

self-interest would suggest that the A.O.U. and other organizations do all they can to help such biologists and make them aware of international work. A.O.U. members might also consider sponsoring subscriptions.

A third direction is the establishment of Biological Documentation Centers in Latin America to collect and circulate scientific literature, with special emphasis on the gray literature. The first of these, supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has been established by our university. When fully operational it will conduct computerized literature searches and copy publications for the personal use of neotropical biologists. Our unpublished holdings will be available to biologists outside the region who wish to know what work has been done but not published by local workers.

We hope that eventually a network of such centers

will operate, providing regional access and coverage. In the meantime, we hope that ornithologists both within and outside the Neotropics will make available reprints and unpublished reports so that our coverage can be as complete as possible.

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Learning to Live with Nature: A Commendable Philosophy with Practical Limitations

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The recent review (Southern 1987) of our report "The Ring-billed Gull in Ontario: a review of a new problem species" (Blokpoel and Tessier 1986) is so unbalanced that it warrants some comments. As employees of the Ontario Region of the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS), the agency that administers the Migratory Birds Convention (MBC) Act in Canada, we have had to deal with complaints about nuisance and damage by the burgeoning numbers of Ring-billed Gulls in Ontario. At one point the Association of Ontario Municipalities adopted a resolution that called for the removal of the Ring-billed Gull from the list of species protected under the MBC Act. Despite substantial political support for the resolution, CWS was able to fend off this attack on the Ring-billed Gull. Nevertheless, the resolution showed that many people in Ontario had very serious concerns about the growing numbers of Ring-billed Gulls. CWS therefore published two information pamphlets (Blokpoel 1983, 1984) and the report (Blokpoel and Tessier 1986) to provide more detailed background about the population explosion, the problems caused by it, and the various methods that could be used to reduce those problems.

The strong bias in Southern's review apparently stems from his philosophy as stated at the end of his review: "It is time that we stop thinking in terms of conquest of nature instead of considering ourselves

part of nature. Our fight against nature is, in many ways, a war against ourselves." This is a commendable approach, but it cannot be pushed to the extreme. Humans have irreparably changed the face of North America, and in many areas there is little original nature left. Occasionally a species adapts exceedingly well to a disturbed environment, becomes superabundant, and may cause problems. This is the case with the Ring-billed Gull in southern Ontario. In such situations it makes little sense to insist that we "stop conquering nature," especially when humans are largely responsible for the present superabundance. When a property owner complains about the smell, noise, and defecations of thousands of gulls nesting on his land, or when a desperate farmer is on the phone reporting gulls feeding on his tomatoes, it is counterproductive to suggest to them "to learn to live with nature." The affected people will lose confidence in government and may try to control the gulls illegally.

In Ontario, CWS uses the following rule with respect to complaints about problem birds: The problem is that of the affected landowner, and it is up to the landowner to carry out a control program. The landowner needs a permit from CWS if the control operations take place at a nesting colony. If the landowner wants to scare problem birds from areas outside a nesting colony, a permit is required only if firearms or aircraft are used. The roles of CWS are to evaluate requests for permits and to issue such permits where warranted, to advise affected land owners, to coordinate control operations where needed, to evaluate

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effectiveness and efficiency of control operations, and to communicate with the public.

We wrote our report for the general public, i.e. tax-paying citizens, many of whom either like or dislike the numerous Ring-billed Gulls in their environment. We described methods used in Ontario for local gull control and explained that nonlethal local gull control often shifts a problem rather than eliminating it. Displaced gulls can and do start problems elsewhere. We therefore discussed the possibility of overall population reduction and emphasized the many difficulties such a program would engender even if there were a documented need. We recommended "that an effort be made to determine the need for and feasibility of an on-going, biologically sound, socially acceptable, internationally co-ordinated program to reduce the Ring-billed Gull population in the Great Lakes area to an acceptable level." More specifically we made the following recommendations: "1. Obtain better documentation about the nature, extent, and costs of gull problems in aviation, public health, agriculture, industry, recreation, and other spheres of human activity. 2. Obtain better documentation on the effects of Ring-billed Gulls on other bird species. 3. Obtain information about the biology of Ring-billed Gulls that is relevant to the gull problems and develop a predictive population model for the Great Lakes area. 4. Develop reasonably humane techniques (a) to physically exclude or scare Ring-billed Gulls away from areas where they are not wanted, and (b) to reduce their reproductive success. 5. Propose to the USA a joint committee to deal with gull problems on both sides of the border. 6. Carry out a public information exchange program regarding the gull problems."

Our report was up-to-date through 1984. In the three following years, the need for rangewide population control has not been demonstrated. The results of questionnaire surveys of Ontario farmers indicated no significant crop depredation in 1985 and 1986, and the survey was not repeated in 1987 (C. Baldwin pers. comm.). In 1985 Ring-bills ate cherries in several orchards in the Niagara Peninsula of Ontario, but in 1986 and 1987 there were no reports of significant cherry depredation by gulls (Blokpoel and Struger in press). A study of earthworm depredation by Ring-bills in southern Ontario in 1985 showed that the gulls had no significant impact on earthworm populations (A. D. Tomlin pers. comm.). CWS has not received further complaints about pollution of water reservoirs and small lakes due to roosting gulls. At Ontario airports gull problems were contained by scaring or shooting gulls, or both, under Airport Permits issued by CWS. Complaints about Ring-billed Gull nuisance have increased in New York state (J. Forbès pers. comm.) and Michigan (D. Parr pers.

comm.), but there appears to be no need for statewide control operations.

The main gull problems in Ontario during 1985-1987 were caused by Ring-bill colonies at urban/industrial sites where the nesting birds interfered with day-to-day operations. Under CWS permits, the affected landowners of eight sites were allowed to reduce or eliminate Ring-bill colonies on their properties. Methods used included: installation of gull enclosures, gull scaring, collection of gull eggs, and habitat manipulation (Blokpoel and Tessier in press). We expect that the urbanized Ring-billed Gull will continue to cause problems at urban/industrial sites in southern Ontario. The fact that this adaptable species was found nesting on a roof during 1985-1987 near Owen Sound, Lake Huron (Blokpoel and Smith in press), and that this new behavior may spread, is an additional concern.

Further to Southern's review: He is entitled to his opinions that we are on a "witch-hunt," describing "an imminent plague," and "fabricating a plan for saving the world from this threat." Readers of *The Auk* are entitled to form their own opinions, and we suggest they do so by reading our report themselves.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Three other unsolicited comments on Southern's review were received. All made the same basic points. Current policy and space limitation preclude their publication.