

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

The Song of the Mountain Bluebird.—The Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*) is generally considered to be a songless bird. I do not recall having seen a description of its singing, although some mention of its song has evidently been made. Dawson, in "The Birds of California" (p. 782), after describing the call and alarm notes of the Mountain Bluebird, writes: "Other song the birds have none . . . For here, again, the entire song tradition, including the 'delightful warble' attributed to the bird by Townsend, appears to be quite without foundation, as in the case of *S. m. occidentalis*."

I do not know whether all male Mountain Bluebirds sing, or if songs are given by some of the birds throughout the breeding range of the species; but I do know that at least some of the Mountain Bluebirds which nest in this locality (Lincoln County, Montana) regularly sing a definite, distinctive song. On frequent occasions during the last seven summers I have forsaken the comfort of my bed to enjoy their subdued, gentle singing.

For one must be an early riser indeed if he wishes to hear the Mountain Bluebird's song. Singing commences in full darkness, and continues for a few minutes to as much as an hour, ceasing soon after daylight. Thus during June the period of song here lies between 3 and 4 o'clock (Mountain standard time; in the extreme western portion of the county, 2 and 3 a. m., Pacific standard time); in early spring and midsummer it occurs about half an hour later. Only once during the past seven years have I heard the bird's song at any other time of the day: At 9 o'clock on a dark, rainy morning in March of 1932, a Mountain Bluebird gave weakly a few snatches of its usual daybreak song.

As the demands of the day make it impossible for me regularly to indulge a penchant for early morning strolls, I am unable to delimit the season of the Bluebird's singing; I know, however, that the birds sing at least frequently from early April until the middle of July. (Nesting activities begin usually the last week of April, the second broods of young leaving the nests about July 15.)

In form, the song is almost a replica of the familiar caroling of the Western Robin; but it is given very softly, crooningly, with the unmistakable quality of the Bluebird's gentle call. Though I have not determined the distance at which the singing can be heard, I doubt if it is audible at seventy yards. The notes are repeated over and over, without a pause, for as much as thirty minutes at a time.

Because of its marked resemblance to the song of the Robin, despite its unconformity to the normal "purposes" of bird song (the birds are mated and the nesting territories selected before singing begins in the spring), the song of the Mountain Bluebird appears to be a possible illustration of retrogression in the evolution of bird song. It seems probable that the song, at some time in the past, was louder and more varied, and was sung more commonly, than it is now; and that it is gradually being lost, even as the species is losing other thrush-like characters. If this be so, it is possible that some or all of the Mountain Bluebirds in some parts of their breeding range are already songless, as the testimony of many writers indicates.—WINTON WEYDEMEYER, *Fortune, Montana, February 5, 1934.*

Unusual Mountain Bluebird Nests.—In the January, 1933, number of the "Auk" (p. 111) Adolph Murie describes a robin's nest utilized by chickadees. Somewhat similar nesting habits of the Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*) were observed in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

On June 3, 1932, on the river bottom along lower Gros Ventre River, Wyoming, I found a nest situated about nine feet up in a large cottonwood. A female Mountain Bluebird was incubating five eggs and the male was hovering near with food in his beak. I revisited the place on July 4, after the young had left, and collected the nest, at that time containing a single addled egg.

Close examination revealed that this was an old Robin's nest, somewhat dilapidated, for the mud foundation was not continuous all around the rim. The old nest had simply been filled with weathered grass, other plant stems, and strips of bark, really the same type of material that had gone into the construction of the original Robin's home. There were no feathers in the lining; in fact, I could not see that a definite lining had been differentiated.