

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Chronology of an Early Hooded Merganser Nesting: Our farm pond on Ten Mile Road, Town of Carrollton, Cattaraugus County, had about 200 square feet of open water on 26 March 1986. A pair of Hooded Mergansers flew in and fished for minnows along the edge of the ice. The next day all the ice had melted. We saw the mergansers daily after that. A standard Wood Duck box was located about 150 ft. from the house and mounted on an 8 ft. two inch iron pipe in shallow water. We occasionally saw the female enter the box for short periods and then join the male in fishing on the pond. Then both flew to some unknown destination.

On 7 April we saw the male alone on the pond for about 30 minutes and then he left without the female. This was the last we saw of him but the female was seen fishing on the pond later in the day. We assumed this to be the start of incubation. Thereafter, the female usually emerged from the box early in the morning, fished vigorously for about 15 minutes, making a dive about every half minute. Usually she surfaced with an approximately inch and a half long Fathead Minnow (*Pimephales promelas*). Once she had a crayfish. When she finished feeding she went to a large rock to preen for about five minutes before flying directly to the opening in the duck box. Only once did she slip and have to drop back to the pond for a second try.

On 5 May we noticed that the female no longer fished in the pond but flew down to the middle of the pond from the box, swam to the near end of the pond and flew off. Palmer (*Handbook of North American Birds*, Vol. 3: 458; 1975. Yale Univ. Press, New Haven) gives the incubation period as usually 33 days, so we watched the nest box carefully on 10 May. The female emerged from the box, flew off for a short time, but we didn't see her return. About 09:30 hours we thought we could see movement in the box; at 09:45 the female was at the entrance with half her body out of the opening; at 10:00 she flew down to the middle of the pond and then swam back toward the box. We were at a closed window at the upper level of our house so we couldn't hear if she was calling but at 10:05 the first young appeared for a second or two at the opening, jumped the eight feet to the pond surface, and swam to the mother. Ducklings continued to come out at about one minute intervals. Some intervals were longer than others, for once three jumped out one after the other. At 10:16 all nine young were out of the box and appeared to be lively and in good shape. Some dived for a second or two, some preened and when the female swam away from the group they followed closely in line. Usually one of the young jumped on the female's back for 5 to 10 seconds and then slid back into the pond. Three or four times the female dived for two or three seconds, coming right back up, as though demonstrating the Hooded Merganser dive.

The female led them along the edge of the pond where they appeared to chase surface insects and moved across to the far side where they loafed along the shore for about 10 minutes. She then led them to a small inlet spring run which took them from view. This was the last we saw of them, at 11:12. In the evening we checked the box for unhatched eggs or tardy young. Only four small egg fragments remained.

Gretch and Gretch (*Kingbird* 35: 254-255) rightly predicted that in the state south of Clinton County Hooded Mergansers would start egg laying earlier than 16 April. This Cattaraugus County Hooded Merganser probably laid her first egg on 30 March if we assume her to lay one egg per day and to start incubation after the last egg was laid 7 April. Johnsgard and Kear, in a review of parental carrying of waterfowl, (*Living Bird* 7: 89-102; 1968) cited accounts from Bent (*Life Histories of North American Waterfowl*, 1923) of female Hooded Mergansers carrying young in the bill but not carrying young on the back while swimming. We were not able to determine whether the female ate the egg shells or carried them away but they were missing the evening of nest leaving.

Stephen W. and Ellen E. Eaton, Ten Mile Rd., Allegany, New York 14706

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

A Wilson's Storm-Petrel Sighting from Rockland Co., New York: At 6:00 p.m. on the afternoon of August 18, 1986, as Tropical Storm (nee Hurricane) Charlie passed off Long Island, I sighted a Wilson's Storm-Petrel in the Tappan Zee north of Piermont Pier. The air was clear, with excellent visibility as the humidity had dropped during the afternoon to 55%. The sky was equally blue and clouded with dramatic bands of cumulus leftovers from the storm. The wind was steady from the northeast at about 25 mph, raising a goodly chop but no waves or swell. The sun was shining brightly on the portion of the river where I observed the bird.

I was returning from the end of the Pier and had come west about one-third of a mile (*ergo*, I was about two-thirds of a mile out on the Pier). I had been scanning gulls, cormorants, and swallows, using both my B&L 7x35 binoculars and my gun-stock (Bushhawk mount) mounted BalScope telescope at about 30x. What appeared at first glance to be a large, dark, slow-moving swallow proved to be a storm-petrel: all black with long, pointed wings, bright-white rump patch, **rounded** tail, and even a glimpse of yellow webbing in the feet that trailed through the water from time to time.

The bird was 75 to 100 feet north of the Pier in excellent light when first sighted; the sun was at a low angle, which is probably why I could see that bit of yellow in the webbing. It flew with the typical "butterfly-like" hovering, contentedly picking at bits of flotsam or plankton (or whatever is floating on the Hudson). It was moving slowly eastward (to the right as I faced north) at first, reversed direction, then gradually and erratically flew north, still feeding, until out of sight near the Tappan Zee Bridge. The total viewing time was 10 minutes. I am familiar with the species after 30 or 40 summer pelagic trips into the Atlantic.

Peter Derven, 70 Third Ave., Nyack, New York 10960