



Figure 1. Typical nest of Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*). Bruce Peninsula National Park. 26 June 2009.
Photo: Michael Patrikeev

DOME-LESS NEST OF THE OVENBIRD FROM THE BRUCE PENINSULA

Michael Patrikeev

The Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*), a familiar member of family Parulidae, is common and widespread in forested parts of northern and north-eastern North America (Van Horn and Donovan 1994). This species occurs in every region of Ontario, including the entire Bruce Peninsula (Armstrong 1987, Burke 2007).

Well-camouflaged, domed nests built

on the ground “resemble a miniature Dutch oven”, hence the name Ovenbird (Gross 1953, Godfrey 1986). The nest is usually constructed in a slight depression on the ground, and made of grass, weed stems, rootlets, leaves and moss, with lining of fine grasses and hair and is invariably covered over (Godfrey 1986). The female creates a circular spot on the

the ground by pushing back the leaf litter (Stenger and Falls 1959), which then is filled with dead leaves, and the nest-cup is woven of slender plant stems, fibrous bark, and hair (Van Horn and Donovan 1994). Then grasses and other plant materials are placed around the edges for dome construction, and the entire nest, dome and cup, are woven into one unit (Hann 1937). A side entrance (Figure 1) is invisible from above (Gross 1953).

On 11 June 2010, I flushed an Ovenbird from an uncovered nest, in a hardwood forest south of Cameron Lake in Bruce Peninsula National Park. The nest was hidden in a growth of sugar maple saplings (10-12 cm high), and contained three newly hatched young. The nest had a well-defined base made of maple and beech leaves and leaf skeletons, and lined with fine grass and fibre, but lacked any traces of a dome. The bird was reluctant to leave the nest, and was photographed

brooding small young on 15 June (Figure 2). Detailed observations at this nest were not undertaken due to a black bear presence in the vicinity. The nest was depredated by 18 June.

All 260 nests reported from Ontario by Peck and James (1987) and twenty or so nests previously found by the author were domed or roofed over. No reference to dome-less nests was found in recent nest cards submitted to the Royal Ontario Museum (Mark Peck, pers. comm.) or in literature (Hann 1937, Gross 1953, Godfrey 1986, and Van Horn and Donovan 1994). Though Gross (1953) reported a nest (interestingly, from Birch Point, Toronto), in which “the whole dome or top had been torn off”, but the bird “continued incubation apparently unconcerned by its exposed condition”.

Figure 2. Ovenbird brooding small young in a dome-less nest. Bruce Peninsula National Park. 15 June 2010. *Photo: Michael Patrikeev*



Thus, this nest from the Bruce Peninsula may be one of the first documented dome-less Ovenbird nests, as Dawn Burke and her team (pers. comm.), Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR), found three nests with no dome in 2008-2010. One nest had a dome base formed and lower walls started, but never completed (Figure 3). Another nest lacking a proper dome was built into a small mound

Figure 3. Ovenbird nest photographed on 20 June 2008. Notice the rudimentary walls surrounding the nest. Photo: Daniel Geleynse



under a fern, and the third one had only two leaves for a dome (D. Burke and L. Monck-Whipp, pers. comm.). Two of the nests found by the OMNR team were built by second year females (R. Leshyk, pers. comm.). Perhaps the Bruce Peninsula nest was built by an inexperienced second year female also.

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Michael Patrikeev, Bruce Peninsula National Park, P.O. Box 189, 248 Big Tub Road, Tobermory, Ontario N0H 2R0.