

## Country Notes for May 2025

As I write this in early April many farmers are busy preparing their fields for the crops of the coming summer. As their fields are given a top dressing of manure or raked and smoothed to provide a good seed bed, the tractors are often followed by a crowd of gulls eager to see what food might be brought to the surface for them. Often these are black headed gulls and herring gulls. Common gulls however, despite their name, are not as common and are less likely to be part of the excited group following the farmer.

In recent times, and in particular in our southern villages, it is often the case that more than a few of what we consider to be black headed gulls are actually mediterranean gulls. These gulls have become much more widespread over the last few years and are now frequently to be seen and often in reasonable numbers. That is certainly the case in our villages of Hollingbourne and Hucking. I am often aware of their presence by their sad yiauw sound. At first glance they are very similar to black headed gulls. However black headed gulls actually have a very dark brown head, whereas the mediterranean gulls heads are actually black! On the black headed gull the dark brown head ends at the back of their head, whereas the black on a mediterranean gull goes further down the back of their head making it look much more like a hood. They both have red beaks, although it is a much more sturdy beak on a mediterranean gull. In flight the black headed gulls have pointed wings with a white leading edge. Mediterranean gulls have slightly more rounded wings which, in the adults, are much whiter.

It is really worth looking out for these newer members of our local gull population as they are quite elegant looking gulls. You certainly will not be able to miss their call once you have become acquainted with it!

All of these gulls may be seen in quite large numbers out of the breeding season as they fly overhead. It is certainly a mistake to think that gulls are only to be seen at the seaside!

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