

Northern Flicker Nesting on the Ground

STEVEN J. WAGNER

STANLEE M. MILLER

Department of Biological Sciences

Clemson University

Clemson, S.C. 29634-1903

In late May 1984 we received a call from Bill Alewine, a resident of Anderson, S.C., who said he had a Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) nesting on the ground in his yard. On 24 May we visited the site and found the female on the nest. We flushed the female from the nest, which had been excavated at the base of a utility pole and contained three eggs. The first egg had been noticed by Paul Alewine on 8 May, and the other two were present by 21 May.

On 25 May we returned to the site to make measurements of the eggs and nest. The eggs were 2.6 cm x 2.0 cm and were apparently addled as bubbles were clearly visible through the translucent shells. The nest itself was 9.5 cm deep at its deepest point and 18 cm long by 13 cm wide. When we were finished with our measurements and had moved away from the nest, the male returned and moved onto the nest.

On 28 May Wagner returned and took photographs of the nest with eggs and of the incubating male. (Original color slides and black-and-white prints are on file in the Clemson University Vertebrate Collection accession file number 642. Copies of the prints are also on file in the Charleston Museum.) On the afternoon of 8 June the birds were not seen, and one egg was missing. On 23 June the nest was apparently abandoned. The last egg, which was on the ground near the nest, was collected but not kept.

Our observations represent the first report of ground nesting by Northern Flickers in South Carolina. However, ground nests of this species have been described elsewhere (Table 1). In 9 of the 12 citations the nests consisted of excavations or shallow depressions in bare dirt, sand, or gravel. Two nests were excavated in lawns, and another involved eggs on grass with apparently no excavation. In none of these reports were young known to be successfully fledged from the nests, although at least one nest made it to the nestling stage. In nine of the ten cases where the fates of the nests are known, all were abandoned after apparent predation or flooding of the nests during egg laying or incubation. One set of three eggs was destroyed by a mower.

Acknowledgments. We thank Bill Alewine for contacting us and Paul Alewine for providing information on the early progress of the nest.

LITERATURE CITED

- Brewster, W.A. 1909. Eggs of the flicker (*Colaptes auratus luteus*) found in an odd place. *Bird-Lore* 11:73-74.
- Brewster, W.A. 1916. A ground-nesting flicker. *Bird-Lore* 18:399-400.
- Brown, J.K. 1972. Ground nesting of a Yellow-shafted Flicker. *Iowa Bird Life* 42:98-101.
- Dorsey, G.A. 1969. Flicker nesting in the ground. *Oriole* 34:55-56.

TABLE 1. Reported incidents of Northern Flickers nesting on the ground.

Location—Description—Fate	Citation
Barnstable Co., Mass.—14 July 1906, 5 eggs in 3-inch-deep, 24.5-inch-diameter depression in sand and gravel—eggs collected	Brewster 1909
Suffolk Co., N.Y.—9 June 1916, 7 eggs in shallow depression in sand—eggs disappeared by 16 July	*Brewster 1916
Northampton Co., Pa.—21 June 1933, shallow cavity with 3 eggs—deserted by 28 June, pieces of shell found	*Paff 1934
Elbert Co., Ga.—19 June 1964, 9 eggs on ground in cotton field—fate unknown	Smith 1964
Wake Co., N.C.—31 May 1965, 5 eggs in depression in sand and gravel at base of utility pole—eggs and bird gone by 7 June	*Wray 1965
Whitfield Co., Ga.—4 June 1965, female incubating 5 eggs in 3-inch depression in sand pile—deserted but 3 eggs left on 11 June	Hamilton 1965
Bristol Co., Mass.—late May 1964, 3 eggs incubated by female and 3 eggs near nest scooped out of gravel—found flooded and deserted 9 June.	Kinsey 1966
Fulton Co., Ga.—23 June 1969, 11 inches deep, 6-6.5 inches in diameter, hole in lawn with 3 nestlings—survived to 24 June, after that fate unknown	Dorsey 1969
Whitfield Co., Ga.—excavated 10-20 June 1969 in turf at base of utility pole, 2 clutches of 5 eggs each—clutch 1 flooded and abandoned, clutch 2 found broken and scattered	Hamilton and Hart 1969
Fulton Co., Ga.—21 June 1971, female incubating 3 eggs on grass—eggs destroyed 22 June by mower	Dorsey 1974
Polk Co., Iowa—10 June 1972, 5 eggs in shallow scrape in bare ground—abandoned after heavy rain	*Brown 1972
Washington Co., Miss.—April 1973, 2 holes in ground 6 feet apart near 2 utility poles, 6-8 inches deep, 7 inches in diameter; 1974 and 1975 similar holes in same area with up to 2 eggs in some nests—some nests flooded, some eggs found broken	*Ganier and Jackson 1976

*photographs published

- Dorsey, G.A. 1974. Flicker tries to incubate eggs on ground. *Oriole* 39:11.
- Ganier, E.J., Jr., and J.A. Jackson. 1976. Common Flicker nesting in the ground. *Mississippi Kite* 6:8-10.
- Hamilton, A.P. 1965. Flicker nesting on sand pile. *Oriole* 30:111-112.
- Hamilton, A.P., and J.O. Hart. 1969. Second flicker nest on ground in Whitfield County. *Oriole* 34:56-57.
- Kinsey, K.B. 1966. Another flicker nest on the ground. *Chat* 30:28.
- Paff, W.A. 1934. A ground-nesting flicker. *Bird-Lore* 36:105.
- Smith, P.B. 1964. In "From the Field." *Oriole* 29:42.
- Wray, D.L. 1965. Ground nest of a Yellow-shafted Flicker. *Chat* 29:111-113.

BRIEFS FOR THE FILES

HARRY E. LeGRAND JR.

(All dates 1985)

- COMMON LOON:** Rare inland in summer were individuals at Lake Keowee, S.C., on 11 June (Douglas McNair) and at Seven Lakes, Moore County, N.C., on 15 June (Dick Thomas, Steve Prior).
- EARED GREBE:** One of the few records for South Carolina was one seen in breeding plumage by Alan Bennett on 15 April at Mount Pleasant. Charlie Walters and Randy Glover observed it on the following day.
- PIED-BILLED GREBE:** Probably nonbreeding were adults in breeding plumage on 1 and 23 June near Fayetteville, N.C. (Philip Crutchfield et al.) and on 18 June at Clemson, S.C. (Charlie Wooten).
- BLACK-CAPPED PETREL:** Dennis Forsythe saw one on a pelagic trip of Murrells Inlet, S.C., on 8 June. In the Gulf Stream off Oregon Inlet, N.C., where the species is regular, Dave Lee had an excellent count of 77 on 14 July.
- WILSON'S STORM-PETREL:** Hurricane Bob passed through central North Carolina during the day of 25 July. On that day it carried a Wilson's to Lake Surf, near Vass, N.C., where it was seen by Jay Carter and others. They observed a black petrel with white rump; one person (Mike Reid) was able to see a rounded tail and feet hanging down below the body. Another storm-petrel of unidentified species was seen the same day at Jordan Lake, N.C., by Peter Frederick. These are the first storm-petrel records for that state's Sandhills and piedmont.
- LEACH'S STORM-PETREL:** Remarkable numbers were seen off Oregon Inlet this summer by Dave Lee and others. High counts were 50 on 23 June and 27 on 14 July. Dennis Forsythe saw a rare individual in South Carolina off Charleston on 13 July.
- BAND-RUMPED STORM-PETREL:** Dave Lee and party observed this formerly "accidental" species on all seven pelagic trips he made off Oregon Inlet in June and July; peak counts were 21 on 15 July and 11 on 21 June.
- WHITE-TAILED TROPICBIRD:** During the passage of Hurricane Bob (25 July), Derb and Ann Carter and Harry LeGrand observed an adult for several minutes at Jordan Lake. The bird was flying around the lake and appeared healthy. Noted were a 10-inch-long tail, black bar across