

THE BLACK-HEADED GULLS (LARUS RIDIBUNDUS) ARE ASSIGNED
THEIR QUARTERS ON AIRFIELD
(M. LATY)

In the Nice area, the black-headed gulls desert their sea roost in bad weather. They take refuge at the Airport. At night they roost on the lighted parking areas. Even after the weather improves, they remain at the Airport for a few nights. This situation resulted in several serious accidents in the winter of 1973-74.

We have tried to keep the gulls away from the operational parts of the Airport: parking and traffic areas and runways. The traditional methods at our disposal proved to be ineffectual: attempts to frighten the birds away merely resulted in their milling about in the air above the Airport in large flocks.

Observing this, we decided to build a roosting area for the black-headed gulls at the Nice-Riviera Airport. Provided with conditions like those which seemed to attract them to the parking areas (shelter, light, safety, blacktop surface), they could spend their bad-weather nights there without endangering Airport flying conditions.

This novel idea was outlined at the 9th Meeting of the BIRD STRIKE COMMITTEE EUROPE. At that time, the roosting area had not been completed and was not entirely suited to the gulls' requirements. It was inadequately lighted and had not been blacktopped. No tangible results had not been achieved before the black-headed gulls left for their breeding grounds.

Since then, appropriations have been made by the General Secretaryship for Civil Aviation, and the Municipality and Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Nice.

The roosting area has been completed and was placed in service on January 16, 1975. The staff, including the Airport Manager, used their best efforts to persuade the black-headed gulls to spend their nights on the roosting area rather than elsewhere at the Airport in bad weather. Food scraps were spread over the roosting area and decoys were placed on the blacktopped surface lighted by floodlights. Concurrently, the operational parts of the Airport which were off-limits for gulls were made unattractive: the watchmen were given hunting rifles to shoot at the gulls, and efforts were made to frighten them away with distress calls. These deterrent methods had been used against the gulls before establishment of the roosting area. They had been ineffectual because the startled birds had had nowhere else to go. After the roosting area was built, positive results were obtained. The startled gulls took refuge there. However, it took 45 days for the birds to decide to roost on the area provided for them. This relatively long acclimation period may have been due to the difficulty of breaking the gulls of their habit of

spending their bad-weather nights on the lighted parts of the Airport, acquired before commissioning of the roosting area. Quicker results might have been achieved had the area been operational for the arrival of the first black-headed gulls wintering in the Nice-Riviera area. This hypothesis will be tested next winter.

The roosting area is described as follows:

Geographical location:

On the periphery of the Airport, bordering the Var River, inside a rental car parking area.

Surface area and soil cover:

5,133 square metres blacktopped, surrounded by a no man's land 25 metres wide. As an experiment, 460 square metres of the blacktopped area were covered with pebbles.

Lightning:

3 MAZDA P R M 1000 projectors equipped with Mac 1000 W Bulbs (130,000L) placed atop 12-metre poles 42 metres apart.

At ground level and horizontally, the yellowish-orange light intensity averages 10 luxes (21 measuring points). At a height of 1/2 metre and obliquely, it averages 31 luxes.

Lighting times:

From dusk to dawn. The lights are switched on and off by LUCIREX J H Y 4-lux Model 100 - 504 photoelectric automatic control.

Decoys:

15 plastic black-headed gulls were placed on the pebbled area. These were actually golden plover (*pluvialis apricaria*) decoys painted to look like gulls.

Feed:

10 to 15 kilograms of scraps from the Airport restaurant are spread periodically.

Construction and operating costs:

Ground surfacing:	63,000 francs
Electrical equipment:	45,000 francs
Annual power consumption:	7,000 kWh (estimate)

Calendar of events:

Opening of the roosting area:	January 16, 1975
Spreading of food scraps:	February 28
First daytime sighting of gulls:	February 28
First nighttime sighting of gulls:	March 3
Last nighttime sighting of gulls:	March 31, 1975

