

Belted Kingfishers Nesting in Abandoned Sawdust Piles

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On 20 May 1978, Weber discovered an active Belted Kingfisher (Megaceryle alcyon) nest in an abandoned sawdust pile (Fig. 1) on the Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern Mississippi. The nest site was in Noxubee County, 3.3 km south of the Refuge headquarters on Bluff Lake. A vociferous and wary adult kingfisher was seen near the sawdust pile, and several young were heard calling noisily from a burrow in the side of the pile. Two days later, Miller found a second kingfisher nest in a sawdust pile in Winston County, 8.0 km west of the first one. Here also, one adult was seen, and young were heard calling within the burrow. The second sawdust pile was much larger than the first, with a stand of shining sumac (Rhus copallina) growing on top; on one side, some sawdust had been hauled away, leaving a 4 m vertical face. The kingfisher burrow entrance was 2.5 m up on this face, and three other inactive burrows, probably used in previous years, were in the same face. We were unable to revisit either nest site before the young departed, but we believe that successful fledging occurred. Both burrows remained intact for many months after their discovery, and no signs of predation were noted.

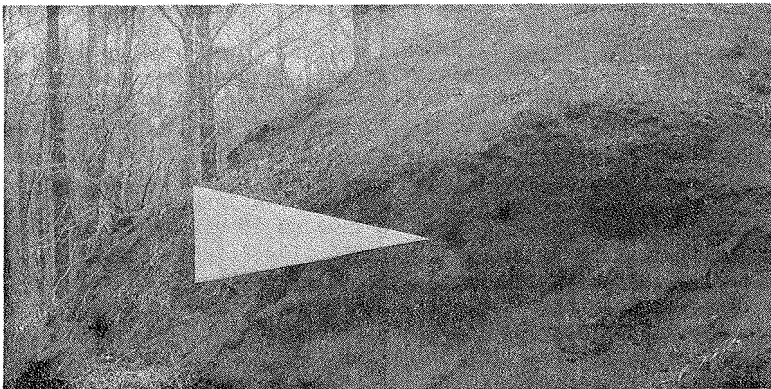


Fig. 1. Belted Kingfisher nest site, Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, Mississippi. (Arrow indicates burrow entrance.)

Although there are several reports of sawdust-nesting by Bank Swallows, *Riparia riparia* (Torrey 1903, Barrows 1912, Norton 1927, Palmer and Taber 1946, Greenlaw 1972), the only other report of similar nest sites for the Belted Kingfisher is that of Hopkins (1980). Donald McCrimmon, Director of the North American Nest Record Card Program at Cornell University, wrote us in September 1978 that he had no record cards for sawdust-nesting by Belted Kingfishers.

The use of sawdust piles by kingfishers on the Noxubee Refuge may result partly from the scarcity of earth banks in this generally flat region (although a gravel pit located only 3.1 km west of the second nest-site, when visited in the fall of 1978, contained at least five old kingfisher burrows). The first nest-site is probably the closest suitable site (0.4 km) to Loakfoma Lake, a favorite foraging area of kingfishers. Although sawdust piles may seem to be a very unstable nesting substrate, those on the Noxubee Refuge are old and highly compacted, with little tendency to collapse or slump. There are several such piles on the refuge remaining from old logging operations. Old sawdust piles are easily excavated, and as noted by Greenlaw (op. cit.) for Bank Swallows, they may offer a suitable and locally important nesting substrate for Belted Kingfishers.

LITERATURE CITED

- Barrows, W.B. 1912. Michigan bird life. Michigan Agric. Coll., Special Bull.
 Greenlaw, J.S. 1972. The use of sawdust piles by nesting Bank Swallows. Wilson Bull. 84:494-496.
 Hopkins, M.N., Jr. 1980. Belted Kingfisher nesting in a sawdust pile. Oriole 45:22.
 Norton, D.D. 1927. Notes from Maine. Bird-Lore 29:117.
 Palmer, R.S. and W. Taber. 1946. Birds of the Mount Katahdin region of Maine. Auk 63:299-314.
 Torrey, B. 1903. Sand swallows (*Riparia riparia*) nesting in sawdust. Auk 20:436-437.

Request for Information: Armadillos. I am studying the range expansion of Armadillos in the mid-South and would appreciate learning of any sightings (such as armadillos dead on the highway) north of a line between Greenville and Columbus in Mississippi or north of a similar latitude in Alabama. Please send details including precise location, date, and observer to: Dr. Jerome A. Jackson, Box Z, Mississippi State, MS 39762.