

## ROOF-NESTING BLACK-BACKED GULLS

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Reports of nesting by Black-backed Gulls (*Larus dominicanus*) on roof-tops at six separate points in the central Auckland city area were received in the 1968-69 season by the Museum, chicks reared by four pairs being observed up to their successful departure from the breeding site. So far as is known to the writer this is the most extensive occupation of such sites in the area, and since this constantly-increasing species may well extend further on to roof-tops in the city the records received are given in some detail. It may be added that press publicity was given to three of the nests, so that it seems likely that if any further sites in the city area had been under observation they would have been reported; however, it is hoped that should any additional records of breeding in the area be known they will now be recorded.

(a) *Old Oxford Theatre, Queen Street.* This pair was first observed in occupation of the site in early November, 1968, by Mr. J. H. Hall, of the staff of the Chief Post Office (on opposite side of the street), a bulky nest having been completed on the roof ridge by this stage; a photograph showing the pair at the nest appeared in the *New Zealand Herald* of 13th November, 1968. Two chicks were subsequently hatched; they were observed at intervals by Mr. Hall, ultimately becoming fully feathered, and are believed finally to have flown.

A photograph showing the two chicks (then approximately 10 days old) appeared in the *Weekly News* for 6th January, 1969; I am indebted to the Photographic Section of the *Weekly News* for the information that this was taken on 12 December. The photograph shows the chicks away from the nest and crouching in an angle of the brick parapet.

Mr. Hall also informed me that a pair nested on the same site in the 1967-68 season: eggs were laid but, although the birds sat for a lengthy period, evidently did not hatch. Nesting had not been recorded on the roof in earlier years.

(b) *Chief Post Office, Queen Street.* Information was supplied by Mr. J. Douglas, Chief Post Office staff, who had watched a pair regularly on the roof from approximately July, 1968, and noted that they appeared interested in various sites — they finally chose the flat roof of a metal shelter built to house a hot-water tank, the top being about seven feet above the flat main roof and accessible only by ladder. Nest construction was begun in early November, and the birds brought in much material, including grass, fragments of paper, etc. Only one egg was laid; a chick hatched towards mid-December, but died towards Christmas and was found by Mr. Douglas dead in the nest.

According to Mr. Douglas' observations there has been an interest in the roof as a nest site over the past three seasons, and a pair built a nest, but did not lay, in the 1966-67 season; this was on the upper level portion of the roof a little away from the main flat roof.

(c) *Buckland Building, Customs Street.* This pair could also be observed by Mr. Douglas from the Post Office roof: the site was on the corrugated iron roof of the Building (situated at corner of Customs and Gore Streets), and against a skylight. Mr. Douglas saw the two chicks from their first few days onwards; they hatched in mid-December and he saw their departure with the parents in February.

(d) *Lower Albert Street area.* This record is also due to Mr. Douglas who could from the Post Office see a pair, obviously in occupation of a roof-top site, in this general area. Nesting was at about the same time as the two other pairs observed.

(e) *Magistrate's Court, Kitchener Street.* The observations at this site extend over a full three seasons, and I am much indebted to Mr. M. M. Fisher, of the Court staff, for the information on his records throughout this period. The birds — doubtless the same pair throughout — have used the same site in 1966-67, 1967-68 and 1968-69 seasons: the nest was on an upper flat roof, inaccessible from a lower roof level from which the observations were made; unfortunately, the whole of the nesting portion is not visible, and it has thus been difficult to be sure of the number of chicks hatched each year. However, young were seen each season, and it is believed that they fledged and left the roof successfully each year. Departure time was approximately mid-January.

(f) *24 Cook Street.* This nest was probably the most regularly and fully observed of the six recorded this season, the site being on the roof of the three-storey building at the above address, and thus visible to many members of the Auckland City Council staff from the adjacent towering City Administration Building: I am indebted for much of the following information to Miss J. Walker, who kept a constant watch from the Building on this nest. On 23rd December, 1968, when Miss Walker first rang, a single egg was being incubated; there had been two eggs in the nest on about 20th November, but these must have been destroyed and the single egg then laid. It had been difficult to see the eggs for the past month while the birds had been more or less constantly on the nest.

The nest was situated in the gutter at the edge of the main slope of the roof, and supported partly by a projecting dormer window; Miss Walker suggested that the loss of the first clutch may have been due to flooding of the nest, water being seen to pour through the site when it rained.

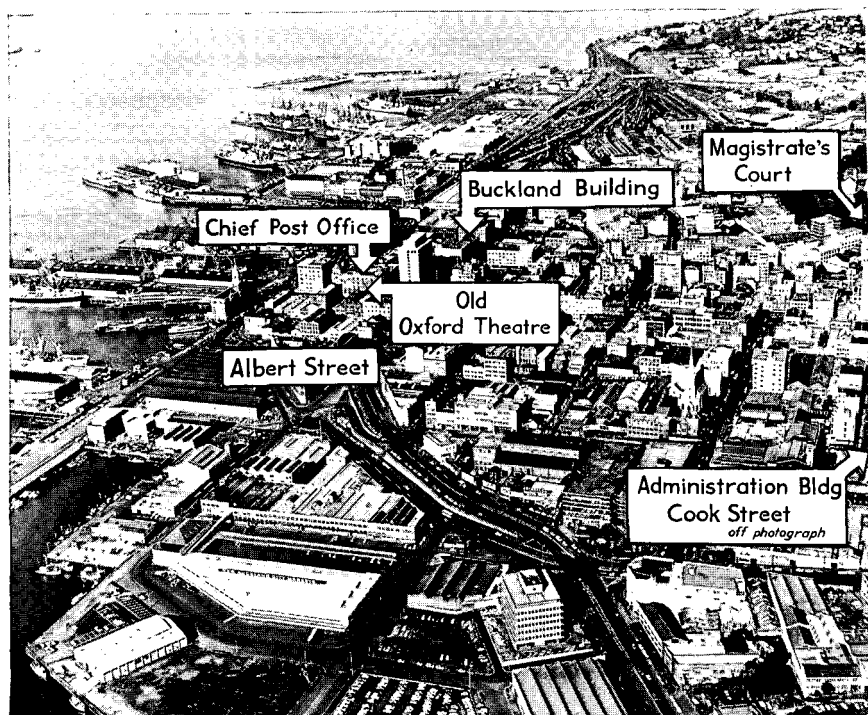
On 6th January Miss Walker reported a chick; I visited the Administration Building and saw the chick, which was in the nest and accompanied by one of the parents, the other being on the adjacent roof ridge. According to reports from several members of the Council staff, hatching was on either 25th or 26th December, so that the chick was now some 12 days old. By 7th January the chick was moving freely about the roof: a photograph showing an adult with the chick appeared in the *Auckland Star*, 9th January, 1969.

Miss Walker continued to watch the progress of the chick, and regularly saw it fed by the parents; she also noticed that a third adult hovered about the area constantly, and was seen frequently when the chick was being fed.

On 7th February i.e. approximately six weeks after hatching, the young bird now fully fledged took off from the roof in company with both parents.

*Nesting in city area: earlier records.* Mr. J. Douglas, whose observations from the Chief Post Office are recorded above, also informed me that nesting on the wharf-shed roofs has been recorded from time to time in past years. Nesting has also been recorded, according to various reports sent to the Museum, on secluded waste land adjacent to the waterfront; however, the success of such nests is not known.

*Acknowledgements.* In addition to the informants mentioned above, my thanks are due for assistance to Mr. P. J. Garland (Custodian, Chief Post Office) and to Mr. D. W. Lochore, Photographic Editor of the *New Zealand Herald*. I am also grateful to the *Auckland Star* Illustrations Department for permitting me to use the accompanying fine aerial photograph.



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