

COWBIRD EGG IN MOURNING DOVE NEST

by **Martin McNicholl**, 1281 Valour Road, Winnipeg

The Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) is well known as a parasite of other bird species, usually laying its eggs in the nests of passerines, especially warblers and sparrows. However, I was surprised to find a cowbird egg, along with one dove egg, in the nest of a Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura*) at 8:25 P.M. on June 15, 1965. The nest, which was about five feet above the ground in a lilac bush in Brookside Cemetery, Winnipeg, Manitoba, had contained one dove egg when found by David Hatch and the writer at 8:30 P.M. on the previous day. When examined at 9:30 P.M. two days later, the nest contained only two dove eggs. Since the nest was a flat platform of twigs, the cowbird egg, which is rounder than a dove's egg, could conceivably have rolled out when the adult dove took flight. Also, the dove could have rejected it and pushed it out. Finally, a Common Crow may have taken it, as a pair in the area were suspected of nest robbing in several cases. This may also explain the later disappearance of the two dove eggs.

The Mourning Dove is an unusual host for the cowbird. Houston (1966) does not include the Mourning Dove on his list of Saskatchewan bird hosts, nor does Terril (1961) for southern Quebec, Norris (1947) for Preston Frith, Pennsylvania, King (1954) for Whitman County, Washington, or Walkinshaw (1949) in a list of 25 eggs laid apparently by one cowbird. The first reported case of parasitism on a Mourning Dove was found in eastern Iowa in 1884 by E. H. King (Friedmann, 1963). Friedmann (*op. cit.*) lists another found by C. D. Kellogg at Rock Hill, Pennsylvania on May 25, 1899. Another is reported by Hicks for Ohio (Friedmann, *op. cit.*).

Berger (1951) omits the Mourning Dove in a Michigan list, but later (as cited by Friedmann, *op. cit.*) added it to the Michigan list on the basis of a nest found near Ann Arbor. Friedmann (*op. cit.*) notes that Oberholser listed the western Mourning Dove in an unpublished manuscript on Texas birds, but without substantiating details, and that R. F. Johnston had a record for Kansas. Bent (1958) includes the Mourning Dove as a victim of the cowbird on the basis of the above records. The statement by W. M. Tyler in Bent (1932) under "Enemies" of the Mourning Dove that "The cowbird not infrequently selects the dove as a host for its young" is probably a misprint or error.

Kellogg's 1899 record (above) was for a Common Grackle's nest in which a Mourning Dove nested three days after a cowbird egg was laid. A young cowbird was later found in the nest, but, as Friedmann (*op. cit.*) points out, no evidence was obtained as to whether the grackle or the dove raised the young cowbird.

The Mourning Dove is undoubtedly in the category of an "accidental host", or a host in the nest of which the cowbird "dumps" her egg in desperation. As pointed out by Friedmann (*op. cit.*) and Bent (1958) the difference in parent-young feeding habits makes the dove a most unsuitable host. Several other "host" species also fall into this category. Friedmann (*op. cit.*) gives records of Blue-winged Teal, Ferruginous Hawk, Upland Plover, Wilson's Phalarope, California Gull, Ground Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Black-billed Cuckoo, Red-headed Woodpecker, and Blue Jay, with substantiating records, and unsubstantiated records of Killdeer, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, and

Common Crow. Several other species of passerines listed by him may also be "accidental hosts." In addition, Hatch (1967) provides a substantiated record for the Common Crow.

LITERATURE CITED

- Bent, A. C. 1932 (Dover edition 1963). Life histories of North American gallinaceous birds. U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull. 162.
- Bent, A. C. 1958 (Dover edition 1965). Life histories of North American blackbirds, orioles, tanagers, and allies. U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull. 211.
- Berger, A. J. 1951. The cowbird and certain host species in Michigan. Wilson Bull., 63: 26-34.
- Friedmann, H. C. 1963. Host relations of the parasitic cowbirds. U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull. 233.
- Hatch, D. R. M. 1967. Cowbird egg in crow nest. Blue Jay, 25:189.
- Houston, C. S. 1966. Book review of "Host relations of the parasitic cowbirds" by Herbert Friedmann, 1963. Blue Jay, 24:44.
- King, J. R. 1954. Victims of the Brown-headed Cowbird in Whitman County, Washington. Condor, 56:150-154.
- Norris, R. T. 1947. The cowbirds of Preston Frith. Wilson Bull., 59:83-103.
- Terril, L. M. 1961. Cowbird host in southern Quebec. Canadian Field-Nat., 75:2-11.
- Walkinshaw, L. H. 1949. Twenty-five eggs apparently laid by one cowbird. Wilson Bull., 61:82-85.

BANK SWALLOWS IN GRAVEL STOCK-PILES IN MANITOBA

by **Robert W. Nero**, Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature,
147 James Ave., Winnipeg 2, Manitoba

The use of gravel stock-piles by Bank Swallows for nesting sites has been recorded for nine localities in Saskatchewan (*Blue Jay*, 19:20, 84, 115, 174; 22:42), but has evidently not previously been reported for Manitoba. I found an active colony on August 12, 1967 about 18 miles east of Winnipeg where several gravel stock-piles lie adjacent to water-filled excavations on the north side of highway No. 15. Fifty-three apparently active nest burrows were found in a large stock-pile and on a southwest-facing embankment about 12 feet high and 25 feet long. Broken eggs and dead newly-hatched young lying on the slope beneath the face of the embankment had clearly resulted from nests being dug out a few days earlier by vandals. Incubation was evidently still in progress, since several adults were flushed from the burrows a long time after the flock had been milling about us. This is a late date for nesting for this species which, in Manitoba, normally has begun to migrate by the third week in August. The material in this stock-pile was a very compact, fine, sandy gravel, almost a coarse sand.

An older, abandoned colony site with about 100 nest burrows was found on a west-facing cut on a nearby pile. A third pile was of some interest in that in contrast with the other piles which were devoid of vegetation it had a few clumps of sow-thistle, Canada thistle, and choke-cherry on top. Gravel had not yet been removed from this pile, hence it offered only gentle slopes in which burrow excavation would not be possible. Bank Swallow nesting sites seem to require a nearly vertical face. The removal of sand or gravel from a stock-pile of suitably compacted material results in the formation of such an embankment. Later slumping may improve the site by forming a new and better face or it may demolish the colony, depending upon the timing. Nesting also requires a cessation of gravel removal operations following the initial establishment of a cut. These several factors may only occasionally be met, but it is clear that Bank Swallows are especially adapted to taking advantage of transitory cut-banks, not only along streams and in excavations but also in the wholly artificial situation of sand and gravel stock-piles.