
McGILP—Nesting of the Painted Snipe.

The Nesting of the Painted Snipe. (*Rostratula australis*).

By J. Neil McGilp.

While wading through water from three to four inches deep in the Camden Swamp on 22nd October, 1933, a bird rose about 70 yards ahead of me. I was not sure of its identity, but thought it was a Snipe. A search revealed a nest containing two eggs. The nest was rather a solid mass of water weeds and rushes built from the ground to about an inch above the water. There was a little depression for the eggs. The nest was shaded by overhanging rushes, some of which appeared to have been drawn together much after the style of the canopy over Crake's nests.

About twenty yards away I found another nest with four eggs. This nest was exactly the same as the above. It was in three inches of water, and one-and-a-quarter inches above the level of the water. The mass of water weeds and rushes was solid, and rested upon the ground. The nest was well hidden, except on one side, which was open, and the eggs were clearly visible. The rushes had no doubt been laced together by the birds, and formed quite a "cradle top" over the nest. The nest was exactly six inches in diameter across the top of the nest. The eggs were quite damp from the water weeds.

I remained near these nests for a considerable time, and a bird came around, but not sufficiently close to be able to identify it with certainty, but there can be no doubt that the eggs are those of the Painted Snipe. I cannot find any reference to the bird building its nest in water, the site is usually given as in clumps on small islands or on margins of swampy localities.

On looking at the specimens in the S.A. Museum, I recognized them as similar to the birds I saw at the swamp, the female

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having a much darker throat, the male is smaller and greyer. The bill appeared yellowish in flight.

On 29th October the nest with two eggs then contained four eggs, the diameter of the nest was 6 x 6 inches, and the water weeds upon which the eggs rested were very damp.

On 5th November a third nest was found on a rise about six inches higher than the adjacent muddy land. The nest was an inch in depth, and had a canopy of bent rushes (*Heleocharis acuta*) and beard grass (*Polypogon monspeliensis*). The height of the canopy at the front of the nest was $6\frac{3}{8}$ inches, and the diameter of the nest was $6\frac{3}{8}$ x $6\frac{3}{8}$ inches. About 18 inches from the front of the nest was an egg, two yards away was another egg, and a third egg was a foot further away. Each egg had a large hole, and the inside was quite clean—there were no evidences of incubation. As large numbers of Silver Gulls were on and about the swamp the damage to the eggs may have been done by that species. The immediate vicinity was soft, dampish mud, and a little distance away were little pools of water. When the eggs were laid the nest must have been in and surrounded by water. The eggs with the holes on the under sides were placed in the nest and photographed after a few rushes had been removed from in front of the nest. (Photographs of the second nest turned out failures, through the bad light). The accompanying Plate XIII is half-size.

Mr. S. E. Terrill, in writing to Mr. Sutton on 27th December, 1933, stated:—"Am forwarding herewith the three eggs I mentioned as probably Painted Snipe's eggs† with apologies for their condition. They were sound when I found them, but very dirty. I washed them, but left them in their present container in a motor garage, and they appear to have burst since. I found them, as near as I can now remember the date, about the end of November in the same swamp where Mr. McGilp took other eggs. They were then in the nest where they had been laid, together with small pieces of the shell of another egg, which had been crushed by the toe of a boot. When found the reeds surrounding the nest had been much trampled by cattle, and the tops eaten off them. There was no water nearer than about 20 feet away, though it was clearly apparent that the eggs were previously in soft, wet mud from their dirty condition and from the fact that when each egg was removed an impression showed in the hard caked surface of the "nest."

† They are Painted Snipe's eggs.—J. S.



Plate XIII—Half natural size.

B. C. Cotton

Nest and eggs of the Painted Snipe (*Rostratula australis*).

No material had been brought to the nest, and there were but a few blades of grass or water weed and a slight depression, which had clearly been made while the mud was soft. The impression of the boot was very clear, although at the time I found the eggs the surface was so hard that my boots made no impression, so it seems clear the nest was deserted some weeks before I found it."

Mr. H. A. Mawhiney, of St. George, Queensland, under date of 22nd December, 1933, wrote to me:—"Any Painted Snipes' nests that I have found were very similar to those of the Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*). On the Budgree swamp they were placed on small knobs right out in the open swamp, rushes about six inches high being practically the only vegetation, and the birds were nesting in close proximity to one another, about a dozen nests on an acre. Others found on the Watercourse were placed on dry banks between running channels, practically no nest in all cases."
