

the winter. A small number (two to four) remained at the feeder through the middle of May, after which time only one bird was observed coming to feed. This single bird appeared every day until the feeder ran out of seed on June 6. The feeder was refilled on June 12 and the bird reappeared within fifteen minutes, spending a good part of each day there during the following week. On June 19 a second adult came into the yard, accompanied by two fully fledged young in buffy juvenal plumage. This second bird fed both juvenals while the original bird remained at its post on the feeder. The two young and the adults stayed only a few minutes, but returned later that day for short visits, and were seen again on succeeding days. The birds were last seen on June 23.

From the continuing presence of at least one adult throughout the spring it is presumed that the siskins nested in the vicinity. Palmer (1968, in Bent, *Life Histories of N. A. Cardinals, etc.*, p. 431) states that the male feeds its mate at the nest during incubation and until the young attain flight, and this would explain why only one bird was seen feeding during late May and early June. If they did breed nearby, it would be the first such record for Staten Island and one of the few for southern New York State. Previous records are at Ossining, Westchester County, 1883, and Cornwall, Orange County, 1887 (Bull, 1974, *Birds of New York State*, p. 564).

For a fuller account of this event see our weekly column, Footnotes on Nature, in the *Staten Island Sunday Advance*, July 4, 1976.

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Soaring Great Blue Herons: A loose flock of about 50 Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*) was observed for 20 minutes at 5 p.m. on 1 April 1976, as the birds circled above a ridge in the Catskill Mountains near Route 17 east of Hancock. Although the flock was very high, it was clearly noted through binoculars that many individuals were using thermals to gain altitude, as were seven Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*) soaring above a nearby crest. The herons alternated flapping and soaring with set wings; soaring periods lasted about 5 to 15 seconds. Small groups of herons repeatedly broke away from the large flock and flew off, but most then made a large circle and rejoined the flock. Several other small groups of herons appeared in the distance and joined the flock, bringing the total to 74 birds. The entire flock flew off to the west at one point but most circled back a few minutes later and continued to flap and soar high above the ridge. No herons were seen soaring above any of the other nearby mountains. When last seen, the herons were so high that they were barely visible without binoculars.

On my next visit to the area on 7 April, a flock of 80 Great Blue Herons was seen in the same location. They lifted simultaneously out of the trees, flew in a

large low circle, and landed again in the trees near the top of the ridge. In subsequent observations made by Barbara Belanger and myself, it became clear that a nesting colony had formed at that location. From a vantage point on Route 17, 36 nests were counted (using a 20X spotting scope) on 29 April. Great Blue Herons were on or near many of the nests.

Soaring by Great Blue Herons has been reported before; it "sometimes soars in circles to immense heights—perhaps more often than generally realized," according to Palmer (Ed., *Handbook of North American Birds*, Vol. I, 1962). Presumably this would occur most often during migration. However, a social function for some Great Blue Heron group flights has also been suggested. In a brief discussion of flights of all or most of the herons in a nesting area prior to the start of incubation, Pratt (*Condor* 72: 407-416, 1970) states that these flights "seemed to be socially induced." It seems unlikely that the soaring flight of 1 April was unrelated to the breeding colony later observed in exactly the same location. Perhaps this flight served in attracting birds to the colony, as in the "colony advertisement displays" of Ward and Zahavi (*Ibis* 115: 517-534, 1973).

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Gray Kingbird at Jones Beach, Long Island: Late on the afternoon of September 11, 1976, a Gray Kingbird (*Tyrannus dominicensis*) was discovered on the topmost dead branch of a tree southeast of the parking lot at the Tobay (John F. Kennedy) Sanctuary, Jones Beach, Long Island. It was seen perched at close range for at least five minutes and finally flew off into thick growth as evening approached. In addition to the writer, four other people saw it well—Steve Quinn, Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Bengelsdorf, and my wife, Edith. Late the following morning, September 12, I decided to try for another look in broad daylight. As soon as I entered the sanctuary road off the main highway, I spotted the Gray Kingbird perched on the chain-link fence alongside the road. As I stopped the car to examine the bird, it flew off over the marsh and alighted on a sign farther along the road. It finally flew back to the partially dead tree where we had all seen it the previous day. I had several excellent looks at it both at rest and in flight. Altogether, I had it under observation for fully one-half hour, when I left it in the same tree. Unfortunately, no one else was around to observe it. It was not seen after the second day.

The outstanding characters—heavy bill, dark mask, white underparts, and notched tail without any white at the tip—left no doubt that we were looking at a Gray Kingbird. I am very familiar with this species, having observed it many