

## UNUSUAL NESTS OF COLORADO BIRDS

By HUGO G. RODECK

Several years ago workmen from a local roofing company brought to the University of Colorado Museum a domestic pigeon's nest which had been removed from the roof of a business building just off the main downtown corner of Boulder, Colorado. The nest, shown in figure 47, is constructed almost entirely of metal. It measures about 9 inches in diameter and about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches high. Woven into it are steel, brass, and copper wire, nails, hairpins, safety pins, spectacle frames, watch springs, and other metal scraps,



Fig. 47. Nest of domestic pigeon, composed mainly of metal.

all showing evidence of having been in a fire. A jewelry store on the ground floor of the building evidently was the source of a great deal of the material of which the nest was built, and an incinerator in the alley behind the building solves the mystery of the burning. When found, the nest is reported to have contained a "set" of eggs, but it now contains only one broken shell.

When the writer first visited Science Lodge, the University of Colorado's mountain laboratory, in the summer of 1935, he was surprised to find a family of Mountain Chickadees (*Penthestes gambeli*) nesting in the brain cavity of a horse skull which hung on a tree some three or four feet from the door of a student cabin, and about six feet above the ground. Access to the interior of the skull was through the foramen magnum. Reports showed that presumably these same birds had occupied the skull for some years previously. Since then, each summer the same cavity was occupied by the birds until 1939 when, at the beginning of the season, the horse skull was missing from its accustomed place. In a few days the birds were found to have moved to the

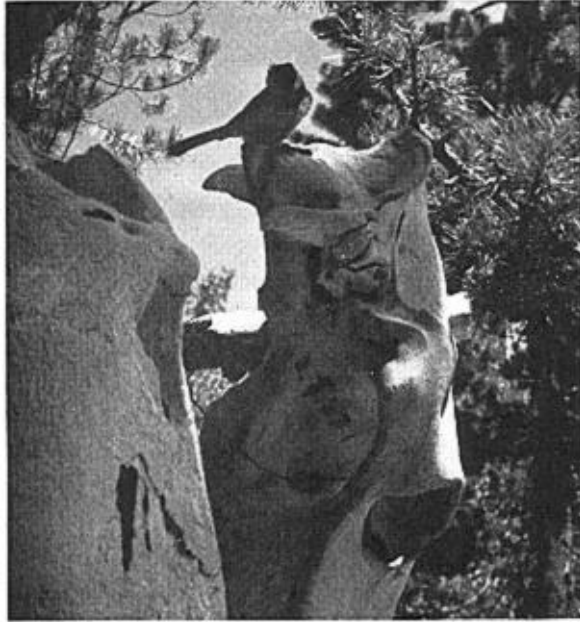


Fig. 48. Mountain Chickadee at entrance to nest in skull of horse.



Fig. 49. Nesting site of Violet-green Swallows in sheet metal sign.

“totem pole”, figure 48, a tree stub decorated with horse, cow, and goat skulls about 75 feet from the old location. Here they built their nest in the brain cavity of another horse skull and raised their family practically in the center of one of the principal gathering places for the students, and only a few feet above their heads.

In an instance reported and photographed (fig. 49) by Elliott Miller, of Boulder, a family of Violet-green Swallows (*Tachycineta thalassina lepida*) was reared in the cavity of a sheet metal Kodak sign on the main street of Estes Park, Colorado, only a few feet above the heads of the crowds of people who stroll the streets of this town during the summer.

The most persistent and fearless nest builders among the birds at Science Lodge (altitude 9500 feet, in western Boulder County) are the Western Flycatchers (*Empidonax difficilis*). They nest by preference in and on the log buildings. A nest under the porch of one of the buildings has been occupied every year since 1935 to my knowledge, and for some time before then according to report. The nest is on top of a supporting post about three feet off the ground and within ten feet of the community woodpile where a truckload of wood is deposited two or three times a week, and from where some forty or fifty persons carry wood daily to their cabins. Its disturbed location recalls another nest of the same species in the eaves of the sawmill close to a shrieking power saw.

Another Western Flycatcher has nested for several years on a board between two rafters inside the boiler room of one of the bathhouses. The door stands open all summer and the bird is not disturbed by the visits of the stoker. Still another of these birds found an open door in a temporarily unoccupied student cabin and built a nest inside, above a window. Incubation was well advanced when it became necessary to eject this occupant to allow the cabin to serve its original purpose. It was found impossible to keep the bird away until the nest had been removed.

*University of Colorado Museum, Boulder, Colorado, April 21, 1941.*