

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Garden Island Revisited: Sixty-one years ago Lewis Fifield, then a resident of Plattsburgh, NY, characterized a trip he made to the Herring Gull colony on Garden Island (Lake Champlain) as his "most interesting ornithological excursion of the year 1925" (*The Oologist* 43(4): 53-55; 1926). On May 24, 1925 he and his brother rowed out to this island-rock, approximately 75 yards by 35 yards, that is located 2100 feet south of a much larger island called Valcour (1000 acres). In 1925 the otherwise level landscape of this island was broken by only 2 large trees and a few bushes. As they approached the island, 80 to 90 gulls arose in the air and began to circle the island emitting screams in objection to the Fifield's untimely entry into their domain. Upon landing the Fifields counted 34 active nests. They found eggs in all stages of incubation.

Other than this old publication, information concerning the wildlife of this island is scarce. In *A Portrait of the Lake Champlain Islands* (Lake Champlain Island Trust, 1979, Darby Bradley and Cheryl King, editors) the authors mention that the Conservation Committee of the Green Mountain Audubon Society undertook an inventory of the bird life on the islands in the early 1970's. However, in the description of Garden Island little is said except that the island is "quite isolated and probably a nesting site." No mention is made of which species nest on the island. Ignatius Lacombe (*pers. comm.*) surveyed the island (block 6293A) in the early 1980's for the N.Y. State Breeding Bird Atlas project. He found no evidence of gulls nesting on the island.

Garden Island is one of 71 small islands (less than 1000 acres) in Lake Champlain. With so little documentation concerning the avifauna of this island and its historic Herring Gull colony, another search of the island for avian breeding activity was planned. On May 17, 1986 Mark Gretch and Harold Klein were transported by boat to Garden Island by Scott Johnson. As we approached, a solitary Herring Gull watched from the top of a dead tree trunk near the center of the island. We were encouraged to find evidence of Herring Gulls showing a preference for the island. We hoped that a small breeding colony might still exist, even though we realized that such small island-rocks are particularly vulnerable to human disturbance. Our hopes were dashed as we started to explore the island. We found no evidence that Lake Champlain Herring Gulls now use this island for nesting. What we did find was evidence of human disturbance, including old campfires and miscellaneous trash left by previous visitors. I have since learned that a campsite existed on the island for a number of summers about 20 years ago. It is our suspicion that every year this island is more frequently used for landings. Boat traffic between Plattsburgh and nearby Valcour Island along with recreational boating on Lake Champlain has increased recently. Such landings during the breeding season more than likely have resulted in the demise of this colony.

The vegetation of this island has not changed much since 1925. There are a few more trees (basswood and northern white cedar) and shrubs (European gooseberry). We found some evidence of breeding of Rough-winged Swallows, Tree Swallows, starlings and, perhaps, Common Mergansers.

If the island were given protection from human disturbance, would the island once again become a haven for the Herring Gull or for other colonial nesting birds? We thought the experiment was worth trying. We have contacted the Champlain Island Trust. They have agreed to help us post the island. Signs urging boaters not to land during the breeding season will be posted.

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