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First Nest Record of White-eyed Vireo in Ontario

by

William J. Rayner

The White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*) is presently considered a rare breeding species in the Carolinian Zone of Ontario (James 1987).

Although there is an unsubstantiated nesting record from Toronto in 1898 (Macoun and Macoun 1909), the White-eyed Vireo was not confirmed as a breeding species in Ontario until 1971.

On 24 May 1971, M. A. Rayner and the author observed a White-eyed Vireo flitting nervously between bushes on either side of a moderately travelled private road, 75m west of the shoreline of Lake Erie and 2km north of the entrance to Rondeau Provincial Park, Kent Co., Ontario. We soon located a second bird of this species in the immediate area and a closer study with 10-power binoculars revealed that one vireo was carrying nesting material to a choke cherry (*Prunus*

virginiana) bush situated 1.5m from the edge of the road. Upon examination of the bush, we observed the placement of anchor strands of a nest from a fork of a branch about 1m above the ground.

On the evening of 28 May we returned to the site and found a completed, cone-shaped nest, tightly built and constructed of various materials, including twigs, pine needles, paper, grasses and string (Fig. 1). No eggs were present in the nest. The following day, M. H. Field arrived and confirmed our findings. In response to a playback of the vireo's recorded song, one of the birds began uttering a series of scolding notes not unlike the call of a nuthatch (*Sitta* sp.) but increasing in volume and intensity and lasting approximately 40 seconds.

The next morning (29 May) one of the birds was observed on the

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nest. Several photographs were taken with a hand-held 35mm camera and telephoto lens from a distance of about 3.5m. During this period of photography the bird on the nest did not flush. Field and the author visited the nest on 3 June and found it to be unattended and to contain one egg of a Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*).

Upon a search of the immediate area, a White-eyed Vireo began to sing from the edge of a thicket, about 300m to the north of the original nest site. We soon located a second bird, which was observed to be carrying nesting material to a small oak (*Quercus* sp.), where we found the beginnings of another nest. This structure was also in the

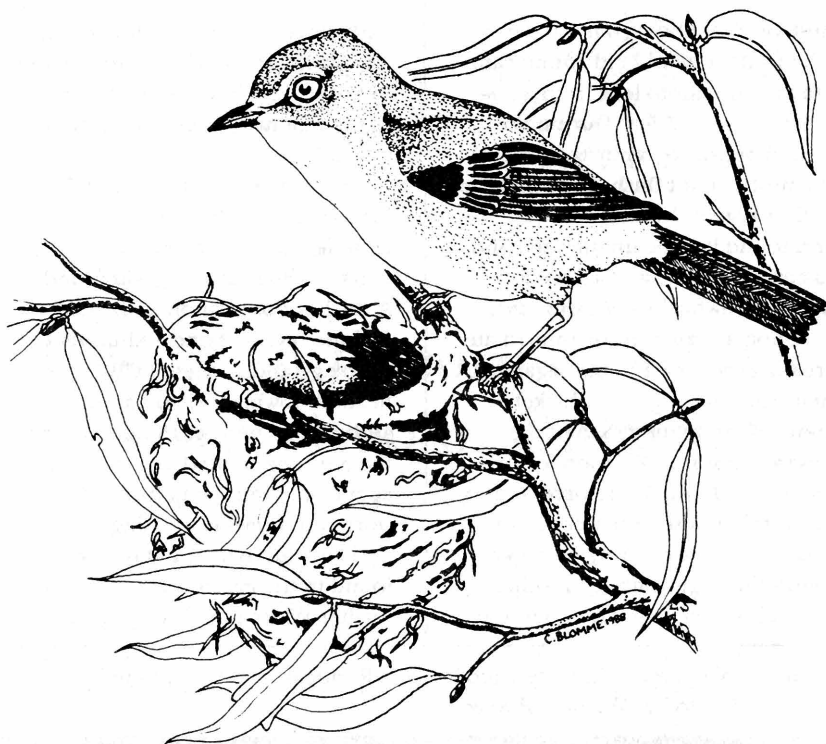
early stages of construction and it was placed so as to hang from a fork in the sapling in the same manner as the first nest, about 1m from the ground.

Subsequent visits on 5 and 6 June indicated that the nest was complete and on 7 June one creamy-white vireo egg was found. A further observation at the nest on 11 June revealed one additional vireo egg and an egg of a Brown-headed Cowbird. Field and the author returned on 15 June to find the nest unattended and the three eggs cold, even damp from a rain-storm the previous evening.

The adult pair could not be found in the general area and no further White-eyed Vireo sighting

Figure 1: White-eyed Vireo nest (collected), Rondeau, Kent Co., June 1971.
Photo by William J. Rayner.





White-eyed Vireo / drawing by *Chris Blomme*

were recorded in the area of either nest during the remainder of the breeding season.

Both nests and the two vireo eggs were subsequently collected and deposited in the Department of Ornithology, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, along with a detailed description, colour slides, and tape recordings. The Ontario Ornithological Records Committee (precursor of the Ontario Birds Records Committee) accepted these findings as the first nesting record for the province of Ontario (Goodwin 1971).

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