

**COOPERATIVE FEEDING OF AN AMERICAN ROBIN (*TURDUS
MIGRATORIUS*) NESTLING BY AN AMERICAN ROBIN
FLEDGLING IN CAPTIVITY AND AFTER RELEASE**

Valery E. Smith
Mississippi Wildlife Rehabilitation, Inc.
9865 Green River Rd.
Lake Cormorant, MS 38641

Nicholas A. Winstead
Mississippi Museum of Natural Science
2148 Riverside Dr.
Jackson, MS 39202

On 27 April 2015, Valery Smith with Mississippi Wildlife Rehabilitation, Inc. at Lake Cormorant admitted a nestling American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) into rehabilitation. The bird was close to fledging age when it was found in DeSoto County on the ground near a dead parent and siblings, and showed no signs of trauma. A number of free-roaming cats were observed in the area, and locals noted they were preying on songbird nests. The bird was syringe-fed a special diet formulated by wildlife researchers associated with the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council, and its diet was supplemented with mealworms and crickets. On 11 May 2015, the bird began self-feeding mealworms and crickets from the bottom of the cage. On 7 May 2015, another nestling American Robin was admitted into rehabilitation from Memphis, Tennessee. This bird was placed into a large cage with the then fledgling American Robin.

On 16 May 2015, the older fledgling was observed foraging for crickets from the bottom of the cage while the

younger nestling began begging vocalizations from the perch above. The fledgling responded to the nestling by picking up a cricket and hopping up to the perch and feeding the nestling. The next time crickets were placed in the cage, a video was taken that documented these actions (viewable online under *The Mississippi Kite* Supplemental Files at missbird.org). This behavior continued through 5 June 2015, when both birds were released together. Backup mealworms were provided after release. The younger bird followed and begged from the older bird and the older bird fed it for about a week and a half after release, although the younger bird began self-feeding after a week post-release. After about a week and a half, the older bird ignored the begging, which forced the younger bird to forage on its own.

Nice (1943), in her seminal work on the life history of Song Sparrows (*Melospiza melodia*), discussed the premature appearance of breeding behavior in young birds including attempted copulation, nest building and caring for young. She referenced many instances of young birds of several species feeding nest mates or younger birds of the same or different species in the wild and in captivity. One of these instances was a young captive American Robin that regularly fed a younger bird of another species for three days until the younger bird died (Favell 1935). Skutch (1961) noted that in captivity, well-fed young birds may attend younger birds with which they share the same compartment. However, in his annotated list of such behavior, he did not mention any instances of American Robins engaging in this behavior other than the one by Favell (1935). We know of no other occurrences in the literature of young American Robins feeding young birds or of one feeding another American Robin, or whether this behavior occurs in the wild.

Literature Cited

Favell, A.H. 1935. Behavior of a pet robin. *Wilson Bulletin* 47:298-299.

Nice, M.M. 1943. Studies in the life history of the Song Sparrow, II. *Transactions of the Linnaean Society of New York*, 6:1-328.

Skutch, A.F. 1961. Helpers among birds. *The Condor* 63:198-226.

The editor of *The Mississippi Kite* thanks Joe McGee for his assistance in reviewing this article.