



# Please Don't Feed the Gulls!

Feeding gulls may be fun and appear beneficial for the birds, but this food threatens their well-being as well as presenting a threat to drinking water supplies. Before deciding to feed the gulls, please consider the following impacts.

## Gull Health

Foods like breads, crackers and french fries are commonly offered to gulls, but these items are nutritionally inferior and poor substitutes for natural foods. Gulls with a highly artificial diet may suffer long-term health problems.

## Disease

Lower nutrition and crowding together promotes the spread of disease among gulls, other native birds, and humans. Gulls are best left alone to forage naturally.

## Gull Safety

Sometimes the confusion and competition of feeding distracts the gulls from watching out for fast-moving traffic, machinery, or other hazards, putting the birds in harm's way. Gulls can be injured or killed in parking lots or roadside feeding areas.

## Water Quality

Gulls spend nights on the water in large groups. Since the Wachusett and Quabbin Reservoirs are the largest bodies of water in Massachusetts, many gulls often congregate there. Droppings from the concentration of gulls can cause water quality problems.

DCR encourages the appreciation of wildlife. However, due to the environmental and water quality impacts, DCR asks that you please

**DO NOT FEED THE GULLS!**

## You can help DCR's ongoing study

If you see a wing-tagged gull, please contact Dan Clark at dan.clark@state.ma.us or 508-792-7423 ext. 215 with the date and time of the sighting, the color of the wing-tag, and if possible the alpha-numeric combination. For more information about the study and the problem, please visit the DCR website.

[www.mass.gov/dcr/gullstudy](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/gullstudy)



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The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of Water Supply Protection asks that you **DO NOT** feed the gulls.

Feeding gulls...

- Risks the spread of disease
- Threatens the health of the birds
- Jeopardizes the safety of the birds
- Endangers drinking water supplies

This brochure explains DCR's gull research, findings, and the reasons why it is best to leave gulls alone.

# DCR study finds that it is best to leave gulls alone.



## BACKGROUND

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of Water Supply Protection (the Division) is responsible for the long-term management and protection of Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs. These reservoirs provide drinking water to more than 2 million people.

Many kinds of birds regularly use these reservoirs for roosting. Some species, like gulls, ducks, and geese, will stay in large numbers for long periods of time. Gulls are the Division's top concern because they are always present and can degrade water quality.

Gulls can carry, and potentially transmit, a variety of bacteria and pathogens, including *Salmonella*, *E. coli*, *Campylobacter*, *Listeria*, and fecal coliform.

The Division has operated a successful bird harassment program on the reservoirs for many years. The program, however, does not affect the population of gulls in central Massachusetts. Ideally, the Division would like to see the number of gulls roosting on the reservoirs reduced or even be eliminated.

## DCR GULL STUDY

The Division began an intensive research program in 2008 to better understand gulls' habits. To study the gulls, the Division captured, marked, released, and then tracked the birds.

After capture, gulls were carefully marked with a combination of bands and tags. They were given a silver

federal leg band and a uniquely color-coded metal leg band. Most birds also received an individually numbered, colored wing-tag. A few gulls were harnessed with a tiny satellite transmitter. These solar powered transmitters can send several locations per day from anywhere in the world.

The Division, so far, has tracked more than 900 gulls. While many of the 2,700 reported wing-tag sightings have been local, some have been spotted as far away as Florida and Labrador, Canada. Of the 25 gulls fitted with satellite transmitters, several made their way south along the east coast to New Jersey and Georgia; two of these birds made it all the way to Florida.



## STUDY FINDINGS

The study identified key feeding areas, documented the gulls' use of water supply reservoirs, and mapped their habits over the course of several seasons.

Data show that gulls in central Massachusetts get most of their food from people through handouts at local parking lots. Gulls are very resourceful and adaptable. They have learned that time spent in a parking lot may lead to free food. Sometimes people will feed the odd french fry to a begging gull, while other times there are more devoted feeders who frequently provide large amounts of stale bread or crackers. In both cases, the birds choose to eat this food rather than rely on more natural sources and types of foods.

## THE RESULTS

There are several negative outcomes from this feeding behavior. Because it's easier for gulls to eat a free handout, they don't eat as much of their natural food choices. A diet of bread and fries does not have the same nutritional value as natural foods, which may impact the long-term survival of the birds. Also, gulls have been known to get hit by cars as they are distracted by the frenzy of feeding. Finally, because gulls always spend the night on water with other gulls, those feeding in parking lots in central Massachusetts often make their way to Wachusett or Quabbin Reservoirs. Large numbers of gulls on any water supply negatively affect water quality.

There is an opportunity to fix the problems caused by this type of gull feeding. If food availability at parking lots can be eliminated, gulls will not congregate in large numbers and will likely move to areas where their natural food choices are more abundant.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

Gulls are highly resourceful, very mobile, and extremely adaptable. They can live a healthier life without french fries, crackers, or bread. The next time you consider tossing a few crumbs to a begging gull, please stop and think about the long-term health of these birds, where they go each night, and the impact they can have on drinking water supplies. **Please don't feed the gulls.** It will keep our environment cleaner and healthier.

## THANK YOU!

