

in Des Moines, Iowa. The shaft had been abandoned and the top was on a level with the surface of the ground. A wire fence was rudely set up around the opening to keep stray cattle from falling in. The phoebes had chosen this site for their nest, which was fastened onto the side of the perpendicular walls seven feet below the surface of the ground. At the time of discovery, which was on May 12, 1914, the nest contained five eggs. I proceeded to collect these for my collection by using a long stick with a piece of copper wire attached to one end and bent into a loop for scooping up the eggs. Leaning over a cavity probably a couple hundred feet deep and about five feet square it was impossible to maintain sufficient equilibrium to bring all of the eggs up to the surface.

The question, however, which came to my mind was this: If the young birds should have hatched could they possibly have escaped from a birthplace so dangerously situated. Aside from the nest no projection offered itself as a stepping stone to the outside world. It would seem to be an impossible feat for young birds never before out of the nest to fly upwards for seven feet, especially to a species that under ordinary circumstances has the opportunity of a more easy downward flight at the time of their initial attempt. It seems quite doubtful also as to whether the young birds could cover the seven feet by climbing straight upwards clinging to the planks, twelve inches wide, which were snugly fitted together. Some birds might be provided by nature to escape from a similar opening, such possibly as the chimney swift, but I feel doubtful if the young phoebes would have been capable of the task.

At least I felt that the parents would be increasing their number more rapidly by immediately starting a new home in a more choice location than by spending the next few weeks in hatching out and raising the young to fall into the dark depths of the mine.

EMERSON A. STONER.

A BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER'S NEST

On April 23, 1921, near Ballard Normal School, Macon, Ga., an uncompleted Blue-gray Gnatcatcher's nest was discovered in a young elm tree. The nest was twelve feet or a little over from the ground, on one of the two main forks of the tree, and partly supported by a twig. It was deep, the outside covered with lichens, and to a casual glance appeared to be merely a large tuft of lichens. The tree grew beside a fence that ran along a lane, through which some hundred and fifty children passed to and from school each day, in addition to the numerous adults who also used the lane. Back from the fence a rather open, wooded area of pine mingled with several species of deciduous trees and a sparse undergrowth, largely species of *Crataegus*, sloped down to a small stream. A line of pines ran along the opposite side of the lane, and beyond this an open rocky field.

During the following week the nest was completed. By May 16, possibly earlier, the four young birds were hatched. Both parents assisted in feeding. Neither approached the nest directly, but always alighted first in some other part of the tree. The birds did not appear disturbed by the presence of several observers near the tree, so long as they were comparatively quiet.

For two or three days before leaving the nest the young birds climbed up to its edge. In fact it appeared as though there were not sufficient room for the four of them. Some two evenings before the young Gnatcatchers left the nest an Indigo Bunting, just learning to fly, alighted in the tree. The parent Gnatcatchers flew around the young Bunting, scolding, and nearly striking it, until it moved on to another tree.

May 26, late in the afternoon, the young birds left the nest. Just before dark all were seen on the fence or on the lowest twigs of *Crataegus* shrubs. The following morning three of the young Gnatcatchers were located in small trees or shrubs near the nest, none of them over five feet from the ground. They had already learned to fly a few feet. The fourth young bird was not located, but from the actions of the parents it appeared probable that it was in some of the bushes farther from the lane.

BERYL T. MOUNTS.

HOUSE WREN NESTING IN RURAL MAIL BOX

It is a well known fact that the House Wren will nest in any available nook or cavity that strikes its fancy regardless of what the object's use in the world happens to be. Hundreds of seemingly unsuitable places have been selected by this eccentric species as desirable home sites. I have heard of many of these unusual home selections and have seen a few, but on one occasion only have I known them to appropriate a rural mail box for this purpose.

A farmer with whom I am acquainted owned a mail box with a bad fitting cover. The receptacle was of the oblong box type, with a long hinged cover on the top, and when the cover was shut there was a large crack between it and the box.

This box chanced to catch the eyes of a pair of home-making House Wrens and presently the owner of the box found it partially filled with sticks. The sticks were a nuisance and were unceremoniously removed. But the wrens were not in the least daunted by this interference in their plans and continued to fill the box with more sticks as fast as they were removed, loudly berating any intruder in appropriate language, known only to the wren's spiteful vocabulary. After this state of affairs had prevailed for some time, with neither defensive nor offensive force giving way, the farmer's son built a nice little wren house and placed it on the mail box post. This cured the trouble immediately. The wrens' labors were apparently transferred to the new structure with no misgivings and, so far as I know, they return each year to nest in the little house, as they have now done for a number of years.

The bird house on the post attracted considerable attention from people passing by. One tourist, possessed of an abnormal "bump" of curiosity, drove in off the Grant highway, upon which he was passing, to inquire what the little box on the mail box post was for. He went away carrying his first bird protection lesson.

FRED J. PIERCE.

Winthrop, Iowa, Jan. 4, 1922.