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AGING RING-BILLED

COMMENTS BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM

KAUFMAN FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING,
UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU SEE AND HEAR

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PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE

BY KENN KAUFMAN

KAUFMAN FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING, UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU SEE AND HEAR

July 2010



Photo by Eric Michaels

July 2010

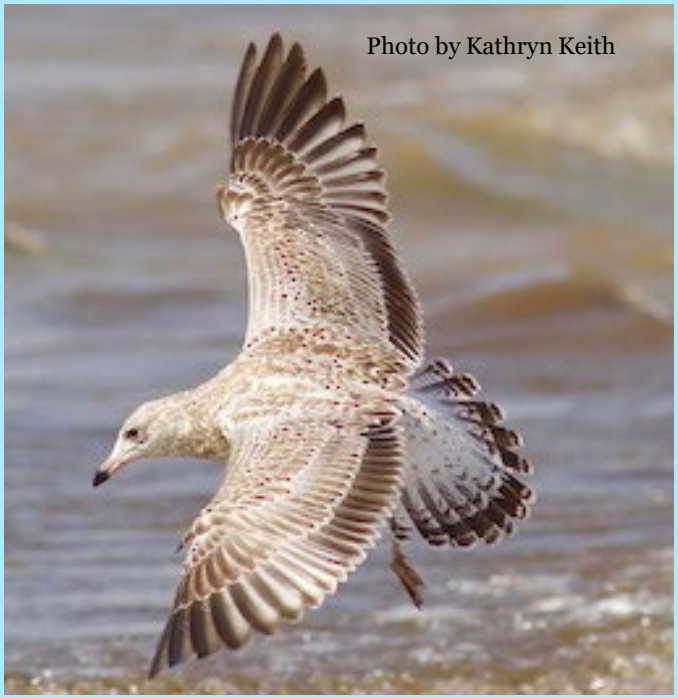


Photo by Kathryn Keith

Juvenile plumage. Fresh juveniles, recently fledged, are heavily marked with dark brown looking quite different from any later stage. Their bills may be all dark at first, although pink soon begins to develop at the base.

PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM *FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING*

August 2010



August 2010



Full juvenile plumage usually lasts a short time; within a month or two, most begin to molt. Often, as on this bird, some scapulars, head feathers and feathers of the underparts are among the first to be replaced. This molt is now considered a long, gradual prealternate molt, not a pre-formative molt and it may continue from August to the following April.

PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM *FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING*

October 2010



Photo by Shey Caflin

October 2010



Photo by Phillip Dickenson

These 1st-cycle birds are all roughly the same age and in the process of a gradual pre-alternate molt, but they differ in the number of scapulars and other body feathers that have been replaced. Much of the variation in appearance of young gulls is owing to variation in timing of the molt.

PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM *FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING*

January 2011



January 2011



The bird may still be gradually molting body feathers, but overall appearance seems to show less change after the scapulars and upper back feathers are replaced with smooth gray and after most of the dark brown spots on the underparts are lost.

PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM *FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING*

April 2011



April 2011



The body and head plumage are looking fairly clean. Some birds replace some inner coverts, but this individual apparently has not; the coverts are very worn and have faded or bleached to whitish. On this bird the bill is already more yellow than pink. And it appears that the iris is just starting to turn paler. Even if the first pre-alternate molt is still going on, the second pre-basic molt starts around this time.

PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM *FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING*

June 2011



Photo by James Moodie

June 2011



Photo by Ian K Barker

The bird is now showing extreme wear and fading on the coverts, which now look white and frayed, and the primaries and tail are also faded and abraded. In flight, we can see that the second pre-basic molt has begun, as the innermost primaries on both wings are missing.

PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM *FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING*

July 2011



Photo by Ian K. Barker

July 2011



Photo by Gary Mele

As the bird glides past, we can see that it is well along in the second pre-basic molt. The inner primaries (and inner primary coverts) are new, the outer ones are old, and apparently a couple of central primaries are missing.

PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM *FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING*

August 2011



August 2011



In the latter stages of second pre-basic molt, the outermost primaries are still being replaced, but the best clues to age are eye color and bill pattern. The bird looks much more similar to the adult than to the juvenile birds that have just appeared on the scene.

PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM *FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING*

October 2011





October 2011



With the pre-basic molt complete, the bird is now a clean example of a 2nd-cycle Ring-billed. As is typical with 3-year gulls, the 2nd cycle birds look superficially similar to adults and might be overlooked in a casual view. Distinctive points include a variable subterminal black tail band (usually a series of spots, not a complete band); more extensive black on the outer primaries, with only one small white "mirror" or none; black markings on the primary coverts; a few extra dark marks elsewhere on the wings; and usually a wider black ring on the bill. Although the bird appears to be in complete 2nd basic plumage, the 2nd pre-alternate molt may have begun already; this molt will have only a limited impact on the bird's overall appearance during the winter.

PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM *FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING*

May 2012



May 2012



The 2nd pre-alternate molt is finished and the bird is in complete 2nd alternate plumage. It looks much like a breeding adult, but still has the extra dark marks in the wings and tail from the previous winter. On the standing bird, the most obvious sign of age is the black wingtip, mostly lacking white spots. Around this time, the bird will begin its 3rd pre-basic molt.

PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM *FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING*

August 2012



August 2012



Now in 3rd pre-basic molt, the bird shows big white spots on the incoming primaries, while the old outermost primary (solid black, but in worn condition) has not been dropped yet.

PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM *FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING*

January 2013



Photo by Michael Stubblefield

January 2013



Photo by Steven Mlodinow

In 3rd basic plumage the bird is essentially adult, although older birds tend to show more white in the wingtips.

PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM *FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING*

May 2013



May 2013



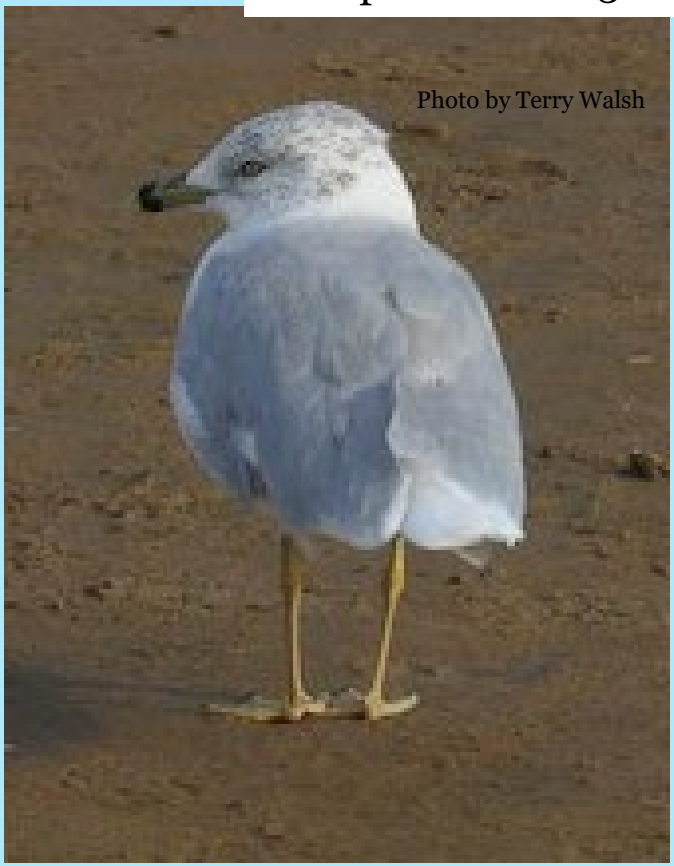
The bird went through the pre-alternate molt in late winter and early spring, replacing only head and body feathers. It is now in adult alternate plumage, although the pre-basic molt will begin soon.

PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM *FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING*

September 2013



September 2013



The bird is now in the latter stages of its 4th pre-basic molt. The outermost primaries are just growing in and are too short to be visible on the folded wing, and this makes the wingtip look distinctly odd.

PROGRESSION OF JUVENILE RING-BILLED GULL PLUMAGE BY KENN KAUFMAN FROM *FIELD GUIDE TO ADVANCED BIRDING*

February 2014



Photo by Matthew Pendleton

February 2014



Photo by James Kennerley

Now in its 4th cycle or in 4th basic plumage, the bird may show more white in the wingtip than 3rd cycle adults, but otherwise its appearance is essentially unchanged. From now on, its only changes will be seasonal.