Common Goldeneyes Nesting in Wisconsin
By Bruce Bacon and Sam Moore

Evidence of Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) nesting in Wisconsin is very limited even though Minnesota and Michigan goldeneye breeding range borders northern Wisconsin. Bellrose (1976) estimated Minnesota’s Common Goldeneye breeding population at 1,000 and Michigan’s at 4,000. M. Zicus (pers. comm.) indicates Minnesota’s current breeding goldeneye population is probably around 14,000.

Because of Northern Wisconsin’s close proximity to these two populations, it would seem probable that goldeneyes should nest there. Common Goldeneye breeding habitat is described as large sand-bottomed fish lakes with a fringe of hardstem bulrush (Johnson 1962, M. Zicus pers. comm.). Because of the large number of lakes across northern Wisconsin, there are probably many lakes that fit such a description.

Common Goldeneyes nest in tree cavities of similar size to those used by Wood Ducks (*Aix sponsa*), and they also use artificial nest boxes. Since breeding Wood Ducks are common throughout northern Wisconsin, nest cavities are probably not a limiting factor to Common Goldeneyes there.

Jahn and Hunt (1964) reported no Common Goldeneye broods in Wisconsin from 1947 through 1963. Kumlien and Hollister (1903) referred to “several breeding records for northern Wisconsin”, but did not elaborate on them. More recent surveys in 1965-66 and 1968-70 (March, Martz, and Hunt 1973) did not report rare breeding waterfowl such as goldeneyes and a search of their field notes found no Common goldeneye breeding recorded. R.A. Hunt (pers. comm.) reported the lack of goldeneye breeding records despite many years of contact with Wisconsin D.N.R. field personnel to establish breeding duck records.

Wisconsin Society for Ornithology records (Ray Anderson, pers. comm.) were searched for goldeneye breeding records. There were several records of broods seen along Door County in Lake Michigan. Tom Erdmann (pers. comm.) also reports broods seen near Toft’s Point in Lake Michigan and on Mud Lake in Door County since 1980. These reports suggest a local breeding population of Common Goldeneyes exists in Door County. This population is probably nesting in natural cavities.

Three brood sightings in Nelson Lake, Sawyer County during the summer of 1984 were reported to the junior author. Nelson Lake fits Johnson’s (1962) definition of Common Goldeneye brood habitat. Approximately 12 houses have been put up on Nelson Lake by private individuals. An effort was made to contact owners and obtain permission to check the houses for evidence of Common Goldeneye nesting. On February 20th, 1985 the junior author found the remains of a goldeneye nest in a wooden wood duck house. The house contained bluish-green egg shells identified as Common Goldeneye eggs (Harrison 1978, M. Zicus, pers. comm.) and grayish-white down and narrow white breast feathers with a dark shaft which key out to Common Goldeneye feathers (Broley 1950). The house had an entrance slightly larger than the standard three by four inch opening. M. Zicus reports goldeneyes are able to enter the standard entrances but sometimes with much difficulty. No effort was made to evaluate the availability of natural cavities, but it can be assumed there are some present in the area.

During the winter of 1984-85, nest boxes for Wood Ducks and goldeneyes were put up on Nelson Lake. The local Wisconsin Conservation Corps
Crew built and erected 75 with the standard entrance size. A lesser number of houses were also put up by lake property owners who contacted the junior author beforehand and were advised to enlarge the entrances of the boxes. All the new houses will be closely watched in order to document use by Common Goldeneyes.

These reports from Nelson Lake and Door County are the only evidence of Common Goldeneye breeding in Wisconsin that we could find. Wisconsin is at the southern edge of their breeding range and it is probable that there are few records in the state since the original forests were logged off. Anyone having evidence of Common Goldeneyes breeding in Wisconsin is requested to send that information to one of the authors.

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LITERATURE CITED

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Great Blue Heron Killed by Kite String
By James O. Evrard

Accidental bird deaths are caused by a variety of man-made objects and materials. Some birds have become entangled in fishing line (McMullen 1984), string (Foreman et. al. 1978), and even hair from horses (Hendricks and Martin 1972, Knight and Ryan 1980), and humans (Fillmore and Titman 1977, Brittingham 1984).

On 9 April 1984, I discovered a dead Great Blue Heron (Ardea herodias) entangled in a kite string in a roadside pool of the outlet of Wagon Landing Springs (SENW of Section 20, T32N, R17W, Town of Alden, Polk County). The bird was suspended at the water surface by the string which was twisted and knotted around 4 primary feathers on the right wing and entangled in a tree on one side of the stream and a clump of Alder (Alnus rugosa) on the other side (Fig. 1). The thin kite string appeared to have been made of cotton and although easily stretched, broke readily when I pulled on it.