

Roof-nesting by Ring-billed Gulls and Herring Gulls in Ontario in 1989

by

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Roof-nesting by gulls has recently (1985-87) occurred in Ontario (Blokpoel and Smith 1988). After 1987, further roof-nesting by both Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) and Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) has occurred at a few more sites in Ontario. In this paper we report on several documented cases of roof-nesting in Ontario in 1989 (Table 1 and Figure 1), problems caused by the nesting gulls, and methods used to ameliorate the situation. All control operations took place under special permits issued by the Canadian Wildlife Service — Ontario Region.

Federal Building, Thunder Bay

By mid-May 1989 there were three Herring Gull nests present on the roof. The birds had built large nests and they attacked the people that maintain antennas which are installed on the roof. Nests and eggs were removed twice (in early

and late June) and no young were produced. As far as is known, 1989 was the first year that gulls nested on the Federal Building (C. D. Ball, Public Works Canada, Thunder Bay, pers. comm.).

There may have been roof-nesting by small numbers of gulls on other roofs in Thunder Bay in 1989, but no detailed reports are available. The local OMNR office has received sporadic complaints about gulls on roofs since about 1985 (R. Chessell, OMNR, Thunder Bay, pers. comm.).

Station Mall, Sault Ste. Marie

In spring 1989 only one Herring Gull nest was present. Nest and eggs were removed and destroyed. Herring Gulls have nested on this roof since at least 1983. In 1988 there were at least 50 nests present and the gulls caused fouling, noise, and disturbance. During the 1989 breeding season there was

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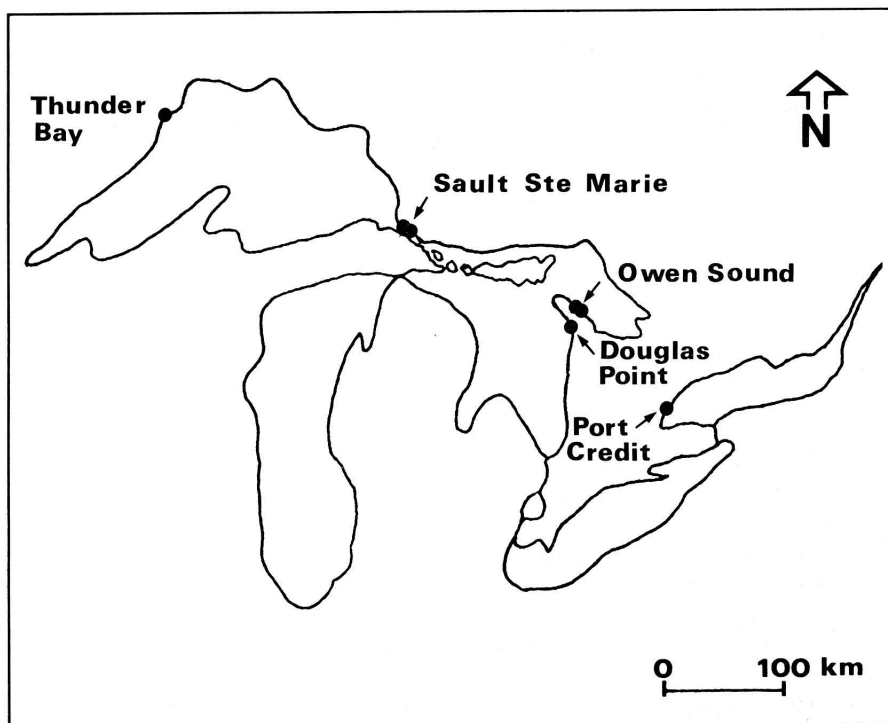


Figure 1: Locations of known roof-nesting by gulls in Ontario in 1989. See Table 1 for details.

construction activity on the roof and that probably caused many gulls to abandon the roof of the mall as a nesting site in 1989 (J. M. Willey, Algoma Central Properties, Sault Ste. Marie, pers. comm.).

Algoma Steel, Sault Ste. Marie

On 3 May 1989 a total of 354 Herring Gull nests were present on five roofs. Of these 354 nests, 331 had eggs and/or were attended by adults. The great majority (330 nests) were located on the Bar and Strip Building which overlooks the St. Mary's River. The second largest colony with 16 nests was on #2 Tube

Mill Building and the remaining three roofs had two to four nests each.

At the Bar and Strip Building most nests were located against large ventilation shafts, large pipelines, and wooden boardwalks; while only a few nests were "out in the open" (i.e., not adjacent to an object or structure). At the #2 Tube Mill roof, 12 of the 16 nests were located under, adjacent to, or within one metre of a metal cable guard. Of the other four nests, three were against the raised roof edge and only one nest was "out in the open".

Gulls have nested on the Bar and Strip Building since 1980, but it was not until 1989 that they nested in large numbers on Algoma Steel property. The nesting gulls caused increasing problems including noise, defecation, distraction of workers, fire hazard (their nests consisted of inflammable materials), damage to roofs (gulls dug into the soft top surface of the Bar and Strip Building), and young birds entering the Bar and Strip Building by falling through ventilation shafts.

At the Bar and Strip Mill close to 800 eggs were destroyed during 10 May–26 June in those nests that could be safely reached. On 12 June, 88 young birds were counted in the nests that could not be reached. At the #2 Tube Mill

Building, 46 eggs were destroyed during 10 May–12 June. There was no interference with nests on the other three roofs. On one of these, 12 chicks are known to have hatched (D. Crawford, Algoma Steel, Sault Ste. Marie, pers. comm.).

PPG Canada Inc., Owen Sound

On 26 May 1989, there were 148 Herring Gull nests and four Ring-billed Gull nests on the roof of the main plant. The roof where the gulls nested is flat but has parallel ridges spaced about 2m apart. The great majority of nests were located against these ridges.

The nesting gulls caused noise, smell, and fouling of the roof and adjacent areas. All nests and eggs were repeatedly removed until no further nesting took place. The

Table 1: Location and extent of known roof-nesting by gulls in Ontario in 1989.

Location	Number of Nests	
	Herring Gull	Ring-billed Gull
Federal Building Thunder Bay	3	0
Algoma Steel Sault Ste. Marie	344	0
Station Mall Sault Ste. Marie	1	0
PPG Canada Inc. Owen Sound	148	4
Former RCA Building Owen Sound	0	6
Ontario Hydro, BNPD Douglas Point	20	0
Ontario Hydro, Lakeview TGS Mississauga	3	127
Total	519	137

gulls were persistent in their nesting efforts and many gulls relaid. On 5 June 1989 there were 80 Herring Gull nests with 125 eggs, and on 1 July 1989 there were 85 Herring Gull nests with 120 eggs. No chicks hatched in 1989.

Roof-nesting by gulls at this site has occurred since the early 1970s, but only in the last three years have nesting efforts and nest rebuilding continued into mid-summer (A. J. Gibb, Plant Engineer, PPG Canada Inc., Owen Sound, pers. comm.).

Former RCA Building, Owen Sound

On 6 May 1989 there were six Ring-billed Gull nests with eggs. Eggs and nests were collected and destroyed. This colony site was first used by Ring-billed Gulls in 1985 when there were 20 nests with eggs which were all destroyed by a raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) that reached the roof via an emergency ladder (Blokpoel and Smith, 1988).

In 1986 raccoons again destroyed all (>100) nests. In 1987 there was no evidence of predation by raccoons. On 3 June 1987 there were two Herring Gull and 158 Ring-billed Gull nests. The nesting gulls created noise and smell, and fouled the roof with defecations and nesting materials. Nests and eggs were removed and destroyed.

On 20 June 1988 there were 21 Ring-billed Gull nests: 12 nests were empty, five nests had addled eggs and four nests had viable eggs. There were no live chicks, but one

dead chick was found. Raccoon scats were found on the roof and at the bottom of the exterior ladder, suggesting that raccoons were responsible for the observed nest failures. All eggs present on 20 June 1988 were collected and destroyed. In 1989 fresh raccoon scats were again present on the exterior ladder and the small number of nests in 1989 was most likely due to raccoon activities.

Ontario Hydro, Bruce Nuclear Power Development (BNPD), Douglas Point

Twenty Herring Gull nests were found on eight roofs on 8 May 1989. All nests contained from one to three eggs. Of the 20 nests, seven were on the roof of the Bruce Stores Building which is located approximately 2km from the Lake Huron shoreline. The birds cannot see water from any vantage point on the roof. Roughly half of the nests were located against the edge of the sill of the roof and rooftop structures, and the others were located in the open. Gulls had damaged the roof lining and covering in several places.

One nest containing three eggs was found on the roof of the Administration Building which is located 0.6km from Lake Huron. Three nests were constructed near the edge of the Generating Station, a roof overlooking the water intake channel. These contained two or three eggs. Eight additional nests containing eggs were constructed

on the roof of the pumping stations of Generating Station A along the water intake channel. One additional nest attended by adults was located on a nearby building.

No gull control programs were implemented in 1989. The nests and eggs were not removed, and it is presumed that young successfully hatched. Herring Gulls have nested on roofs at BNPD since at least 1985. During 1986-88 eggs have been collected and destroyed under CWS permit, but the gulls have not yet given up on nesting on the roofs of the BNPD complex. In fact, rooftop nesting at BNPD has become more widespread over the last two years.

Ontario Hydro, Lakeview Thermal Generating Station, Mississauga

On 17 May 1989 there were three attended Herring Gull nests, one on each of Pumphouses 1, 2, and 3, as well as 127 Ring-billed Gull nests with eggs on Pumphouse #2. The three Herring Gull nests were built against a raised ventilation area and were facing south, i.e., overlooking Lake Ontario. The roof of Pumphouse #2 consists of an upper level (with 88 Ring-billed Gull nests) and a lower level (with 39 nests). Of the 88 nests on the upper level, 54 were located against raised vents, planks, construction materials, and the raised outside lip of the roof, while the remaining 34 nests were "out in the open".

Gulls have nested on the ground

at Lakeview TGS since at least 1986, but 1989 was probably the first year that they nested on roofs (T. Brownlee, Lakeview TGS, Mississauga, pers. comm.). The increasing number of nesting gulls created noise, smell, fouling of buildings and equipment, interference with operations (some nests were on a little-used roadway), and distraction of workers. During 1988 and 1989 gull nesting has been discouraged by collecting eggs and scaring. The presence of a red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) in the area and gull control efforts may have caused some gulls to colonize the roofs.

How did roof-nesting by gulls begin?

Many gull colonies on the ground first started in areas where gulls frequently lounged. Along the Toronto Waterfront this process of colonization took place at Tommy Thompson Park, Toronto Island Airport, and Bluffer's Park, and in Hamilton Harbour at the East Port Development and the yards of Stelco (Blokpoel and Tessier 1986, 1987, and unpubl. data). In Lake Erie the same phenomenon was observed at Long Point (McCracken *et al.* 1981).

Because many gulls frequently roost on roofs, it is likely that roof colonies start as the first nesting attempts of first-time nesters and/or as nesting efforts by experienced gulls displaced from traditional natural colony sites.

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Is roof-nesting increasing?

Roof-nesting by gulls along the shore of the Great Lakes has now become a fairly widespread phenomenon in Ontario (Figure 1) and it is likely that there were several other sites where gulls nested in 1989 in addition to the ones listed in Table 1. Small numbers of nests may go unnoticed and/or unreported.

It is also clear the roof-nesting by gulls in Ontario has been going on longer than previously thought. Blokpoel and Smith (1988) reported first roof-nesting at Owen Sound in 1985, but apparently gulls have nested in small numbers on the roof of the plant at PPG Canada Inc. since the early 1970s. At RBW Graphics Inc., adjacent to PPG Canada Inc., gulls were attracted to a sprinkler system installed on a new roof in 1975. In following years gulls began to nest on that roof in increasing numbers and soon became a problem (noise, smell, fouling, and attacks on people servicing the sprinkler system). When the sprinkler system was discontinued, the gulls showed less interest in the roof and for the last several years there has been no roof-nesting at the site (R. J. Morris, RBW Graphics, Owen Sound, pers. comm.). Roof-nesting by gulls has also occurred in recent years in the U. S. portion of the Great Lakes: there were 13 Herring Gull nests on buildings associated with the operations of locks on the U. S. side of the St. Marys River (W. C. Scharf,

Northwestern Michigan College, Traverse City, Michigan, pers. comm.).

All in all, it appears that roof-nesting in the Great Lakes area is spreading despite scattered control efforts. It is also likely that more and more people will report various problems caused by roof-nesting gulls.

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