

Acknowledgements

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LITTLE GALLOO ISLAND — A TWENTY YEAR SUMMARY

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Since my initial visit to Little Galloo in May 1948 there has been a continued expansion in the Ring-billed Gull colony located there. It is now considered to be the largest breeding colony of the species in North America. The increase in gulls since the passage of the migratory bird act in 1918 has been particularly noticeable during the past two decades. For many years the Ring-billed Gull bred mainly in the prairie regions of the United States and Canada, eastward to the upper Great Lakes. An eastward expansion began some forty years ago and the colony on Little Galloo was established around 1940.

Our first definite knowledge came as the result of a visit to the island on June 7, 1945. At this time Dr. H. L. Kutz found Ring-billed Gulls well established on the southwesterly end of the island. During the past twenty years numerous visits have been made to Little Galloo by the writer and others, mainly in the months of May and June.

Little Galloo Island, about 43 acres in extent, lies near the eastern end of Lake Ontario some $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the mainland. Roughly oval, it is three-sevenths of a mile in the longer dimension. The island is composed of rock with a thin covering of soil. Grass and weeds constitute much of the vegetation. The number of trees is limited and these are mainly around the perimeter. The interior resembles a level, grassy meadow.

The recorded history of the gulls on Little Galloo began in 1945 when Dr. Kutz estimated a population of 2000 adults, with a ratio of ten Ring-bills to one Herring Gull. At the time of my visit in 1948 the Ring-bills were occupying an area of nearly ten acres and showed a considerable increase in numbers. On the other hand the Herring Gull population was

little changed and has remained nearly stable ever since.

In 1950 an attempt was made to make an accurate estimate of the number of gull nests on the island. Nests in representative sections of the breeding area were counted and a density figure expressed in nests per acre arrived at. The total nesting area was estimated and the population found by simple arithmetic. Based on several years sampling the density was found to vary from 2000 to 2500 nests per acre.

Over the years the Ring-billed colony has expanded until it now occupies all available space, with one exception. This is an area of about four acres retained by the Herring Gulls. The Ring-billed colony has gradually encircled this area with the Herring Gulls maintaining their ground. In 1967 the Ring-billed Gull population was estimated at 85,000 pairs.

The amount of food required to maintain a colony of this size during the period the young are being raised must be tremendous. Gulls eat many kinds of animal food and are natural scavengers. I have come to the conclusion that the fertile agricultural land in southern Jefferson County, adjacent to the lake provides a considerable portion of the food supply. Ring-billed Gulls devour many varieties of arthropods and frequently follow the plow in search of food. There is a large acreage of cultivated land within twenty miles of Little Galloo Island. In late spring gulls can be seen as far as thirty miles from the island following branches of Sandy Creek well onto the Tug Hill Plateau. During the nesting season gulls can be seen trading back and forth between the island and the mainland. On May 28, 1966 counts were made showing that from 6000 to 8000 birds were making the crossing in each direction hourly.

Banding of young gulls has been carried out sporadically during the past twenty years. In the spring of 1967 over one thousand adults were banded, having been caught by the "boom net" technique. The best time for banding young birds is the second week in June and thousands could be captured provided the necessary manpower were available.

Aside from the gulls a number of other nesting species have been found on the island. Waterfowl include a few Mallard and Black Ducks, one or two pairs of Canada Geese, and in 1967 at least one pair of Pintails. In the early nineteen fifties Common Terns had a flourishing colony on Little Galloo but this has been gradually wiped out by competition from the Ring-billed Gulls. On the other hand, a small group of Black-crowned Night Herons has expanded into a sizable colony of over seventy-five pairs. The herons build their stick nests in low bushes that fringe the southwestern end of the island.

Three factors seem to be responsible for the success of the Ring-billed Gulls on Little Galloo. One is the previously mentioned availability of food. Another is the lack of disturbance by humans and natural predators. In addition, the large acreage of open land provides room for the thousands of nests found every year.

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