

nate, with Black-crowned Night-Heron, Snowy Egret, Glossy Ibis and Green-backed Heron ranked in decreasing order. The total number of nests probably is between four and six dozen. It is possible that other species are present but no evidence of this has been obtained so far.

Although the herons, egrets and ibis are commonly seen feeding in nearby marshes, there is very little external evidence of the colony itself during most of the nesting season. The approach and departure of adult birds is fairly cautious. There is no major exodus at dawn or influx at dusk. There is a total lack of roosting or perching sites for adults. However, fledgling birds, particularly egrets, roost on a row of low shrubs near the crest of the island for a few days before they are fully airborne. It was the presence of these birds on the skyline that led to the discovery of the colony.

Ground nesting and secretiveness undoubtedly are adaptations to difficult local conditions which include (1) a scarcity of isolated island sites, (2) a scarcity of trees and shrubs in shore, marsh and island areas, (3) increasing human activity and disturbance beginning earlier and earlier in the spring, and (4) the lack of predators on the island. There almost certainly is no disturbance at all from the gulls. Ground nesting has been reported for all five of these species before, and occurs in many if not most species of herons. In North America, ground nesting by herons is most prevalent in the Southwest. It seldom has been reported in the Northeast although it may be more widespread than generally is realized.

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[Editor's Note: The author is keeping the location of this colony secret. Access to it would be quite easy and, therefore, the possibility of disturbance is quite high should the location be publicized.]

Some Early Egg Dates for Cavity Nesting Ducks: For the past four years we have maintained a small waterfowl nest box project along Lake Champlain in northern Clinton County. In early spring of each year, we inspect each of the boxes for nesting activity. This year 10 of 17 boxes were occupied by cavity nesting ducks: three by Common Goldeneyes, four by Wood Ducks, and three by Hooded Mergansers.

Each year we have been checking the boxes earlier so as to determine the earliest initiation of egg laying. On 17 April of this year we canoed the Little Chazy River and inspected the four nesting boxes we have along this slow moving stream. At that time, only one of the boxes was occupied. We flushed a female Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) from the nesting box as we approached, and found eight eggs in the box. If we assume one egg was laid per day, the first egg would have been laid 10 April. This date is earlier than the one I reported for the 1984 breeding season (*The Kingbird* Vol. XXXIV, No. 3, p. 167; 1984). Considering that spring arrived late this year,

egg laying may begin even earlier than this in some years. Nesting activity started about two weeks after the ice had gone out of the Little Chazy River. On 10 April there still were patches of ice on some of the bays in nearby Lake Champlain.

We also have nesting boxes at King's Bay W.M.A. This year we set out four boxes on the perimeter of a small island in the center of a marsh. These boxes were placed on live trees rather than dead stumps. We have learned from experience that the boxes have a greater chance of surviving from season to season if we use live trees on the periphery of the marsh rather than dead stumps over water. On 26 April, we canoed through the button-bush marsh surrounding this island and found that all four boxes were occupied: two by Wood Ducks, one by Common Goldeneye, and one by Hooded Merganser. The nest box occupied by the Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*), had eleven eggs. Again assuming that one egg was laid per day, the first egg would have been laid 16 April. This is earlier than the earliest egg date reported by John Bull (*Birds of New York State*, 1974, p. 152). This is the most northern reported breeding site in New York State for this species. Much earlier dates for initiation of egg laying should be expected in more southern parts of the state. Also, there were still a few patches of ice remaining on this marsh as late as 12 April at this site. It appears, therefore, that egg laying started soon after the ice disappeared from the surrounding nesting area.

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A Case of Woodcock Mortality possibly due to weather: One of the most difficult types of information to collect on an avian species is the cause of mortality. Direct observations on avian death are rare and the decomposition or removal of carcasses by scavengers is often rapid. Reports on woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) mortality aside from hunter kill and collisions with power lines or towers are scarce. Gregg (1984), Liscinsky (1972), and Mendall and Aldous (1943) have reported causes of adult woodcock mortality, but the reported causes of woodcock chick mortality are few. I report in this note on a possible case of woodcock brood mortality due to inclement weather.

On June 30, 1984 my bird dog located a group of three dead woodcock chicks in an alder (*Alnus rugosa*) stand located 10 km south of the town of Pulaski, Oswego County, New York. The woodcock chicks were not scattered but were all grouped in an interlocking pile. Examination of the chicks indicated no external injuries. The chicks were wet and their plumage was matted. Although the weather was warm the chicks were not in an advanced state of decomposition, indicating death had been fairly recent. The chicks were 9 days old as indicated by the bill length method (Amman 1977), and