

UNUSUAL NESTING SITE OF YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER

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In British Columbia, like elsewhere throughout its breeding range, Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*) typically builds its nest on the horizontal branch of a mature or second-growth coniferous or deciduous tree. The nest is usually placed in a fork or crotch, or less commonly saddled directly on a branch (Campbell et al. 2001, Hunt and Flaspohler 1998). There is only a handful of unusual nesting sites reported for Yellow-rumped Warbler. These include a tree cavity in New Mexico (Bent 1953), on the ground in Ontario (McIlwraith 1894), in an apple orchard and in thick foliage of an old Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) growing over the wall of a farmhouse in Nova Scotia (Tufts 1986), and on a wooden beam in rural New York (Snyder 1980).

On 7 July 2008, while monitoring the productivity of a small Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) colony in Cadboro Bay, British Columbia, I noticed a small passerine fly into a heron nest. A few seconds later the bird left with a fecal sac in its bill and landed on a nearby tree. I was surprised to identify it as a female Yellow-rumped “Audubon’s” Warbler (*D. c. auduboni*). Over the next 30 minutes or so I watched the nest site and saw both the male and female warbler feeding and removing fecal sacs on five separate occasions. During one feeding both parents visited the site together suggesting that the nest contained at least two nestlings. The warbler nest was located in a crevice among large twigs and sticks in a Great Blue Heron nest about 13.2 m above the ground (Figure 1). The nest tree, a mature red alder (*Alnus rubra*), was 16 m tall. The heron nest contained three large nestlings and the entire nest was heavily “whitewashed” from droppings. The heron colony was located within 150 m of a marine shore at 2 m elevation.

The following day I observed activity at the nest for an hour hoping that the nestlings might appear. During that period the female fed her brood 11



Figure 1. The nest site of Yellow-rumped “Audubon’s” Warbler nestled between sticks in a large Great Blue Heron nest containing three near-fledged young and an adult. Cadboro Bay, BC. 8 July 2008 (R. Wayne Campbell). BC Photo 3621.

times; the male fed them only twice. On 10 July I spent another hour watching the nest during which time the female visited the nest with food nine times and the male fed nestlings five times. On most visits fecal sacs were removed and dropped within 15 m of the heron colony often over an adjacent residential pond.

During the morning of 11 July two fledged young were being fed by the female about three metres from the nest site. The family was not found on subsequent visits.

This observation adds to the list of 14 other bird species in British Columbia I have found using Great Blue Heron nests as sites for breeding. The additional species include Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo*

jamaicensis), Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) (Figure 2), Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*), Vaux’s Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*), Common Raven (*Corvus corax*), Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*), Violet-green Swallow (*T. thalassina*), Chestnut-backed Chickadee (*Poecile rufescens*), Winter Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), Golden-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus satrapa*), European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), and House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*).

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Figure 2. At least 15 species of birds in British Columbia are known to occasionally nest in active and abandoned Great Blue Heron nests. In the early 1970s, a pair of Great Horned Owls used an abandoned heron nest (center) on the University of British Columbia Endowment Lands for three consecutive years. Point Grey, BC. 5 May 1971 (R. Wayne Campbell). BC Photo 3628.

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