

## Urban Gulls

*Kevin Krebs, Vancouver*

The winds of an approaching storm pick up, streaming into English Bay. Soaring high, Glaucous-winged Gulls glow in the setting rays of the sun. Rosy amber embers flame, winging against the heavy clouds of wet slate.

Gulls live close to us, trade their hardened gaze with ours. Perhaps they see us more clearly, more fully, than our own furtive human eyes see them. They live close to us, but a chasm of ideas separates them, a distance our wingless forms cannot traverse.

For many, there are only “seagulls” – a flattened black M on a child’s drawing of the beach, a lifeless symbol of the seaside. Otherwise, an urban pest allied with crows, scheming and intimidating, desperate to pilfer a French fry. Only a small number of us pay attention to the gulls, to their often-subtle differences: shapes, sizes, and colours. Seasons change as numerous gull species appear and disappear, leaving no trace of their passing in the sky.

We live in part of the home territory of the Glaucous-winged Gull. They watched us arrive in the late Pleistocene, undoubtedly with their recognizable curiosity and cautiousness. Trees



fell and cities grew; bricks, roads, and glass towers – guns, dogs, and rat poison. No memories exist of hushed evenings at the water’s edge with the sound of pine cones falling onto soft earth in the distance.

For countless generations, isolated island colonies were the periphery of the known world for Glaucous-winged Gull chicks. Rocks, grass, and the sea’s harsh wind blowing through speckled down. Rooftops now extend across the city’s horizon, inviting gulls to settle

and breed on these rectangular islands. These gravel rooftops are safer places than the colonies – no neighbours to contend with and fewer predators.

A vicious sun blazes on a late July morning. Three chicks rest languidly on a small piece of rooftop off the western edge of the Granville Street Bridge. Across the city, gull chicks take refuge in the shade of AC units, exhaust vents, and aluminium ducting. Unlike the colony-born chicks, the first sounds these urban gull chicks hear is the drone of traffic. Few of us see or visit these rooftops, and fewer have the patience or inquisitiveness to scour the gravel-covered roofs for gravel-coloured chicks.

The wind comes in off the ocean with the twilight, and the twilight seeps into the chick’s juvenile feathers. Streetlights flare their warm light into the dusky roads and alleyways. Before night settles onto the city, a young gull tests its wings then tucks in beside its siblings in a quiet corner.



*Photos by author.*