

Of all the gull

*"To the sea, to the sea! The white gulls are crying,
The wind is blowing, and white foam is flying."*

-Legolas's Song of the Sea, "The Lord of the Rings," J.R.R. Tolkien

Gulls can be the most obnoxious and annoying animals known to man. They eat almost anything, jettison their droppings without regard to person or place, and are widely referred to as "rats with wings."

But bad reps aside, gulls represent an avian success story: graceful aerial acrobats whose omnivorous appetites have allowed them to adapt well to human-altered environments.

You might be aware of some of the following gull facts. Others might surprise you. Either way, chances are you'll never look at that gull fluttering around your head in pursuit of your sandwich the same way again.



TEXT AND PHOTOS BY GLENN V. OSTLE



Gull-ible. While many people would prefer that gulls just go away, a large group of bird-watchers, known as "Ictrophiles," spend their time logging individual sightings of different gull types, and waiting for rare vagrants to show up in mixed flocks.

Clean machines. Because of their insatiable appetites, for which they are routinely criticized, gulls provide a valuable service by cleaning up leftover food. They serve as a natural way to help preserve the environment and conserve clean-up budgets.



High Q. Gulls are extremely intelligent birds. Their technique of breaking open mollusks by dropping them onto rocks from a great height is a behavior that exists in only a few animal species.