



Birds

Laughing Gull

Leucophaeus atricilla

Priority 3 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)

Class: Birds (*Aves*)

Order: Plovers, Sandpipers, And Allies (*Charadriiformes*)

Family: Gulls, Jaegers, Kittiwakes, Skimmers, Skuas, And Terns (*Laridae*)

General comments:

The Laughing Gull is a medium-sized gull with a crisp black hood, dark red bill and laugh-like call. In Maine, they nest on a handful of rocky or vegetated coastal islands in the midcoast region, especially those where larger gulls are excluded. They nest on the ground under tall, dense vegetation. First thought to be extirpated from Maine in 1945, they were documented breeding again in the early 1950s and increased slowly after that. By 2008 there were approximately 4,000 pairs in Maine. Tern colony managers have since been actively discouraging Laughing Gulls from nesting at the tern colonies because the gulls compete for nesting habitat, prey on tern eggs and chicks, and steal food from the terns. These control efforts have decreased the breeding population to 1,330 pairs in 2022 and increased the number of non-breeding adults all along the coast. In other parts of their range, they are not doing well primarily due to human disturbance and coastal development.

Species Conservation Range Maps:

Town Map: [Leucophaeus atricilla_Towns.pdf](#)

Subwatershed Map: [Leucophaeus atricilla_HUC12.pdf](#)

SGCN Priority Ranking - Designation Criteria:

State Special Concern:	Laughing Gull is listed as a species of Special Concern in Maine.
High Regional Conservation Priority:	<p>NatureServe: Global Rank: G5 State Rank: S2</p> <p>Partners In Flight: Regional Concern: Yes, Regional Stewardship: , Regional Importance: Yes, Continental Importance: No</p>

Professional Discretion:

Current criteria ranked *Leucophaeus atricilla* as SGCN priority 2, however, species should be SGCN priority 3 based on professional discretion.

Justification: Actively discouraged from ME tern colonies; Decline likely a result of management which aims to reduce their population for the benefit of other seabirds. Doing well in MA (Monomoy), but declining in mid-Atlantic where they nest in salt marshes.

Habitat Associations:



Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*

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Formation: Coastal Scrub-Herb

Macrogroup: North American Atlantic Coastal Beach & Rocky Shore

Macrogroup: North American Atlantic Coastal Dune, Grassland & Rocky Headland

★ **Primary Habitat**

Habitat System: Acadian-North Atlantic Rocky Coast

Formation: Subtidal

Macrogroup: Subtidal Pelagic (Water Column)

Habitat System: Nearshore

Threats

No Threats Currently Assigned to Laughing Gull or other Priority 3 SGCN.

Species Level Conservation Actions:

No Species Specific Conservation Actions Currently Assigned to Laughing Gull or other Priority 3 SGCN.

Conservation Actions Associated with the Island Nesting Seabirds Guild:

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Continue seabird restoration activities at historic nesting sites using social attraction, vegetation management, and predator control	Survey and Monitoring	high	on-going

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Invasive Non-native-Alien Species-Diseases
- Fishing and Harvesting of Aquatic Resources
- Problematic Native Species-Diseases

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Determine which factors influence breeding success and productivity	Research	high	on-going

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Invasive Non-native-Alien Species-Diseases
- Problematic Native Species-Diseases

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Determine the association with commercial fisheries and climate-induced changes to food availability	Research	high	new

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Fishing and Harvesting of Aquatic Resources

Broad Taxonomic Group Conservation Actions:

Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*

Priority 3 SGCN



Additional relevant conservation actions for this species are assigned within broader taxonomic groups in Maine's Wildlife Action Plan: Element 4.

Habitat Based Conservation Actions:

Additional conservation actions that may benefit habitat(s) associated with this species can be found in Maine's Wildlife Action Plan: Element 4. Click on the Habitat Grouping of interest to launch a habitat based report summarizing relevant conservation actions and associated SGCN.

The Wildlife Action Plan was developed through a lengthy participatory process with state agencies, targeted conservation partners, and the general public. The Plan is non-regulatory. The species, threats, and voluntary conservation actions identified in the Plan complement, but do not replace, existing work