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REPORT OF A NESTING SORA (*Porzana carolina*)

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INTRODUCTION by Wayne J. Mollhoff

During the summer of 2008, long-time NOU member and former NOU Treasurer William (Bill) Lemburg of Cairo, Howard Co., Nebraska, discovered the nest of a Sora (*Porzana carolina*). On 29 July 2008, while using a small flat-bottomed boat to gather duckweed (*Spirodela polyrhiza*) on a small pond near his bird pens to feed the exotic waterfowl he raises, he noted a pair of Sora walking about, foraging atop the dense growth of duckweed. The pair ignored his presence even though, as he later discovered, he was within 10 feet of their nest. The following evening, 30 July, he again noted a bird feeding there. The next morning, 31 July, he noticed a small tent-like cluster of broken-over bur-reed (*Sparganium eurycarpum*) in the middle of the shallow pond and suspected a nest might be present. Upon further investigation while wearing chest waders, he flushed a Sora 5 feet away from him, and within the clump of the previous year's growth of broken bur-reed he found a nest with eight eggs.

The dated comments that follow are derived from Mr. Lemburg's original field notes and give a timeline of the Sora nesting behavior.

- 29 July 2008: Pair of Sora observed in pond.
- 31 July 2008: Nest discovered in clump of dead bur-reed in middle of pond.
- 1 August 2008: One adult Sora seen leaving the area of the nest site.
- 2 August: One adult seen feeding at 0950 hrs. Noted Sora giving short call notes as it came from the edge of the pond, with head and neck extended and beak open as it finished calling. I decided to do future observing from inside the nearby duck pen to reduce disturbance.
- 5 August, 1300 hrs: Water depth at nest measured 35 inches. When I approached pond, one adult called excitedly and came toward the nest from the edge of the pond, while the other bird ran from the nest followed by two young. Later that evening: one adult seen feeding. Shortly thereafter the other adult came from the nest, followed by two young, who wandered about. After a short foraging session, one adult returned to the nest followed by the two young.
- 6 August, 0640-0740: Both adults seen foraging. One adult returned to nest frequently, no doubt to feed the young. 1600 hrs: Both adults foraging; one stayed close to the nest. Bird closest to nest returned to nest; other bird came back frequently, probably to feed the young. 1630 hrs: Three young left the nest but remained close to nest while foraging.
- 7 August, 1700 hrs: Both adults present. Four young scattered out, foraging near the nest.
 - 1930 hrs: Both adults present. More colorful adult (presumed male)

searched for food atop duckweed, and when it found something, it would run rapidly back to nest, put head in nest, then hurry off at a run for more food. Only on one occasion, about 5 feet from the nest, did he feed one of the young birds.

- 8 August, 0920 hrs: Both adults foraging. One adult returned to nest and stuck head in, but none of hurry-up activity as noted on previous night. Three young left the nest to forage. 1315 - 1340 hrs: Saw male at edge of pond with three young following it. The young later scattered to forage on their own. Female was near the nest but just before I left, she went out of sight toward the north side of the pond. 1830 - 1900 hrs: Both adults and three young near nest. A fourth young bird returned alone from the other side of the pond. Female stayed near nest, feeding and returning to the nest often, probably to feed young. Male went out of sight to north side of pond.
- 9 August, 0900 hrs: One adult feeding with two young; young later separated to feed on their own. 1300 hrs: Both adults foraging and feeding the three young in sight. Adults did not return to nest as noted previously. 1500 hrs: Both adults foraging near nest, feeding two of the young in the area. When one of the young reached toward an adult's head, the adult gave it two sharp raps on the head with its beak. No idea what prompted the action. The young bird ran off. Adults collected pieces of dead bulrush and placed them on a floating water-level mat of same material which looked as though it had been started by muskrats. Adults acted as though in a hurry to build an alternate nest (heavy rain was forecast). When one of the young pecked



Juvenile Sora at Lemburg pond, Cairo, Howard Co., 22 Aug 2008.
Photo by William Lemburg.

- at a piece of bulrush the adult was holding, it also got two hard raps on the head as witnessed previously. 1900 hrs: Bulrush "platform" occupied by a female Blue-winged Teal and what appeared to be her young.
- 10 August: Male Sora noted foraging in willows beside pond at 1400 and 1700 hrs. No young noted. 1900 hrs: Adults seen foraging. Saw single young at other end of pond.
- 11 August, AM: Saw four young foraging at different locations on pond. One young walked closely past a teal without any reaction from it. 1900 hrs: Three young returned to the nest. Fourth young went to north side of pond. Both adults present.
- 12 August, 1900 hrs: Both adults and four young noted. Young feeding along west edge of pond. One young fed within a foot of a Blue-winged Teal. Seems as though young are not all the same size.
- 13 August, 1800 hrs: Only observed a couple of minutes. One young seen on pond.
- 14 August, 0900 hrs: One adult and three young noted.
- 15 August, 1300 hours and again at 1800 hours: One adult and four young noted.
- 16 August, 1700 hrs: One adult and two young noted. One of the young seemed larger than those seen yesterday.
- 17 August, 1900 hrs: One adult and four young noted. One young getting brown feathers on side.
- 21 August, 1840 hrs: Three young noted. Adults not seen.
- 22 August, 1815 - 1840 hrs: Photographed one young bird. Saw but was unable to get pictures of another, larger young bird.
- 23 August, 1800 - 1830 hrs: Saw four young foraging on pond. The ducks, geese and cranes in my rearing pens started calling and making a commotion. The young Soras seemed to take it as a danger signal. All four raced to hide in the reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) near the boat.
- 24 August, 1745 - 1845 hrs: Saw at least three different young.
- 25 August: No Sora seen. Cattle using the hay meadow where the pond was located fed around the pond and flattened the reed canarygrass. Another pond, also surrounded by reed canarygrass, is 30 ft. away and although it has less duckweed on it, the young birds may have moved to this pond. They were not seen again.

Concluding Comments:

Although not necessarily applicable to other Sora nestings, from my observations of this nest, I feel I can conclude the following: 1) the eggs did not all hatch at the same time; 2) after the young begin to leave the nest, they do not remain close together; 3) the adult male is a good provider but does not, as the saying goes, take the young "under his wing" (I saw three young with him only one time and it was only for a short time); 4) one adult may leave before the young are ready to fly. The other adult might also do so. A final impression: it was simply amazing when I first saw the adults from my boat. They were completely calm, totally ignoring me even though I was within 10 feet of their nest.