

Common Raven Nest in Allegany County: Except for us, only the singer's mother would call this song beautiful as a loud guttural "Wrrruck" rolled from the throat of the huge black bird circling overhead.

This was 16 Apr 1988 in the north section of the Town of Ward, Allegany County, New York, about 4:00 P.M. Daylight Time. Earlier in the day Earl Schriver, from Baden, Pa., had discovered the huge nest and needed someone as a second witness. What a privilege this was not only to see the nest but also to document it for Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology.

As we first hiked through the mature Red Pine forest with heavy canopy and little understory, just a few spindly saplings and berry vines, all was so quiet that I wondered if we were headed right. Earl's running comments did nothing for my unease: "Now – if I can find it again. I thought it was here. These snow patches look like droppings. I'm looking for some twigs I broke...." The monotonous rows of huge Red Pines stretched on and on and all around us. Then at last, the big male bird began calling overhead the "song" described above as it circled in an alternate soaring-flapping pattern and as Earl relocated the huge stick nest. About three feet in diameter and two and a half feet deep, it was secured among the branches about 70 feet up against the trunk of a Red Pine. At the base of the tree, scattered among small patches of snow, was a profusion of fresh bird droppings. Young were in that nest! Although we used binoculars and the sky was cloudy-bright, we could not see the young over the edge of the nest. Earl lacked his climbing gear and so could not attempt to band the young at this time.

This bird guarding the nest was not a Turkey Vulture as the wings were solid black, not two-toned, and were held flat, not at a dihedral angle. It was not large enough to be an eagle nor was the call the creaky cackle of an eagle. Also, the tail was wedge-shaped rather than like a fan. It was not a crow. Even though all black, the bird was much larger than a crow and had pointed wings carried on the horizontal, not bent upward, and spanning four to four and a half feet. Again, the pointed tail was wedge-shaped, not of the fan shape of the crow. The robust guttural "Wrrruck" was not the crow's thinner "Caw". Not so agile a flier as this bird, a crow would have been defeated in these high winds. This was a Common Raven, *Corvus corax*, a species I have previously seen and heard a few times fairly recently in Allegany County, as well as many times over the years in the northwestern United States and in both Canada and Alaska.

Although very common in Western New York early in the nineteenth century, in late years the Common Raven has been rare here even as late as 1974. In recent years Elizabeth Brooks and I have seen individuals of this species fairly regularly in the Town of Ward, as have John and Lois Sheffield, residents here. This is the first modern confirmed nesting record in New York away from the Adirondack and Catskill highlands.

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