

NESTING STUDIES OF THE SPOTTED SANDPIPER

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War-time restrictions on travel have made it impossible for the bird lover to travel far afield in the pursuit of his hobby. As a result, some have concluded that this sport must be largely discontinued for the duration, except for the seasons of migration in the spring and fall. Others, however, have decided that this is the best time to learn how many birds there are in one's own near neighborhood. This article is the result of such an investigation.

In the very heart of the city of Milwaukee, is a large tract of waste land which, with the coming of peace, will be transformed into park and boulevard. It is an area of one hundred and twenty-eight acres, stretching south for more than a mile along the shore of Lake Michigan from the Milwaukee harbor. This property was formerly the site of a large steel mill. The mill was closed down during the depression, and the property was finally acquired by the city of Milwaukee. All the buildings



REMOVING THE SHELL

have been removed and the area, well littered with such rubble as bricks, stones and cinders, with here and there a large slab of unbroken concrete, is now largely grown up in weeds. The northern end of the property contains two marshes where marsh wrens, red-wings, swamp sparrows, mallard ducks, and occasionally soras, raise their young. At the present time due to the nearness of installations vital to the war, the fifty-one acres at the north, containing the two marshes, have been fenced off and closed to the public, making a splendid bird sanctuary. The remaining seventy-seven acres are open to the public, and make an interesting place for the study of the bird life of that kind of habitat. We have made a rather intensive study this year, visiting the area nearly every day for a period of several weeks, and on many days spending several hours there.

Because the area is almost denuded of trees, only a few species of birds find it suitable for nesting. Prairie horned larks are found there throughout most of the year. One nest containing young several days old was found on the 19th of April.



FOUR EGGS USUALLY CONSTITUTE
THE CLUTCH

Several male Savannah sparrows were heard singing in their nesting areas. Three nests of the meadowlark and five of the killdeer were found.

Our particular interest, and the chief reason for writing this report, was the spotted sandpiper, one of the commonest and most widely distributed of our shore birds. A year ago we discovered that large numbers of them were using this area for nesting; in fact, fourteen nests were located in 1943. This year we made a more systematic search, and as a result we were able to locate twenty-one nests. It is not likely that many nests escaped our notice. We set down here our observations of these nests.

The nests were located anywhere from 50 to 1000 feet from the shore of the lake. In fact, only one nest was found within two hundred feet of the water. Two of the nests were about one hundred feet apart, and all of the rest were separated by distances usually greater than 200 feet.

The nest itself is a slight hollow scooped out of the ground. This is lined with a thick mat of dried weed stems. It was interesting to notice that the first egg was laid before the nest building was completed. Many sticks were added during the period of egg laying. In the case of one nest the birds struck a stone when scooping out the earth for their nest, and then moved a few inches away and tried again, this time successfully. The birds were not seen in this area in any numbers until a few days before nidification began. Prior to that time they were found along the shores of the near-by ponds and the lake.

The area was remarkably free from predators. Of the twenty-one nests we found only two were unsuccessful. One of them was destroyed after the full clutch of eggs had been laid. We do not know what happened in this case, as the eggs just disappeared. The other nest was destroyed after the first egg was laid. The egg was broken by a stone which might have been thrown out by the tire of a passing car, or by some thoughtless boy. All of the other nineteen nests hatched successfully. All nests were observed either at the time of hatching, or a few hours later, when the young were still in or near the nest.

The first nest was located on Saturday, May 27. It had three eggs that day. The fourth was added the next day, and hatching occurred June 18th. The last nest to hatch was July 16th. It seems quite certain that the last two or three nests were tardy due to unsuccessful earlier attempts. There is no evidence to make one believe that a second brood is ever raised.

When the nests were first constructed, there was not much cover. But by hatching time they were well protected, usually by the white sweet clover which grows in abundance there.

Two of the nests were located before the first egg had been laid, the birds being flushed when in the act of scooping out the nest cavity. Six nests in all were found before the complete clutch had been laid. As a general rule an egg was laid every day, but there were two exceptions to that rule. In one case two days elapsed between the laying of the first and second eggs, and in another three days passed, again between the laying of the first two eggs. Incubation was not begun until the fourth egg was laid, but the birds, both male and female, stayed near the nest during the time when the eggs were being laid, which fact made it possible for us to find six nests before the clutch was completed. The almost infallible rule for shore birds is that four eggs constitute the clutch. In all the nests discovered last year and this year there was but one exception to that rule, a nest with five eggs.

The period of incubation, as determined by the six nests in which the dates of egg laying were known, varies from nineteen to twenty-two days, with the usual time being twenty-one days. It is to be noted that this is not in harmony with the figures usually given. One nest hatched in nineteen days, another in twenty, four in twenty-one, and a seventh nest found on June 8th, with four eggs, hatched on the 30th, or in twenty-two days.

The eggs were pipped two days before hatching took place, so it was easy to predict the time of hatching, and to be there to observe and record it. In every case



EGGS WERE PIPPED TWO DAYS BEFORE HATCHING

the hatching occurred during the day, usually the afternoon. All four of the eggs were hatched within the period of a few hours. The young left the nest the same day.

We were unable to tell whether or not both parents assisted in the task of incubation. Both birds were seldom found near the nest at the same time, except, as already indicated, during the time of nest building and egg laying.

Like other shore birds the spotted sandpipers attempt to lure one away from the nest by feigning injury. However, very few of them did so at any other time than the day when the eggs were hatching, at which time they put on a splendid demonstration. The tail feathers were spread, the wings drooped, and a rapid series of piteous cries were emitted, as the bird ran rapidly about in the neighborhood of the nest.

Eleven of the nests hatched between June 21st and June 30th, indicating the peak of the season.

American Egrets Nest on Horicon Marsh

By HAROLD A. MATHIAK, Horicon

Two egret nests were found in 1944 in the large great blue and black-crowned night heron rookery on Four Mile Island in Horicon Marsh. The first nest when found on July 31 had two young egrets about two-thirds grown. On August 20 a second egret nest with two nearly full grown young was located. In addition, two fledged young were in nearby trees. These young may have come from the nest found on July 31 which now contained a dead egret. The age of the dead bird could not be determined from the ground.

The egrets apparently left the marsh soon after leaving the heron rookery in contrast to their actions of the previous year when a dozen or more were commonly seen feeding near the marsh headquarters. I saw only one egret on the marsh after August 20. There were no egrets at the rookery on Labor Day. The nest trees have been blazed to determine whether or not the same trees are used by the egrets each year.