

PROTHONOTARY WARBLER BREEDING ON LONG ISLAND

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After a number of years in which male Prothonotary Warblers (*Protonotaria citrea*) have been found singing during the month of June, the first nesting of the species on Long Island has been confirmed. The first sighting occurred on 6 June, 1979, when a male was discovered singing at the Nissequogue River State Park in Smithtown, Suffolk County, by Park Naturalist Gregory Mertz and the writer. Mr. Mertz saw the bird fly to a hole in a stump; thereafter we saw both a male and a female make repeated visits to this hole. On 10 June I saw the adults feeding two young in the nest, and on 12 June, Adrian Dignan and I visited the site and again saw two young. Mr. Dignan returned on 13 June to photograph the birds; his photographs later revealed that there were three young. On 16 June the young were no longer in the nest, although the adults still made occasional visits to the nest-hole. At this point, we wondered whether the young had actually fledged or had been victims of a predator, but on 18 June Richard Houghton saw an adult Prothonotary feeding one newly fledged young bird, and a few days later, Park Naturalist Jack Cahill saw two young being fed.

On 12 September I returned to the site and made some measurements. The lip of the cavity was three feet, ten inches from the base of the stump; the cavity was three inches wide and four inches high; the depth of the cavity from the lip was three inches. The stump was that of a red maple (*Acer rubrum*), according to Mr. Cahill. The nest itself consisted of grass, strips of purplish bark, perhaps of fox grape, (*Vitis labrusca*), short pieces of very thin twigs or stems with tiny, crumbly seed-pods, and small, dry pieces of sphagnum moss. Edgar M. Reilly, Jr. (1968, *Audubon Illustrated Handbook of American Birds*, p. 399) describes the nest of this species as being made of "mosses and lined with grape bark, rootlets, and fine grasses; built in cavities or holes in trees or stumps 3-30 ft. above the ground, but generally below 10 ft." The nest was in an eight-foot stump that leaned out from the bank of a quiet stretch of water leading to a quarter-acre fishing pond; part of the base of the stump was submerged. The low banks of this narrow stretch were lined with sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*) which were crowded around the stump. In the immediate vicinity were two red maples with four-inch trunks, one red maple with a one-and-a-half-inch trunk, a black oak (*Quercus velutina*) of the same size and a slender young tupelo



Prothonotary Warbler at Nest Hole, Smithtown, Suffolk Co.
June 13, 1979 *Adrian J. Dignan*

(*Nyssa sylvatica*). These trees and shrubs provided good cover from the bank, while the nest-hole faced obliquely over the water, easily accessible to the adults.

This first breeding record for Long Island had been anticipated for several years. A singing male was recorded at Manorville, Suffolk County, on 10-11 June, 1961. Barbara Spencer discovered a singing male at Mill Neck, Nassau County, on 1 June, 1969, and again on 5 June, 1976, in an area of streams, red maples, and tupelos. In Spring, 1979, a male and a female were observed at Manorville, according to David Larsen; these birds disappeared and are not known to have nested. There are other such sightings on Long Island.

The Prothonotary Warbler is a southern species that has been extending its range to the north. According to John Bull (1974, *Birds of New York State*, p. 464), the species was not reported with any regularity in the state until the 1920's and 1930's. The first nesting record was in 1931 at Old Orchard Swamp, near Alabama, Genesee County, where there is now a "permanent colony" of the species. Other such colonies listed by Bull are at the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge in Seneca and Cayuga counties and at Oneida Lake in Onondaga County.

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