

**Habits of the Barred Owl.**—The first paragraph of the interesting article by Mr. Bolles in the April number of 'The Auk,' would leave the general reader under the impression that the Barred Owl (*Syrnium nebulosum*) defends its nest and young by attacking the intruder. My own experience would lead me to conclude that it is a very timid bird. I have collected many sets of their eggs, and have frequently climbed to the nests to examine their young, and in no case have I ever been attacked by the parent birds. They usually fly away at the approach of the collector, and remain away until he leaves the vicinity. If the nest contains young, they make demonstrations of cries and snapping of bills from the safe shelter of a neighboring tree. I have known them to fly toward me snapping their beaks, until within a few yards, but they were careful not to come very near. I have never been attacked or seen other persons attacked by any species of Owl in defense of its nest, except when the Owls were in confinement. I once experienced great difficulty in getting a set of eggs from a cage containing three Great Horned Owls.—D. E. LANTZ, *Manhattan, Kansas.*

**Phalænoptilus nuttalli nitidus Breeding in Kansas. Is it a Valid Race or a Color Phase of P. nuttalli?**—Since the publication of the A. O. U. Check-List, two varieties of the Poor-will have been added to the the list, the Frosted and Dusky. Of the latter I have no personal knowledge. Its habitat—as given by the describer—is different from that of the Frosted, and if constant in the coloration of its plumage, it is doubtless a valid race. The home of the Frosted Poor-will, however, as far as known, is about the same as that of the Poor-will, and the few specimens of each that I have examined do not differ materially in size, and I am impressed with the thought that it is possible the Frosted may prove to be a dichromatic phase, similar to the case of the Screech Owl (*Megascops asio*), and not a bleached race, as it is now regarded. I therefore call attention to the matter. But, be that as it may, it now stands as a distinct race, and so anything relating to its nesting habits will be of interest. I therefore take please in saying that Mr. Eben M. Blachly, of Leonardville, Riley County, Kansas, kindly loaned me for identification a set of eggs, together with the skin of one of the parent birds (I regret that he did not capture its mate), which proved to be of this variety. The bird and eggs were collected in the vicinity of Leonardville, June 26, 1889. The eggs two in number, were laid upon the bare ground, under a bunch of grass, upon the prairie, near the edge of a cornfield. In color they are white. In form they are oval or rounded elliptical, the small end nearly as obtuse as the larger. They measure 1.05 X .79, and 1.03 X .78. They do not differ from the eggs of the Poor-will; this, however, would be expected, for even if the former is a valid race, the eggs might be expected to be alike.—N. S. Goss, *Topeka, Kansas.*

**Food and Habits of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird.**—On June 5, 1888, I secured a nest, containing one young bird and an egg on the point of hatching, of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. The nest is a

very peculiar one, being constructed upon one of the preceding year, and in a very conspicuous situation upon a branch of sycamore, which inclined at an angle of  $45^{\circ}$ . It was about twelve feet from the ground, on the lowest branch (a dead one), with no foliage whatever to afford concealment, and could be readily seen from a distance of sixty to seventy-five feet in any direction.

The old nest is much the worse for wear, having passed through at least one winter; the new one was built partly on one edge of this and partly on the adjoining branch, leaving fully one-half of the distorted cavity at the base exposed. The entire external surface of both is covered in the usual way with lichens, although not in any way resembling the smooth, mottled surfaces adjoining. It would seem that the scenes of bygone associations have some permanent attractions, even though comparatively barren to our eyes.

Perhaps the most interesting facts were brought to light when the young one, about two days old, was examined. Its throat being much distended, I sought the cause by lightly pressing with a dull instrument from the thorax toward the bill, and succeeded in bringing to light, *sixteen* young spiders of uniform size. These measured about .11 of an inch in length, and with outspread legs covered a circle of .26 of an inch in diameter. Dissection revealed a pulraceous mass of the same in the stomach, but no more liquid than would result during digestion of insects of this gelatinous character. They were all of the same species, and may have been young found about certain plants in the immediate vicinity. It is surprising that young Hummingbirds of this age could thrive, as it would seem, entirely upon insects, although the quality be of the finest.

Although I spent several hours watching this nest, on different occasions, no food was brought at such times, but the actions of the female, as seen through a strong field glass at short range, were decidedly interesting. The approach to the nest was as usually described in about one third of the records—*i. e.*, directly to a point over and close to the nest, then dropping lightly into it. The general method, however, was by a dashing flight to within twelve or fifteen feet, a sudden pause while poised in the air, anxiously looking about her, then one or two feet further, another pause with the same manœuvres, to be repeated until at last, she dropped into the nest as ordinarily. This entire procedure occupied less than ten seconds. A few times she seemed to fly directly *into* the nest without any preliminaries.

Just after settling in the nest, she had a habit of occasionally completely turning around in it, one or more times. This was a hitching motion, as if by the use of her feet, meanwhile appearing to re-arrange the material on the outside and as if shaping the interior to her better satisfaction by this treading motion. At other times, spreading her wings over the nest in a seeming ecstasy of delight, she rather flutteringly turned around in it, apparently without regard for its precious contents.

There seemed to be one never varying position when at rest, that facing the more open part of the grove, the usual direction of approach be-

ing from behind, whereas the flight from the nest was toward the clearer space in front. The sitting posture was not one of absolute rest at any time, as the head was constantly in motion, so that no approach could be made without her knowledge. The flight from the nest seemed to be directly out of it, without any preliminaries. The weather was warm, yet she would remain on the nest from fifteen to twenty minutes, and in no instance was away more than two minutes, while I had her under observation. The male frequently appeared in the vicinity, but neither offered food or even deigned to alight on the same tree, yet birds which had a good claim in the neighborhood dared not approach very close, as the combined attack of these active birds always proved so distasteful that they invariably beat a hasty retreat.—EDWIN H. EAMES, *Bridgeport, Conn.*

**Snake Skins in the Nests of *Myiarchus crinitus*.**—The habit of the Great Crested Flycatcher of putting scraps of discarded snake skin in its nest is—so far as the nests which I have found—invariable. Nevertheless, in one instance, at Tamworth, New Hampshire, I found a nest with one egg in it but with no snake skin visible. I found it about 7 A.M. one beautiful day in early July, 1888. I touched the egg and handled the nest slightly. Shortly before sunset I looked a second time into the hollow limb where the nest was placed, and was much surprised, in fact somewhat startled, by what I saw. Forming a complete circle about the egg, resting, in fact, like a wreath upon the circumference of the nest cavity, was a piece of snake skin six or seven inches long. The part which had encased the head of the snake was at the front of the nest and was slightly raised. It may not be wise to found a theory upon a single fact, but from the moment I saw that newly acquired snake skin, placed as it was, I made up my mind that the Great Crested Flycatcher uses the skin to scare away intruders. When the full set of eggs was laid, I took them and the nest. Only remnants of snake skin remained in the rubbish of the nest. The large skin had been removed or torn to bits.

The following year the same hollow was again occupied by Great Crested Flycatchers. I found the nest on July 7. It contained four eggs, and some scraps of snake skin were in sight. All the eggs hatched on the morning of the 12th. On the intermediate days my visits to the nest were regular. During those days a number of larger scraps of skin were placed on the outer edge of the nest. Their position was changed almost daily. Once some were set up like a fence, and so was a hen's feather. The birds knew of my visits, and scolded me while I remained in sight. These facts tended to confirm my theory in my own mind.—FRANK BOLLES, *Cambridge, Mass.*

**Wintering of the Red-winged Blackbird near Cambridge, Mass.**—On the 29th of December, 1889, while passing along the edge of a small swamp grown up with cat-tails, low bushes, birches, and maples, not far from Fresh Pond, I heard repeatedly the note of a Blackbird. I was un-