AN UNUSUAL NEST SITE FOR PROTHONOTARY WARBLER (*PROTONOTARIA CITREA*) IN CENTRAL ALABAMA

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In Alabama the Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*) is a locally common to abundant breeder inhabiting seasonally flooded bottomland hardwood forests, wooded swamps, and riparian corridors along rivers and streams (Imhof 1976, Petit 1999). Prothonotary Warblers are unique in that they are the only eastern North American warblers that require cavities for nesting. Typical nest sites include natural cavities in dead snags, holes in branches of live trees, or abandoned nest holes of woodpeckers and chickadees (Bent 1953, Petit 1999). Many forms of artificial cavities (e.g., nest boxes, milk cartons, pails, jars, coat pockets, structures on active river ferries, etc.) are also readily used (Bent 1953, Lee and Clark 1985, Dunn and Garrett 1997, Petit 1999). Prothonotary Warblers have even been reported to use open cup nests of other bird species (Conway 1946, Petit and Petit 1988). Other than the typical use of woodpecker and chickadee nest holes, reports of interspecific nest use by Prothonotary Warblers are limited.

On 6 June 2001, an unusual Prothonotary Warbler nest was discovered by the author and Garth Crow, Natural Heritage Section's Aquatic Zoologist, while running a Breeding Bird Survey on the Cahaba River in Perry County. The nest was constructed in an abandoned Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) mud "gourd" which was plastered to the underside of one of the pilings supporting the Walter C. Givhan Bridge on Perry County Road 49 just east of Jericho, approximately 20 ft (6.1 m) above the river. The nest was discovered when a male carrying food was observed flying to the entrance of the swallow nest. Two other partially intact swallow nests were adjacent to the one occupied by the warblers. Other than the abandoned nests, there was no evidence of Cliff Swallows in the immediate area. The entrance to the Cliff Swallow nest was broken off so that some of the nesting material of the warbler nest was visible. While studying the nest, the female was observed carrying food to the nestlings. Immediately after feeding, she entered the nest and began brooding. Petit (1999) reports that on the third day following hatching, females brood in short periods immediately after feeding the young, with brooding ceasing after the fourth day. Based on the female's behavior, it is reasonable to assume that the young were no older than four days. The number of young in the nest could not be determined

due to the height of the bridge above the river. Although Prothonotary Warblers have been widely reported to nest in old woodpecker and chickadee holes and even open cup nests of other bird species, this is the first account of an abandoned Cliff Swallow nest being utilized as a nesting site.

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