

## The Myth of Seagulls by Cindy Williams

I bet a lot of you didn't know that we have gulls in the Kansas City area. You just don't think of "seagulls" living in the Midwest, right? Well, here's something else you might not know – there's really no such thing as a seagull. There are gulls, and many of them live near the sea, but there is no species called seagull. There are at least 28 types of gull species in North America according to Birds of North America and as many as 18 have been recorded in Missouri. They tend to be migratory and you are most likely to see them around our area lakes, which makes sense since they migrate from the Great Lakes area as opposed to the "sea". There have also been 6 types of terns recorded in Missouri – a tern is a bird that is closely related to a gull (as are kittiwakes and skimmers – they aren't relevant to this story but don't they sound cool?).

So when the little fella (or gal) pictured was brought into Lakeside by a Jackson County park ranger from Lee's Summit you might forgive us for thinking it was a gull. When it first arrived I did some research to figure out which type of gull it was and I came up with a few candidates but none of them seemed exactly right. Of course by the next time I saw it the real experts at the Center had figured it out – it's not a gull at all, it's actually a Caspian Tern. Cool.



This bird came in with an unknown injury to his right wing. A nice lady had been observing him for a few days and decided he needed some help. After being dusted for mites (gross) he was tubed with Lactated Ringers to stabilize his hydration and electrolytes. Upon a full examination it was believed that his wing was just badly bruised (and there was a small puncture wound) but he was sent to the vet for x-rays just in case. The vet confirmed no break a few days later, just soft tissue

damage. In the meantime he was given medication for pain and infection, his wing was wrapped to allow him to heal and a cage was set up that included a soft "pier" to stand on along with some fish and water. He didn't eat the first day (not unusual for any bird, and especially not a water bird) so he had to be tubed with AD (a Science Diet prescription food) three times a day. Unfortunately for him he wouldn't eat for about a week, which makes it tough on him and on us to have to tube him that often. Finally one of the staff members enticed him to swallow a fish and from then on he was eating on his own – a very good sign!

While not particularly vicious this guy packs quite a pinch and he loved to deliver it whenever he could to his benevolent torturers. He was kept with his wing wrapped and on antibiotics for a while then off came the wrap and the wing seemed to be in great shape. Then we needed to get him out the door before he hurt himself in a cage but that's a little tricky with an unusual bird like this. We don't want to send him out on his own without others of his kind. Luckily for us (and him) the person who reported him injured in the first place had kept in touch and she informed us that a flock of Caspian Terns were still present on Longview Lake. So before long the bird got a special transport to the lake. He spent a few seconds getting his bearings then he and the resident flock started calling to each other. He made an exploratory flight and then he was able to join the group on the lake – a successful reentry into tern society! Happily the lovely person who released him took video and kept an eye out for several days to confirm that he was indeed going to be ok. We are so grateful for her participation in this rehab and release – thanks, Karen!

Here are a few Gray Squirrels that you might see around if you visit Lakeside! These juvenile squirrels are Eastern Gray Squirrels alright, but they are what's known as a white or light phase. That means they are not albino squirrels (who lack pigment in their skin and eyes) they merely have inherited a gene which causes them to appear lighter than normal. While not rare it is unusual. White squirrels in the wild tend to have a higher mortality rate since they are more obvious to predators. These cuties, also from Lee's Summit, will be staying as our guests in the display area for a little while. You see, our display squirrels and opossums generally come from the ranks of our rehab animals. They spend some time with us until the next generation takes their place; then they are released back into the wild where they belong. So the next time you're at the Center say hello to our display squirrels. In a few weeks they might be white!



And finally here is an example of something that everyone in the non-profit world knows well – multitasking and improvising. We sometimes use knitted hats as nests for small babies (birds or mammals). LNC director Kim Hess needed an assist after she had done some messy lawn work around the Center that had trashed her shoes and socks. Rather than walk around with bare feet while they were in the wash she used the knit hats as temporary slippers. We appreciate all the donations received for animal care at the Center, but be aware they won't always be used by the winged or four-legged animals here!



## Stuff I Didn't Know About Caspian Terns by The Editor

As large as a big gull, the Caspian Tern is the largest tern in the world. Its wingspan is between 4 and 5 feet, and it weighs about a pound and a half. Its call is a loud heron-like croak. Its large coral red bill makes it one of the most easily identified terns throughout its worldwide range.

They breed on the shores of large lakes and on ocean coasts. They are found in North America (including around the Great Lakes), around the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea in Europe, in Asia, Africa, Australia and New Zealand. North American birds migrate to the southern and Gulf coasts, the West Indies and the northernmost parts of South America. European and Asian birds spend their non-breeding season in the Old World tropics. African, Australian and New Zealand birds are usually residents and migrate short distances (if at all).

Caspian Terns dive for fish, hovering high over the water and then plunging for their prey. They will eat large insects, the young and eggs of other birds and small rodents. They may fly more than 30 miles from the breeding colony to find fish.

They nest on the ground in colonies, which may include other tern and gull species. The varied coloring of the chick's feathers (from pale creamy to dark gray) assists the adults in recognizing their own chicks. Fledging occurs after 35-40 days.

Some other cool facts

- The Caspian Tern aggressively defends its breeding colony. It will pursue, attack, and chase potential predatory birds, and can cause bloody wounds on the heads of people who invade the colony. The entire colony will take flight, however, when a Bald Eagle flies overhead, exposing the chicks to predation from gulls.

- The world's largest breeding colony is on a small, artificial island in the Columbia River between Oregon and Washington, home to more than 6,000 breeding pairs each year.
- Young Caspian Terns appear to have a difficult time learning to catch fish efficiently. They stay with their parents for long periods of time, and are fed by them even on the wintering grounds. Many young terns do not return to the nesting grounds for several years, remaining instead on the wintering areas.
- The oldest recorded wild Caspian Tern was at least 29 years, 7 months old when it was found in Louisiana in 1989. It had been banded in Michigan in 1959. The average life span of Great Lakes Caspian Terns is estimated to be 12 years.