

At one time, we observed up to 500+ adults flying over the building north of the pond and up to 200+ adults flying over the smaller building east of the pond.

The property on which the gulls were nesting, 1905 Mt. Prospect Ave., in Des Plaines, was recently leased by Ciba Vision, for use as a new production unit. Building management was getting ready for the new occupant, and it was, as of that time, not fully occupied. The company wanted to be able to use it soon, and of course the nesting gulls would make it very messy when it was fully occupied. As it was, there was whitewash all over the parking lot, and upon further inspection, a few dead gulls (whole or parts) in the grass along the edge of the buildings, where they had most likely fallen.

As we went to get a closer look at one of the buildings, a guard, Wizard Marino, asked what we were doing. We told him, and he was more than happy to provide us with information about the gulls. He said earlier in the summer two people had been invited to look at the nests through hatches on the roof, but immediately after opening the hatches they were scared away as hundreds of the adult gulls flew at them. They closed the hatches very quickly without getting more detailed observations. "There are thousands of gulls on the roofs, and especially on the northernmost building," said Marino. "The adults push the young off the edge of the building when the chicks are ready to go."

On a number of subsequent visits to the site, additional juveniles were spotted, but not as many as on the 1 July visit. Possibly a number of juveniles had already left the nesting area and pond prior to our first visit. On 7 July, 75 to 80 young juvenile gulls were on or around the retention pond area (some were definitely recent additions from the rooftops, as they were quite young) and a few east of the building. By 29 July, there were 21 juvenile gulls around the pond, including nine that were unable to fly, as well as nine adults. A quick tour of the areas just adjacent to the buildings showed the remains of at least 10 juveniles, that most likely died as a result of their fall from the rooftop and subsequent injuries. On 30 July, Carol Nelson joined me at the site, and we observed the same nine juveniles that could not yet fly, as well as about 15 other older juvenile birds. On 4 August, six juveniles remained on or around the pond, with only one that appeared to be unable to fly on its own. When I visited the site 15 August, no gulls remained.

A few years ago, on one of my annual visits to the Ithaca, New York area, Bill Evans and I were talking about nesting Common Nighthawks (*Chordeiles minor*), and their apparent decline on the East Coast. One possible reason, he told me, was that in a number of locations, gulls were nesting on rooftops now, and



Figure 1. Doris Johanson looks at juvenile gulls resting on a retention pond at the corner of Howard and Mt. Prospect Avenues in Des Plaines, Illinois, which was adjacent to the buildings upon which Ring-billed Gulls nested. Photo taken 1 July 2001 by Alan Anderson.

competing for nesting locations. Another reason is the conversion of gravel roofs, which nighthawks prefer, to asphalt-type roofs, which nighthawks may not choose because the dark color of the asphalt increases surface temperatures and can harm the eggs and young (pers. comm. S. Bailey).

What does a rooftop provide that attracts gulls to breed there? Professor Dick Ferren of Berkshire Community College in Massachusetts said flat rooftops are predator-free islands. "The roof of a building, really, is a kind of island where gulls and other birds, are safe from terrestrial predators," said Ferren, an expert on birds in the state of Rhode Island.

An example of gulls nesting on "islands" comes from Chuck Westcott, former naturalist at Crabtree Nature Center in Palatine, Illinois (Cook County). During the Illinois Breeding Bird Atlas (1986-1991), Westcott, reported that one to three pairs of Herring Gulls attempted to nest on a small island at Crabtree Lake, a number of times during that period, but they were unsuccessful due to predation by raccoons. Although roofs afford protection from some predators, hazards still exist. The "move" from the nesting area to the ground can be hazardous to the precocial young of this species, as noted earlier. But the benefits probably outweigh the hazards.

Other Records of Rooftop Nesting

Although the Des Plaines rooftop nesting by Ring-billed Gulls appears to be the first such documented case in Illinois, nesting by gulls on rooftops has been documented in a number of other states in the United States, especially in New England, as well as in Canada and in Europe.

Requests for more information about other loca-