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THE ROBIN NESTS

BY MINNA ANTHONY COMMON

APRIL 17.—A male and female robin were seen examining possible nesting sites. Each turned about many times in several places in two adjacent apple trees. Neither looked at the other's choices. They were not seen to go near the maples near by.

APRIL 19, 8:00 A. M.—Two female robins were seen fighting in the driveway. Soon we discovered the reason: two nests started. One foundation was laid in Fox's maple in a crotch up 25 feet. The other foundation—the first grasses—was laid in my maple by the drive, 30 feet from the 'Fox' tree. It was on a slight shelf on the bare trunk where two large branches had been recently removed.

APRIL 20, early A. M.—Nest larger in Fox's tree; still just a few dangling grasses on my tree stub-shelf.

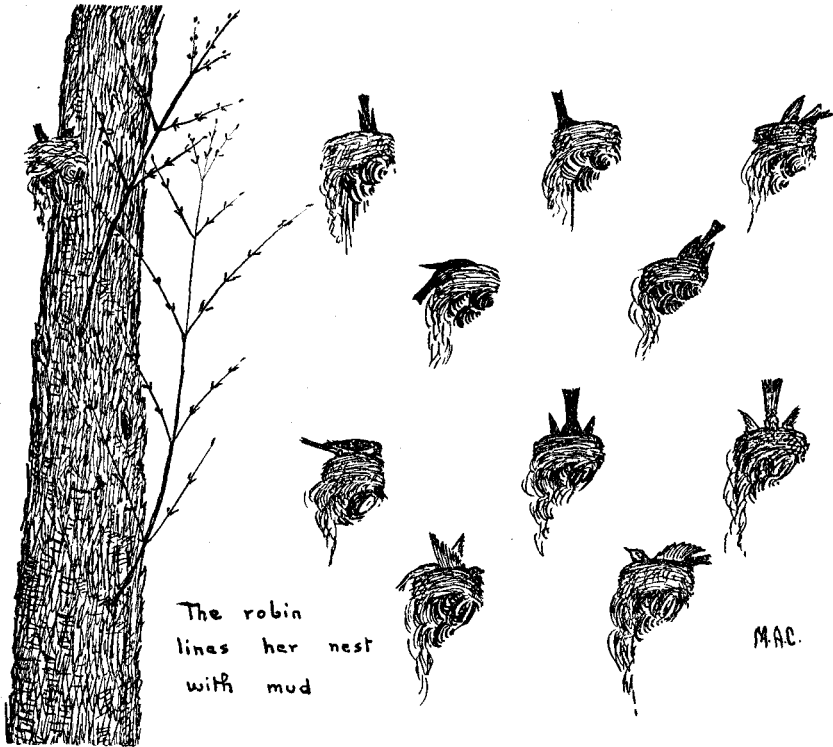
APRIL 21, early A. M.—The 'Fox' nest almost full-sized; no robins seen about during this day.

APRIL 22-23.—No activity noticed. The 'Fox' nest looked finished. The stub nest had more grasses laid, but a strong wind was blowing and some grass was drifting away now and then.

APRIL 24, 6:00 A. M.—Much work had been done on the stub nest. Grass and string hung down a foot or more and blew about. The nest was slightly cupped and the female was very busy. She would bring a rather long piece of string or grass and lay it in a coil by placing the end on the nest lining and poking it in securely, then

turning herself about while letting the rest of the string slip through her bill. Sometimes she got into the nest and appeared to kick vigorously while facing in all directions.

Systematically she robbed the 'Fox' nest. I saw her go and return many times with a billful of lining material. No robin appeared in defense.



TEXT-FIG. 1

The male stayed near, and flew with the female for material, but I did not see him do any actual work. He ate on the lawn or searched for food for himself most of the time. He did not sing.

At 8:30 her work looked very untidy. Loose grasses dangled a yard downward. At 8:45, disturbed by two cars in the drive, a peddler, and a loud rapping, she left off work; returned at 9:45. By then much of the loose material had blown away. She caught some in her bill and tucked it into place. She worked until noon. The rest of the day no robins were seen about the premises.

APRIL 25.—Quite cool. It froze last night. At 7:00 A. M., the nest shape seemed finished as far as grass, etc., was concerned. Robins did not appear all day.

APRIL 26.—No robins were seen in the forenoon. Very warm. Ground unusually dry. Today a neighbor had his hose going to spray fruit trees, and the ground became very wet near the connection. The man quit at noon, and the female robin immediately took over. All through the noon hour she worked carrying billful of mud and grass. She pulled the grass up by the roots, deliberately. That would make better 'plaster,' reinforced adobe, as it were. The male was interested and flew beside her, but did no work, nor did he sing. She stopped in about a half hour, perhaps to let the first coat set before adding more.

At 1:30 she was back at work. She spent two minutes placing each billful. To arrange it she used her bill a little, but mostly she squatted down, half opened her wings, and kicked with both feet at once as if treading water. Each time she turned several ways in the nest and kicked in different directions.

Both robins took a bath in the bird bath at the same time. A grackle flew in, too. They drove it off; then one, the male, finished his bath. Later the grackle resumed bathing. The female robin worked steadily most of the afternoon.

APRIL 27, 7:00 A. M.—Female robin again busy bringing mud. Each billful was partly grass roots for she pulled them up, mud and all. The nest now appeared quite deep, almost completed. She flew directly to that one muddy spot—the dripping hose connection—and came quickly back. Each bit was kicked vigorously into place with her feet, poked with her bill, and smoothed by her turnings. Often she took a dip into the bird bath as if for added moisture. The male was an interested spectator.

APRIL 28, 8:00 A. M.—Still working. Now she was getting some fine, dead grasses from beneath rose bushes where it was very dry. She had used all the material in the 'Fox' nest. The side walls were now so deep the bird was almost out of sight when in the nest.

About noon, female busy bringing mud as usual. The male sat in a near-by lilac with a piece of worm in his bill. She went to the nest. He followed. Her bill was toward him. He alighted beside her on the nest rim. He held out the worm toward her. She reached up, and took one bite, then another which finished it. Then both flew away. The female worked all day. At any time we looked she was busy.

APRIL 29.—No robins in the vicinity all morning. The day was sunny and warm. At noon a grackle alighted in the nest tree. At once the male robin appeared and drove him off. (The grackle's nest was in a dense poplar 100 feet distant.)

About 4:00 P. M., my tame gray squirrel came to the house steps to be fed. The maple nest tree is only a few feet from the steps, and all winter the squirrel had been in the habit of taking his nut up to the stub, where now the nest was, to eat it. The robins made such a commotion when he came that he left without eating.

MAY 1, 5:00 A. M.—Female perched on the rim of the nest, poking something around, possibly an egg. The male came, perched on the opposite side of the nest, peering in inquisitively. She looked up, and off he flew. Then she did some more poking. He came back. This time she pecked him determinedly, and as he departed she settled down on the nest. Five minutes later she also left.

At 11:30, the male stood at the foot of the tree on the lawn, not even eating, while the female sat on the nest. At 12:20 both left. An egg?

MAY 2.—On the nest at 6:00 A. M.; left at 7:30. An egg?

On at 5:00 P. M.; left at 5:45.

MAY 3.—On at 6:30 A. M.; left at 7:30.

On at 12 M.; left at 12:30; back at 12:45.

At 1:05, chased two grackles away with quite a clamor.

On the nest all afternoon but left many times to chase grackles away. Male nowhere about.

MAY 4, 5, 6.—Female on the nest all day; no male in evidence.

MAY 7.—At 9:30, the male came, stood on the nest edge, and watched the eggs while the female went to the bird bath—15 minutes. Again male on the edge watching at 11:30; female back at 12:30. At 12:40, off again for five minutes; male at hand. All afternoon she flew off every half hour or so. Almost always the male came at once to the nest, perched on the rim, but never stepped inside. Often he seemed to be eyeing the eggs curiously. It was raining much of the afternoon, and the eggs must have gotten wet whenever she left them.

MAY 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.—Each day the female sat on the nest and seldom left. When she did slip off, the male perched on the rim and peered at the eggs, one eye at a time. As she came back, he left with no waiting at all. The last two days were cool, and she stayed close. We watched but never saw any signs of the male bringing her food.

MAY 14, 15.—Warm. Female noticeably thinner.

MAY 16.—We saw the male feed the female twice, once a small green worm, once something white which the female ate in three separate bites from his bill. I think it was a piece of bread.

MAY 17.—Rain, a steady downpour. The female had her wings spread out over the nest, tail spread, and breast fluffed out in front. She made a perfect umbrella. We saw the male bring her food. She stood up to eat it, but did not leave the nest.

At 1:00 P. M., clear but cool and cloudy. The female stayed close to the nest. The male brought food several times and fed it to the young. Three bills could be seen opening. The female stood when he came, but did not leave the nest and hovered again quickly.

MAY 18.—Chilly. The female sat with wide-spread wings, occasionally stood, peered into the nest, seemed to eat something, then sat again. The sun shone on the nest in the forenoon.

The squirrel came for nuts but kept discreetly to the middle of the drive and did not even look toward the robin tree.

MAY 19.—Bills of three young were plainly seen above the nest rim. A chilly day and the mother stayed on the nest most of the time. A cat came to the foot of the tree, and the robin drove it away with fierce cries.

MAY 20.—Sunny. Both birds fed the young with small angleworms. Sometimes both came at once. The female would stay two or three minutes to brood, but the bills would appear and off she would go. The male never stepped down into the nest but fed from the rim.

We heard a commotion in the driveway. Both robins were pecking the squirrel, and how he was running! He cannot even use the drive now!

MAY 21.—A grackle hid in the syringa at the foot of the nest tree. The male robin came stalking across the lawn toward him, and the grackle left, the robin in pursuit with vicious "yawks," fierce wing noises and snaps of his bill.

The female fed the young last at 6:30, also cleaned the nest by eating the refuse. The male was not in sight from six until dark. By street light we could see him roosting in an apple tree.

MAY 22.—A gorgeous day! The mother robin almost stood up to brood the young. Their opened bills protruded in all directions.

At 8:25, the nest was apparently deserted, the young quiet; then at 8:38 a grackle came into the maple just above the nest. The male robin drove it off with a rush. The young woke up and stretched so that their heads hung out over the rim. There were three.

At 8:40, both robins came into a near-by apple tree while the young moved about in the nest but made no sound.

At 8:50, the female brought a large piece of angleworm rolled into a ball, ate the nest leavings, stood on the rim looking in. The young nestled out of sight, but occasionally stretched.

At 9:02, the female left the nest rim, sat on a branch of the maple above the nest. Grackles were heard not far away. A Chipping Sparrow sat on a branch beside the robin, singing, but she paid no attention. A dog ran by; the robin peered but made no move of attack. Two English Sparrows had a terrific quarrel in the apple tree. The robin was unconcerned.

9:15; 9:22; 9:34; 9:36.—The female brought worms and cleaned the nest. The young made no sound.

9:37.—The male brought what looked like a beetle. He had been searching the lawn, but it was so dry worms were scarce.

9:47.—The female brought food and stood on the rim three minutes.

10:00.—The male brought food and stood on the rim two minutes.

10:25.—The female brought food.

11:00.—A bumblebee buzzing about the nest rim; the birds paid no attention.

11:15.—The male brought a large mouthful and fed one bird. Another was reaching up but he gave it no heed. As he left, female came and fed this other youngster.

11:55; 12:00; 12:05 (stayed four minutes); 12:20; 12:31.—Fed first three times by the female, the last two times by the male. The young were showing their bills above the rim.

The female nowhere in sight. The male rested in an apple tree, but a grackle flew out of the same tree with the robin in hot pursuit. A few minutes later the grackle came into an elm 30 feet away, but the robin drove it from there. The young were asleep and showed no activity.

3:00.—The mother bird came. One youngster spread its wings wide and came into full view, but dropped to sleep at once with neck dangling over the nest rim.

3:02; 3:10; 3:14; 3:16.—The young were fed by the female.

3:34; 3:36.—The male came and put food down the youngsters' throats.

6:55.—The female was on the nest, perched on the rim. One young perched beside her in imminent danger of falling. At 7:01, by good luck, it fell in, not out. The mother stood preening herself unconcernedly; left at 7:03. Young quiet. At 7:20 she returned and fed a large bunch of worms to one youngster and then settled down as if for the night.

MAY 23, 24, 25, 26.—Both birds busy all day. They drove the grackle away several times. The young climbed up in the nest so that they seemed in danger of toppling off. Very little noise.

MAY 27.—The squirrel was driven away by both birds with bills clacking. The young stretched often. The worms fed were balled and in huge chunks. The nest droppings were now carried off and let fall about 30 feet away.

A starling came into the maple and was not chased. Is he no longer a menace?

At 3:00 P. M. the largest youngster left the nest. It went at a 60° angle to the grapevines, 'yipped' there for an hour, and then was fed several times by the female. The others stayed quietly in the nest. In the evening the male fed the one in the vines several times.

MAY 28.—The male took over the entire care of the young that had left the nest. He kept it in bushes and low trees near the nest tree. It did not cry much, and he fed it huge billful of worm.

The two left in the nest perched side by side on the rim. Sometimes they fluttered but by good luck fell back in. In the late afternoon it rained, and the mother bird hovered them.

MAY 29.—At 6:30 A. M., one young left; at 6:45 the other fluttered down. After they had both left, the male came to the nest with a billful of worm.

JUNE 1.—We saw the female with two young running about the lawn.

JUNE 3.—The female robin fed two young, fully grown (tails and all) in an apple tree near the nest.

JUNE 14.—A pair of robins were feeding three youngsters in the yard.

SUMMARY

On April 19, the newly-laid foundations of two robin nests were discovered high up in two maples which stood 30 feet apart. In a few days one pair disappeared, and the other female incorporated the abandoned material into her nest. The male was seen to do no work though he acted as escort, sang a great deal, and drove intruders from the vicinity of the nest. Most of the construction was done in the early morning. The nest was apparently finished on April 28.

From May 3 to 18, the female brooded all day. The male was seen to feed her a few times. If she left briefly to bathe or feed, the male guarded the nest, often from the rim. He did not brood the eggs.

From May 19 on, the male took an active part in feeding the young. He watched the young from the nest rim but never was seen to step inside, nor did he take any part in nest sanitation. On May 22, a

continuous watch was kept of the nest from 8:25 A. M. to 7:30 P. M., when the female settled down for the night. During that time the young were fed seven times by the male, seventeen times by the female. The next four days were very busy ones, and the male had no time for singing.

The first young left on May 27 and was cared for by the male. On May 29 the last two young fluttered down; the other had disappeared in the meantime. The whole group stayed about the lawn for several days, with both parents feeding and training the young.

The history of the nest comprised: 9 days nest building; 5 days egg laying; 15 days brooding; and 11 days nest feeding.

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New York

OBSERVATIONS ON THE BIRDS OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC

BY ROLLIN H. BAKER

As part of my war-time duties in the United States Navy, I served on board a destroyer, which included in its operations as an escort and antisubmarine patrol vessel, several cruises into the North Atlantic Ocean. I was able to record the birds observed on voyages during the period from August, 1943, to June, 1944.

In the months from August through January, six Atlantic crossings between the United States and French Morocco were made. From February to June, trips were made in the western Atlantic as far north as New York, as far east as Bermuda, as far south as Trinidad, and as far west as Texas in the Gulf of Mexico.

BIRDS RECORDED ON TRANS-ATLANTIC CRUISES

Text-figure 1 presents the routes taken in six crossings of the Atlantic Ocean. The time occupied by each trip was about three weeks. The following dates are included: eastbound, August 7 through August 26; westbound, August 30 through September 18; eastbound, October 5 through October 27; westbound, October 30 through November 19; eastbound, December 5 through December 24; westbound, December 27 through January 18. In the longitudes of 40° W. to 75° W., birds were observed in the latitudes of 31° N. to 38° N. In the longitudes of 8° W. to 39° W., bird populations were recorded in the latitudes of 31° N. to 50° N.

There were never more than four ships in the group. This small number did not appear to be as attractive to birds as did the large cargo-ship convoys, which operated during the same period. Further-