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NOTES ON THE NESTING OF THE REDPOLL

By LEE R. DICE

WITH TWO PHOTOS

NOTES on three nests of the Redpoll (*Acanthis linaria linaria*) found in the interior of Alaska are here presented as an addition to our knowledge of the breeding habits of this species. These notes were secured by the author while a Deputy Fur Warden in the Alaska Fisheries Service, and they are published with the permission of the United States Bureau of Fisheries.

During the winter, Redpolls are found in flocks consisting of a few individuals up to several hundred, but in the spring the flocks break up and the birds pair off. On the North Fork of the Kuskokwim River, near its head, pairing began in 1912 during the last week in April, but a flock of fifty was seen as late as May 7. The exact position of this locality is about seventy-five miles almost directly south of Tanana, Alaska, and about eighty miles north and a little west of Mount McKinley.

In this region the valleys and low hills are largely covered by an open scrubby forest of black spruce, beneath which the ground is heavily carpeted with sphagnum moss. Lakes and small streams are numerous. Along the streams and extending up on southern hillsides are patches of paper birch and white spruce forest, while on the river bars thickets of willow and alder are common.

The first nest was found May 20, and was apparently completed. The nest was placed about four feet above ground in a willow which was growing at the edge of the river in a fringe of willows and alders. The following day, May 21, two more nests were found, both incomplete. One of these (no. 2) was about three feet from the ground in a small paper birch which was in a partly open place where the paper birch and white spruce forest had been burned off a number of years before. It was about twenty feet from the river, just behind a screen of willows. The other nest (no. 3) was about five feet high in a willow,

which with others formed a narrow fringe along the river. All these nests were included within a distance of a half-mile along the stream.

The work of building the nests, incubation, and care of the young seemed to be entirely performed by the females, and the males were not seen near the nests after the eggs were laid. Each nest was a dainty cup of dried grass lined with feathers and down, and each was placed in a fork alongside the main stem of the shrub.

Eggs seemingly were laid one each day, as shown in the accompanying table. The cases where two eggs apparently appear in one day are probably due to one egg having been laid after my visit the first day and the other before my visit the second day. The number of eggs in the complete set was four in nest no. 3, and five in each of the other nests. The eggs of nest no. 3 were collected on May 30 when the set was seen to be complete.

Incubation was in progress in all nests on May 29, but may have begun on May 28, for the nests were not examined on that day, or perhaps even earlier in



Fig. 23. NORTH FORK OF THE KUSKOKWIM RIVER ABOUT A HALF-MILE BELOW WHERE THE REDPOLL NESTS WERE FOUND. A GROWTH OF WILLOWS CAN BE SEEN ON THE RIVER-BAR AT THE LEFT OF THE PICTURE, AND IN THE DISTANCE A FOREST OF PAPER BIRCH AND WHITE SPRUCE.

nest no. 2, where the female was on the nest when it was seen on May 27. Due to a collecting trip to an adjacent mountain the nests were not visited on June 4, 5, or 6, so the time the eggs hatched is not exactly known, but was, for the two nests remaining, sometime between June 3 and June 7.

Three eggs of nest no. 1 failed to hatch, though all hatched in nest no. 2. A male was collected May 19 near the site of nest no. 1, before the nest was found. Perhaps he was the mate of the female of this nest, and his loss may have been the cause of the infertility of part of the eggs. Apparently the male has no function in the home life of the Redpoll other than to fertilize the eggs.

Of the two nestlings in nest no. 1, one grew much more rapidly than the other, but both grew more rapidly than the five in nest no. 2. By the time the young birds were able to fly the nests had become foul with excrement, and the

edges of the nest-cups had been broken down by the weight of the growing nestlings.

A well-grown young Redpoll was collected in alders by the river on May 30, so these nests were not the earliest for the year, and it is possible that they represent a second brood. The time required to build a nest and rear a nestful of young Redpolls to the time when they leave the nest is apparently just about a month.

RECORDS OF REDPOLL NESTS			
	Nest No. 1	Nest No. 2	Nest No. 3
1912	completed	.....	.....
May 20	completed	building	building
May 21	completed	building	building
May 22	completed	building	building
May 23	1 egg	completed	completed
May 24	2 eggs	2 eggs	1 egg
May 25	3 eggs	.....	2 eggs
May 26	4 eggs	4 eggs	3 eggs
May 27	5 eggs	.....	4 eggs
May 29	5 eggs	.....	4 eggs
May 30	5 eggs	5 eggs	4 eggs
June 3	5 eggs	5 eggs	.....
June 7	2 nestlings	5 nestlings	.....
June 17	all left nest	all left nest	.....

Missoula, Montana, January 26, 1918.



Fig. 24. FEMALE REDPOLL ON THE NEST (NO. 2) IN A PAPER BIRCH SHRUB. NORTH FORK OF THE KUSKOKWIM RIVER, ALASKA; MAY 30, 1912.