

Notes

Great Black-backed Gull Nesting in Hamilton Harbour

by

Kevin A. McLaughlin

The Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) is a species which is slowly increasing its range on the Great Lakes. Recent expansion has been detailed on Lake Huron, on both the Ontario and Michigan sides (Ewins et al. 1992). Peck and James (1994) summarize 32 breeding records for Ontario, involving nine provincial regions, with new nest sites in the past decade in the following Counties / Regional Municipalities / Districts: Bruce (1988-9), Durham (1981), Haldimand-Norfolk (1991), Manitoulin (1991), Prince Edward (1986), and Stormont (1988).

The purpose of this note is to document the first nesting of the Great Black-backed Gull for Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Municipality.

Hamilton Harbour is located at the extreme western end of Lake Ontario. Two small man-made islands are located in the northeast corner of the harbour. They are known locally as the Hydro Islands, and are also referred to as Neare and Farre Islands. Both are significant sites for nesting colonial waterbirds (Dobos et al. 1988).

On 16 April 1995, along with Christine Bishop, Bob Curry and Bill Lamond, I was observing waterfowl from the end of Allview

Avenue in Burlington, overlooking Hamilton Harbour. The birds were in the water around Farre Island, which was home to a colony of Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), Black-crowned Night-Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) and Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*). During this observation, we noted the presence of several adult Great Black-backed Gulls on Neare Island, which, like Farre Island, is made up predominantly of large rocks, cobble, and gravel, and is equally suited to breeding waterbirds. We speculated, as others have in the past, on the overdue first nesting of the species in the Hamilton area.

On 4 June 1995, viewing from the edge of Eastport Drive, I was intrigued to find two pairs of adult Great Black-backed Gulls on Neare Island, one of the pairs engaged in nuptial display (i.e. upward bill pointing).

Returning to the site on 10 June 1995, I found only one pair of adults, which was located on the central part of the island. While viewing the birds, I was surprised when suddenly a downy chick popped up from between the rocks, and waddled over to one adult,

begging food. No feeding took place at this time. However, I returned later and observed an adult carrying in and feeding the chick what appeared to be the remains of a European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*).

The adults were seen by several observers during the following weeks, attending to the chick, which eventually fledged. I last observed the juvenile on 29 July, as it flew about the island with the adults.

This successful nesting of the Great Black-backed Gull represents the first breeding record for Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Municipality. Observers are encouraged to continue to watch for future nesting involving this species, particularly in suitable southwestern sites on the north shores of Lakes Ontario and Erie.

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An Unusual Nesting of the American Robin

by

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The American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) is one of the most common and widespread breeding birds in Ontario. Indeed, during the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project it was found in 86 per cent of the 137 blocks in the province, including 98 per cent of the 1824 atlas squares of southern Ontario. It was confirmed in 89 per cent of these atlas squares. Of the regular southern Ontario breeding birds, only the European Starling (*Sturnus*

vulgaris), at 90 per cent, had a greater rate of confirmed breeding (Cadman et al. 1987).

On 15 April 1989, I was birding from my car at the south end of Lakeshore Road, in Rondeau Provincial Park. I noted some movement at the base of a small tree near the road, and identified the source of the movement to be an American Robin. At first, I believed it to be gathering nesting material, until I realized that it was