



Figure 1. Nestling Yellow-crowned Night-Herons. Photograph by the authors.

FIRST BREEDING RECORD OF THE YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON IN RICHMOND COUNTY, NEW YORK CITY

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The Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*), a common breeding species in Southern states (A.O.U. 1983), has been recorded only rarely as nesting in the New York City area. The first breeding record in New York State was four pairs observed in Nassau County in 1938 (Bull 1964). There have been only two records for New York City: one pair at Jamaica Bay Refuge in Queen's County, in 1953, and two pairs at Pelham Park in Bronx County, in 1962 (Chapman 1966). We could find no more recent citations of breeding records for this species in New York City. Here we report the following: the first breeding record for Yellow-crowned Night-Heron in Richmond County (Staten Island); the first breeding record for Yellow-crowned Night-Heron in all of New York City in 25 years, and, at nine pairs, the largest breeding population ever recorded in New York City.

Prall's Island, is located in the Arthur Kill, a narrow but important waterway separating Staten Island, New York City, and New Jersey. This 32 ha island supports approximately 300 pairs of herons, egrets, and ibises. Another 250 pairs of wading birds nest on 17 ha Shooter's Island, north of Staten Island in the Kill Van Kull (Maccarone and Parsons 1988). Both colonies formed about 10-15 years ago. More recently, a third colony was discovered breeding on Isle of Meadows, a 22 ha island located south of Prall's Island in the Arthur Kill. In 1988 we counted more than 800 breeding pairs on this island; in 1989, that number decreased to approximately 550 breeding pairs.

In 1986, we observed Yellow-crowned Night-Heron adults several times on both Prall's Island and Shooter's Island. However, we were unable to locate active nests of this species that year. During the 1987 breeding season, we located three Yellow-crowned Night-Heron nests on Prall's Island. Two of these were on the extreme northern end of the island, in an area in which Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*), Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), and Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) also were nesting. Both Yellow-crowned Night-Heron nests were located atop dead aspen trees (*Populus* sp.), approximately 4 m above the ground. The other nest was located on the southern end of the island, in a subcolony area also used by the other wading bird species. On Shooter's Island, seven active Yellow-crowned Night-Heron nests were located in a small stand of Gray Birch (*Betula populifolia*) trees; all of these nests were

located between 4 m and 5 m above the ground. No other nests beside those of Yellow-crowned Night-Heron were found in this area. We did not monitor activity at Yellow-crowned Night-Heron nests in 1987.

In 1988, we censused breeding populations on all three islands. On Shooter's Island, four or five active Yellow-crowned Night-Heron nests were located in the same general area as in the previous year. These nests were placed too high in the trees to afford easy access, so we could not monitor Yellow-crowned Night-Heron reproductive success on this island. On Prall's Island, four active nests were monitored during the breeding season. Three nests were located in adjacent aspen trees on the northern end of the island. Of these, one nest fledged three young and two nests fledged one young each. The fourth nest, located at the southern end of prall's Island, also fledged three young. The lone Yellow-crowned Night-Heron nest on Isle of Meadows, the newest colony, also fledged one young in 1988. A total of eight active Yellow-crowned Night-Heron nests were found among all three islands in 1989. We did not attempt to monitor activity or reproductive success.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron represents only about one percent of the total breeding population of wading birds at these three small island colonies. However, they appear to have gained a foothold in the area, having bred there for three years, and probably longer. During the 25 year period between documented breeding records of this species in New York City, the local waterways have suffered from extreme degradation, which affected water quality and prey populations. The prolonged unavailability of prey may have contributed to the absence of Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. During the past four years, however, we have observed abundant, widely distributed populations of fiddler crabs (*Uca* spp.), the primary prey of the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. Thus, it appears possible that Yellow-crowned Night-Heron breeding populations may grow larger as recruitment of new adults and maturation of immature birds from these colonies proceeds.

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