

NOTES ON RAPTOR OBSERVATIONS AND BANDING DURING 1967

by George Jonkel and Don Adolphson

During the nesting season of 1967 we banded 39 young raptors from nests in South Dakota. In connection with banding operations, data was collected on 84 raptor nests to provide information for the statewide population study that we are conducting for the Raptor Research Foundation, Inc. In many of the nests, young were not banded; however, nest success and other information was gathered so that we will be able better to determine the status of these species. The following includes only our banding data but includes nest success data from John Flavin.

The first Red-tailed Hawks were noticed on March 10 with 17 observed during March, 13 during April and 12 during May. They are numerous in the Black Hills and timbered valleys of the larger streams of the prairie. They are the most common hawk nesting west of the Missouri River in South Dakota. They fledged over two young per nest for 24 nests. The nests were all high in trees and difficult to get to and only one young was banded. Except for occasional wintering birds, the marsh hawks moved back about March 10 with 13 seen in March, 48 in April and 18 in May. They are common in some areas but rare in others. During the summer Don Adolphson saw approximately one per 50 miles of travel. No nests were located by us.

Sparrow Hawks were very plentiful during migration and the nesting period in the West River area, with 7 seen in March, 70 in April and 86 in May. Every timbered area along the creek bottoms in the West River prairie seemed to have a pair.

Swainson's Hawks seem to be plentiful on the prairie, statewide, with the first ones back about April 15 and 30 seen during April and May. We made observations on 23 nests. By fledging time 12 of these appeared to have been blown down or abandoned and were unsuccessful. Eleven of the 23 were successful and fledged at least 19 young. Four of the nests had one young, four had two young, one had three young and one had four young. On one of the nests the young fledged but were not counted before flying. Six of these nests were occupied by Swainson's during 1966. In "Life Histories of North American Birds of Prey," Bent reports that for about every 30 Swainson's nests, one has four young. The Swainson's nests were all in trees but most were fairly easy to get to. A magnesium extension ladder was used to avoid human scent on the trees and to prevent predators trailing the scent to the nests. The nests were not visited until the young were about to fly because Swainson's are reported to be likely to abandon nests if disturbed during incubation. Observations were made from a distance during incubation.

We had observations on five Ferruginous Hawk nests, all of which are believed to have fledged young. Two of the nests are known to have raised three young each, four of the nests were in trees and one was on the ground. One of these nests was used by Ferruginous Hawks during 1966. The ground nest was also very near a ground nest used in 1965.

John Flavin had 18 Ferruginous nests located in the West River area during 1967. Of these only seven produced young. The low success was due to the severe April 30-May 1st blizzard. In 1966 he had 16 nests, 13 of which produced young. Three of the pairs produced young on the same nest both years.

B. J. Rose reported seeing a Harlan's Hawk in Pennington County in April and one in Haakon County during spring migration.

Due to the very wet summer we did not get to all the Golden Eagle nest sites in time to band, but 20 nest sites were located. We do know that young were fledged in four counties.

Great Horned Owl nest success was better in 1967 than in 1966. Of the 14 known nests, all were believed successful. Two of the nests were inaccessible. Of the 12 nests where young were banded, three raised three young, six raised two young and three raised one young. This gives a nest success of two young per nest compared to 1.75 young per nest for 13 nests in 1966. Seven of the 1967 nests contained food items consisting of one kangaroo rat, six cottontail rabbits, two jackrabbits, two blue-wing teal, one snake, four meadow mice and one white-footed mouse.