

Pollution Suspected in Deforming of 39 Tern Chicks in L.I. Sound

By JOHN C. DEVLIN

Thirty-nine abnormal tern chicks, including one with four legs, have been discovered in a colony of the gull-like birds in eastern Long Island Sound in a three-year study by the American Museum of Natural History.

Helen Hays of the Linnaean Society, an ornithology group and chairman of the museum's committee making the study, said environmental pollution was suspected.

Human Defects Foreseen

She said deformities in the chicks included crossed mandibles (beaks or bills), no feathers or missing primary or secondary feathers, a missing eye, abnormal feet and legs, and swollen bodies.

Miss Hays, Dr. Robert W. Risebrough and a team of volunteers are conducting their investigations on Great Gull Island, the site of abandoned

Fort Michie, which lies in the Race, midway between the Long Island and Connecticut shores.

Environmental pollution according to Miss Hays may soon result in an increase in the numbers of human birth defects "as they work their way up through the food chain to the ultimate consumer."

In examining the tissues of the terns, Miss Hays said, "we did find relatively high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls — and in the fish on which the birds feed."

These compounds, she said, have a number of chemical properties similar to DDT which, with its derivatives, become concentrated in the fatty tissues of animals when present in a food chain, "but they are even more stable."

Miss Hays, who is spending most of the summer on the island, first reported in the museum's publication, Natural

History, on some of the abnormalities, and since then has been joined on weekends by groups traveling by bus from the Museum of Natural History here to Niantic, Conn., where they board a chartered boat for a weekend visit to the island.

She said Long Island Sound "is one of the more polluted areas of the world's oceans, a distinction it shares with the Baltic, the Mediterranean and the Southern California coastal waters."

"Obviously," she said, "much further research is necessary

before we can definitely pinpoint just what pollutants are responsible for what deformities and what the cause-and-effect relationships are.

"It is important to point out," she and Dr. Risebrough wrote, "that although all the evidence is not yet in and weighed, what is happening to the terns on Great Gull Island is of critical significance — not only to the local survival of the species, but quite possibly to humans as well."

Other researchers have said that pesticide residues cause egg shells to be so thin the

mother's weight breaks them, but these researchers had not linked the pesticides to deformities in living chicks.

She said high priority should be given to a study of pollutants in the waters of Long Island Sound such as have been undertaken for air pollution, sewage in some waterways and with lead hazards.

She noted that PCB is added to paints, plastics and rubber to make them more resistant to breakdown.

YOU + FRESH AIR FUND =
FUN FOR KIDS AT CAMP.