

Ground-Nesting by Barn Owls

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While trapping small mammals on the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in south Texas, I flushed some Common Barn-Owls (*Tyto alba*) from the ground in a dense stand of gulf cordgrass (*Spartina spartinae*). There were 3 separate tunnel-like pathways through the cordgrass which were apparently being used for roosting. Each cordgrass tunnel was about 1 m long, terminating in a small chamber beneath the grass. The floor of each chamber was littered with owl pellets and skulls of rodents and shrews. Between November 1980 and January 1981, owls were regularly observed using these cordgrass tunnels for roosting, and in January an abandoned clutch of 4 eggs was found in 1 concealed compartment. I suspected the nest was abandoned after having been flooded during a rainstorm (gulf cordgrass communities normally occur on areas that are periodically flooded). I could not find additional nests or roosts. The grass community had a dominant *Baccharis* shrub influence except for a small 3 ha shrub-free area in which the owl tunnels were located.

These observations are of interest because they provide additional evidence that Common Barn-Owls will nest and roost on the ground. Quigley (Condor 56:315, 1954) found young barn owls in a box with an open top, sunk flush with the surface of the ground in a marsh. It is possible, however, that owls resort to such areas for nesting and roosting only if there is no alternative. The nearest tree or man-made construction that could serve as a nest or roost site was located over 4 km away.

Raptor management has received increased attention in recent years. If particular management objectives for an area include enhancing the raptor populations, then attempts should be made to preserve roost and nest sites by not altering selected mature cordgrass stands. Erection of nest boxes (Marti et al., Wildl. Soc. Bull. 7:145-148, 1979) over cordgrass meadows may attract barn owls and support more successful nesting attempts than ground nests. Otteni et al. (Wilson Bull. 84:434-448, 1972) and Delnicki and Bolen (Southwest. Natural. 22:275-277, 1977) provide additional instances of Common Barn-Owl use of nest boxes in marsh areas.

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Unusually Low Nesting Site For American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*)

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Two American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) nests found in extreme northern Utah were located in small pine stumps on a steep canyon hillside. The nests were less than 45 m apart and both nest holes were only 64 cm above the ground. Higher and seemingly more suitable holes were common in nearby trees but were not occupied by nesting kestrels.

The low nest holes that were occupied did not appear to make the birds more sensitive to human disturbance. On one occasion, I was able to walk directly up to one of the nests and temporarily remove the incubating female before she made an attempt to fly.

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Monitoring Bald Eagle Nesting in Baja California, Mexico

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Henney et al. (Auk 95:424, 1978) discussed Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) sightings and nesting activity in the vicinity of Bahia Magdalena in Baja California. They confirmed 2 nesting pairs in 1977, apparently the first published record of Bald Eagle nesting in Baja California during the last 50 years.

During an aerial survey of wintering waterfowl on 18 January 1983, the first and second authors found 3 nests (2 occupied) on Isla Creciente. Two were close together (one occupied) at the location (24°22'N, 111°39'W; hereafter abbreviated as 2422-11139) reported by Henney et al. (op.cit.) and an additional one occupied at 2422-11133 also on Isla Creciente. At the latter nest there was an adult eagle incubating 2 eggs with another adult perched nearby. One of the other 2 nests had an incubating adult, but we were unable to flush it off the nest. Assuming an incubation period of 35 days, the eggs seen would not have been laid before mid-December. All nests were made of sticks and located in the crowns of mangrove, but were readily visible from the air. The location of the other nesting pair found by Henney et al. (op.cit.) in 1977 (near San Jorge 2534-11206) was not checked in detail in 1983.

The west coast winter waterfowl survey was conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in cooperation with the Direccion General de la Fauna Silvestre of Mexico as part of the U.S.-Mexico Joint Agreement. Bald Eagle observations were made incidental to the waterfowl survey. We expect to fly annual winter surveys in this area in the future and plan to monitor the status of Bald Eagle nests at both general locations.