

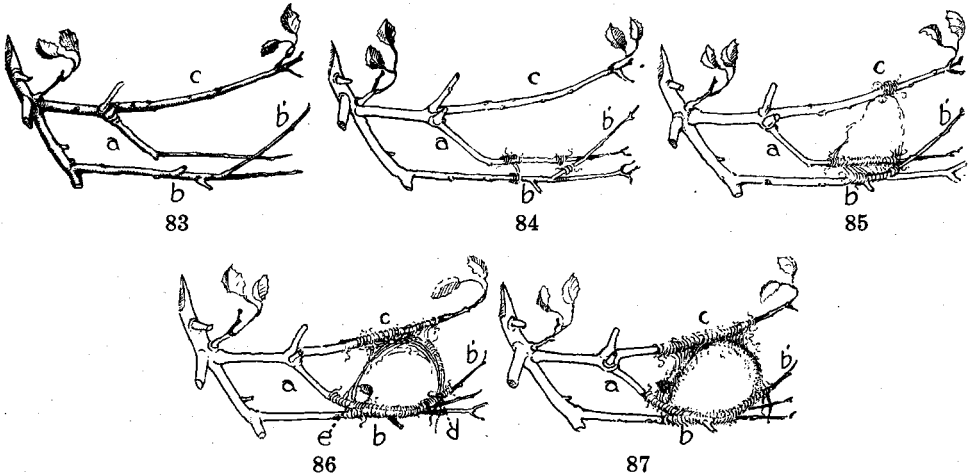
THE CONSTRUCTION OF A HUTTON VIREO'S NEST

WITH FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS

By AMELIA S. ALLEN

The Hutton Vireo (*Vireo huttoni*) is a permanent resident in the San Francisco Bay region but is comparatively rare in the neighborhood of Berkeley. It was therefore a decidedly interesting event when a pair began building a nest in the terminal twigs of a live oak situated in such a way that the site was within six feet of one of our windows. The notes of these birds had been frequently heard for two or three days immediately preceding March 24, 1930, when the pair was first seen.

Weather was very warm during these days (max. 85°), and on March 23 a light east wind cleared the air of every vestige of fog. Even a human being might easily have been deceived into believing that he was basking in the Sonoran zone, until March 28 when a chilly ocean fog brought him back to the proper Transition frame of mind. It was then that the vireos apparently repented of their rash venture and departed.



Figs. 83-87. SUCCESSIVE STAGES IN NEST-BUILDING BY THE HUTTON VIREO. SEE ACCOMPANYING TEXT.

But in spite of the fact that the nest was never completed, a few observations regarding its structure and the technique of the builders may be worth recording, since most of the published accounts of the nesting of vireos begin with the feeding of the young.

The site selected was about twenty-five feet from the ground on the northwest side of a tree which stands on a north-facing cañon slope. The sun shone on the site during the early afternoon and it was during those hours that most of the building was done. Though I was awake at dawn each morning I failed to hear a vireo note before eight o'clock. Whenever the birds were seen at the nest, which was at rather long intervals, their actions seemed deliberate and their work, as a rule, unhurried.

The arrangement of twigs in the site selected is shown in figure 83. The new leaves on the twigs were less than half grown. It was on twig *a* that the bird was first seen at 2:50 p. m. on March 24. When it came again at 3 p. m. and alighted

on the same twig, my suspicions were aroused. At its third appearance it seemed to bind some fine material to twig *a*, then flew into the next tree. Immediately the mate came and bound more material to the same twig, and by using glasses I could see a covering of cobweb on this twig. At 3:20 the pair came again. One carried cobweb in its beak which it deposited on twig *b*, drawing it across from there to twig *a* (fig. 84). After she left, the mate came, calling *swee-eet, swee-eet*, but made a hasty inspection only. At 4:03 a bird giving a harsh note came and deposited a bunch of cobweb on twig *b'*, called loudly several times and left. At 4:07 a bird came, took a hasty look and flew without giving a call.

March 25 dawned clear and warm. More cobweb had been deposited after my last observation on the previous afternoon. I saw a bird at the nest site at 9:15 a. m. and again at 10:40. It was not possible for me to watch continuously, but I could listen and I heard very few calls. At 1:25 p. m. I heard the sharp call being given continuously, so I turned my glasses on the nest. One bird came but almost immediately flew away. At 1:30 a bird alighted on twig *c*, reached across to twig *a*, seized some of the cobweb in its beak and pulled it across to twig *c*, holding it there with the left foot. It then drew another bit across from a lower point on twig *a*, brought it to the same point, drew it around under and up with the bill and fastened the two strands to the upper twig (fig. 85).

Warm weather continued on March 26 with a light breeze from the east. At 8:10 a. m., I first heard the birds. One call was the *swee-eet*, typical song of the Hutton Vireo, the other *mee-me-e-e*, common alarm note used by other vireos as well as the Hutton. Then the harsh note sometimes used by the Hutton was heard. At 8:25 a bird came to the nest, but a telephone call prevented me from seeing what was done. Between 9 a. m. and 10:15, when I watched continuously, nothing happened. More material had been added so that the outline of an upper rim for the future nest could be seen. The cobweb on twig *c* was loose but that on twig *a* was firmly felted and bound twigs *b* and *b'* closely to twig *a*. Some shreds of fine green moss were visible, on twigs *b'* and *c*. At 10:55 I happened to be near the window again and saw the pair in the next tree. One bird flew across to the nest and hurriedly pulled cobweb to the left from a dense felting at *d* and another bit toward the right at *e* (fig. 86). This bird flew, and immediately the other perched on twig *c* and very deliberately tucked in a few ends, binding them more firmly. At eleven o'clock a few more touches were given to the rim.

Quite a strong east wind blew during the night following and continued intermittently during the morning of March 27. I watched continuously much of the time but saw nothing of the birds. The wind had blown many blossoms from the oaks and these had lodged in the cobweb, making the whole look more dense than before. A coarse white thread was conspicuous at *d* and a dead leaf at *e*. An open webbing sagged from the rim and its supports. That the birds had not yet given up their undertaking is shown by the fact that they were seen at the nest at 1:15 p. m. We were away from home from that time until the afternoon of March 29. While we were away from the weather changed. A cold fog blew in, and on our return the nest was practically unchanged (fig. 87) but deserted.

Berkeley, California, May 30, 1930.