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
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*).

**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.

**Literature Cited**


Campbell, R.W., N.K. Dawe, I. McTaggart-
Great Horned Owl successfully rears four young in the Creston Valley, British Columbia

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Great Horned Owl is a common resident of the Creston valley, British Columbia. It occupies a variety of habitats throughout the region such as agricultural lands, wetlands, rural and urban residential areas, and mixed coniferous forests. The most utilized habitat is the extensive deciduous riparian black cottonwood (Populus balsamifera) stands along Boundary Creek, Goat River, Old Goat River channel, Duck Creek, and the Kootenay River system.

In British Columbia, this widely distributed owl initiates nesting from late February through late March (Campbell et al. 1990b). In the Creston valley, Great Horned Owl nesting activity has been recorded as early as 5 February but peak nesting occurs from mid to late March (L.M. Van Damme unpublished data).

On 5 March 2006, a Great Horned Owl nest site was discovered in a natural hollow created by a major branch breaking off the primary trunk of a mature 17 m tall dead black cottonwood tree. The hollow, situated on the west side of the main trunk, was 14 m from the ground. The cottonwood tree had a diameter at breast height of 117 cm and was located in the Corn Creek Marsh within the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area. Three young fledged from this nest site on 9 May 2006 (Figure 1).

The nest site was checked again during the 2007 breeding season and was found to be active. On 15 May, it was a surprise to observe four nestlings at the cottonwood hollow (Figure 2), although only one was active outside the hollow. By 18 May, all four nestlings were actively climbing out of the hollow and flexing their wings. Developmentally, the feathers on the back, tail and wings were well developed but the head and body still had a downy appearance. The actual fledging date for all young is unknown.

In British Columbia, the brood size for Great Horned Owls ranges from one to four young with

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.


