

## NESTING OF THE BONAPARTE GULL IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

WITH ONE ILLUSTRATION

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The Bonaparte Gull (*Larus philadelphia*) has been definitely recorded as nesting at Atlin Lake in extreme northwestern British Columbia (Brooks and Swarth, Pac. Coast Avifauna No. 17, 1925, p. 28). These authors refer also to reported nesting colonies at Fort St. James and at Moorehead Lake in the Cariboo region, the latter reference being based on evidence submitted by local residents and observations, by the senior author, of small flocks of adult Bonaparte Gulls flying directly toward this lake after fishing in lakes some twelve miles to the southwest. This was in July, 1901. Apparently these are the only references in literature to the species nesting in British Columbia. Consequently the discovery on June 24, 1935, of a small nesting colony at Bridge Lake in the Cariboo region is considered of sufficient interest to place on record.

The location and topography of Bridge Lake is set forth in an article describing a Herring Gull colony at that place. (See Munro, Condor, 37, 1935, pp. 214-215.) It was following a visit to this Herring Gull colony, and while returning to shore, that the presence of Bonaparte Gulls was detected through seeing a single individual of this species fly toward a small wooded island situated about half way between the gull rock and the mainland. While I was proceeding toward this island and was distant from it about 150 yards, two adult Bonaparte Gulls flew toward the boat, and after circling over, and swooping down several times, alighted on the water alongside. These were photographed at a distance of twelve feet. The two birds followed the boat with short flights, descending on the water between times, and became increasingly excited as the wooded shores were neared. The reason became apparent when two downy young were discovered swimming in and out among the flooded brush along the shore. These were captured without difficulty and proved to be approximately a week old, with sheathed primaries showing about three-quarters of an inch beyond the down.

Meanwhile the two adults, sometimes accompanied by a third, either circled overhead or stood on a dead branch of a birch tree which extended over the water from a green background of alder and willow foliage. The island is approximately an acre in extent, thickly wooded with alder, birch, willow, dogwood, and, rising above them, tall, slim Englemann spruce and Douglas fir. The lake level being abnormally high, only two to five feet of the steep, rocky shore showed above water and this shore line was overhung by an all but impenetrable tangle of deciduous growth, as shown in accompanying photograph (fig. 13). Here and there were prostrate conifers still imbedded at the roots while their crowns rested in the lake.

A careful survey of all the trees along the shore revealed one nest, on a stout branch close to the trunk and twenty feet above the base of a sixty foot spruce growing at the water's edge. This proved to be an old nest and in the possession of a pair of Tree Swallows. Four eggs of this latter species occupied a slight depression lined with gull feathers at one side of the nest.

In the interior of the island fallen trees were piled everywhere in great confusion, some on the ground, others supported at various angles by the standing timber. The interstices were grown up with thickets of wild gooseberry and other shrubs. Near the island's center a small space clear of standing timber permitted a clear view of the surrounding trees, and with this vantage point as a base a survey of the island

was conducted. Here two Bonaparte Gulls, standing on separate trees and calling continuously with the characteristic twanging note, attracted others which kept passing back and forth, sometimes to alight momentarily in one or another of the near-by trees. At one time six individuals were in sight and this number apparently represented the entire colony.



Fig. 13. Adult Bonaparte Gulls on a dead limb of a tree at Bridge Lake, Cariboo region, British Columbia; June 24, 1935.

The conifers which were thought to be the most probable sites for nests were scrutinized carefully, but the gulls showed no increase of excitement upon my approaching any particular tree. Most of the conifers were in a dying condition, with accumulations of broken twigs both on the dead branches and among the live foliage. Many such deposits resembled closely the old nest previously described. Thus the finding of nests, if such were present, presented a problem which I was unable to solve in the time available.

Moreover, the season being so far advanced, it seemed unlikely that eggs or young would be still in the nest, and the possibility of the young having been taken by Herring Gulls nesting on a near-by island was considered. This was suggested after seeing eight Herring Gulls attacked and driven off by the Bonaparte Gulls.

There is reason to believe that Bonaparte Gulls nest also on Montana Lake, a small lake in thickly wooded country only a short distance from Bridge Lake. Reports by local residents that a pair of small black-headed gulls with young were seen on Montana Lake during several successive summers are believed to be reliable.

*Okanagan Landing, B. C., September 25, 1935.*