

BANDING IN THE FINNISH GULF

By Timo Tallgren

If we are in a high lighthouse in the middle of the Finnish Gulf, there are islands, great and small, islets and rocks, hundreds and thousands as far as you can see. Such a landscape is beautiful especially in summertime. The greater islands in the inner archipelago are wooded, the prevailing tree being the pine (*Pinus silvestris*). This is the only species of pine in Finland. The outer islets and rocks are nearly naked with small and low junipers and the vegetable world is almost poor because the soil is principally rocky without the mould layer.

In winter the Finnish Gulf is normally iced and the only birds are the Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) and the Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*). But when the waters are opened in the end of April, dozens of thousands of birds are coming to nest to these numerous islands and rocks. Because the nesting grounds are small, there are only a few larger colonies of gulls. The Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) nests in two places in "my" area, which covers the archipelago from the cities of Helsinki to Hanko. In Adholm there are nesting about 1700 pairs and in Tiirakari 3200 pairs. The Herring Gull also forms some larger colonies, in which can be 200 to 300 nesting pairs. In general there are yet few islets where there are nesting over 100 pairs of gulls or terns...so, there are many birds in small numbers everywhere.



Left: Colony of Black-headed Gulls; Right: Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*), common on the islands, nests under stones and in holes. All photos by the author.

The species in the archipelago of the Finnish Gulf are:

Mallard (Anas platyrhynchos): An uncommon bird in the area.

Widgeon (Anas penelope): Very rare.

Tufted Duck (Aythya fuligula): Very common, nests in all gull and tern colonies.

Velvet (White-winged) Scoter (Melanitta fusca): It nests in small numbers in juniperous islets and is commoner in the inner archipelago.

Common Eider (Somateria mollissima): A rather common waterfowl - hundreds of pairs everywhere.

Red-breasted Merganser (Mergus serrator): Common.

Goosander (Mergus merganser): This species nests in the holes of trees and is not therefore so common. Locally it is common for the nest-boxes which have been put up. (American Merganser. -Ed.)

Grey Lag Goose (Anser anser): Very rare - some 20 pairs in the Finnish Gulf.

Oystercatcher (Haematopus ostralegus): Uncommon - solitary pairs here and there.

Ringed Plover (Charadrius hiaticula): Uncommon, because there are so few sandy shores in this area.

Turnstone (Arenaria interpres): The commonest wader, which nests surely in every islet.

Redshank (Tringa totanus): Very common in more thriving islets.

Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger) (Stercorarius parasiticus): Rare - only five pairs in this area.

Great Black-backed Gull (Larus marinus): Solitary pairs in the outer zone.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (Larus fuscus): Common everywhere.

Herring Gull (Larus argentatus): Most abundant of the greater gulls. The greatest colonies in Finland are in this area.

Common Gull (Larus canus): Equal to his name. It is the commonest bird of the archipelago in Finland.

Black-headed Gull (Larus ridibundus): Two great colonies, 3200 and 1700 pairs, but these are the only nesting places in the archipelago of this area.

Caspian Tern (Sterna caspia): Some 800 pairs nest in Finland of which there are 330 pairs in five colonies in this area.

Common Tern (Sterna hirundo): Common, especially in the inner archipelago.

Arctic Tern (Sterna paradisaea): Abundant in small colonies on the meager rocks in the outer zone. This species is increasing today and the Common Tern becomes rarer.

Razorbill (Alca torda): There are some greater (100-200) colonies in the eastern Finnish Gulf, but in this area only 10 pairs nest.

Black Guillemot (Cepphus grylle): Common, where there are suitable holes for nesting.

I started to band in the archipelago in 1961 with my good friend Mr. Miekkaavaara and after this we have visited the best colonies every summer. I have not always had time to band much and the reason has been serving in the military forces (1963-64).

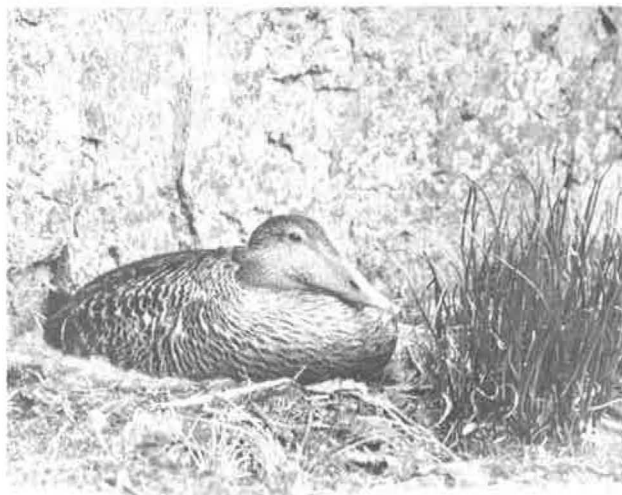
The banding is not easy in our archipelago. The rocks are often surrounded by low waters and especially with wind it is difficult to land. In addition, the banding takes much time and because the rocks are scattered here and there and the number on a given rock is normally under 50. The banding is hard work and before the numbers increase to thousands one has to land on 100-200 islets and rocks. The only species easy to band much and quickly, are the Black-headed and Herring Gulls. In 1966 I got a comfortable and quick boat and therefore the last two years' banding totals are considerably greater. I can now easily visit all our best bird islets and a number of new ones.

During the past two summers, I have made three trips to the archipelago. The first one, at the end of May, when the Eider females have finished their hatching and take their young to the water. I have caught females in their nests. The Common Eider, as known, stays very well in her nest and deserts it only exceptionally. It is easy to catch females for banding, with a long-handled hoop-net. The handle is of bamboo, about 3m. long (10 ft.) and the diameter of the hoop-net is 120cm. (4 ft.). It is essential that the meshes are so great, that the head of the Eider can go through the net. I think it is possible to catch 500 Eiders in three or four days next summer.

The second trips were made in the middle of June to the colonies of

Black-headed and Herring Gulls, which are the first nesting gulls in spring. At this time we have banded 1000-1500 young in a day. The Herring Gull is not so quick to band as the Black-headed because the nests are not so near and the bands are greater; in the last three years I have banded Herring Gulls with colour bands too. The different colonies have their own colour. The intention has been to examine the wintering of young Herring Gulls in the ports, and their fidelity to the native colony.

The third trips follow after the midsummer and these have been the longest, usually made between June 25 and July 10. At this time I have the summer vacation and I believe it is the best manner to pass it in the beautiful archipelago with birds. The total banded during this third trip has increased in the last two summers to some 3000 birds. These have surely been such summer vacations as I will always remember.



Left: Common Eider. Right: Black-headed Gull, at the nest.

<u>Yearly Banding Totals</u>	<u>Gulls</u>	<u>All Birds</u>
1961	2,664	3,046
1962	1,985	2,290
1963	139	357
1964	184	432
1965	1,934	2,699
1966	4,379	5,298
1967	3,860	4,898
Totals	14,745	19,020