

# Wintering Lesser Black-backed Gull Project

## March 6, 2008

### 1. First recorded NA LBBG – 1934 Beach Haven, NJ

- For years a quest bird – searching with my sister along the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel
- Late 90's, this all changed. Late winter 1998 – I was with a group watching 60 LBBGs eating worms on the Richboro Junior High ball field in Bucks County. Kenn Kaufman said, “Well, they must be a wintering group from Iceland” and we all began to wonder.
- Last year after chatting in the field and some internet discussions, we decided to look for some answers. Where were these birds coming from? Where did they nest? What were their routes?
- Complicated and painfully slow but we're making some progress in setting up a research project.

### 2. Background

- LBBG subspecies *graellsii* traditionally nested in the British Isles. During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it expanded its range in the Old World dramatically. This expansion now seems to be occurring in NA

### 3 & 4. North America

- CBC data show a drastic increase from early 1990s. An average of 121 individuals tallied in 1990 thru 95 to an average of 755 from 2001 thru 2006

### 5 & 6. Southeast PA

- Over last 10 years, SE PA has accounted for 32% of CBC LBBG numbers.
- Winter high counts continue to increase - 456 counted in Upper Bucks on March 17, 2007
- Also – occasionally big numbers in Florida but no comparable numbers from New England or eastern Canada

- And then they disappear.

## 7. Project Goals

- Comments beyond the slide – If these birds are breeding in Europe and migrating here to winter, then they are by far the most numerous species to do so.

## 8 & 9. Plan of Action

- Fall - Capture, band, and color mark for local and east coast observation. This is where birders, listserves, & eBird will become very important... where we need help from observers.
- Spring – Telemetry units

## 10. Two Side Notes

- 1<sup>st</sup> documented nesting – HERG X LBBG in Maine
- Iceland connection - 1000 banded birds, 691 recoveries and resightings, 1 from the New World – Puerto Rico!!

## 11. Conservation Implications & Current Status

- A chance to study and document a hemispheric colonization event with implications as other species change their ranges in the face of climate change.
- In these days of avian-borne pathogens, keeping track/studying species that travel between continents (esp. gulls!!) is of value
- All permits in place, our proposals to the BBL have been accepted, grants in, CLO has agreed to house the project without overhead, and we're looking for additional funding of all amounts. Our budget is slim and trim – materials only but telemetry units and satellite time over 2-3 years run about \$5000 a piece. A plea will be sent to local bird clubs and birders for assistance monetarily and, as important, for reports and observations after birds are marked.

