

LITERATURE CITED

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Copulatory behavior of a pair of Yellow-billed Cuckoos.—On 19 July 1973 while driving some of the back roads just south of Bartlesville, Washington County, Oklahoma, I paused to observe a Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) that flew across the road in front of me. The bird (later determined as a male) landed in a dead tree beside the road about 10 m from me. As I watched he moved across a thick branch and snapped off a small twig about 7 cm long with his bill. He then flew back across the road with the twig in his bill and landed directly on the back of another Yellow-billed Cuckoo (assumed to be a female) perched on a branch about 15 m up in a tree. He placed the twig crosswise in the female's bill while maintaining a firm hold himself, his head being oriented over her right shoulder. Coition lasted about 3 sec, during which time both birds maintained their holds on the twig. The male then flew off, with the twig, to another tree. The female remained perched in her original position. After a 20-sec interval the male returned with the twig and repeated the entire procedure. Following coition he flew off, leaving the twig in the female's bill. She held the twig for another 5 sec before dropping it, after which she fluffed her feathers and then flew off in the direction the male had taken.

The exact function of the twig in this unusual performance can only be speculated, but two possibilities come to mind. First the twig acted as an offering by the male to the female, in place of a food item such as that described in Bent (1940, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. No. 176: 68). Second the twig was used as a device that helped the male maintain his balance during copulation with a minimum of fluttering, which would be another interesting and, so far as I know, unique use of a tool by a bird.—D. PAUL HENDRICKS, *305 East Maplewood Avenue, Littleton, Colorado 80121*. Accepted 20 Dec. 73.