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GROUND NESTING KANSAS THRASHERS

Charles F. Face mire

Although Bent (1948) has stated that the brown thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*) commonly nests on the ground and has cited Kennard's observations relating to 10 of 23 brown thrasher nests in the Boston area as having been constructed on the ground, this phenomenon has not generally been observed in the southern and midwest regions of the United States. Sherman (1912) had never seen a nest nearer the ground than eighteen inches in Iowa. Erwin (after Bent, 1948, op. cit., p. 356) studied 59 nests in Tennessee, all of which were located twelve inches to fourteen feet from the ground. A number of nests were reported in the Orlando, Florida area by Howell (after Bent, 1948, op. cit., p. 359). He noted that they were all between eight and twenty feet from the surface, predominantly in oak and orange trees. Of 134 other nests reported by Bent, only 2 (1.49%) were constructed on the ground. The remainder were found at heights ranging from two and one-half feet to fifteen feet. In his treatise of the breeding birds of Kansas, Johnston (1964) stated that nests were commonly about four feet from the ground (N=237, range 1.67 feet to 15.00 feet). None were observed on the ground.

The only reports of ground nesting behavior in the midwest that I could find were those of Currier (1904) and Sutton (1967). Currier reported several nests in the Leech Lake region of Minnesota and noted that all of them were constructed in depressions in the soil under bushes and small trees. Sutton cited only one ground nesting thrasher in Oklahoma; this being one of 87 nesting birds observed during a ten year period (1919-1929). No other ground nests have been reported in Oklahoma since that time. While conducting nesting studies of the dickcissel (*Spiza americana*) and the red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) during the summer of 1978, I found two brown thrasher nests, both of which were constructed in shallow depressions on the ground.

The study area, an oldfield of approximately 80 acres (32.4 ha) in size, is located at the eastern edge of Fort Riley military reservation southwest of Manhattan, Riley County, Kansas. Due to a fire in 1977, all vegetation except a few moderately sized elm (*Ulmus americana*) and cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) trees was growth of the current year. Dominant species were goldenrod (*Solidago* spp.), ragweeds (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia* and *A. trifida*), and sweet clover (*Melilotus alba* and *M. officinalis*).

The first of the two nests was found by S. D. Fretwell, Steve Bump, and myself on 7 June as the female bird was seen flying from under a small patch of field thistle (*Cirsium discolor*). The nest contained five eggs on that date. I was unable to relocate the nest until 19 June when I noticed a pair of thrashers in a nearby tree. Five nestlings were in the nest and were found to range in weight from 13.5 grams to 22.5 grams (\bar{x} =18.54 g.). From the weight of the birds, the hatching dates were estimated to have been 13 thru 14 June. The nest was visited every other day with few exceptions, beginning 19 June. The birds are thought to have all fledged successfully—the first one, the largest, leaving the nest prior to 0747 21 June. This action was probably due to serious overcrowding in the nest. Those four remaining birds were last seen in the nest on 23 June. On 27 June, the nest was empty.

The second of the two nests was located the day following the discovery of the first nest beneath a dense canopy of sumac (*Rhus glabra*) and sweet clover

(*Melilotus officinalis*). This nest was found as a result of dragging a 100 foot length of rope across the field for the express purpose of flushing nesting birds. There were four eggs in this nest. The average weight was 5.38 grams with individual weights ranging from 5.2 grams to 5.5 grams. The average length and diameter of the four eggs was 27.0 mm x 19.8 mm. These measurements are essentially the same as those reported by Bent (1948) where the average dimensions of fifty eggs were 26.5 mm x 19.4 mm. This nest was also visited every other day commencing with the date first observed. One egg was missing from the nest on 11 June. Two of the three remaining hatched prior to 0819, 15 June. The other one was found to be dehydrated, apparently due to a small crack observed in the shell. The chicks were weighed during the 15 June visit; one weighing 5.9 grams, the other 7.0 grams. The nest was visited as usual two days later on 17 June, but both chicks and the remaining egg were missing. Apparently the nest fell victim to a predator. The parents were extremely attentive and one or the other was at the nest at the time of each visit. All visits were made at irregular times between 0800 and 1730.

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BLACK-NECKED STILTS NEST AT QUIVIRA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Robert F. Bartels

The black-necked stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) is listed as a rare, transient in Kansas (Johnston, 1965). Jurek and Leach (1977) felt the black-necked stilt was a transient species with irregular status in Kansas. Parmalee, et al. (1969) described this species as an irregular, rare transient at Cheyenne Bottoms, an area about 30 miles northwest of Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. Quivira's bird checklist carries this bird as a rare migrant.

Although sight records of the black-necked stilt have occurred almost every year since the mid-1960's in this area of the state, no evidence of nesting was discovered until recently. Goss (1886) stated that the black-necked stilt probably nested in southwestern Kansas, but he had no proof of nests. Neither Parmalee, et al. (1969), nor Johnston (1965) included any nesting records.

The first documented indication that nesting of this species may occur in Kansas was in 1974 at Cheyenne Bottoms (Schwilling, 1974). Mr. Schwilling (pers. comm.) stated that he saw two adults and three fledged young on 10 and 11 August 1974. However, he was unable to locate the nest.

In 1976, Ed Martinez reported seeing flightless, young black-necked stilts at Cheyenne Bottoms (Schwilling, pers. comm.). Again, no nest site was located. Refuge records at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge show that a pair of black-necked stilts attempted to nest on the Big Salt Marsh this same year. This nest was found by Assistant Refuge Manager, Larry Veikley, but was destroyed before the clutch was complete. This is the first documented sighting of a black-necked stilt nest structure in Kansas.

On 19 June 1978, I located another active black-necked stilt nest on Quivira's Big Salt Marsh, close to the area described by Veikley in 1976. The nest contained a four egg clutch, and appeared to be well into incubation. The two adults were very aggressive in their defense of the nest. This same day, I located two other pairs of stilts on the Big Salt Marsh that were displaying territorial behavior. However, no other nest structures were located.

The black-necked stilt nest was located in a shallow water area with inland salt grass (*Distichlis stricta*) and salt marsh bulrush (*Scirpus robustus*) the predominant emergent vegetation. The nest structure was a salt grass platform built up about two inches out of the water. The eggs were very similar to those of the American avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*).

On 27 June, 1978, Charles Darling, Refuge Manager, and I rechecked the nest. There were two newly hatched chicks, and an egg that was being pipped by a third chick. The fourth egg showed no signs of hatching. The next day I returned to the nest area and found the adults with four chicks about 50 feet from the empty nest. About 400 yards from this brood, I located a second pair of black-necked stilts with four chicks on the edge of a mud flat. These chicks also appeared to be about one day old. The third pair of stilts in the area still displayed territorial behavior, but no nest or young birds were seen.

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Winter Movements of Pine Siskins in Eastern Kansas.—During the winter of 1977-1978, 6,767 pine siskins (*Carduelis pinus*) were banded by Calvin Cink, Roger Boyd, Katharine Kelley and Margaret Boyd in Baldwin, Kansas. Each of these banders also color-marked the siskins banded at their separate stations with a distinctive dye on the birds' breast feathers. This allowed subsequent sight identification of banded birds according to the station of initial capture, but more importantly, it enhanced the probability of sightings of these birds due to their peculiar coloration. Through newspaper stories, notices at stores selling winter bird food, announcements at Audubon society meetings, and word of mouth, awareness of the presence of oddly marked siskins in eastern Kansas was publicized. Over 150 reports of colored siskins were reported back to the Baldwin banders.

More than half of the siskins captured and banded at Baldwin were never recaptured anywhere again, but many were retrapped again and again in the Baldwin area during the period from January through May, 1978. Some individuals showed a strong preference for a single banding station. For example, one bird was recaptured 17 times at the station of initial banding and only 3 times at other Baldwin stations. The latest date of recapture was 26 May for a bird banded in February, recovered in April and again on 15 May. Katharine Kelley also recaptured a siskin on 27 January 1978 that she had banded at her station in March 1976.

As should be expected, most of the subsequent sightings and recaptures outside of Baldwin were relatively close by. There were 75 reports from Lawrence, which is just 15 miles away. The Baldwin banders likewise retrapped 40 siskins banded by Peter Lowther in Lawrence. Furthermore, five birds banded in Baldwin were later netted in Lawrence and then recaptured in Baldwin, one bird making the round trip in four days. There were 35 sightings from the Kansas City area with 16 Baldwin siskins being recaptured by Mary Louise Myers in Shawnee, Kansas. One siskin banded in Baldwin on 4 April was recaptured by Mrs. Myers two days later. Shawnee is approximately 30 miles away as the siskin flies.

More distant records in Kansas of the birds marked in Baldwin were from

Boicourt, Oskaloosa, Topeka and Garnett; while Missouri reports came from as far away as Plattsburg, Independence, Raytown and Pleasant Hill. One bird banded by Katharine Kelley on 11 January and retrapped in Baldwin by Calvin Cink on 13 and 14 January was recovered in Danville, Illinois on 13 April 1978. Additional birds banded by Katharine Kelley have been subsequently recovered in Hudson, Wisconsin and Little Falls, Minnesota as well as Spring Hill, Kansas. Roger Boyd received a recovery of a dead bird from Cameron, Missouri. *Amelia J. Betts, Box 43, Baldwin City, KS 66006.*

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