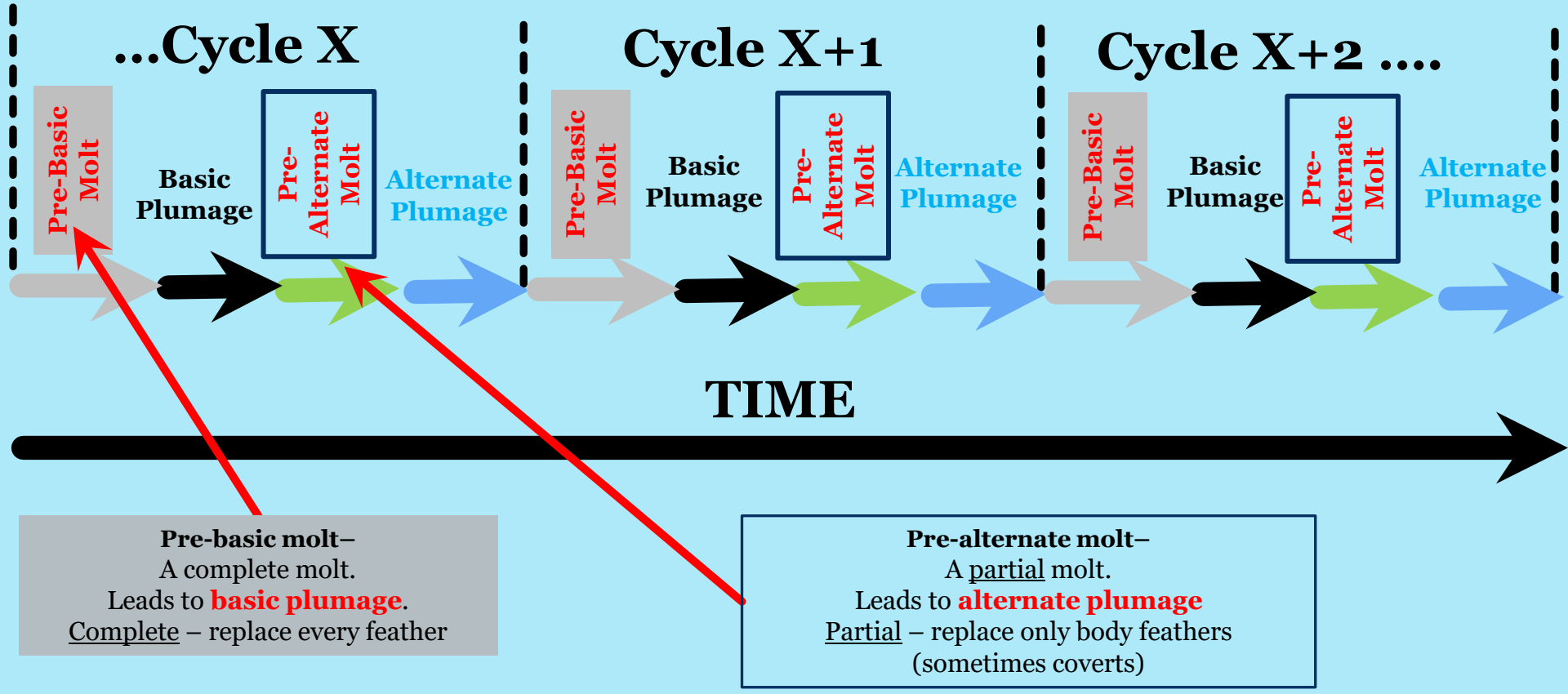
GENERIC GULL
MOLT CYCLES OF ADULT GULLS

2 molts/year
(1 complete, 1 partial)



Pre-basic molt–
A complete molt.
Leads to **basic plumage**.
Complete – replace every feather

Pre-alternate molt–
A partial molt.
Leads to **alternate plumage**
Partial – replace only body feathers
(sometimes coverts)

Note: Molt timing varies by species, age, population, individual
Note: Cycle 1 is not depicted here because it is slightly more complex.

HERRING GULL AGING

HERRING GULL AGING (example large gull)

AGE	GULLS SIMPLIFIED			JUVENILE				SUB-ADULT								ADULT			
	CYCLES			1st Cycle				2nd Cycle				3rd Cycle				Definitive Cycle (4th Cycle)			
	OTHER TERMS			*Juvenile*		*1st winter*	*1st summer*	*2nd winter*		*2nd summer*		*3rd winter*		*3rd summer*		*4th winter*		*4th summer*	
				1st Calendar Year				*2nd Calendar Year*				*3rd Calendar Year*				*4th Calendar Year*			
				(Calendar year starts at hatch and ends Dec 31)															
	MILESTONE	Egg	Hatch Chick				1st B-day						2nd B-day				3rd B-day		4th B-day
PLUMAGE	~ TIMING OF PLUMAGE	late Apr–late Jun	Jun-Jul	Jul-Sept	Oct/Jan-Jul			Aug-Feb			Feb-Aug	Sept-Feb		Feb-Aug		Sept-Feb		Mar-Aug	
	WEAR & FADING						Worn & faded				Worn & faded				Worn & faded				Worn & faded
	PLUMAGE	Egg	Natal Down	Juvenile Plumage	Juvenile/1st Alternate			2nd Basic Plumage		2nd Alternate Plumage		3rd Basic Plumage		3rd Alternate Plumage		Definitive Basic Plumage		Definitive Alternate Plumage	
MOLT	MOLT			1st Pre-Basic molt (Pre-juvenile Molt)				2nd Pre-Basic Molt		2nd Pre-Alternate Molt		3rd Pre-Basic Molt		3rd Pre-Alternate Molt		Definitive Pre-Basic Molt		Definitive Pre-Alternate Molt	
	OTHER TERMS			Fall molt				Fall molt		Spring molt		Fall molt		Spring molt		Fall molt		Spring molt	
	TIMING OF MOLT			Jun-Jul	primarily Oct–May (starts as late as Jan–Feb in some & is suspended during Dec–Feb in others)			May-Dec		Oct-Apr		May-Dec		Oct-Apr		May-Dec		Oct-Apr	
	TYPE OF MOLT			complete	long, gradual, partial			complete		partial		complete		partial		complete		partial	
	FEATHERS MOLTED			All (body & wing panels)	Head & body, back, some scapulars			All (body & flight feathers)		Head & body only (sometimes wing coverts)		All (body & flight feathers)		Head & body only (sometimes wing coverts)		All (body & flight feathers)		Head & body only (sometimes wing coverts)	

NOTES ON
MOLT & AGING GULLS

- In gulls – molt is almost a continuous process !!!!!!!!

- 3 different gull aging systems are used:

1) **Cycles**: defined by molt. (**This is the most un-ambiguous system**!!)

   - The 1st plumage cycle starts at "juvenile" and goes to the start of its 1st pre-basic molt the following summer, at which point it would become a 2nd cycle gull.

2) **Season**: 1st winter, 1st summer, 2nd winter, 2nd summer.....

   - After hatching (usually late summer) a gull goes into its 1st winter.
   - If a gull hatches in summer, it is a chick or juvenile. Not a 1st summer gull. The next summer (when it's about 1 year old) would be its "1st summer".

3) **Calendar year**:

   - Gulls born in 2020 were 1st calendar year gulls until January 1st 2021 rolled in. They then become 2nd calendar year gulls.