

A NEW HERRING GULL BREEDING SITE IN SOUTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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The Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) breeds throughout the interior of British Columbia at 40 or so sites from Okanagan Lake northwest through the Fraser Plateau, Babine Upland, Nass Basin, and the Northern Mountains and Plateau region to Kelsall Lake in Chilkat Pass, and locally east through the Liard Basin to the vicinity of Kotcho Lake northeast of Fort Nelson (Campbell et al. 1990). It nests singly, or in colonies (rarely more than 100 pairs), and all sites are associated with lakes with forested and rocky islands and/or grassy and bare rocky islets.

At the southern limit of its range in south-central British Columbia the Herring Gull is known to nest at only two sites; on a bare rocky islet in Okanagan Lake (Cannings et al. 1987) and on a smaller bare rocky islet in Bridge Lake (Munro 1935, Campbell 1968). The elevations at both sites are 342 m and 1,133 m respectively.

In late summer 2004 I received a telephone call from Brian Peters, a sports fisherman at Tunkwa Lake, BC, concerning a “seagull” that had “babies” on a grassy islet in the lake (Figure 1). He described the birds as large and white with black wing tips and pinkish legs and when fishing too close to the island the gulls often dived at him. He noted also that the gulls were nesting on the island among many nesting Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) since at least the early 2000s.

On 15 May 2005 I visited the site briefly and discovered a Herring Gull nest containing two eggs (Figure 2) atop the island. The nest was a sparse collection of grasses, plant stems, a few twigs, a couple of gull feathers, and several small rocks. Both adults were present but not overly agitated. Later in the summer Brian watched an adult Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) grab one of the young gulls and fly back to its nest where the young gull was plucked and eaten.

The gulls apparently nested in 2006 and 2007 but the number of young raised is not known. I visited



Figure 1. A pair of Herring Gulls built their nest atop this low grassy islet in Tunkwa Lake, BC. Each summer they move their chicks to the rocky tip (right side of photo) where they are fed by both adults. 30 June 2008 (R. Wayne Campbell). BC Photo 3633.

the site on 30 June 2008 and watched two downy young, about half grown, being fed on a small rocky tip of the nesting islet (see Figure 1). During a half hour of watching the gulls, the adults continued to forage, chased an adult Bald Eagle that flew over the



Figure 2. A Herring Gull nest with two eggs at Tunkwa Lake, BC. 15 May June 2005 (R. Wayne Campbell). BC Photo 3620.

islet, and gave alarm calls at campers walking along the nearby shore. Fishermen in boats near the nesting islet were not harassed as long as they kept moving.

Records of isolated pairs of typically colonial-nesting species are noteworthy since they may represent a “pioneering-pair“. Also, the additional location contributes to determining the breeding range for the species.

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