



*Ring-billed Gull colony at Dresden Nuclear Plant cooling lake near Lorenzo, Will County. 15 May 1993.
Photo by Joe B. Milosevich.*

mere handful of Ring-billed Gulls could even be found on the colony dike.

Will County

On 30 April 1993, I observed approximately 50 Ring-billed Gulls on the center dike of the Dresden Nuclear Plant cooling lake near Lorenzo in southwestern Will County. Some of these gulls appeared to be paired and defending territory. In fact, on 5 May, a few gulls were horizontally positioned on the embankment as though they might have been sitting on nests. Unfortunately, in both instances, the distant viewing conditions did not permit confirmation of breeding.

I was given special permission by Commonwealth Edison for on-site entry to the Will County portion of the cooling lake on 15 May. The center dike was approximately 1.7 miles long and connected to the shoreline only at its western end along County Line Road. I walked about 1.5 miles before reaching the colony site, which was near the dike's circular turnaround tip.

The colony site was about 80

yards long and 20 feet wide (the width of the top of the dike). I found 20 nests; 16 contained eggs, four had none. The exact egg/nest count was as follows: one egg (two nests), two eggs (six nests), and three eggs (eight nests). In a cluster of seven nests near the middle of the colony, two were as close as 1 foot apart, but most were typically 3 or more feet apart. Nests located on the east/west fringes of the colony were more dispersed. The nests were all built in low, scattered vegetation (common cinquefoil, tall goldenrod, yellow sweet clover) atop the dike. Most nests were neat circular constructions largely composed of finer materials, which gave them a soft, somewhat spongy appearance. Larger stems and stalks were also used in nest building. The gulls quickly returned to these nests after I departed the immediate area.

I decided to make only one return visit late in the nesting season to minimize disturbance. The waist-high vegetation I encountered at the colony site made observations very difficult on 1 July. A brief, incomplete search produced five nests with eggs. Four contained one egg each

and one nest had two eggs. Well-worn paths of matted-down vegetation leading to the dike's rocky shoreline were found near the middle of the colony. I also observed three fledged young swimming away from the dike's southern shoreline. A pair of small young was carefully monitored by a swirling group of 20 to 25 Ring-bills which hovered over the young birds as they moved farther out onto the lake. A single, slightly larger young bird was protected by a pair of dive-bombing adults.

My limited observations made it difficult to evaluate the breeding success of the colony. Some eggs found on 1 July in the water-soaked nests were cracked, broken, or punctured. These eggs suggested possible predation, egg infertility, nest abandonment, or even late (second) nestings. No larger juvenile-plumaged Ring-bills were observed on 1 July.



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