

CANADIAN WILDLIFE SERVICE
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Census of Colonial Nesting Birds
on Margaree Island National Wildlife Area
May 29, 1984

H. P. Barkhouse
June 12, 1984

NWA
Margaree I
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A census of colonial nesting birds on Margaree Island National Wildlife Area was conducted on May 29, 1984 by Al Smith, Colin MacKinnon and Peter Barkhouse, Canadian Wildlife Service, Sackville, New Brunswick.

Great Cormorant nests which are located on the northwest cliff face were counted from a boat. Sea and weather conditions were very good and a good count was obtained. The total nest count was 127 and nearly all were occupied by incubating birds.

Razorbills were observed at two locations on the northwest cliff (Figure 1). The most birds observed at one time was 9 and on two occasions single birds were observed entering crevices in the cliffs.

Black Guillemots were observed along the northwest side and southeast end of Margaree Island (Figure 1). Birds were counted mostly while they were in the water and a total of 109 were recorded. One observed nest contained 2 eggs.

Herring Gulls and Great Black-backed Gulls nest over most of the unforested part of the island and cliffs along the northwest side (Figure 1). The number of cliff nests (all Herring Gull) was estimated from a boat when conducting the Great Cormorant nest count. The upland nesting area was completely covered by making successive sweeps beginning at the southwest end of the island. Each nest was assigned to one of the two species and its contents recorded. Empty nests were

assigned to species on the basis of their location and to some extent on construction and general appearance. Total nest counts were: Herring Gull - 602; and Great Black-backed Gull - 273. Clutch size data are presented in Table 1. Nesting appeared to be as much as four weeks later than in 1981 and 1976 the last two census years. Great Black-backed Gulls were either laying or in early incubation. More than half of the Herring Gulls had not initiated laying. There were a number of broken eggs, but not unusually large for a colony of nearly 900 nests; however, 21 dead Herring Gulls were found.

There was more nesting on the southwest end of the island than previously with about 50 Great Black-backed Gull nests at the extreme southwest end and considerably more Herring Gull nests southwest of the lighthouse. There had been a snowshoe hare population explosion on Margaree Island between 1981-1984 which had resulted in considerable habitat change. Shrubs, particularly bayberry had been almost completely killed and small white spruce and the lower branches of larger trees had been denuded. That appears to have provided more suitable gull nesting habitat and may account for the shift towards the southwest end.

A small colony of Great Blue Herons is located in a stand of stunted white spruce (15-20' high, DBH 6-8") about two-thirds of the way to the northeast end of the island. Two trees contain two nests each and the remaining nests are

located in the tops of individual trees. A total of 21 active nests were located. A check of nest contents revealed two nests with four eggs and most others with young. Egg shell fragments were found beneath most nests. A maximum of 15 adult birds were counted.

A single Common Tern was heard and observed on different occasions over the island in the general vicinity of the usual nesting location (Figure 1). A flock of 12 birds were observed flying past the island. There was no nesting activity, but it may have been too early.

The species and numbers of other birds recorded on Margaree Island NWA during May 29-31 are given in Table 2.

During the gull census 20 snowshoe hare were observed and on May 30, 10 animals were observed during a 30 minute period near the abandoned lighthouse. Snowshoe hare sign was very evident from one end of the island to the other. Droppings in places formed a carpet where Juniper (2 species) had formerly been. Bayberry which had been very prevalent was almost completely dead over the entire island. A few living plants were still present near the CWS building. Several carcasses were located and it is very likely that a population explosion and crash had occurred between this visit and the last previous visit in 1981.

One harbour seal was observed off the southwest end and possibly a porpoise off the northeast end of the island. There were no other mammal sightings or sign on the island.

John Beaton, Broad Cove Marsh, Ph. 258-3002 transported us to and from Margaree Island. He fishes lobster around the island and he did not make any extra trips for us. His brother Dan Joe Beaton, Ph. 258-2070 also fishes around Margaree Island. We used our 12' aluminum boat to ferry us between the fishing boat and the island and to conduct the census of birds on the cliffs.

H. P. Barkhouse

June 12, 1984

Table 1. Clutch Size Data of Gull Nests Recorded on Margaree Island NWA on May 29, 1984

<u>Species</u>	<u>Number of Eggs</u>					<u>Total</u>
	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>Unknown</u>	
Herring Gull	299	84	71	66	82	602
Great Black-backed Gull	111	54	68	40	-	273

Table 2. Species and Numbers of Birds Observed on Margaree Island NWA during May 29-31, 1984.

Species	Number
Common Loon	1
Red-throated Loon	1
Great Cormorant	127 nests
Great Blue Heron	21 nests
Common Eider	9
Red-breasted Merganser	2
Spotted Sandpiper	4
Great Black-backed Gull	273 nests
Herring Gull	602 nests
Common Tern	1
Razorbill	9
Black Guillemot	109
Northern Flicker	1
Bank Swallow	1
Barn Swallow	5
Common Raven	2 (pair)
Common Crow	2 (pair)
Black-capped Chickadee	1
Boreal Chickadee	1
Swainson's Thrush	1
Golden-crowned Kinglet	2
Starling	2
Parula Warbler	1
Yellow Warbler	1
Magnolia Warbler	4
Yellow-rumped Warbler	3
Black-throated Green Warbler	1
Blackpoll Warbler	1
Common Yellowthroat	2
Bobolink	1
Savannah Sparrow	10
Fox Sparrow	5
Song Sparrow	10

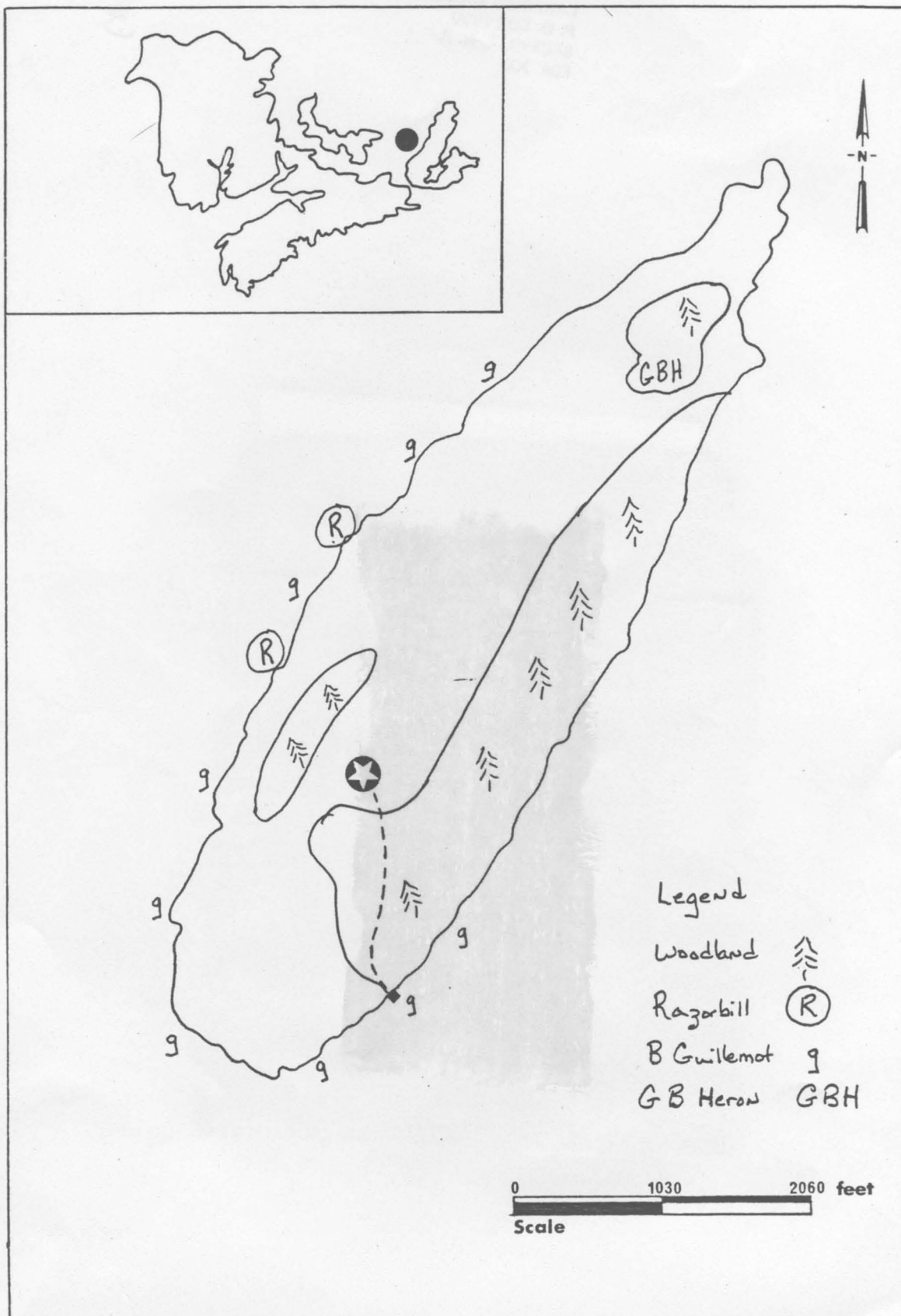


Figure 1. Location of Margaree Island National Wildlife Area. ~~Map~~
Nesting Areas.