

ATTEMPTED BREEDING BY HOODED MERGANSERS IN SUFFOLK COUNTY

MICHAEL S. SCHEIBEL

On 13 May 1980 the writer, J. Michael Laspia and Michael Male secured evidence of the first known breeding attempt by Hooded Mergansers (*Mergus cucullatus*) on Long Island. On several occasions during late April and early May, a lingering pair of "hoodies" was observed frequenting a fresh water impoundment known as the "Sanctuary" on the Mashomack Preserve, Shelter Island. Although the Hooded Merganser is well known as a wintering species at the preserve, late spring and summer records are rare. The Hooded Merganser is reported by Bull (1974, *Birds of New York State*, p. 152) as an "uncommon and very local breeder" in the state, where it is found most commonly in the central Adirondacks and the western counties.

The Nature Conservancy's 2,035-acre Mashomack Preserve is situated on the southeastern peninsula of Shelter Island, located between Long Island's north and south forks. A deciduous woodland, consisting primarily of oak, beech and dogwood, surrounds most of the "Sanctuary." However, to the south a large clearing with several buildings lies adjacent to the pond. It was here, among the large widely scattered oaks, that we located the nesting site. During early May, a pair of Hooded Mergansers was observed at least twice in this vicinity, on 3 May perched in an oak, presumably scouting out suitable nesting holes and on 5 May at the "Sanctuary." The author, a fish and wildlife technician assigned to the endangered species unit of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, was advised of these repeated observations during early May, and decided to investigate further in the hope of obtaining conclusive breeding evidence for this species. J. Michael Laspia, the preserve manager, and Michael Male, presently filming the Osprey colony at Mashomack, were both residing on the property and thus afforded the opportunity of numerous sightings during the breeding season.

On 13 May, finding an oak about 10 meters west of the "Manor" house with an apparently suitable nest hole, we climbed the tree to investigate. The hole was located on the south side of the tree about 4 meters above ground. The cavity was found to contain six pure white eggs in a down-filled nest.

On the following day, Mr. Laspia was mowing the lawn near the nest tree when he observed the female Hooded Merganser perched at the edge of the nest hole. She was observed again the next day, 15 May, on the "Sanctuary."

The absence of further observations during the ensuing weeks of either adults or young, prompted a subsequent investigation of the nest site in mid-June. At this time only eggshell fragments remained in the nest and the female was apparently no longer in attendance. Given the proximity of the nest tree to the manager's residence, it seems reasonable to assume that if a brood had successfully hatched, it would not have gone undetected. The cause of the apparent failure can only be speculated upon. However, the large population of raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) at Mashomack leads one to suspect predation.

*New York State Department of Environmental Conservation,
Endangered Species Unit, Bldg. 40, SUNY at Stony Brook,
Stony Brook, New York 11794*