

# VERTEBRATE STUDIES

## Heron nesting – Greenwoods Conservancy Apparent abandonment of rookery by great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*)

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The decline in use of the Woods Hole Rookery (Butts, 2006) to the level of a single active nest continued in the summer of 2007. No active nests were observed in approximately weekly site visits from April 25 through September 12.

The two remaining nest remnants have deteriorated and are barely recognizable as such. Adult herons were seen in flight over the impoundment on May 30; June 6, 13, 27; July 3, but none were seen either wading or perched.

Cause of declining use is obscure. The tendency of this species to return to previous nesting sites may result in establishment of large rookeries which persist for many seasons as long as dead trees remain available for nesting, with more than one nest per tree commonly recorded. Mortality during migration may be a limiting factor, and re-location of nesting to other sites in the area may have occurred.

Another change that could affect the use of the rookery is the marked decline in available feeding sites. The extensive impoundment behind the Zachow Grange that has been available for many years is now drained due to loss of beaver activity. Similar loss of standing water has been noted in the impoundment south of Cranberry Bog Road. In recent years the edge of the impoundment had reached the berm of the road, but has been largely drained during the summer of 2007.

On the morning of September 19, a single immature bird was seen standing in this area. It remained motionless for several minutes and then flew away to the east. Although its presence suggests a successful nesting in the vicinity, the tendency of this species to engage in overnight flights of several miles in apparently random directions in late summer and early fall prior to migration must be considered.

### References Cited

Butts, W.L. 2006. Vertebrate Study: Heron Nesting – Greenwoods. In 39<sup>th</sup> Ann. Rpt. SUNY Oneonta Biol.Fld. Sta. SUNY Oneonta p. 61.

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