

SOME ROBINS' AND MOURNING DOVES' NESTS IN THE LOWER
YAKIMA VALLEY, WASHINGTON

By CLARENCE HAMILTON KENNEDY

WITH TWO ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

WHEN I first came into the Yakima Valley, I was pleased to be greeted by an old friend, the robin (*Planesticus migratorius propinquus*), slightly paler than his eastern relative and with the same cheerful note and mien; but I was surprised to see pair a complacently building a nest on a beam in a cow

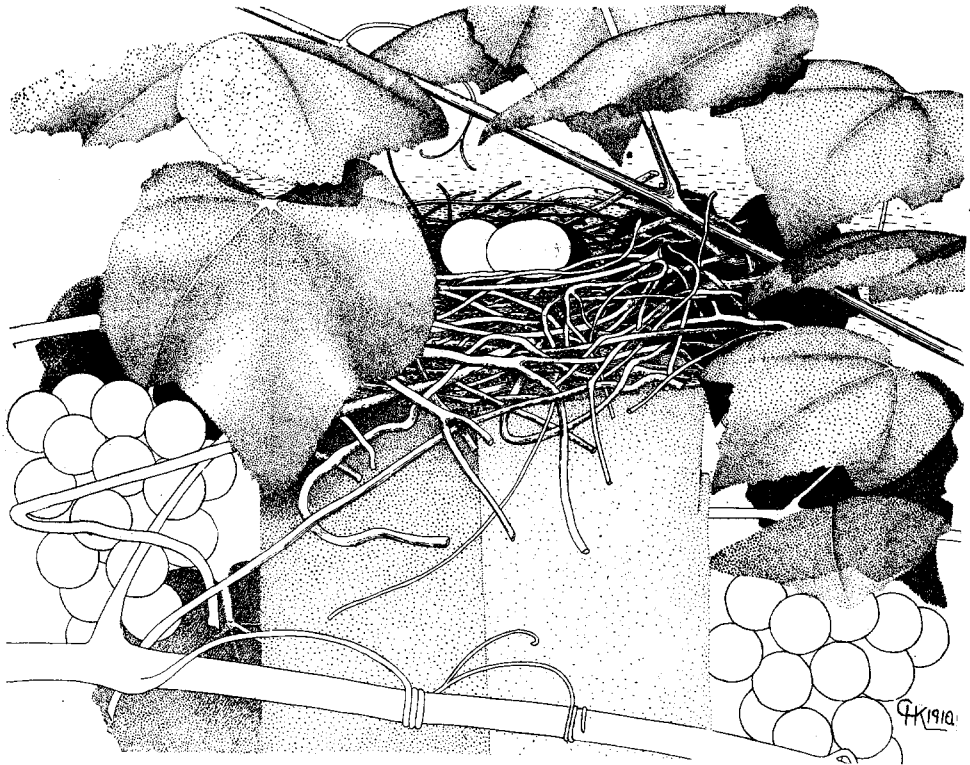


Fig. 55. A MOURNING DOVE'S NEST ON A POST

shed. However, on considering further I ceased to wonder. The Lower Yakima Valley, lying as it does in the Upper Sonoran Zone, is a sage-brush desert except along the streams, where are thickets of willows and cottonwoods, and in its more level portions, where are now many square miles of irrigated fields and orchards.

Because of the past scarcity of timber, the robins and also Mourning Doves (*Zenaidura macroura carolinensis*) appear to have lost to some extent their desire and ability to build in trees. Now that large areas of the valley are covered with orchards and that shade trees are numerous, they yet occasionally revert to their former habit of building in places other than trees. It is possible, though, that as irrigation is recent here, the robins and doves have spread out from their formerly more restricted habitat about the water holes and streams, into the sur-

rounding irrigated portions of the valley ahead of the development of a sufficient number of trees large enough to be suitable for nests.

The robin's nest mentioned above was begun on May 2, 1910, and was constructed of alfalfa and weed stems plastered together with mud and lined with rootlets after the usual robin style, but it was placed on a six inch beam close under the roof of an open cow-shed. The nest was about six feet above the ground. On May 15 it was nosed down by an inquisitive horse, breaking the three eggs which it contained. A nest was built shortly afterward, possibly by this same pair, in a cork elm tree on the lawn. This nest was built in a heavy fork about twelve feet above the ground.

These robins perhaps lacked a strong tree nesting instinct, because they con-

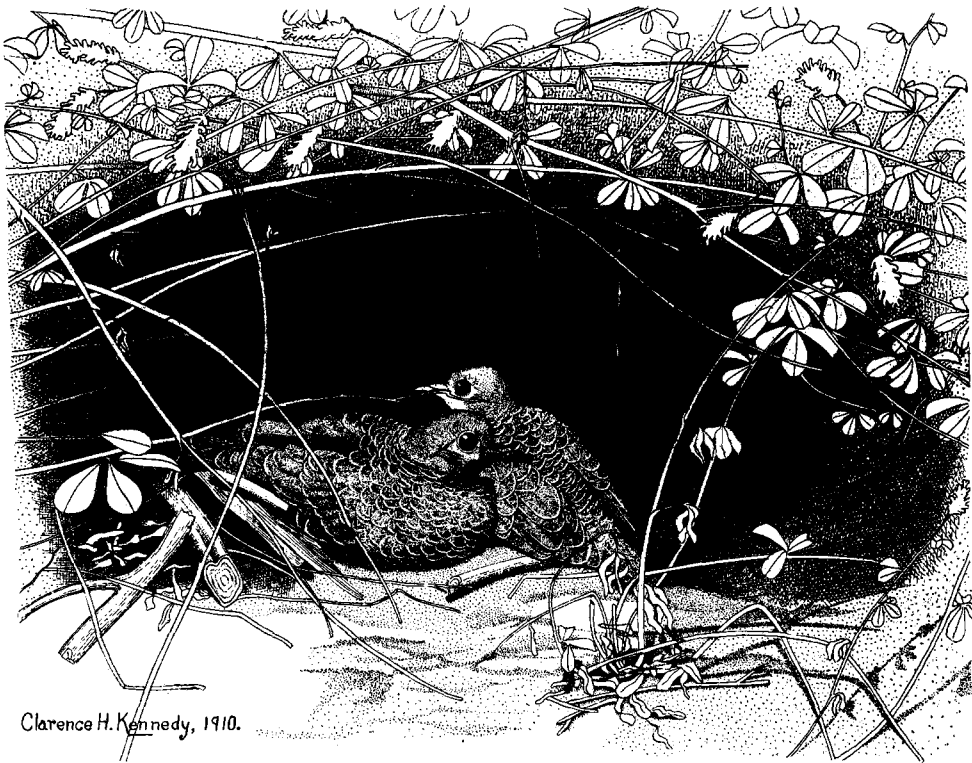


Fig. 56. A MOURNING DOVES' NEST ON THE GROUND

structed a loosely attached nest. Sufficient mud and other material had not been put in the base of the nest to wedge it solidly in the tree fork. This nest, with the four eggs which it contained, was destroyed by being blown out of the tree during a moderate gale on June 9, 1910.

During this same season of 1910 a pair of robins built a nest in the fork of a cherry tree about four feet above the ground. This pair was successful in rearing its young. During the present season, 1911, a pair of robins built in a honeysuckle vine on a porch within five feet of a door, through which people passed frequently. The nest was well built and of the usual type. There were three eggs in the clutch, which were hatched and the young successfully reared.

Mourning Doves do build on low horizontal limbs and in broad forks as is their

custom in the eastern states, for just recently, August 19, 1911, I observed on the Herke ranch in Parker Bottom a dove's nest on a horizontal limb of a willow and another, from which the young had just flown, on a horizontal apple limb. But as is the case with the robins they build in unusual places as well. The ordinary place to find doves' nests on this ranch is on the flat top of a vineyard post, where the nest is nicely shaded and screened from view by the grape leaves.

Two such nests were found in 1910, one of which is shown in the accompanying illustration (fig. 55), and two have been found this season, 1911. In all four cases the nests were well built for doves' nests, and the young were reared.

The second illustration (fig. 56) shows a dove's nest on the ground. This nest was at the edge of an alfalfa field just above the perpendicular side of a narrow ravine, the parent doves alighting and leaving from the brink of the bank. Sage brush rubbish had been scraped to this side of the field in clearing it, and in this half decomposed trash the doves had made for a nest merely a slight depression, apparently having brought nothing in the way of material to the nesting site. This nest was discovered on June 15, 1910, when the young were apparently but two or three days old. They left the nest on June 23.

It seems hardly probable that these birds, particularly the robins, which differ in other characters from their eastern relatives, should ever, even with the changed environment of irrigation, become as rigidly tree-nesting as their eastern relatives.

However, it will be interesting to observe how these desert robins and doves will adapt their nesting habits to the coming change of environment.

NESTING NOTES ON THE DUCKS OF THE BARR LAKE REGION, COLORADO

By ROBERT B. ROCKWELL

PART II

WITH TEN PHOTOS

PINTAIL (*Dafla acuta*)

THE effect of irrigation and land cultivation upon the distribution of bird life, was clearly illustrated by our field work among the Pintails. Cooke's "Birds of Colorado" published in 1897 classified the Pintail as a "rare summer resident", with the qualifying statement that it usually bred from the northern states northward. This statement was no doubt largely correct, when it was published, but ten years' time, with the accompanying development of large reservoir and canal systems, and the cultivating of thousands of acres of fertile land, has wrought a decided change in this condition. Upon the beginning of our work* along the Barr Lakes in 1906, we found the Pintail very much in evidence throughout the spring and summer, and their nests were found in greater numbers than those of any other species of duck except the Blue-winged Teal.

It was a difficult matter to reconcile ourselves to the fact that the extremely shy, wild and racy birds that eluded our carefully placed and concealed blinds, and

* The notes upon which this paper is based were taken in company with Mr. L. J. Hersey.