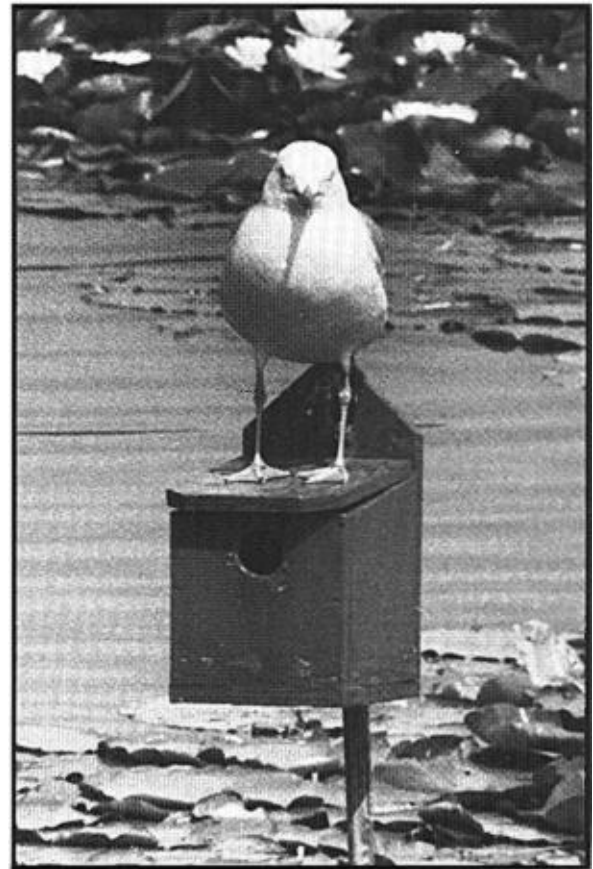

Slowed Development of Tree Swallow Young Due to Ring-billed Gulls

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The number of Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) summering on the 22.3 hectare Long John Slough in Southwest Cook County, Illinois has shown a steady increase over the last several years. This Slough is the project site for an ongoing study of the Tree Swallow (*Iridoprocne bicolor*). We also have an area of the slough that has been set aside as a waterfowl feeding location for the general public. Three nest boxes were affected by the Ring-billed gulls; however, one box near the waterfowl feeding area was much more noticeably affected than the other two. The problem nest (box #2) is about 25m from the waterfowl feeding site which also has a strong attraction for the Ring-billed gulls. A few gulls have chosen the nest box as a frequently used perch (see photo) Visits to this swallow nest showed a much slower development of the young compared to other nearby swallow nests. Observations from a distance indicate a reluctance of the adult swallows to enter the box to feed the young while a gull was perched on top. The gulls seemed indifferent to the diving attacks of the adult swallows. Our visit to the nest caused the gull to leave after which the swallows were observed to feed the young as fast as they could until the gull returned at which time the feedings slowed down or stopped completely. Gulls were absent from the perch often enough for three young swallows to survive but was present often enough to slow development of the young swallows noticeably, and may have been the cause of the death of two young swallows. The normal hatch to fledge time is 14 to 16 days while the hatch to fledge time for the nest boxes used by the gulls was 18 to 20 days.

It was not determined that the gulls were the problem until about half way through the nesting season, a little too late for comparative weights to be taken. Next year, however, more observations will be made if the problem occurs again.



Ring-billed Gull setting on top of swallow nest box.

Chronology of nest Box #2:

1. May 17, 1984 nest completed, no eggs
2. May 30, 1984 nest with four eggs
3. May 31, 1984 nest with five eggs
4. June 8, 1984 adult female 960-99733 on five eggs
5. June 12, 1984 five young just hatched
6. June 19, 1984 three young banded 960-99751-52-53
two dead young removed from the box.
7. July 1, 1984 young gone