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NESTING NOTES ON THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN CREEPER

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WITH FOUR PHOTOS

ON JUNE 21, 1917, accompanied by Robert Niedrach and Egmont Rett, and having arrived at the limit of vehicle transportation, in Gilpin County, Colorado, I started afoot to climb a steep, blazed trail up the mountain side for the open ground above timber-line. Our search was mainly to be directed toward the nests of the White-tailed Ptarmigan and Brown-capped Rosy Finch. The timber at the upper altitudes was dense, and the obscure trail could be followed only by the occasional "blazing" on trees, since long stretches were covered by deep snow drifts. This, together with the rarified air at an altitude of nearly 11,000 feet, made progress slow and difficult, and necessitated frequent stops for rest and to regain breath. During one of these pauses, about 200 feet below timber-line, we noticed a small bird that by its habit of diving from one tree to the base of another, we identified as a Rocky Mountain Creeper (*Certhia familiaris montana*). This bird was soon joined by its mate. After watching the pair for nearly a half-hour and having in mind a hard day's work yet ahead of us, Rett and I went on, leaving Niedrach to follow the birds until their nest was discovered or until they were lost. We had gone but a short distance, however, before being recalled by Niedrach's lusty signal, and found that he had located the nest by seeing one of the birds enter it.

The nest was about ten feet from the ground, on the side of a dead spruce sixty or eighty feet tall, from which most of the limbs and considerable of the bark were gone. It was placed between the trunk of the tree and a section of the bark that had warped away from its original position. As the nest was about six inches below the entrance, which was on one side of the section of bark, the most careful investigation was necessary to prevent endangering its contents, which proved to be three eggs. These were left undisturbed. (See fig. 12.)

On revisiting the nest, on June 24, it was found to contain seven eggs. It was next visited on June 26 and as the number of eggs had not been increased and as we had to depart for Denver the next day, these, together with the nest

and parent birds were collected. An examination of the birds showed that no additional eggs would have been laid.

One or both birds were present and remained nearby on each of the visits to the nest, and though quite tame and fearless evinced no special solicitude while it was being examined and finally taken. On the first and last visits it required an unusual amount of hammering on the tree trunk to cause the bird to vacate the nest.

The nest proper was placed on a foundation of small spruce twigs which had found lodgment or been placed behind the gaping section of bark where there were a number of small bunches of spiders' web. The nest itself was composed of fine, shredded, inner bark fiber and occasional flake-like chips of



Fig. 12. NESTING SITE OF ROCKY MOUNTAIN CREEPER, NEAR ALICE, COLORADO.

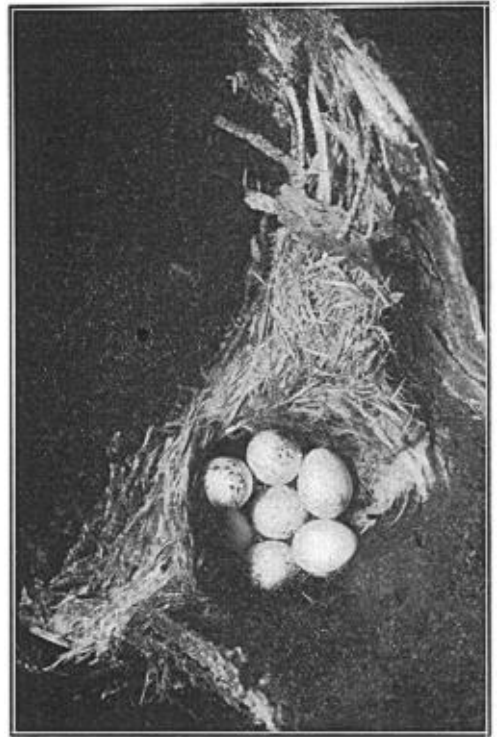


Fig. 13. EGGS AND NEST OF ROCKY MOUNTAIN CREEPER.

the same material, with a few small fluffy feathers matted to the inside surface of the cup. (See fig. 14.)

The extreme dimensions of the nest, including foundation, are: Top to bottom, 7 inches; width, 5 inches. While the nest itself was 3 inches deep and 4 inches broad in one direction, the restrictions due to its location confined it to a breadth of $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in the other direction. In fact, so limited was the space that the bark itself comprised one side of the cup, the latter being $1\frac{1}{2}$ by 2 inches at the rim and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep.

The eggs are white, sparsely dotted with rufous (Chapman's color chart) over the entire surface, more heavily marked with spots and dots of the same

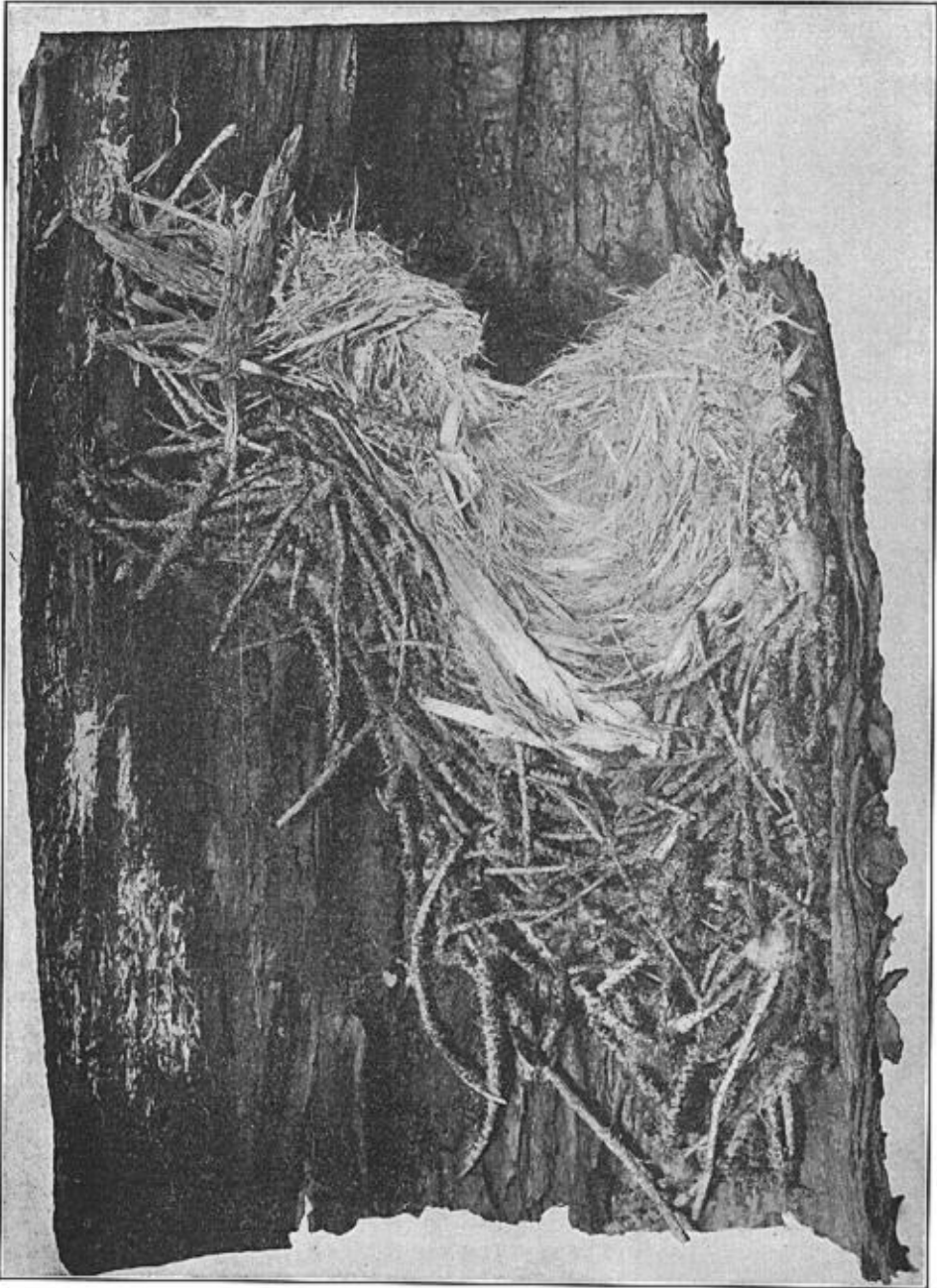


Fig. 14. NEST OF ROCKY MOUNTAIN CREEPER, AFTER REMOVAL FROM SITE BUT IN PLACE AGAINST BARK STRIP.

color at the larger end. The density of the spotting varies individually among the eggs. (See fig. 13.) The seven eggs show but very slight variation in size. The measurements average .52x.40 inches.

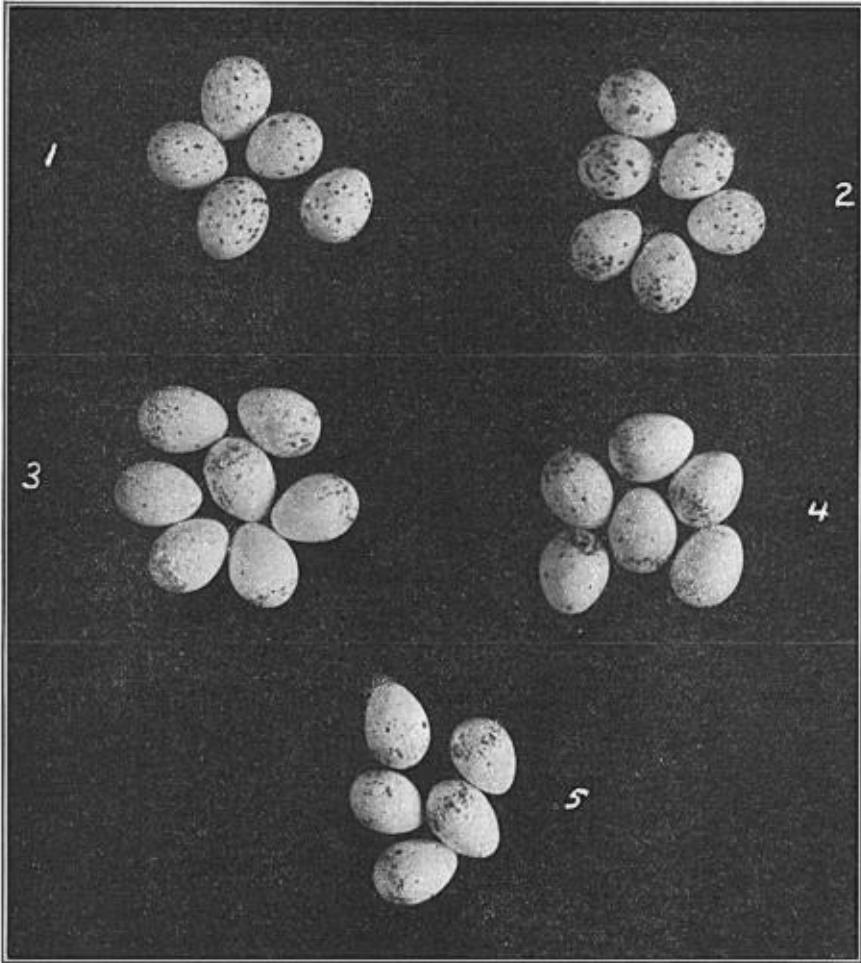


Fig. 15. SET NO. 1, BROWN CREEPER; NO. 2, MEXICAN CREEPER; NO. 3, ROCKY MOUNTAIN CREEPER; NO. 4, CALIFORNIA CREEPER; NO. 5, SIERRA CREEPER.

Photo by J. D. Figgins

So far as I am aware, this set is the first to be taken in Colorado and since it completes the genus as represented in our collection of eggs, I submit a photograph of the eggs of the five subspecies for comparison. (See fig. 15.)

Denver, Colorado, November 25, 1918.