

NESTING HABITS OF THE WESTERN BLUEBIRD

By HARRIET WILLIAMS MYERS

THE Western Bluebirds are, as a rule, winter visitants, only, in the vicinity of Los Angeles, staying about in small flocks until spring, when they disappear. Recently, however, some of them have been changing their habits and becoming resident birds.

The only place where I have known of their nesting is in a Los Angeles city park, called Sycamore Grove. This park is a continuation of the Arroyo Seco, and is filled with large live oak and sycamore trees. One side is bordered by a busy thoroughfare where electric cars and vehicles are continually passing. Moreover, this park is a most popular place for picnic parties and is filled with people throughout the summer months. It seemed a little queer that these birds should have chosen so busy a place for a nesting site, when by going a little farther back they could have had perfect quiet.

On the 24th of April, 1910, while watching birds at Sycamore Grove, I noticed a male Bluebird flying about. Having been told that these birds nested in the park the year before, I gave all my attention to locating them. I had waited only a short time when the female appeared on a wire that was strung among the big trees. After darting out into the air and down onto the lawn a few times, she flew up into a tall sycamore tree that grew close beside the walk on that busy thoroughfare, Pasadena Avenue. This tree had four trunks, one of which had been broken off about thirty feet from the ground. A round hole just below the break, partially hidden by a growth of new leaves, suggested that it had once been the nesting site of a woodpecker.

For one hour and thirty-five minutes I watched the nest. During this time the female left four times, staying away five minutes once and eight the other times. Her times for brooding were respectively twenty-two, eighteen, ten, and twenty-four minutes. Almost invariably during this and subsequent watchings the female did not leave the nest until the male came to it. A small broken limb grew out from the nesting trunk and this was used by the male as a resting place. He never brooded the eggs, although sometimes he hopped down into the nest, or beside it, as if to assure himself of their safety; then after a moment's inspection he returned to the resting site, or flew directly away. His coming to the dead branch was always a signal for the female to leave the nest and fly away. It was almost as if the little mother away up there above everything, and with only the blue sky to look at, knew that her mate was thinking of her and would come and remind her, and this he surely did.

He did not seem to guard the nest while the little mother was away, but often accompanied her. Together they foraged about on the lawn or in the trees until time to return to the nest, when quite often the gallant male accompanied his mate homeward, then flew away when he had seen her located. Neither bird seemed at all shy, oftentimes foraging about on the lawn only a few feet from where I sat.

Four days later I again visited the nest, staying an hour and a half. During that time the female left the nest four times as before. The longest interval of staying away was twenty-seven minutes; the shortest two minutes. The longest interval of brooding was sixteen minutes; the shortest thirteen. Twice

the male visited the nest for a moment. During one of the brooding intervals a blackbird rested on the telephone wire near the nest, and the male immediately drove him away.

I did not visit the park again until May 3, five days later. Then I stayed only a short time and did little watching, as a picnic party claimed my attention. The leaves had grown so large around the nest that it was harder to watch than at first, and I could not be sure whether the female was still brooding, or not, but from later developments I believe that the young had probably hatched. Three days later, when I watched for an hour, there was no doubt of it. During the hour fifteen trips were made to the nest, the feeding being very equally divided. In fact, with two or three exceptions, the birds were both at the nest at once each of the fifteen times. Several times the female stayed from one and one-half to two minutes at the nest. The male also lingered, though not so long as the female.

Only a few times did I hear either bird utter a note. No song was heard during my watching, only a single call note given in a very low tone. Though many of the writers on California birds speak of the Bluebird's song, I am inclined to think he has none. W. Leon Dawson author of the "Birds of Washington" tells us that in the fifteen years he has studied the Western Bluebird in Washington he has never heard one sing. If so reliable and thorough a bird student as Mr. Dawson has heard no song in Washington, where they nest abundantly, I believe we are quite safe in saying that they have no song. It is an interesting point, well worth the bird lovers' while to observe, should he come across a pair of these birds nesting.

I was prevented from visiting the nest until May 14, when I found the young had flown. They were nowhere about, but a friend told me that she had seen several young bluebirds in another part of the park the day before. On this day I watched at the nest for over an hour, and was mystified at the actions of the birds. It was evident that they were not feeding, and several times both birds made trips of inspection to the nest. The young were not about, nor did the old birds seem to be caring for them, so I came to the conclusion that the birds, having raised their first family, were making preparations for another. On June 2 I visited them long enough to assure myself that they were, indeed, occupying the same nest for a second brood.

Although I have not again watched the nesting habits of these Western Bluebirds I know that they are still about in this park.

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Notes on the Texas Nighthawk.—The field party from the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology which spent the last season (1912) in the Sacramento Valley remained at Winslow, Glenn County, from June 15 to 20.

About 6 p. m. on the afternoon of June 17 I was tramping over the rocky country bordering Stony Creek, when a Texas Nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis texensis*) was flushed. An examination of the place from which it flew showed the presence of two young, resting side by side on the rocky ground. The parent bird feigned a wound, fluttering about on all sides while I was in the vicinity. When I finally followed it, I was led farther and farther away from the site of the "nest."