



Figure 4. Ring-billed Gulls nest in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on the roof of a building. Photo taken in summer of 1999 by Brian Boldt.

had 962 Ring-billed nests; the colony on this roof was destroyed by a disgruntled maintenance worker about halfway through fledging, with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fines following.

“I estimated the total population on the three warehouses in 1999 to be double that which I counted on the one, or greater than 2000 nests total. Scattered among these Ring-billed Gull nests were about two dozen Herring Gull nests. Although I haven’t checked it out personally, it seems this colony has re-materialized on the roof of a shipping center at Brown Deer Road and Highway 57 in the northern part of the county. There is a mall surrounded by several man-made ponds near here which has always harbored large numbers of gulls.”

Gulls also have been nesting on rooftops in Europe for a number of years. Steve Huggins, of Arlington Heights, Illinois said, “In the UK, gulls nesting on roofs is now commonplace.” Huggins is from a small town called Tewkesbury north of Gloucester. “Ten years ago, large gulls, mainly Lesser Black-backed (*Larus fuscus*) and Herring Gulls did not breed here, but now literally hundreds nest on rooftops, especially flat-roofed industrial units,” he said. “They seem to be increasingly breeding further inland each year. This year (2001) there apparently are Great Black-backed Gulls also breeding here for the first time. The reason might be area landfills.”

Besides gulls, other birds also nest on roof-tops: Common Nighthawks, Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*), and Least Terns (*Sterna antillarum*) among them. Eric Lundquist, of Mundelein, Illinois, noted that Least Terns nest on some buildings in the Tampa/St.

Petersburg area of Florida. Chicago bird expert Jim Landing also notes that “some terns are nesting on flat-topped roofs with pebbles in the American southeast. Since some of these species are endangered it has raised hopes of establishing a new type of habitat to keep the species alive.” Comins of Connecticut Audubon also noted that “On the other side of the pond (across the ocean), there have been increasing reports of Northern Fulmars nesting on buildings.”

Population Fluctuations

Gull populations are fluctuating throughout the country, increasing in some locations, declining in others. On the East Coast, some gull populations are declining. Steve Mirick, of Newmarket, New Hampshire, said: “There has been a general population decline of Herring Gulls in New Hampshire with clean-up and closures of landfills.”

Comins similarly noted, “With the closing of most of the East Coast landfills, and the decline of commercial fisheries, the sub-adult mortality rates should return to more natural levels. This would probably mean an end to the explosive expansion in gull numbers and perhaps an ensuing reduction in their numbers. Herring Gulls have seen a dramatic reduction in their nesting numbers from the Gulf of Maine to New Jersey in the last few years according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service numbers.”

In the Chicago region, both Ring-billed and Herring Gulls have increased greatly in the past two decades. Some of this is due to the landfills in the Calumet area, and elsewhere, providing an abundance of food for both species of adults — which have nested in fairly large numbers in the past two decades — and their young. Increased food sources, especially garbage on Lake Michigan beaches, around fast food restaurants, and in mall parking lots, and elsewhere, provide subsistence levels for many more gulls than in the past. Whereas gulls mainly have had their earliest and best success nesting in the Lake Calumet area, they now also nest along the Lake Michigan lakefront, specifically on the Waukegan lakefront and on Chicago breakwalls (Kleen 2000), and now on at least one industrial park building rooftop. Jim Landing thinks that overall, the area gull population should stabilize, or even decline, as some landfills in the Calumet area close.

Des Plaines Colony Future

What will become of the Des Plaines colony? Last year the owners of the building wanted to destroy or get rid of the colony during the nesting season.