

GARAGE-NESTING CAROLINA WREN PARASITIZED BY BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD

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On 24 June 1993, I found a Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) nest in a rattan basket on a shelf 1.8 m above the floor of a residential garage in Starkville, Mississippi. The nest was constructed mostly of loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) needles, with a few straws of grass, and lined with mosses. It was not domed as is often the case with Carolina Wren nests (Bent 1948), although any dome might have been pushed aside by the comparatively large cowbird chick (Figure 1). The nest was approximately 2.5 m from the open garage door. While such "garage nests" are rather typical of Carolina Wrens, this one was unusual in that it contained three Carolina Wren chicks and one Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) chick, all at or very near fledging age. There were no unhatched eggs in the nest. As I approached the nest to examine it, all four chicks fledged, but their flight capabilities were limited and I was able to capture them for banding. All four chicks seemed in good health and were attended by their parents following fledging.

Friedmann (1963) considered the Carolina Wren an uncommon victim of the Brown-headed Cowbird except perhaps in Oklahoma, where 4 of 16 nests were parasitized. He describes some of the nest sites, and none mentioned were in buildings. Luther (1974) considered reported cases of Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism of Carolina Wrens rare because of their well-concealed nests. He detailed a case in which a pair of Carolina Wrens fledged three cowbirds from a nest in a basket under the eaves of a building. The only other case I have noted where cowbirds parasitized nesting wrens within a building was reported by Cain and McCuiston (1977) in College Station, Texas. They observed a Carolina Wren nest located in a hibachi grill that was 1.8 m above the floor of a garage. Although two cowbird eggs and three wren eggs were laid, the wrens hatched one cowbird and two wren chicks, but fledged only one cowbird.

In the case I observed, it was not only unusual that a nest within a garage would be parasitized by a cowbird, but also that the wrens were successful in raising both their own three young and the cowbird.

I thank Ruth Kohers who informed me of the nest in her garage and invited me to band the nestlings.



Figure 1. Brown-headed Cowbird chick on the edge of its Carolina Wren nest. The smaller Carolina Wren chicks are still within the nest.

Literature Cited

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