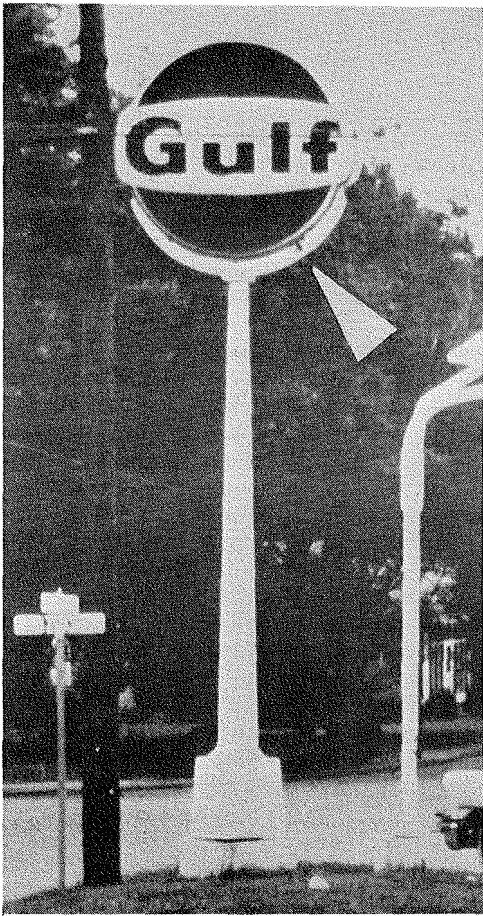


House Sparrow Nest in a Revolving Sign

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The nesting of birds in moving objects is decidedly rare, although it has been observed in several species, most notably the Barn Swallow (Hirundo rustica), which has been reported to nest on trains and boats plying regular routes over short distances (Bent 1942). Thus the nesting of a pair of House Sparrows (Passer domesticus) in a revolving service station sign at Starkville, Mississippi seems worth recording.



The sparrow nest (Fig. 1) was located inside the hollow base of a sign at a Gulf service station on State Highway 12 at Montgomery Street, one of the busiest intersections in Starkville. The birds gained access to the sign's interior through a small opening in the base. The sign remained still when the service station was closed, but revolved when the station was open (07:00 to 19:00 Mondays through Saturdays and 08:00 to 17:00 Sundays); thus it was in constant motion during most of the daylight hours. It made 6.4 complete revolutions per minute; hence the nest entrance, about 0.5 m from the sign's axis, moved at a rate of about 0.34 m/sec. When entering the moving nest, the adults usually clung to the entrance hole in a vertical position for a few seconds before entering. However, their judgment sometimes erred; Jerome A. Jackson twice saw an adult fail in an attempt to land on the nest entrance.

Fig. 1. Nest site (arrow) of House Sparrows in a revolving sign.

I discovered the nest on 16 April 1976, when both adults were present and the female was carrying food to the loudly-calling young. The young were last heard on 22 April, when Jerome A. Jackson visited the nest. So far as I know, they survived at least up to the point of

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fledging, with no ill effects except perhaps for a slight case of dizziness. On 28 April, the female was again seen entering the nest, perhaps in preparation for raising a second brood.

House Sparrows are notorious for building nests in a wide variety of places. In addition to the usual nest-sites (ledges and crevices in buildings, nest boxes, vines, tree cavities, and exposed branches of trees), they have been recorded nesting in hawk nests, Bank Swallow (Riparia riparia) burrows, drawn-up awnings, old American Robin (Turdus migratorius) and Barn Swallow nests, bales of hay, and even an abandoned hornet nest (Bent 1958, Werler and Franks 1975). However, I know of only one previous report of House Sparrows nesting in a moving object: Tatschl (1968) reported several House Sparrow nests on working oil pumps in Kansas. Nevertheless, I feel certain that House Sparrows nest more often in moving objects than these two published reports would suggest. The species' adaptability in terms of nest-sites must surely be one of the major factors permitting its overwhelming success in urban areas. What else but a House Sparrow would nest in a revolving sign?

Thanks are due Jerome A. Jackson for making some of the observations, for photographing the nest-site, and for commenting on the manuscript.

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Common Flicker Nesting in the Ground

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During April of 1973 E. J. Ganier, Jr. frequently flushed a Common Flicker (Colaptes auratus) from near two utility poles in the middle of a cotton field about three miles south of Hollandale, Washington County, Mississippi. When he investigated the site he found two holes in the ground about six feet apart. Each was about seven inches in diameter and six to eight inches deep. One had been rained on and was partly washed in; the other appeared freshly dug. Around the holes for several feet the ground was completely bare (Fig. 1). Again in 1974 and 1975 a pair of flickers excavated cavities in the ground and as many as two eggs were laid in some of the nests (Fig. 2). However, the first rain following cavity excavation always eroded the walls and partially filled the hole with water. Several times in a season the birds would dig a new cavity, but they were apparently never successful in rearing a