



Ring-billed Gull at nest with two eggs, 13 May 1993, Heidecke Lake (Collins Station Cooling Lake), Grundy County. Photo by Joe B. Milosevich.

A Tale of Two Colonies

Ring-billed Gulls struggle against predation in Will and Grundy counties

by Joe B. Milosevich



During the summer of 1993, I confirmed the breeding of Ring-billed Gulls in Grundy and Will counties, both located on a dike with no public access in a Commonwealth Edison cooling lake that borders a major waterway. While photographing and observing the birds, I learned of the hardships this species encounters when struggling against predation.

Young Ring-billed Gull at Dresden Nuclear Plant cooling lake, Will County. This was one of three young observed on the lake near the newly established colony. 1 July 1993.

Photo by Joe B. Milosevich.

Grundy County

On 23 April 1993, I located nine Ring-billed Gull nests with eggs on a dike in the Commonwealth Edison Collins Station cooling lake in eastern Grundy County. While identification of this colony represented the first documented breeding record of its kind for Grundy County, it was nevertheless, much anticipated and made somewhat after the fact.

I had long suspected that gulls might be nesting at this location, but my past on-site observations had been primarily restricted to the winter months watching concentrations of waterfowl and gulls. However, with the cooperation of Commonwealth Edison, I recently had been able to gain access to the cooling lake more frequently, which eventually led to a chance meeting with an employee

who confirmed what I had suspected. "Seagulls" had, in fact, nested at Collins Station and the old nests placed among the rocky slopes of one of the dikes seemed to verify his claim. During our conversation, he also mentioned that the eggs in these nests had disappeared for some unknown reason. I was soon to realize just how prophetic his statement was.

The Ring-billed Gull colony was located behind the power plant on an east/west dike near the Illinois River. The dike was .9 mile long and 30 feet wide at the top. At the dike's western deadend was located a circular turnaround. It was near this more isolated tip that the colony was established. At its peak, the colony ran .1 mile along the north and south slopes of the embankment. The wide drive atop this dike went unused for nesting, and therefore provided a way in which the entire colony could be ob-