

Further Observations of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons in Middletown, Orange County, NY

With great anticipation, in early April of 2021, I began watching for the arrival of the Yellow-crowned Night- Herons (*Nyctanassa violacea*) that have resided in a swamp at 580 Van Burenville Rd. from early spring to mid-summer for the past two years (Depew 2019, Depew 2020). In those years, I had first observed the male on 15 April 2019 and 19 April 2020. The female arrived later and was first seen on 22 April 2019, by fellow birders Scott Baldinger and Bill Fiero, and on 2 May 2020, by me.

As I awaited the herons' arrival during spring 2021, it is important to note that the winter of 2020-21 was snowy, brutally cold at times, and quite windy well into late spring. This seemed to be like the "old fashioned" winter weather that I grew up with, as a native of the region. As the arrival dates noted above came and went without the male's appearance, I wondered whether unfavorable wind conditions may have delayed his migration. I did not give up hope, however, and neither did other local birders who were anxiously awaiting the fifth occurrence of this species in Orange County, according to our Edgar A. Mearns Bird Club records.

The male Yellow-crowned Night-Heron finally appeared on 25 May 2021. I immediately reported the find on eBird's New York Breeding Bird Atlas portal and notified my fellow bird club members. I was elated! The bird was a welcome sight after a long, trying winter. I began to wonder what type of breeding season this would be since he arrived over a month later than in previous years. My past observations indicated that actual mating requires not only the presence of the female, but also several weeks of courtship and nest-building or repair. The nest from two years ago was still intact in spite of harsh winter weather. The male made his usual mating calls from a tree during the first week following his arrival. I visited this location as often as I could, watching for the arrival of the female. Meanwhile, I continued to observe the male as he fed on crayfish, in either the pond near the house, or in the swamp. This year, I observed the bird on 25 and 30 May and 3, 11, and 16 June. Other birders stopped by to observe it on 29 May and 3 and 8 June and recorded their observations in eBird. Despite this relatively thorough coverage, a second bird was never seen this year. The female never arrived, and I will never know what happened to her.

The male began to leave the swamp and pond more often during the second and third week of June. He was foraging and not calling any longer. During the last few times that I observed him, I noticed that his breeding plumage was not as showy. His normally long, yellow crown plumes became shorter, where in past seasons I had seen these plumes reach his shoulder. After 16 June he was not seen again by either me or the owner of the property. I searched through other Orange County eBird checklists to determine if I missed a later sighting but could find none.

I hope that the summer of 2022 will be a better one for Yellow-crowned Night-Heron breeding activity in Middletown, NY. I certainly would like to see a pair actually raise young. It is always possible that next year a different female might bond with the male and become its new mate.

Acknowledgments

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Literature Cited

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