

A BELATED HUMMINGBIRD.

BY MINNA ANTHONY COMMON.

THESE observations were made at Thousand Island Park on Wells Island in the St. Lawrence river about twenty-five miles from Lake Ontario. Where we have a summer cottage. As it is in the woods my opportunities to study birds have been especially favorable.

The wood consists of beech, ash, oak, and maple. There is thick underbrush except where a grassy glade cuts through. It was over this sunny spot that I found a nest with young of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird on the remarkably late date of August 21, 1931. The wood is on a hillside and the nest about half way from top to base. A swamp at the foot of the hill contains cattails, Joe-pye weed, orchids, wild buckwheat, jewelweed, etc. The many flowers always bring hummingbirds there. Six times we have found their nests, twice in an oak tree, and four times in a beech. At other times I have seen the nest-building, the eggs, the feeding of the young, but this year was the first time that I attempted to record my observations systematically.

I was weaving a seat in an ancient chair with rushes from the swamp and sat about twenty feet from the nest. When the bird approached I stopped all movement and when she left wrote down my notes.

August 21, 1931—Found nest in beech tree on a horizontal limb nine to ten feet from ground. Female disclosed its whereabouts to me as I sat on the ground nearby. She flew over my head many times. I grew curious, and watching her as she went back and forth happened to spy the tiny home. I sat about twelve feet from the nest. After much fussing she fed her young, at 10 and 11.25 A. M.

At 11.15 she alighted on edge of nest. Fed both each time. Dashed at me with a "flur-r" wing noise quite different from the usual "hum." Called young with a faint "hweek, hweek." They answered fainter than insect notes—not nearly so loud as the crickets and cicadas all about, a repeated note. "Zip-zip-zip."

August 22: 2.30 P. M.—Fed both. I was lying down on the

ground, so had to be investigated. She flew several times down to me and stayed poised in the air a few seconds about a foot from my face.

Nest on a horizontal branch which extends out over an open grass-covered spot in the woods. There is a canopy of horizontal leaves just above it. Branch size of little finger. Nest entirely above branch, where there are two side twigs. Lichens which cover it are very light colored.

The advance to the nest was very interesting. First she perched on several dead twigs near by. After reconnoitering from her outlooks, she came through the air about a foot at a time, poised and turned around to face in the opposite direction; repeated the advance; poised and turned again; and so on until she had looked in all four ways. The peculiar "whir" of her wings was noticeable at each poise. This peculiar noise when a hummingbird is near her nest is characteristic. She "squeaked" to the family as she approached.

She propped her tail against the nest when feeding her young. After a few preliminary pokes, presumably to get the youngsters bill open and her own inserted within it, she pumped the food into it. About four "pumps" to each bird.

3.20 P. M.—Drove off a catbird by flying at it spitefully; also a nuthatch that alighted on her tree trunk, and a robin that hopped too near. Fed both young. A dozen "pokes" to each.

The men of the family climbed on a chair and looked in the nest. They reported two young which they said resembled lumps of gum with bills added. The young did not open their mouths when the nest was jarred as most baby birds do. Their eyes were closed. They appeared to be naked.

August 23: 9.07 A. M.—When I was picking cattails in the swamp perhaps fifty feet from the nest the hummingbird flew all about me curiously.

Bird waited six minutes on branch nearby because of cat on the ground and two squirrels playing tag in the next tree. The nest as she had placed it could not be on a squirrel run-way as the branch connects with no other. Did the bird think of that? Every one of the six hummingbird nests I have found have been similarly situated.

9.30—Scared by my dog; watched him from a branch just above where he was lying.

9.55—Another female came visiting. No fuss whatever.

10.20—Fed both young each time.

August 24:—My husband wished to witness the feeding. Went to nest at 2.45 P. M. Bird fussed around for half an hour showing plainly she feared the stranger for she kept flying out in front of him and "standing" in the air at attention. At 3.20 she got up enough courage to alight on the nest. Husband unfortunately moved his hand. She flew straight at him, then resumed the watching. Finally out of pity for the hungry young he left.

August 25: 9.45 A. M.—I changed my usual position to one directly under the nest. Husband smoking rather near. Bird would not go to nest. Waited until 10.40, then moved to old place. In one minute she went to nest. I raised my arm. She came, hovered, returned to nest as if satisfied (husband gone in meantime). Fed both young.

August 26: 1.45 and 2.45 P. M.—Fed both young. Got insects from a large garden spider's web. Gathered as many as ten from it.

3.40—Two ladies watching with me. Fed both young.

August 27: 8.45 A. M.—Two children, the cat, the dog and I. Quiet. Fed both.

9.20:—Fed one. Dog moved his tail, bird flew over him, went back and perched an instant on edge of nest. Dog got up, she flew at him so close he shook his head. He lay down. She fed other young, looked us over from her perch for two minutes (she usually flew directly off) then left for food.

9.40:—A friend and I present. Fed both young.

10.45:—Cat, dog, three children. Quiet. Fed both young.

2.30:—Dog and I. No fussing on part of bird, just looked four ways in air as usual. Flew over us when leaving in a questioning manner.

3.00:—Fed both.

3.20:—I approached the nest, she flew at me.

3.50:—Fed both. Took 23 rapid "pokes" in one throat; 42 in the other—as fast as I could count.

4.55:—Fed both.

This day I had not left the nest all day so my records would be as complete as possible.

August 28: 8.00 A. M.—Daughter and I present. Both young fed.

8.45:—Alone. Both young fed. (Called away).

3.10 P. M.—Three ladies, dog and I. Both young fed. but in a hesitant manner and only a trifle to each.

3.31:—Two ladies and I. Fed both young well.

4.05:—Same audience. Fed one.

4.10:—Fed other. Saw bills of young above nest. Restless.

August 29: 9.45 A. M.—Baby birds poking heads well out of nest, one's whole head and neck, other's crown and bill.

I took a new position at foot of tree. Bird had accepted me when I was weaving chair seat in a certain spot, but now I became an object of suspicion. She flew about me in a semicircle, facing me all the while and "chittering" sharply and with tail spread to show white band in a curve. Clicked her bill—or so it sounded. Young crouched and very still, their bills only showing above rim. Did not feed young.

10.00:—Returned to look me over again. Did not go near nest.

10.10:—Two children, strangers, came to look at nest. One pointed it out with a stick. Hummingbird went wild and chased them away with a whiz. Flew around their heads like a wasp.

1.45 P. M.—Heads both above nest, one on each side. Considerable movement, but no fluttering of wings. Both young fed.

2.10:—Fed both. Wind blew fiercely. One stretched out of nest so far it looked risky. Young made no noticeable noise.

4.05:—Fed both. Rainy. Bills look same size whole length.

4.50:—Fed both, fussing about me all the time.

5.00:—Fed both. Young lively; heads close together on one side of nest.

5.10:—Mother watched from a branch after feeding young. Unusual. Never perched on a leafy branch, but always chose a dead one. No versatility, but approached the nest from the same direction every time using the same twigs as stopping places in the same order.

Young quite restless. Both heads well above rim.

5.40 P. M.—Fed both. I sat in a chair. Had always been on the

ground before. The change bothered her. She fussed over half an hour before she went to the nest, then stayed only a moment, stretched her head toward me, fed each young bird a little, then flew over and around me "squeaking."

August 31: 9.30 A. M.—Alone. Fed both. Young appeared to rest almost across top of nest, heads projecting in one direction and tails making a white fringe on other.

When mother fed young she clung to side of nest in an upright position, her tail braced on branch below nest. The young were now so large she had difficulty withdrawing her bill from their throats. It stretched her neck backward until she seemed in danger of a fall. High wind.

Sept. 1: Another *all* day watch.

Fed both young at 8.00 A. M., 10.30, 11.30, 12.45 P. M., 1.10, and 2.05.

3.00:—Fed one. Both young on top of nest facing in opposite directions. Mother always alighted on very same place on nest to feed birds. As she did not reach across nest she could feed only one unless they changed places and I did not see them move.

An automobile went by the country road about 100 feet distant while she was busy feeding one of the young. She flew at it; then came back. I moved my arm in an unusual gesture, she hovered above my head, then sat above me in a new place a few minutes, five to be exact and looked at me with one eye and then the other.

3.05:—Fed other bird. Reached across nest. I got a chair and tried to take a picture from underneath. Mother now gone. Both bills pointed one way. They were watching me. Then, *without warning*, one flew away. A level flight fully 100 feet and I had never seen it so much as spread a wing. Lit in a willow.

3.45:—Mother fed remaining nestling.

4.05:—Wanderer had come closer to nest into a maple. Mother fed it sitting on a branch beside it.

4.10:—Fed nestling.

5.00:—Fed wanderer.

5.05:—Fed nestling.

5.45:—Fed both, going directly from one to the other.

Sept. 2:—Other young still in nest. No exercises. For first time I saw mother approach nest from other side.

Sept. 3: 9.30:—Fed young in nest (cloud burst in night).

10.00:—Young *not* in nest. (I had had to go in house a moment.)

10.10:—Mother approached nest as usual evidently not knowing young had left. Lit on rim. Left. Sat on perch. Left.

10.30:—Lit on nest again, no young of course. Flew to top of tall tree near by. (Top dead). In five minutes flew down to a dead twig in another tree and fed young there.

12.00:—She came again. Approached in usual manner, but did not alight.

1.00:—She came to tree, buzzed about but did not approach nest.

Sept. 4:—Fed both young in vicinity of nest, but not together. Flew over and around nest several times, but did not alight near it.

Sept. 5: 6.00 A. M.—Fed young in top of tall tree about fifty feet from nest twice at half hour intervals.

Sept. 6 and 7:—Not seen.

Sept. 8:—Saw a hummingbird in touch-me-nots. May have been another.

Note:—Never once saw a male bird during this whole time.

Watertown, N. Y.