

## 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.

The nest had been placed close to the cottonwood trunk, pretty well concealed by a great tangle of drooping limbs and twigs, so characteristic of these trees.

On June 24, 1932, another nest of a Mountain Bluebird was found in a shed on a farm west of Jackson, Wyoming. The birds entered the building by one of several small holes in the wall and the nest, which was a rather loose, bulky structure, was placed on top of a two-by-four near the eaves, just as a Robin's nest would have been placed under similar circumstances.

In both these instances the bluebirds had departed from their customary habits of nesting in cavities. Yet in each case there were suggestive circumstances.

Recalling again the article in the *Auk*, on the chickadee, referred to above, we find that the Robin's nest occupied by those birds was unusually deep and they had excavated farther through the mud bottom. This evidently gave the chickadees a semblance of the usual nesting cavity.

In the case of the bluebird nesting in the cottonwood, there was nothing but a normal Robin's nest, but I could not help suspecting that the tangle of sheltering twigs so effectively screened in the old nest that the bluebirds, on the lookout for the accustomed cavity and finding the old hidden nest by the tree trunk, experienced a sense of shelter, somewhat akin to that of a true cavity, sufficiently to arouse their nest-building activities.

In this connection it is of interest that about the middle of September, 1933, a number of Mountain Bluebirds appeared at my home in Jackson, Wyoming, and for several days both sexes were busy hovering about the various bird boxes. In a small dead fir tree were the remains of an old Robin's nest, disintegrating, but still retaining the cup shape. A male bluebird settled into this old nest and went through the motions of shaping a nest "cup" with its breast. No nest could be less sheltered than this one, located as it was in a small dead tree stripped of foliage.

Going back to the nest in the shed, that structure was not in a cavity, to be sure, but it should be noted that the birds entered through a hole in the wall, which was normal, and while the large interior of the building should have struck the birds as anything but a normal nesting cavity, still the darkened interior, together with the entrance hole, may have furnished sufficient sense of protection to inspire their nest-building activities.—OLAUS J. MURIE, *Bureau of Biological Survey, Jackson, Wyoming, February 19, 1934.*

**A Record of the Cape May Warbler in Arizona.**—In July, 1933, while engaged in a search for other specimens, I found in the mounted collection in the *Galerie des Oiseaux*, at the *Museum d'Histoire Naturelle* in Paris a male *Dendroica tigrina*, ticketed as "*Dendroica townsendi*. Arizona." Reference to the catalogue showed that this specimen (no. 1876-887) came to the museum, with two other birds, from J. A. Spring of Arizona in 1876. One of this trio, catalogued as "*Geothlypis trichas*," was found in the collection and proved to be a specimen of *Geothlypis trichas occidentalis*. The third bird, a "*Haemophila*" of some species, I was not able to locate. In view of the contributory evidence of the Western Yellowthroat there is little reason to doubt the authenticity of the Cape May Warbler record. While I am not too familiar with the seasonal plumages of the species, the bird in question appears to be a fully adult male taken in the fall.—A. J. VAN ROSSEM, *California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California, February 21, 1934.*

**Further Concerning Vernacular Names.**—The moot question of what kinds of vernacular names are most useable will not down; for instance, see the lively continuation of the discussion by Taverner and Stone in April *Auk* (LI, 1934, pp. 279-281). It may thus be in order to call attention to some usages in practice abroad. Stuart Baker in his latest work on Indian birds (*The Nidification of Birds of the Indian Empire*, London, Taylor and Francis, vol. I, 1932, vol. II, 1933) describes and justifies the plan he adopts in the following words.

"... Recently many writers have drawn attention to the fact that the trivial names of Indian birds often convey no descriptive meaning to the hearer either as regards the birds themselves or of the country they occupy. . . ."

"It will be noted that I have completely dropped the use of surnames of people as trivial names. It may be argued that to those who knew well, either personally