

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

had a mean weight of 54.3 g. The chicks were still in natal down although some juvenile body contour feathers were present on their bodies, the flight feathers were only slightly developed and still in sheaths. This brood was believed to be the same one encountered in the same alder stand on June 23. The lack of external marks on the chick bodies and the death of all chicks at one location indicated that the cause of death was due to some factor other than predation or disease. The day the chicks were found the alder stand was particularly wet and numerous small puddles surrounded the chicks. Rainfall for the prior week consisted of 2.2 cm of rain with most of the rainfall occurring on June 24 and June 28 (weather data for the city of Syracuse). Rain of sufficient duration and/or intensity which soaked the natal down could have caused their deaths due to hypothermia caused by a prolonged wetting. According to Sheldon (1967) woodcock chicks are brooded by the hen until the chicks develop flight feathers. The chicks described in this note were of sufficient size that all three would have had difficulty finding adequate shelter under the hen.

Several studies (Gregg 1984, Mendall and Aldous 1943, Sheldon 1967) have suggested that rainy and/or cold weather could be an important cause of woodcock chick mortality. Chambers (1973) documented that the chick to adult ratio of summer-trapped woodcock in central New York during 1969 was much lower than in previous years. In that particular year a heavy rain (15 cm of rain in two consecutive days) occurred in early May and was believed to have caused considerable mortality of woodcock chicks, as well as the destruction of woodcock nests.

While it is possible that the dead woodcock chicks described in this note died of some other cause, it appears plausible that their deaths resulted from hypothermia due to a period of heavy rainfall.

Dr. R. E. Chambers reviewed this short report.

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