

NINTH CENSUS OF NON-PASSERINE BIRDS IN THE SANCTUARIES OF THE NORTH SHORE OF THE GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE

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IN 1925 ten bird sanctuaries were established on the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence by the then Department of the Interior of the Canadian Government. The sea birds nesting on the many islands which fringe that shore had been persecuted so that their numbers had rapidly dwindled. To evaluate the effects of the protection given to those birds, a census has been conducted every five years by the Canadian Wildlife Service and the results have all been published in *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* (Lewis, 1925, 1931, 1937, 1942; Hewitt, 1950; Tener, 1951; Lemieux, 1956; Moisan, 1962).

The ninth census was conducted by the authors from June 14 to June 25, 1965. The cruise from Gaspé to Blanc Sablon, Quebec, and return took place aboard the Royal Canadian Mounted Police ship "Wood". The co-operation of the commanding officer, Inspector Roberts, and of the crew was again outstanding. Exceptionally good weather prevailed during the trip so that the census was completed in record time.

As in previous censuses, the procedure followed was that described by H. F. Lewis. Only birds actually seen were counted, except for the Common Puffins on Perroquet Island in which case the number of occupied burrows was carefully checked. In Wolf Bay Bird Sanctuary, Razor-billed Auks and Puffins were so numerous that an estimate had to be made which might be termed rather subjective. However, it is felt that the results of the 1960 and 1965 censuses are comparable, as both surveys were conducted by the same person (senior author) in the same manner. Since no attempt was made to guess the number of birds away fishing, the figures listed in Table 1 constitute a conservative estimate.

The nesting season appeared to be late in 1965 and many birds which are not local nesters such as Brant, the three species of scoters, and Common Loon were often seen in the sanctuaries. These birds are not included in Table 1.

A slight increase (10 per cent) in the total number of birds was found but the increase did not apply to each species. There was no significant change observed in the total numbers of Red-throated Loon, cormorants, Black Duck, Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Red-breasted Merganser, Semipalmated Plover, Spotted Sandpiper, Razor-billed Auk, and Black Guillemot. A decrease was noted in Common Eider, Great Black-backed Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Caspian Tern, and Common Murre. Herring Gull, Kittiwake, Common and Arctic Terns, and Puffins showed an increase. The conditions of the sanctuaries varied: some were in excellent condition, some appeared to have deteriorated, and others showed no visible change.

TABLE 1. — Census of Non-passerine birds in the bird sanctuaries of the North shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence 1960-1965

Species	Caroussel Island		Birch Island		Bet-chouane		Watshishu		Fog Island		Wolf Bay		St. Mary Islands		Mecatina		St. Augustin		Bradore Bay		TOTALS	
	1960	1965	1960	1965	1960	1965	1960	1965	1960	1965	1960	1965	1960	1965	1960	1965	1960	1965	1960	1965	1960	1965
Red-throated Loon									3	15	10	2	8	15	8	8	22	6			51	46
European Cormorant	200	230	12	14			250	270			101	0	555	365							555	365
Double-crested Cormorant			13	6	0	3			2	10			0	210	4	0					563	724
Black Duck			2	6	1		3	2	0	3			2	0							21	19
Pintail	0	2							0	2			5	2			0	1			6	11
Green-winged Teal	172	210	2025	725	705	1040	1492	2910	985	575	1620	980	2650	1000	263	200	1120	335	0	4	11032	7979
Common Eider	1		3						3	2			7	10	0	3	1				7	5
Red-breasted Merganser									5	4			28	15			1	1	2	2	15	19
Semipalmated Plover			0	8	10	7	0	2	36	5	7	4	405	575	2	0	0	7	10	12	114	67
Spotted Sandpiper			64	95	62	50	310	102	295	215	494	270	405	575	114	110	145	115	0	2	1896	1594
Great Black-backed Gull	2410	7000	1200	3100	850	1200	165	170	55	125	1200	1100	1585	1400	387	460	3080	3760			10932	18315
Herring Gull					500	150			135	150	466	0					1300	0			2401	300
Ring-billed Gull	249	380	250	275	0	25	560	1490	162	45	82	35	230	40	44	35					499	680
Black-legged Kittiwake			260	160	3	3			45	10											1341	1808
Common and Arctic Terns									45	40											45	10
Caspian Tern									9240	11000			5450	1675	0	16			1100	1700	16221	14950
Razor-billed Auk	34	100			315	390	33	29	49	40	1075	1000	10570	6120					150	5	11795	7150
Common Murre					0	25			200	200	14	18	390	375	184	73	114	50			1	908
Black Guillemont	125	165	40	3			17	23	136	7	11240	12500	4840	1325					7180	21000	23473	35273
Common Puffin			1		205	430																
TOTALS	3198	8147	3870	4392	2651	3323	2851	5007	1918	1419	25549	26909	26725	13127	1006	905	5782	4275	8442	22726	81992	90230

Caroussel Island Bird Sanctuary in the Bay of Seven Islands was in excellent condition. The total number of birds had more than doubled since 1960, the increase being mainly due to the fantastic proliferation of Herring Gulls. These birds were nesting all over the island and the hatching success was the highest observed in the North Shore Sanctuaries. Common Eider, Kittiwake, Razor-billed Auk, and Guillemot are also increasing. All molestation has ceased due to the caretaker's diligence and the sanctuary is beginning to attract the residents of Seven Islands who visit the area to enjoy the bird-life.

In the Birch Islands Bird Sanctuary at Mingan, the main features were the drastic diminution of the Common Eider breeding population (65 per cent) and the augmentation of the Herring Gull population. The Herring Gull population, which in 1925 was estimated at 60, had reached more than 3,000 birds.

No important change was observed in Betchouane Sanctuary. There was a significant increase in the numbers of Common Eider, Herring Gull, Razor-billed Auk, and Common Puffin. A small colony of Murres has appeared as well as a small group of Black-legged Kittiwakes but the Ring-billed Gull colony has dwindled from 500 to 150 individuals.

In Watshishu Sanctuary the Common Eider population has doubled and the terns tripled since 1960. The gull population has remained low and other species showed no appreciable change.

Fog Island Sanctuary appeared to have deteriorated. Common Eiders were reduced in number as were the terns. It was disturbing to note that the Caspian Tern colony, which had numbered between 60 and 95 individuals since 1925, was down to five pairs in 1965. This species is not known to nest elsewhere in the sanctuaries or even in the Province of Quebec.

In Wolf Bay Sanctuary, the cormorant and the Ring-billed Gull colonies had disappeared, and Common Eiders were less numerous than previously. Razor-billed Auk and Puffin were so numerous that any precise count would have been impossible to carry out in the short time we spent in the area. The estimate in Table 1 was based on information supplied by Mr. Henry Jones, who has been caretaker of this sanctuary for more than 25 years.

The sharp decrease noted in the numbers of Razor-billed Auks, Murres, and Puffins in St. Mary Islands Sanctuary may be less serious than it appears since we did not account for birds away fishing. The weather conditions were ideal when the census was made and many birds were undoubtedly away from the islands. A significant drop was also observed in the terns and Common Eiders. The appearance of 200 Double-crested Cormorants and the fact that the total number of cormorants did not change suggest that all cormorants were probably, and erroneously, identified as European Cormorants in 1960. This sanctuary remains one of the most interesting along the North Shore.

The Mecatina Sanctuary continues to be poor. In 1925, it was estimated by Lewis (1925) that 962 birds were breeding on the 138 islands; in 1965, we counted 905. Egging and shooting may be responsible since the sanctuary is located between two fair-sized communities.

The striking features in St. Augustin Sanctuary were the sharp drop in Common Eider numbers (70 per cent), the disappearance of a large Ring-billed

Gull colony, and the fact that nearly all Herring Gull nests had been robbed. On one island occupied this year by 2,500 gulls, only 25 eggs were counted in 250 nests found at random. This area has always been known for its eggers.

In Bradore Bay Sanctuary, the Common Puffins, which numbered about 50,000 since 1925 but only 7,000 in 1960, are increasing: they were estimated at 21,000 in 1965.

In summary, it is probable that most of the variations encountered in comparing 1960 and 1965 data were within the margin of error inherent in the method of censusing. However, the increase in Herring Gulls and the decrease in Common Eiders were undoubtedly real. The drop in the number of Ring-billed Gulls was probably due to the peculiar habit of this species of shifting breeding sites every few years, especially when disturbed. Arctic and Common Terns behave the same way and their increase might be similarly explained. The fine recovery of the Common Puffin population at Perroquet Island in Bradore Bay Sanctuary is encouraging as is the increase of birds on Caroussel Island. In general, the avian populations appear to have maintained themselves reasonably well, particularly in the areas where depredations seem to be at a minimum.

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