

Times are Changing

The Great Black-backed Gull – by Bruce Di Labio



Over the years, I have noticed a number of changes in the status of certain species in the Ottawa area. One change that stands out more than others is the significant increase in the number of Great Black-backed Gulls. In an annotated checklist *The Birds of the Ottawa Region*, written by Ron Pittaway (*Ottawa Field Naturalists Club Trail & Landscape* Vol. 3 #1, 1969), the Great Black-backed Gull was considered to be a scarce migrant.

During the early to mid-70s, as I birded along the river in October, I began to see Great Black-backed Gulls along the Ottawa River as they came in to roost in the evening. I found these birds resting on the log booms at Kitchissippi and Remic lookouts. In the early 70s I would see a few birds in October and early

November and by the late 70s to early 80s the Great Black-backed was a regular migrant to our region.

In the 80s and early 90s, numbers began to significantly increase, from the 100s to 1000s. They began to arrive as early as August and stay later, often until December. Some years, hundreds could be found still lingering along the Ottawa River well into January or early February.

Our region has now reached the point where a small number of Great Black-backed, along with Herring, Glaucous and Iceland gulls have over-wintered. On January 19, 2007, on the Rideau River, near Manotick, I observed 650 Great Black-backed Gulls resting on the ice and open water! What a difference 38 years has made!

To Wade or Not to Wade

text and photo Bruce Di Labio

A question on birders' minds as they venture out to Gull Island off Presqu'île Provincial Park is "How deep is the water between Owen Point and Gull Island?" Due to late fall storms shifting gravel, for the first time in nearly a decade, Gull Island was linked to the mainland by a gravel bar which one could walk along. In past years this was impossible. The normal route

required one to wade across a few deep channels wearing hip waders or running shoes – depending on your comfort zone! Each year, between Mar. 10 and Sept. 10, there is no access to the island due to the large breeding colony of Ring-billed Gulls, Caspian Terns and Double-crested Cormorants. Unfortunately, this gravel bar did not last. An early winter storm washed it out in a number of locations, making it virtually impossible to get to Gull Island without getting a huge soaker!

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