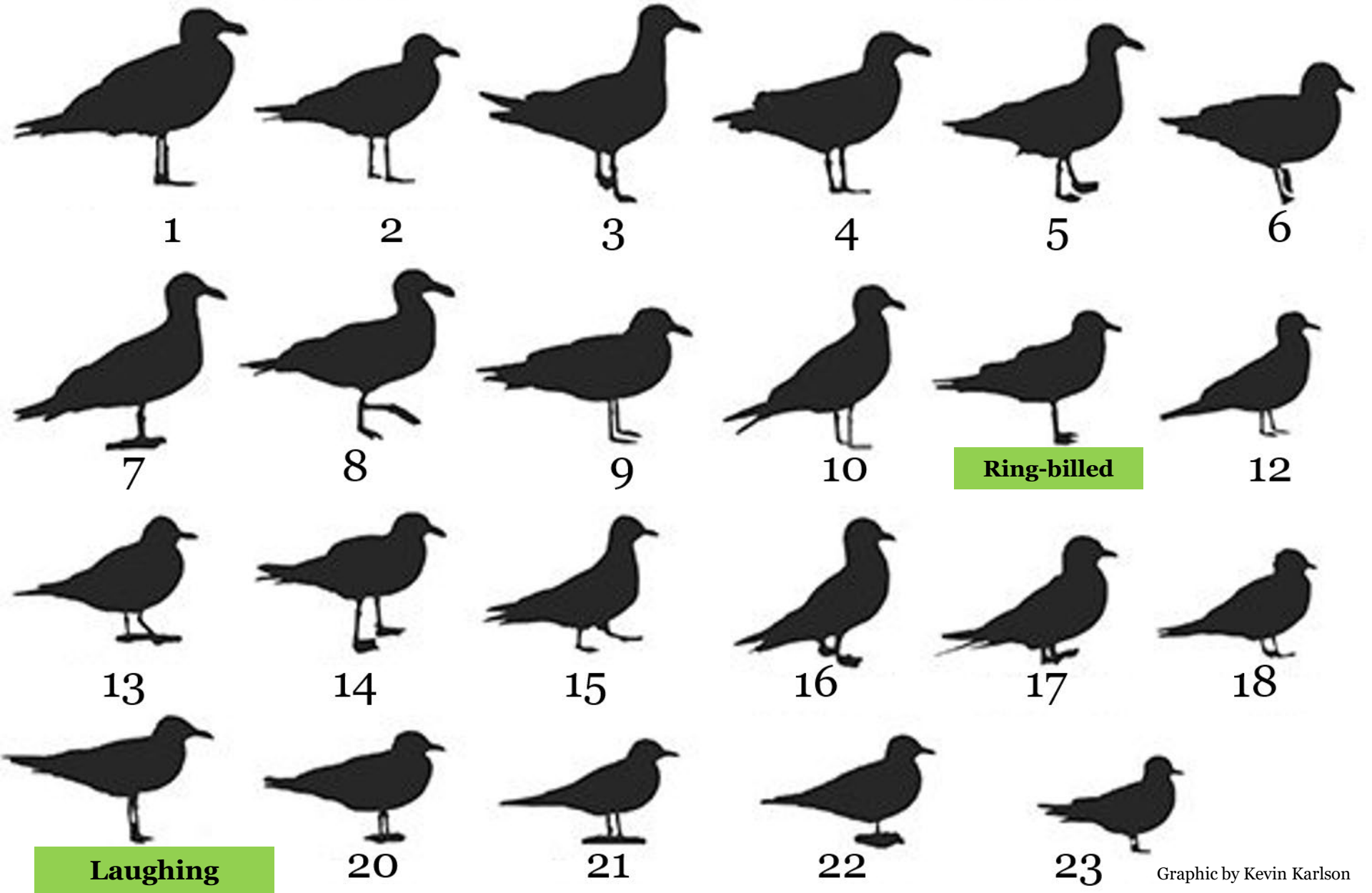
Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

WHO'S LAUGHING ?



Graphic by Kevin Karlson

WHO'S LAUGHING ?



Graphic by Kevin Karlson

STRUCTURE

LAUGHING ADULT BREEDING

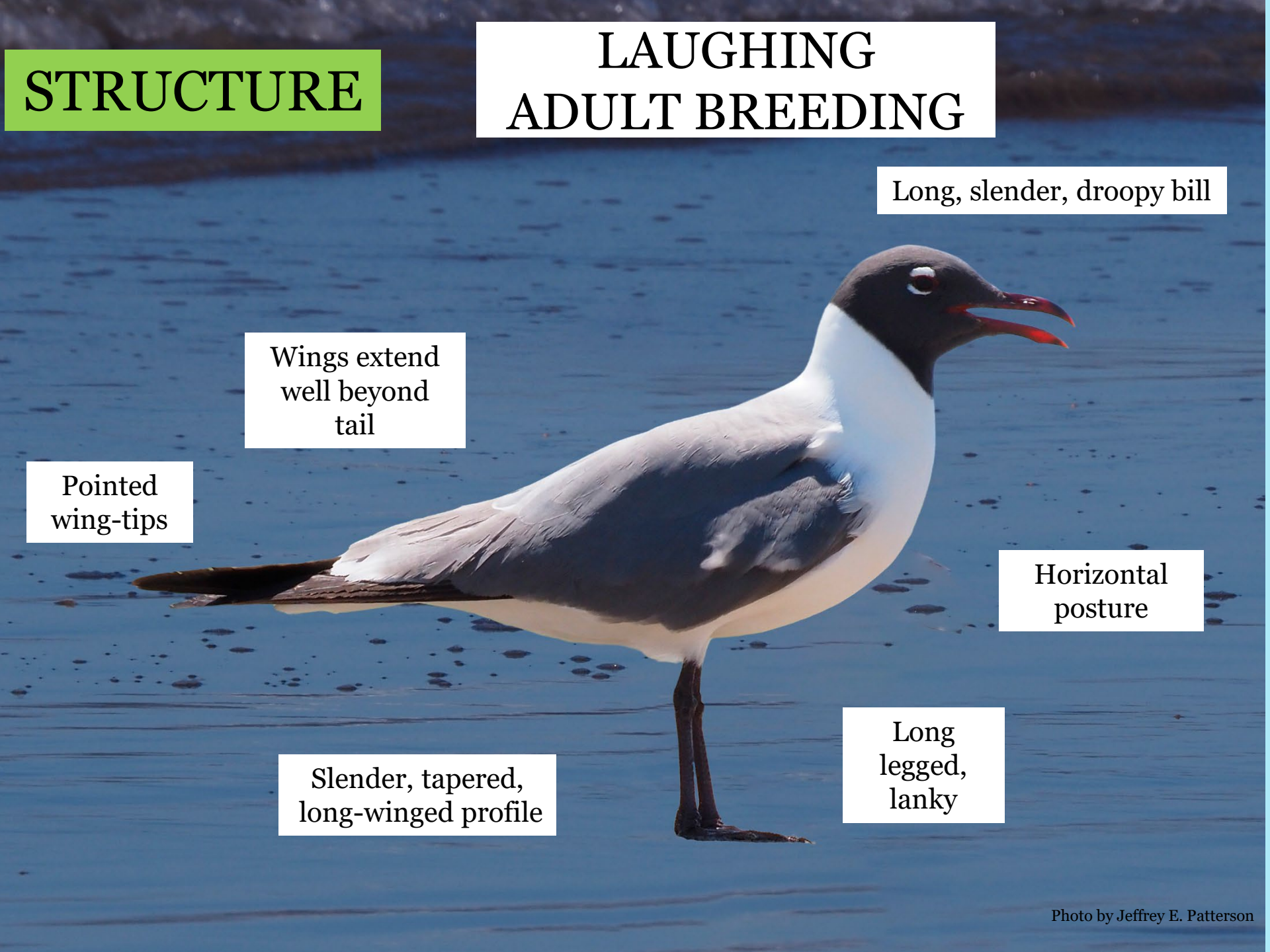


Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

PLUMAGE

LAUGHING
ADULT BREEDING

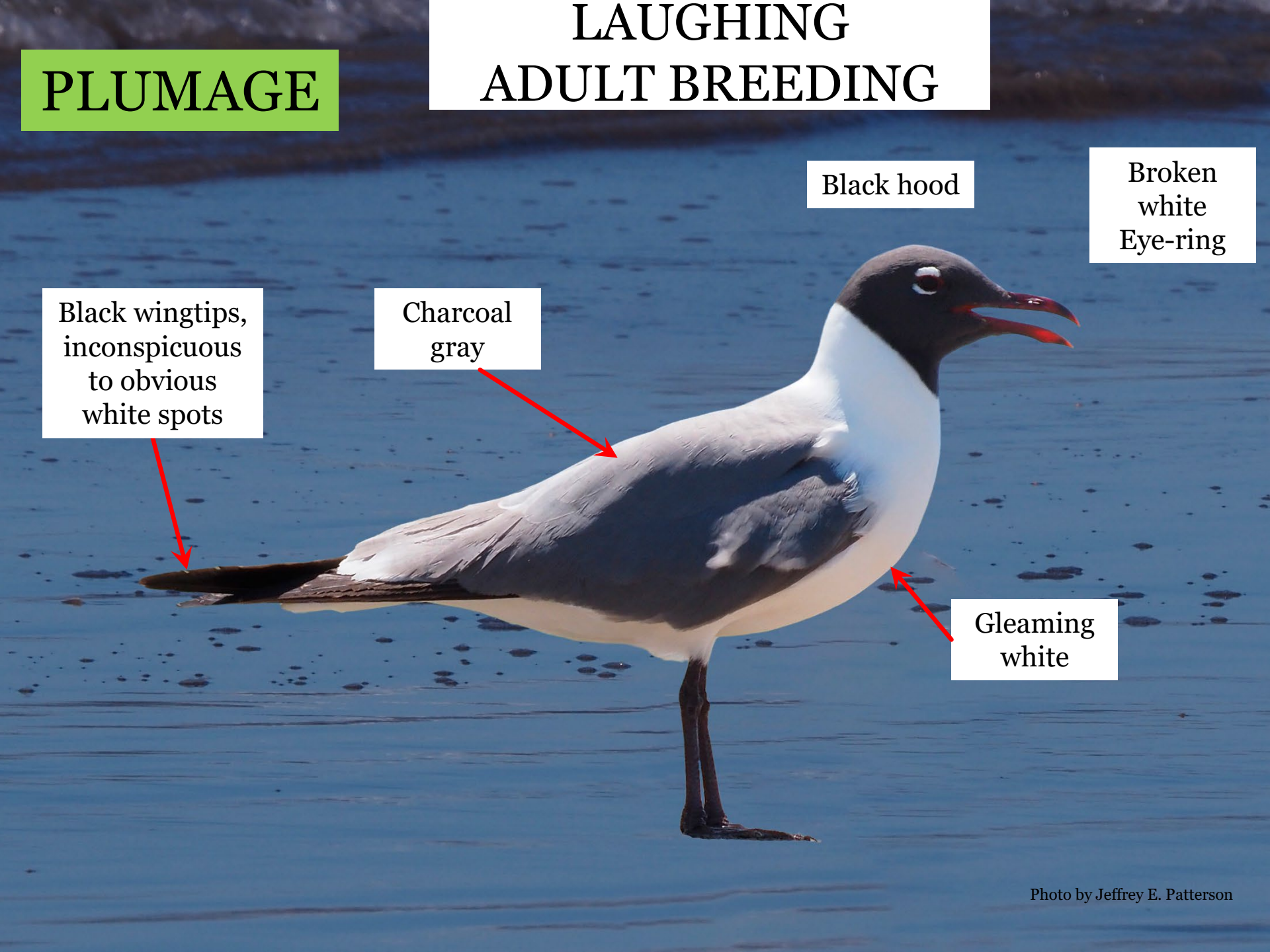


Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

LAUGHING
ADULT NON-BREEDING

Pointy tips

Long, slender wing



Fully white tail & rump

Extensive black

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

SPOTS ON PRIMARIES

1



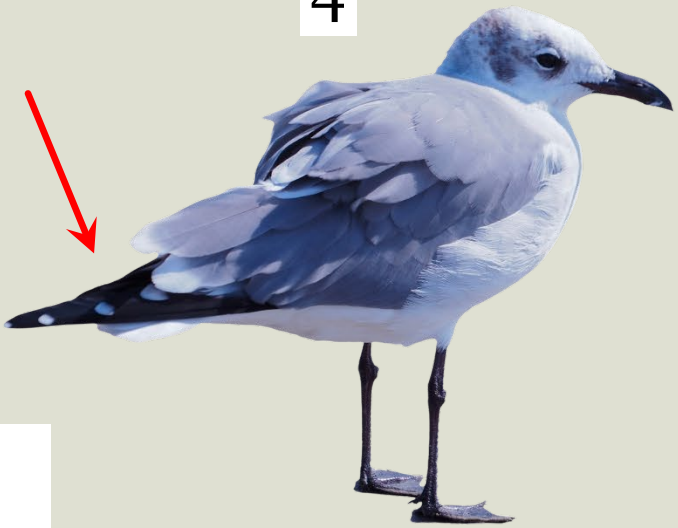
2



3



4



All taken
10/26/23

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson



LAUGHING ADULT BREEDING

Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

FRANKLIN'S

FRANKLIN'S

Migrate in well-defined flocks



Buc-ee's National Wildlife Refuge
Temple, Texas
4/17/23

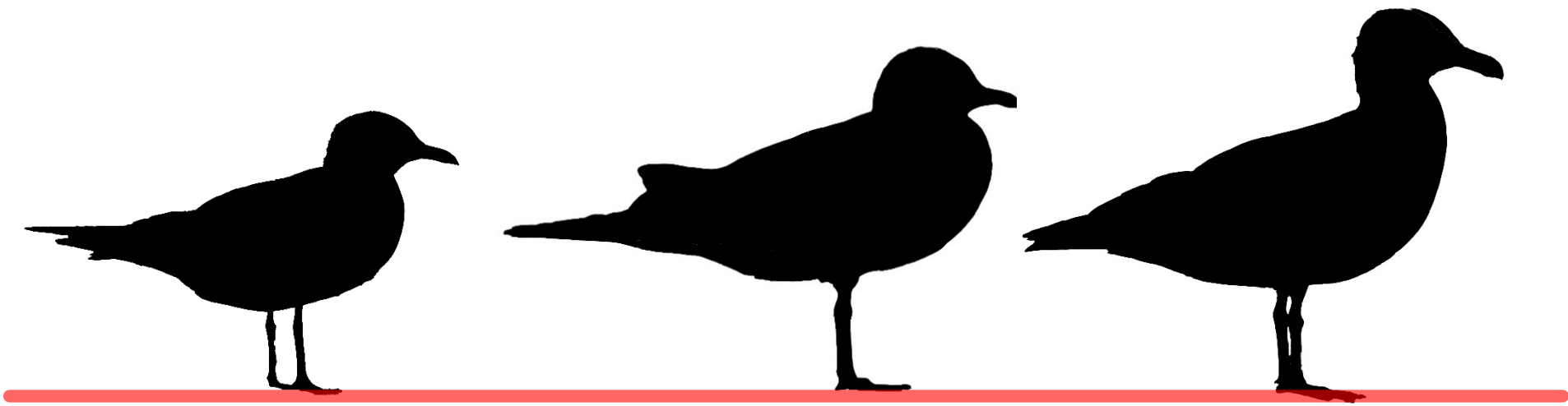
Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

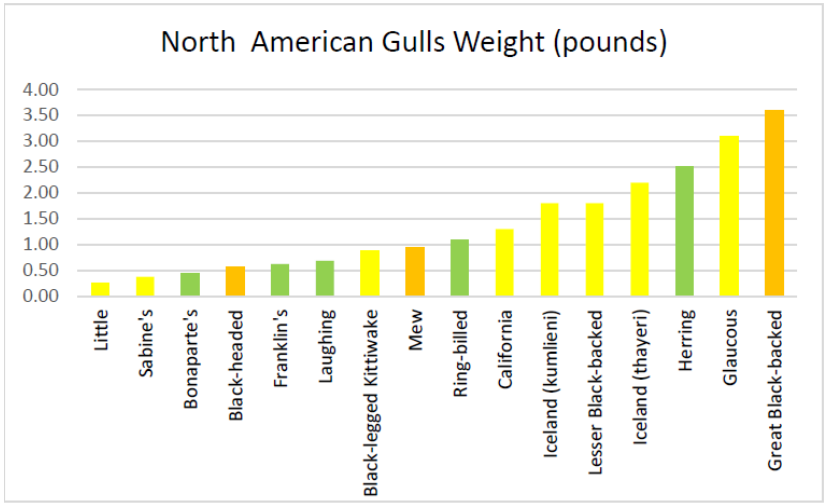


Video by Jeffrey E. Patterson

SIZE COMPARISON

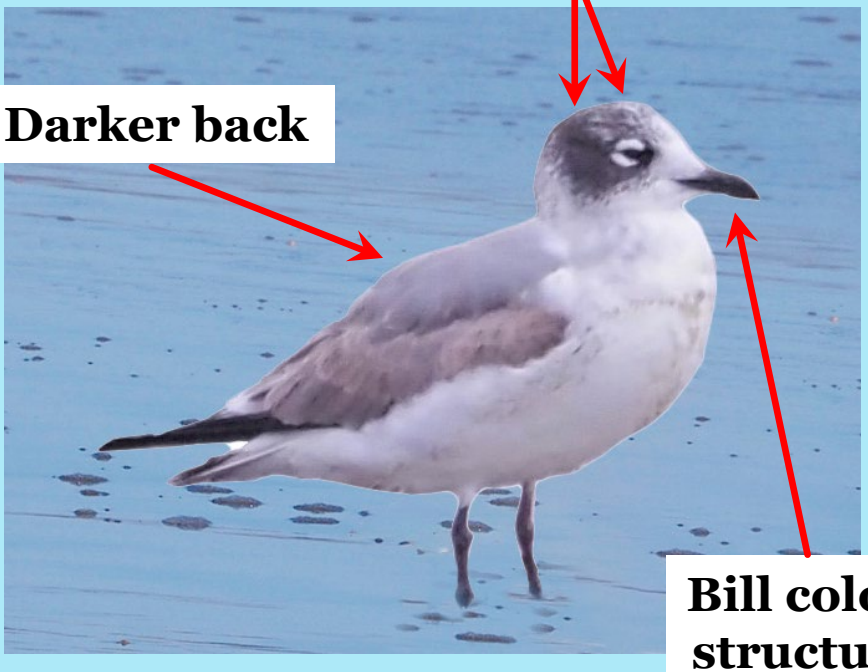
Franklin's **Ring-billed** **Herring**





Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

WHY IS THIS NOT RING-BILLED ?



Franklin's

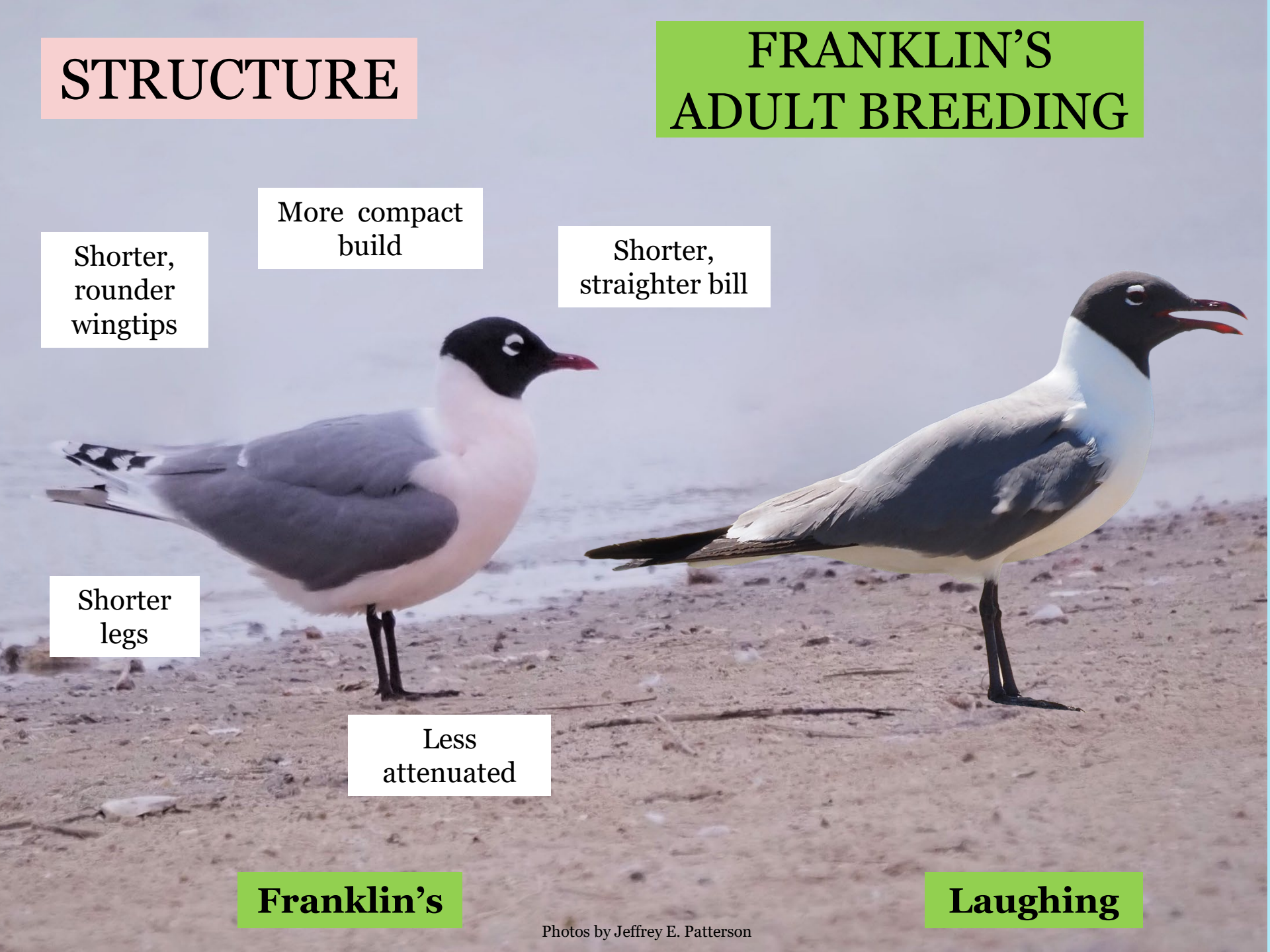


Ring-billed

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

STRUCTURE

FRANKLIN'S ADULT BREEDING



Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

PLUMAGE

FRANKLIN'S ADULT BREEDING

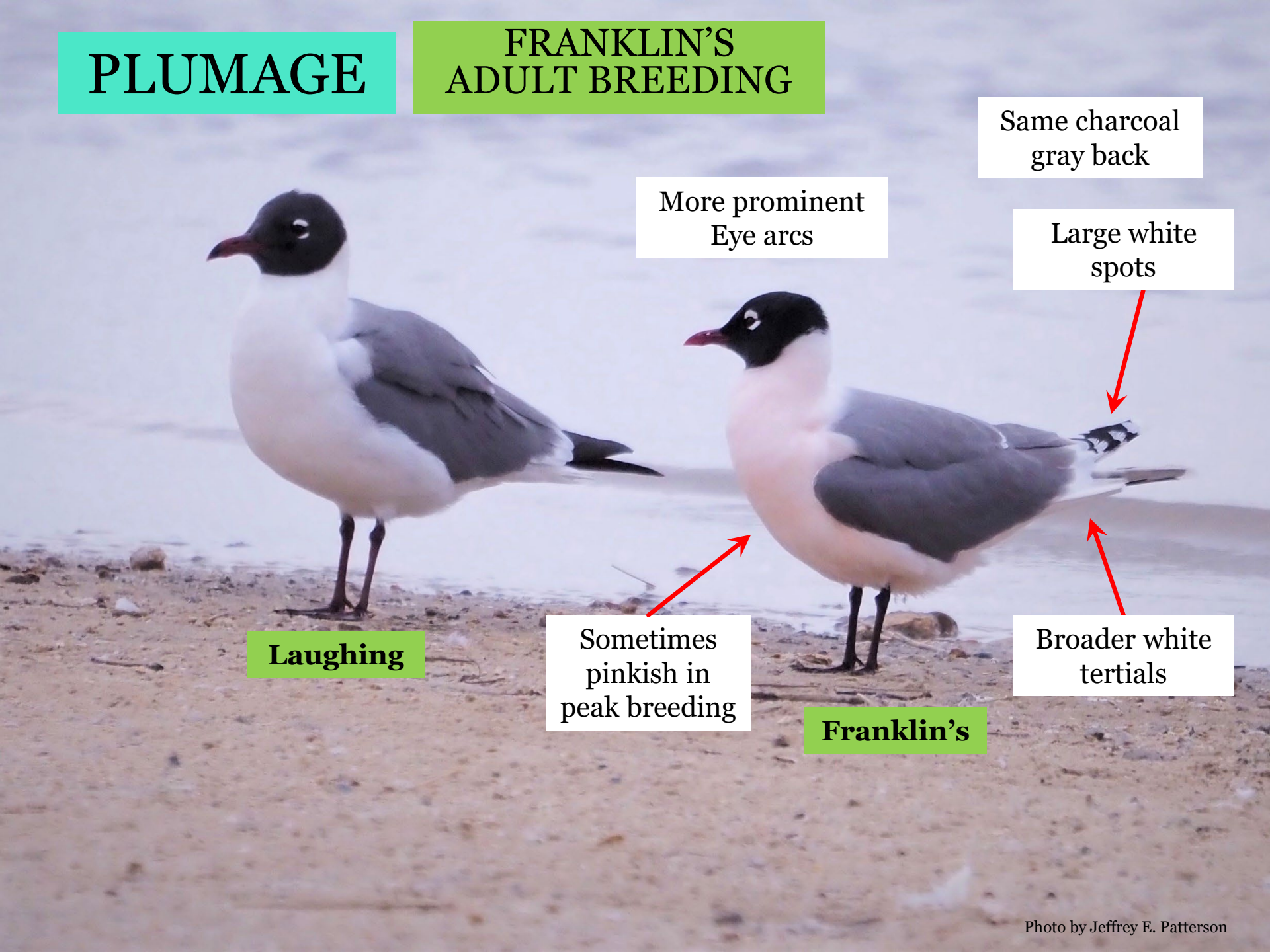


Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

FRANKLIN'S ADULT BREEDING

White

Black

Gray

Broader & rounder wings



Laughing

Franklin's

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

HOODED GULLS



Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

Laughing



Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

Franklin's



Photo by Jim Sims

Bonaparte's



Photo by Ian Davies

Sabine's

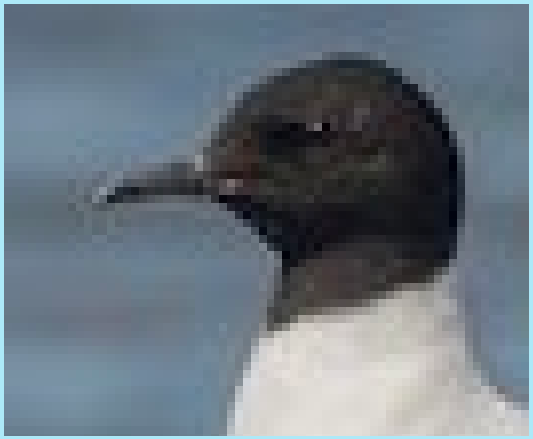


Photo by Derek Rogers

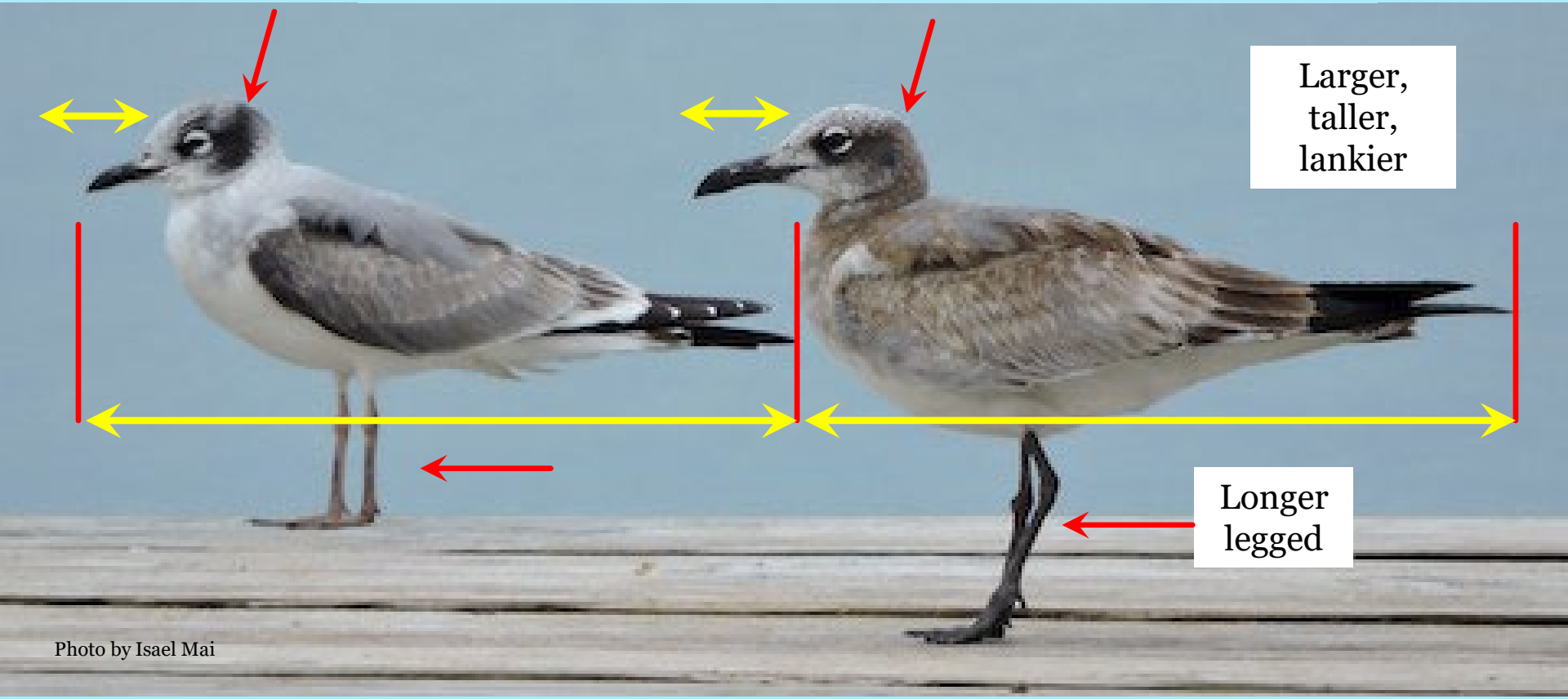
Little



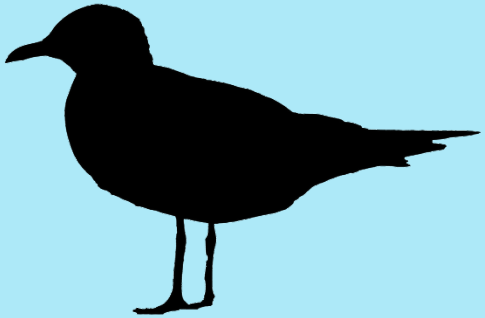
Photo by Alexis Lours

Black-headed

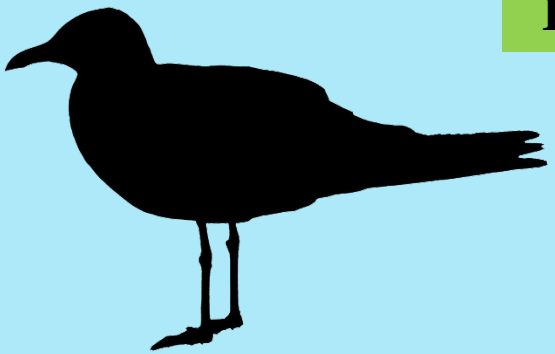
FRANKLIN'S VS LAUGHING



Franklin's



Laughing



Other Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson



Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

WHICH IS WHICH ?







Immature

Sub-adult

Adult







Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

WHICH IS WHICH ?

Laughing



Franklin's



Laughing



Immature

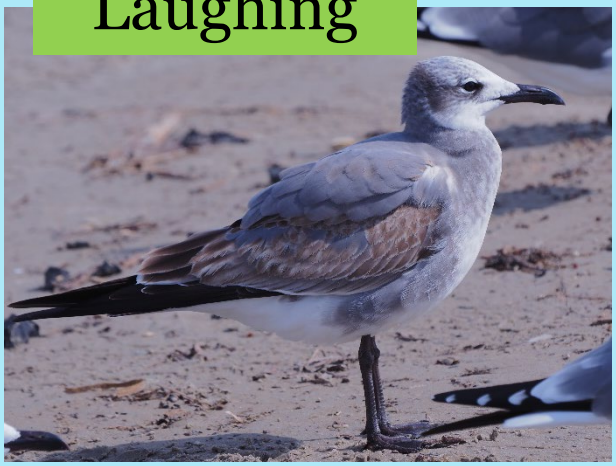
Sub-adult

Adult

Franklin's



Laughing



Franklin's



Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson



Not much black

Franklin's

Black

Laughing

Long, narrow wings



Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson



REAL LIFE GULLING !!!



Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

HERRING

AMERICAN HERRING



- 4 year gull.
- Most common large white-headed gull in NA.
- Most variable gull in the world.
- Genus name refers to a gull or other large seabird.
  - *Larus smithsonianus*
- Species name commemorates English chemist James Smithson whose bequest created the Smithsonian Institution.
- **Vega Gull** (Siberia, Japan, Korea, eastern China, Taiwan) Sometimes considered a subspecies of **American Herring**.

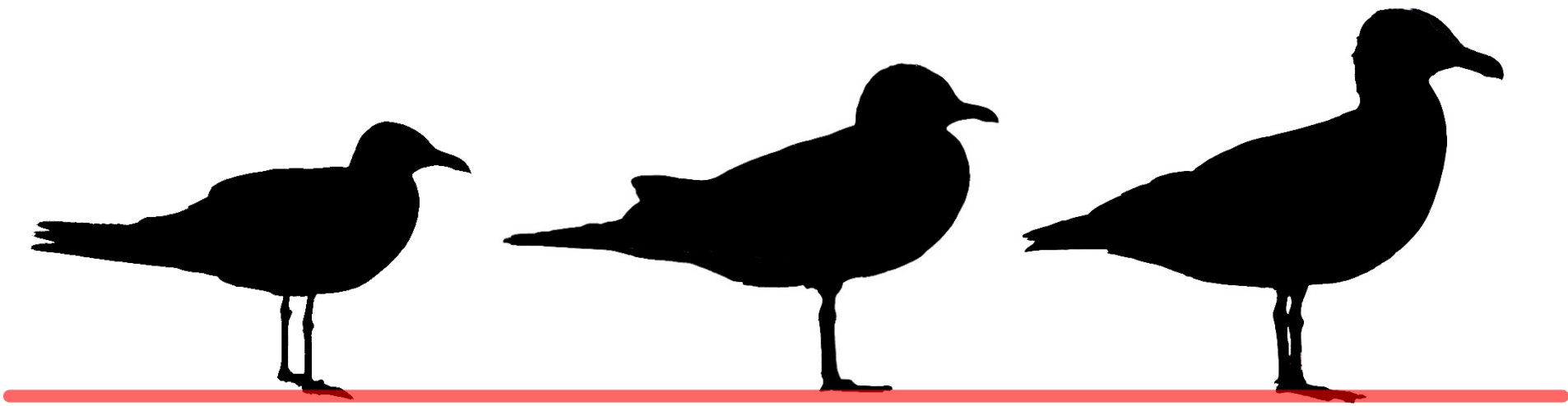
HERRING

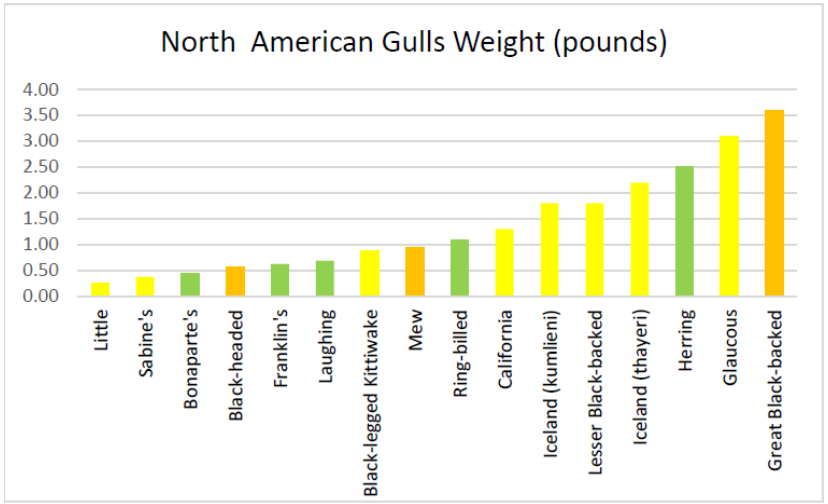


- Most variable gull in the world
  - Head shape
  - Wing projection vs tail
  - Body shape
  - Bill shape
- Maybe up to 12 subspecies (or species)
- Immature – most common brown gull for Texas
- Immature – “only chocolate brown gull east of Rockies”

SIZE COMPARISON

Laughing **Ring-billed** **Herring**

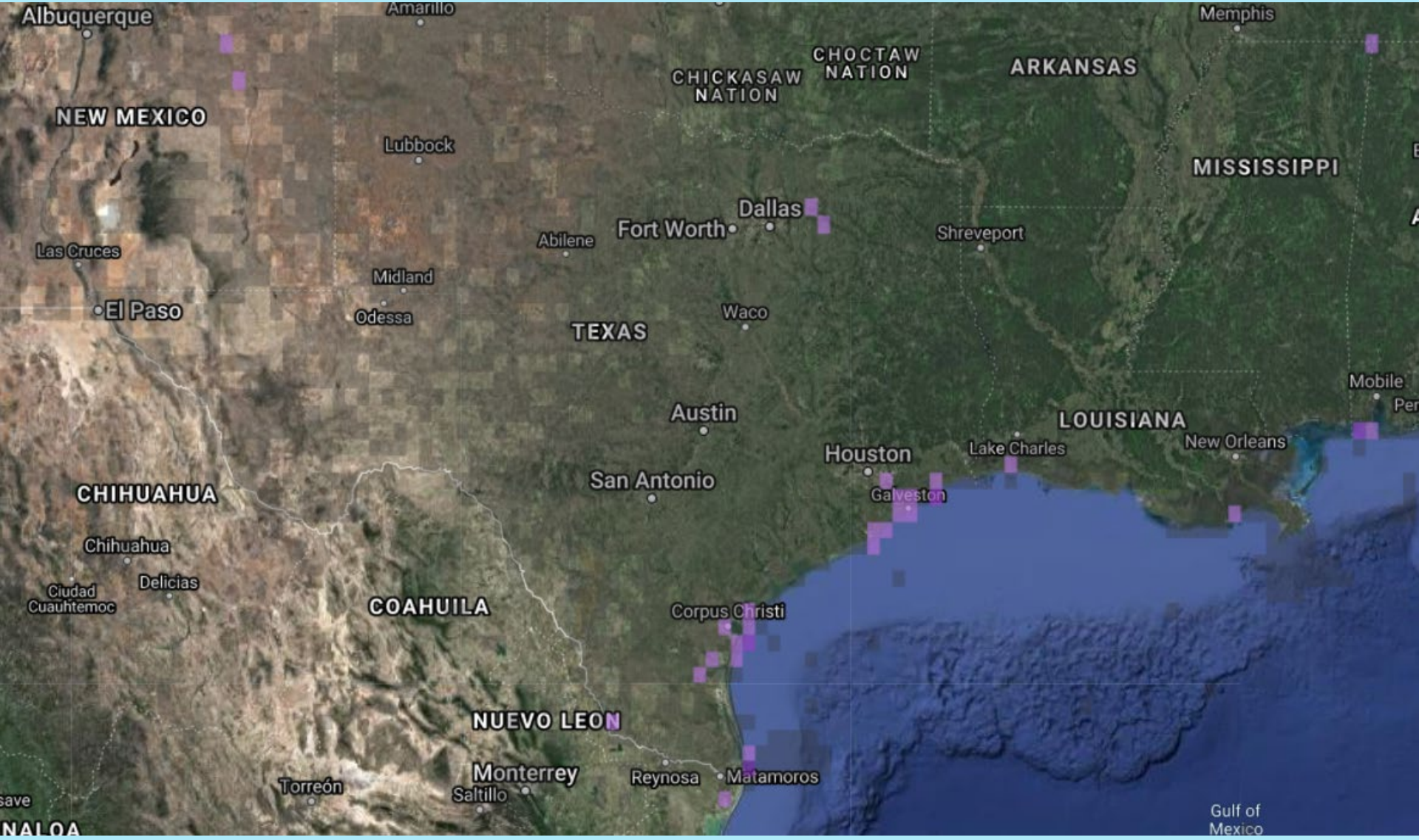




Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

HERRING
TEXAS DISTRIBUTION

SEPTEMBER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Delicias
Ciudad Cuauhtemoc
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Corpus Christi
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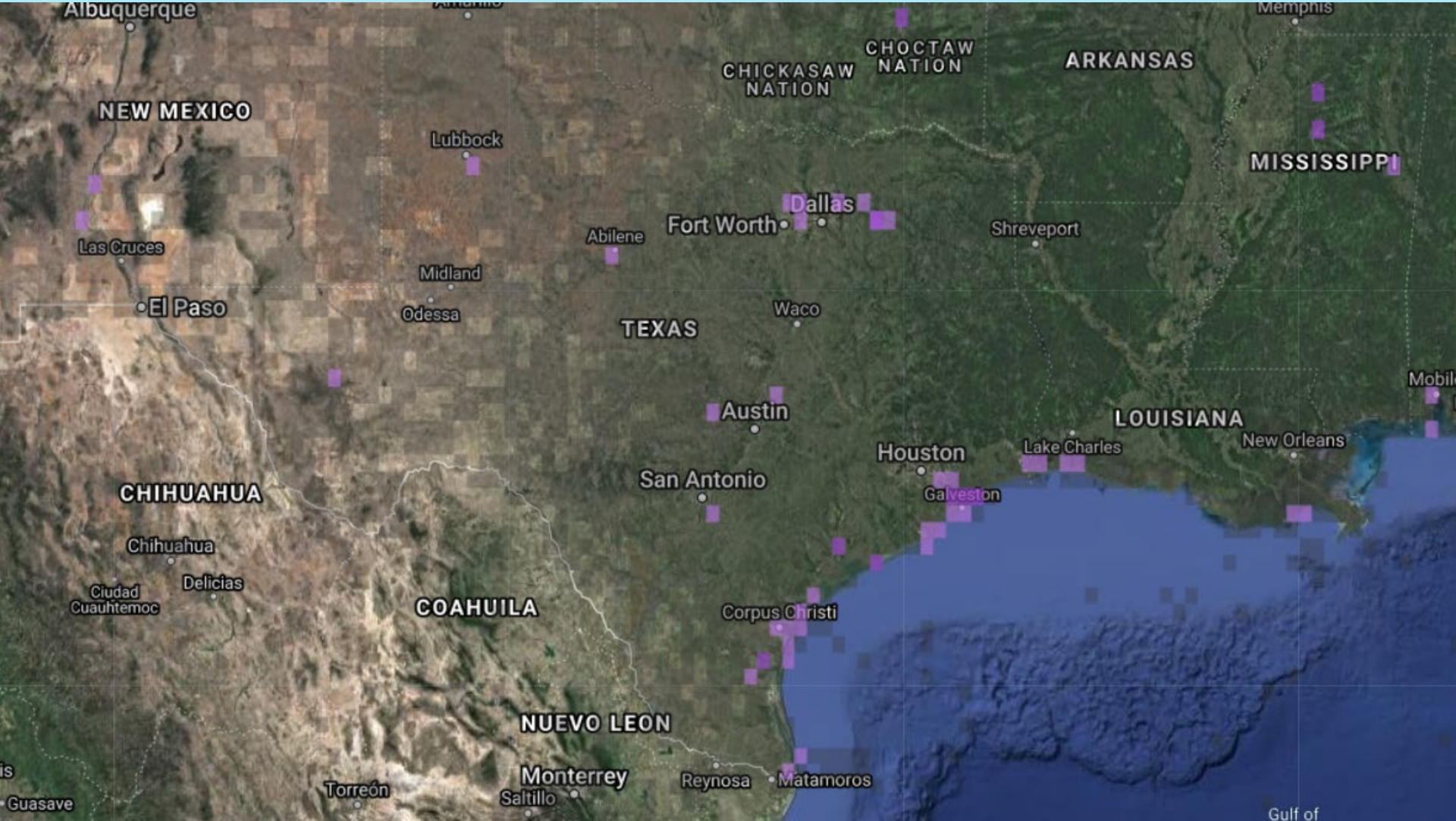
Matamoros
Gulf of Mexico

OCTOBER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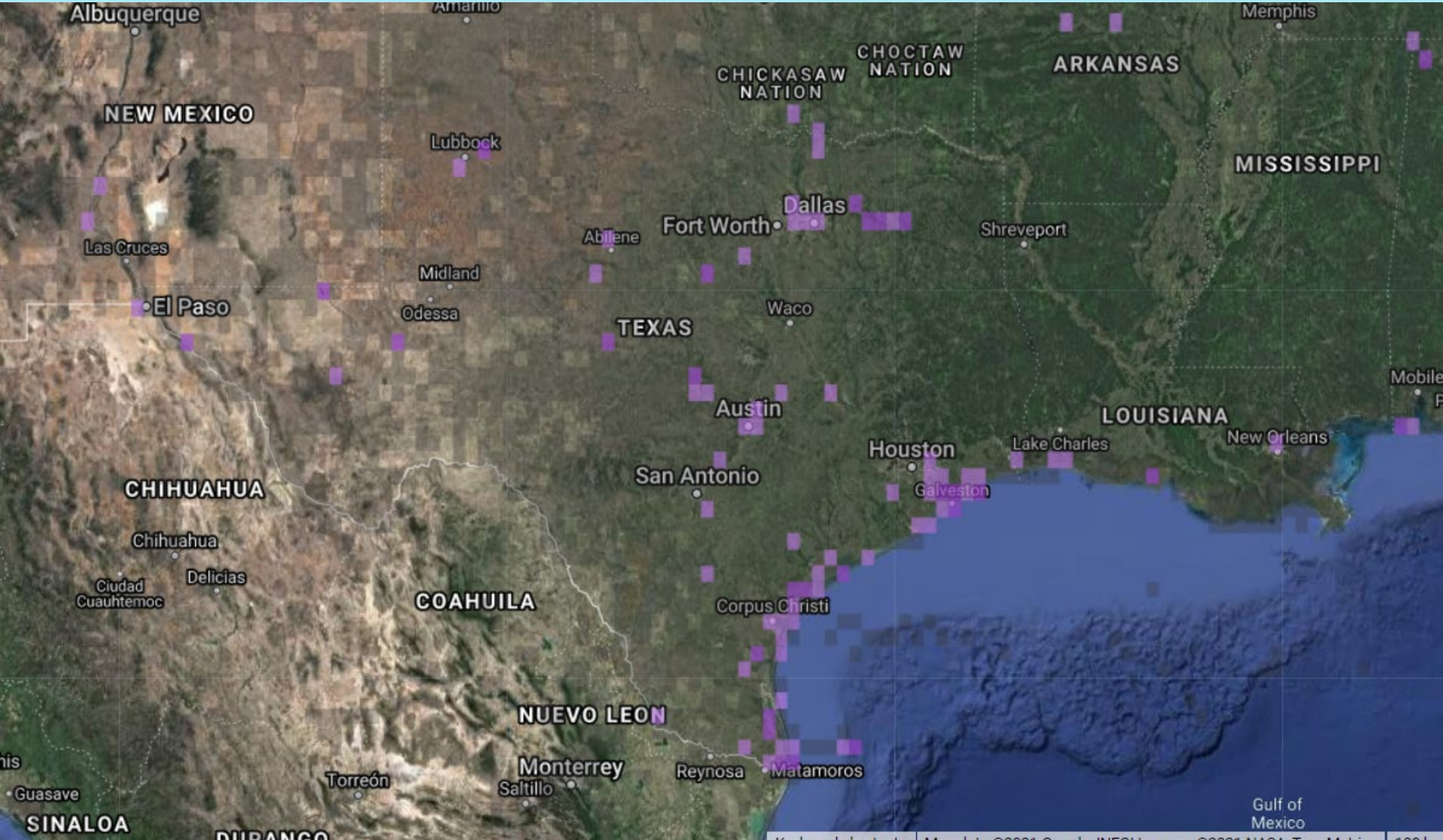
Gulf of

NOVEMBER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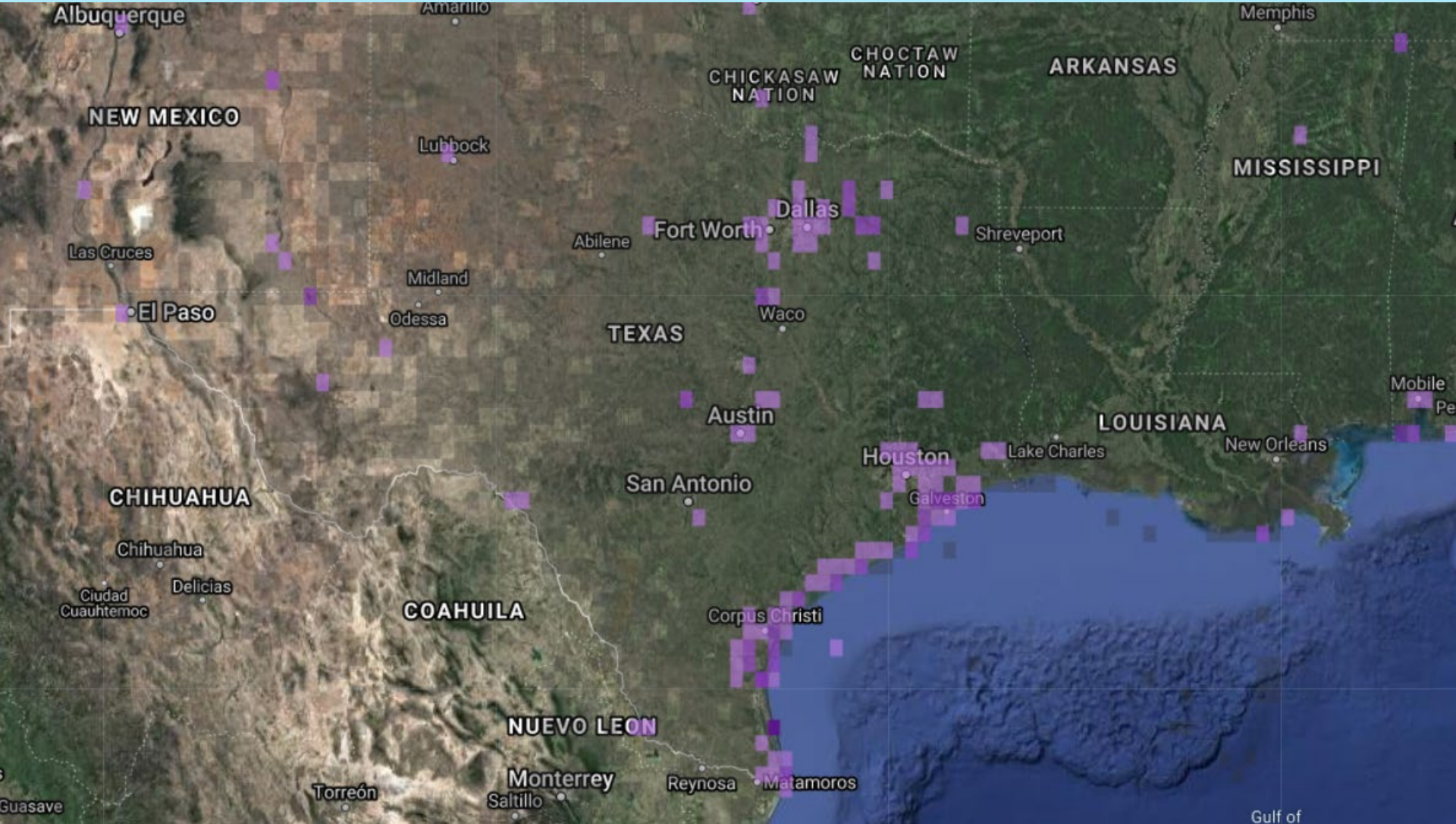
DECEMBER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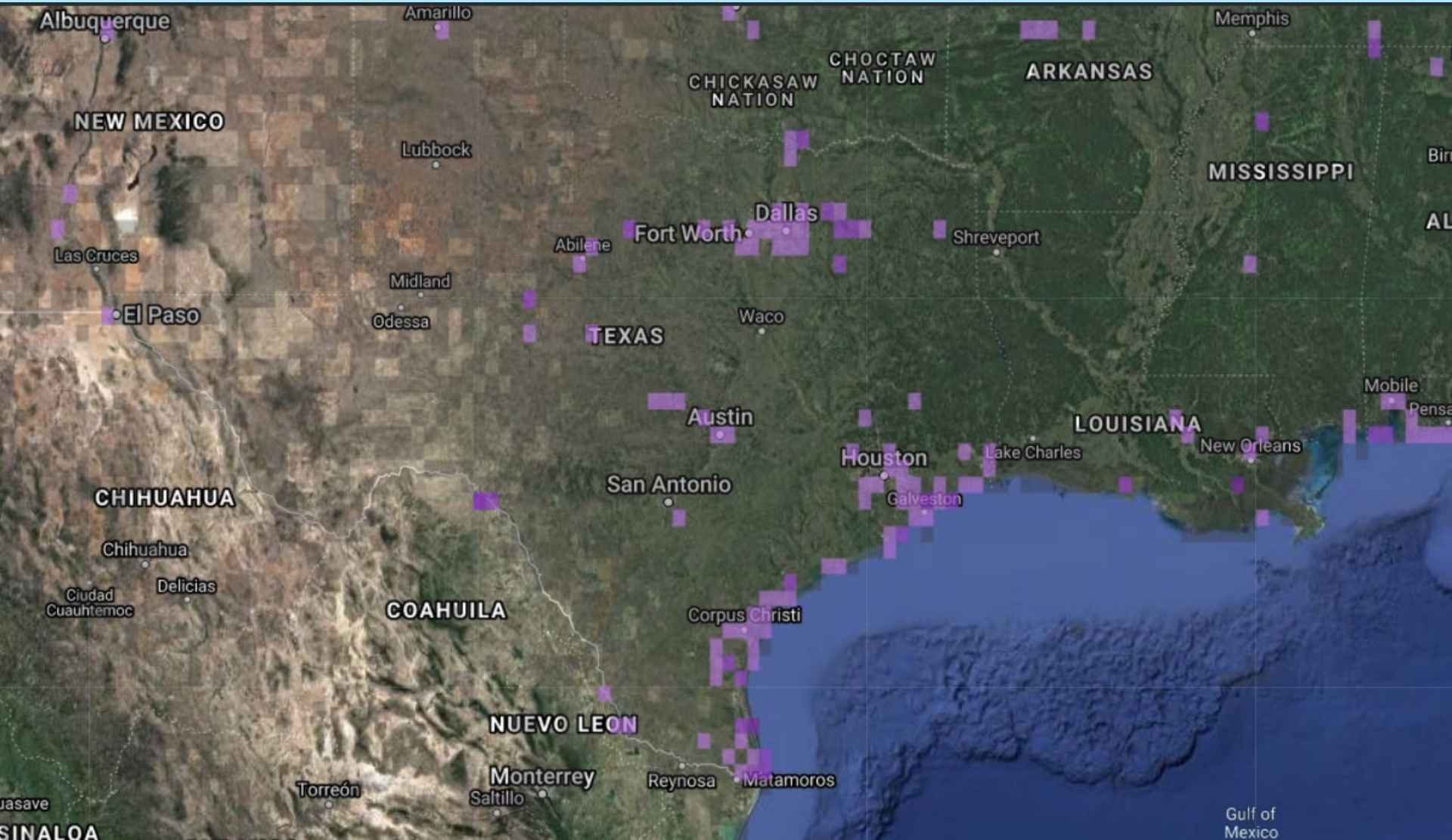
JANUARY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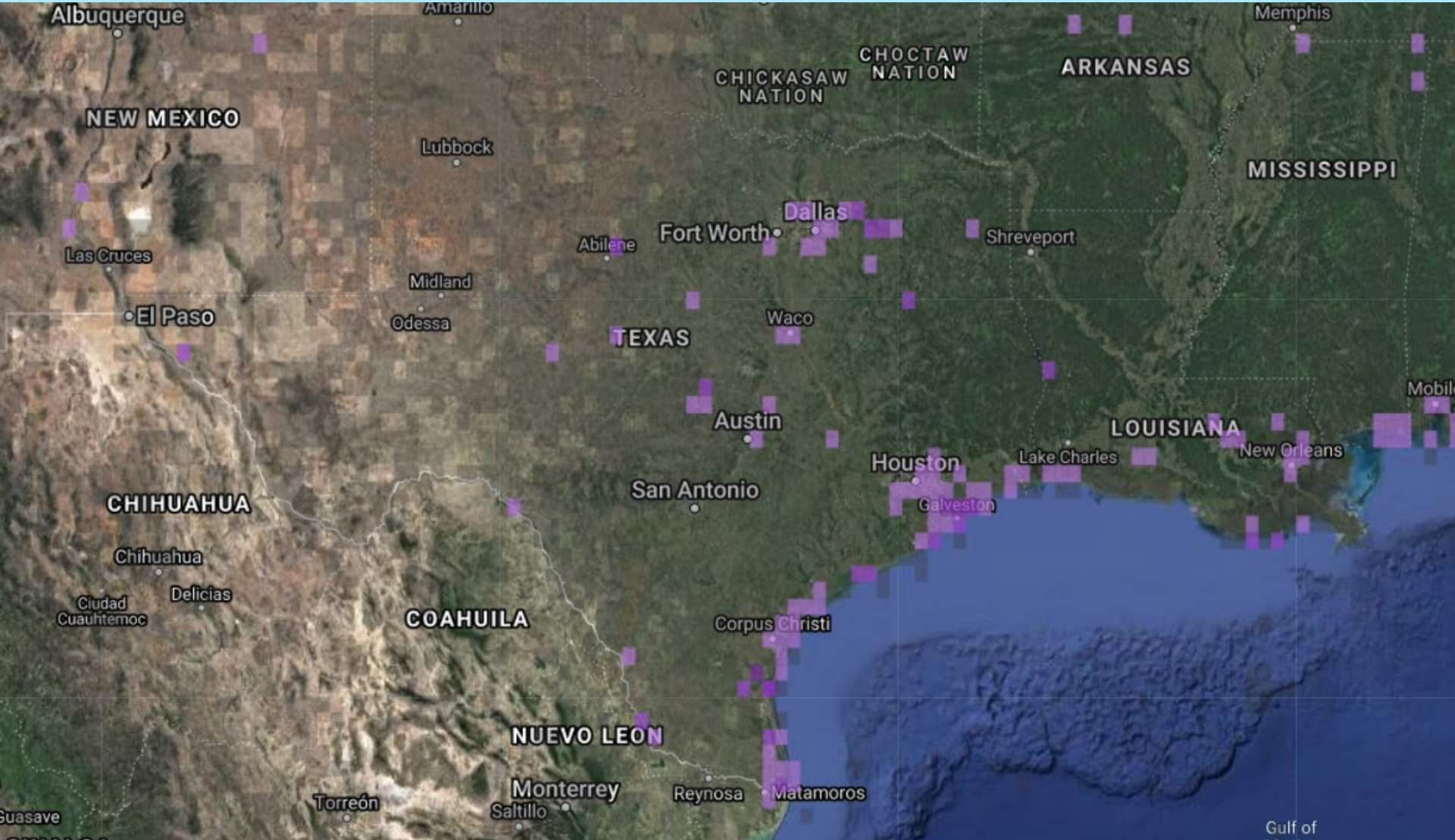
FEBRUARY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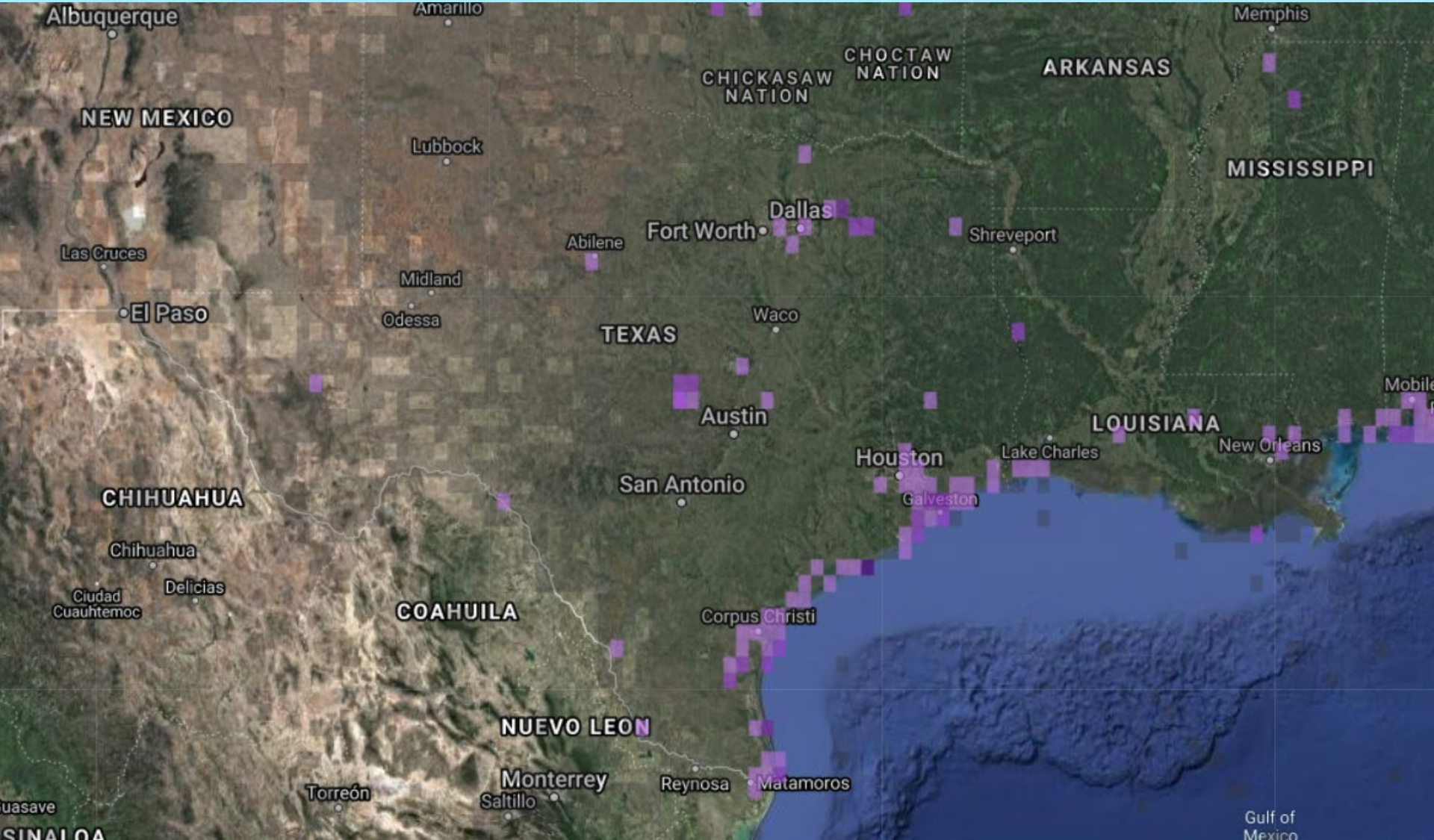
MARCH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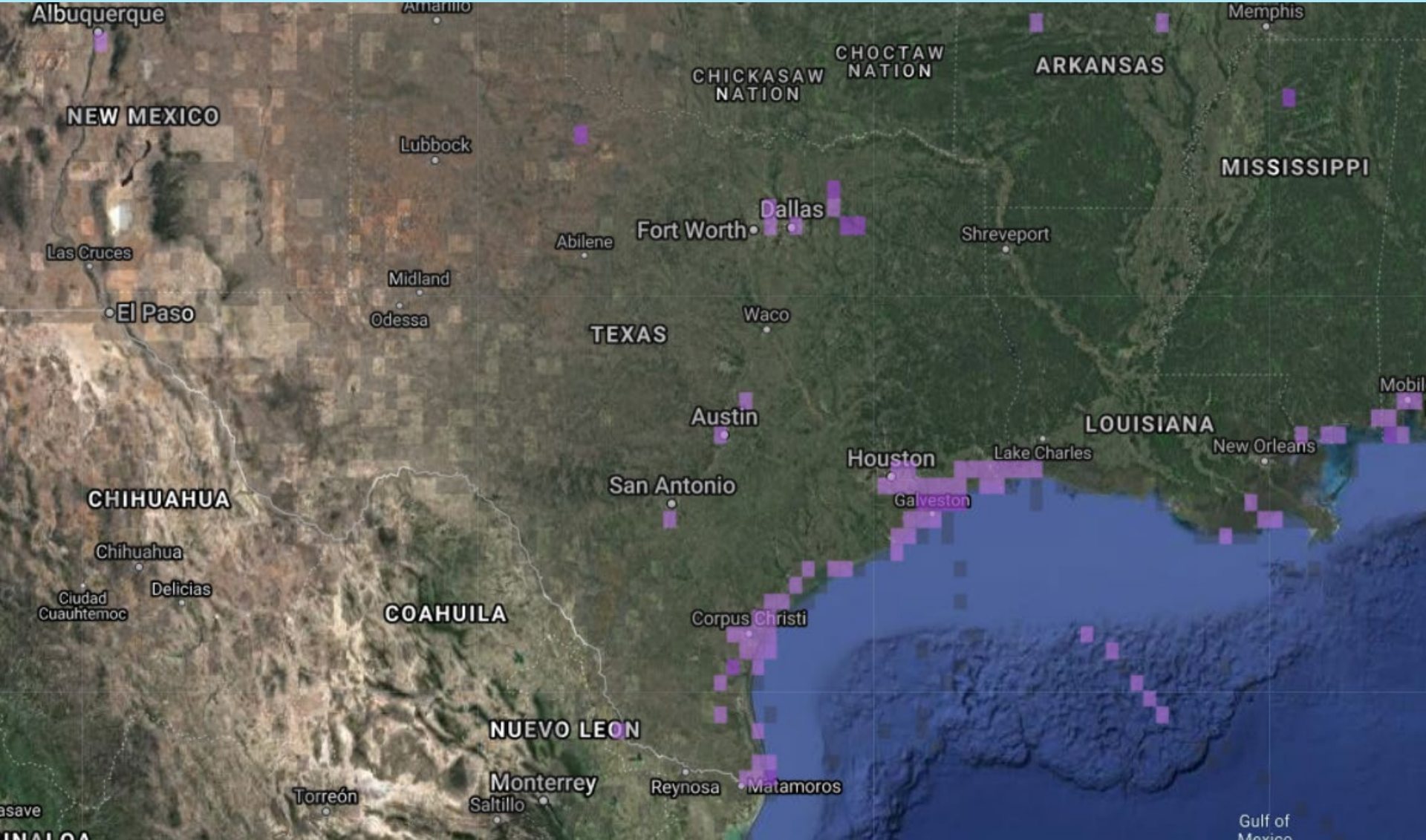
Gulf of Mexico

APRIL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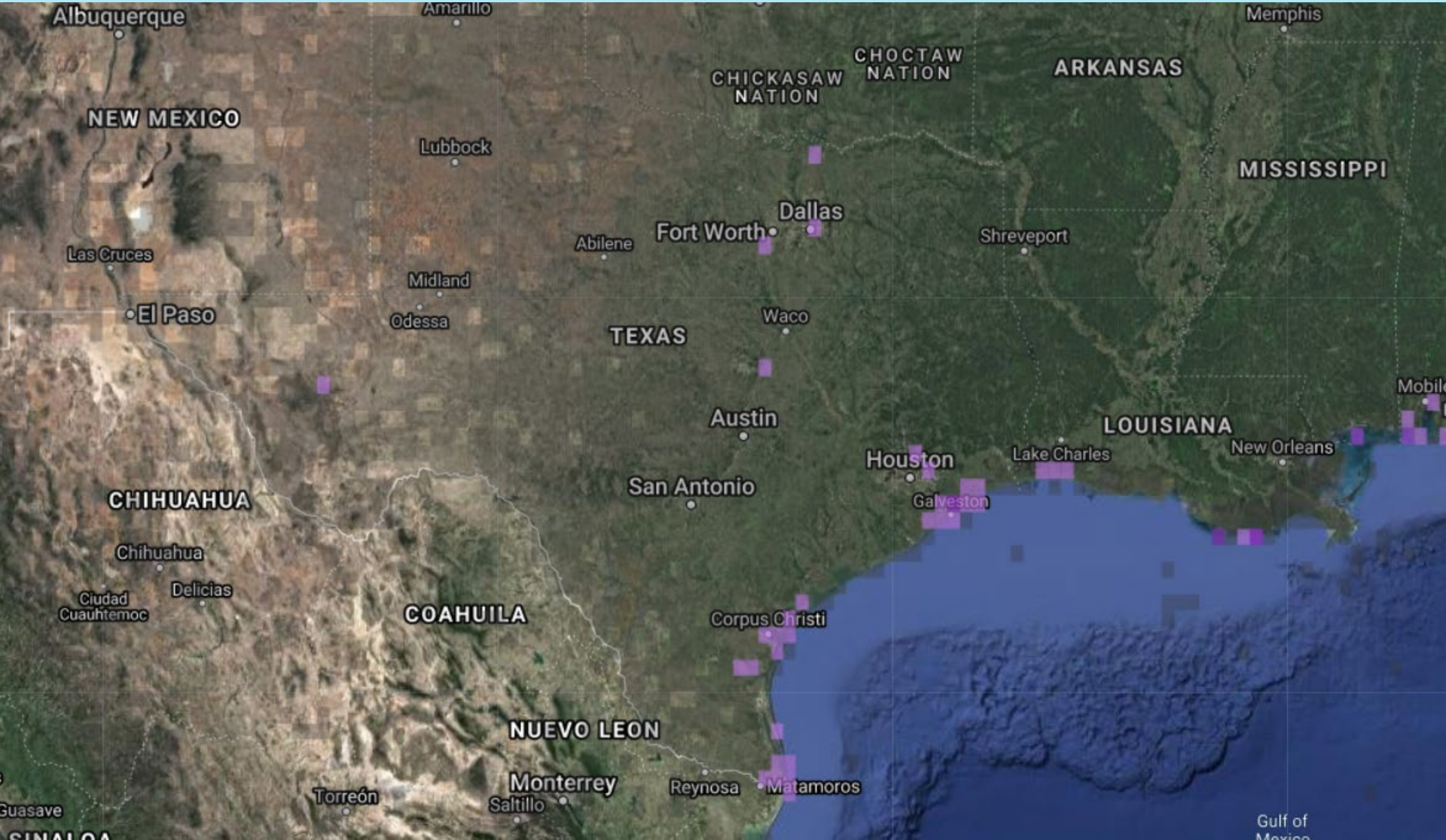
MAY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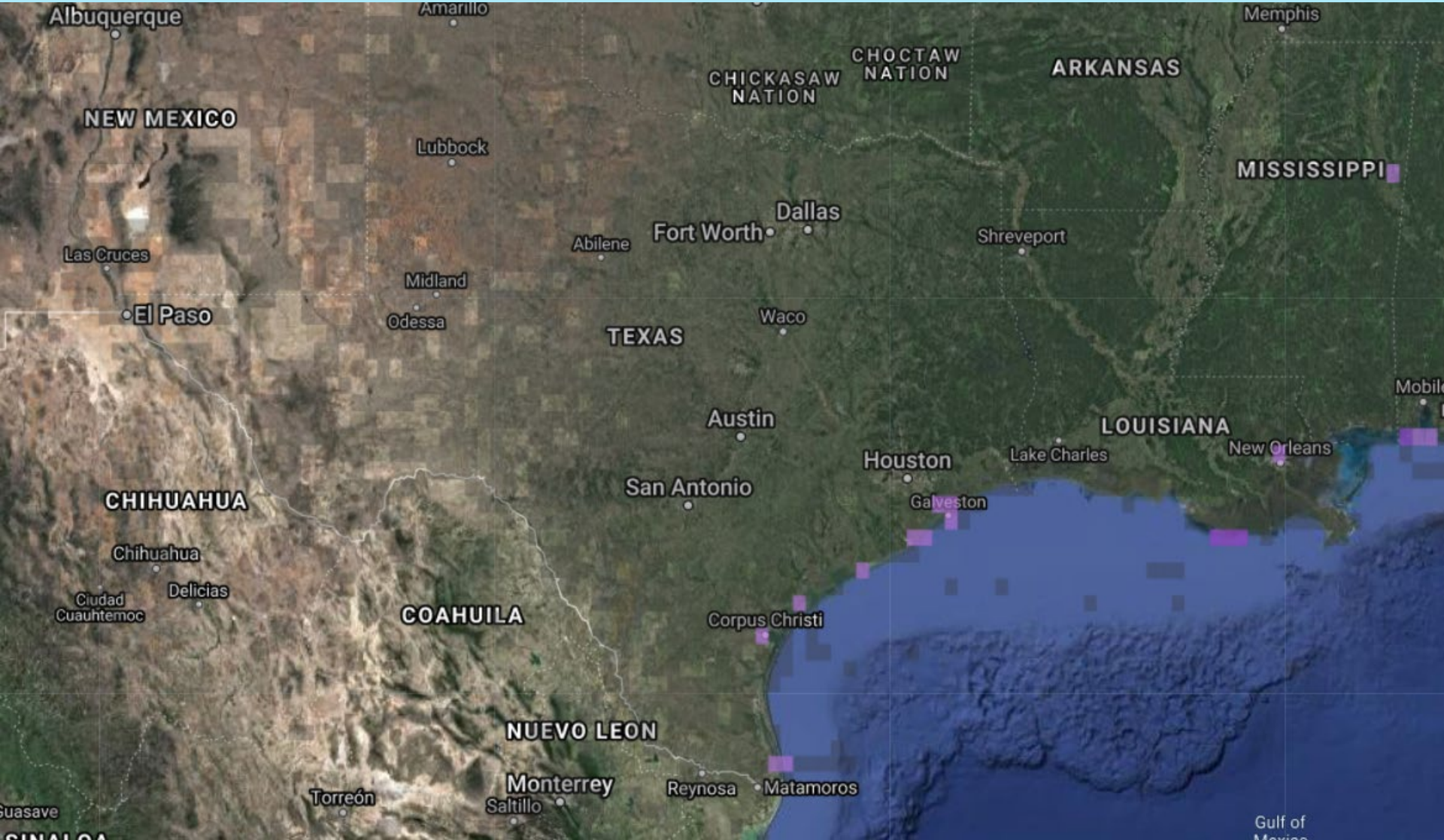
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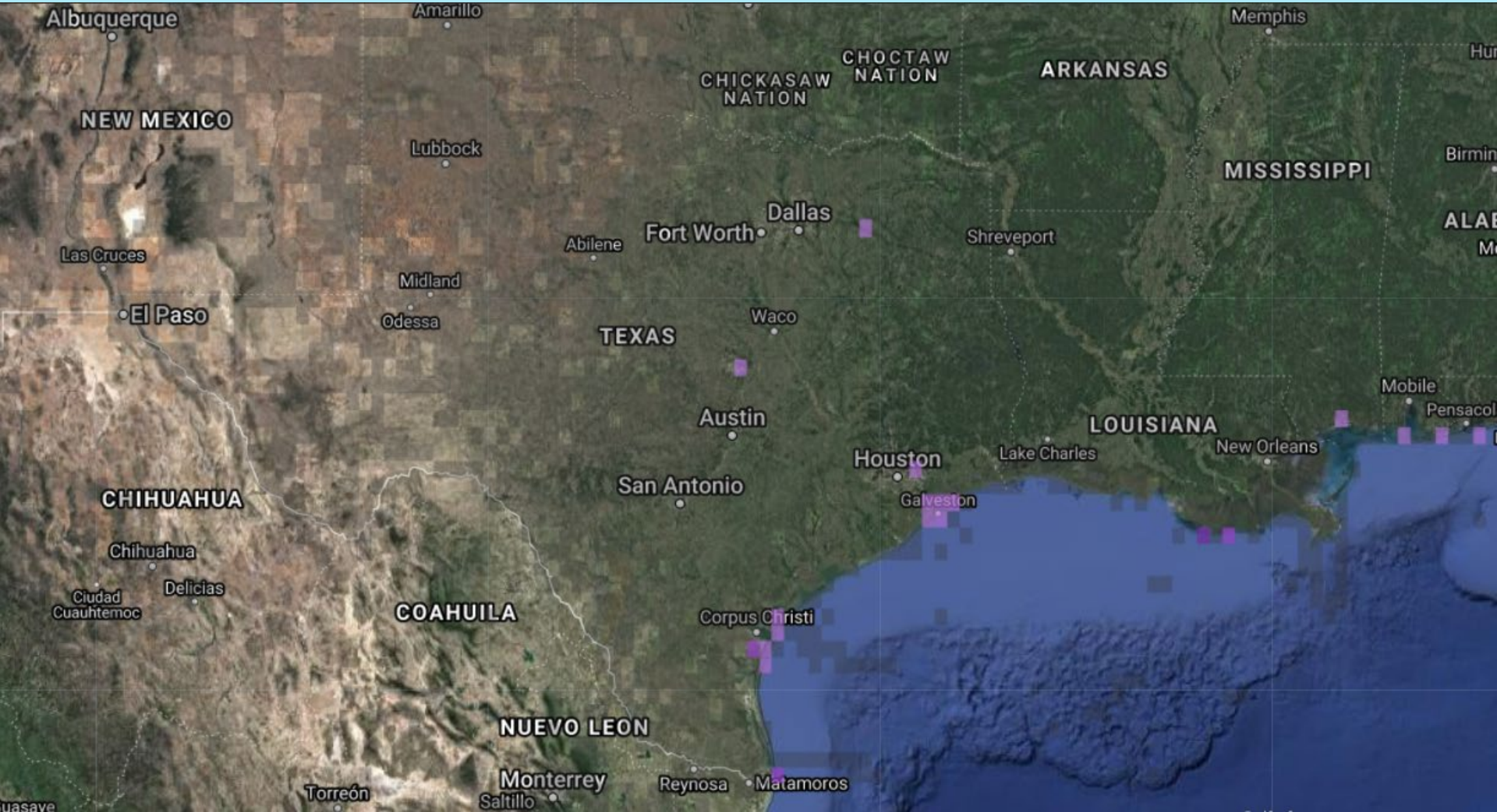
JULY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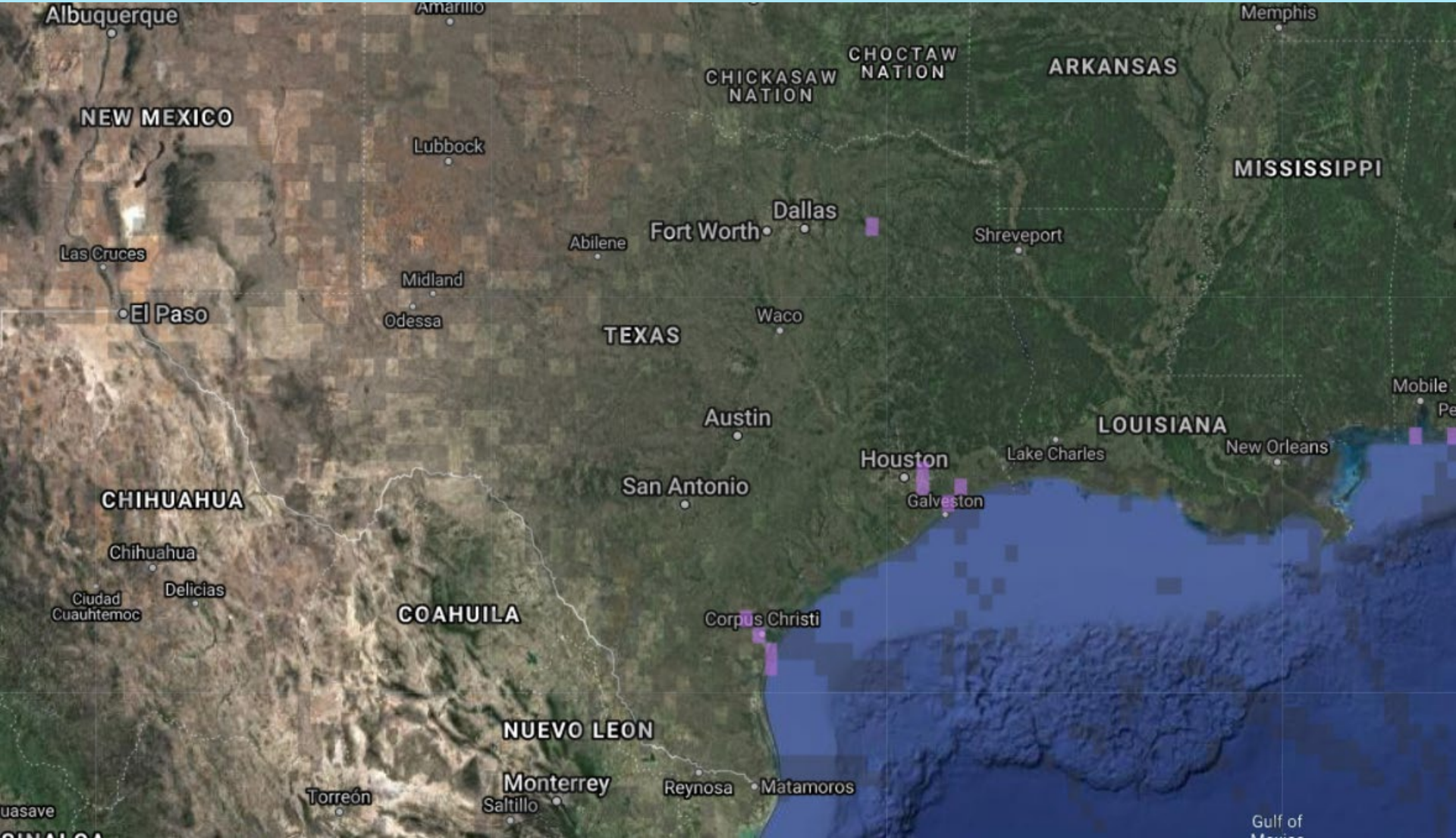
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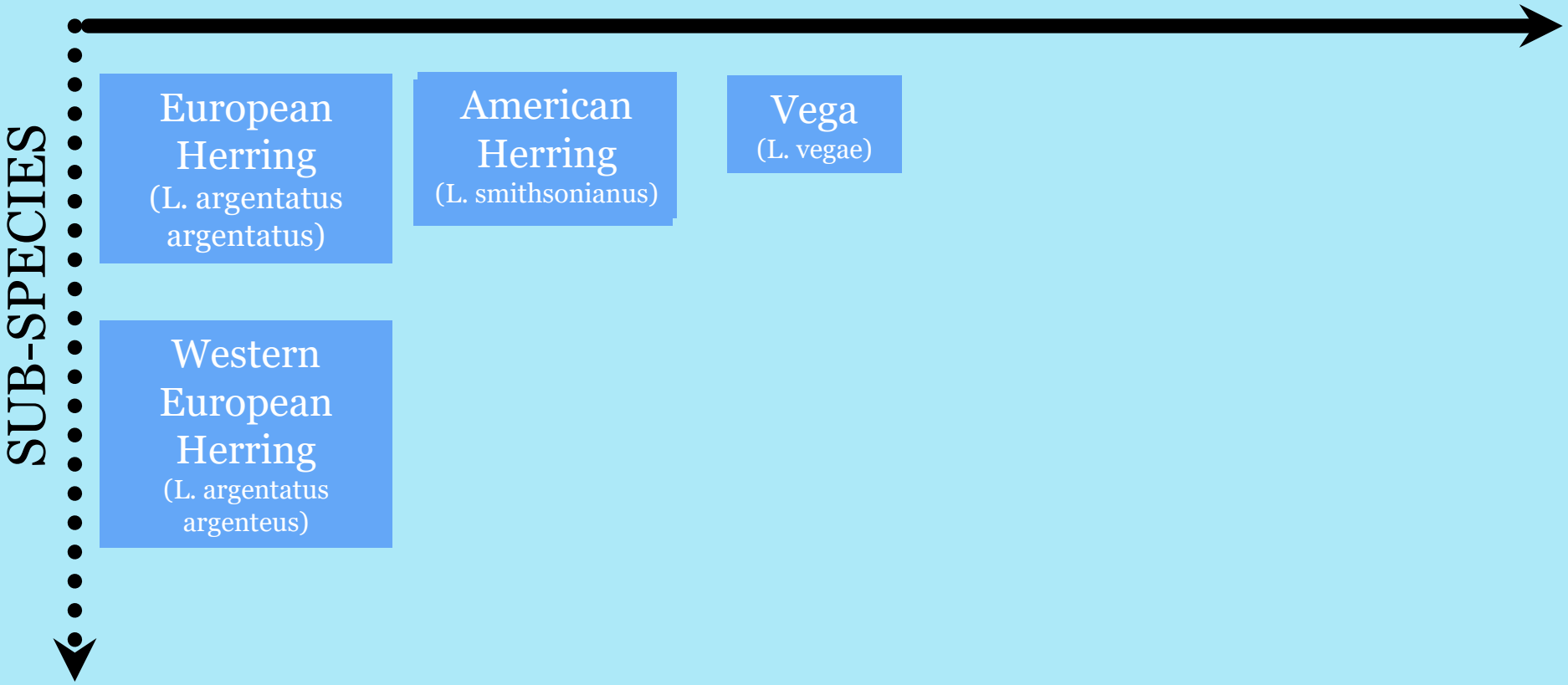
Gulf of

HERRING TAXONOMY

CURRENT
ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN RARITIES COMMITTEES
TAXONOMY



OLD AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY (AOS) TAXONOMY

SPECIES

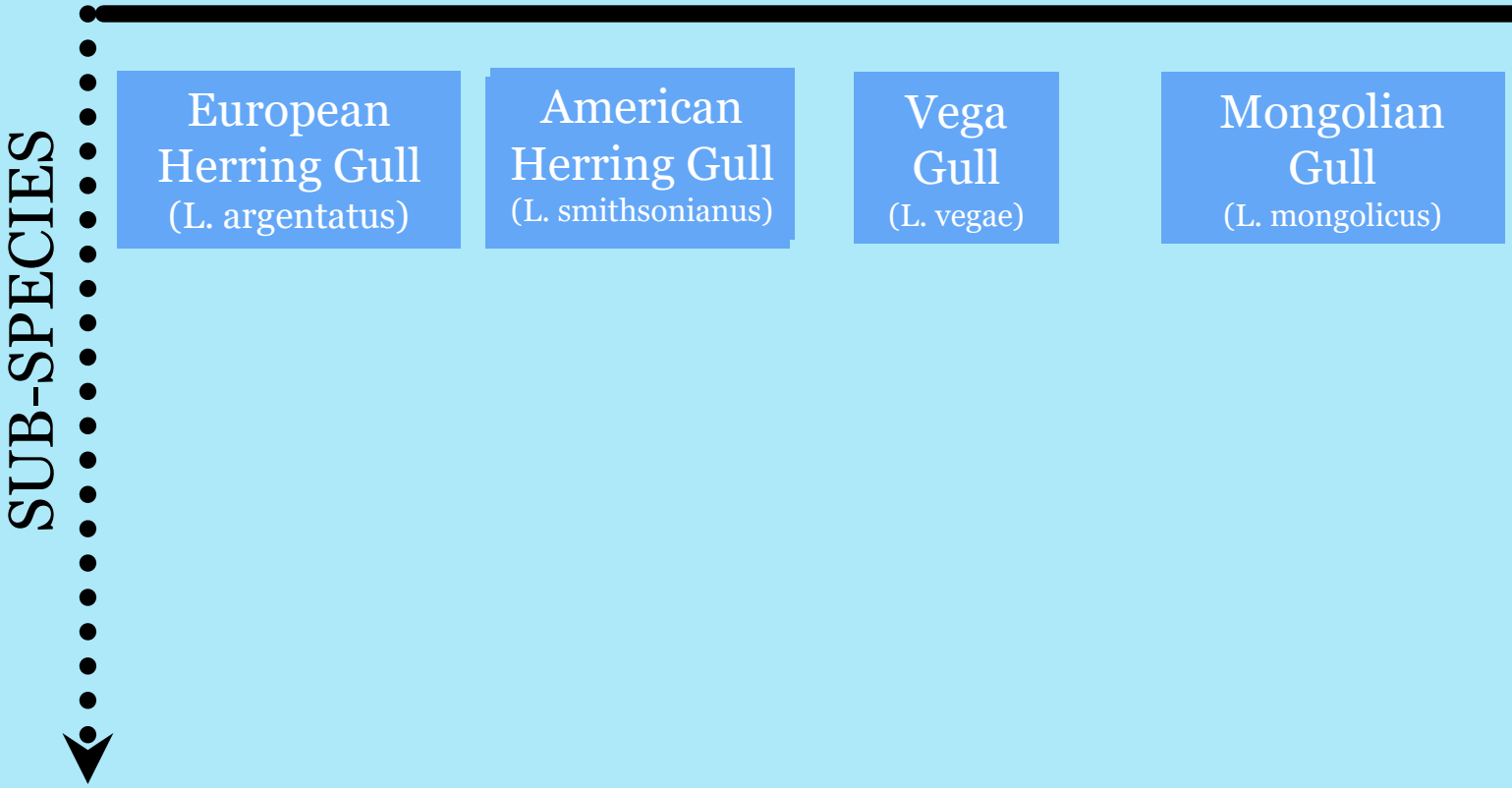
SUB-SPECIES



2025
AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY (AOS) TAXONOMY

SPECIES

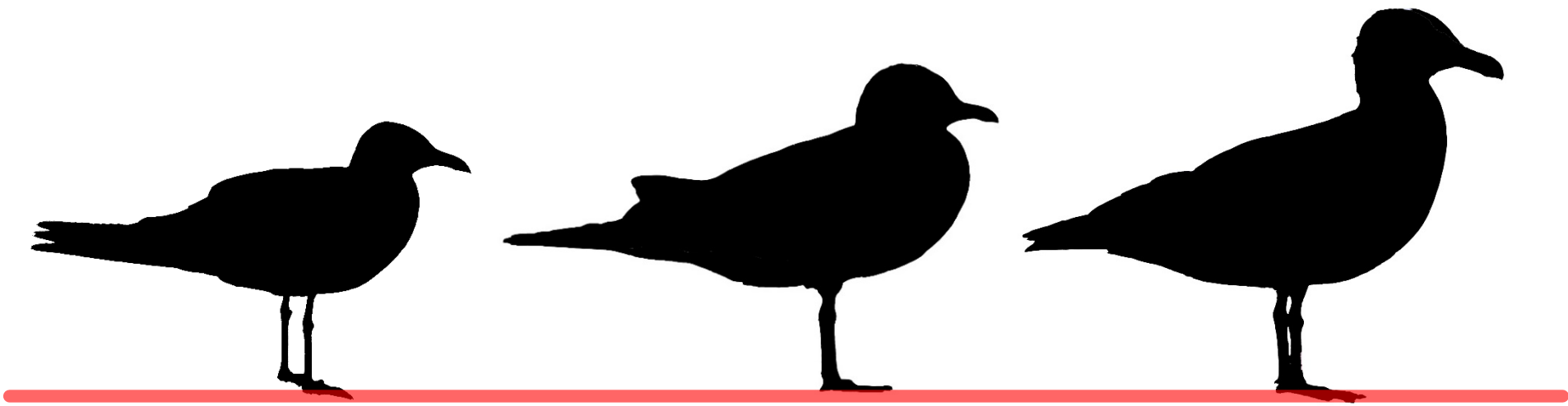
SUB-SPECIES



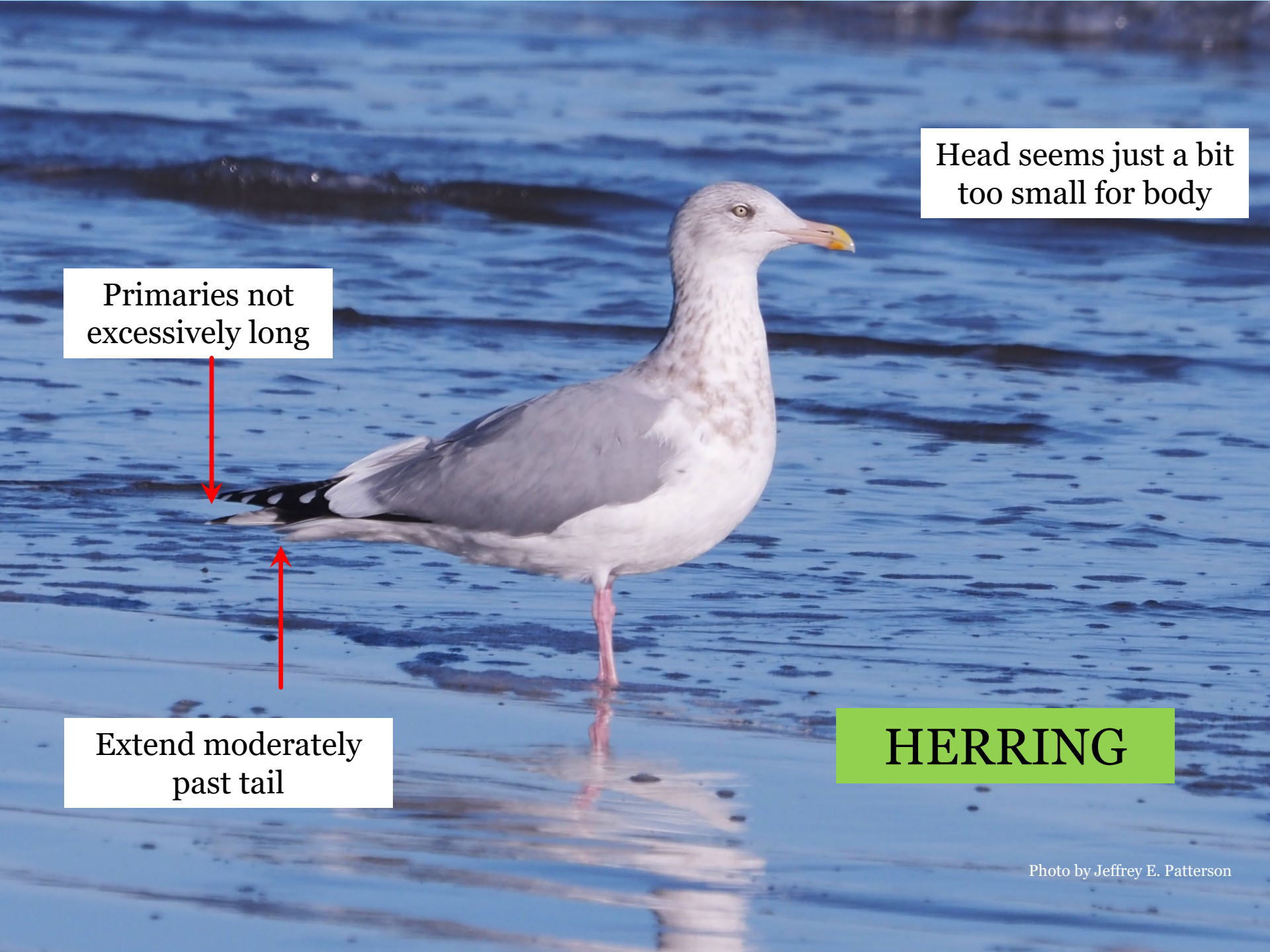
HERRING STRUCTURE

STRUCTURE COMPARISON

Laughing **Ring-billed** **Herring**

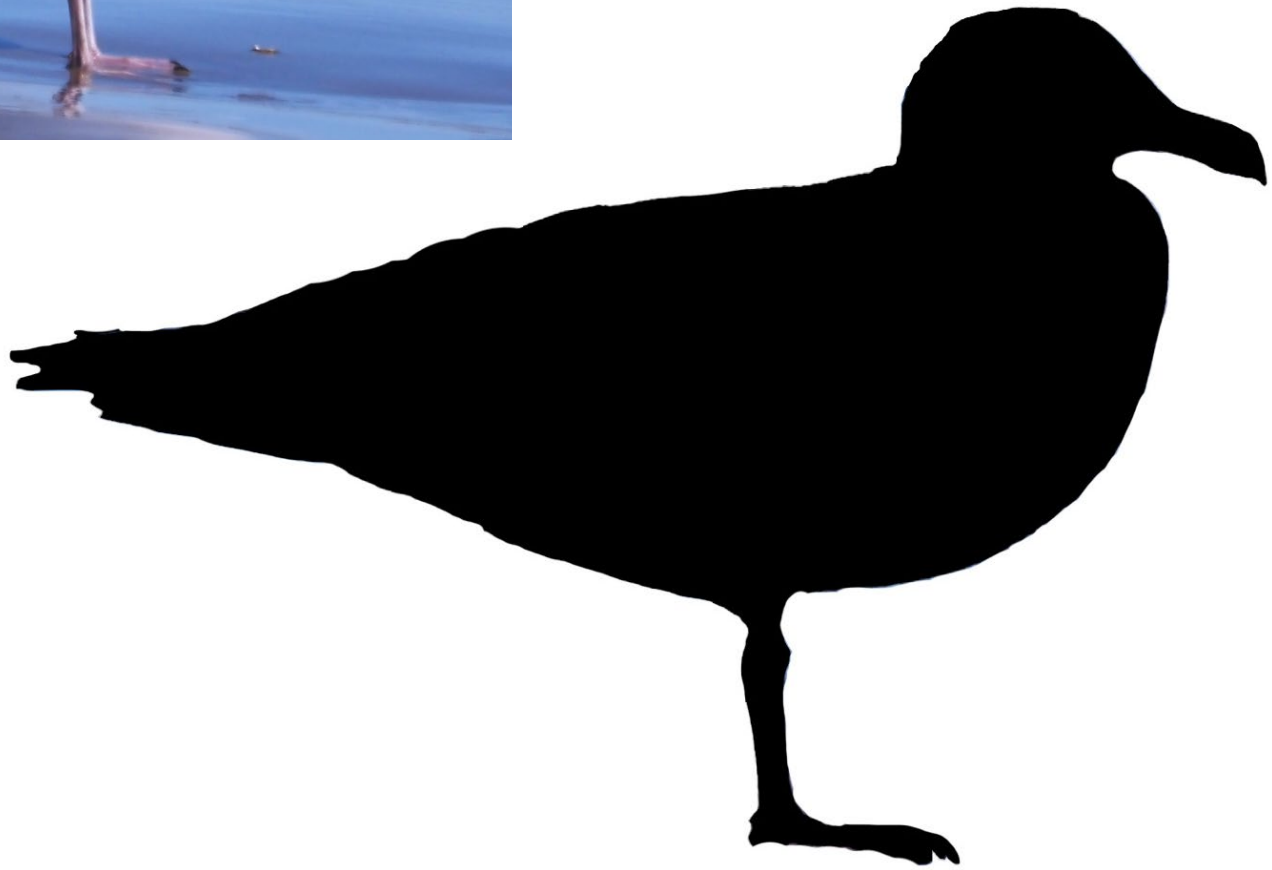


Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson


Head seems just a bit too small for body
Primaries not excessively long
Extend moderately past tail
HERRING
Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

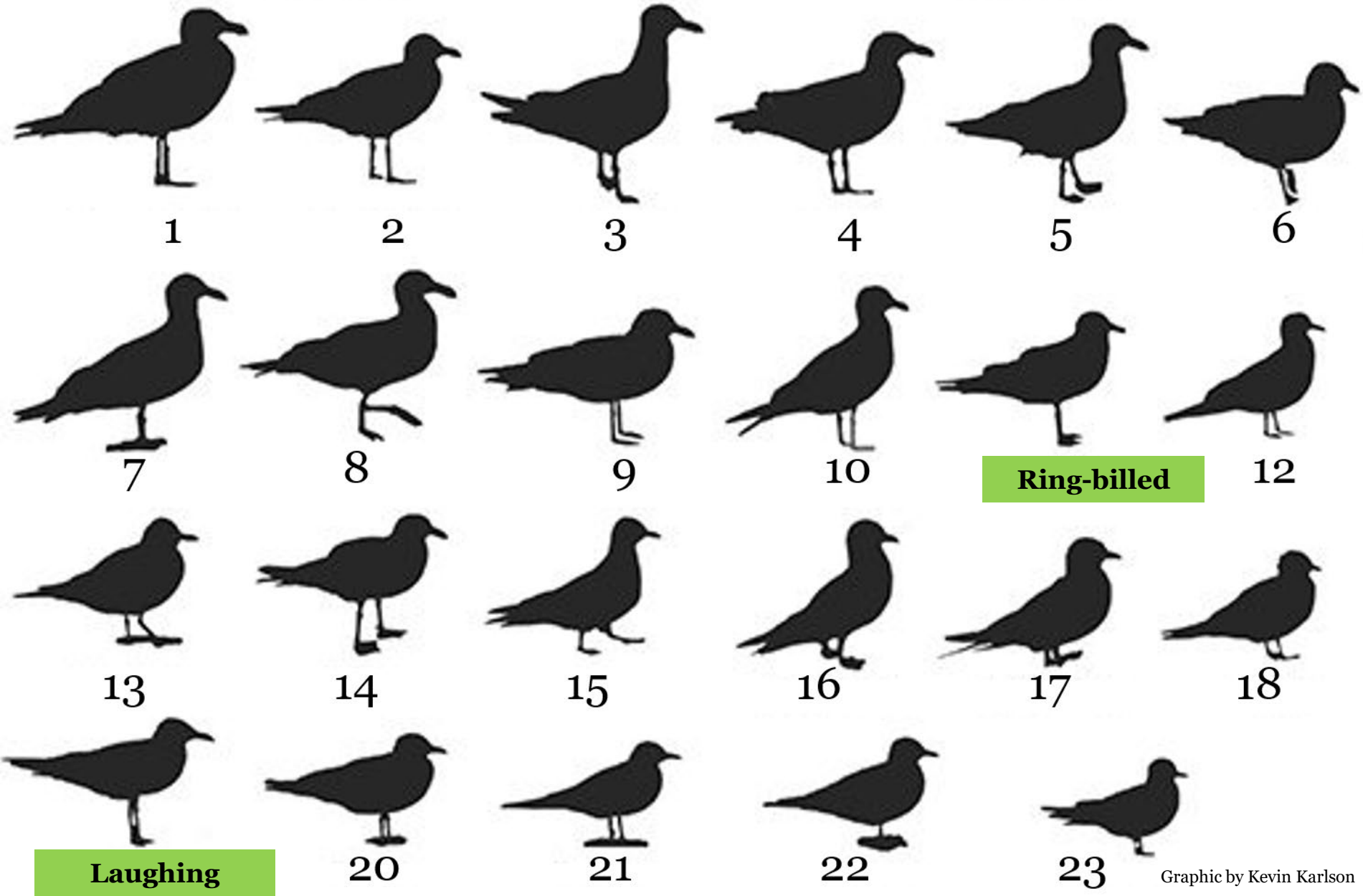


HERRING STRUCTURE



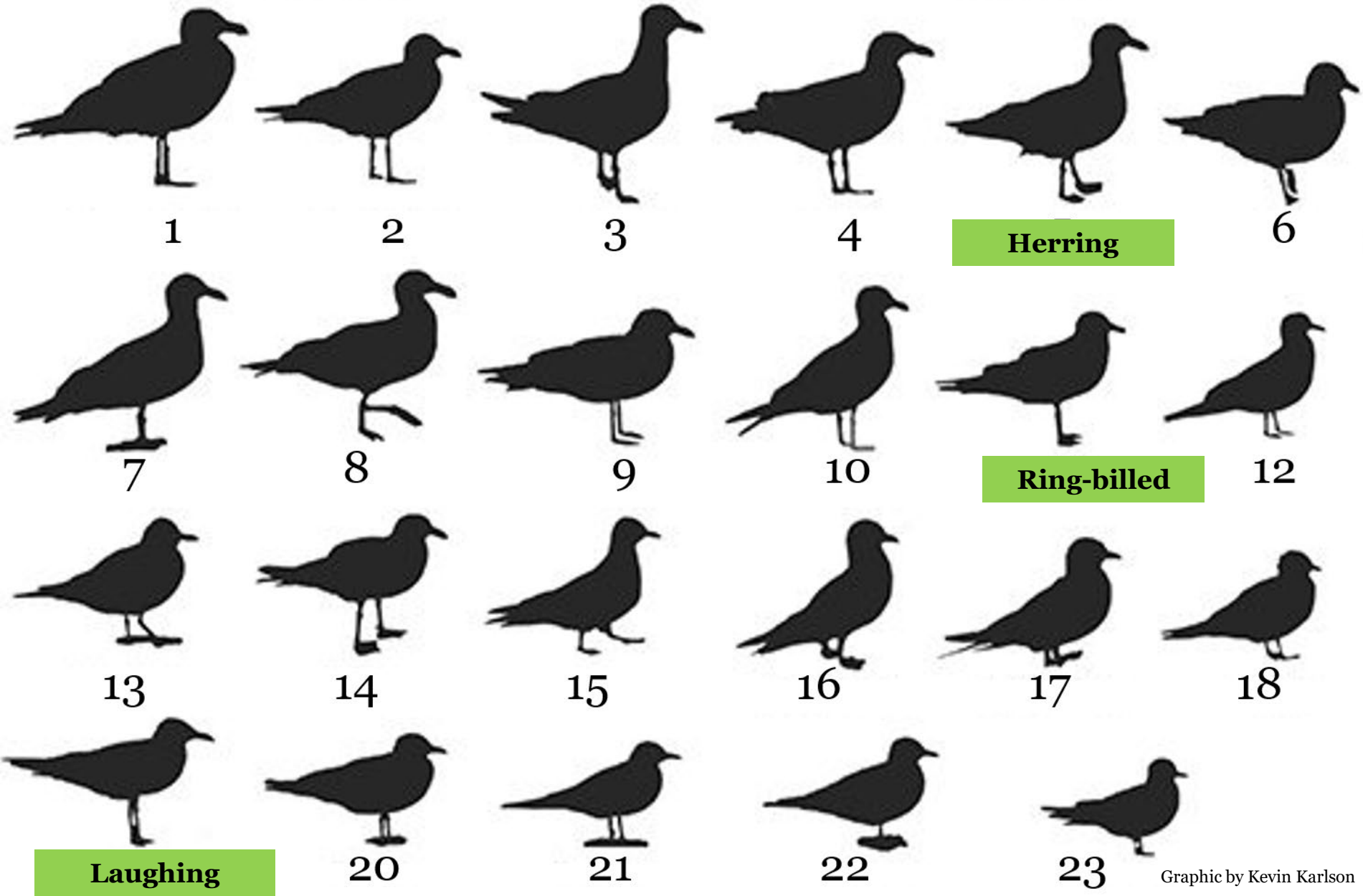
Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

FIND THE HERRING



Graphic by Kevin Karlson

FIND THE HERRING



Graphic by Kevin Karlson

WHY IS THIS NOT A RING-BILLED

WHY IS THIS NOT A RING-BILLED?

Ring-billed

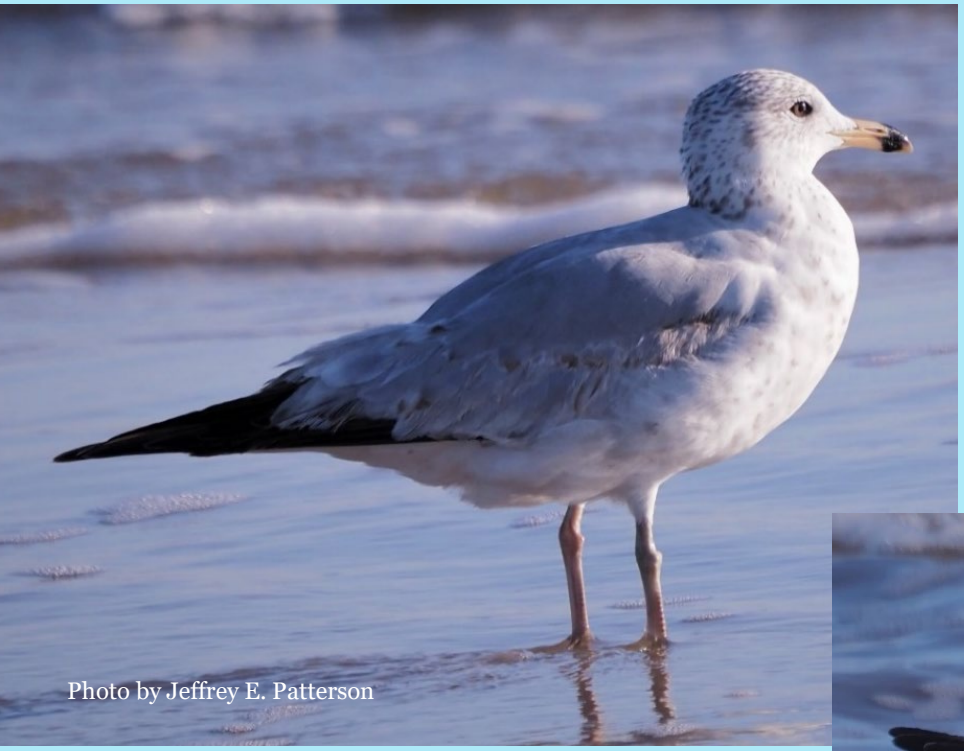


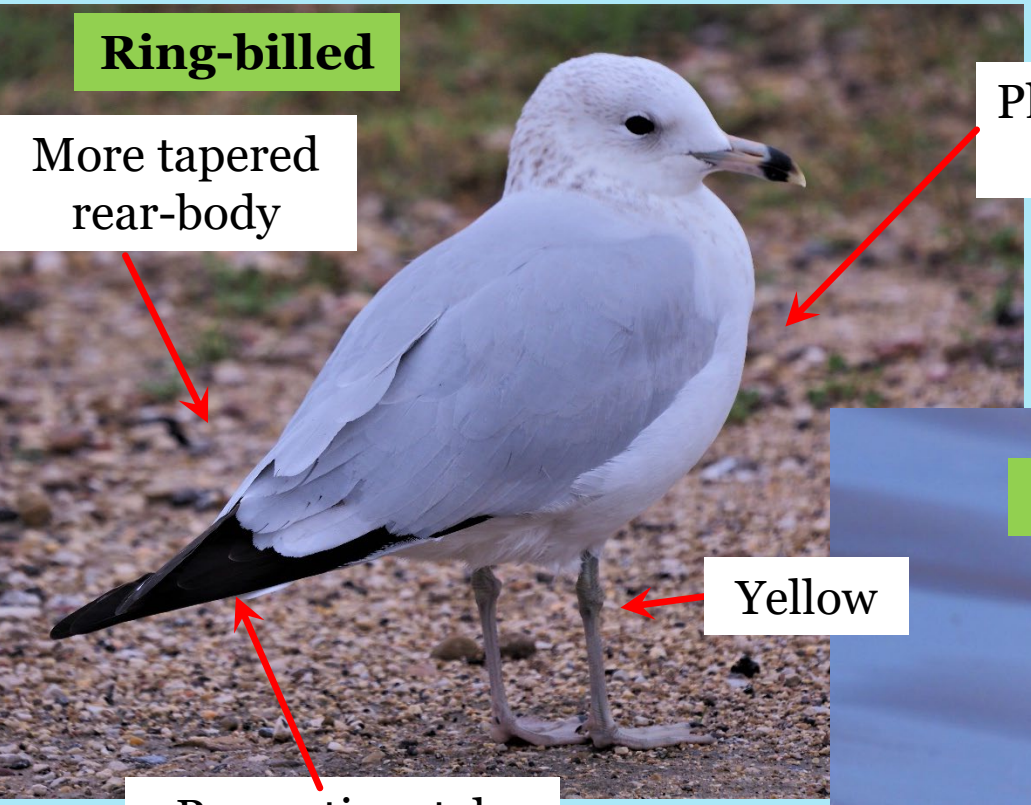
Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

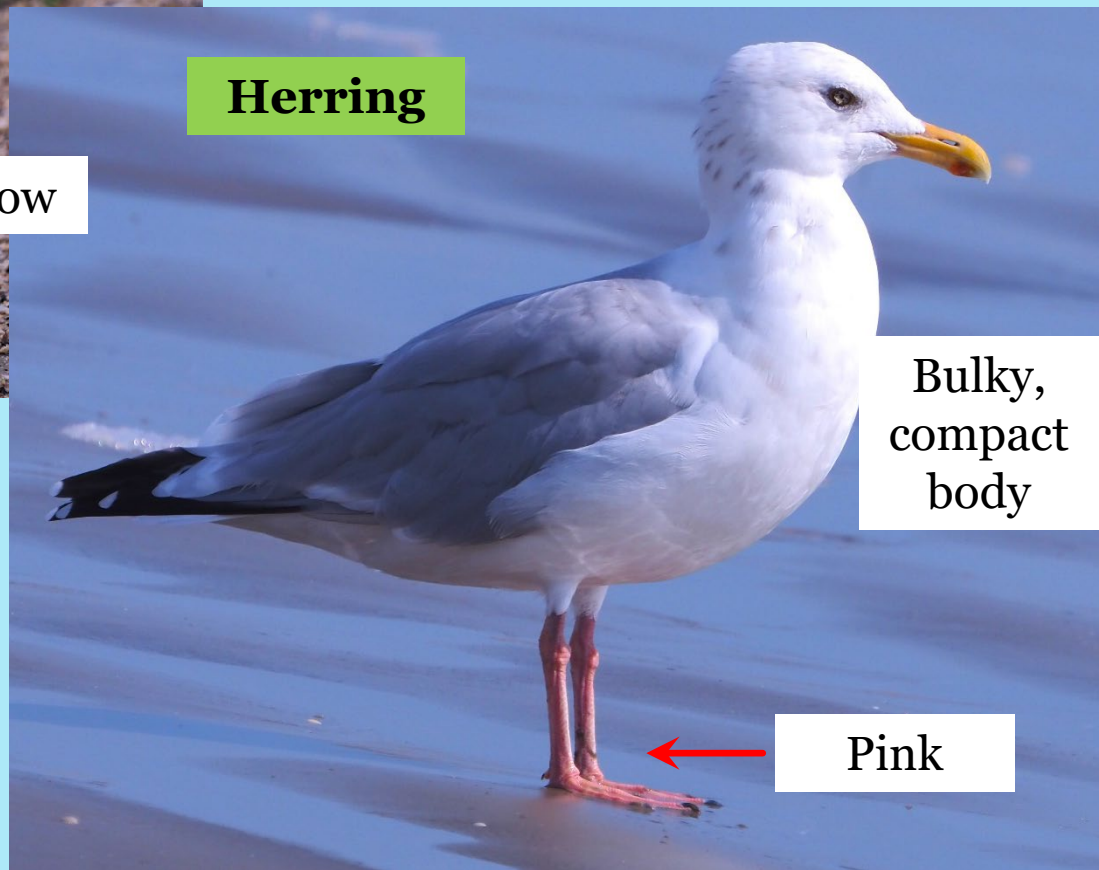


Herring

Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

WHY IS THIS NOT A RING-BILLED?





Adult non-breeding

Photos by Jefrey E. Patterson

WHY IS THIS NOT A RING-BILLED?

Sub-adult



Ring-billed



Herring

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

WHY IS THIS NOT A RING-BILLED?

Ring-billed



Herring



Adult non-breeding

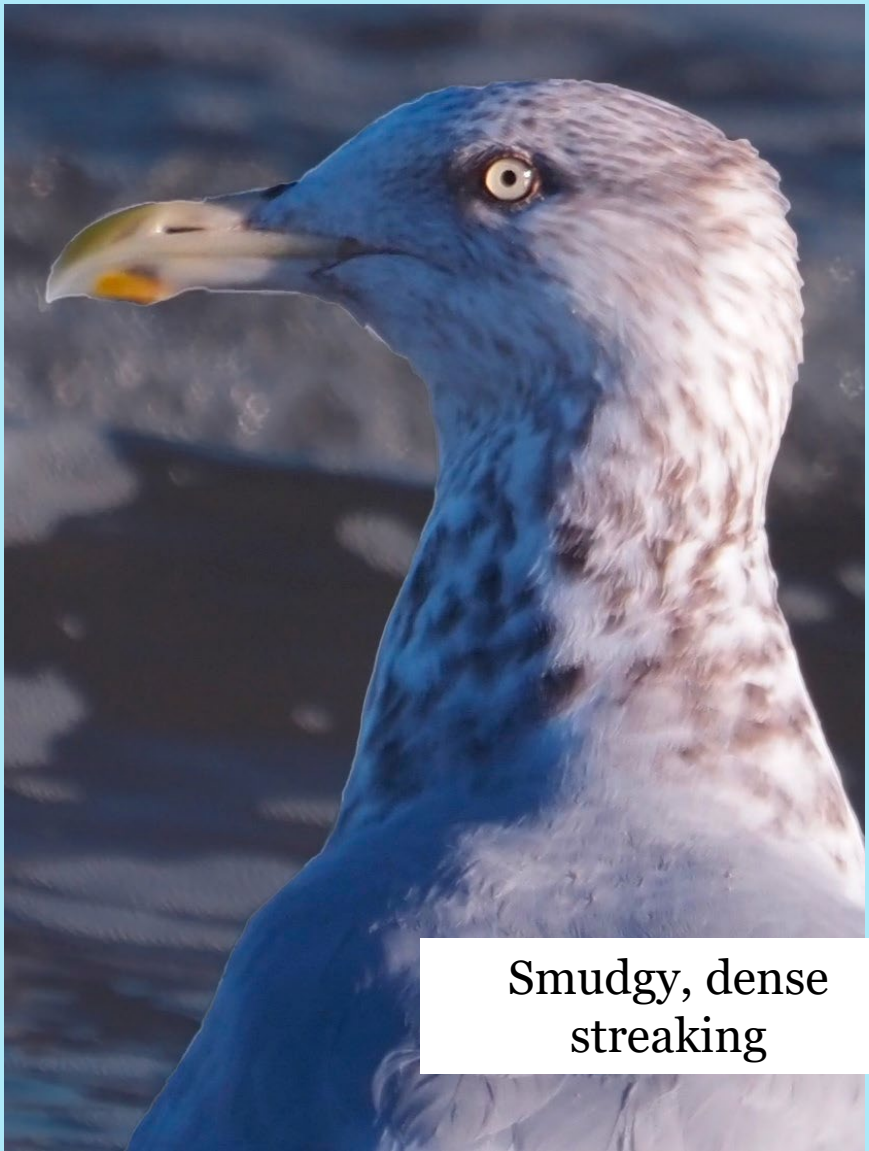
Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

Ring-billed



Finer streaking

Herring



Smudgy, dense streaking

Adult non-breeding

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

BILL & HEAD: AGE PROGRESSION







Ring-billed

Photo by Amando Guercio

Immature **Sub-adult** **Adult**







Herring

Other Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

STRUCTURE: BILL & HEAD

What do you see ?

Ring-billed



Herring



Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

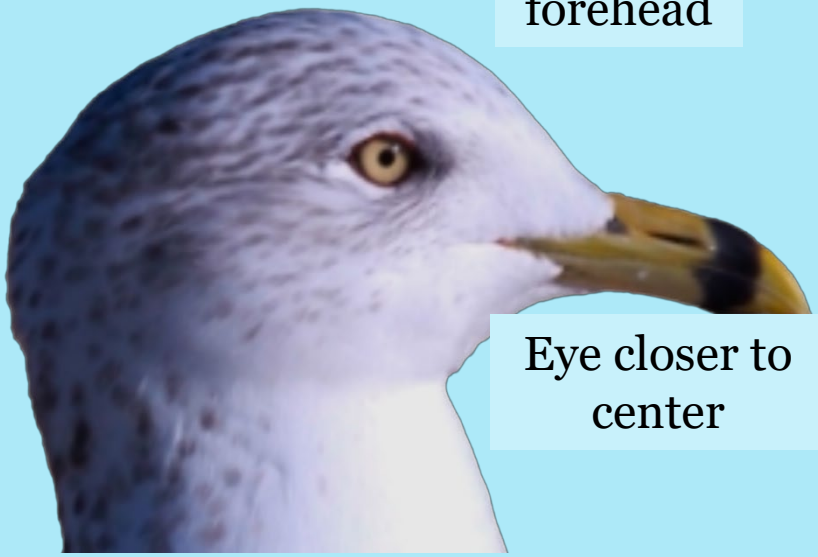
STRUCTURE: BILL & HEAD

Ring-billed

Rounder head

Steeper forehead

Eye closer to center



Herring

Flatter head

More bird behind eye

Eye more forward



Pulled taffy look of snout

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

STRUCTURE: BILL



Ring-billed



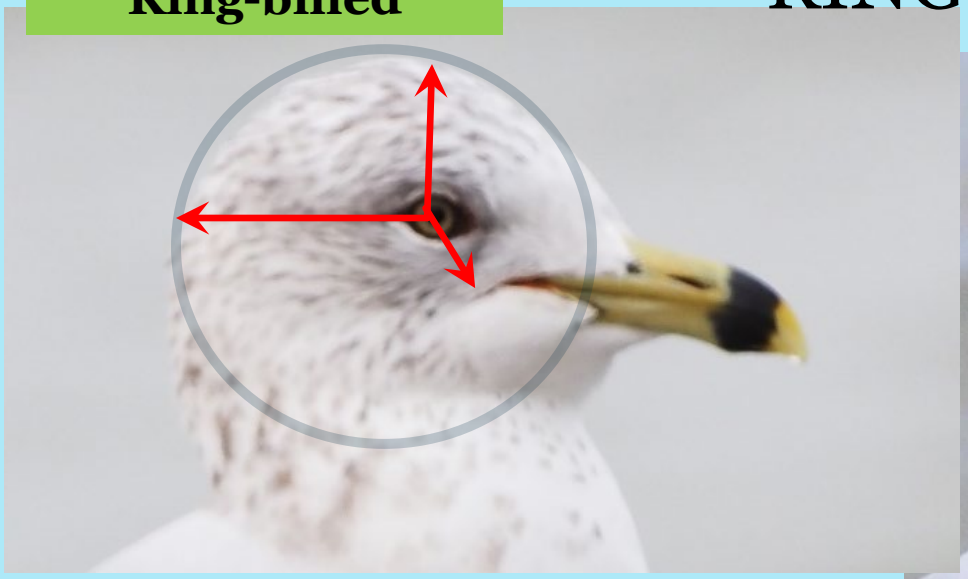


Herring

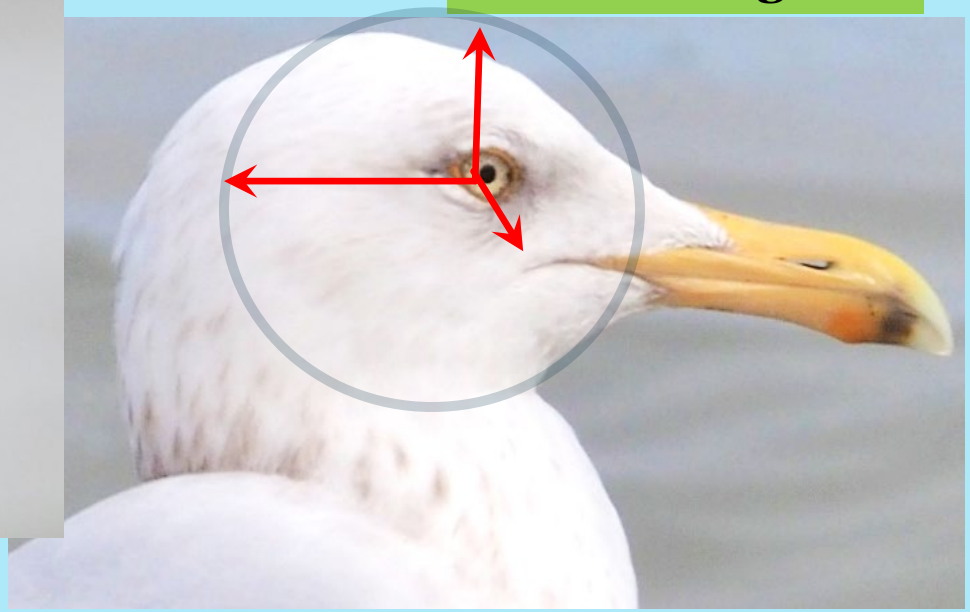
Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

BILL & HEAD: WHY IS THIS NOT A RING-BILLED?

Ring-billed



Herring



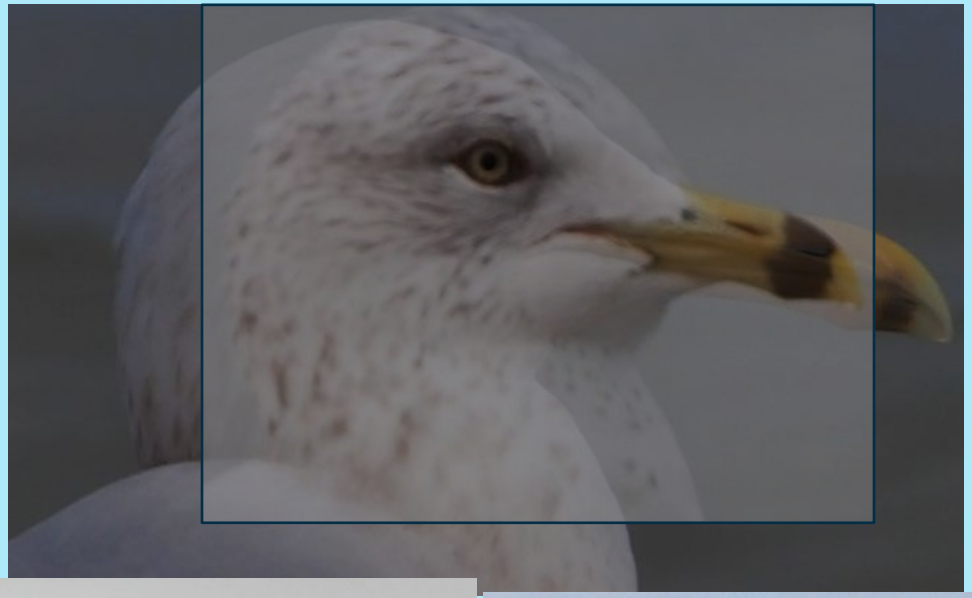




Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

BILL & HEAD: WHY IS THIS NOT A RING-BILLED?

Ring-billed



Herring





Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

IN FLIGHT

Ring-billed



Herring



Slower flapping compared to Ring-bill

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

HERRING VS RING-BILLED



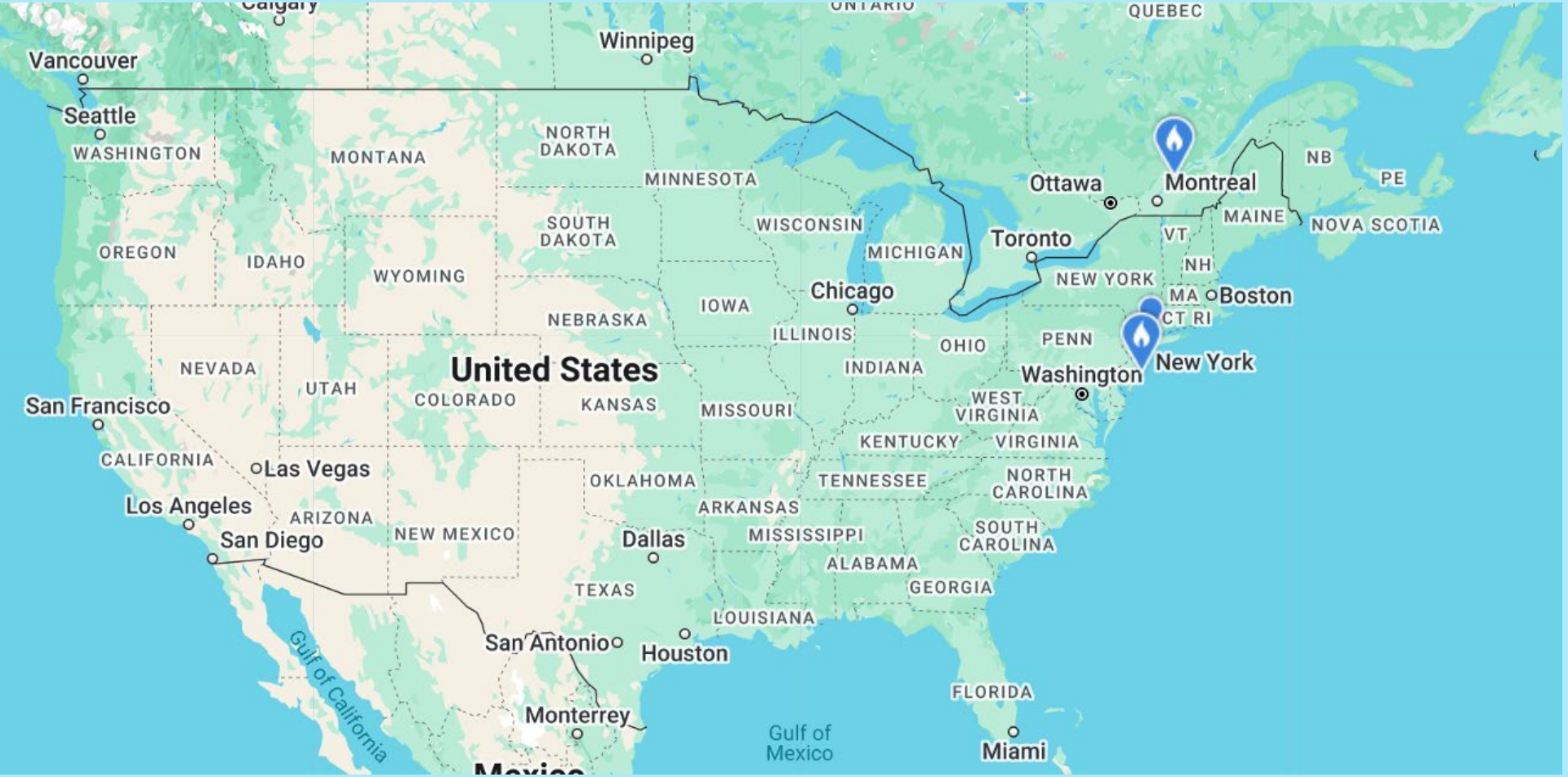
Photo by Kevin Karlson

HERRING VS RING-BILLED VS LAUGHING

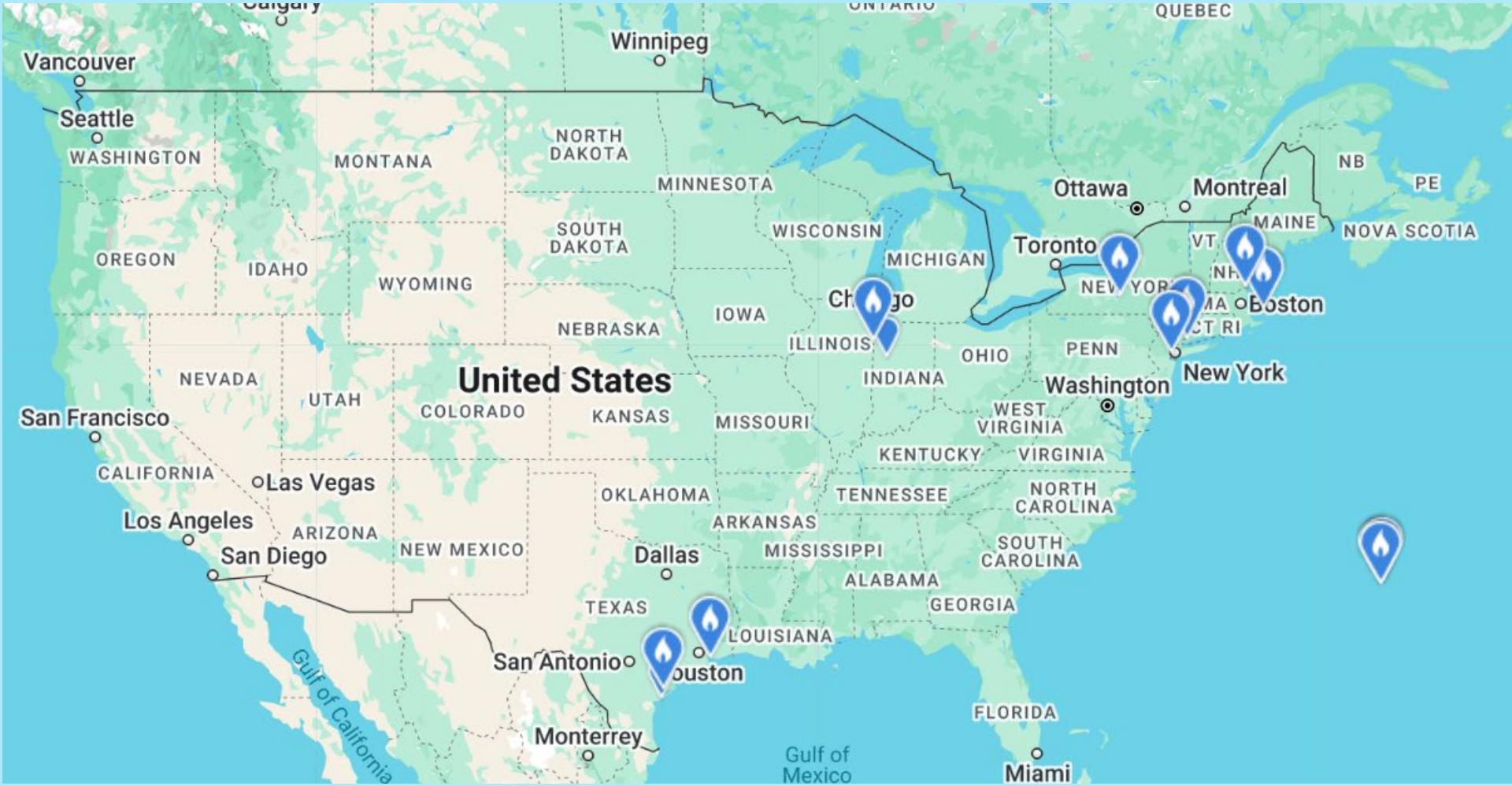


LBBG

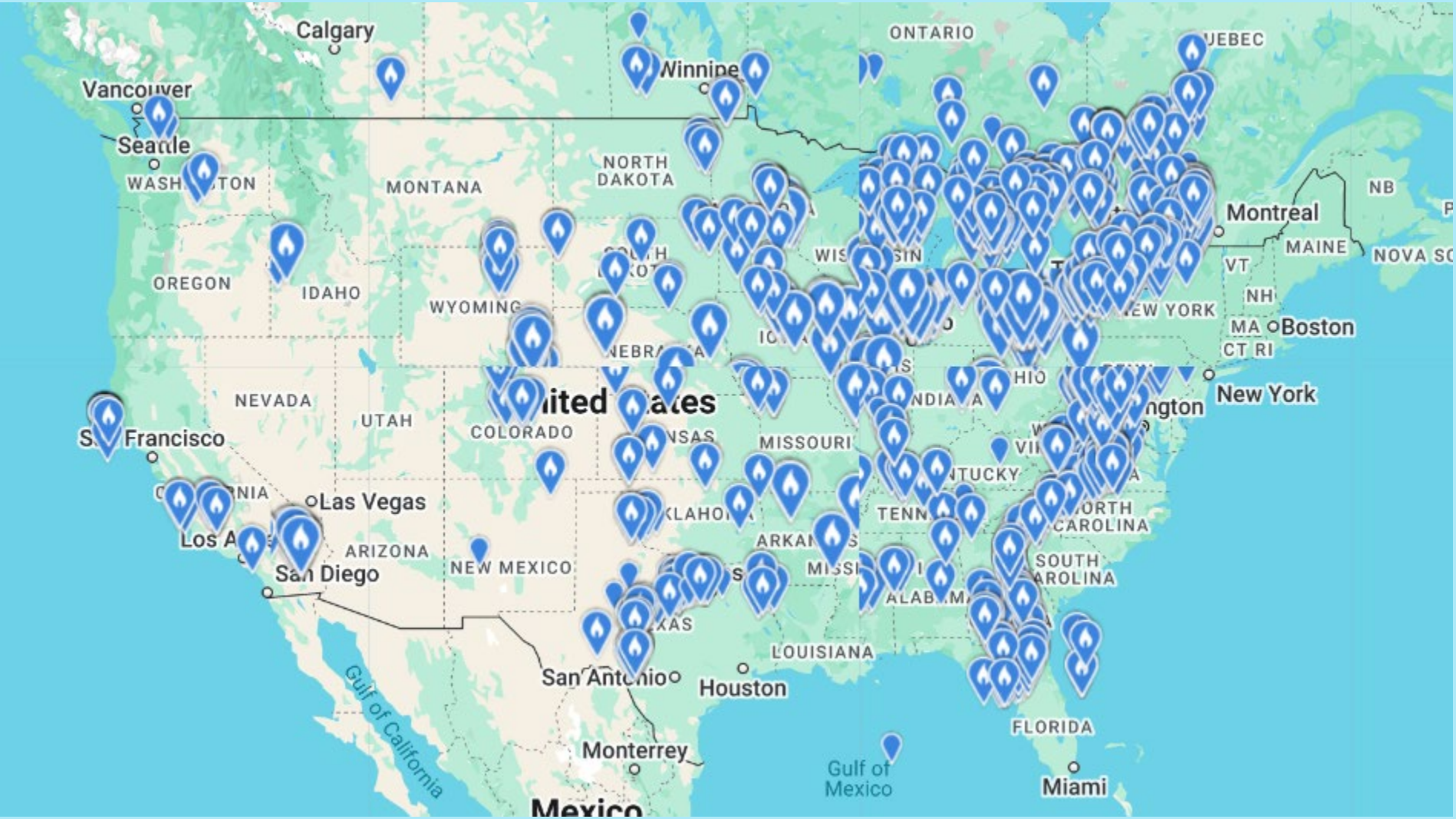
LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (LBBG) 1900-1950



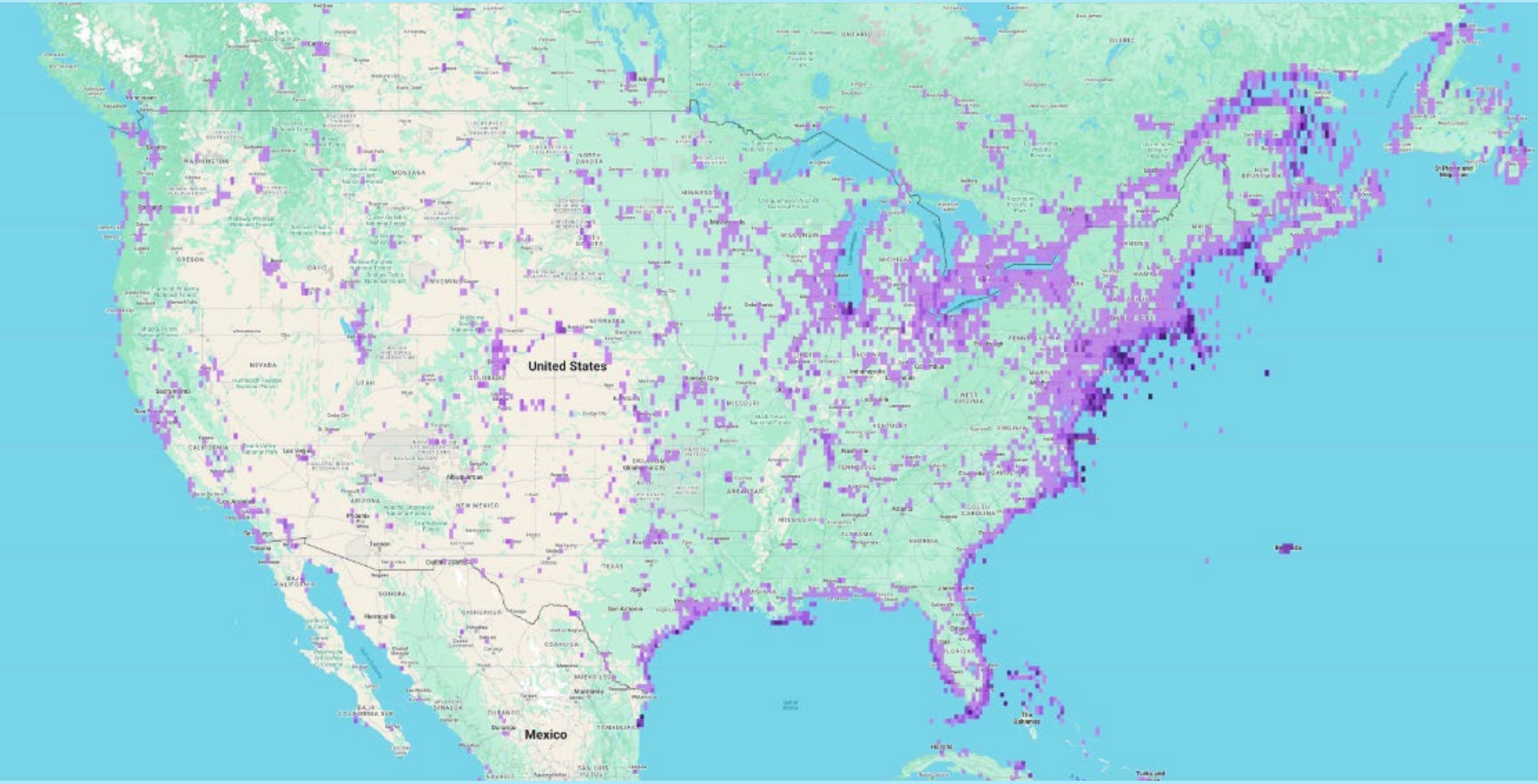
LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (LBBG) 1951-1970



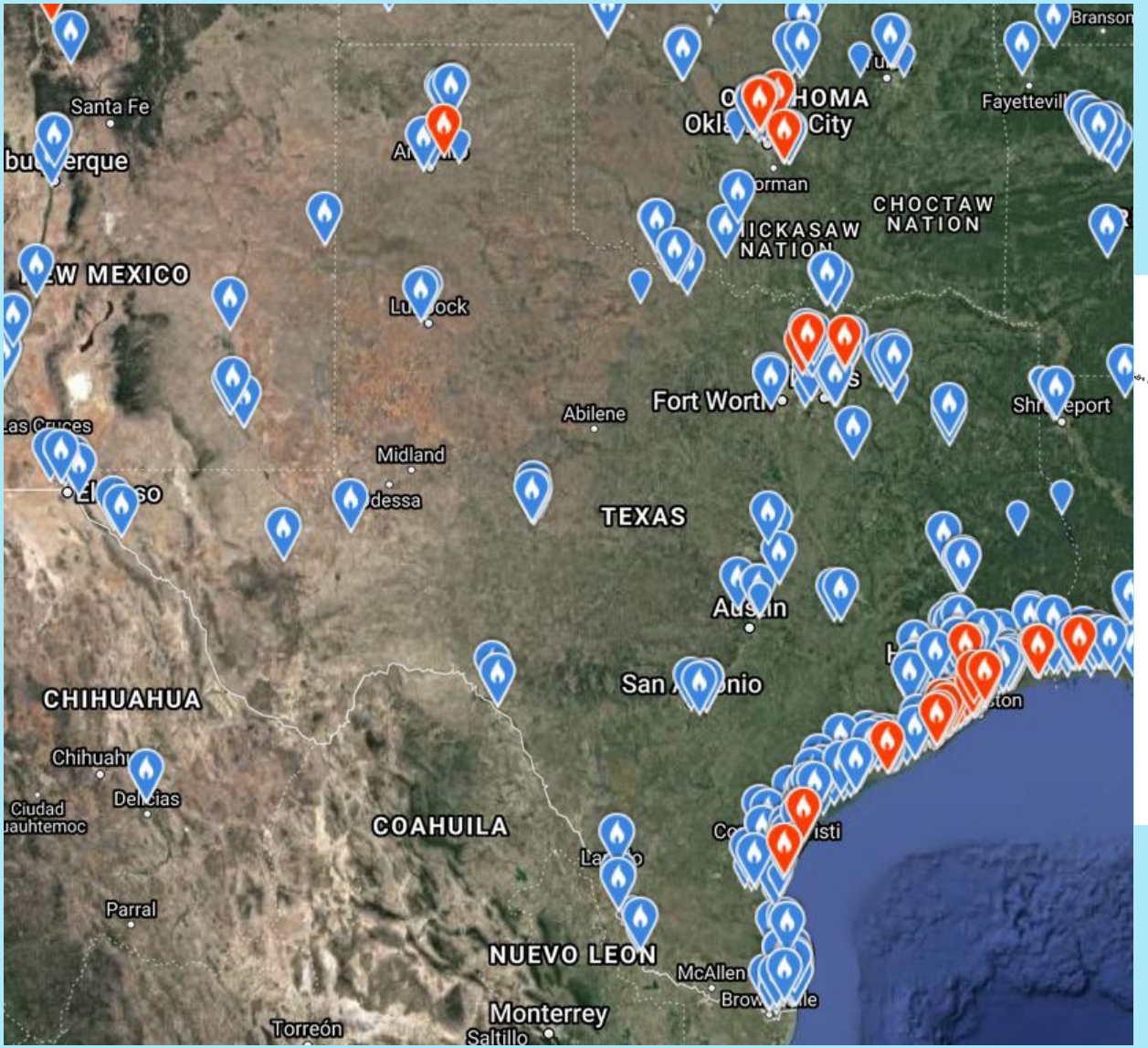
LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (LBBG) 1971-2000



LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (LBBG) 2001-2024

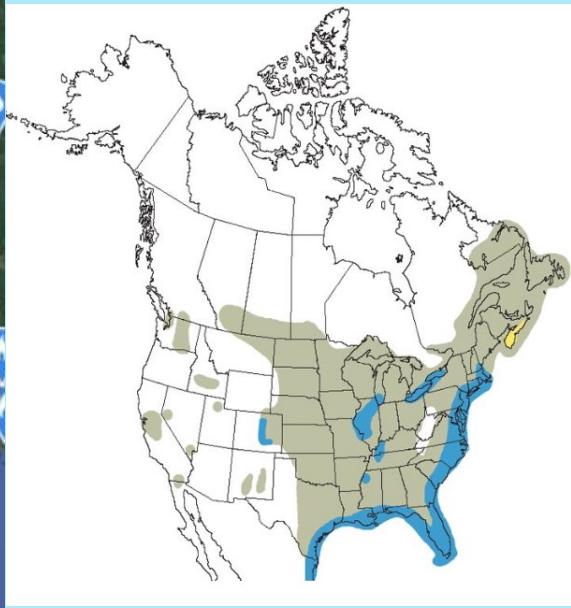


LESSER BLACK-BACKED



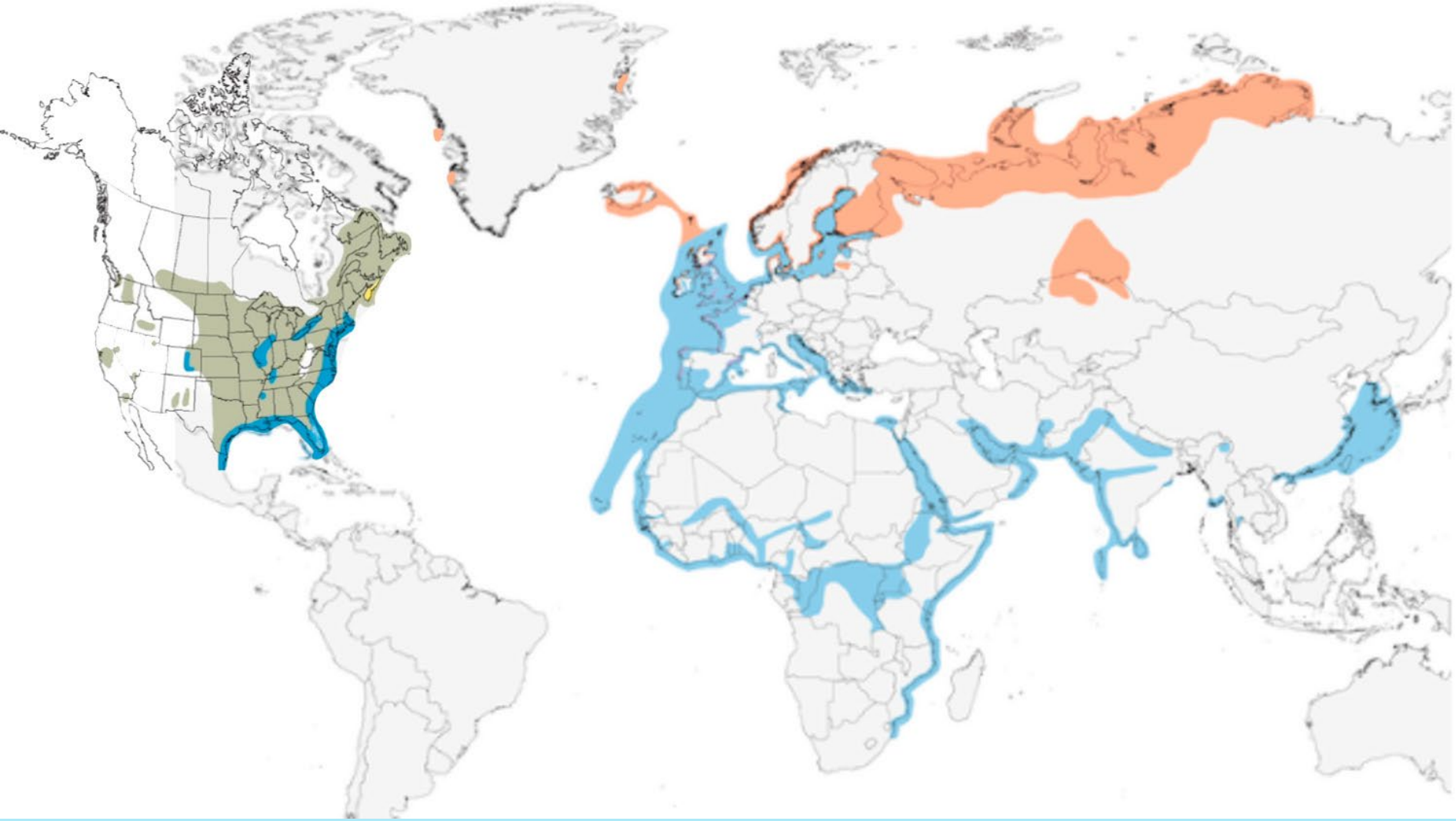
Last 10 years (ebird)

2015-2021
~50/year



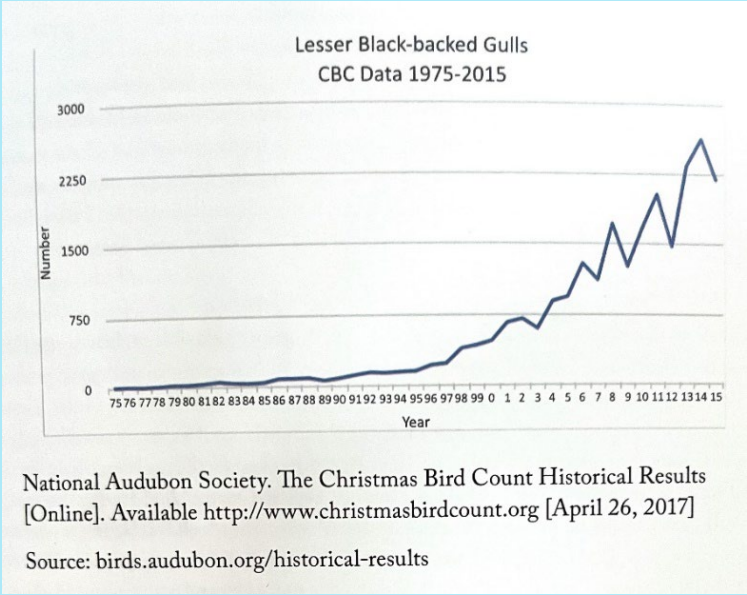
2022-2023
100s/year

LBBG



LESSER BLACK-BACKED (LBBG)

- Not part of North American avifauna until 1934
- Increased rapidly in 80s and 90s
- Originally a breeder in Europe
- Expanded to Iceland, Greenland, & then NA
- Same for Texas
  - A few in the 60s & 70s
  - More in the 80s & 90s
  - Removed from Review List in 1997
- **If you go gulling enough – you will find one**



National Audubon Society. The Christmas Bird Count Historical Results [Online]. Available http://www.christmasbirdcount.org [April 26, 2017]

Source: birds.audubon.org/historical-results

Subspecies [edit]

The five recognized subspecies are:

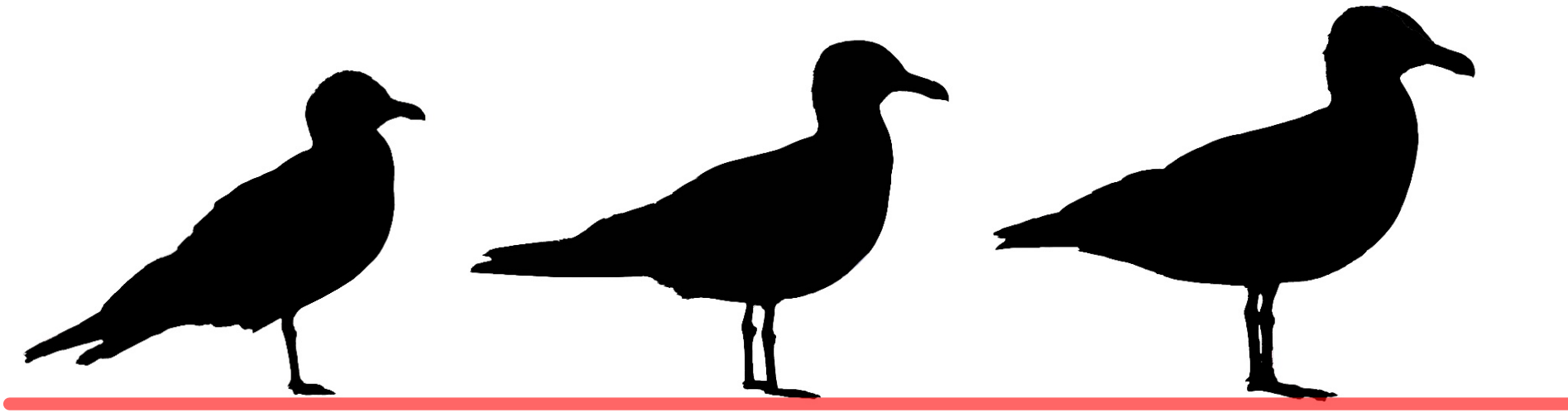
- *L. f. graellsii* Brehm, 1857: Greenland, Iceland, Faroe Islands, British Isles, western Europe - mantle dark grey
- *L. f. intermedius* Schiøler, 1922: Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, southwest Sweden and western Norway - mantle sooty black
- *L. f. fuscus* Linnaeus, 1758: northern Norway, Sweden and Finland to the White Sea - mantle jet black
- *L. f. heuglini* Bree, 1876: northern Russia to north-central Siberia, known as Heuglin's gull, this was previously considered a separate species.
- *L. f. barabensis* Johansen, 1960: central Asia

LBBG

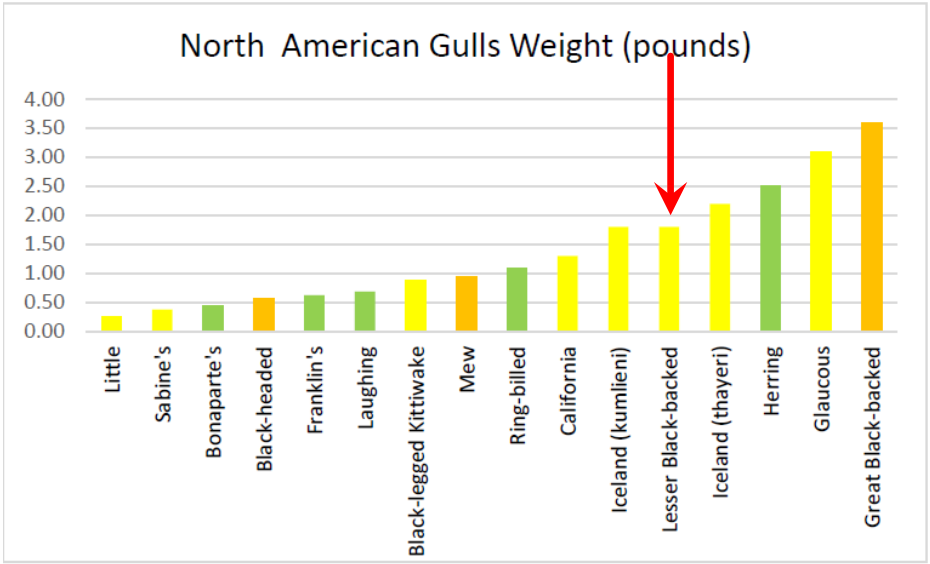


Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

SIZE COMPARISON



Ring-billed **LBBG** **Herring**



Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

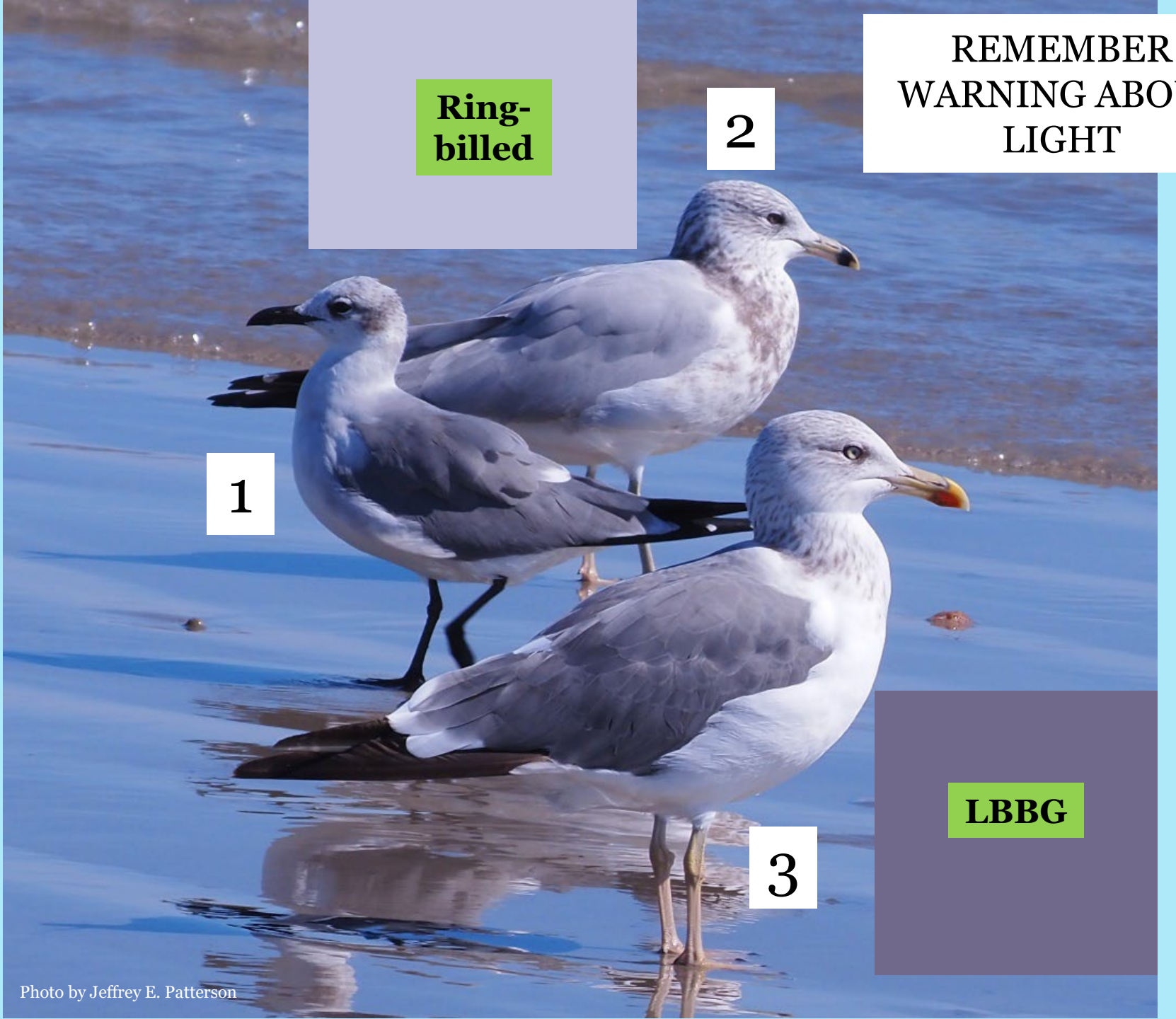

Ring-billed
2
REMEMBER WARNING ABOUT LIGHT
1
LBBG
3
Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson



Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

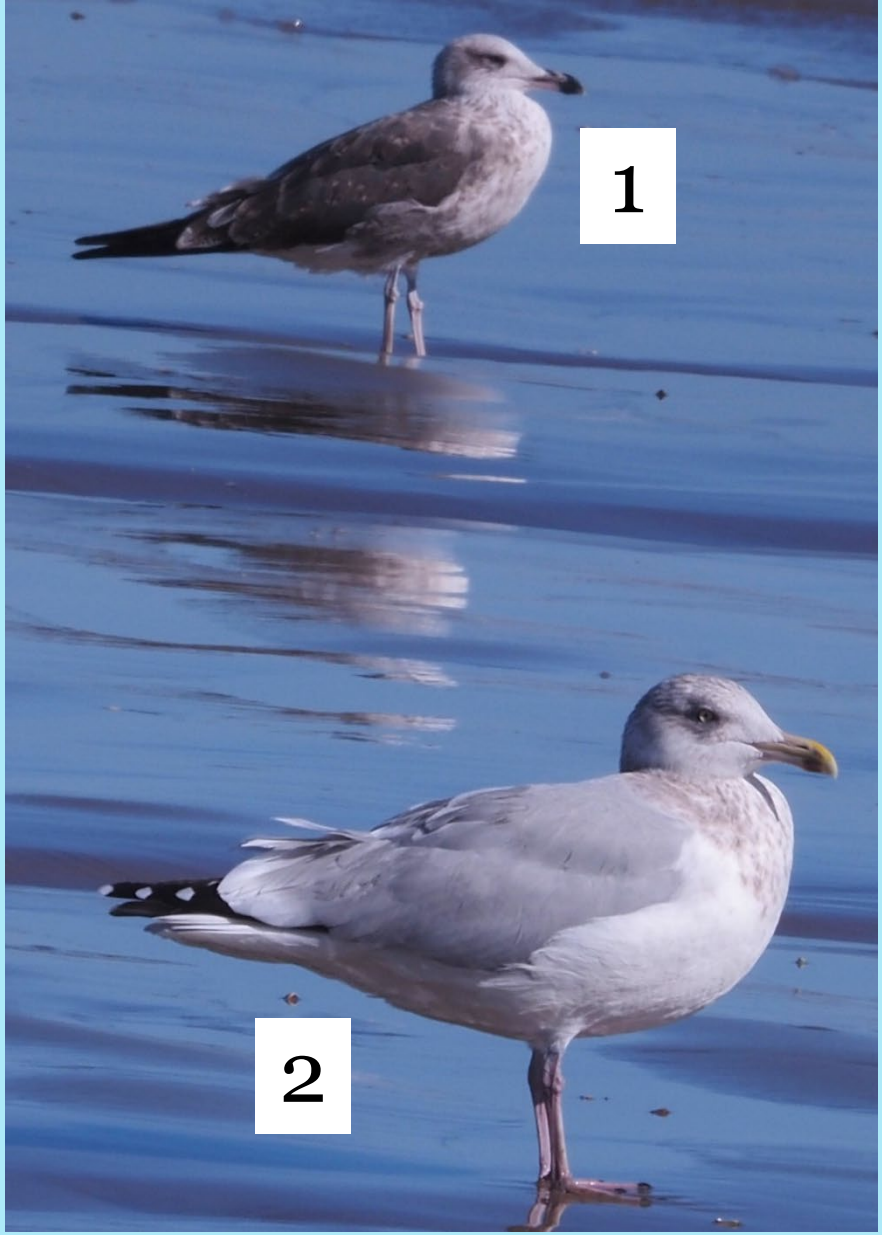

LBBG
Yellow eye, slim head and “punched in eye” results in a fierce look (often)
Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

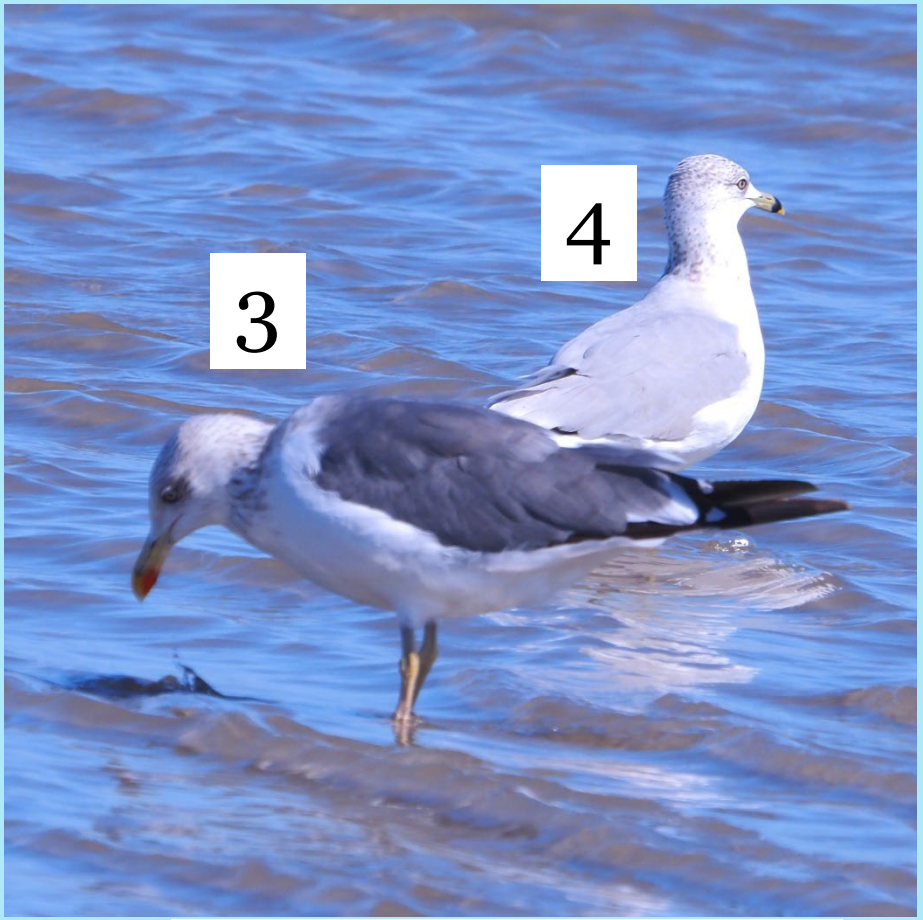


Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

COMPARISONS

Find the LBBG





Slimmer than Herring,

Slightly bulkier than Ring-billed

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

Find the LBBG



Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

Find the LBBG



Find the LBBG



Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

LBBG





Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson



Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson


APRIL
LBBG
Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson


JULY
LBBG
Photo by Anonymous

LBBG





Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

POP QUIZ

Long and tapered



Ring-billed

Bulky,
but not in upper chest



Herring

Longer, more tapered
with bulky upper chest

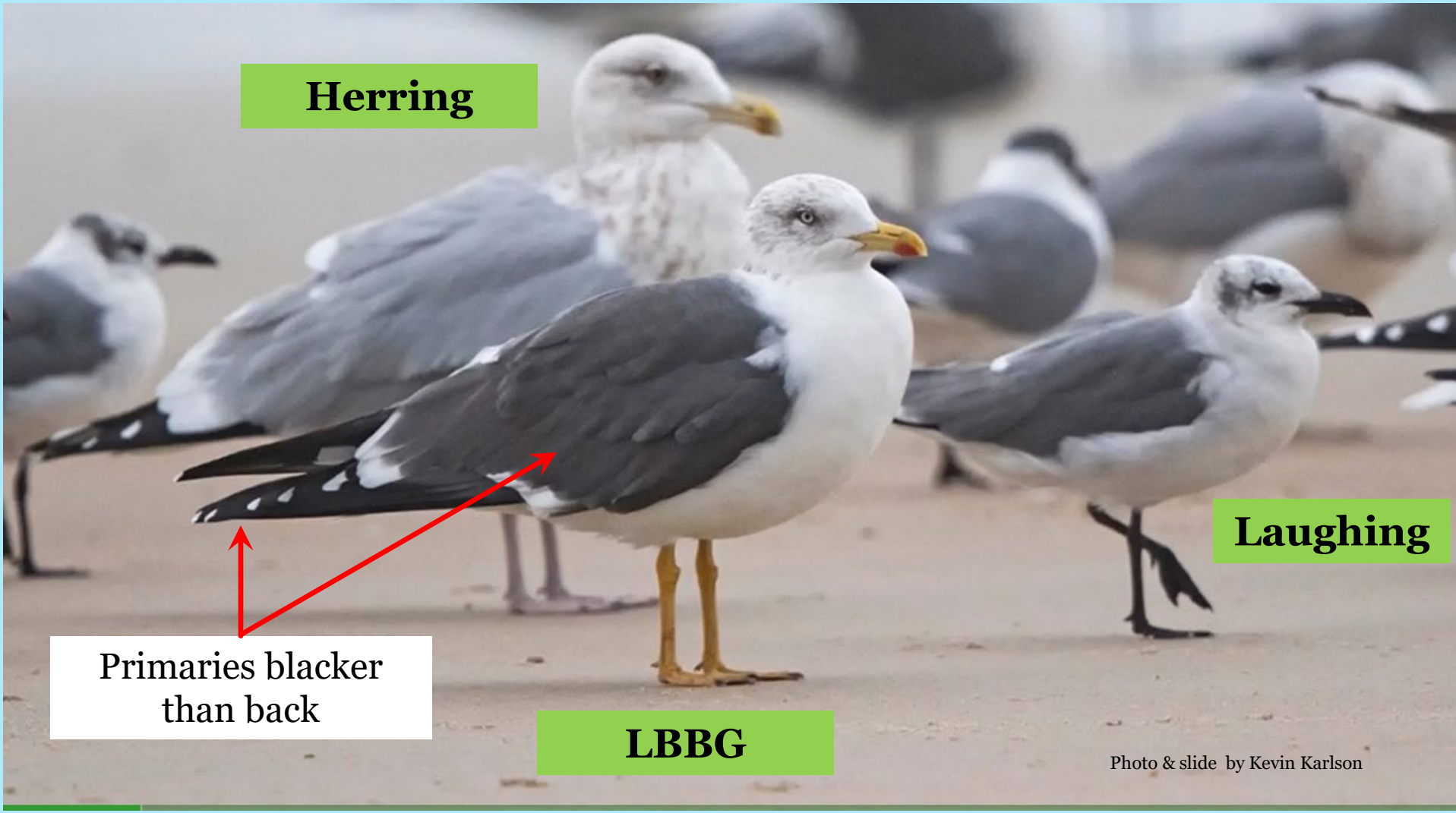


LBBG

Photo & slide by Kevin Karlson

POP QUIZ

Slightly darker than Laughing



BONAPARTE'S

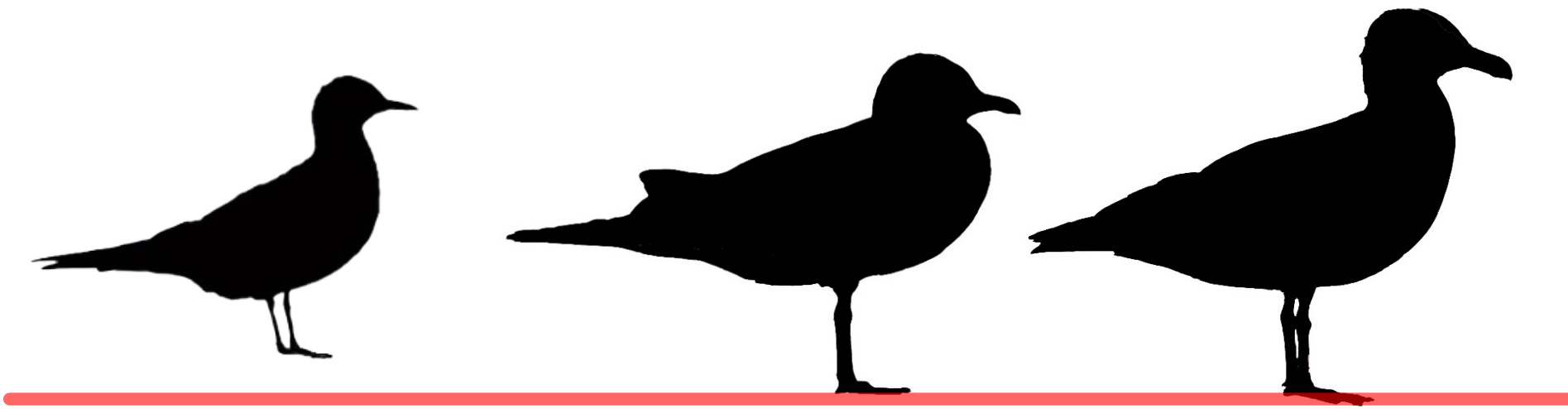
BONAPARTE'S

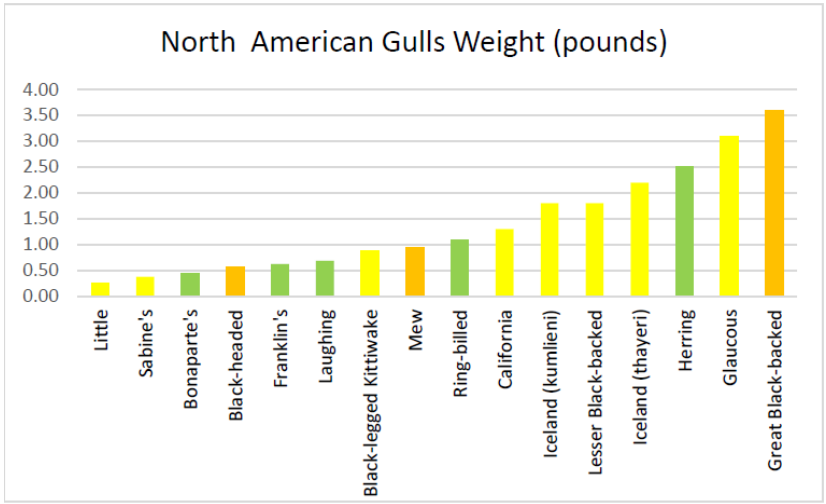


- 2 year gull.
- One of the smallest.
- Often in dense flocks.
- Dives into water for fish.
- Buoyant flight (tern-like).
- When swimming often stretches neck like a phalarope.
- Swimming and standing birds look long-winged.
- Sometimes rosy tinged under parts (breeding).

SIZE COMPARISON

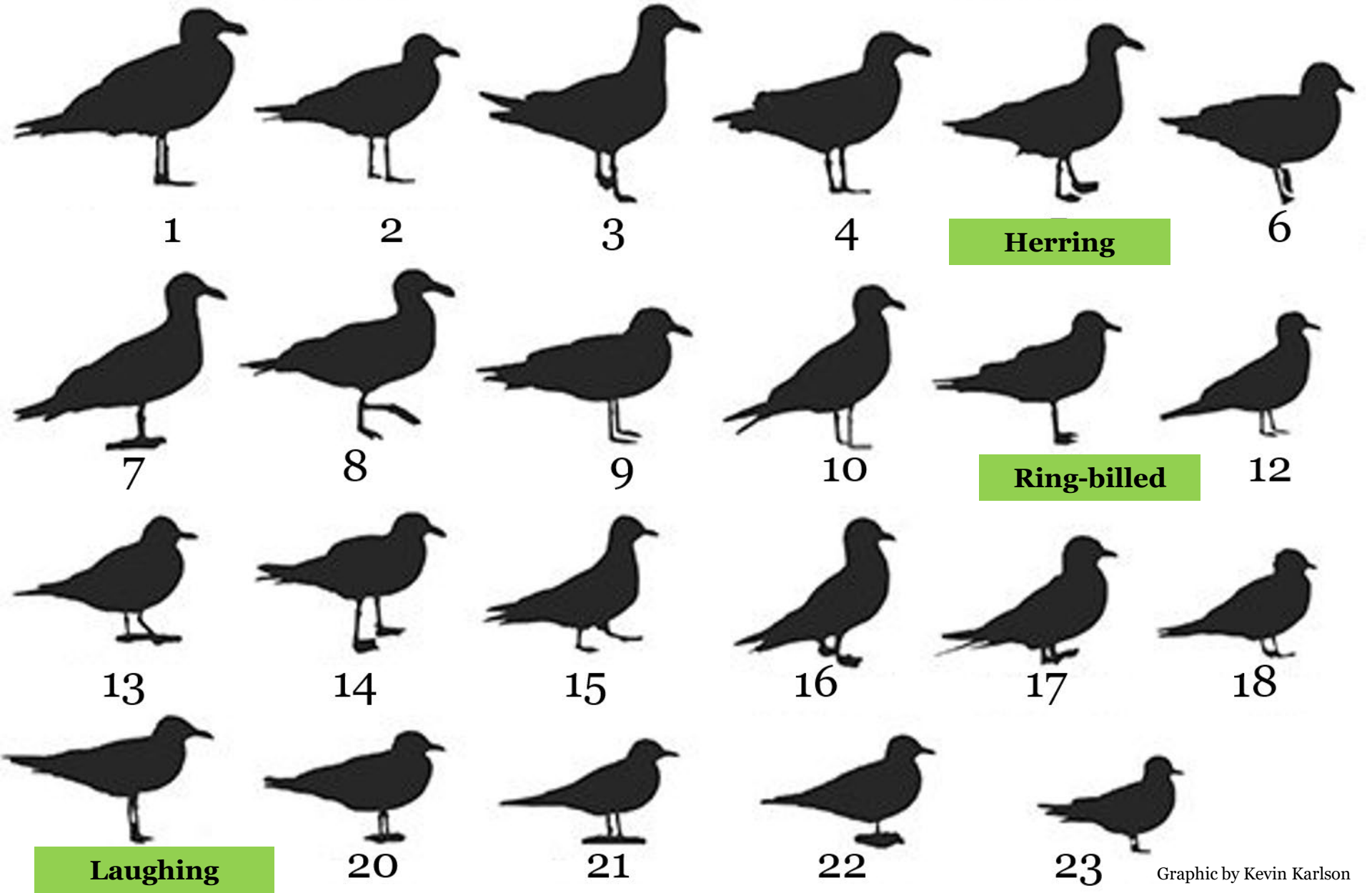
Bonaparte's **Ring-billed** **Herring**





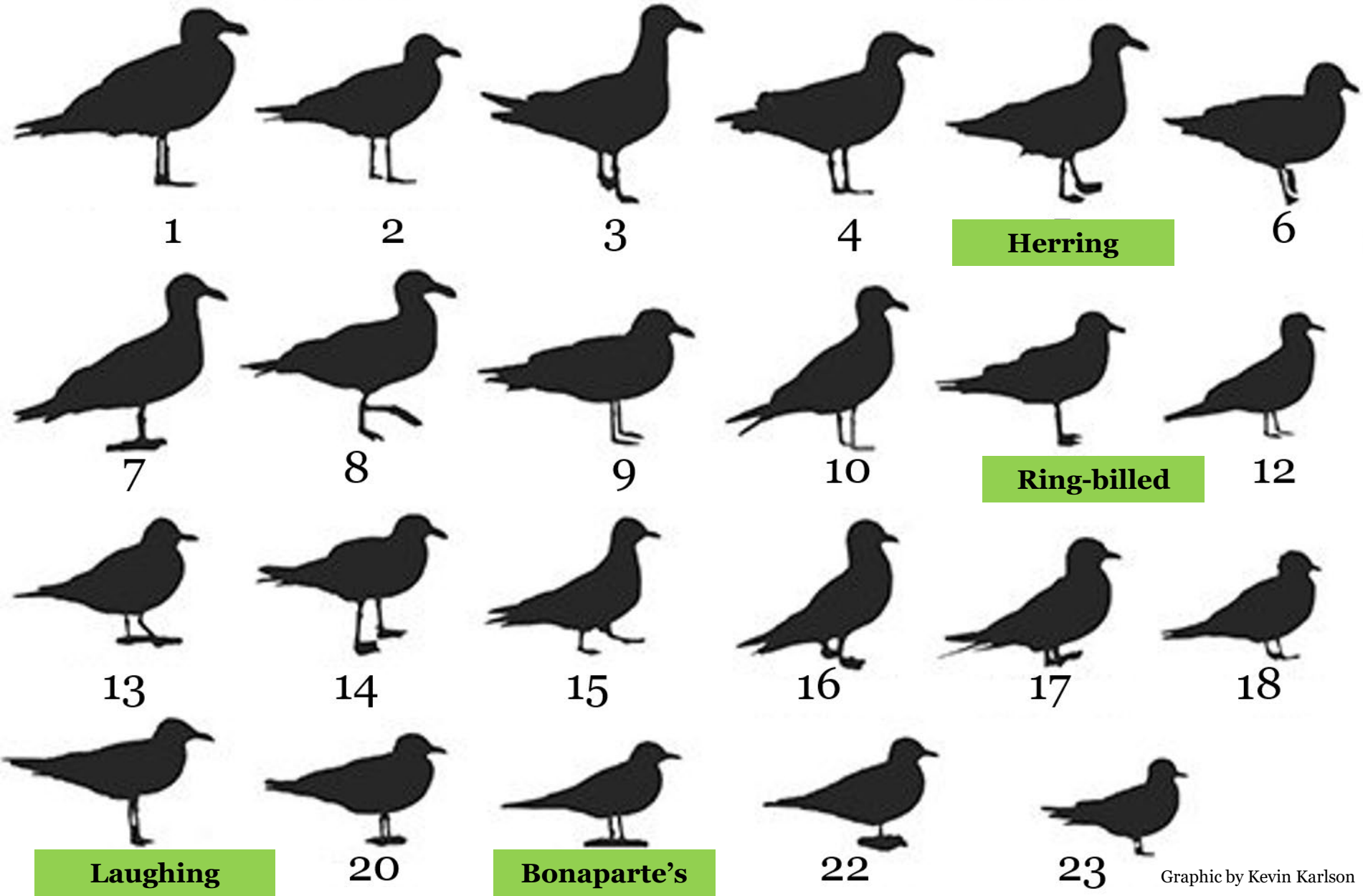
Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

FIND THE BONAPARTE'S



Graphic by Kevin Karlson

FIND THE BONAPARTE'S



Graphic by Kevin Karlson

SIMILAR SPECIES MATRIX

GULLS OF NORTH AMERICA SIMILAR SPECIES MATRIX	Ring-billed	Laughing	Franklin's	Bonaparte's	Herring	Lesser Black-backed	Glaucous	Sabine's	Little	Iceland (L. g. kumlieni)	Iceland (L. g. thayeri)	California	Black-legged Kittiwake	Great Black-backed	Short-billed	Black-headed	Slaty-backed	Heermann's	Western	Kelp	Black-tailed	Glaucous-winged	Yellow-legged
Ring-billed					x							x	x		x	x							
Laughing			x	x				x															
Franklin's		x		x				x															
Bonaparte's		x	x					x	x				x			x							
Herring	x					x	x			x	x	x		x			x		x	x	x	x	x
Lesser Black-backed					x		x			x	x	x		x			x		x	x	x	x	x
Glaucous					x	x				x	x	x		x			x		x	x	x	x	x
Sabine's		x	x	x					x				x										
Little				x				x					x										
Iceland (L. g. kumlieni)					x	x	x				x	x		x			x		x	x	x	x	x
Iceland (L. g. thayeri)					x	x	x			x		x		x			x		x	x	x	x	x
California	x				x	x	x			x	x			x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x
Black-legged Kittiwake				x				x	x							x							
Great Black-backed					x	x	x			x	x	x					x		x	x	x	x	x
Short-billed	x											x											
Black-headed				x				x	x				x										
Slaty-backed					x	x	x			x	x	x		x					x	x	x	x	x
Heermann's																							
Western					x	x	x			x	x	x		x			x			x	x	x	x
Kelp					x	x	x			x	x	x		x			x		x		x	x	x
Black-tailed					x	x	x			x	x	x		x			x		x	x		x	x
Glaucous-winged					x	x	x			x	x	x		x			x		x	x	x		x
Yellow-legged					x	x	x			x	x	x		x			x		x	x	x	x	

BONAPARTE'S SIMILAR SPECIES

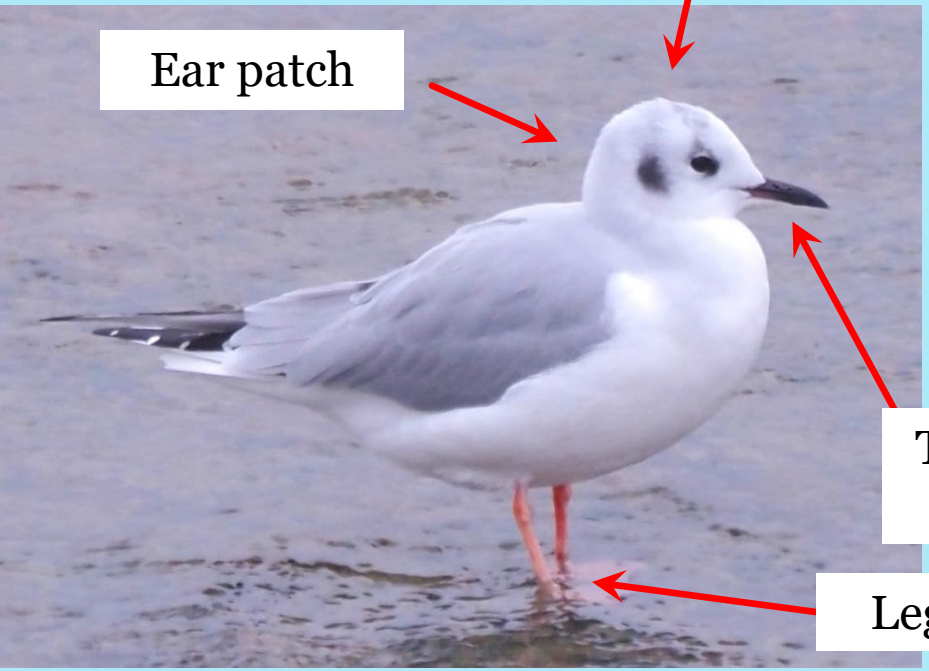
GULLS OF NORTH AMERICA SIMILAR SPECIES MATRIX	Bonaparte's
Laughing	x
Franklin's	x
Sabine's	x
Little	x
Black-legged Kittiwake	x
Black-headed	x

WHY IS THIS NOT A RING-BILLED?

Smaller

Taller head

Ear patch



Thin, black bill

Leg color

Bonaparte's



Ring-billed

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

RING-BILLED VS BONAPARTE'S



What age and plumage are these birds?

Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

WHY IS THIS NOT A RING-BILLED?

Buoyant, tern-like flight

White leading edge

Black trailing edge



Bonaparte's



Ring-billed

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

WHY IS THIS NOT A FRANKLIN'S?



Bonaparte's

Darker

Franklin's

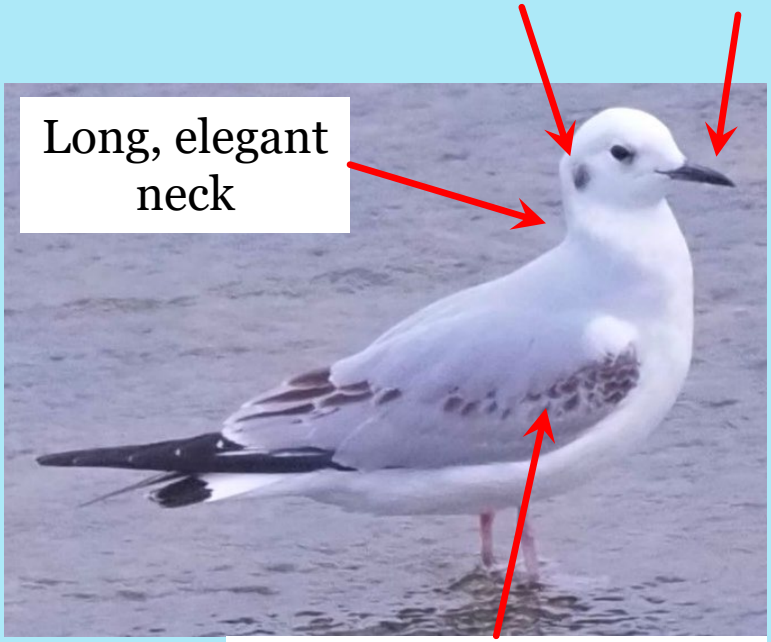


Larger

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

WHY IS THIS NOT A RING-BILLED?

What age are these birds?





Bonaparte's

Ring-billed

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

WHY IS THIS NOT .....?



Ring-billed

"M-bird"



Bonaparte's



Franklin's

Photos by Jeffrey E. Patterson

BONAPARTE'S MOLT SEQUENCE

August



Photo by Robert G Buckert

October



Photo by Dan O'Brian

December



Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

March



March



Photo by Nancy Villone

January



Photo by Brian Johnson

Alternate (Apr-Aug)

BONAPARTE'S ADULT – ALTERNATE

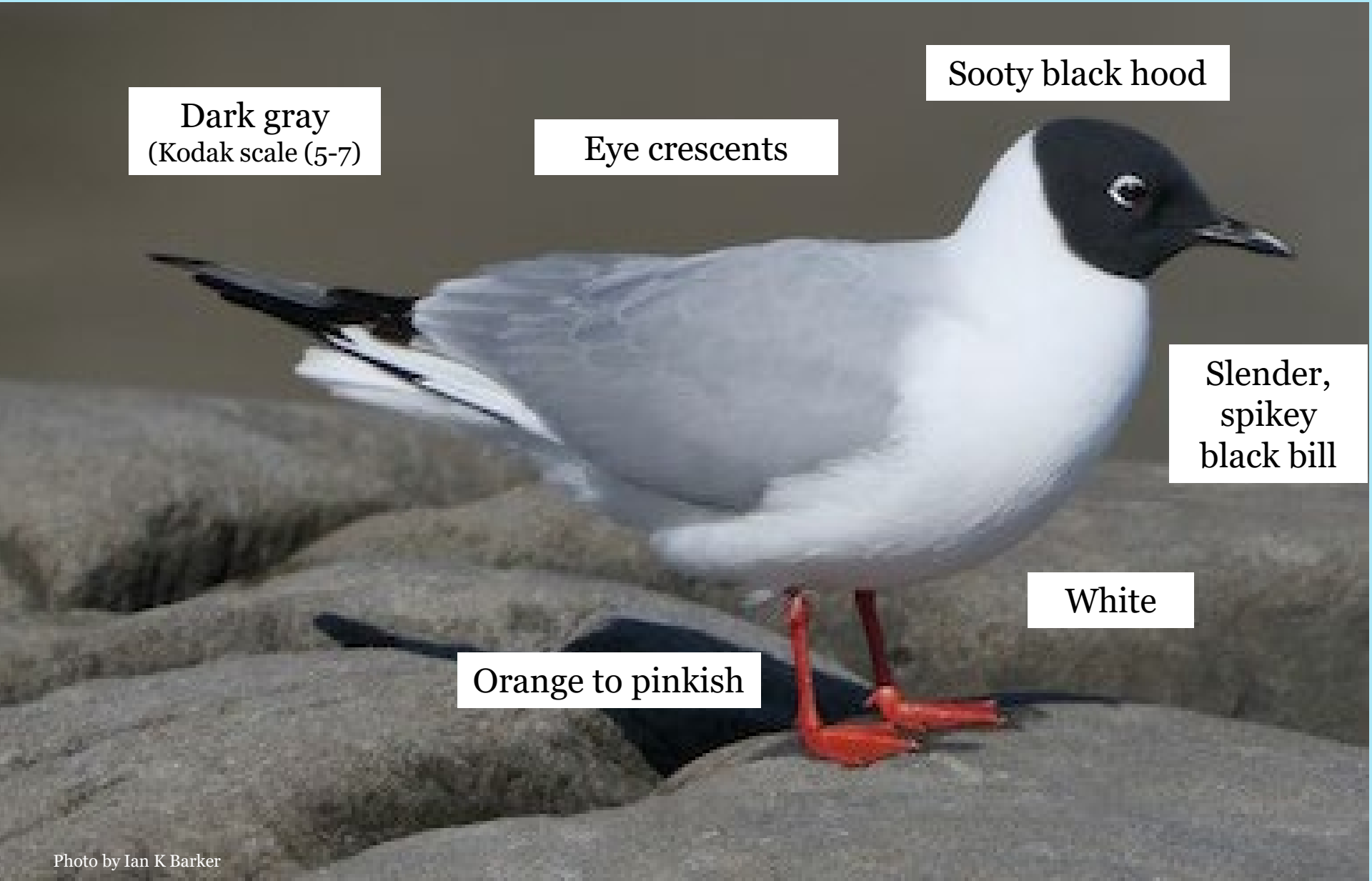


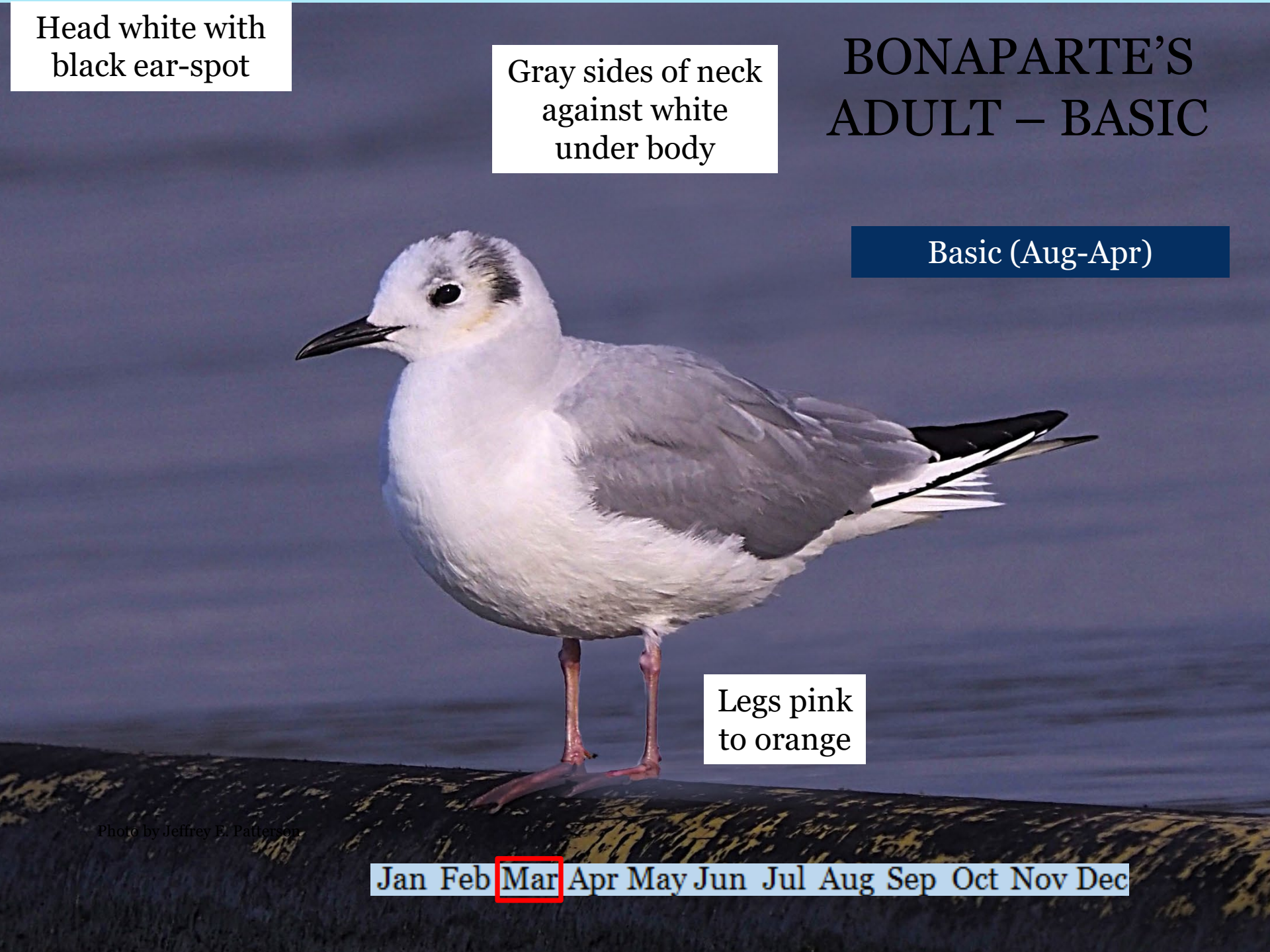
Photo by Ian K Barker

BONAPARTE'S ADULT – BASIC

Head white with black ear-spot

Gray sides of neck against white under body

Basic (Aug-Apr)



Legs pink to orange

Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

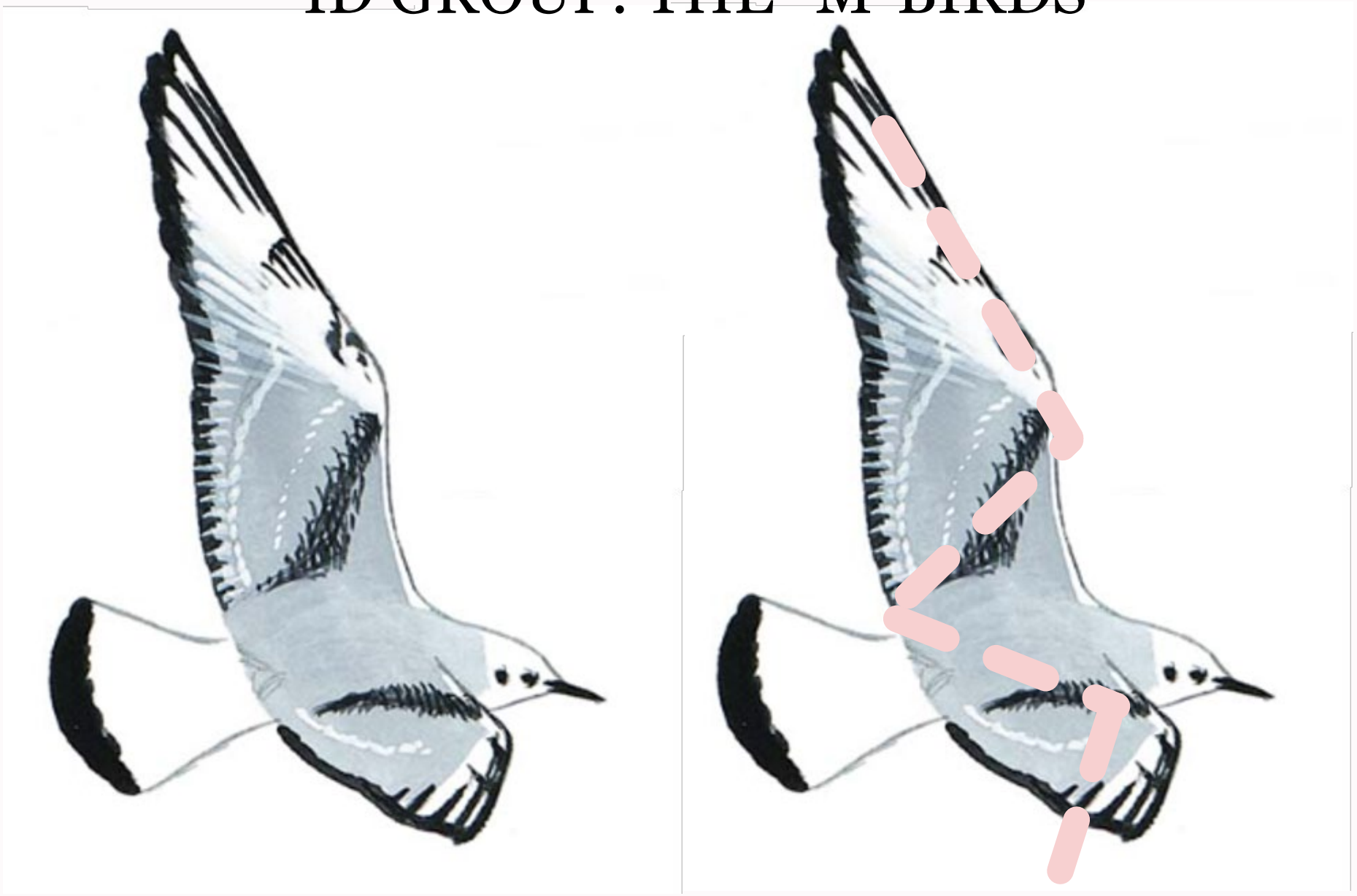
Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec



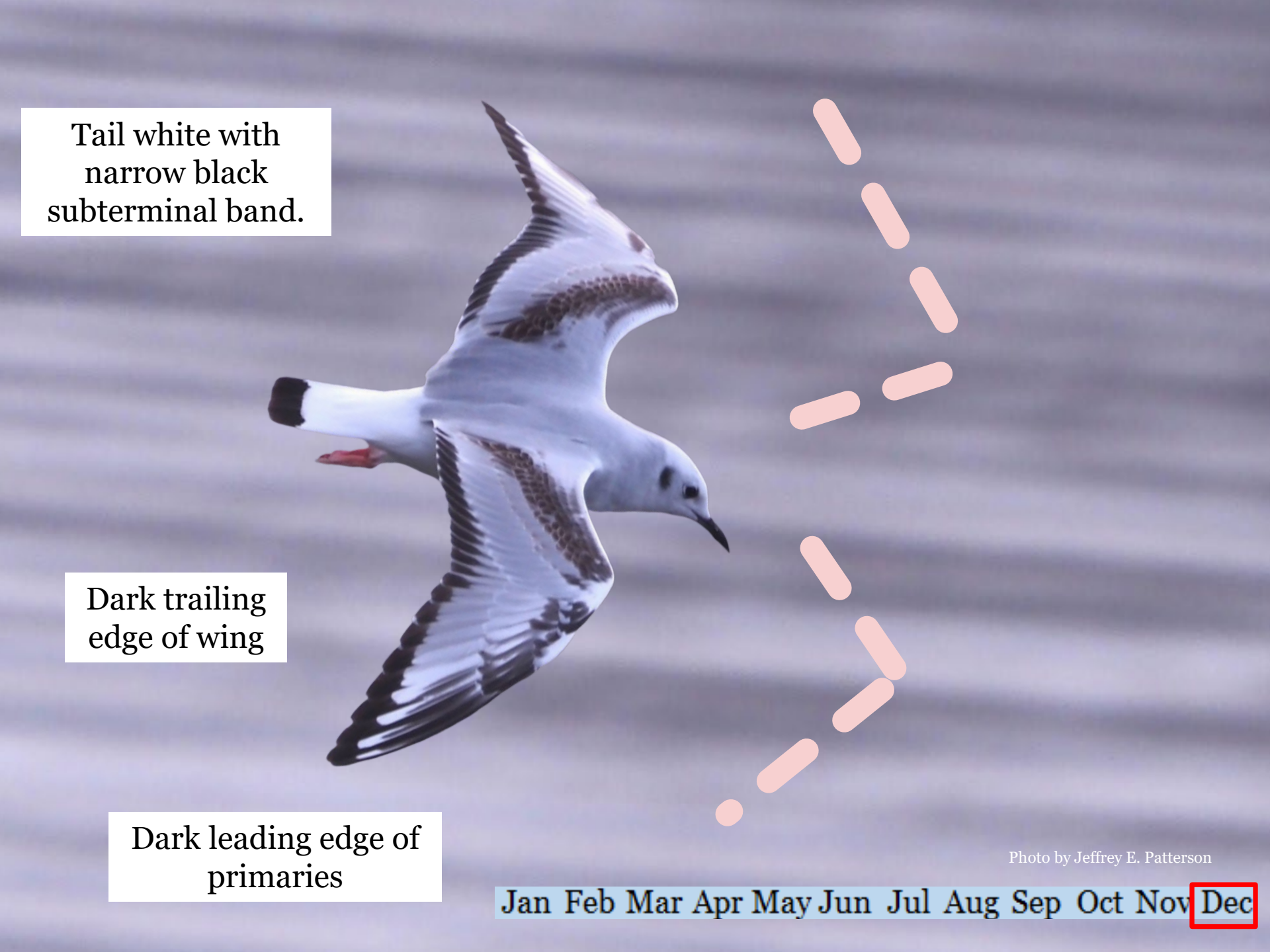
BONAPARTE'S ADULT – BASIC

Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

ID GROUP: THE “M-BIRDS”



Paintings by David A. Sibley


Tail white with narrow black subterminal band.
Dark trailing edge of wing
Dark leading edge of primaries
Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson
Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec

Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec

Head becoming white

Back transitioning to adult gray.



BONAPARTE'S SUB-ADULT

(1ST WINTER)

Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson



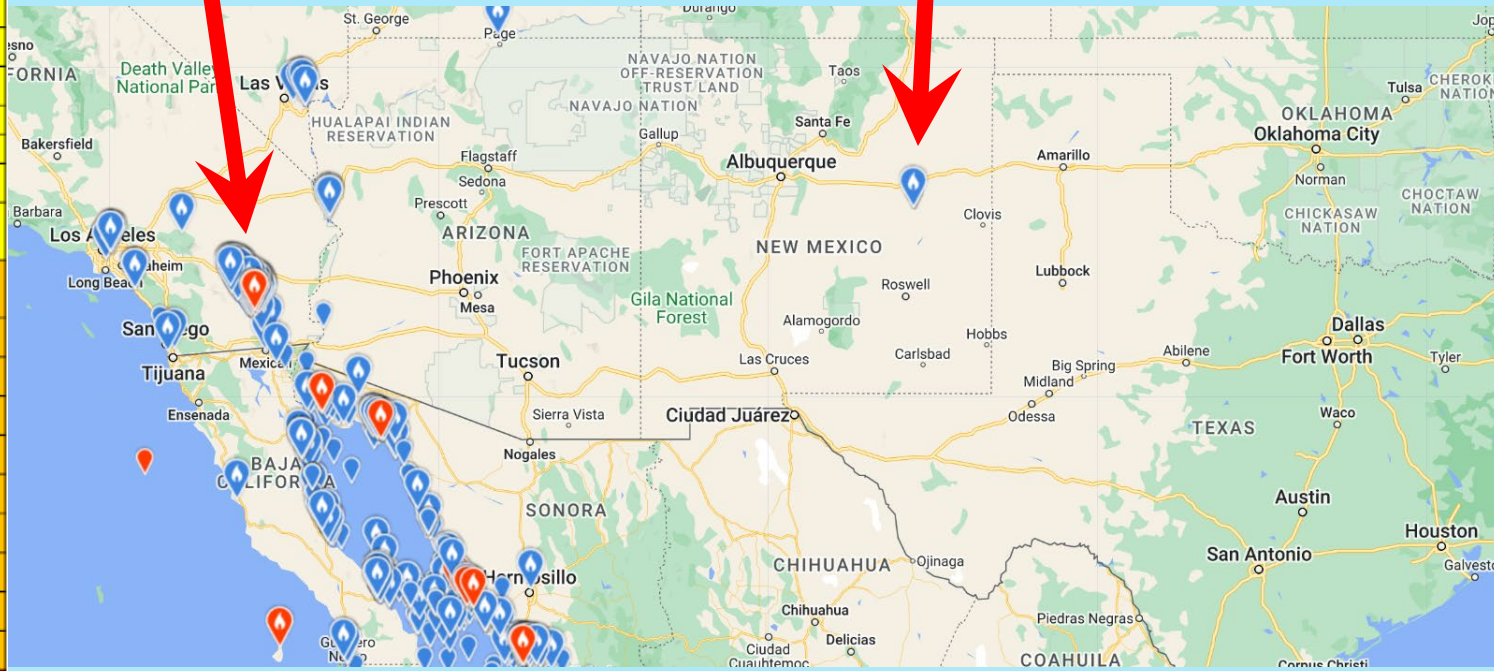
Photo by Jeffrey E. Patterson

2023 CLASS
YELLOW-FOOTED GULL
COMING TO TEXAS SOON ??

#	Species	Years to Mature
1	Ring-billed	3
2	Laughing	3
3	Franklin's	3
4	Bonaparte's	2
5	Herring (*L.smithsonianus*)	4
6	Lesser Black-backed	4
7	Glaucous	4
8	Sabine's	2
9	Little	3
10	Iceland (*L.g.kumlieni*)	4
	Iceland (*L.g. thayeri*)	4
11	California	4
12	Black-legged Kittiwake	2-3
13	Great Black-backed	4
14	Short-billed	3
15	Black-headed	2
16	Slaty-backed	4
17	Heermann's	3
18	Western	4
19	Kelp	3-4
20	Black-tailed	4
21	Glaucous-winged	4
22	Yellow-legged	4
23	Ivory	2
24	Red-legged Kittiwake	2-3
25	Ross's	2
26	Yellow-footed	3

Salton Sea

Sept – Nov 2021



YELLOW-FOOTED GULL CAME TO TEXAS !!!!

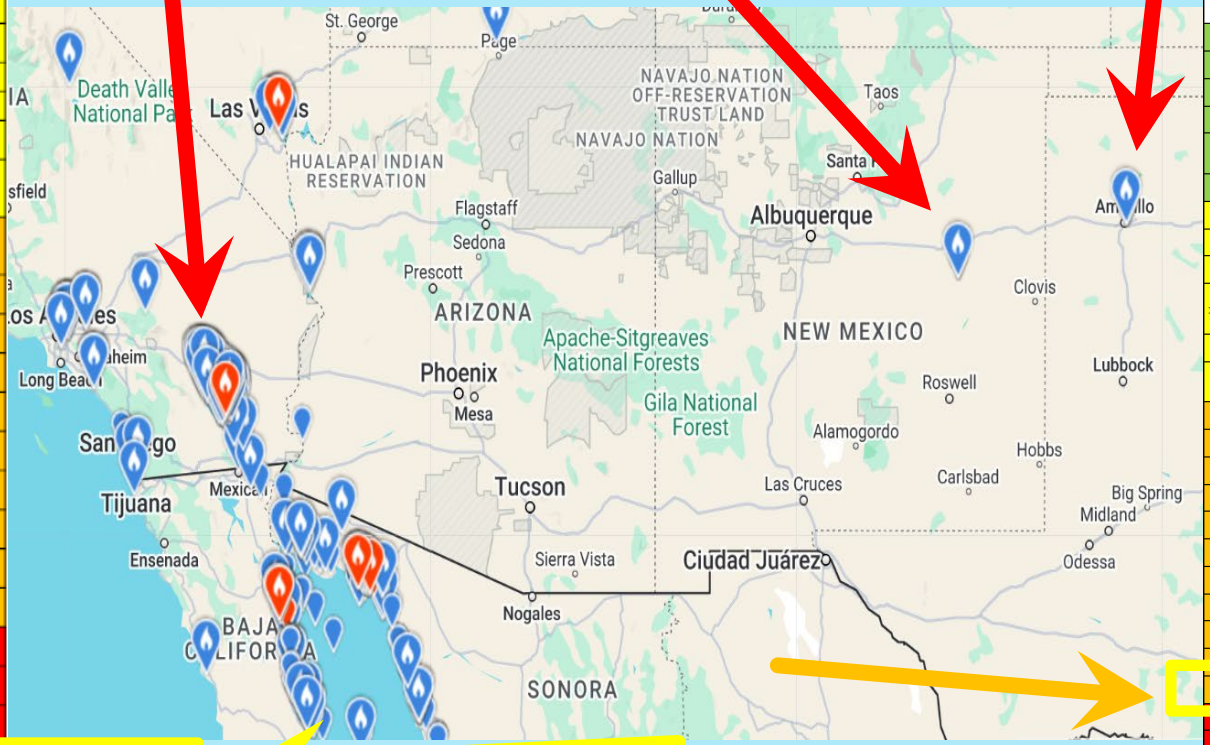


Nov 2, 2023—Jan 30, 2024

Salton Sea

Sept – Nov 2021

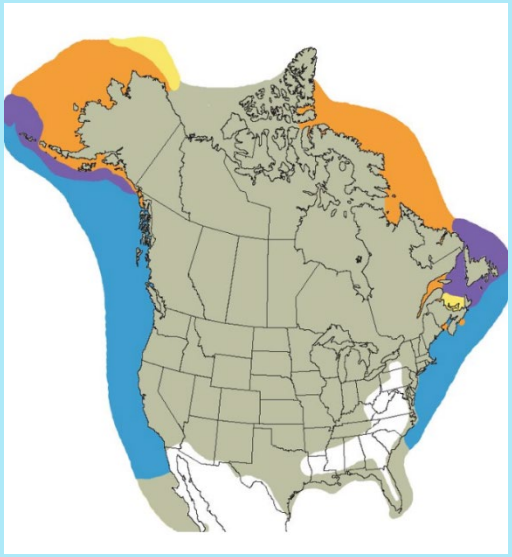
#	Species	Years to Mature
1	Ring-billed	3
2	Laughing	3
3	Franklin's	3
4	Bonaparte's	2
5	Herring (*L.smithsonianus*)	4
6	Lesser Black-backed	4
7	Glaucous	4
8	Sabine's	2
9	Little	3
10	Iceland (*L.g.kumlieni*)	4
	Iceland (*L.g. thayeri*)	4
11	California	4
12	Black-legged Kittiwake	2-3
13	Great Black-backed	4
14	Short-billed	3
15	Black-headed	2
16	Slaty-backed	4
17	Heermann's	3
18	Western	4
19	Kelp	3-4
20	Black-tailed	4
21	Glaucous-winged	4
22	Yellow-legged	4
23	Ivory	2
24	Red-legged Kittiwake	2-3
25	Ross's	2
26	Yellow-footed	3



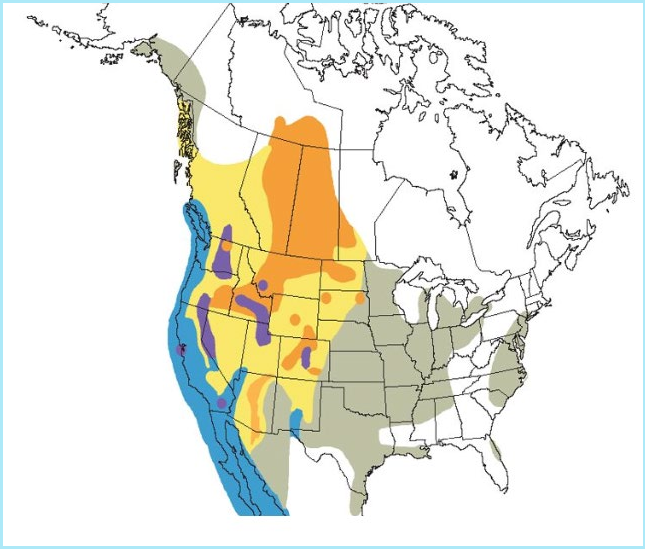
#	Species
1	Ring-billed
2	Laughing
3	Franklin's
4	Bonaparte's
5	Herring (*L smithsonianus*)
6	Lesser Black-backed
7	Glaucous
8	Sabine's
9	Little
10 (+1)	Iceland (*L.g.kumlieni*)
	Iceland (*L.g. thayeri*)
11	California
12	Black-legged Kittiwake
13	Great Black-backed
14	Short-billed
15	Black-headed
16	Slaty-backed
17	Heermann's
18	Western
19	Kelp
20	Black-tailed
21	Glaucous-winged
23	Yellow-footed
25	Red-legged Kittiwake
26	Ross's

NORTH AMERICAN GULLS BY DIFFICULT

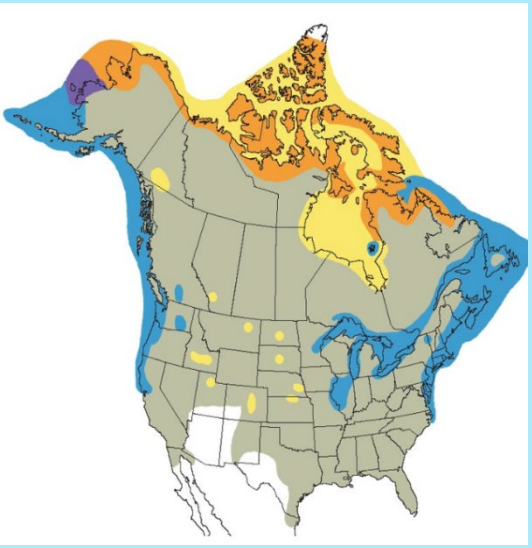
7 Wandering Texans



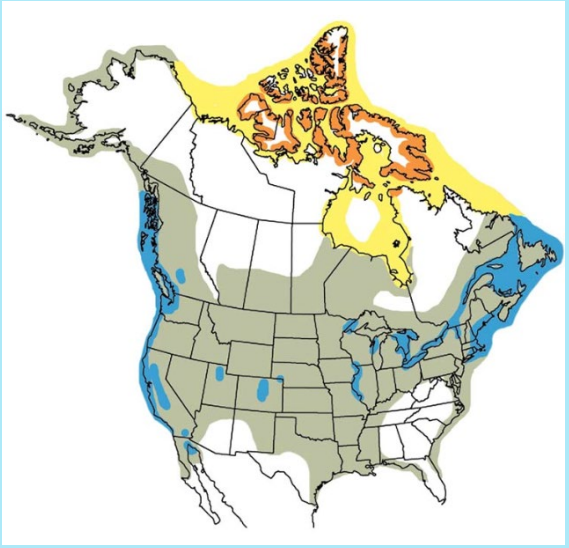
Black-legged Kittiwake



California



Glaucous



Iceland

7 UNCOMMON TEXAS GULLS (FORMERLY ON REVIEW LIST)	
Species	TBRC Status
Black-legged Kittiwake	On Review List until 1999; On Review List 2005-2018
California Gull	On Review List until 1999
Glaucous Gull	On Review List until 1997
Iceland Gull	On Review List until 2017
Lesser Black-backed Gull	On Review List until 1997
Little Gull	On Review List until 2012
Sabine's Gull	On Review List until 1999

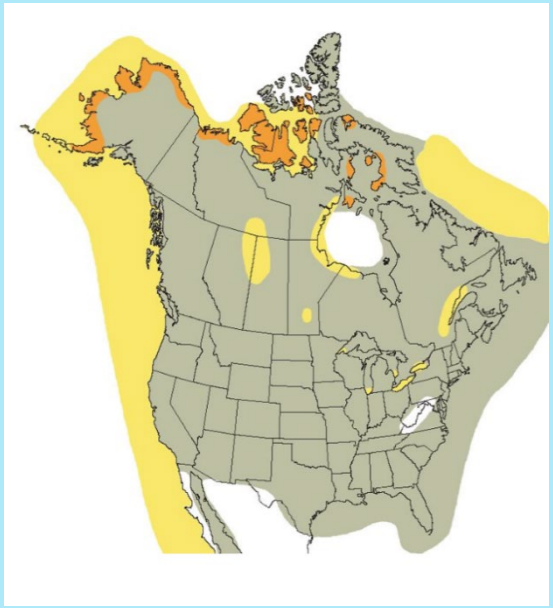
Iceland

Thayer's

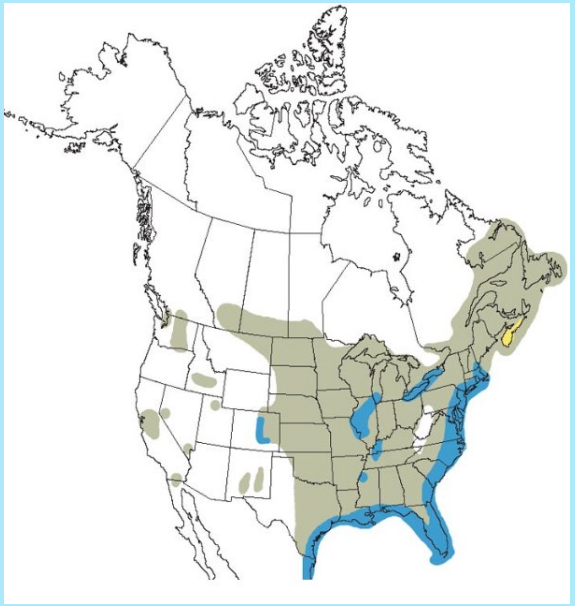
7 Wandering Texans

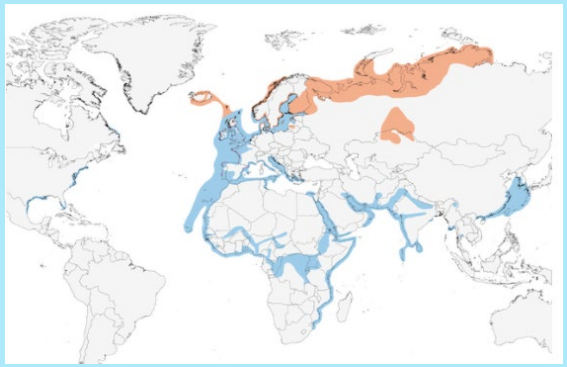


Little



Sabine's





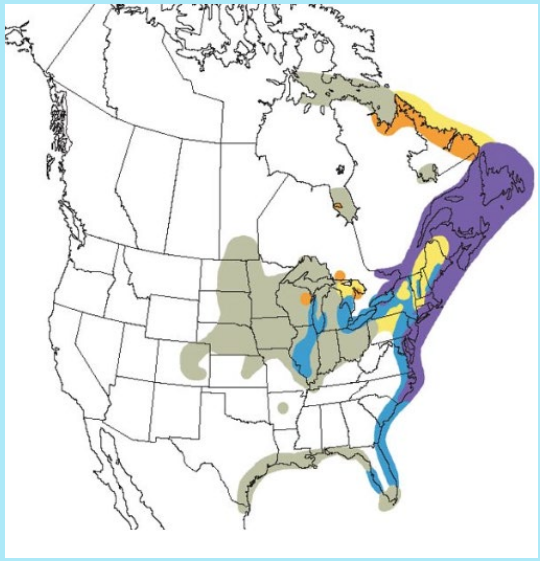
Lesser Black-backed

7 UNCOMMON TEXAS GULLS (FORMERLY ON REVIEW LIST)	
Species	TBRC Status
Black-legged Kittiwake	On Review List until 1999; On Review List 2005-2018
California Gull	On Review List until 1999
Glaucous Gull	On Review List until 1997
Iceland Gull	On Review List until 2017
Lesser Black-backed Gull	On Review List until 1997
Little Gull	On Review List until 2012
Sabine's Gull	On Review List until 1999

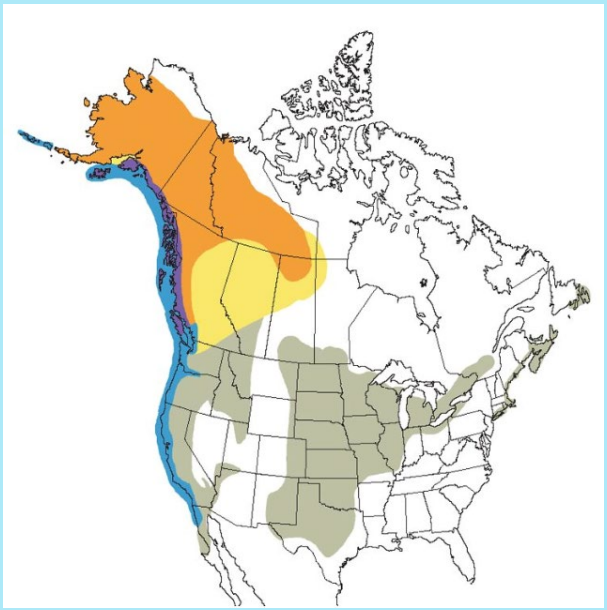
10 Rare Texas Gulls



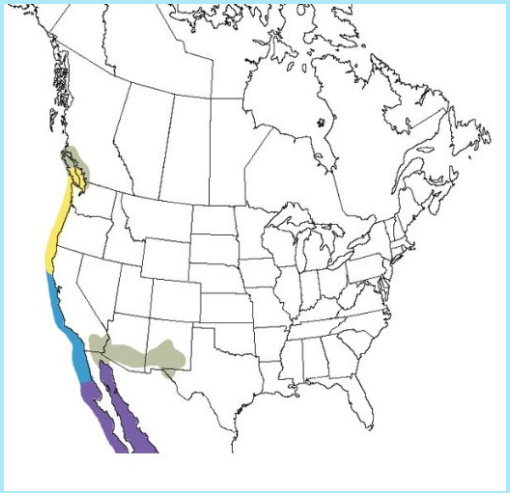
Black-headed



Great Black-backed



Mew



Heerman's

BE AWARE OF 4

10 TEXAS RARE GULLS (CURRENTLY ON REVIEW LIST)	
Species	TBRC Status
Black-headed Gull	On review list. Accepted records - **27**
Great Black-backed Gull	On review list. Accepted records - **62**
Heermann's Gull	On review list. Accepted records - **5**
Mew Gull	On review list. Accepted records - **43**