

NOTES

THE RING-BILLED GULL: A REDISCOVERED NESTING SPECIES IN WYOMING

SCOTT L. FINDHOLT, Game and Fish Department, 260 Buena Vista Drive, Lander, Wyoming 82520 (present address: Wyoming State Training School, Lander, Wyoming 82520)

Historically, two Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*) nesting colonies existed in Wyoming (Conover and Conover 1981, Conover 1983). Knight (1902) indicated that this species bred on the Laramie Plains, Albany County. It was also found nesting on the Molly Islands, Yellowstone Lake, Yellowstone National Park (Skinner 1917, Kemsies 1930). I can find no evidence for the four recent Ring-billed Gull nesting colonies Conover (1983) listed for Wyoming. The intent of this note is to clarify the literature on the recent status and distribution of Ring-billed Gull nesting colonies in the state and provide details on the only known breeding location of this species in Wyoming.

In 1983 and 1984 I conducted a comprehensive survey for Ring-billed Gull nesting colonies in Wyoming. On 21 May 1984 I counted 102 adults and 70 nests of this species at Soda Lake (42° 54' N, 106° 18' W), about 3 km north of Casper, Natrona County. Ring-billed Gulls were nesting in two small groups on the east perimeter of a large concentration of breeding California Gulls (*Larus californicus*). Mean clutch size was 2.6 with a standard error of 0.09; the range was 1-3 eggs). I did not revisit the colony to determine hatching or fledging success. To my knowledge, this survey is the first documentation of Ring-billed Gulls nesting in Wyoming in over 50 years.

The nesting colony was on a 1.3-ha man-made island near the southeast shore of Soda Lake. Although Ring-billed Gulls may have previously nested elsewhere at Soda Lake, this island was not constructed until after the 1983 nesting season. Soda Lake is a natural lake that has been enlarged and is used by Amoco Oil Company for the evaporation of waste water from its local oil refinery. It provides significant nesting habitat for several species of colonial nesting waterbirds and protection from human intervention because the area is closed to the public.

Dominant vegetation on the island consists of Silver Sagebrush (*Artemisia cana*) and Cheat Grass (*Bromus tectorum*). Other common plants were Plains Pricklypear (*Opuntia polyacantha*), Green Rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus*), Needle-and-thread (*Stipa comata*), and other grasses.

Other birds nesting with the Ring-billed Gulls included the Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*; 58 active nests), Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*; one active nest), and California Gull (1907 ± 204 (SE) active nests). In addition to these species, Black-crowned Night-Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) and Caspian Terns (*Sterna caspia*) were nesting in other colonies at Soda Lake.

The Ring-billed Gull breeds in Idaho (Larrison et al. 1967, C.H. Trost pers. comm.), Montana (Skaar 1980), and South Dakota (Johnsgard 1979) but is not known to nest in other states that adjoin Wyoming. In contrast to the reported increases in breeding populations of Ring-billed Gulls in the Great Lakes region,

NOTES

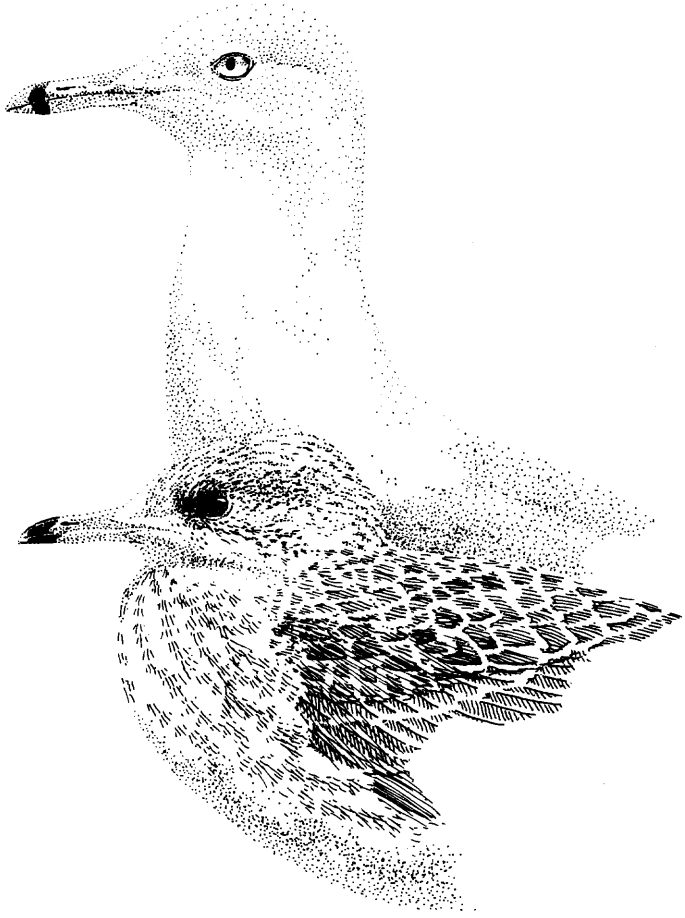
Washington, California and other western states (Ludwig 1974, Conover et al. 1979, Conover and Conover 1981, Conover 1983), there appears to have been no significant increase in nesting Ring-billed Gulls in Wyoming in historical times.

I thank Larry Pate for assistance with field work. Alan Craig, Nancy Findholt, Bob Oakleaf, and Oliver Scott provided helpful comments on the manuscript. This study was made possible through funding by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Nongame Project.

LITERATURE CITED

- Conover, M.R., Thompson, B.C., Fitzner, R.E., and Miller, D.E. 1979. Increasing populations of Ring-billed and California gulls in Washington State. *W. Birds* 10:31-36.
- Conover, M.R., and Conover, D. 1981. A documented history of Ring-billed and California gull colonies in the western U.S. *Colonial Waterbirds* 4:37-43.
- Conover, M.R. 1983. Recent changes in Ring-billed and California gull populations in the western United States. *Wilson Bull.* 95:362-383.
- Johnsgard, P.A. 1979. *Birds of the Great Plains: Breeding Species and Their Distribution*. Univ. Nebraska Press, Lincoln.
- Kemsies, E. 1930. Birds of the Yellowstone National Park, with some recent additions. *Wilson Bull.* 42:198-210.
- Knight, W.C. 1902. The birds of Wyoming. *Univ. Wyo. Agric. Exp. Sta. Bull.* 55:1-174.
- Larrison, E.J., Tucker, J.L., and Jollie, M.T. 1967. Guide to Idaho birds. *J. Ida. Acad. Sci.* 5:1-220.
- Ludwig, J.P. 1974. Recent changes in the Ring-billed Gull population and biology in the Laurentian Great Lakes. *Auk* 91:575-593.
- Skaar, P.D. 1980. Montana bird distribution. Publ. by P.D. Skaar, Bozeman, MT.
- Skinner, M.P. 1917. The birds of Molly Islands, Yellowstone National Park. *Condor* 19:177-182.

Accepted 20 February 1987



Keith Hansen 1987