

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Unusual Common Raven nest in Elmira: Astonished would be the word to describe our feelings when a non-birder discovered a pair of Common Raven building a nest on a light standard at Dunn Field Stadium in Elmira (photo p. 136). The ravens were first noticed building the nest on 14 March by a local resident, who called Tanglewood Nature Center. By 3 April, the nest was complete and the female raven had assumed an incubating position. Dunn Field Stadium is used for minor league baseball and high school events. It is surrounded on three sides by houses and the stadium parking lot. The remaining side is bordered by the Chemung River with wooded hills nearby. The nest was located on a transformer in the midst of a light standard (see photo, page 136). Employees of the stadium were afraid that if the lights were turned on, they would ignite the nest or that a short-circuit would occur. A decision was made not to use the standard with the nest, but to use the remaining light standards as needed. This arrangement would work for the spring, but if the nesting went into June and the minor league season started, then something else would have to be done. On 3 April a high school baseball game ran late. All the lights were turned on except for the lights at the ravens' nest. The ravens flew from the nest. They kept returning, flying toward the nest but veering away. We assumed it was due to the lights and commotion. Even thirty minutes after the lights were turned off, the birds had not returned. That night the temperature dropped into the middle twenties. The following morning the birds had returned. For almost the next two weeks there were no late games. The female could be seen regularly sitting on the nest. On 16 April, an exhibition double header ran well into the night, again causing the birds to flee. They made one appearance at the nest the following day. They were also seen in Elmira about four miles from the nest that afternoon. Those were the last sightings. The nest was abandoned, much to the dismay of many residents near Dunn Field, whose neighborhood received a lot of media attention because of the ravens.

A local resident would put raw chicken on a tree stump. The ravens would swoop down and snatch the food, carrying it elsewhere to be eaten. On one occasion while the female was sitting on the nest, the male came along, grabbed the chicken off the stump and flew to the roof of the stadium. He called to her. She came off the nest and flew to him. When she reached him, he let her have the chicken.

About a month after the nest was abandoned, a local electric company retrieved the nest intact and gave it to Tanglewood for public display. Mysteriously, there were no eggs or traces of eggs found. The nest was made largely of sticks, probably from cottonwoods. On top of the nest rim was a layer of grass, covered in turn with a layer of skunk and deer hair. This layer covered the inner layer as well, and appeared ample enough for the birds to be able to cover the eggs or young while the adults were away from the nest. The floor of the nest was covered with earth. Other interesting materials in the layer of fur were a clump of moss, a disintegrating portion of a green rug and a Great Horned Owl pellet.

Ravens have been seen on occasion in our area the last few years, especially on the wooded hills just a short distance "as the crow flies" from Dunn Field. Prior to this year, raven nestings outside the Adirondack-Catskill area have been confirmed only once. We are hoping they will nest here again, but not in the same spot!

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