



Roundtable

... with Louis C. Fink

Adopt-A-Tern-Nest Project

Under the leadership of Greg Cornwell, the Waccamaw Audubon Society initiated an Adopt-A-Tern-Nest Project in order to monitor the birds nesting on the roof of the Harris-Teeter grocery store in Surfside Beach, S.C. The following report summarizes activities for the 1985 nesting season.

With the help of 35 nest sponsors, Cornwell and his assistant Deb Sue Griffin were able to monitor 55 Least Tern nests from May to August. The marking of nests began on the third of May when 17 nests were identified by fist-sized pebbles numbered with fingernail polish. Terns were involved in courtship, mating, and nest building well into the first week of July when the last of 93 eggs were laid.

Chicks first hatched in late May, following an incubation period of approximately 23 days. Of the 93 eggs laid, 5 eggs never hatched. Seventy-four chicks were banded with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bands. Most of these birds were observed until their permanent departure from the roof. Eleven chicks died before being banded.

In the 1984 breeding season, numerous chicks died when they fell off the rear of the roof. To help solve this problem in 1985, a piece of hardware cloth or wire 8 inches high by 4 feet long was laid near the corner edges of the roof. The wire made a curve that directed the terns away from the edge. The wire was very effective and reduced the number of "jumpers" to only two chicks after installation. These birds died from the fall.

Late May and early June were particularly hot months in 1985. Temperatures in the 90s caused both chicks and adults to pant or "gullar flutter." By mid-June, six chicks were dead on the roof. There were no apparent causes of death, other than dehydration. Special care was taken not to disturb the colony during the hot periods.

The hot, dry weather was broken by heavy rain on 24 July when Hurricane Bob passed by the coast. Fortunately, by this date most of the chicks had left the roof. However, following the storm two chicks and two adult birds were found dead. Two other adults were found dead during the breeding season. The cause of their deaths could not be determined.

No signs of predation were observed on the roof in either 1984 or 1985. It would appear that the roof is relatively safe from predators. The possibility of owl predation

will be investigated in 1986. Terns were observed escorting crows from the airspace above the roof.

The increase in the number of nests from 46 in 1984 to 55 in 1985 and the increase in the number of chicks banded, indicate that the colony is doing well. However, many questions still remain unanswered. These include the following: Why did the terns pick the grocery-store roof when there are many other roofs closer to the beach and marshes? What were their selection factors? Minimum roof size, distance from fishing areas, roof texture and color, and many other factors could influence their selection. Or, could they somehow "realize" how safe they would be from predators and spring tides if they nested on the roof?

Another question of importance may be answered next spring. That is whether or not chicks banded in 1984 will return as adults to nest on the same roof. Banding data will identify these birds.

With the help of Adopt-A-Tern-Nest Project sponsors in 1986, we shall continue to monitor the progress of the Least Terns. Mr. Hopkins, manager of Harris-Teeter grocery store, and his assistant, Mr. Brown, deserve special thanks for their assistance.—GREG CORNWELL, 406 Brook Glenn Road, Taylors, S.C. 29687.

Newspaper Gleanings

Michigan is trading 150 wild turkeys to Ontario for 30 moose. *** A wild eagle was fitted with a transmitter in TVA territory in Tennessee, but the backpack was too heavy and the bird was released. *** In Boston, joggers were attacked by birds. Five of the joggers said the birds were "European buzzards"; seven joggers could not identify the birds.

In Pensacola, Florida, a Caribbean Elaenia was seen for the first time in the United States. When the sighting was reported to the Florida Ornithological Society banquet in St. Petersburg, the banquet broke up as everyone hurried off to see the bird.

The Ivory-billed Woodpecker, placed on the Endangered Species List in 1967, has had no confirmed sightings in 20 years. So says the Fish and Wildlife Service. Only five Florida Dusky Seaside Sparrows are left, and they are all male. The interior population of the Least Tern is down to about 1,500 birds. On the bright side, the Whooping Crane can be numbered in the hundreds, instead of its low point of 15 birds a few years back.

Cornell University has shipped 54 Peregrine Falcons to the World Center for Birds of Prey at Boise, Idaho, in hopes of breeding more birds for release in Eastern States. A Gyrfalcon born in captivity would be used to help incubate Peregrine eggs. British authorities seized several Northern Goshawks at Heathrow Airport. They had been smuggled in from the United States.

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