

# ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

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### **FEMALE HOODED MERGANSER (*LOPHODYTES CUCULLATUS*)**

### **SUCCESSFULLY HATCHES TWO WOOD DUCK (*AIX SPONSA*) EGGS**

Chad A. Manlove

The Hooded Merganser is unique among North American mergansers in that it breeds exclusively on this continent (Dugger et al. 1994). Throughout much of the eastern United States, populations of breeding Hooded Mergansers are widely dispersed in forested habitats consisting primarily of second growth

timber. Few natural cavities occur for nesting waterfowl, and therefore, Hooded Mergansers commonly nest in artificial boxes. In areas where Wood Ducks are abundant and nest boxes occur in high densities, nest parasitism occurs at high levels (Semel et al. 1988). Consequently, female Hooded Mergansers have been observed incubating Wood Duck eggs (Zicus 1990), but no information exists relative to hatching success of parasitic eggs.

Most information regarding the breeding biology of Hooded Mergansers has been collected from studies of Wood Ducks in managed areas (Morse et al. 1969, Doty et al. 1984, Kennamer et al. 1988, and Zicus 1990). Kennamer et al. (1988) reported that Hooded Mergansers began nesting as early as 24 February in South Carolina. On 29 February 1996, a single Hooded Merganser egg was observed in box #217 on the Bradley Unit of Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge. The egg was uncovered and cold. One week later on 7 March, the nest contained 5 Hooded Merganser eggs and 2 Wood Duck eggs. The eggs were again uncovered and cold. However, both Wood Duck eggs were situated on the nest periphery. Mallory and Weatherhead (1993) suggested that Hooded Mergansers can identify parasitic eggs and move them to the nest periphery to incubate their own eggs more efficiently.

On 13 March, the nest contained 9 Hooded Merganser eggs and 2 Wood Duck eggs. A layer of down lined the nest, but the eggs remained mostly uncovered and cold. I noted that both Wood Duck eggs were in the same position as in the previous week, further supporting Mallory and Weatherhead's (1993) suggestion that Hooded Mergansers can presumably detect parasitic

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eggs. One week later on 21 March, a female Hooded Merganser was observed incubating the clutch. The female was again observed incubating on 11 April, and remained on the nest after being disturbed. On 18 April, egg shell fragments from both Hooded Merganser and Wood Duck eggs were present in the nest indicating a successful hatch. No unhatched eggs remained.

This observation represents only a single instance of successful interspecific nest parasitism by Wood Ducks on Hooded Mergansers. Future research involving Hooded Mergansers should focus on their ability to detect parasitic eggs and how this behavior might affect Hooded Merganser clutch size, as well as, hatching success of parasitic eggs.

Gary Hepp, Keith McKnight, and Joe Benedict made helpful comments on the manuscript. **Chad A. Manlove**, Department Zoology and Wildlife Science, Auburn University, AL 36849-5414.

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## AN ANNOTATED BIRD LIST FOR HORSESHOE BEND

### NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

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Horseshoe Bend National Military Park is located about 14 miles (22.5 k) north of Dadeville, Tallapoosa County, Alabama, on Alabama Highway 49 and the Tallapoosa River. Elevation in the park varies from about 540 feet (164.6 m) above sea level to over 600 feet (182.9 m) on the river hills. Vegetation is mostly mixed forest, with much beetle damage in the pine trees (*Pinus sps*). Many trees lie on the forest floor, partly from beetle damage and windfall from Hurricane Opal (October 1995). In the visitor's portion of the park, the "Battlefield Area", there are large open areas of well-mowed grasses with patches of mixed forest interspersed. There is a paved road through the visitors area leading to the various observation posts. There is also a Battlefield Hiking Trail and a Nature Hiking Trail. In the non-visitors area there is a network of several miles of service roads.

Our bird studies started in 1992, with ornithology class field trips from Auburn University, in the spring and summer. In 1994 to 1996, additional trips