

General Field Notes

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Brown-headed Nuthatches Nest Again at Weaverville, Buncombe County, N.C.

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Brown-headed Nuthatches (*Sitta pusilla*) are very rare and sporadic breeding birds in the mountains of North Carolina, even since the early 1970's when they reinvaded the French Broad River Valley in Buncombe County (Simpson, 1969; Whitehurst, 1986). Consequently, we present herein a detailed record, supported by two photographs by the senior author, of a 1988 nesting by *S. pusilla* near Weaverville, Buncombe County.

Brown-headed Nuthatches nested in the rural yard of Mr. and Mrs. Ray Charbonneau, elevation 732 m, 3 km N of Weaverville, off the intersection of U.S 19/23 and Monticello Road. The yard contained Shortleaf (*Pinus echinata*), Virginia (*P. virginiana*) and White (*P. strobus*) pines, and a variety of deciduous trees, chiefly poplar (*Populus* spp.), oak (*Quercus* spp.), dogwood (*Cornus* spp.), and maple (*Acer* spp.). The nest was located 7.6 m from the corner of the house in a cavity in a Shortleaf Pine snag 2.1 m tall. Diameter of the snag at breast height was 30.5 cm. The nest cavity was 1.8 m above ground, near the top of the snag. The entrance was narrow, with no bark surrounding the opening (Figure 1).

The senior author watched the pair of adults, plus one auxiliary bring food to the nest daily from 15 to 17 April (20 feeding trips, all documented by color slides). On six trips, spiders were brought to the nest; on seven trips, insects were

fed to an unknown number of nestlings (Figure 2); food items brought to the nest for the remaining seven trips were not identified. The eventual outcome of this nesting attempt is unknown.



Figure 1. Cavity entrance in a Shortleaf Pine snag excavated by breeding Brown-headed Nuthatches near Weaverville, Buncombe Co., N. C. Photo by B. Duyck.



Figure 2. At the cavity entrance, one adult Brown-headed Nuthatch passes a caterpillar to another for use in feeding nestlings.

Except for a set of eggs collected in 1894 at an unidentified nest site by John S. Cairns, also near Weaverville (Simpson, 1969), our observation is the only confirmed nest record for Brown-headed Nuthatches at a specific site for the North Carolina mountains. The other three confirmed breeding records are of adults feeding fledglings, all of them from Buncombe County, but from localities other than Weaverville (Whitehurst, 1986; Chat 51:22, 1987; Chat 51:81, 1987).

For a further review, including breeding information, of the recent range expansion of the Brown-headed Nuthatch in the Southeast, especially Tennessee, see Haney (1981), Loftin and Green (1985), and Tanner (1988). We note that the Brown-headed Nuthatch is not rare but uncommon and local, in the mountains of South Carolina, up to elevations of 610-671 m (Loomis, 1890; Pickens, 1928; D.B. McNair, pers. obsv.).

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American Coots Nest in South Carolina after a 35-year Interlude, and a Summary of South Carolina Coot Nidology

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On 17 June 1989 in the main freshwater impoundment at Magnolia Gardens, Charleston County, South Carolina, I found an American Coot (*Fulica americana*) nest containing three eggs. Both adults mobbed me from hidden positions in nearby Cattails (*Typha* spp.). On 20 June, the eggs were gone, although the nest was intact (see below), and adults were still in the vicinity. I assumed that the nest was depredated, as no young were seen or heard in the area.

On 6 July 1989, I found evidence of another nesting, when I saw a young American Coot (about seven days old) being fed by another pair of coots. The young, half-grown coot was last seen on 15 July, still accompanying the adults at the same spot where they were first seen.

On 30 July 1989, I saw four downy young (< 5 days old) in the vicinity of the nest site first found on 17 June. These young did not come from the first nest, as it had been collected (see below), but presumably were the results of a renesting by the original pair of coots.

In summary, in 1989 I found three nesting attempts at Magnolia Gardens, by at least two pairs of American Coots. During the breeding seasons of 1985-1988, the impoundment was searched weekly for nests of all species. No coot nests were found, and no coots were seen in the impoundment after June. The main difference in habitat conditions between 1985-1988 and 1989 was the higher water level maintained throughout the summer in the latter year (0.25 - 0.5 m higher than in preceding years).

As no descriptive information has been published for any of the American Coot nests that have been found in the state, I give the following details for the nest found on 17 June 1989. The nest was in a sparse (average distance between 10 clumps = 9 cm) island of cattails that measured 1.5 x 2.1 m, located near the center of a narrow (about 12 m wide) channel through dense stands of cattails. The distance from the island to the main cattails was 4 m on one side and 6 m on the