

## HERRING GULLS AT MARTHA'S VINEYARD - SUMMER 1961

By Mabel Gillespie

(The following is a personal letter, not originally intended for publication, but Mrs. Gillespie kindly consented to have it published. She plans to write an enlarged paper on Herring Gulls which will appear soon. -Ed.)

According to my custom of recent years I am spending several months at my summer home at East Chop on Martha's Vineyard Island. Grace Meloney and I, along with any assistants we could muster, have been actively banding in the seabird colonies. Our totals to date include over 1400 Herring Gulls, some 50 Great Black-backed Gulls, and less than 50 each of Common and Least Terns, as well as the songbirds we net or trap.

Much to our surprise the fledgling gulls were well advanced at an early date. We had supposed that the general lateness of the season would have delayed their nesting dates. We may have missed an appreciable number for this reason. I think we pretty well covered the Lobsterville dunes, and the Cape Poge Elbow, a sandy peninsula. We have not been to Little Neck near Cape Poge, nor to Muskeget, much to our disappointment.

On the Elbow I think the gulls must be reaching the saturation point. I have never seen Herring Gulls so closely crowded together. I feel that nature will shortly deal with such a population explosion, and it will be interesting to note developments in coming years.

Earlier I wrote to Dr. Wetherbee, asking what use was to be made of poison this season. He answered that no poison would be used. I also asked for information about the teams of college students which were reported (N.Y. Herald Tribune, July 16) as dyeing Herring Gulls along the Eastern New England Coast, using a given color for each nesting locality. He knew nothing about this. Fish & Wildlife certainly believes in not letting its right hand know what its left hand is doing! I will not enlarge on the obvious fact that cooperation with banders might work greatly to the advantage of all concerned.

Eventually we tracked down the team of three working on the Vineyard. They were camping at the Edgartown Pumping Station: a Stanford freshman (♂) in a pup tent, and two sophmores of eastern colleges (♀) in a larger tent. We left a note under the pillow of a sleeping bag.

A few days later the three hunted us up. They are delightful and eager young people carrying on a strenuous program. They were eager to hear all we could tell them, and more than once claimed that our reports or suggestions were of value. (See last sentence of fourth paragraph above!)

This work is sponsored by Fish & Wildlife and Massachusetts Audubon, with a grant from the former. The protection of Logan Airport (in Boston)

is given as the basic reason for the work. The idea is to watch the gulls at the airport and find out, from the dye color, where they have been breeding. (Gulls have not yet, to my knowledge, been a problem there, but still, the airport is almost in the middle of Boston Harbor, and there must be gulls about.) Then, if the majority seem to be coming from any particular area, steps will presumably be taken. What steps, is anyone's guess.

Well, it's a novel way of spending the taxpayer's money, and at least poison isn't being spread wholesale over a vacationland at the moment. Maybe something will be learned. I should add that only adult gulls are being dyed. They are caught by tricky net and trap devices. The artificial color invites attacks from the normal gull population, so that the experimental birds are driven away from their colonies; in which cases, if they are fortunate enough to survive, they won't prove anything but will only confuse the records.

One part of the program is for a cooperator to sit and watch a dump for hours. And while mentioning unsavory subjects, I might note that we discovered something new about the Herring Gull diet. As a rule, young Herring Gulls, belonging to a tough breed, are not enough disturbed by banding to part with portions of previous meals, as do Laughing Gulls and assorted Herons. However, one young gull upchucked forty (40) Japanese beetles.

Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, Mass.

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LINCOLN'S SPARROWS Mrs. Marie Dumont, of Pequannock, N. J., writes:  
AT PEQUANNOCK, N.J. "I am interested to find out whether other banders have had the same experience I have, with the Lincoln's Sparrow. Going back over our banding records for the past 20 years - I have been banding since 1932 - I find that in 1940 we banded 5 in May; in 1941, one in October; ditto for 1942; then in 1943, 3 in May and so on until 1946 when none showed up at all. But in December 1947 we had one; in January and June 1948, one each; then none for the next three years. Then one in September of 1952; none at all in '53, '54 and '55. In 1956 we banded 5 in May and one each in July and September, a total of 7; then none until this June (1961), the 27th to be exact, when I trapped and banded one Lincoln's Sparrow."

(By way of comparison, in Montclair, N. J., your Editor banded two Lincoln's Sparrows in May, 1952 and one in September 1952; one in May 1953, 3 in May 1954, and one in September 1954. - Ed.)

## 1962 ANNUAL MEETING

Plan now to attend EBBA's 1962 Annual Meeting the week after Easter -- Friday evening, Saturday and Sunday April 27, 28, and 29 -- probably at Cape May, New Jersey. Exchanging bird and banding information with your fellow banders at one of these meetings is a most interesting experience -- one that can make your activities infinitely more productive and satisfying.