

served and photographed from inside a car without creating major disturbance to the nesting gulls. The gulls proved very reluctant to leave their nests and were always quick to return if initially startled.

How often Commonwealth Edison employees went to the colony dike is unknown. It is, however, off limits to individuals engaged in recreational activities in the eastern portion of the cooling lake. This part of the lake is managed by the Illinois Department of Conservation as the Heidecke Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area next to Goose Lake Prairie State Park. Because Heidecke Lake is a well-known location, I have referred to this Ring-billed Gull colony as the Heidecke Lake colony, although the Collins Station colony would be more accurate.

Beginning in late April and ending in early July, I conducted nest counts at the Heidecke Lake colony on seven dates and took egg tallies on five of these same dates. Individual nest totals listed herein are also broken down into the north and south slope subtotals as follows: 9 nests (1N,8S) 23 April; 66 nests (7N,59S) 30 April; 154 nests (41N/113S) 13 May; 208 nests (48N/160S) 24 May; 162 nests (55N/107S) 9 June; 51 nests (17/34S) 22 June; 2 nests (0N/2S) 6 July.

While some of the Ring-billed Gull nests were very bulky, most were modest-sized accumulations of dried weedy stalks with a few white feathers. Other materials such as plastic and corn husks were also utilized in nest building. The somewhat untidy appearance and irregular shape of most nests were no doubt dictated in part by the physical characteristics of the rocky niches selected for nest building. A few eggs were laid in scrape sites with little or no surrounding nest material.

Nests in which the contents could be seen contained one to three eggs, except for two nests noted 24 May which contained four eggs each. The oval-shaped eggs were olive or greenish white and covered with irregular brown and gray overlaid blotches.

Egg count totals and corresponding clutch size averages on five dates were as follows:

17 eggs (9 nests), 23 April = avg. 1.8 eggs/nest

121 eggs (61 nests), 30 April = avg. 1.9 eggs/nest



249 eggs (122 nests), 13 May = avg. 2.0 eggs/nest

84 eggs (49 nests), 22 June = avg. 1.7 eggs/nest

3 eggs (2 nests), 6 July = avg. 1.5 eggs/nest

While I counted hundreds of eggs during my visits to the Heidecke Lake colony, I observed evidence of young on only four occasions. The one and only live young I saw out of a nest was observed 9 June. This

downy gray chick appeared from beneath an adult that was sitting on the drive atop the dike. On 22 June, I found a featherless chick carcass out of its nest, as well as many scattered nests and broken eggs. In one nest containing two eggs, the bill of a young bird was seen moving about through a pierced hole in one egg. Finally, the one and only chick I observed in a nest was on 22 June.

I am guessing that the declining number of active Ring-billed nests counted after a peak of 208 on 24 May was not due to desertion because the young had fledged. Rather,

*Devastating nest predation at the Heidecke Lake Ring-billed Gull colony prevent even a single young to survive. 22 June 1993. Photo by Joe B. Milosevich.*

*Ring-billed Gull nest with three eggs at Dresden Nuclear Plant cooling lake, Will County. 15 May 1993. Photo by Joe B. Milosevich.*



these declining tallies instead probably reflected the catastrophic impact of repeated predator disturbances at the colony. Egg production and clutch sizes experienced similar declines after peaking in May. By 6 July, only two nests with eggs and a

Meadowlark