

2.2. AN ATTEMPT TO REDUCE THE HERRING GULL POPULATION ON SALTHOLM

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Resume:

An attempt to reduce the Herring Gull population on Saltholm near Kastrup Air-port, by H. Lind. (Denmark).

In Kastrup Air-port (Copenhagen) the Herring Gulls constitute the main problem concerning bird-strikes. The gulls frequently feed and rest in the air-port, and on some days there are thousands of them. It was found that an essential part of these gulls are local birds (adults and fledged young) from a large colony on the island Saltholm in Øresund about 5 km apart from the air-port. It was therefore decided to try to reduce the number of birds breeding on the island and the number of young coming from there.

This is a rather difficult project because Saltholm is about 1600 ha and the gulls breed in nearly all parts of the island. The best method would probably be that used by A.O. Gross in USA 25 years ago. The eggs in the nests are sprayed with an emulsion of oil in water with 10% formaldehyde. The oil closes the pores of the egg, the embryo dies, the formaldehyde conserves the egg, and the gull will continue to brood the dead egg for a period of time without laying a new one. In this way no offspring will be produced in the sprayed nests.

In 1969 22.000 nests were sprayed and in 1970 24.000. The project is continued in 1971. The effect of egg-spraying was controlled in selected areas. It was found that spraying has a 100% destructive effect on embryos. Small quantities of the fluid are sufficient, and as a matter of fact spraying has to be moderate, otherwise the eggs may be abandoned at once by the parent gulls. The majority of correctly sprayed eggs are brooded for at least 2-2½ week. Since a new clutch of eggs cannot be produced until 12 days after the sprayed eggs are abandoned, spraying causes a delay in breeding activities of about 4 weeks. The hatching success of late broods was found to be very low (about 10% or less, compared to about 80% in early broods), and therefore the delay in breeding caused by spraying is very effective in preventing the production of offspring. In two respects serious disadvantages of the method were ascertained, in both cases mainly due to the size of the colony. A number of nests are not sprayed, because they are founded after spraying has taken place in that particular area. This post-spraying increase of nests (excl. of repeat laying) is perhaps about 20% on an average. Furthermore, only about 65% of the nests, which are present on the day of spraying, are actually found

and treated.

The reduction in the number of fledged young due to spraying was roughly calculated about 50%. Actually it seemed to have been even greater due to some indirect effects of egg-spraying. The number of fledged young in the colony was obviously much smaller than previous years. However, an improvement of the methods is certainly necessary if a significant reduction of the population (and not just of the annual production of young) shall be achieved. At present experiments in this respect are made.