

eared owl (rare), willow flycatcher (common), least flycatcher (rare), white-eyed vireo (common), blue-winged warbler (occasional), prairie warbler (occasional), black-and-white warbler (rare), yellow-breasted chat (common), vesper sparrow (rare), savannah sparrow (occasional), grasshopper sparrow (common), Henslow's sparrow (common), rose-breasted grosbeak (rare), dickcissel (occasional), bobolink (common), eastern meadowlark (common), and orchard oriole (common).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A project of this scope isn't possible without the efforts of many, and I was fortunate to have numerous excellent birders helping out. These include, in no particular order: Laura Gooch (whose excellent photos contributed greatly to the project), Nick Barber, Larry Rosche, Linda Burianek, Bruce & Craig Glick, Bernie Daniel, Scott & Janice Emrick, John Rakestraw, Robb & Pam Morrison, Tim Fitzpatrick, CeCe Johnston, Carl & Jaunita Slater, Mike Williams, Guy Denny, Marlene Woo-Lun, Mike Flynn, Joe Hammond, Bill Whan, Dan Sanders, Kathy & Ara Beal, Dave Demmon, Kitty Butterworth, Shaune Skinner, Scott Hull, Melanie & Kelly Koontz, John Watts, Bob Royse, Brad & Dee Bond, Bill Thompson, Julie Zickefoose, Jay Stenger, Jane Huff, Brad Bolton, Jason Larson, Donna Kowalczyk, Carroll DeVore, Jessica Mulford, Brian Gara, and especially Claudia Steele. My apologies to anyone I've inadvertently omitted.



Eastern Meadowlark
by Ben Winger

Red-breasted Nuthatches Nesting at Hocking Hills: The First Records for Southeastern Ohio

by Frank Renfrow

On 12 June 1998 I found a pair of red-breasted nuthatches (*Sitta canadensis*) excavating a hole in a dead red pine (*Pinus resinosa*) at the campground at Hocking Hills State Park, Hocking County, Ohio.

During several subsequent trips I found the pair's attention had shifted to another hole in another dead red pine nearby. Nesting activity was confirmed on 4 July, with the pair going in and out of this hole and making feeding motions, but evidence of young was never definitely established. I did locate several other red-breasted nuthatches in two additional locations near Old Man's Cave during this summer period.

I returned to the campground the next year, on 14 April 1999. I found a male red-breasted nuthatch, and followed it as it busily inspected numerous holes in many dead red pines in the area, including last year's nest hole. I also observed him collecting sap from a small wound that he had apparently made in the base of a white pine (*Pinus strobus*).

I returned to the campground on 31 May, but was unable to find any red-breasted nuthatches. The next day I checked the Old Man's Cave picnic area and the cabin area near the lodge, these being the two other areas where I had found this species the previous year. Just as I was about to give up, I found a male perched on a live red pine in front of one of the cabins. There he was joined by a female, and both were soon busily foraging in the needle clusters in the upper branches of the pines.

I foolishly proceeded to search every dead red pine in the area, only to find the female flying into a hole in the living red pine where I had first seen the male. I then noticed that there were many holes in this tree, some rather large and oblong in shape, indicating the work of a pileated woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*). The nuthatch hole was about eighteen feet up and almost square, possibly also started by a pileated. This



Red-breasted Nuthatches at nest site in Hocking Hills SP, Hocking Co.,
3 June 1999. Photo by Frank Renfrow.

hole was thickly coated with pine resin, as were many of the other holes in this tree. I observed the male spreading more resin on the nest hole rim on this date and the next as the female flew in and out of the nest hole.

The pair's duties were made much more difficult by a pair of tufted titmice (*Baeolophus bicolor*) nesting in a crevice in the trunk about six feet below in the same tree. The titmice seemed determined to keep the nuthatches from reaching the hole. On several occasions the male nuthatch appeared to act as a distraction. While the male was being chased by the titmice, the female nuthatch was able to fly into the hole.

On 10 June I found the pair busily engaged in carrying food to the hole and removing fecal sacs about every ten minutes. Instead of dropping the fecal sacs on the ground, they would carefully place them on the branches of nearby red pines.

On 16 June the in-and-out pace had risen to once every 3 or 4 minutes. A pair of white-breasted nuthatches (*Sitta carolinensis*) landed on the nest tree, only to be dive-bombed by the irate male red-breasted. They quickly moved on to quieter foraging nearby.

On this same date I observed the male carry a periodical cicada (*Cicada septendecim*) out(!) of the nest hole. This being about the peak of the 17-year outbreak, the insects were everywhere. I later saw the female chasing a cicada through the pines. Most of the food items carried to the nest were smaller fare, consisting mainly of small caterpillars and flying insects.

On 20 June I could hear the begging young in the nest hole, as the parents came about every two minutes. By this time I had devoted the better part of 14 days during four separate trips to observing this nest. I would have liked to witness the fledging, but obligations to home and family (my own nest) won out.

Larry and Lenna Mae Gara took up the torch on 21 June. When they arrived at the site the nuthatches were very loud and vocal, possibly engaged in coaxing the young to come out. The next day the birds could not be found, and the young had probably fledged.

Red-breasted nuthatches have previously been found in the summer at Hocking Hills (Peterjohn, 1989). The planted red and white pines at Hocking provide excellent habitat for this species. Red pine does not naturally occur in Ohio. White pine is not known to be native to Hocking County, although it is indigenous to two nearby Southeastern Ohio counties, Jackson and Washington (Braun, 1961).

The red-breasted nuthatch breeds in scattered locations across northern Ohio, the closest to Hocking Hills being about 90 miles to the north in southern Ashland County (Peterjohn and Rice, 1991). The Hocking Hills area is distinct from these northern Ohio sites in being a northern outlier of the Cliff Section of the Allegheny Plateau, with a forest of mixed (i.e., southern and northern) character (Braun, 1961).

I have found these birds nesting even farther south in the Cliff Section at the Rock Bridge area of the Red River Gorge, in Wolfe County, Kentucky. These birds nest in a deep gorge area of eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) and white pine (Renfrow, 1996).

The only other southern Ohio nesting record of the red-breasted nuthatch is of a nest that I chanced upon at Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati (Hamilton County) in June 1982 (Renfrow, 1982). This was located in the dead limb of a white ash (*Fraxinus americana*) among ornamental plantings of a wide variety of conifer species.

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Dickciessel - Woodbury WA, Coshocton Co., 16 June 1999. Photo by Laura Gooch, Kingston Photography, Copyright © 1999.