

Birds of the Isle of Bays, 1957

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For many years an island on Old Wives Lake known as the Isle of Bays has been of considerable interest to the Saskatchewan Museum and several museums outside the province. Motion pictures have been taken of the rich bird life, specimens have been collected, and bird banding operations have been conducted by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. In 1953 naturalist Hugh Halliday visited the Island with Fred G. Bard and myself and vividly described the island for thousands of readers of the **Toronto Star Weekly**.

Old Wives Lake lies 20 miles southwest of Moose Jaw. It is approximately 17 miles from north to south and 18 miles from east to west. It is a shallow lake being at present no more than 9 to 10 feet in depth between the island and the north shore. The island is approximately 2¼ miles from shore at the closest point. Owing to its isolation the island forms a natural sanctuary for an abundant bird life. Because of the winds and huge waves which spring up so quickly it can be a dangerous trip to the island if one is not careful. During the time of Hugh Halliday's visit we had to wait on shore for three days for the wind to go down before it was possible to venture out to the island.

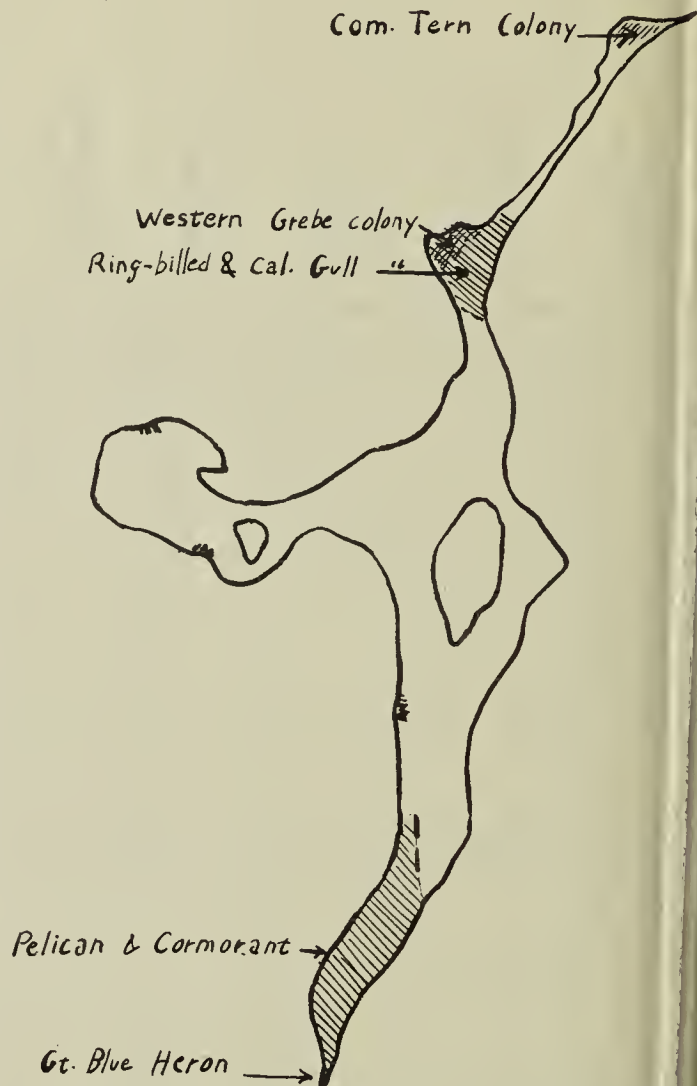
During the period from June 6 to July 20, 1957, several visits to the island were made by Dr. Robert Nero, Bruce Shier and myself to study the behavior of the Western Grebe, species which has been nesting here in a dry-land situation, and to collect faunal material for the Museum. We made five trips to the Island and were on it for a total of 18 days. During this period I had the opportunity to obtain the following information on the birds which poulate or visit the island.

As soon as one arrives on this island one is impressed by the large numbers of gulls and terns which rise in a screaming flock—a noise which never ceases day or night—and by the swarms of midges, which rise in clouds and almost smother anyone who attempts to walk through the buckbrush, rose briar and nettle which cover the island.

The most spectacular of the breeding birds are the Pelicans. We estimated more than 1,000 nests. In the midst of this colony about 350 Double-crested Cormorant nests were found and on the edge of the colony on the southern tip of the island, three Great Blue Heron nests were found. Other birds observed on or near the island follow:

Western Grebe — approximately 1,000 Grebes visible on the water from island at times. 250 nests.

Horned Grebe	several	none breeding on island
Eared Grebe	2	none breeding on island
Pied-billed Grebe	1	none breeding on island



Black-crowned Night Heron — up to 50 or more could be seen at one time. They would fly back and forth to the mainland where they were nesting.

Canada Goose	36	no nests found
Lesser Canada Goose	1	no nests found
Mallard Duck	plentiful	several nests and young
Black Duck	4	no nests found
(1 hybrid Mallard-Black Duck)		
Gadwall	plentiful	Many nests and young
Baldpate	plentiful	Many nests and young
Pintail	plentiful	Many nests and young
Shoveller	2	no nests found
Blue-winged Teal	3	no nests found
Green-winged Teal	3	Birds with young
Redhead Duck	plentiful	Birds with young
Canvasback	plentiful	no nests found
Lesser Scaup	plentiful	no nests found
Ring-necked	a few seen	non-breeding
American Golden-eye	a few seen	no nests found
Ruddy Duck	plentiful	no nests found
Red-breasted Merganser	a few seen	non-breeding
Hooded Merganser	3	non-breeding
White-winged Scoter	a few seen	?
Buffle-head	2	?

Great rafts of ducks visit the island to go through their moult or "eclipse" period, and at times 5,000 or more could be seen resting on the sandy beaches and floating in the nearby bogs. Red-heads and Canvas-backs formed the majority of this group. The island provides ideal nesting requirements for the "tip-feeder" type of ducks especially and their nests were frequently found within 50 feet of each other indicating that there were hundreds of nests distributed over the island.

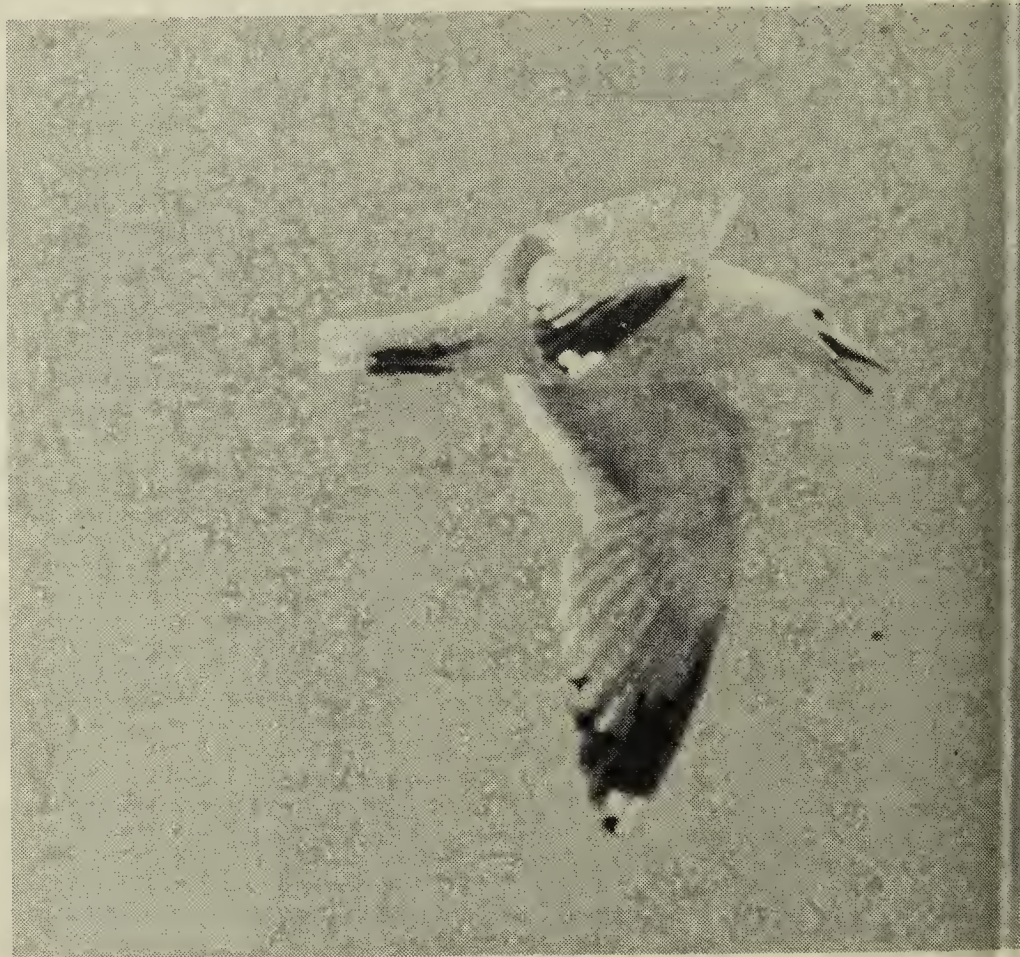
Marsh Hawk	1	would fly across from mainland daily
Coot	2	no nest found
Killdeer	2	no nest found
Willet	several	no nest found
Lesser Yellow-legs	several	
Greater Yellow-legs	several	
Knot	several	
Ruddy Turnstone	several	
Peep Sandpipers-Least	several	
Spotted Sandpiper	several	one nest found
Baird's Sandpiper	several	
Dowitcher	several	
Marbled Godwit	several	no nest found
Sanderling — 4 were found washed up on shore after a severe thunder storm.		
Avocet	several	no nest found
Wilson's Phalarope	several seen	nesting
Ring-billed Gull	estimated 2,000 nests	
California Gull	estimated 50 nests	
Franklin's Gull	visited island in large numbers	
Bonaparte's Gull	visited island in small numbers	
Common Tern	estimated 1,000 nests	
Eastern Kingbird	2 pair	nesting
Crow	1 pair	nesting
Yellow Warbler	plentiful	nesting
Brown Thrasher	one heard singing	
Red-winged Blackbird	approx 800 birds	nesting
Yellow-headed Blackbird	2 birds seen	no nest found
Cowbird	100 or more	heavy parasitism on the Redwing
Long Sparrow	plentiful	nesting
Clay-colored Sparrow	plentiful	nesting
Savannah Sparrow	several birds seen	probably nesting

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Pelican colony on
Isle of Bays,
Old Wives Lake, S

As one approaches the
island, gulls and terns
rise in screaming
flocks.



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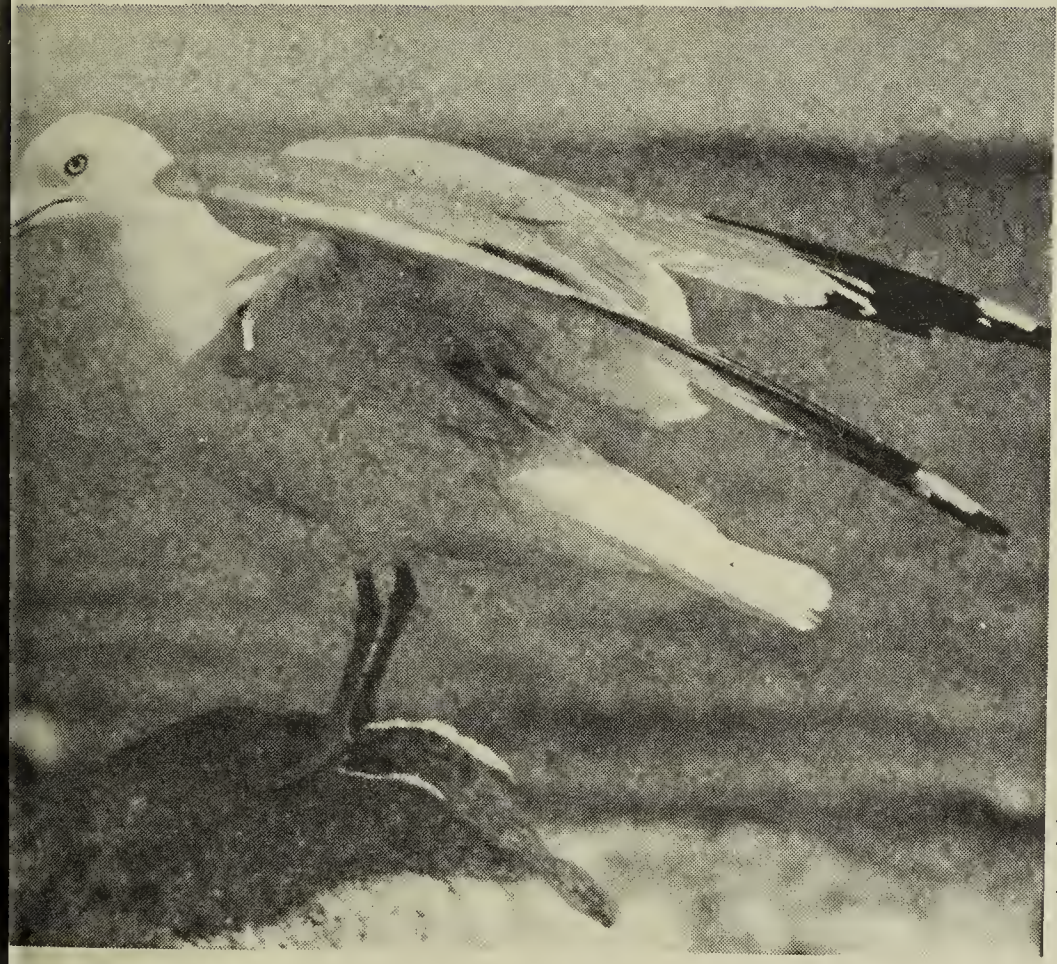
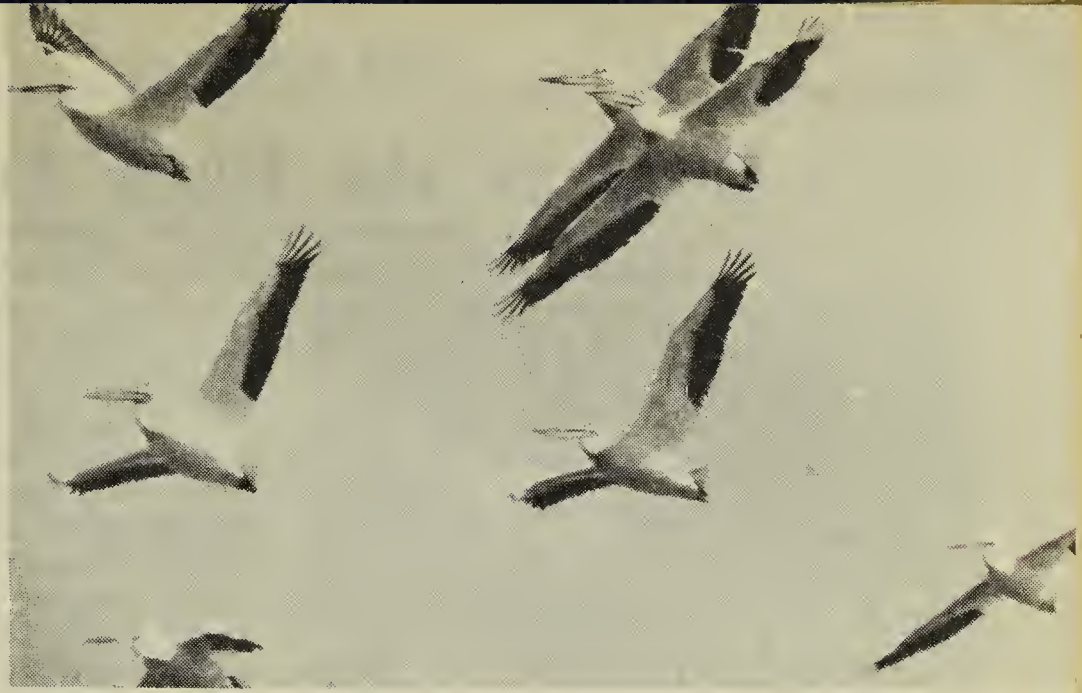


Great Blue Heron f
ing between its fish
grounds and the
breeding colony on
island.

BAYS

Shewan

Pelicans in majestic flight over Old Wives Lake



Ring-billed and California Gulls are found breeding together on the island

ed Gull

Great Blue Herons usually nest in trees, but here is a typical nest on the ground on the treeless Isle of Bays.



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