

## Response to H. Blokpoel and G. D. Tessier

WILLIAM E. SOUTHERN<sup>1</sup>

Blokpoel and Tessier (1988) refer to my review (Southern 1987) as unbalanced. Their commentary, based on my closing statement, inaccurately implies that I oppose all control efforts directed at Ring-billed Gulls. They ignore completely the specific criticisms I directed at their unsupported claims, omissions, and exaggerations. The point of my review was that Blokpoel and Tessier (1986) exaggerated the problem by suggesting that the Ring-billed Gull population was still exploding and that there was no indication natural controls would limit population growth and range expansion. I viewed their actions as comparable to scare tactics that could convince the public there was a problem for which Blokpoel and Tessier had the solution. I specifically stated that I considered control measures justified in cases where evidence supported such action. The failure of their commentary to address any of the substantive issues I raised causes me to conclude they also recognize them to be valid criticisms.

Since publication of my review nothing has occurred to change my opinion about the impression the inaccuracies in their report may have on readers, particularly those not knowledgeable about gull biology. Fortunately, the increased level of concern they have caused about a rapidly exploding Ring-billed Gull population may be short-lived. Resource managers and gull biologists in the Great Lakes region recognize that the Ring-billed Gull population peaked several years ago and that population growth now is limited by space and energetics. A symposium on the changing populations of Great Lakes colonial waterbirds was held at the September 1987 annual meeting of the Colonial Waterbird Society in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Both Hans Blokpoel and I presented papers, and the organizers expected a major debate about Ring-billed Gull population dynamics. In the lead paper I described the effects of changing water levels on Ring-billed Gull populations since 1860 and what is happening during the record high water levels of the 1980's. The consensus among those present was that the Ring-billed Gull population has stabilized on the

Great Lakes and that in some areas it has actually declined. Inundation of island nesting sites by high water, shortages of forage fishes caused by introduced salmon, and landfill closures were listed as factors possibly responsible for the reported changes.

Except in cases where gull colonies are close to human habitations or situated on sensitive industrial sites where large numbers of birds may cause problems, there is no evidence to justify intensive gull control. Where gulls and people are in conflict, local control in the form of scare tactics or deterrents (e.g. monofilament line barriers) are adequate methods to solve the problem. The State of Michigan has concluded that statewide gull control is unnecessary. With adequate scrutiny it should be possible to determine when permits to scare or kill gulls should be issued. Simply issuing a permit whenever one is requested is not proper management of a species.

Blokpoel and Tessier mention the Canadian Wildlife Service "was able to fend off an attack on the Ring-billed Gull" that involved attempts to have it removed from the list of species protected by the Migratory Birds Convention. It is true that many individuals within CWS opposed such action, but Blokpoel was not one of them during discussions with me and at a public meeting in Toronto sponsored by the Animal Protection Association of Canada. Perhaps the tone of Blokpoel and Tessier's commentary indicates that a consensus of opinion has been reached within CWS that does not advocate rangewide control of Ring-billed Gulls. I hope my presumption is correct.

## LITERATURE CITED

- BLOKPOEL, H., & G. D. TESSIER. 1986. The Ring-billed Gull in Ontario: a review of a new problem species. *Can. Wildl. Serv. Occas. Pap.* 57.
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- SOUTHERN, W. E. 1987. [Review of *The Ring-billed Gull in Ontario: a review of a new problem species*. H. Blokpoel and G. D. Tessier. 1986. *Can. Wildl. Serv. Occas. Pap.* 57.] *Auk* 104: 359-361.

<sup>1</sup>Department of Biological Sciences, Northern Illinois University, Dekalb, Illinois 60115 USA.

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