

NESTING OF THE SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

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The generally recognized true summer home of *Accipiter velox* is in the northern states and Canada though it is also reported as a breeder in hilly sections of the south as well. I am unable however to find any published record of a nest south of the Ohio River and the following account of its breeding, 25 miles southwest of Nashville, Tenn., may prove of interest.

On a rocky bluff, overlooking the Turnbull River and the valley beyond, is a fringe of scrub pine averaging a hundred feet in width and about half a mile long. Here, on May 11th, 1919, while vainly searching the pines for a nest of the Pine Warbler, I came across a large nest which I took to be that of a crow. It was located 30 feet from the ground and 6 feet from the top of one of a thick growth of pines and was easily discernable. Choosing a rock I rapped vigorously on the trunk of the tree and to my delight I saw a Sharp-shinned Hawk rise quickly in the air and alight 20 feet away, peering at me and calling excitedly. I lost no time in climbing to the nest, while the one parent bird in evidence kept up her clatter, flying excitedly about and at times darting close to my head. Looking over the brim of the nest I viewed a clutch of four eggs, handsomely blotched with chestnut, which on blowing proved to have been incubated not more than two or three days. The measurements and shape of these eggs are quite uniform. The nest was at least a year old and the old portion underneath was not, as first supposed, that of a crow. It was constructed throughout of oak and pine twigs and was lined with twigs of small size. The eggs lay upon an additional lining of perhaps a dozen pieces of thin oak bark. Sixty feet away, in another pine, was an old nest of similar construction and it appeared not unlikely that this fringe of pines had been the home of these hawks for years. "Pineries," which are very scarce in this region of hardwood, are said by many writers to be a favored habitat of this species during the breeding season.

As I packed the eggs, a Broad-winged Hawk soared close overhead and alit in a nearby dead tree to look me over. Lack of time kept me from making a good search for its nest which no doubt was not far away.

Thinking that possibly another set of Sharp-shins might be

deposited later, in one of the two nests, I visited the place again on May 27th. Both nests were found to be empty and neither of the parent birds were to be seen.

May 11th, of the following year, found me on hand again in hopes of finding them nesting in the pinery. The two old nests were first visited and climbed to but neither had been repaired. A careful search of the pine clad bluff revealed no other nests nor were any Sharp-shins in evidence. Looking further up stream, I discovered another line of cliffs, a mile distant and likewise fringed with scrub pine. Though the hour was getting late I determined to investigate and shortly after my arrival was rewarded by seeing one of the small hawks fly from a pine in which was located a fine nest. I lost no time in buckling on my spurs and making the ascent where, peering into the nest, I saw that one egg had been deposited. Oddly enough, the parent birds did not show themselves while I was in the nest tree. Five days later, on the 16th of May, I returned and climbing to the nest found four handsome eggs. These I packed in my box and after photographing the nest, as best I could from the slender branches above, I descended. On this visit, one of the parent birds was quite pugnacious, darting at me most viciously while I was at the nest. Further search revealed the fact that two old Sharp-shins' nests were in pine trees nearby and this, added to the fact that the eggs were of an entirely different type of markings, made it evident that the pair was not the same as those visited the previous year. In order to ascertain if the birds had laid a second set, I returned three weeks later, but could find no new nests nor were any of the old ones occupied.

During the winter which followed, I determined to carefully investigate the small pineries further up the stream to see if still other pairs were breeding there. Accordingly, on Thanksgiving Day of 1920, I took the train to a station which enabled me, after a 3 mile walk, to tap the river 6 miles above the location of my last Sharp-shin's nest. A careful and leisurely search of all likely localities down the well wooded and sparsely settled river course led me to the conclusion that I had already found the only two pair on this stream and possibly in this section as well.

May of 1921 found me quite as eager as formerly to investigate my little *accipiters*, so on the 17th, I was again in their haunts. The grove of two years before was first well and fruit-

lessly searched and the two old nests, while still in good condition, showed no repairs. Next I wended my way to grove number two and, within 50 feet of last year's nest, I found a new one built like all the others and about 40 feet up and near the top of a slender pine. In fact this pine was so slender that my weight combined with a light breeze, caused the tree to bend and twist in a dangerous manner. The attacks of the one Sharp-shin on hand was most spirited, swooping to within inches of my head every few moments. The eggs were five in number and much like the set of four secured the previous year. Incubation was about three days advanced. As in previous years, I went to some trouble to ascertain if a second set would be laid and six weeks later a careful search of the pineries showed that these birds had found other diversions of greater interest than that of raising a brood.

As the 1922 nesting time came around I decided that I would defer my usual visit until some six weeks later than formerly in anticipation of taking some photos of well developed young in the nest. My trip was made as planned but I regret to say that no occupied nests could be found. Rather careful search for this species during the breeding season, at other likely points in this area, has met with no success and I am therefore inclined to record the Sharp-shinned Hawk as a very rare breeder here and one of probably very local distribution as well.

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