

**HISTORY & FACTS of the FEBRUARY CENSUS**

FEBRUARY	14-YEAR TOTALS of SPECIES / INDIVIDUALS							
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
43 / 1,244	41 / 1,183	40 / 744	39 / 658	45 / 1,863	42 / 1,342	41 / 734	44 / 1,092	41 / 1,383
2019	2020	2021	2022	2023				
44 / 2,451	39 / 1,017	47 / 2,591	42 / 1,371	42 / 934				

Most Species seen in February : 47 on 02/01/2021.

Most Individual Birds seen in February : 2,591 on 02/01/2021.

Fewest Species seen in February : 39 on 02/01/2013 & 02/01/2020.

Fewest Individual Birds seen in February : 658 on 02/01/2013.

Species Average in February : 42.1 Species.

Total Individuals Average in February : 1,329.1 Individuals.

Lowest Temperature on February Census : 9-degrees F on 02/01/2019 & 02/05/2022.

Highest Temperature on February Census : 47-degrees F on 02/01/2014.

Longest Time Afield on February Census : 9 hours & 50 minutes on 02/01/2019.

Shortest Time Afield on February Census : 6 hours & 20 minutes on 02/04/2012.

**LAST FEBRUARY'S FIELD REPORT**

02/04/23	<b>TOTAL SPECIES:</b>	42	<b>START / END TIME:</b>	7:05am - 2:30pm		
	<b>TOTAL BIRDS:</b>	934	<b>TIME AFIELD:</b>	7:25	<b>FT. MI.:</b>	13.22
<b>ROUTE:</b>	Red Lock Trailhead south to Merriman Valley with a stop at Trail Mix in Peninsula.					
<b>TEMP.:</b>	9F ~ 24F	<b>CONDITIONS:</b>	Frigid and cloudy early, turning sunny with blue skies, bright and no clouds; clouding back up at 10:40am; back to sunny with blue skies from 11:35am until end of census; winds S at 5-7mph most of the day, gusting to 15mph from 1:30pm until 2:30pm.			
<b>TRAIL CONDITIONS:</b>	Fair; frozen and rutted, icy in many spots, but little to no snow cover; all footbridges icy with packed snow; Stumpy Basin and Ira Beaver Marsh boardwalks icy and snow-covered; all small creeks and runs frozen; Ira Beaver Marsh frozen.					
<b>RIVER CONDITIONS:</b>	Slightly above normal and swift; frozen along the edges with small ice chunks forming and floating down the river.					
	<b>OBSERVERS:</b>	Douglas W. Vogus.				

**SIX YEARS AGO on the TOWPATH TRAIL**

On February 01, 2014 we saw a species that I never truly expected to see in the Cuyahoga Valley, our first and only record of an Iceland Gull. In fact, since this sighting I haven't seen another in the Cuyahoga Valley! The cold winters of early 2014 and early 2015 were exceptional for viewing several species of gulls as they made their way south from the lakefront of Lake Erie, following the Cuyahoga River and the the Tuscarawas River like an aerial roadmap, to the Bolivar Landfill for their daily scavenging.

## FEBRUARY 2024's BIRD SPECIES PROFILE

### ICELAND GULL (*Larus glaucoides*)

**DESCRIPTION:** *Iceland Gulls are medium-sized gulls with relatively slender, short bills. They have fairly long wings that extend past the tail, they are larger than a Ring-billed Gull but smaller than a Herring Gull - both common Ohio species. Adults have pale gray back and wings, yellow bill, and white head and neck that are smudged brownish in winter plumage. Wingtips are extremely variable, typically gray to white in the East and darker in the West. Juveniles are light to medium brown mottled with white; immatures have pale gray backs with mottled brownish wings and dark bills. During breeding the eye-ring is red. The legs are pink in all ages.*

**REGIONAL DIFFERENCES:** *Iceland Gull consists of three subspecies that vary most noticeably by the color of the wingtips. The "Iceland" form breeds in Greenland and winters mainly in the North Atlantic (including Iceland). It has very pale to completely white wingtips. The "Kumlien's" subspecies is the form most commonly seen in winter on the East Coast of North America. Its wingtips vary from nearly white to gray. The "Thayer's" form (considered a separate species until 2017) winters on the West Coast of North America. It usually has slightly darker wings, dark gray to black wingtips, and heavy streaking or smudging on the head and neck in winter. There's lots of overlap between each of these forms, and some individuals can't be easily placed into a subspecies based on plumage.*

**LENGTH:** 19.7 to 23.6 inches    **WINGSPREAD:** 45" - 54"    **WEIGHT:** 28.9 to 38.8 ounces

**VOICE:** *Long call is a laughing call like the Herring Gull, but shriller; usually silent in winter.*

**HABITS:** *Iceland Gulls are graceful fliers with fairly quick wingbeats. They often forage by flying low over the water and swooping down to pick up fish or other food without landing. Scavenges for refuse around docks, piers, and dumps in winter; often feeds with Herring Gulls.*

**HABITAT:** *They breed on coastal cliffs in the high Arctic and forage in open water among pack ice. In winter they occur along coasts and forage close to shore, on beaches, and sometimes on lawns, agricultural fields, and garbage dumps.*

**NESTING:** **NEST:** *In colonies on tall cliffs, sometimes with other species of gulls; nest built of mosses, grasses, and seaweeds. **EGGS:** May to July, 2 to 3 eggs, red-brown with chocolate markings. **INCUBATION:** Period of and age when young first fly unknown. (Once again, we'll go to Mars before we ever figure out what is actually going on down here! - Your Editor.)*

**RANGE:** *See Range Map provided at top of pg. 4 due to the somewhat recent developments of the elimination of both "Kumlien's Gull" and "Thayer's Gull" now becoming the Iceland Gull.*

**STATUS:** *Estimates of 40,000 pairs of nominate "glaucoides", 5,000 pairs of "Kumlien's" and 6,300 pairs of "Thayer's" subspecies. Overall, not a very common "large" gull species.*

**DID YOU KNOW?:** *The cold winters of 2014 and 2015 provided excellent gull viewing in the CVNP? Low flights with snow reflecting light - conditions I don't expect to see again.*

**Abundance Codes on the graphs below indicate the best time of year to find the Iceland Gull in Northeast Ohio.**

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.
uuuuuuuu	uuuuuuuu	uuurrrrrr	rrrrrrrrrr	oo	
Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
**	*			oorrrrrrrr	rrrrrrrrrr

- CCCCCCC** = Common to Abundant. Frequently encountered in this region during this time of year.
- uuuuuuuu** = Uncommon. Occurs regularly during this time of year but not frequently detected.
- rrrrrrrrrr** = Rare. These birds can occur more or less annually but are easily missed in their scant presence in the region.
- ooooooo** = Occasional. Limited history in this region and are not to be expected.
- \*\*\*\*\*** = Accidental. Few records in the past 60 years. Not expected in this region during this time of year.
- |||||** = Fluctuating Abundance. May occur some years yet absent other years. Irruptive or overwintering birds.

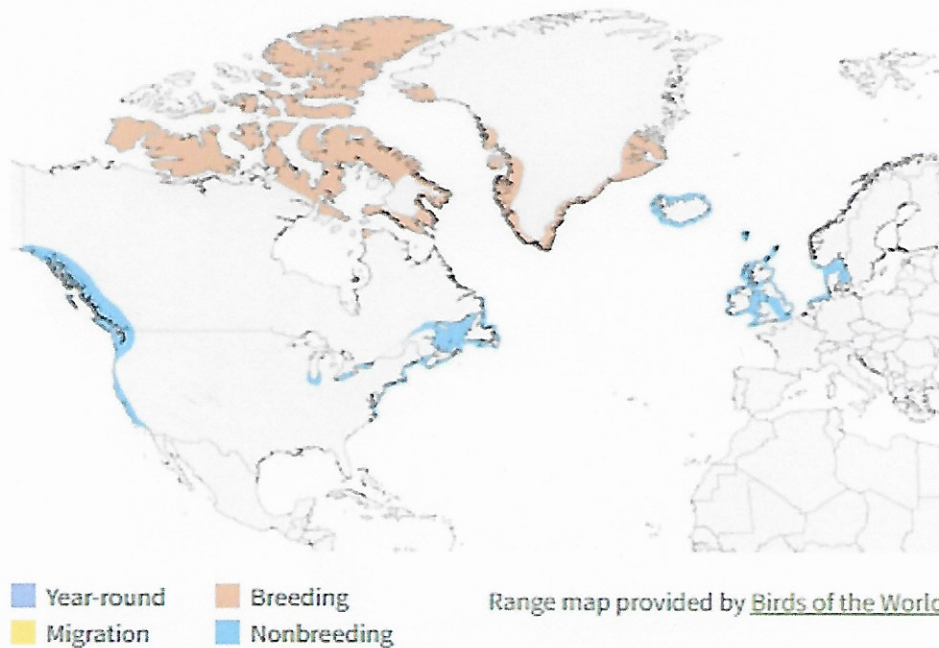
**History of the Iceland Gull on the Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census 2010 ~ present.**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
JAN.								
FEB.					<b>1*</b>			
MAR.								
APR.								
MAY								
JUN.								
JUL.								
AUG.								
SEP.								
OCT.								
NOV.								
DEC.								

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
JAN.							
FEB.							
MAR.							<b>DID YOU KNOW?:</b>
APR.							Although perceived as
MAY							strictly a winter visitor,
JUN.							Larry Rosche's updated
JUL.							version of "Birds of the
AUG.							Cleveland Region" lists
SEP.							three occurrences from
OCT.							the summer months -
NOV.							all in July - and far from
DEC.							expected. They are as

- \*** = HIGHEST COUNT TOTAL ON CENSUS.
- BOLD #** = HIGHEST COUNT FOR THAT YEAR.

follows: July 03, 1965 - Lorain (on Lake Erie),  
 July 20, 1969 - Edgewater Park (on Lake Erie),  
 July 02, 1979 - Headlands Beach State Park (on  
 Lake Erie) - noticing a trend here? Not exactly your  
 average "parking lot seagull" here.



The Iceland Gull's breeding range is exactly that - a "land of ice" - although somewhat more tolerable during summer.

(courtesy of: [allaboutbirds.org](#))

**DID YOU KNOW?:** Prior to 2015 there was no better place in Ohio to observe rare winter gulls than the lakeshore in Cleveland? The reason? The warm-water outflow from the Lake Shore Power Station owned by Cleveland Electric Illuminating Co. would keep water open even during the coldest of winters. Not only did the area attract rare gulls such as Little Gull, California Gull, Iceland Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Glaucous Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, and one of Ohio's two records of the high Arctic stray, the Ivory Gull, it also attracted birders from across the state, as well as out-of-state "gullophiles". Built in 1911, the coal-fired plant was closed in 2015 rather than be upgraded to meet new air quality standards to reduce mercury and other toxic metal emissions.

Energy Harbor imploded the plant in spectacular fashion in 2017 and most of the remaining structures were razed since, leaving a large, nearly empty site next to Gordon Park and the E. 55th. St. Marina. For those of us that have birded there, the memories are certainly etched in our brains. The sight of thousands upon thousands of gulls congregating in one area was mind boggling! And when either a Bald Eagle or a Coast Guard helicopter flew by and sent all the gulls into the air, it was like being in the middle of a snowstorm of gulls, one straining to find that one gull that stood out as rare amongst the hordes.

**DID YOU KNOW?:** Think all gulls are the same? To the novice, I'm sure it appears that way. Ohio's current bird list consists of an impressive 23 species!

- |                            |                                  |                                     |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Black-legged Kittiwake  | 9. Franklin's Gull               | <b>17. Iceland Gull</b>             |
| 2. Ivory Gull (2 records)  | 10. Black-tailed Gull (1 record) | <b>18. Lesser Black-backed Gull</b> |
| 3. Sabine's Gull           | 11. Heermann's Gull (3 records)  | 19. Slaty-backed Gull (3 records)   |
| <b>4. Bonaparte's Gull</b> | 12. Common Gull (1 record)       | 20. Glaucous-winged Gull (1 record) |
| 5. Black-headed Gull       | 13. Short-billed Gull            | <b>21. Glaucous Gull</b>            |
| 6. Little Gull             | <b>14. Ring-billed Gull</b>      | <b>22. Great Black-backed Gull</b>  |
| 7. Ross's Gull (2 records) | 15. California Gull              | 23. Kelp Gull (1 record)            |
| 8. Laughing Gull           | <b>16. Herring Gull</b>          |                                     |

**BOLD** = a species that has been recorded on the monthly Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census.



*An Iceland Gull in breeding plumage as they would be seen on their high Arctic breeding grounds.*

*(photo by: Amanda Guercio)*



*A first-year Iceland Gull, typically how Ohio's birdwatchers encounter the species during the cold winter months.*

*(photo by: Luke Seitz)*

**DID YOU KNOW?:**

*Most people, if given the opportunity to come back as a bird in life, probably wouldn't choose to be a gull. Maybe an eagle or a hawk or the speedy Peregrine Falcon, or a graceful swan or swallow - but odds are that you could adapt to just about any conditions were you a gull. Flying? You'd have that covered with endurance for days. Swimming? More than able and seaworthy. Walking? Way better than duck on flat ground with a lot less waddle. Loneliness? Gulls congregate together like no other. How about eating? Pretty much anything you could cram down your gullet would be on the menu - including fish, shellfish, nestlings of birds and their eggs, parking lot hand-outs such as bread, crackers, Cheetos, McDonald's french fries, leftover chicken pieces and bones from park picnics, and trash, waste, garbage, refuse - whatever you want to call this litter and landfill problem we have in America.*

## **"LANDFILLS: WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF SPACE"**

*Written by Ryan Deer*

*This post was originally posted March 2018 and has been updated with recent data and analysis March 2021.*

*What if we told you the biggest cover-up operation in America had to do with where we send trash? All over the country, subterranean garbage heaps called landfills are rising, fueled by the 292.4 million tons of municipal solid waste (MSW) the U.S. produces each year.*

*According to the EPA, in 2018 (which is the most recent data the agency reports), almost half of that trash (49.997%) went to landfills around the country. Worse, yearly MSW production has been steadily climbing, year over year since recording first began in the 1960s - and the U.S. never had a national recycling rate (recovered material + composting) higher than 35%. For many Americans, "out of sight, out of mind" is good enough. But inevitably, major problems will surface. From hazardous waste to running out of space, we may be overwhelmed by the rising cost of landfills this century.*

**WHAT IS A LANDFILL?** *A landfill is not to be confused with a "dump." A dump is largely a relic of the past - unregulated, unchecked excavated land where waste of all sorts was piled with no rhyme or reason. Landfills, on the other hand, are maintained and regulated by the EPA. Properly managed, landfills accept MSW and other materials from haulers for a fee, layering it in an excavated hole in the ground, covering with soil, and leaving the waste to decompose. From this process, some naturally occurring methane gas and toxic liquids called leachate can be extracted. Unfortunately, many landfills aren't properly managed, and the process is inefficient. The uncaptured methane, for one, is a major contributor to climate change, 84 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. In fact, 2018 numbers reflect that MSW landfills are the third largest source (15.1%) of human-related emissions in the U.S. That's equivalent to more than the CO2 emissions from 20.6 million passenger vehicles driven for one year or the emissions from powering 11 million homes over the same period. Aside from greenhouse gases, the landfill-caused environmental crisis runs deeper.*

**ARE LANDFILLS POLLUTING THE EARTH?** *Waste management has an inelegant history - like how 15th-century Paris was plagued with stinking piles of garbage directly outside its city walls. Our practice of locking our waste far away from people, deep in the earth seems like the most sanitary option available. What we throw away matters, and when it fails to get recycled (the case 68% of the time), it often heads to be covered over in the landfill. And 21st-century waste can be disastrous for the environment. First, the natural stuff: Food and yard trimmings make up roughly 34% of all MSW. Under the right conditions, this would enter into a composting process, where it decomposes to become nutrient-rich organic material, often called "black gold" by farmers and gardeners for its benefits. In a landfill, however, food, grass clippings, and other material are densely packed and thus decompose with the absence of oxygen (anaerobically). For that reason, waste - both organic and inorganic - breaks down significantly slower in landfills than it would in nature. Through its oxygen-deprived breakdown, organic material omits methane as a byproduct, making landfills volatile and gassy. But the downstream impact may cost even more - and our discarded technology and something called "forever chemicals" are to blame.*

While the methane goes up into the atmosphere, the poisonous, wastewater sludge, called leachate goes down - and while landfills effectively work like a big sink for liquids, it's impossible for operators to contain it all. These toxins can seep into soil and groundwater aquifers and affect local ecosystems, animal-life, and our drinking water. Electronic waste, for example, contains various types of dangerous chemicals, including lead, cadmium, beryllium, mercury, and brominated flame retardants. In 2018, we sent 2.8 million tons of tech to landfills. Meanwhile, "forever chemicals" (also known as PFAs), are aptly named. These fluorinated, harmful chemicals are used in a wide variety of products like Teflon frying pans, dental floss, and food packaging - **and they never break down in the environment - ever.** PFAs are in the tap water supply for 200 million Americans, and it's widely known that they're found in high concentrations in leachate. What's interesting is between food (which releases methane) and chemical-laden electronics and junk (which trickle toxins through leachate), we're only talking about 35.6% of the total landfill volume. And volume has created a crisis of its own.

**ARE LANDFILLS RUNNING OUT OF SPACE?** Collectively, the world produces two billion metric tons of solid waste per year. Americans, for our part, rank number one in per capita waste, producing 12% of the world's trash despite only accounting for 4% of its population. From the same analysis, the U.S. was determined to be the only developed nation in the world where MSW generation outpaced recycling. Framed differently, of the 96,000 Olympic-sized pools Americans fill per year with MSW, we send between 136M and 150M tons of it to landfills annually instead of recycling or reusing it. So, the elephant in the room: How long until we run out of space to bury it all? When does the New York City Metro Area, home to a population of nearly 20 million people, start to look and smell like 15th-century Paris? The answer is complex and speculative, but largely, it depends on where you live in the country. According to a 2015 analysis conducted by Dr. Bryan Staley, CEO of the Environmental Research & Education foundation, it's unbalanced: "Seven states are looking at running out of landfill space in the next five years, one state will reach capacity in five to ten years and three states have 11 to 20 years to go. But 22 states have available landfill space for decades to come." Nationally, that examination put us at 62 years until all of our currently operating facilities are stuffed to the gills.

However, this timeline predated China refusing to buy our recyclable waste. That complication becomes a mountainous issue when you consider that the U.S. is the largest global producer of plastic, only recycles 9.8% of the material, and is only exporting a third of what we did in 2015. It has to go somewhere. When the Northeast taps out, will we shunt unrecoverable plastic junk and other garbage to Middle America? Over the Rockies? Guaranteed, as our waste and recycling must travel more and more miles to the end-destination, you won't see many haulers clamoring to eat the cost of gas for their two-mile-per-gallon compactor trucks.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO:** I know - after reading that it's more like, "What Can You Do?" Summit County recently added large metal recycling bins that take electronics and the cords, gadgets, adapters, wires, etc. that come along with them. Michelle and I have a bin right near where we live by Sand Run Metro Park. Go for a hike - get rid of something you don't like - as I like to say! They are large white bins next to the green cardboard recycling bins. Old computer cables? Why do I still need that? Landline phone connectors? Ask a kid today if they know what a landline is - get rid of it! That old extension cord that you accidentally cut with the hedge-trimmer that you were going to fix? You're not an electrician - get rid of it! That old black and white Admiral TV that you watched the Indians' Lenny Barker throw a perfect game on? Okay, I DID keep it for a while as though it held some kind of "baseball magic" - get rid of it! Just not in a landfill.



*As opportunists, gulls love landfills. Things edible - and not so edible. I'll save "micro-plastics" for another discussion. Birdwatchers, opportunists in their own strange way, know that active landfills and dumps will hold that rare gull gem.*

*(photo by: Terry Whittaker)*

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