

A VERY OLD BIRD

Riverfront Park on the Hudson River in Coeymans Landing, southern Albany County, New York is a reliable spot to look for gulls and other visitors. I stop by there whenever I'm going through town with a few minutes to spare. It's a good place to look for Iceland or Glaucous Gulls in winter. In other seasons, I've come across other species, such as Franklin's Gull, Laughing Gull, Caspian Terns, Black Skimmer, and more often, Bonaparte's Gulls. What's nice about the park is that you can sit in your car and study the birds up close and in comfort.

On 29 November 2009, I noticed one of the 25 or so Ring-billed Gulls had a band on its leg. It was taking the occasional bread handouts and didn't seem to be too shy or in any hurry to move on. So I set up my window mounted spotting scope and got to work reading the numbers on the band. As a licensed bird bander, I knew what to look for in the sequence of numbers and their placement

relative to prefix/suffix and dividing dash. When reading bird bands through my scope, I set up a diagram on a page in my notebook with blank dashes to be filled in as I read the various numbers. That way, I could get all the band numbers in their proper sequence.

I submitted the band number to the Bird Banding Lab via their electronic band reporting page: www.reportband.gov. After a rather long wait, I received a note from the lab asking for more details (including a request that I send them the band itself—well, that couldn't be done). After an exchange of e-mails, I found out why they were so concerned about the accuracy of the report. Their records show that that band number corresponded to one that was placed on a Ring-billed Gull more than 25 years ago. If the report was accurate, that would make this the oldest Ring-billed Gull on record.

With the additional information I supplied (such as how I read the band and noted the numbers), they were satisfied. With that, the biologists at the Banding Lab determined that the gull was banded as a fledgling near Willsboro, Essex County, New York, by none other than our own long-time Kingbird Region 7 Editor, John "Mike" Peterson, on 10 June 1984!

As you can see from the picture of this particular bird (p.52), it appears to be healthy enough for an old bird. You bet I'll be watching to see if he/she shows up again this year to keep that record going.

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