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## Birds of the Great Plains: Family Anhingidae (Anhingas)

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# FAMILY ANHINGIDAE (ANHINGAS)



Anhinga

## Anhinga

### *Anhinga anhinga*

**Breeding Status:** Accidental; has bred in McCurtain County and at Sequoyah N.W.R., Oklahoma, the former in 1937 and the latter in 1971 and 1972.

**Breeding Habitat:** Breeds on sheltered, quiet waters, often in cypress swamps, mangrove-lined bays, and other subtropical areas, primarily freshwater.

**Nest Location:** Anhingas are colonial, with nests usually clustered in groups of 8-12 pairs, in shrubs or trees from 5 to 20 feet above water. Large twigs and branches provide the foundation, with smaller twigs and leaves forming the lining. As in cormorants, the male selects the nest site and gathers materials, which the female incorporates. Sometimes the same site is used in subsequent years.

**Clutch Size and Incubation Period:** From 2 to 5 eggs (29 Arkansas nests averaged 3.9). Eggs are chalky and pale bluish green. Incubation period is probably 25-28 days, starting before the clutch is complete. One brood per season.

**Time of Breeding:** Texas egg records extend from April 14 to July 27. On the Gulf Coast, breeding is concentrated in late winter and spring, with reduced summer nesting, but in southern Florida breeding occurs throughout the year. The recent Oklahoma nesting was in late April and May, with dependent young seen as late as September.

**Breeding Biology:** Anhingas are monogamous and probably do not breed until their second year. Studies in Florida indicate that males establish territories by taking over old nests or building new "preliminary" nests, on which they display by wing-waving, feather-ruffling, and bowing. Females are attracted by such behavior and approach the nest while performing the same displays as the male. Copulation occurs almost immediately, and soon thereafter the male begins to gather nesting material, which is incorporated by the female. The permanent nest is finished within a few days, and egg-laying then begins. Both sexes incubate and both help rear the young, which are fed by regurgitation. The young are normally raised in the nest, but after a few weeks they tend to leave the nest when disturbed, sometimes climbing back to it later. The fledging period has not been established.

**Suggested Reading:** Palmer 1962; Allen 1961.

