



Common Name

Grey Gull

Scientific Name: *Leucophaeus modestus*

FAMILY: Lariidae

ORDER: Charadriiformes

AZA MANAGEMENT: Not managed

GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

- EUROPE
- ASIA
- NORTH AMERICA
- NEOTROPICAL
- AFRICA
- AUSTRALIA
- OTHER

Range includes coastal areas of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Falkland Islands. Breeding occurs in Northern Chile.

HABITAT

- FOREST
- DESERT
- GRASSLAND
- COASTAL
- RIVERINE
- MONTANE
- OTHER

Found in coastal areas except in breeding season. Nesting occurs inland in the Atacama Desert, Chile

CIRCADIAN CYCLE

- DIURNAL
- CREPUSCULAR
- NOCTURNAL
- OTHER

Nocturnal during nesting season, as chicks would likely overheat during the day.

TEMPERATURE TOLERANCE



From ° 30F to °90 F

Can tolerate most weather conditions, but access to shelter when temperatures are below freezing is beneficial. Can tolerate heat, but access to shaded areas and a large pool or water source is ideal.

DIET

- FRUGIVORE
- CARNIVORE
- PISCIVORE
- INSECTIVORE
- NECTIVORE
- OMNIVORE
- FOLIVORE
- OTHER

Captive dietary needs: Whole or chopped smelt, capelin, trout, herring, and silversides offered twice (three times when chicks are present) daily. Vitamin supplements offered daily: Vitamin E, Thiamine, Salt, Vitamin A Seabird Tablets can be crushed and sprinkled over the diet prior to breeding season (April – June), then discontinued once chicks have fledged.

LIFE EXPECTANCY

Median Life Expectancy	Maximum Longevity
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Within AZA	Between 15 – 20, although one outlier lived to 30.	
In the Wild	Unknown	

Within AZA	No difference between sexes.	
In the Wild	Unknown	

BREEDING INFORMATION



AGE AT SEXUAL MATURITY



Males 2 Years



Females 2 years

Incubation period: 29 – 31 days

Fledgling Period: 40 days



CLUTCH SIZE, & EGG DESCRIPTION



1 – 3 eggs, 2 is typical. Egg slightly pointed at one end.



COURTSHIP DISPLAYS

Data deficient. Breeding season in the wild is generally November – January, but April – June in the Northern Hemisphere under human care.



NEST SITE DESCRIPTION

In the wild, the nest site is a small scrape in the sand, usually amongst large rocks. In captivity, they will utilize rock work nest cavities filled with play sand as well as open sandy or pebbled areas in the exhibit.



CHICK DEVELOPMENT

Grey gulls have the slowest growth rate of any gull species. There is a high mortality rate during the first two weeks after hatching. More research is needed to determine reasons leading to this.



PARENTAL CARE

In the wild, both parents take turns making daily trips to bring food and water back for the chick. In captivity, both parents will care for the chick.

CAPTIVE HABITAT INFORMATION



SOCIAL STRUCTURE

In the wild: Gregarious. Feeds, rests, and breeds colonially.

In Captivity: A single pair can breed on their own, although breeding may be encouraged by having multiple pairs present. Careful attention must be used to determine parentage in large colonies.



MIXED SPECIES EXHIBITS

Compatible in mixed species exhibits?

YES

NO

Comments: Often kept in coastal-themed exhibits with Humboldt penguins and Inca terns. They are more timid than other gull species and may be displaced by other birds. Can also be housed with small herons, storks, spoonbills, ibis, stilts, lapwings, small waterfowl, and pelicans.



OPTIMAL HABITAT SIZE

As large as possible with multiple elevated perching and resting opportunities with access to a large water source.



MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

Minimum Group Size: Very social, should not be housed singly.

Maximum Group Size: Dependent upon exhibit size only.

Achieving consistent breeding has been more difficult in recent years. Many of the birds in the US are likely post-reproductive, so imports are needed if the species is to be maintained long-term. Historically, Brookfield has been very successful in breeding the species. More research is needed in determining conditions for natural parent rearing in mixed-species exhibits and determining the most ideal nest site conditions. The population is currently unmanaged and consists of only fifteen individuals, all of Brookfield descent. If there is sufficient interest and successful breeding, formal management by the Shorebird TAG will be considered and the US population can be supplemented by imports from EAZA.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Conservation messaging opportunities include: protection of inland desert nesting sites and coastal feeding sites; competition with the fishing industry and the importance of seafood sustainability; effects of global warming; reducing and eliminating single use plastics. Questions and comments can be directed to the species champion: Kirby Pitchford, kpitchford@birminghamzoo.com

REFERENCES

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[Photo by Oregon Zoo](#)



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Date: 3/26/2019