

Nesting Ring-billed Gulls On a Rooftop in Des Plaines, Illinois, With Comments on Similar Occurrences in the Eastern United States and England

by Alan Anderson

On Friday 29 June 2001, Vern Kleen, then Avian Ecologist for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, notified me that he had received a call from a building manager in Des Plaines, not far from where I lived, regarding roughly 1,500 gulls nesting on a roof. Kleen hadn't heard of any gulls nesting in this region before (outside of well-known colonies at Lake Calumet, Cook County, Illinois, and along the Lake Michigan lakefront), and he wanted additional information as well as confirmation of the report. The people who reported the colony said it was causing many problems including "wash" on car windows and on the parking lot, and young "all over the place." They wanted the gulls and nests removed or destroyed.

I called local Chicago Audubon Society Hotline expert Doris Johanson, who also lives in Des Plaines, and we went to the site on Sunday, 1 July. (Just a bit earlier in the summer, Johanson received a phone call on the CAS Hotline from someone living near 18th and Halsted in Chicago, who told her "a young gull had fallen out of a nest on their flat-top roof onto the ground." So quite possibly, gulls are nesting on other Chicago-area flat-top roofs, and even in residential areas, albeit in smaller numbers.)

When we arrived, we were a bit surprised to see a large number of Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*), both adults and juveniles, in the area. Many gulls feed on garbage in the numerous parking lots of shopping centers in Des Plaines, and many rest and feed at Lake Opeka and other parks, preserves, wetlands, and places in Des Plaines, but there had been no indication of any gulls nesting in the area. In the evening, a parade of local gulls heads out of the area to spend the night at the lakefront, but no one knew that many were staying to nest.

A large business park is not your usual birding hot spot, especially for breeding birds. Doris Johanson and I observed the gulls for several hours. Young gulls wandered in and around a retention pond at the corner



An adult Ring-billed Gull stands watch atop a roof on a building in Des Plaines, Illinois, (Cook County), where a colony was confirmed breeding the summer of 2001. Photo taken 1 July 2001 by Alan Anderson.

of Howard and Mt. Prospect Avenues (Fig. 1). At the pond, with sloped gravel sides, and the area surrounding it, which had a small number of trees and few shrubs, we counted between 115 and 120 juvenile Ring-billed Gulls (Fig. 2). Most of them stayed in the water and as far away from us as they could get. Between 150 and 200 adult Ring-billed Gulls were also in and around the pond. Some of the juveniles were close to adult size, but many were smaller; a number of juveniles were only about two-thirds to three-quarters the size of the adults. One was a chick that seemed to have left the nest in the past day or two; it was less than one-half the size of an adult.

Where there are young gulls, you often find dead young gulls, and this was certainly the case here. Four juveniles were found dead along the shoulder of Mt. Prospect Road, most assuredly hit by cars, and another intact dead juvenile was found nearby (Fig. 3).

At times, a few gulls flew over the rooftops of nearby buildings; other times there were many more.