

Northernmost Nesting Record for Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*) from North Carolina

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On the morning of 15 May 2019, while conducting aerial photography of a private conservation area using an unmanned aerial vehicle (DJI Phantom 4 Pro), I happened upon a wading bird rookery (Figure 1) on an adjacent property owned by the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. The rookery was in a single large Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) tree, in an open canopy swamp, at 34°45'10.7"N, 77°54'27.7"W along the Northeast Cape Fear River near the town of Wallace, in Duplin County, NC. Photographs were taken from a safe distance, and no disturbance to the birds was observed.

Based on rough estimates from my aerial photographs, the tree contained: Great Egret (*Ardea alba*, 52 active nests and 100 individuals), Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*, 15 active nests and 25 individuals), and Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*, 2 active nests and 3 individuals). Adults, fledglings, and nestlings of Great Egrets and Great Blue Heron were discernible.

The tree also contained at least two active Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*) nests and three individuals. A flock of six Wood Storks was photographed earlier on the same morning approximately 2km N-NE of the rookery flying north along the river, indicating additional individuals were in the area that may use the site for nesting or roosting. The site was reported to NC Wildlife Resources Commission staff who inspected it later that same month and confirmed nesting of the above reported species (Carmen Johnson, NCWRC, pers.com.)

Wading bird rookeries are tracked by the NC Natural Heritage Program as Important Animal Assemblages and the Wood Stork is listed as a Threatened species under both the State and Federal Endangered Species Acts (Ratcliffe, 2018). The Wood Stork population in the United States expanded its range northward into southeastern North Carolina in the early 2000s and the first nesting record was reported in 2005 (Schweitzer, 2018).

As of May 2019, the NC Natural Heritage Program Database contained only six records for Wood Stork roosting or nesting locations, with the nearest record occurring 34km southwest in Sampson County along the Black River near the town of Ivanhoe. The record reported here represents the first nesting site reported for Duplin County and the northernmost nesting record in North Carolina (Carmen Johnson, NCWRC, pers.com.), making this the northernmost record within the species' range.

Fortunately, for conservation purposes, the site is located on a property protected under a conservation easement held by The Clean Water Management Trust Fund and

lies adjacent to the Angola Game Lands (owned by NC Wildlife Resources

Commission) and to two private conservation easement properties held by North American Land Trust.



Figure 1. Great Egret, Great Blue Heron, Anhinga, and Wood Stork rookery photographed by unmanned aerial vehicle on May 15, 2019.

Literature Cited

- Ratcliffe, J. 2018. Natural Heritage Program List of Rare Animal Species of North Carolina 2018. North Carolina Natural Heritage Program, N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources Raleigh, NC
- Schweitzer, S.H. 2018. Surveys of Wood Stork Nesting Colonies in North Carolina, 2018. Waterbirds Investigations and Management Project, Wildlife Diversity Program, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission

