

BREEDING OF THE HERRING GULL (*LARUS*
ARGENTATUS) IN MASSACHUSETTS.

BY GEORGE H. MACKAY.

SHORTLY after arriving at Nantucket for the summer of 1925 I met several of my acquaintances who frequent Muskeget waters, and who informed me that the "big Winter Gulls" were breeding again this year on the South Beach, a narrow sand bar over a mile long and about thirty yards wide situated on the back side of Muskeget Island about three quarters of a mile to one mile distant, where it serves as a barrier to protect that island from the fury of the ocean on that side. Not only that the Herring Gulls were breeding on this beach, but had been doing so for about three years.

As this was a most interesting piece of information I deputed my son Captain R. L. Mackay, U. S. A., to go down there and make a thorough investigation. He did this on July 1, and was on the South Beach, July 2, returning to Nantucket July 4, 1925, and the results of his visit will, I hope, interest the readers of 'The Auk,' as much as they did me.

As far as I am aware *Larus argentatus* has never been recorded as breeding in Massachusetts waters with but one exception, when I recorded the finding of a nest with two downy young on the middle Wepecket island, Buzzards Bay by Mr. Vinal Edwards of Woods Hole, Massachusetts. ('Auk,' Vol. IX, No. 3, July, 1891, page 226.)

I would now place before my readers the results of my son's trip to Muskeget island and the South Beach, Massachusetts.

This beach, as before stated, is over one mile long, and about thirty yards wide, higher at the western end, where there is a little beach grass on the north side, than at the eastern end, where at times the ocean breaks over the beach and washes away any eggs, and any thing else that happens to be there, so that on one occasion the Gulls moved their breeding site over to the south end of Muskeget island proper, but only for one season, so I am informed—returning afterwards to breed again on the South Beach, which is only oc-

asionally visited by fishermen, the isolation of the situation undoubtedly appealing to the birds, coupled with a feeling of greater security.

Here my son found a considerable number of chicks, the prevailing color of which was gray, on his approach the chicks would make for the water, several of them disgorging pieces of sand eels about two inches long, and, notwithstanding that they were repeatedly washed back on the beach by the waves, they continued to try until they reached the smoother water back of the breakers, one good sized chick had its wing broken while trying to get through the surf.

My son and his companions Captain Fred Howes, and Mr. Preston Swain, both of the Life Saving Station on Muskeget island, estimated there were about three hundred chicks already hatched out, and about two hundred parent birds one-third of which were white, and two-thirds gray.

Most of the chicks and eggs were at the southwest end of the Beach, on the north side where there is a little beach grass, there were a few scattered nests with eggs at the middle of the beach, one to three eggs in a nest.

The nests were composed of a little seaweed scantily put together, which could scarcely be called a nest, many of the chicks were huddled in the lee of anything that afforded them protection from the elements, six being counted in one group under the lee of a piece of wreckage which was partially in the water. The estimated number of nests with unhatched eggs was about thirty.

The chicks were of various size, some just hatched out and some just able to lift themselves off the beach with their wings.

My son also walked all over Muskeget island proper to ascertain the status of the Terns, domiciled there this season. He reports that the eggs were pretty much hatched out and the birds in the air beyond estimation.

He also informed me that according to local estimates there might be some three thousand Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*) domiciled on the island.

Nantucket, Mass.