

Atypical Nest-Site of the American Oystercatcher in South Carolina

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A pair of American Oystercatchers (*Haematopus palliatus*) nested near the mouth of the Cooper River on an abandoned concrete and wooden barge, located one km south of the bridges which connect Charleston and Mount Pleasant.

The barge is in decrepit condition and about 10 x 30 m in surface area. Vegetation is scanty on top of the fairly level surface which contains numerous broken pieces of old mortar, wood chips, and pieces of shell. At high tide, the surface of the barge is approximately 1.2 m above water, while at low tide the barge lies on a mudflat above water and the surface then is 2.5 m above the mudflat. Above the shoreline and a narrow contiguous saltmarsh is a spoil site which has one dike that parallels the shoreline and rises 10 m above it. The barge is 45 m from upland habitat. The pair of Oystercatchers nesting on the barge were easily watched from this dike.

I watched the pair of Oystercatchers for approximately one hour on 22 May 1985. Several behaviors were noted: 1) The mate announced its arrival to the incubating bird by using the Weep-call, which is a contact call of the pair, cf. Eurasian Oystercatcher *H. ostralegus* (Cramp 1983:31). 2) The pair was highly territorial. One bird exchanged places at the nest and the bird which left the nest called after leaving the barge, cf. Nest-relief of the Eurasian Oystercatcher (Cramp 1983:28).

The incubated eggs were not seen, but the above behaviors clearly indicate American Oystercatchers were breeding on the barge. The pair did not behave aggressively toward other species that visited the barge, i.e., one Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*), up to four Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), and up to ten Boat-tailed Grackles (*Quiscalus major*).

W. Post and I revisited the site on separate occasions more than two weeks after the original discovery of the incubating Oystercatchers. The pair was present on the barge but the outcome of the nesting attempt is unknown.

The pertinent literature mentions four breeding habitats (and nest-sites) for North and South Carolina and Georgia: outer beaches, sandy islands, oystershell banks, and spoil islands (Bent 1929, Pearson et. al. 1942, Burleigh 1958, Kilham 1979, Rappole 1981). Thus, nesting of American Oystercatchers on a barge is atypical in South Carolina, though it is similar to nesting on small spoil islands, habitat which is also an artifact of man's activities. Eurasian Oystercatchers may frequently use atypical nest-sites, including artifacts such as roofs, tops of walls, posts or other structures (Cramp 1983, Munro 1984). It is possible American Oystercatchers may use atypical nest-sites more frequently in South Carolina than documented herein.

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Massive Roost of Fish Crows at Drum Island, Charleston, South Carolina

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I watched a massive roosting flight of Fish Crows (*Corvus ossifragus*) at Drum Island, Charleston, S.C. from 13 to 17 November 1985. On each evening, I estimated the number of Fish Crows as they approached the roost. My estimates ranged from 45,000 to 60,000 crows (counts on 14 and 15 November with W. Post). We found it difficult to count crows with great accuracy, though I believe the estimate of 45,000 should be regarded as an absolute minimum. Crows were impossible to see approaching the roost from several directions. Scouting trips prior to and after my counts indicated relatively few crows approached the roost from these directions, though the number was perhaps 2,000 to 3,000 birds.

The great majority of crows approached the roost from the west and northwest directions. The greatest concentration occurred at the Romney Street dump along the Cooper River, just 3 km north of the roost. Crows flew from here directly to the roost or stopped at pre-roost staging areas on old disused barges alongside salt marshes north of the Cooper River bridge, on rooftops of buildings at the Charleston Port Authority Terminal (directly across from the roost site at the southern tip of Drum Island south of the Cooper River bridge); on trees, telephone lines and poles, ship masts and spars, and other structures near the roost. The location of other pre-roost staging areas at a distance farther away than the Romney Street dump is not known. Fish Crows do cross both the Ashley and Cooper Rivers to reach the Drum Island roost. The preponderance of Fish Crows seen flew in over the peninsula of Charleston and North Charleston, from tidewater and open residential areas favored by this species.

The duration of passage of the roosting flight to Drum Island varied from 26 to 30 minutes. Time of arrival at the roost varied from 5 minutes before sunset to 26 minutes after sunset. The most concentrated movement each evening occurred from 10 to 24 minutes after sunset, when one extended flock accounted for approximately 75% of all crows each even-