

Establishment and Loss of a Nesting Colony of Anhingas at
Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, Mississippi

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In April of 1979, heavy rains resulted in flooding of the Noxubee River and breaching of the dams at Bluff Lake on Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge in Oktibbeha and Winston counties, Mississippi. Because of the disaster, the lake was completely closed to fishing for the first time in many years. Extensive willows and other emergent vegetation grew in the exposed lake bed during the time that repairs were being made, and an abundance of shorebirds and waders took advantage of the mudflats and shallow water. After the dams were repaired, the lake returned to its earlier level, but the ban on fishing remained while fish populations were allowed to recover. In the spring of 1980 and for each year through 1982, several pairs of Great Blue Herons (Ardea herodias) nested in the mature cypress trees at the west end of the lake. Then on 3 May 1982, I observed two Anhingas (Anhinga anhinga) soaring high above the lake. Continued observations through May and June revealed a growing Anhinga population and by 10 July there were several active nests in the cypress trees near the Great Blue Herons.

On 15 August I canoed through the cypress to determine the number and status of the nests. There were six nests, three in one tree and one in each of three other trees. Five of the nests were between 10 and 11 m above the water, the sixth was 16 m high. One nest was empty. Three young were in or near each of four nests, and one nest had five young on nearby branches. All of the young were near adult size, but still extensively covered with juvenal down (Figure 1).

The Anhingas remained on Bluff Lake through the fall and winter. On 19 December I observed a high of 26 Anhingas in one flock. Through the last day of February 1983, I observed Anhingas regularly in the cypress near the nesting area. On 1 March 1983, however, all of Bluff Lake was again opened to fishing with no limits placed on the size of motor used. By 3

March, when I next visited the lake, no Anhingas could be found. On that date there were at least 14 motorboats within the cypress area the birds had occupied. In spite of frequent checks through the summer of 1983, no Anhingas were observed on or near Bluff Lake. Similarly, there were no nesting Great Blue Herons on Bluff Lake in 1983.

The disturbance caused by fishermen and their boats following reopening of fishing on Bluff Lake seems to have resulted in the immediate disappearance of the Anhingas and the lack of nesting by the Anhingas and the Great Blue Herons.



Figure 1. Young Anhingas near their nest on Bluff Lake on 15 August 1982.