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## Active Ruffed Grouse Nest Found in South Carolina

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The Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) is an uncommon resident of the Appalachian Mountains, with the lower altitudinal limit of its range being 300m (McNair and Post 1993). Late May and early June are the usual months that eggs are laid (Sprunt and Chamberlain 1970). Post and Gauthreaux (1989) describe the status of the species as "poorly known," so all sightings in South Carolina should be reported. This is the first photographic evidence of the nesting of this species in South Carolina.

On 5 May 2000, while conducting point counts, I found an active Ruffed Grouse nest with 7 eggs. The nest was beneath a 38 cm stump that was 1 m uphill of the Foothills Trail in Pickens County, South Carolina, and only about 250 m from F. Van Clayton Highway at Chimney Top Gap (35° 03' 43.9" N, 082° 47' 49.8" W). The nest was constructed out of hardwood leaves and 2 contour feathers (fig. 1). The site was a mature oak-hickory forest on a southwest slope of 240° and at an altitude of 805 m. Groundcover consisted of canopy species seedlings, sparse ferns, and forbs.

The nest was reinspected on the morning of 26 May 2000. The female was flushed and the eggs were inspected for signs of life. I heard one of the chicks peeping within its egg, and some eggs were pipped.

On 29 May 2000, Stanlee Miller from Clemson University reinspected the nest and found that 6 of the 7 eggs had hatched. The shells and the addled egg were taken back to Clemson University, where they were catalogued (CUSC#3787) along with copies of my photographs of the site and nest.

This finding demonstrates that a Ruffed Grouse had laid eggs in April and that they had hatched in May, earlier than what Sprunt and Chamberlain (1970) report as the normal time frame. The altitude was within the known range according to McNair and Post (1993), however. In an investigation on Ruffed Grouse habitat use by Hein (1970), mature, xeric communities dominated by Pignut Hickory (*Carya glabra*) and White Oak (*Quercus alba*) were the sites of most brood reports. This is the same forest type in which I found this active Ruffed Grouse nest.



Fig. 1: Ruffed Grouse nest in Oconee County, SC. 5 May 2000. Photo by Anna Huckabee.

There is a second record of a female and young being seen approximately 1.24 km (2 miles) east of Laurel Fork Falls along the Foothills Trail on 16 May 2000 by Johnny Townsend of Clemson University (CUSC records). The actual number of fledglings could not be determined. Both of these sightings demonstrate early nestings of Ruffed Grouse in the Blue Ridge Escarpment of South Carolina.

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