

BIRD COLONIES IN EASTERN LAKE ONTARIO

By John B. Belknap

During the past three seasons the writer has made observations of birds nesting on three islands off Henderson Harbor, Jefferson County. In June, 1949 an island in the St. Lawrence River was visited to secure information on the Ring-billed Gull and in May, 1950 observations were made on two islands near Kingston, Ontario. The following species were found breeding on one or more of the islands: Herring Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Common Tern, Black-crowned Night Heron and Double-crested Cormorant.

A review of periodical literature reveals few references to the bird life on these islands and it is evident that they have been regularly visited by bird students only in recent years. Of particular interest is the occurrence of the Ring-billed Gull and the Double-crested Cormorant since both, as breeding birds, are relative newcomers to this area. A summary of observations on the six islands follows.

Little Galloo Island

This is by far the largest of the group, being over forty acres in extent. Except for a few trees bordering the shore the island is practically free of larger vegetation. It is essentially a level, grassy plain a few feet higher than the lake. Each spring the southwesterly portion of the island is occupied by an immense colony of gulls, the great majority of which are Ring-bills. Very little is known of the early years of this colony but it is evident that it is much larger than it was in 1945 when visited by Dr. Kutz. Since the nesting area is several acres in extent it is obviously impractical to attempt to count all of the nests. A method of sampling was used by the writer in 1950 to approximate the number of nests on the island. Several representative squares each fifty feet on a side were selected and all nests within the squares were counted. By averaging these a density figure of 96 per 2500 square feet for the entire colony was obtained. The nesting area was then measured and found to be $11\frac{1}{2}$ acres. The resulting total is 19,200 nests which the writer believes to be sufficiently accurate for practical purposes. No attempt was made to determine the proportion of Herring

Gull nests but it is safe to say that they constitute less than five percent of the total.

Gull Island

Gull Island, situated in Henderson Bay is of outstanding interest to bird students. Hardly more than an acre in extent, over 3000 birds of five varieties nested on it in 1950. Ring-billed Gulls account for over 90% of the total, the other species are the Herring Gull, Common Tern, Black-crowned Night Heron and Double-crested Cormorant. All nests on the island were counted in 1950 with the following results: Ring-billed Gull 1436, Herring Gull 41, Common Tern 47, Night Heron 4, Cormorant 34. This represented a considerable change from the preceding year. The number of tern and heron nests showed a definite decrease while the cormorant colony had nearly doubled. However, on June 11, 1950 although some of the nests contained eggs no cormorants were observed on or near the island. There have been reports of shooting and it must be concluded that the birds had been driven away. Although this species is not on the protected list the loss of this colony will be most unfortunate as it is the only one known to exist in New York State.

Bass Island

This island is situated in Henderson Bay northeast of Gull Island. It is several times the size of Gull Island and supports considerably more vegetation. Herring Gulls and Common Terns nested here in 1948 and '49. The next year, however, showed a marked change. The terns practically deserted the island. Only one nest was found, and Herring Gulls were less numerous. On the other hand, Night Herons began using the island for nesting, presumably having moved over from Gull Island.

Black Ant Island

Lying between Clayton, N. Y. and Gananoque, Ontario in the Thousand Island region, this island supports the second largest colony of Ring-billed Gulls of those under discussion. It was visited briefly in June, 1949. As was the case on Little Galloo and Gull Islands, a few Herring Gulls were also

found to be nesting. The gull population is believed to be in the neighborhood of five thousand.

Snake and Salmon Islands

These islands lie in the northeast corner of Lake Ontario in Canadian waters, not far from Kingston, Ontario. They were visited on May 27, 1950 through the courtesy of Dr. Geo. M. Stirrett, Dominion Wildlife Officer for the Province of Ontario. Both islands are small, only about 1/4 acre each. Salmon Island lies farther to the west and is virtually a rocky shoal nearly bare of vegetation. A nest census gives the following results: Ring-billed Gull 216, Herring Gull 43, Common Tern 17, Double-crested Cormorant 11. The Cormorant nests consisted of platforms of sticks built up until they were 12 to 18 inches above the ground. Egg laying by the Cormorants had just begun and most of the nests were empty.

Snake Island supports considerable vegetation including a number of elm and ash trees. Herring Gulls (146 nests) and Cormorants (19 nests) were the only birds found nesting here. As on Gull Island the Cormorants nested in the elm trees.

The following table indicates the species breeding on each island in 1950, with the exception of Black Ant Island which was not visited.

	<u>Herring Gull</u>	<u>Rg-billed Gull</u>	<u>Common Tern</u>	<u>D.C. Cormorant</u>	<u>Night Heron</u>
Galloo	X	X			
Gull	X	X	X	X	X
Bass	X		X(1 nest)		X
Salmon	X	X	X	X	
Snake	X			X	

Summary

The six islands under discussion lie in an area 40 miles east to west by 25 miles north to south. All are in the north-easterly part of Lake Ontario with the exception of Black Ant Island which is in the upper St. Lawrence River. Although the Herring Gull nests on all of these islands, the Ring-billed Gull is the dominant species, greatly outnumbering all of the others combined.

DICKCISSEL IN FINGER LAKES REGION

On the evening of June 7th, as I was driving along the road about three miles from Pulteney in Steuben County, I suddenly became conscious of the singing of a Dickcissel, (*Spiza americana*). I stopped the car and located the bird sitting on a roadside high tension wire, singing as if he were sitting along an Iowa road, where I have been familiar with the species since childhood. The bird is still there (three days later at this writing), and acts as if he might be established. Since I discovered him he has been seen by about twenty other observers, several of whom--Malcolm Lerch, Francis Orcutt, Frank Guthrie--are active members of our Keuka Park Conservation Club.

There is an excellent habitat of clover hay meadow on each side of the road at this point which would encourage nesting should there be a pair of the birds.--Chas. J. Spiker, Keuka Park Conservation Club, Branchport, New York.

WHITE PELICANS IN WESTERN NEW YORK

My favorite spot and by far the best place in Western New York for observing migrating Canada Geese and other water fowl lies in the Alabama swamp region. By retaining the waters of the Oak Orchard Creek, water has covered the terrain to just the right depth for the dabbling species. The Oakfield-Barre road parallels one of these ponds and gives an excellent view of nearly the whole pond. This area, once under private ownership, now belongs to the state as a game refuge and sanctuary.