

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

AMERICAN REDSTART NESTING IN A BARN

As a columnist for local newspapers, I get frequent telephone calls from readers asking me if I am interested in some natural event they have noticed. On 30 July 2002, in response to a column I wrote asking for information on bird nests for the Atlas project, I had a call from Brian Beilen of Fredonia. "Are you interested," he asked, "in a redstart nest?" I told him that I was interested in any nest, so he said, "I have a pair nesting in my barn."

I told Mr. Beilen that I would be up to look at this phenomenon, though I was quite sure that he had misidentified the bird. On the other hand, I could think of no bird he could mistake for a redstart, and he told me that he had seen both male and female and could hear nestlings peeping somewhere in the barn wall.

The next day my son Chris and I went up to the Beilen home. As we entered the barn, a fledgling redstart flew across and landed on a rafter. Although I was quite certain that it was an American Redstart, I said to Mr. Beilen that I wished I could see one off the adults. "Oh, that's easy," he said. "If I open the back door of the barn the male will fly right in."

Once again, I was doubtful, but he had been right once so I told him to go ahead and open the door. He did so, and withdrew to the front of the building, where Chris and I were standing. In just a few seconds, a male American Redstart flew through the door, but seeing two strangers there, he quickly flew out again.

A few days later, Richard Miga and I went back to see if we could locate the nest. Mr. Beilen knew about where it had been because he had heard the young, but our effort to find it were unsuccessful. Apparently it must have been somewhere in the outer structure of the barn, and without tearing the barn to pieces, we could think of no way to find it.

So far as we have been able to ascertain, this is the first records of this species nesting inside a building. There have been a few cases of redstart nests built on structures outside a building, rather than in a normal tree location.

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MORE LATE NESTING DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANTS

On 4 October 2005, unfledged Double-crested Cormorants were observed in seven nests at two sites in western New York State: five nests at Reef Lighthouse, near the source of the Niagara River, and two nests on Strawberry Island, in the upper Niagara River. The downy chicks in one of the Reef Lighthouse nests were determined to be 10 days old, and those at Strawberry Island were assessed as approximately two weeks old. These determinations were made by Connie Adams, a NYSDEC Senior Wildlife Biologist, as part of routine monitoring of the nesting colonies.

Double-crested Cormorants typically wander at 3-4 weeks, fly at about 5-6 weeks, and become independent at 10 weeks (Andrle and Carroll 1988), implying that the nestlings observed on 4 Oct would not be expected to leave their nests until at least 11-15 October, nor to fly until 25 October-5 November. These dates are considerably later than the published nestling period of 31 August - 19 September in New York State (Andrle, R. F. and J. C. Carroll. 1988. *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY), but Watson (Watson, W. 1995. First successful nesting of Double-crested Cormorant in the Niagara Frontier Region. *Kingbird* 45:168) recommends, "Dates for unfledged juveniles in New York State should be extended to June 16 and October 8 based on the observations at Buckhorn Island State Park and the Reef Lighthouse." Even in view of the latter findings, the observations from October 2005 seem exceptional.

It should be noted that NYS Department of Environmental Conservation has been attempting to minimize cormorant reproduction on the Reef Lighthouse and Strawberry Island sites (USFWS Public Resource Depredation Order 50 CFR 21.48, section 10), and these management efforts very likely have prompted repeated re-nesting attempts and the unusually late nesting dates reported here. As management of large colonies becomes more common throughout the range of the Double-crested Cormorant, extended nesting and fledging dates are likely to be reported in the future, and may be artificially late due to disturbance on the observed or nearby colonies.

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