

Leucophaeus pipixcan

Franklin's Gull

Linking Communities

The Franklin's Gull is a target species in the Linking Communities Projects. With an extensive dispersal after breeding and prior to its southward migration, which is as far south as Chile, it is dependent on many different areas to provide quality habitat for survival. It is a common sight in the prairies seen in flocks over wetland areas or even flowing plows through agricultural feeds. However, due to its large dispersal pattern as well as annual changes in nesting sites population, monitoring can be difficult.



Identification

The Franklin's Gull is a small black-hooded gull found in the interior prairies. It has also been called the rosy or prairie dove because of its pigeon-like flight and the faint rosy colour on its breast as it arrives in the spring. It has a white crescent above and below the eye, an ashy grey back, white underparts, and black wing tips bordered by white. In breeding plumage the entire head is black with a black eye ring and red bill.

Habitat & Distribution

The Franklin's Gull arrives in mid-April where it concentrates in marshes, shallow lakes, open grasslands, and fields. Conservation of large prairie marshes is important for the Franklin's Gull as they are highly dependent on these areas for nesting. The Franklin's Gull departs these areas about mid-Sept to winter along the western coast of South America.

Feeding

The Franklin's Gull feeds largely over land during the day; foraging while walking, swimming, wading, and flying. It is often seen in large flocks following plows to feed on the upturned invertebrates. During summer it eats insects, earthworms, mice, seeds, and even garbage while in winter its diet switches to include more fish and crustaceans.

Nesting

The Franklin's Gull nests in large colonies with as many as 100,000 breeding pairs. Nesting in reeds and marshes the nesting site changes each year in response to the condition of the wetlands. The nest is a floating structure of cattails, rushes, and grasses; requiring constant maintenance to prevent it from sinking. Both the parents and the older chicks have been seen adding to the nest. Three eggs are laid and incubated by both parents for about 23-26 days. The eggs are buff coloured with brown spots. The young are able to swim at about three weeks and fly at a little over a month.



Map by Cornell Lab of Ornithology
Range data by NatureServe

