

A NOTE ON THE BREEDING AGE OF RED-BILLED GULLS (*Larus novaehollandiae scopulinus*) AT NELSON, N.Z.

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Red-billed gulls (*Larus novaehollandiae scopulinus*) were ringed by the author, at the Boulder Bank, Nelson, during the breeding seasons of 1943-44 and 44-45 when University of Otago rings were used, and again during the 50-51, 51-52 and 52-53 seasons, when Ornithological Society rings were used.

In the 1950-51 breeding season 106 fledglings were ringed at a colony on the Boulder Bank opposite the Atawhai Church. The following year only six red-billed gulls nested at this site and on one occasion a year old ringed bird was seen to visit the colony. However, this bird was not seen again at the colony, and certainly was not breeding there. During that year the main red-billed gull colony, 363 nests, on the Boulder Bank, was situated near the Lighthouse at Port Nelson, and no one-year-old ringed birds were seen at the colony when visited on 21 January 1952.

Dwight (1925) states: "There is no evidence that any gulls breed before they have assumed practically adult plumage and none reach this stage the first year." Although the observations made during this season do not prove that the red-billed gull does not breed in its first year, there is no reason to believe that it is any exception to the principle pointed out by Dwight.

The following season the only red-billed gull nesting colony on the Boulder Bank was near the Lighthouse at Port Nelson, and eleven two-year-old birds bred there. They had been ringed at the colony opposite the Atawhai Church, Nelson, in January, 1951, with Ornithological Society rings numbered 9314, 9316, 9321, 9328, 9331, 9332, 9375, 9388, 9394, 9397 and 9528. These birds were all seen as they left or returned to nests and were not unemployed birds visiting the colony. Thus birds of this species are capable of and do breed when they are two years old. Dwight (1925) shows that the red-billed gull assumes adult plumage in its second year, and Stead (1932) claims that the black-billed gull (*Larus bulleri*), the red-billed gull's nearest relative in New Zealand, breeds in its second year. The red-billed gull, then, behaves as would be expected for a gull of its size and type.

Two birds, ringed on the Boulder Bank opposite the Atawhai Church during January 1944, rings numbers B818 and B807, were breeding where ringed in the 1950-51 breeding season. These seven-year-old birds were mated to two unringed birds and were seen to change guard on the nest, so that both sexes incubate. On the only visit made to the main colony at the Lighthouse, Boulder Bank, Nelson, during the 1951-52 season one ringed bird (ring number not noted, but ringed with a University of Otago ring, therefore at least seven years old) was seen at the colony.

Two birds, rings numbers B793 and B1273, ringed at the Atawhai Church colony on 22 January 1944 and 24 December 1944 respectively and another University of Otago ringed bird (number not seen) were breeding at the Lighthouse colony during the 1952-53 season. Thus three birds of this species, one eight years old, another at least eight years old and the other nine years old, were still breeding. Assuming that, once started, a red-billed gull breeds each year thereafter, some birds of this species may breed at least seven times in their lifetime and further work will probably show that the breeding span is longer even than that.

REFERENCES.

- Dwight, J., 1925—The gulls (*Laridae*) of the world; their plumages, moults, variations, relationships and distribution.—Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist., 52: 279-85.
- Stead, E. F., 1932—The life-histories of New Zealand birds. London.