

**Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*):  
Recent breeding range expansions in California  
and potential for breeding in Nevada**

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On 1 July 2001, while birding and botanizing in Plumas National Forest, northeastern California, seven of us were pleasantly surprised to see Hooded Mergansers (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) on Antelope Lake. Close scrutiny revealed that the thirteen birds represented two broods, one of four and one of seven, each with an adult female. No adult males were found.

While it is possible that Hooded Mergansers were part of the state's nesting avifauna before the pioneers altered habitat and shot at everything they saw, the first factual record was 13 May 1964 when a female was flushed from "a box" containing 9 eggs at Mountain Meadows Reservoir in Lassen County (Audubon Field Notes, 1964).

**RAPID COLONIZATION**

Other *Lophodytes* have nested in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties on the Northern Californian coast (once in 1974, once in 1981, and at least *nine* in the past three years), in Yolo and Butte Counties at Butte Sink in the north Sacramento Valley, and made two attempts as far south as the San Joaquin River, Stanislaus County, and once in the Sierra foothills of El Dorado County, all in California.

Since 1997, breeding also has been documented in Siskiyou, Modoc, Trinity, Shasta, Mendocino, and, now, Plumas Counties, which completes the representative presence throughout California's northern quarter.

Habitats utilized range from valley riparian (*Salix* sp. and Fremont Cottonwood) along rivers to coniferous forest (Ponderosa Pine, White Fir) at mountain lakes. Elevations range from 200 to just over 7000 feet.

While some of these birds may be nesting in natural cavities, there is no doubt that Wood Duck box placements at wetlands throughout Northern California have been the main cause of recent colonization by Hooded Mergansers, as well as increased populations of Wood Ducks.

**BREEDING RANGE**

In western North America, Hooded Mergansers breed mostly at coastal and south-central British Columbia and in northern Washington (Sibley 2000). In Oregon, the species is an "uncommon breeder W, locally NE" (Contreras 1999). In Nevada, despite meticulous fieldwork for the recently finished state *Breeding Bird Atlas*, nesting has not been documented. The California-Nevada border is 31 miles east of Antelope Lake, Plumas County.

It seems likely that Hooded Mergansers would be attracted to nest box cavity opportunities at suitable wetlands in northern Nevada and, perhaps elsewhere in the Great Basin.

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