

THE EXPANDING RANGE OF THE RING-BILLED GULL

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The Ring-billed Gull (*Larus Delawarensis*) is an inland species, its home being the prairie regions of the United States and Canada. At the time of the passage of the Migratory Bird Act some forty years ago, Georgian Bay constituted the eastern limit of its principal breeding range. Within a few years its breeding area was extended east and south and by 1927 it had secured a toehold in the northeastern corner of Lake Ontario.

In a paper which I read at the 1950 Federation meeting at Watkins Glen, the expansion into the Lake Ontario area was outlined. The first colony, that on Salmon Island near Kingston, Ontario, increased rapidly and by 1930 contained about 300 pairs. Black Ant Island in the St. Lawrence River, 20 miles to the east, became the site of a successful colony, 200 nesting adults being noted in 1940. Ten years later when I visited the island, this had increased to more than 4000. Both Salmon and Black Ant Islands are in Canadian waters.

Hyde (1939) gives what is believed to be the first breeding record of this species in New York State. In July 1936 he visited Gull Island off Henderson Harbor in Lake Ontario and found definite evidence that a few birds had nested. Some time after this, another, and eventually much larger, colony became established on Little Galloo Island in the same area. This was first reported by Kutz (1946), who estimated 2000 breeding gulls, mainly Ring-bills. At the time of my first visit to Little Galloo in 1948 it was evident that the Ring-billed Gull community had grown to a much larger and subsequent trips have disclosed a continued increase. In May 1955 it was estimated that there were 45,000 nests on the island, covering some 20 acres. This constitutes the largest nesting concentration of Ring-billed Gulls in the Northeast.

During the past ten years, three more colonies, two of them in New York State, have been located, showing a continued southward and eastward extension of the breeding range. Mohawk Island in Lake Erie supports the most southerly colony in the area under consideration. Another on Long Island in Oneida Lake was discovered by L. J. Loomis of Endicott in 1952, although breeding may have taken place prior to this time. The 1955 population was estimated at 150 pairs.

The third colony is located in Lake Champlain, on the New York side of the State boundary. I am indebted to William B. Miller of the Vermont Fish and Game Service for early information on this colony. It is on island "C" of the Four Brothers, a group of small islands of Willsboro Point. Miller gives 1949 as the first definite nesting. On June 4, 1955, I had the opportunity to visit Four Brothers through the courtesy of Thomas A. Lesperance of Keesville. The island occupied by the Ring-bills is about five acres in extent, with elevations of from 15 to 25 feet above lake level. The Ring-bills occupy less than an acre, the population being estimated at 2000 adult birds. Herring Gulls occupy most of the remaining area.

It is evident that the past quarter century has witnessed a marked eastward and southward expansion of the breeding range of the Ring-billed Gull. Several of the nesting areas are in New York State, which lies in the direct

path of this movement. Although the number of gull communities is limited, the concentration of birds occupying them is impressive. Most of the islands are small, some only low shoals, such as Salmon and Long Islands. Little Galloo, covering 44 acres is the exception. The birds choose islands having few trees, and level grassy areas are preferred as nesting sites. The Ring-billed Gull occupies a concentrated area, in distinction to the Herring Gull, which spaces its nests more widely. This is well illustrated on Four Brothers where the Ring-bill utilizes a portion of the level open area in a tightly knit group, while the Herring Gulls are found on the remainder of the island with nests widely separated.

Literature Cited

- Hyde, A. Sidney 1939 The Ecology and Economics of the Birds along the Northern Boundary of New York State. Roosevelt Wildlife Bulletin Vol. 72 p. 134
- Kutz, Harry Leon 1946 Auk Vol. 63 p. 591
Gouverneur, N. Y.

BIRD CLUBS MAKE NEWS

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Recently the nest of a pair of Dickcissels was found near Rochester—a rare discovery these days; although a century ago these birds were widely distributed along the Atlantic seaboard. Soon word of this find by members of the Genesee Ornithological Society had spread throughout the State. The Associated Press had wired the story to its member newspapers—an indication that editors want to use nature stories with unusual angles or with news interest.

In two leading papers, The New York Times and New York Herald Tribune, it is not uncommon to find some rare bird like the Lewis's Woodpecker, Cattle Egret or Black-Headed Grosbeak sharing the front pages with Presidents, Senators and Generals. At least two upstate papers now carry weekly bird columns; the Syracuse Post-Standard by B. P. Burtt and The Rochester Times-Union by John Brown.

Here is an excellent opportunity for bird clubs to develop good publicity for their activities. At the same time they can render an important public service by disseminating knowledge and understanding about our wild life.

If your paper does not now carry enough nature stories of local interest, visit the editor and explain that you can furnish material for stories that will attract readers. The editor probably will offer suggestions on what he can use. Some possibilities are listed below.

First, remember that there are two types of stories; feature and news.

Feature stories employ unusual angles or educational elements. Editors like these stories because they vary the tempo of their papers and gain more readers. Thus, these stories usually are displayed prominently with two or three-column headlines.