

General Field Notes

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First Inland Nestings of Black-crowned Night-Herons in the Carolinas

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On 6 June 1989, Seals and Post found a nest of Black-crowned Night-Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) on Green Island, near Eadytown, Lake Marion in Berkeley County, South Carolina. The breeding colony is 75 km from the Atlantic Ocean. The nest was in a 5 m-tall Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*), which also contained Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) and Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*) nests. The three young in the nest were about 20 days old. The nest was next to the main trunk of the maple, 5 m above ground and about 1 m from the nearest Cattle Egret nest. A regurgitant sample consisting of a Cattle Egret's foot was collected from one young. No adult was seen near the nest, although several had been seen on previous visits. On 12 June 1989 the Black-crowned Night-Heron young were seen in the limbs above the nest, and another regurgitant sample was collected. It contained a decapitated Cattle Egret nestling (about eight days old) and a Spiny Softshell Turtle (*Apalone spinifer*).

On 7 June 1989 Calhoon found a Black-crowned Night-Heron sitting on a nest in an ibis-heron colony at Boykin Mill Pond, Boykin, Kershaw County, South Carolina. The site is 165 km from the Atlantic Ocean. Glover returned with Calhoon on 13 June, and they found two chicks in the nest. Their eyes were open, and they appeared to be about one week old. The nest was in a

Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), about 2.1 m above water level. It was on the edge of the nesting colony, and they saw no other nests in the tree, although Cattle Egrets and Little Blue Herons (*Egretta caerulea*) were nesting in neighboring trees.

Sprunt and Chamberlain (1949) implied that this species nests in the interior of South Carolina, although no documented records of a nesting are known (Post and Gauthreaux, 1989). Before the present records, the farthest inland that this species had been found nesting was Penny Dam, Fairlawn, Charleston County, about 25 km from the coast (Cutts, 1955). In South Carolina, Most Black-crowned Night-Heron breeding sites are near saltwater. The largest reported concentration of this species, 585 nests, was on Drum Island, Charleston County (Post and Gauthreaux, 1989). As yet, there appear to be no breeding records outside North Carolina tidal regions (D. S. Lee, pers. comm.). In Virginia several inland breeding records for Black-crowned Night-Herons exist: Danville (15 June 1951), Shenandoah Co. (June 1977), and Rockingham Co. (22 May 1981) (Kain, 1987). In interior, southwestern Georgia, the species was reported breeding in the Swamp of Toa, SW Dougherty County (Charles Erwin, pers. comm.), which is 160 km from the Gulf of Mexico, about the same distance inland as the Boykin Mill Pond site.

The present findings are significant in that they provide additional examples of the interior range expansion of colonial waterbird populations. Such populations have existed in interior South Carolina at least since 1968 (Post, 1970). They initially were composed mainly of Cattle Egrets and Little Blue Herons (Post and Gauthreaux, 1989), but now other species, which are usually associated with saltwater sites, are colonizing the large hydroelectric lakes of the interior (Belser and Post, 1987). We anticipate that Black-crowned Night-Herons will increase in the interior, as the colonies of other wading bird species become more common. The findings of this and other studies (Beckett, 1964; Kale, 1965; Wolford and Boag, 1971) imply that Black-crowned Night-Herons benefit by preying on the co-inhabitants of their breeding sites. Such intra-colony predation may be a factor that contributes to the successful colonization of the interior by the Black-crowned Night-Herons.

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