

Documentation
Second State Nesting Record
Bell's Vireo

Dick and Jean Hoffman

On the morning of July 12, 1980, we found the two Bell's Vireos that had been reported at Irwin Prairie in Lucas Co., Ohio. The birds flitted through the bushes and it took some time to determine that there really were two. We were very curious to learn if they might be a pair, so each of us watched one bird to determine if only one was singing. Jean followed one which proceeded to sing and Dick followed one which moved toward him and then, suddenly, settled on a nest thus revealing both its existence and location.

The nest was about six feet from the boardwalk, about 2½ feet up in a small bush in the shelter of a small aspen. After Dick found the nest we moved off and returned with Matt Anderson, a local birder, to show him the nest. When we approached the nest, the brooding bird flushed and Matt quickly checked the nest and verified that it contained four eggs. Jean sat and watched the nest while Dick went for camera equipment. The male came out, sang, and then hurried onto the nest. In a short while he left and was replaced by the female who never flushed even while being photographed by three separate people.



Bell's Vireo on nest at Irwin Prairie July, 1980 taken by Gary Meszaros and reproduced by Don Tumblin.

Matt Anderson

On July 16, 1980 I observed the nest again and saw again the four eggs. On July 25, 1980 I saw four young in the nest that I thought were probably not more than a day or two old.

Tom Kemp

On August 1, 1980 three young fledged from the nest.

Editor

Bent in his Life Histories of North American Land Birds as edited by Henry Hill Collins, Jr. reports:

"Ordinarily Bell's vireo is a timid, shy, retiring little bird, but when incubating, brooding, or feeding its young it shows considerable fearlessness, coming freely to the nest even in the near presence of an intruder; it has sometimes been touched by the human hand while bravely defending its eggs or young. The male is quite as devoted as the female, and generally remains near his incubating mate, singing joyously in the same bush or in one nearby. But, at other times, the vireo is active and restless, disappearing into its leafy retreats on the least alarm; it jumps and flits about the bushes so rapidly that it is difficult to catch a glimpse of it, though it may be watching the observer from behind some sheltering foliage. Its actions remind us of that other dweller in low shrubbery, the white-eyed vireo."

In Life Histories of North American Wagtails, Shrikes, Vireos and Their Allies, 1950, Bent reports:

Breeding Range: East to eastern Illinois (Chicago, Urbana and Fox Prairie), Western Tennessee, east-central Arkansas, eastern Texas and central Mexico.

Egg Dates: Illinois: 18 records from May 25 to July 6 and 11 records from May 25 to June 5.

Egg Number: Lays three to five eggs to a set but four is the commonest number.

Incubation: Normally lasts 14 days after the laying of the first egg and is shared by both sexes.

Fledging: Nestling life lasts 11 days.

Double Nesting: There is no record of this species raising more than one brood per year. However, a bird in Oklahoma did build three successive nests in one season when the prior nest was destroyed. Twice the nest had eggs and once nestlings.

If the birds at Irwin Prairie first fledged on August 1 then the first egg was layed on July 6 (11 days nestling plus 14 days incubation). This is within the egg date period for the 18 records from Illinois, the nearest known nesting area.

A.H. Clausus reports (pers. comm.) that this species nested once before in Ohio apparently around Cincinnati. The nest was photographed and the eggs and nest collected. The date and other details are as yet unknown.

M.B. Troutman reports in An Annotated List of Birds of Ohio, 1968 two tape recorded songs of this species by Dr. Borrer in May of 1962 and 1966 in Franklin County.