

INCUBATION-PERIODS OF LESSER AND GREAT BLACK-BACKED AND HERRING-GULLS.

BY
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THE incubation-period of the British Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus f. graellsii*) is not known. In the *Practical Handbook* is the statement under this species: "Period said to be 21 days (Paynter), but estimate appears low". On the island of Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, I was able to obtain the following nine records in 1931.

BRITISH LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL.

Nest No.	Dates of Laying			Dates of Hatching			Incubation Period. Days.
	1st egg.	2nd egg.	3rd egg.	1st egg.	2nd egg.	3rd egg.	
	May	May	May	June	June	June	
1	16th	—	—	11th	—	—	26
2	17th	19th	21st	13th	(bad)	16th	(27), 26.
3	16th	18th	21st	12th	(lost)	16th	(27), 26
4	16th	18th	21st	15th	15th	16th	(30, 28), 26
5	14th	16th	—	11th	11th	—	(28), 26
6	17th	19th	21st	13th	14th	16th	(27, 26), 26
7	23rd	25th	27th	18th	(lost)	(lost)	26
8	16th	18th	25th	11th	13th	"	(26), 26
9	15th	17th	—	11th	13th	—	(27), 27

For the sake of comparison I have given the dates of laying and of hatching of all the eggs, just as I recorded them, the eggs having been numbered in the field in the order of laying. Excluding the three eggs which disappeared during incubation and one which failed to hatch, it will be seen that in each nest (save 9, one day late) the incubation-period of the last egg laid was 26 days. Looking at the figures for the other eggs, given in brackets, one is led to conclude that incubation may begin with the laying of the first egg (Nest 8), or may be delayed until the last egg is laid (Nests 4 and 5). Although the data is not sufficient for generalizations in this respect it is evident that there is much individual variation. Nest 1 was exceptional in that it contained but one egg: I feel sure, however, that this was not the full clutch but that the other egg or eggs met with mishap, perhaps being removed soon after being laid. It is my experience that Gulls frequently "lose" eggs through some mysterious (certainly not human) agency, possibly Crows, as the eggs disappear completely as if carried off bodily.

There is a very wide variation in the size and coloration of the eggs of this Gull, considerably more than in those of the Herring-Gull. Pure white eggs are not uncommon, but I have not seen more than one such in a single clutch at a time.

We may say then, that, from the data available, the incubation-period of this Gull is not less than, and probably constant at, 26 days.

Of the Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) I obtained three records, each gave 27 days. The *Practical Handbook* gives "26-28 days".



Lesser Black-backed Gull incubating--Skokholm.
(Photographed by R. S. Pollard.)

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL.

Nest No.	Dates of Laying			Dates of Hatching.			Incubation Period.
	1st egg.	2nd egg.	3rd egg.	1st egg.	2nd egg.	3rd egg.	
	May	May	May	June	June	June	Days.
1	14th	16th	18th	11th	12th	14th	(28, 27), 27
2	13th	15th	17th	(bad)	12th	13th	(28), 27.
3	13th	15th	—	10th	11th	—	(28.) 27

Ten records of the Herring-Gull (*Larus a. argentatus*) were secured. As will be seen in the table below these closely approximated to those of the Lesser Black-backed Gull, and if an average is taken the incubation-period may be put

at a fraction over the 26 days. The *Practical Handbook* states, "Period varies from 24 to 28 days", but my records would modify this to "26-27 days" now.



Great Black-backed Gull approaching nest—Skokholm.
(Photographed by R. S. Pollard.)

HERRING-GULL.

Nest No.	Dates of Laying.			Dates of Hatching.			Incubation Period. Days.
	1st egg.	2nd egg.	3rd egg.	1st egg.	2nd egg.	3rd egg.	
	May	May	May	June	June	June	
1	15th	17th	—	11th	12th	—	(27), 26
2	15th	17th	—	11th	13th	—	(27), 27
3	18th	20th	23rd	15th	16th	18th	(28, 27), 26
4	25th	27th	29th	(bad)	23rd	(bad)	27
5	25th	27th	—	21st	23rd	—	(27), 27
6	26th	28th	31st	22nd	24th	26th	(27, 27), 26
7	27th	29th	—	22nd	24th	—	(26), 26
8	29th	31st	—	25th	27th	—	(27), 27
			June				
9	29th	31st	2nd	24th	26th	28th	(26, 26), 26
		June					
10	31st	2nd	—	26th	28th	—	(26,)26
Average Incubation-period 26.4 days.							

I am indebted to Mr. R. S. Pollard for the accompanying photographs.



Herring-Gull alighting near nest—Skokholm.
(*Photographed by R. S. Pollard.*)