



### Adult Winter Black-legged Kittiwake

Harald Dahlby/ Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML 626216616)



### Adult Winter Black-legged Kittiwake- with wingtips looking “dipped in black ink”

Leo Wexler-Mann/ Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML 625531367)



### First Winter Black-legged Kittiwake

Aidan Brubaker/ Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML 626237921)

Black-legged Kittiwakes are a small three-year gull, about the same size as Short-billed (Mew) Gull but not as small as the tiny Bonaparte’s Gull. It has a **medium-sized yellowish bill** with no markings. Adults have a **black smudgy area** on their white head behind the eye, which is similar to Bonaparte’s Gull, but the bill is light colored and the smudging behind the eye is usually (but not always) more extensive than the small circular area on Bonaparte’s. This is a common offshore species in the winter, only blown in during stormy weather. If you are very lucky you may actually see one on the ground in a gull flock on the beach after a big storm but that rarely happens. They are mostly seen from land flying offshore. The adult is pretty nondescript but is small and has no white spots in its black wingtips like other gulls- this has been described as having wing tips dipped in black ink. On a flying adult Bonaparte’s the white leading edge of the wing is very prominent, you will not see that on a kittiwake. In flight the first winter Black-legged Kittiwake is one of the most striking gulls we see- the black on the top of the **wings forms an “M” pattern**, a bit similar to a first winter Bonaparte’s Gull but much more pronounced and has a strong **black neck collar** which Bonaparte’s lack.



### Adult Winter Bonaparte's Gulls

Trey Weaver/ Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML 625799972)



### Adult Winter Bonaparte's Gull- prominent white leading edge to wing

Matt Parsons/ Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML 625801784)



### First Winter Bonaparte's Gull

Mark Wilson/ Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML 626061963)



In **spring** adult Bonaparte's have entirely black heads but not in the winter! Jim Sims/

Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML 71321524)

Bonaparte's Gulls are a two-year gull (the only one in our area) and our smallest gull, even smaller than Short-billed (Mew) Gull, and often mistaken for a tern because of their dainty tern-like flight. Sometimes during big winter storms a few migrants will blow in but normally they do not spend the winter like Short-billed Gulls do. The small size and white head with a small all **dark bill** with a **black dot behind the eye** are the best field marks on birds sitting on the water. If you are lucky and it is out of the water you might see its pink to orangish legs. When seen flying inland in winter you'll almost immediately think of a tern as they maneuver quickly back and forth and plunge dive for food but there are no terns around in winter here! The winter adult has a **white leading edge on the wings**- no other gull has this obvious white leading edge; this white edge is obvious even on birds seen far offshore. The first-year birds do not have the white leading edge, instead they have a striking black trailing edge to their wing and tail with a dark brown wedge on the upper wings giving it an "M" pattern in flight (similar to Black-legged Kittiwake but not as pronounced and without the black collar they have) which is readily seen on flying birds. The adult and immature look very different and when together could be mistaken for different species.



### "Bonie" Gulls are often observed in flocks- a winter adult and four first years

Susan Packard/ Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML 625687382)