

the chicks to high temperatures and possible predation.

A pair of Great-horned Owls (*Bubo virginianus*) has nested on Dauphin Island for the past three years. The owls had a successful year with four of these large birds having been observed on the Island.

Dauphin Island's west-end beach is a 13 km (eight mi) long narrow dune field. It is used extensively by a large colony of Least Terns, Royal Terns (*Sterna maxima*) and Black Skimmers. Over the past three years, however, continued vehicular traffic in this area has drastically reduced nesting activity along this section of the island. Although the "No Vehicles On Alabama Dunes and Beaches" signs are everywhere, they are ignored and there is no enforcement.

During the breeding season of 1989, the avifauna of coastal Alabama has experienced some problems. On the other hand, the overall picture is still good, and some positive steps for the future have been taken. The inclusion of Little Dauphin Island into the Bon Secour National Wildlife Reserve has helped create a sanctuary for many of the species being displaced by man. Due to a mild climate and abundant food availability, coastal Alabama should continue to support a large assemblage of birds.

Literature Cited

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AN UNUSUAL NORTHERN FLICKER (*COLAPTES AURATUS*) NEST IN BARBOUR COUNTY

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On 31 May 1989 a Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) nest with five eggs was discovered in a vertical ground hole approximately 13 cm (5.25 in) wide by 43 cm (17.0 in) deep at Lake Point State Park in Barbour Co., Alabama. The nest was located about 20 m (66.6 ft) west of the bathhouse and about one m (3.33 ft) east of a power unit box on the

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Barbour Loop campground. The hole appeared to be the reworked entrance to an eastern chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*) burrow. The ground was level and covered by sod which was routinely mowed. Large loblolly pines (*Pinus taeda*) surrounded the area. On the day that my wife, Dana, and I discovered the nest, the bird flushed from the hole at 15:45 hrs and perched on an adjacent pine. After approximately five minutes it flew back and reentered the hole.

Subsequent visits revealed the bird sitting on the nest between 2 June and 9 June. By 13 June, however, the bird had not been seen for four days and there were only four eggs remaining in the nest. By 20 June, approximately 21 days after the initial observation and 11 days since the birds were last seen, it was apparent that the nest had been abandoned. The eggs were removed by the authors and analyzed. Three of the four eggs contained dead embryos approximately 0.63 cm (.025 in) long while the fourth appeared to be infertile. Rainfall between 31 May and 9 June was 4.06 cm (1.60 in) and may have contributed to the nest's failure.

Harrison (1975) reported Northern Flickers nesting mainly in tree cavities at a height between 0.6 - 18.3 m (2-60 ft), while Imhof (1976) reported flicker nests in snags 0.3 - 30 m (1-100 ft) above ground. No instance of flickers nesting in the ground was found in the literature.

Welty (1975) attributes abnormal nesting behavior to individual variation of an instinctive response, or by a dearth of normal nesting sites. Although snags have been removed from the campground, suitable nesting sites are available to Picidids. For this reason, the authors believe that this flicker may have been an inexperienced first time nester. The choice of an almost 90 degree vertical hole in the ground to lay her eggs appeared to be an extreme variation of an instinctive response to locate a nesting site.

Literature Cited

Harrison, Hal H. 1975. *A Field Guide to Bird's Nests*. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston.

Imhof, Thomas A. 1976. *Alabama Birds*, 2nd ed. Univ. of Ala. Press.

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