

LAUGHING GULLS COLONIZE JAMAICA BAY

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The Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) was extirpated as a breeding bird in New York State during the late 1800's, by commercial egggers and hunters for the millinery trade. Despite recent searches by boat and helicopter, the first indication that this species might again be nesting on Long Island was not obtained until 1977. In early June of that year Buckley, Gochfeld, and Buckley (1978) found a pair of breeding-plumaged Laughing Gulls on the Line Island complex of salt marshes in Great South Bay, eastern Nassau County, but no evidence of breeding was found. Returning to the same location on 15 June 1978, they again found a pair of breeding-plumaged Laughing Gulls, but this time they succeeded in locating a nest, which contained one egg. A third breeding-plumaged individual, indicative of the presence



*Fig. 1. Laughing Gull nest and eggs. Jo Co Marsh.
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Fig. 2. Laughing Gull chick. Jo Co Marsh.
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of a second pair, was also seen. Later that same day, they observed two additional breeding-plumaged Laughing Gulls at Jo Co Marsh in Jamaica Bay, Queens County, but failed to obtain evidence of nesting. Our discovery, reported here, of a breeding colony of Laughing Gulls on Jo Co Marsh during the 1979 nesting season is, therefore, of considerable interest.

Jo Co Marsh is bisected, in a north-south direction, by a tidal creek. On 22 June 1979, while on a breeding-bird survey for the National Park Service, we could see a number of breeding-plumaged

Laughing Gulls in the western portion of the marsh, but were unable to explore that section at that time. Although no Laughing Gulls were present in the eastern section of the marsh, we did find three addled Laughing Gull eggs there. These were floating in salt water among *Spartina alterniflora*, near a flooded nest constructed of this same grass. The eggs were thoroughly bleached and thus devoid of any markings. We took one egg back to the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Visitor's Center where measurements (40 x 54 mm) and comparison of shape with the illustration in Harrison (1978) confirmed the identification.

We returned to the western section of Jo Co Marsh on 12 July and found a number of breeding-plumaged Laughing Gulls exhibiting apparent territorial behavior. We estimated that 12-15 pairs of birds were present and nesting. A search in one area, where birds were flying about and calling excitedly, soon produced a Laughing Gull's nest containing two eggs (Fig. 1). These measured 37 x 59 mm and 38 x 54 mm. The nest was located in, and constructed of, *S. alterniflora*, on the edge of an area of *S. patens*.

The following day, 13 July, one of us (PWP) and Bob Cook discovered two Laughing Gull chicks, elsewhere in this section of marsh (Fig. 2). From our photographs, Dr. Joanna Burger estimated these birds to be about 18 days old. The same day we also found a dead Laughing Gull chick, of about the same age, several hundred yards from the first two.

Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) also nest in these salt marshes. Laughing Gulls, which are predatory on tern chicks, were seen harassing adult Common Terns on a number of occasions. The expansion of Laughing Gulls on Long Island, and their interaction with nesting terns, should continue to be monitored in future years.

LITERATURE CITED

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