

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Redhead with Ducklings on the Saranac River, Franklin County: On 17 July, 1982, while canoeing on the Saranac River between Middle and Lower Saranac Lakes (BBA Block 5590-C), I came upon a medium-sized duck with six young ducklings in tow. They were swimming quietly along the weed banks on the east side of the river, just downstream from the mouth of Halfway Brook. I pulled the canoe over along the west bank of the river, and stopped to take a closer look at this little family group. At first glance, without binoculars and at a distance of about 75 feet, my initial reaction was that this was a female Ring-neck with her brood. As this is a rather common species of waterfowl in this area, I had become well acquainted with it over the past three summers working on the Breeding Bird Atlas project. In fact, I had seen two separate groups of a single female Ring-neck with young ducklings not an hour before I encountered this group. As I watched the duck approach closer, I began to have second thoughts on my initial identification. This duck did not look "right" for a Ring-neck. I got out my binoculars and began to study the duck more closely, noting details to jot down in my notebook. I was able to observe the duck for approximately ten minutes, at distances of 75 to 25 feet, with 8 x 40 binoculars in bright sunshine and with the sun behind me. The duck was rather larger than the two Ring-necks I had seen earlier. Its head was rounded in profile, and lacked the "peaked" look of the Ring-neck. The bill was a bluish-gray, with a black tip, but there was no noticeable white ring. There was no white eye-ring or post-orbital streak which I had always found to be a good character for female Ring-necks. Perhaps the most noticeable characteristic of this duck was its coloring. The head, neck, back, wings, flanks, and upper breast were all a rich cinnamon color. This was the most striking difference between it and the darker, subdued umber tones of the Ring-necks with which I was familiar. A frantic search through my Peterson field guide failed to produce anything which resembled the bird I had before me. Therefore, I wrote down all the characteristics I thought might prove helpful in identifying this duck at a later time.

When I returned home, I began searching for photos or paintings which resembled the duck I had seen. Finally, I came across a photo of a female Redhead in the *Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds—Eastern Region*, on page 124, figure 153. This was the bird I had seen on the Saranac River just a few hours before. The color, head shape, bill color, and description of its size all fit. However, I knew that Redhead was not an acceptable answer to my question, as it was not supposed to be in the Adirondacks, much less be breeding here. A search of the literature however, proved more encouraging than I had hoped. Bull (*Birds of New York State*, 1974) lists Redhead breeding in Kings Bay, on Lake Champlain, and Wilson Hill Refuge in the St. Lawrence River Valley. Gretch (*Kingbird*, 31: 226) found Redheads breeding on Upper Chateaugay Lake, in southwestern Clinton County, in July, 1981. This location is approximately 35-40 miles, as the duck flies, from the Saranac River, immediately below middle

Saranac Lake. As Bellrose (*Ducks, Geese and Swans of North America*, 1980) states that Redheads—along with Blue-winged Teal and Ruddy Ducks—are one of the first species to move into an area, it does not seem unreasonable to find them at another Adirondack location only 35 to 40 miles from their newly found breeding location at Upper Chateaugay.

With breeding for this species confirmed at two Adirondack lakes in the past two summers, it would be prudent for birders working in the northern Adirondacks, especially in the lakes district of Franklin and St. Lawrence counties, to be on the lookout for further evidence of breeding by Redhead in suitable habitat.

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A Blue Jay Feeding on Large Mayflies: On 14 June, 1982, while canoeing up a small stream near the Forest Home Road in Saranac Lake, I approached a beaver dam blocking the stream. Beyond the dam, the stream widened to twenty to twenty-five feet, and the forest receded from the stream banks, leaving an open meadow of heather, leatherleaf, Labrador Tea, and a few scattered alders near the water. There were a great many birds flying about this meadow and over the water. Alder and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, Tree Swallows, Chimney Swifts, Cedar Waxwings and Yellow-rumped Warblers were feeding on the hoards of flying insects over the stream—midges, mosquitoes, and the ever-present blackfly. There was also a good number of very large Mayflies, emerging from the water, flying overhead, skipping along the surface of the water laying their eggs, and lying spent on the surface film afterwards. These Mayflies were approximately two to two and one-half inches in length, with a wingspan equal to their length. Most likely, they were of the species *Hexagenia bilineata*. Although these large Mayflies were by far the most conspicuous insect in the area, it appeared that they were being ignored by the squadrons of avian predators which were in such abundance. Just then, a Blue Jay caught my attention as it swooped low over the water, snapped up a Mayfly in flight, and flew up to a perch in a dead birch tree, which was leaning out over the stream. It proceeded to quickly devour its prey, and then flew out and positioned itself on the topmost branch of the birch. For a minute or so it seemed to be watching the insect activity over the stream. Then it darted out over the water, dropped down to a height of 6-8 feet above the surface, and pursued a Mayfly. Turning and twisting, the jay made several passes at the Mayfly, before finally pulling up short in a hovering attitude, like a kestrel, or Eastern Kingbird, and catching its prey in its bill. The hunter returned to the same perch, and finished its meal. This activity was repeated several more times—with equal success—before I continued on.

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