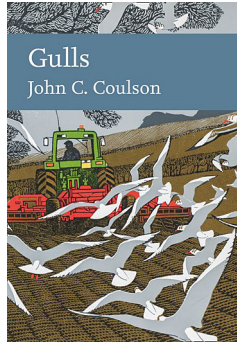


## ORNITHOLOGY

**Gulls**

John C. Coulson. 2019. New Naturalist Library, HarperCollins Publishers. 495 pages, 108 charts and graphs, 35 maps, and 109 colour pictures, 135.99 CAD, Cloth.

This book is about the gulls of Great Britain and Ireland and to a lesser extent those of Western Europe, but it includes many generalisations that apply to gulls everywhere, gulls being a relatively uniform group of birds. A 42-page overview chapter deals with the taxonomy, biogeography, demography, plumage variation, and breeding biology



within the Laridae. This is followed by comprehensive individual accounts for the nine species breeding regularly in Britain (about 25 pages each, but 64 on Black-legged Kittiwake [*Rissa tridactyla*]) and by chapters on rare species (17), on methods used to study gulls, on urban gulls (considered a big problem in Britain), and on conservation and management. There is a “selected bibliography” that is certainly sufficient to satisfy all but the most demanding reader (a full bibliography was considered too extensive to be included) and a few statistical appendices, as well as one dealing with the taxonomy of the Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) complex in Europe.

Compared to a similar area of Canada, Britain is relatively rich in gulls: only five species breed in the Maritimes, for instance. In addition, there has been a great deal of research on British gulls, especially Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*), and Black-legged Kittiwake. Consequently, the author has a lot of material to work with. Moreover, a substantial proportion of it was actually amassed by Coulson and his students (including Canadians John Chardine and Julie Porter) over a span of nearly

70 years. This is the summary of a lifetime’s work by a very industrious and distinguished (and long-lived) scientist!

In his Foreword, Coulson mentions an early interest in banding. This seems to have continued because the book includes many maps of band recoveries and movements figure prominently in the species accounts. Where the author has researched the species extensively (Herring Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake) he gives many details from personal field experience. These anecdotes are among the most enlightening in the book. The methods chapter devotes several pages to banding as a research technique and includes a description of how the author discovered and developed the use of Darvic to make colour-fast plastic bands. This material is still used in many avian studies worldwide and has been an important component of my own research on auks. For many years, the Canadian Wildlife Service sourced its colour bands from John Coulson’s technician at Durham University!

The book, printed in China, is nicely produced on glossy paper with excellent maps, charts, and photographs. John Coulson was a pioneer in the study of seabirds, especially long-term population studies. He was the source for many methods still current in the field. He writes with the authority appropriate to his seniority and lifetime of research. Yes, the accounts are a little parochial: we do know something about Herring Gulls and Black-legged Kittiwakes in North America, but Coulson makes no pretence that these are other than United Kingdom-based accounts. Despite its slightly narrow focus, *Gulls* is a must for anyone interested in any branch of Ornithology.

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