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## First Record of Common Moorhen Nesting in South Dakota

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**FIRST RECORD OF COMMON MOORHEN NESTING IN SOUTH DAKOTA—**

The common moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) is widespread in North America, but is not very abundant throughout its range (Greij 1994, Common Moorhen, Pages 145-157 in Tacha and Braun [eds.] Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird Management in North America, Allen Press, Lawrence). In North Dakota its status is accidental (Konrad 1983, Prairie Nat. 15:144); in South Dakota it is considered a casual visitor and a probable breeding species (South Dakota Ornithologists' Union 1991, The Birds of South Dakota, Northern State University Press, Aberdeen; Peterson 1995, The Breeding Bird Atlas of South Dakota, Northern State University Press, Aberdeen).

On 3 July 1995 a common moorhen was seen swimming in a flooded ditch at Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Brown County (T127N, R62W, Sec. 12). The bird appeared to be carrying nesting material. On 4 July, we searched the wetland and found a nest. The nest contained eight brown eggs, all darker and with larger blotches than those of an American coot (*Fulica americana*). The nest was constructed of common reed (*Phragmites australis*) and cattail (*Typha* spp.) stems.

Several attempts were made to take still photographs of the common moorhen incubating the eggs, all without success. On 12 July a standard 1.25-cm vertical helical scan (VHS) tape recorder on a tripod was placed within 15 m of the nest and set on auto record with the lens focused on the nest. A common moorhen returned within twenty minutes and began incubating the nest. During revisits to the nest site between 4 and 26 July, the nest appeared to be actively attended. On 26 July, I found one addled egg in the nest bowl and one small shell fragment on the edge of the nest. Because common moorhen often eat the eggshells following hatching (Fredrickson 1971, Auk 88:914-917), it was uncertain from this evidence whether the eggs had hatched. However, during this last visit a common moorhen flushed from the flooded ditch.

This record represents the first documented nesting of a common moorhen in South Dakota. Observations of common moorhen in the state have been increasing in frequency. Peterson (1995, op. cit.) lists one sighting from Lake County in 1990 and one from Brown County in 1993. During June 1994 a pair of common moorhen was seen and suspected to be nesting in Brookings County (T109N, R51W, Sec. 25, SE ¼) (Spencer Vaa pers. comm.). Most recently, on 23 August 1995, a common moorhen was observed in a man-made drainage ditch in Jerauld County (Scott Stolz pers. comm.). Our finding confirms that this species also nests in the state.

Photographs of the eggs and VHS tape are on file at South Dakota State University and Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Funding and support for our project were provided by Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration (W-107-R, Job No. 8) and the South Dakota Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit

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