

Common Black-headed Gulls on Petit Manan Island, Maine

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Black-headed Gull standing near nest on Petit Manan Island with Laughing Gull in background. Photo/David Folger.

IN JUNE 1985, A PAIR OF ADULT COMMON Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*) established a territory at the edge of the Laughing Gull (*L. atricilla*) colony on Petit Manan Island National Wildlife Refuge, Washington County, Maine, but did not attempt to breed. In June 1986, a single adult Black-headed Gull built a nest and laid one egg about 20 m from the same spot.

Petit Manan Island has been an important tern nesting island since the 1940s and has been the site of the northernmost Laughing Gull colony on the east coast of North America for at least 25 years (Drury 1973; Korschgen 1979; Nisbet 1971). After the United States Coast Guard permanently moved off the island in 1974, Herring and Great Black-backed gulls moved onto Petit Manan Island in large numbers, and neither terns nor Laughing Gulls nested there by 1980 (Drury *pers. comm.*). The United States Fish & Wildlife Service acquired the island from the Coast Guard, and in 1984 began a gull control program in an attempt to re-establish the tern colony. Several hundred gulls were poisoned, and terns and Laughing Gulls returned to the island in the same year. Since then, nesting populations have steadily increased. In 1986, we estimated over 1500 pairs of Arctic (*Sterna paradisaea*) and Common (*S. hirundo*) terns, 30 pairs of Roseate Terns (*S. dougallii*), and 400 pairs of Laughing Gulls nesting on Petit Manan Island (Drennan and Folger 1987).

Researchers from College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, Maine, were present on the island from mid-June through mid-August 1984 and from early May through early August in both 1985 and 1986.

From June 6 through June 12, 1985, a pair of Common Black-headed Gulls was observed holding a territory at the edge of the Laughing Gull nesting area. They made no attempt to build a nest, and all but disappeared after June 12; one bird was seen flying around the island June 17. They were not seen again that year.

On May 21, 1986, a single *L. ridibundus* was observed roosting on the intertidal zone with Laughing Gulls. Subsequently, the bird was often seen around the island. In early June, it held a territory near the site where the previous year's pair was seen. However, on June 17 it was discovered on a nest approximately 20 m away, still within the

Laughing Gull colony. This nest was 15 m from a surveillance blind making observation relatively simple.

The nest was located in a clump of one meter high grass, Canadian Bluejoint (*Calamagrostis canadensis*), and Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*). Less than one meter from the Black-headed Gull's nest was a Laughing Gull nest with three eggs. Both were situated at the edge of a clearing which the birds used as a landing patch when returning to their nests.

The Black-headed Gull laid a single egg and incubated until July 1, at which time the neighboring Laughing Gull's chicks hatched. That day the Laughing Gull adults began to seriously harass the Black-headed Gull whenever it tried to return to its nest. By that afternoon, the egg was cold to the touch, and we suspected that the adult had abandoned the nest. In the following days the Black-headed Gull was regularly seen with roosting Laughing Gulls on the intertidal zone, but it did not return to its nest. The bird was observed around the island through the end of July. On July 9, the egg in the Black-headed Gull's nest was found to be infertile.

The Common Black-headed Gull seen on Petit Manan in 1986 was a solitary bird. At no time did we observe a second *L. ridibundus* nor did we ever observe the bird acting as if it were paired with a Laughing Gull. We speculate that this was a female Black-headed Gull that was either inseminated by a male Laughing Gull, was stimulated into egg-laying by the breeding Laughing Gulls around her, or began incubating a "dumped" egg laid by an entirely different bird.

These sightings of this European species add to the records already reported for northeastern North America by Weseloh and Mineau (1986), Holt *et al.* (1986), Montevicchi *et al.* (1987), and others. Petit Manan Island occupies a unique position as the northernmost colony of Laughing Gulls on the east coast, and as such deserves close observation for future breeding attempts by Common Black-headed Gulls.

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