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## Ruddy Duck Breeds in Tampa, Florida

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## NOTES

**Ruddy Duck breeds in Tampa, Florida**— We saw a lone male Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) in resplendent breeding plumage swimming near dense emergent vegetation on a borrow pit pond in northeastern Tampa, Hillsborough County, Florida, on 23 and 28 April 1983. We suspected breeding, but fencing prevented us from searching for a nest or young. When we returned on 30 May we saw a female Ruddy Duck with one downy chick close by her side. Based on size and plumage, we estimated the chick's age to be 3 weeks. Again on 4 and 5 June only the female and her young were observed; the male was not seen on the pond after April. Based on the estimated age of the chick and an incubation period of 3-4 weeks (Johnsgard 1975: 535), incubation must have been in progress when we first saw the male in late April. According to Palmer (1976: 514), seasonal monogamy characterizes the Ruddy Duck; however, the pair bond sometimes breaks during incubation. This could account for his absence after hatching.

On 4 June during a thorough search of the Tampa area by eight parties of observers, only one male Ruddy Duck was found, on an incinerator settling pond near McKay Bay estuary about 11 km south of the breeding site. As it was the only male seen that day, and it was in full breeding plumage, we suspect it was the same male we saw in April on the breeding pond.

We find three previous records of the Ruddy Duck breeding in Florida. All are from northern counties and recent decades: Duval Co., 1964 (Robinson and Stone *in* Stevenson 1964), Columbia Co., 1976 (Menk and Stevenson 1977), Hamilton Co., 1979 (Maehr *in* Ogden 1979). Frequent summer sightings on fresh water farther south suggest other breeding localities may exist for the species in Florida, as in Polk County for example (Geanangel *in* Paul 1981, Fellers *in* Paul 1982).

The normal breeding range of the Ruddy Duck is North America west of the Mississippi River. However, the species has a tendency to breed as lone pairs or in small colonies far from its normal range. Palmer (1976: 509) mapped breeding records for numerous states east of the Mississippi River from Illinois to New Jersey northward into Canada, and one record from Louisiana. In addition Johnsgard (1975: 531) listed a record from South Carolina.

Although breeding in Tampa has not been documented previously, Ruddy Ducks are found locally in June in small numbers. From 1971 through 1983 local birders have participated in a Tampa Summer Bird Count (SBC) organized by William D. Courser. The area covered and rules followed are the same as for the Tampa Christmas Bird Count (see *American Birds*, 1972-1983). Ruddy Ducks have been found on 9 of the 13 SBCs, the maximum seen was 28 individuals. Virtually all of these records come from McKay Bay where hundreds of Ruddy Ducks spend the winter. McKay Bay is a tidal estuary; its shoreline includes mangroves and mudflats but no extensive marshes. For these reasons Ruddy Ducks are unlikely to breed there. In 1983 (4 June) only the three Ruddy Ducks mentioned above were seen on the Tampa SBC.

We suspect that the Ruddy Duck has become a regular breeder in Florida in recent decades. Possibly an increase in man-made impoundments in Florida has contributed to the species' establishment. The Tampa breeding site is a

recently-dug pit from which earth was removed to build the adjacent Adventure Island amusement park. Roughly rectangular, the pond is about 300 m x 120 m, with two patches of cattails (*Typha* sp.) occupying about 900 square meters of edge. The pond and its shores are enclosed in a chain-link fence, which precludes human access and probably reduces nest predation by mammals. Many waterbirds use the pond, including several species of ducks in winter. On 4 June we found on the pond about 40 Pied-billed Grebes (*Podilymbus podiceps*), 30 Common Moorhens (*Gallinula chloropus*), and 20 American Coots (*Fulica americana*), each species having several broods of young.

Man-made impoundments provide good, albeit temporary, sites for nesting waterbirds in Florida (Ogden 1979, Maehr 1981). The fact that the breeding birds in some of these impoundments include species not known to breed locally in natural wetlands suggests the artificial sites possess locally unique, attractive conditions. Eutrophy and non-wooded shorelines might be two such features that attract Ruddy Ducks.

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**Play-like behavior of American Crows.**—Play has been relatively little described in birds as compared to mammals, although in some families, such as the Corvidae, it appears to be well developed. Other than an incident described by Good (1952), however, I have encountered no accounts of play among wild American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*). The following observations were made mostly on yearlings (Emlen 1936) in January-May in 1981, 1982, and 1983 at the Hendrie Ranch, 24 km south of Lake Placid, Highlands County, Florida.

On 31 January 1981, I first saw two adults carrying sticks, the stick part of their nest being then nearly complete. At about 1100 on the next day three crows landed 200 m from the nest in a tree, which crows often visited late in the morning to rest and preen. One crow, which I believed to be a breeding adult, rested on a low branch. Two yearlings moved about between the branches and ground, manipulating objects in a play-like manner. I twice saw one hang upside down, swinging from a streamer of Spanish moss as if trying to work it loose. Several smaller clumps were pulled away and briefly carried about, one serving in a tug-of-war between the two active crows. In 1982 I saw yearlings swinging from streamers of Spanish moss on three occasions, with bills pointed toward the ground.