NOTES

AMERICAN REDSTART BREEDING IN CALIFORNIA

McCaskie (1970) has summarized the status of the American Redstart *(Setophaga ruticilla)* in California. He considers it a normal fall migrant and a late spring vagrant, occurring regularly in small numbers throughout much of the state, and a rare, local winter resident in the south. He treats June and July birds as vagrants that have become hopelessly lost. The breeding range according to the American Ornithologists' Union (1957) extends west and south to southwestern British Columbia, central northern Washington, eastern Oregon, and northern Utah. However, the closest definite breeding locality that we can find is in southwestern Oregon 15 miles north of Medford, Jackson Co., and 210 km northeast of Arcata, California (Crowell and Nehls, 1970); this nest contained four young when discovered on 2 July 1970 among willows along the Rogue River (John Butler, *fide* Guy McCaskie). Other summer records from farther northeast in Oregon (Gabrielson and Jewett, 1940; Quaintance, 1942) suggest breeding on a somewhat regular basis.

In 1972 a pair of American Redstarts nested in a small alder-willow bog approximately 5 km northwest of Arcata, Humboldt Co., California. More exactly, this locality is at the west end of Lanphere Road, 2.0 km from its junction with Seidel Road, where Lanphere branches into two private dirt roads, and is on the west shore of Mad River Slough 0.8 km from the Pacific Ocean.

Early in the afternoon of 22 July 1972 we visited this bog. Standing on the south branch of Lanphere Road near its bifurcation, we began "shushing." Almost immediately an adult male American Redstart appeared, scolded briefly, and flew back into the woods. A few seconds later an adult female arrived from the direction in which the male had disappeared. She was not very excited and did not scold, but instead flitted from branch to branch collecting insects. After accumulating a billful, she disappeared into the trees. Binford followed into the mosquito-infested bog and soon found the male, which was calling and singing intermittently while collecting food. Spotting an intruder, the bird began scolding loudly but retained the food in his bill and remained high in the trees. After a few minutes he disappeared into the canopy almost directly above Binford. The female was then noted collecting food some 25 m away. While Binford watched, she flew to the tree in which the male was last seen and went directly to the nest.

The nest was saddled in a crotch between four small vertical branches about 8 m above the ground in the canopy of a Scouler Willow *(Salix scouleriana)*, which was 18 cm in diameter at breast height and about 10 m tall. On 10 August the empty nest was collected by Gary Friedrichsen and Tim Osborne and is now in the collection of the California Academy of Sciences. It is composed largely of the dried stem fragments of herbaceous plants, notably of the genera *Equisetum, Stachys,* and *Scirpus.* Moss, cottony fibers attached to willow seeds, body hair from horses, and miscellaneous plant debris account for the remainder of the nest bulk. The lining is composed solely of hair from the tails or manes of horses. There is a stable about 35 m from the nest site. Dimensions of the slightly dilapidated nest are as follows: diameter, outside 75 mm, inside 35; depth, outside 55, inside 30.

Alder-willow thickets form a narrow strip bordering Mad River Slough. Between the thickets and the ocean is a series of sandy ridges supporting mixed woodland. At the nest site a tiny stream spreads underground forming a bog, in which are growing Pacific Oenanthe *(Oenanthe sarmentosa)*, Giant Horsetail *(Equisetum telmateia* var. *braunii)*, Chamisso Hedge-nettle *(Stachys chamissonis)*, and Bulrush *(Scirpus macrocarpus)*. Here the dominant trees are Scouler Willow, 9 to 12 m tall, and alder *(Alnus* sp.), some of which are even taller.

On 23 July we again visited the locality, accompanied by a large group of people, including Ted Chandik, Dave DeSante, Gary Friedrichsen, Douglas Greenberg, Tom Schulenberg, and Bob Yutzy. Chandik photographed each adult at the nest (Figure 1; color print on file at the California Academy of Sciences). During an hour of observation the Redstarts seemed to exhibit a regular routine. The female would collect food, feed the young, and then brood them loosely until the male appeared. When he was still some 3 m away she would leave. After about a minute the male would land at the nest, feed the young, and leave immediately. On one occasion he reached the nest before the female had left and transferred his food to her. We could not determine if she ate it or gave it to the nestlings. As he did on 22 July, Stallcup saw the head of one nestling and believed the bird was three or four days old, as its crown supported only wispy down rather than contour feathers. The adults seemed to jab in three distinct places in the nest, suggesting that there were at least three nestlings.

FIGURE 1. Adult male American Redstart *(Setophaga ruticilla)* at its nest near Arcata, Humboldt County, California on 23 July 1972.

Photo by Theodore Chandik

On 29 July Stallcup, Friedrichsen, and Ronald LeValley observed the nest for 20 minutes. Three times the male Redstart fed a juvenal Brown-headed Cowbird *(Molothrus ater)* that was concealed in the foliage about 2 meters below the nest. The very short tail, bold yellowish gape, and long down feathers on the crown indicated that it had left the nest quite recently. At no time did the male approach the nest. Although no female or fledgling Redstart was seen, the entire area was not searched thoroughly.

The American Redstart has had an interesting history at the Lanphere Road locality. A male was reported in the summer of 1969, but the observation was never confirmed. On 26 June 1970 an adult male was seen by Dr. Stanley W. Harris and was reported by other observers to have been present for the previous three or four weeks. The area was not checked in 1971. In 1972 an adult male was seen on 1 June by Dick Erickson and Osborne and on the following day by Harris, but no female was seen before 22 July. Whether or not the male had a mate and nest in previous years is unknown.

The only other records we can find for northwestern California are as follows: one young male seen by W. L. Dawson and A. G. Vrooman on 14 June 1916 in northern Mendocino Co. (Dawson, 1923); single females seen by Stallcup on 23 and 24 Sep. 1961 along the west slope of Clear Lake, Lake Co., and on 16 Sep. 1967 at Trinidad, Humboldt Co.; one bird observed by Stallcup on 17 Sep. 1967 at Fairhaven, on the north spit of Humboldt Bay, Humboldt Co.; and single males observed by Ron H. Gerstenberg on 30 Aug. 1970 and 2 and 3 Sep. 1971 at Manila, on the north spit of Humboldt Bay, Humboldt Co. (DeSante et al., 1972; Gerstenberg, *in litt.).*

Grinnell and Miller (1944) do not list the 1916 record, perhaps taking too literally Dawson's statement that the observers obtained only "a rather regrettably unsatisfactory glimpse." We feel that the record should be accepted, because the observers had a view sufficient to determine sex and age and considered the record worthy of publication. Possibly Dawson made his statement because the bird was not collected. North Spit appears to be a natural landfall for displaced vagrants returning from the ocean. Its proximity to the Lanphere locality suggests that it might have been the immediate source of the nesting birds.

The nest described here is the first for California. The alder-willow association is fairly common along the northern coast of the state and could harbor additional breeding pairs of American Redstarts and possibly other species of supposed "eastern vagrants."

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