

Yet, in 1995, the Lake Calumet gull colony population dropped to an all-time 1990s low of 4,000 to 5,000 nests. That was the same year the Waukegan colony originated, and also when the Grundy/Will colony had the highest nesting totals. Perhaps the Lake Calumet birds were displaced to these other sites.

The Waukegan colony caused significant problems for the city and nearby businesses. Low-flying gulls and wandering juveniles regularly collided with cars.

At the nearby public beach, gulls congregated in large masses. When flushed into flight by humans, the gulls often deposited excrement on the beach and into the water. Unsafe levels of bacteria believed to be caused by the gulls' excrement was blamed for the record number of days the Waukegan beach was closed during the summer of 1997 (fide Chicago Tribune). Thin filament wire has been placed on the sand mound in the middle of the colony to prevent the gulls from landing and considering using the dune for nesting.

In 1997, an estimated 16,500 Ring-billed Gull nests were found in the southwestern Lake Michigan basin (Lake Calumet 10,000+; north-west Indiana about 5,000; Waukegan about 1,500; Will/Grundy counties none). This corresponds to 33,000 breeding adults present during the onset of nesting. A significant number of non-breeders would have been present as well. A conservative estimate from this region would be at least 5,000 non-breeders (the vast majority are in subadult, 2nd year plumage).

The total Ring-billed population prior to fledging was estimated at 38,000 for 1997. This number represents about 1 percent of the world's Ring-billed population based on 1993 numbers (Ryder 1993).

The Ring-billed population is poised for a significant population growth in the near future. Using estimates based on Ryder (1993), we will have an estimate of 48,000 gulls returning in 1998 with the potential to breed. This includes almost 35,000



These two Ring-billed Gulls, approximately 15 days old, have left the confines of the colony and now begin life on their own. Photo taken on 11 July 1997 at the Waukegan colony, Lake Co. by Eric Walters.

adults (including the 5,000 subadults now mature) and 13,000 young birds. This number represents a one-year 15 percent growth rate.

While the Ring-billed hasn't nested south of the Great Lakes in the Midwest until the Heidecke Lake/Dresden Lake locations, the expected future population explosion would appear to be the factor that could create new colonies to the south.

The Waukegan colony has established a foothold in the area and appears to be growing rapidly. What the effects of this population or the predicted future explosion of numbers will have on humans will likely become the subject of much interest. Until then, the lower Lake Michigan will continue to offer itself as an excellent summer home for the Ring-billed Gull.

Acknowledgments

I thank Ken Brock, John Castrale, Walter Marcisz, and Joe Milosevich for their comments.

Literature Cited

Blokpoel, H. and G. D. Tessier. 1986. The Ring-billed Gull in Ontario: a review of a new problem species. *Can. Wildl. Serv. Occas. Pap.* 57:1-34.

Emlen, J.T., D.E. Miller, R.M. Evans and D.H. Thompson. 1966. Predator-induced parental neglect in a Ring-billed Gull colony. *Auk* 83:677-679.

Kleen, Vernon. 1996. "Field Notes, 1995 Breeding Season Report." *Meadowlark* 5:31. Illinois Ornithological Society.

Milosevich, Joe B. 1994. "A Tale of Two Colonies." *Meadowlark* 3:7-9. Illinois Ornithological Society.

Ryder, J.P. 1993. "Ring-billed Gull." *The Birds of North America*, #33. The Academy of Natural Sciences. Philadelphia.

Southern, W.E. and L.K. Southern. 1981. Colony census results as indicators of pre-hatching perturbations. *Colon. Waterbirds* 4:143-149.

Vermeer, K. 1970. Breeding Biology of California and Ring-billed Gulls: a study of ecological adaptation to the inland habitat. *Can. Wildl. Serv. Rep. Serv.* 12:1-52.

Eric Walters

7714 N. Marshfield Avenue, #2
Chicago, IL 60626

Author's Note: *The property owners of the Waukegan colony site filled the area with fishing wire to keep the birds from nesting in 1998. However, the gulls appropriated an area about 75 yards west of the original site, where they nested in 1998. On 31 May 1998, there were 850 nests on the site. The first sign of fledged young (13 total) was on 31 May 1998. On 3 July 1998, there were 1,665 adults and 325 juveniles present. In 1999 the property owners used various methods to deter gulls from breeding. As of this writing the methods have been successful.*