

NOTES CONCERNING THE FIRST NEW YORK STATE NESTING OF CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW

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In 1972, I annotated the New York State Chuck-will's-widow (*Caprimulgus carolinensis*) occurrences to date (Photographs of New York State Rarities—22. Chuck-will's-widow. *Kingbird* 22: 157-158). At that time, the sum total of records was nine, six of these during the period 1969-1972. I cited this species' recent range expansion in New Jersey, and the likelihood that an individual that repeated three consecutive years at Islip, Suffolk Co. was a "forerunner of others to come."

Following 1972, additional New York State Chuck-will's-widow reports were as follows:

1. Mist-netted, banded, and photographed, May 11-16, 1973, at Fire Island Light, Suffolk Co., by Darrel B. Ford *et al.* (*Kingbird* 23: 168).

2. Injured female found May 21, 1973, at JFK International Airport, Queens Co., by A. Moorhouse. Later died; specimen at AMNH (*Kingbird* 23: 168).

3. Dead, badly decomposed bird found November 18, 1973, along Ocean Parkway at Oak Beach, Suffolk Co., by Michael Gochfeld *et al.* Bill and wing saved for AMNH collection (*Kingbird* 24: 96).

4. Male, May 1, 1974, at Ridgewood Reservoir, Queens Co., by Thomas H. Davis (*Kingbird* 24: 161).

5. Calling bird, May 18-July 7, 1974, at Richmond Valley, Staten Island, by Susan Kerber, Howard Fischer *et al.* (*Kingbird* 24: 161 and 25: 61).

6. Calling bird, May 25-June 13, 1974, at Oak Beach, Suffolk Co., by many observers (*Kingbird* 24: 161 and 25: 61).

The lingering calling birds at Richmond Valley and Oak Beach in 1974 caused conjecture that these birds were breeding, but pairs were not seen, and it was deemed a near impossible task to locate the nest of a cryptically-colored, nocturnal bird.

In 1975, Chuck-will's-widows returned to Richmond Valley on May 10 (Howard Fischer *et al.*) and Oak Beach on May 3 (Thomas H. Davis *et al.*). In addition, a female was photographed May 8 at Forest Park, Queens Co., by Don Reipe, slide copies to AMNH, and a bird was noted May 14 at Central Park, New York City, by Bill and Wilma Baumann, Lore Schore *et al.*



Fig 1.—The Chuck-will's-widow's "home grove." Oak Beach, Suffolk Co., N.Y.,
June 14, 1975.

—Photograph by Thomas H. Davis

I decided to focus my attention on the bird discovered calling at Oak Beach, Suffolk Co., on May 3. A chronological sequence of events is as follows:

- May 3— Accompanied by Luanne Clark and Peter Polshek. The male was heard calling upon our arrival at 9:30 P.M. It called from within several Japanese Black Pine groves, but seemed to favor one grove in particular (hereafter termed its "home grove," see Fig. 1). I tape-recorded the calling bird. In response to playback of its calls it fell silent, then suddenly flew past my head, and was soon heard calling from another pine grove.
- May 10— Accompanied by Elaine Cook and Joe Costa. The male began calling from its home grove at least a half hour before sunset. Joe entered the grove and soon located the calling bird perched about 6 feet above the ground on a bare pine branch. We rushed to Joe's side. The bird fell silent, and then we heard a guttural *waugh!* from elsewhere in the grove. Joe and Elaine watched the perched bird while I circled toward the strange sound which was re-

peated every few seconds. Suddenly, I flushed a large nightjar which continued to utter the guttural call in flight. It was joined by the first bird, then they disappeared. After a brief wait the male began calling anew from a nearby pine grove. I tape-recorded its calls, including a sequence which terminated with two closely spaced calls, and then a series of clacking sounds, apparently produced by bill snapping. A short while later he continued calling from a more distant pine grove.

May 14— Accompanied by Mike Beyer, Anthony and Brook Lauro, and Bob Parris. Entered the home grove at 7:00 P.M. As we searched the grove, the pair of Chuck-will's-widows suddenly took flight at Brook's approach. They had been roosting side-by-side in leaf litter.

May 24— Accompanied by Stephen B. Dempsey, John Farrand, and Anthony and Brook Lauro. Entered the home grove at 1:00 P.M. As we searched the grove, the female suddenly flushed within 8 feet of John's approach, exposing two eggs. The female disappeared into thick cover, and then



Fig. 2—Chuck-will's-widow's nest with 2 eggs, May 24, 1975.

—Photograph by Thomas H. Davis



Fig. 3—Downy Chuck-will's-widow about 2 days old, June 14, 1975.

—Photograph by Thomas H. Davis

we immediately heard a single "Chuck-will's-widow" call from that direction. The nest site was a bed of dead leaves and twigs with low (6 inch) Virginia Creeper growing about. I photographed the nest (see Fig. 2) and then searched a pine grove 150 feet distant where I flushed a pair of Chuck-will's-widows. We left for 3 hours and then I returned alone to the nest and found the female incubating. I photographed her at 20 feet, at 15 feet, and then she flushed as I approached closer. This time she flew a short distance, and gave a distraction display on the ground, flapping her wings weakly while uttering *churr* notes.

June 8— Accompanied by Fritz G. Scheider. Entered the home grove at 2:00 P.M. and found the female incubating. When flushed at our approach, she repeated the previously-noted distraction display.

June 14— Entered the home grove at 10:00 A.M. and found the female brooding two downy young at the nest site. The young were entirely covered with cinnamon-brown down, their primaries were sheathed; I guessed their age at 2-3

days. While photographing them (see Fig. 3), the pair of adults flew about me in great excitement. They repeated the distraction display described above, but delivered it from pine tree perches well above the ground.

- June 22— Accompanied by Luanne Clark and Brook Lauro. Found the female brooding both young 55 feet from the nest site. I photographed and banded the young. When handled, they uttered *cheep* notes which stimulated the adults to a near frenzy. The adults flew around us constantly, uttering *churr* notes. When perched, they held their wings outstretched and flashed their tails open and shut. After we left the grove at 2:00 P.M., the male immediately burst into song and continued calling until after we were out of earshot.
- June 23— Michael Gochfeld found the young about 50 feet from the nest site. When approached, they ran with wings outstretched and jumped into the air, as if attempting to fly.
- June 25— Michael Gochfeld found the situation little changed from 2 days earlier except that the young appeared stronger.
- June 29— At a point 15 to 20 feet from the nest site I suddenly flushed both young and the adult female. The young birds flew strongly directly away from me, while the female circled and began a distraction display. I ignored her, and continued after the young. Despite 30 minutes' intensive searching I could not locate them, perhaps they had departed the grove. While I searched, the parents circled me, giving distraction displays.
- July 12— Accompanied by Joe Costa. We searched the home grove and an adjacent grove for the Chuck-will's-widows, but to no avail.

This is then the first known instance of Chuck-will's-widow breeding in New York State. There would appear to be great opportunity for this species to establish itself on Long Island and perhaps even Staten Island. The south shore of Long Island includes miles of barrier beach habitat similar to that at Oak Beach. A mid-May 1976 survey of all the roadside pine groves along the "Jones Strip" (ie., Jones Beach State Park east to Captree State Park) might be very revealing. Also, Chuck-will's-widows are appearing in pine-oak habitats now inhabited by Whip-poor-wills (*Caprimulgus vociferus*), such as at Richmond Valley, Staten Island. At this writing, a Chuck-will's-wid-

ow has been calling nightly since late June in pine-oak habitat at Shinnecock Hills, Suffolk Co. (Charles McGuinness *et al.*) In recent years Chuck-will's-widows have been pushing far inland in Virginia, displacing Whip-poor-wills (Robert O. Paxton, pers. comm.).

I am deeply indebted to all those persons cited above who assisted in locating and studying the Chuck-will's-widow's nest, their curiosity and enthusiasm made this documentation possible.

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FROM THE INCOMING PRESIDENT— (continued from page 118)

upon communication on a personal level and too often attempts at progress were limited to hurried meetings once a year at our Annual Convention. Now an Executive Committee, comprising 15 members, including the officers, will be meeting a minimum of three times per year other than at the Annual Meeting. Most importantly, about one third of our member clubs are represented on the Executive Committee. With much broader representation and more willing hands I am sure that the Federation will continue to become a more viable organization.

During my term of office I will be grateful for all constructive criticism and suggestions and I wish to emphasize that increased participation by our members and member clubs can only result in a much healthier Federation of New York State Bird Clubs.

This is the first and last "President's letter" that I shall write for *The Kingbird*. Communications from me to the membership rightfully belong in "New York Birders." *The Kingbird* should devote itself exclusively to New York State ornithology. However, I do feel that *The Kingbird*, as a more permanent record of the Federation's activities, is the proper repository for a grateful membership's recognition of Gordon Meade, Joe Taylor, and Alice Jones.

Richard A. Sloss, President