

FIRST NESTING RECORD OF GREAT BLUE HERON IN DENSELY URBANIZED NEW YORK COUNTY, NY

Shannon R. Curley^{1,2}, José R. Ramírez-Garofalo³, Tod Winston¹, Michael Feller⁴, Beryl Perron-Feller⁵, Daniel Chi⁶, John Carter⁷,
and Dustin Partridge¹

¹New York City Audubon Society, New York, NY 10100

²Biology Department, The College of Staten Island,
City University of New York, Staten Island, NY 10314

³Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Natural Resources,
Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

⁴Queens, NY 11351

⁵Brooklyn, NY 11225

⁶Wild Bird Fund, New York, NY 10024

⁷BoatRideNYC, New York, NY 10006

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) is a large wading bird species found throughout North America. Typically colonial nesters, they aggregate in rookeries during the breeding season, though single nests are not uncommon (Vennesland and Butler 2020). Great Blue Herons prefer to nest in remote areas with minimal human disturbance (Vennesland and Butler 2020). Overharvesting and habitat loss during the late-1800s and early-1900s led to steep population declines throughout their North American range. However, since the 1960s this species has experienced a steady population increase throughout much of their range.

Great Blue Herons currently breed throughout most of New York State, though only sporadically in the New York City area—here taken to comprise of Bronx, New York, Kings, Queens, and Richmond Counties; and Nassau and Suffolk Counties (i.e., *The Kingbird's* Marine Region 10). The lack of firm establishment as a breeder in the New York City area is presumably because of the limited availability of undisturbed nesting locations, and no breeders were detected here on the first New York State Breeding Bird Atlas (1980–1985; Andrlé and Carroll 1988), nor on the second New York State Breeding Bird Atlas (2000–2005; McGowan and Corwin 2008). Single pairs were confirmed on Goose Island, Bronx County in 2011 and 2012; and Clove Lakes Park, Richmond County from 2013–2019 (Buckley *et al.* 2018).

On 20 May 2022, while conducting the annual New York City Audubon Harbor Heron Survey, we observed a pair of Great Blue Herons perched at the top of a Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) on the approach to Mill Rock (40.780717°N, 73.938305°W). Mill Rock is a small, uninhabited island in the East River maintained by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation as part of Mill Rock Park. Since the mid-2000s this island has hosted small numbers of breeding Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*), Great Egret (*Ardea alba*), Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) and Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*). The pair flew from the tree upon our arrival on the island, but a nest was soon located by *The Kingbird* 2022 December; 72 (4)

S.C. in a separate Norway maple (Figure 1). The nest was approximately 10m up the tree, and composed of densely compacted medium sized twigs which formed a central disk approximately 1m in diameter. Due to time constraints imposed by the outgoing tide, the nest was not further monitored.



Figure 1. Great Blue Heron nest in Norway maple. Mill Rock Island, *New York*, 20 May 2022, © Mike Feller.

This represents the first confirmed nest of a Great Blue Heron within New York County, NY. Although Great Blue Herons do breed in low densities in the New York City area, their presence within New York County highlights the importance of the East River islands for conservation of colonial wading birds.

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