

Wilson Bull., 92(2), 1980, p. 249

Red-bellied Woodpecker predation on nestling American Redstarts.—On 3 June 1977, I was observing a nest of American Redstarts (*Setophaga ruticilla*) at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland. The nest was shaded and supported by a tangle of grapevines hanging 7.6 m above the ground in an 18 m tree. The adult birds had been feeding 3 two-day-old young in the nest.

At 14:45, while both adults were absent, I watched a female Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) fly to the nest, remove 1 nestling and depart with it. The parents returned just before the woodpecker returned. The woodpecker again carried off a nestling, seemingly unaffected by the scolding and mobbing of the adult redstarts. A few minutes later the woodpecker carried off the remaining nestling. Returning a fourth time, the woodpecker sat atop the nest tree for several minutes still being mobbed by the redstarts. When it left the male redstart followed. The female remained near the nest chipping loudly and moving around the nest. Several times she hopped into the nest and scratched with her feet. The male returned to the empty nest carrying food, ate it himself, and began chipping with the female. The whole episode took 20 min. I do not know whether the woodpecker was feeding its young.

Bent (U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 174, 1939) reported the Red-bellied Woodpecker to be omnivorous, eating many kinds of insects, seeds, berries and fruits. He did not mention predation on young birds. Conner (Auk 91:836, 1974) noted predation by a red-belly on Carolina Chickadee (*Parus carolinensis*) nestlings. The closely related Red-headed Woodpecker (*M. erythrocephalus*) is known to prey upon eggs and young of various hole-nesting species, including the Common Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*), Purple Martin (*Progne subis*), Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) and Tufted Titmouse (*P. bicolor*) (Bent 1939). This is the first report of a woodpecker removing young from the nest of an open-nesting bird, and the second report of predation by the Red-bellied Woodpecker on young birds.—DORIS J. WATT, *Dept. Zoology, Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma 73019. Accepted 1 Mar. 1979.*

Wilson Bull., 92(2), 1980, pp. 249–250

Nest predation by the speckled king snake.—Nest predation has been regarded as the greatest cause of nest mortality in open-nesting passerines (Lack, *The Natural Regulation of Animal Numbers*, Oxford Press, London, England, 1954). Some species have incurred as much as a 76% loss of nests due to predation (Best, Auk 95:9–22, 1978). It is often difficult to imagine how the more heavily depredated species manage to survive each year; with such a high degree of nest predation occurring annually, it seems that the actual act would be observed often. This is not the case. Pettingill (*Living Bird* 15:33–41, 1976) cited only 12 incidents that he and/or his students had seen during the preceding 35 years.

In early August 1973, a Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*) nest with four 6- to 7-day-old young was found in a lightly grazed prairie near Manhattan, Riley Co., Kansas. The nest was about 15 cm from the ground in an indigo plant (*Baptisia* sp.). A blind was placed within 30 cm of the nest in midmorning and was left vacant until 15:30 to allow the female attending the young to become accustomed to its presence. At that time, the blind was entered with a "go-away." After a tripod-mounted camera was positioned to record feeding behavior, the "go-away" left 1 of us (SF) in the blind. Within minutes the parent was attending the nestlings, seemingly undisturbed by photography.

After 1 h, a speckled king snake (*Lampropeltis getulus holbrooki*) approached the nest. Placing its head in the nest, it seemingly detected the nestlings. This pose lasted 1–2 sec. Then, as in a strike, the snake quickly threw its body over the nest preventing escape of the young. The female Dickcissel, now on a shrub at some distance gave several alarm notes. The snake took 1 young from the nest by encircling and strangling it about the neck and upper body, holding the nestling about 15 cm from the nest while doing so. At the same time the snake swallowed another nestling by pulling it from the nest by its head and then ingesting it head foremost. These activities were photographed without apparent notice by the snake. When the photographer temporarily left the blind for a better view, the snake left the nest. At this point it had completely swallowed the 1 young bird and asphyxiated the other. The 2 remaining young immediately left the nest and the adult female (the adult male was absent during the entire episode) showed intense distraction behavior. She flew near the snake and within 60 cm of the photographer, chirping and falling with both wings down and spread. The snake departed, regurgitating the 1 nestling and leaving the strangled young hanging in the foliage. The female's distraction behavior then subsided and she appeared to lead the surviving young from the nest-site.

On 19 July 1978, a Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) nest was found (by CF) on the Konza Prairie Natural Research Area, Geary Co., Kansas. The nest, 70 cm from the ground in a dense growth of *Apocynum sibiricum*, held 4 nestlings (1- to 3-days-old) and 1 egg (later found to be infertile). The nest was still intact on our next visit on the morning of 21 July. Later, at 13:47 of the same day, Facemire saw a speckled king snake at the nest. The snake, about 90 cm long, had one-third of its body supported by the nest, but not covering the nestlings to prevent escape as with the Dickcissel. As nestlings this young could not leave the nest, apparently the snake was not stimulated to pin them down with several body coils. The snake nudged and prodded each young bird with its head, and then began ingesting the smallest nestling head first. The snake returned to the ground before completely swallowing this nestling (which took 3–5 min). (Best [Auk 91:168–169, 1974] noted the same behavior in the blue racer [*Coluber constrictor*].) The snake then left the area. The nest was inspected immediately (by CF) and only 1 chick was missing. The next largest nestling had apparently been "tasted" as the natal down of the head and neck were wet with saliva.

The nest was visited again at 17:50 on 22 July. The eyes of the largest young had opened during the intervening 28 h, but there were no other changes. Next visited at 09:54 on 24 July, the nest was found empty, but otherwise undisturbed and presumably was depredated in our absence.

Pettingill (1976) and Best (1974) both reported nest predation by snakes of the genus *Lampropeltis*, but in addition to this being, as far as we know, the first record of direct observation of a predator at either a Dickcissel or a Red-winged Blackbird nest, it is seemingly the first record of nest predation by the speckled king snake.—CHARLES F. FACEMIRE, *Dept. Fishery and Wildlife Sciences, New Mexico State Univ., Las Cruces, New Mexico 88003* AND STEPHEN D. FRETWELL, *Div. Biology, Kansas State Univ., Manhattan, Kansas 66506*. (Present address CF: *Dept. Ecology, Ethology and Evolution, 515 Morrill Hall, Univ. Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, Illinois 61801*.) Accepted 29 Mar. 1979.

Wilson Bull., 92(2), 1980, pp. 250–251

Screech Owl eats fish and salamander in winter.—On 17 February 1978, Rising picked up a freshly dead gray female Screech Owl (*Otus asio*) from along the Pennsylvania Turnpike, at Neffs, Lehigh Co., Pennsylvania. The owl (Royal Ontario Museum No. 130,693)