

First Records of Roof Nesting by Ring-billed Gulls and Herring Gulls in Ontario

by
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In recent years there has been an increase in the incidence of birds nesting on roofs. Fisk (1978) provided an annotated list of reports of roof nesting and mentioned that this behaviour has been reported for eight *Larus* species, including the Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) but not the Ring-billed Gull (*L. delawarensis*).

Roof nesting by Herring Gulls in the United Kingdom and Ireland has been documented by Cramp (1971) and Monaghan and Coulson (1977). In North America, Herring Gulls have nested on roofs near Boston, Massachusetts (Paynter 1963), Long Island, New York (Buckley and Buckley 1980) and in Manchester, New Hampshire (R.M. Bollengier, pers. comm.).

This note reports one case of roof nesting by Ring-billed Gulls and two by Herring Gulls in Ontario.

Ring-billed Gulls on roof of commercial building near Owen Sound

This building is located on the east side of Owen Sound, just north of the Town of Owen Sound, Grey County. The building's flat roof is approximately 22,000 m² in size and 7 m high. The top layer is gravel.

In 1985 there were 20 nests with eggs. Few, if any, chicks fledged because there was heavy depredation by a Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) that could reach the roof via an emergency ladder at the rear side of the building (T. Moulton, pers. comm.).

At the end of May 1986 there were more than 100 nests with eggs (T. Moulton, pers. comm.). On 12 June there were only 24 nests with eggs and there were many depredated eggs. On 19 June there were 23 adult Ring-billed Gulls and 81 nests (11 with one egg, seven with two eggs, three with three eggs and 60 empty). Fragments of egg shells

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and dried yolk were present at many of the empty nests. There were 11 depredated eggs scattered about over the roof. Raccoon scats were present on the roof and on a landing of the emergency ladder. On 23 June there were only seven nests with eggs. On 6 July there were no intact eggs or chicks and the colony had been deserted.

Virtually all of the 81 nests that were present on 19 June were built against structures (exhaust vents, gas lines, expansion joints, low platforms, etc.).

On 3 June 1987 there were two separate Ring-billed Gull colonies on the roof: one had 143 and the other 18 nests with eggs. There were no chicks or hatching eggs, nor were there any obvious signs of Raccoon predation. As in 1986, virtually all nests were located against roof structures. The nesting gulls fouled the roof with excrement, nesting materials, food remains, feathers and regurgitations of undigestible objects. The owner of the building was afraid that during a heavy rainstorm these materials would clog drain pipes, causing puddles or leaks. In addition, the gull droppings corroded the metal structures on the roof. At the request of the owner of the building, the Canadian Wildlife Service issued a permit to collect the eggs. On 8 June all eggs were collected and destroyed by staff of the Owen Sound District office of the Ministry of Natural Resources. There was no renesting after the egg collection.

Herring Gulls on roof of Grey County Mall, Owen Sound

The flat roof of the Grey County Mall is about 14,000m² in size and about 7m high. The top layer of the roof is gravel. Opposite the County Mall are three franchised fast-food outlets.

In 1985 there was one nest with three eggs (R. Jackson, pers. comm.). On 5 June 1986 there was one nest with two eggs and another with two eggs and one small chick. On 11 June there were four more nests (each with three eggs) and on 19 June another nest with three eggs. The gulls occupied only a small section of the roof and formed a loose colony.

The gulls apparently preferred to nest near one of the several structures on the roof rather than on the open roof itself. Of the seven nests, one was on top of a ventilation unit, three were against ventilation units, two were against gaslines and one was out in the open about 1m from a roof drain.

The nesting Herring Gulls caused problems similar to those mentioned above for Ring-billed Gulls. Under a CWS permit all eggs were collected repeatedly by the staff of the mall and at most, one chick fledged from the roof in 1986.

In 1987 there were no Herring Gulls nesting on the roof, presumably as a result of the persistent harassment in 1986.

Herring Gulls on roof at Bruce Nuclear Power Development (BNPD), Douglas Point, Bruce County

In 1985 there were 12 Herring Gull nests on the roof of the Bruce Stores building (D. Armchuk, pers. comm.). The roof, which is about 2,000m² and 12m high, is flat and its surface consists of a sheet of waterproof material, thick sheets of insulation material, and a covering layer of pebbles.

On 19 June 1986, there were 44 nests (43 empty, one with three eggs). There were 25 live, half-grown chicks and 11 dead chicks, including one which had been pecked to death and one which had been decapitated. There was also a decapitated adult gull, suggesting depredation by Great Horned Owls (*Bubo virginianus*).

Of the 44 nests, six were located against ventilation shafts, seven against 60cm² patio stones and 31 in the open. Thus, at the BNPD gulls showed a tendency to nest near structures and objects providing visual relief. The 25 chicks were grouped in a pod, except for a few that were hiding in the ventilation shafts.

In addition to fouling the roof, the Herring Gulls nesting on the roof at BNPD caused the following problems: (1) they brought in soil and seeds when building their nests, and vegetation had become established at some of the nests (BNPD staff were concerned that the plant roots might ruin the waterproof lining); (2) gulls stand-

ing at the roof's edge would defecate on the only exposed portion of the lining and thereby chemically erode it; (3) gulls pecked at and damaged portions of the insulation sheets that were not covered by pebbles; (4) chicks hiding inside exhaust vents fouled them; (5) cars parked near the building were frequently fouled; and (6) some BNPD employees were afraid to eat their lunch outside.

CWS issued a permit to destroy the eggs and to kill the chicks to alleviate the immediate problems. After the control operations, carried out by the Owen Sound District office of the MNR, on 25 June, there was no renesting.

In 1987 the Herring Gulls nested again. Under a CWS permit, BNPD staff collected all eggs once a week during May and June and no chicks were produced (D. Armchuck, pers. comm.).

The new behaviour of roof-nesting by gulls in Ontario is of serious concern because, if it becomes more widespread, considerable nuisance and damage may result. Ring-billed Gulls have already become a problem species in many parts of Ontario and now nest on many man-made urban or industrial sites (Blokpoel and Tessier 1986). If Ring-bills were to take to roof-nesting they would have ample nesting habitat along the shores of the lower Great Lakes where much industry is located. At some of these sites gulls loafing on roofs are already creating problems, and these prob-

lems would certainly be exacerbated if the gulls began to nest as well. Several large colonies (>10,000 nests) exist on the lower Great Lakes and there is little suitable nesting habitat left. This makes a change to roof-nesting even more likely.

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Early Nesting by House Finches in Ontario

by
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The breeding season of the House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) commences in late February to late April from the southern to the northern extreme of the species' range (Harrison 1978). In Ontario, the majority of nesting activities take place in May and June. Here, I report on early nesting, in March, by Ontario House Finches and comment on the factors that may promote early nesting in this species.

On 19 March 1987, in a resi-

dential area of St. Catharines, Regional Municipality of Niagara, Ontario, I observed a male House Finch singing from eaves directly above a small Chinese juniper (*Juniperus chinensis*). Soon thereafter, a female finch emerged from the tree and the pair flew off. Suspecting a nesting site, I examined the tree closely and discovered a complete nest positioned about 1.4m from the ground. The cup-shaped nest was composed of coarse grasses and rootlets, its rim

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