

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER PREDATION

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On a morning walk along paths in a wooded area at Whytewold, Manitoba, on Lake Winnipeg 16 June 1984, I heard and saw a male and female Northern Oriole close to an old pensile nest which I had observed in 1983. The nest was approximately 5.4 m from the ground in a cluster of slender hanging branches of an aspen.

Since I wished to keep a record of this nest, I visited the site again 19 June. To my surprise, however, I saw an Eastern Kingbird fly into it, move around a little, and then fly away. On 25 June I noticed the female Kingbird was sitting; the male was perched on a branch of a tree close by.

While the Eastern Kingbird generally nests on the branch of a tree, well out from the trunk, I have also seen their nests in such places as the top of a broken-off tree trunk, in a small cavity at the side of a neon sign on a building, in an eavestrough, as well as in the same tree as a Northern Oriole nest. This was the first time, however, that I had ever seen a kingbird sitting in a Northern Oriole's nest (old or new). Whether the pair of orioles had intended to make use of the old nest, I do not know. I did wonder if the kingbirds had confiscated it. Harrison makes mention of such an occurrence.⁴

I continued my observations every other day as I was anxious to know when the young would be hatched. However, 4 July, as I neared the nesting site, I heard a cacophony coming from the kingbirds. Upon my hurried arrival I noticed that the two kingbirds were dive-bombing a Red-headed Woodpecker which was clinging to slender leafy branches immediately below the nest. The Red-headed Woodpecker seemed

determined to get at the eggs, and the kingbirds just as determined that he would not. They viciously attacked the Woodpecker's head but he clung tenaciously to short branches close to the nest. Even when he appeared to be stunned and fell to the ground, he flew up again close to the nest, apparently even more determined. Finally, after the battle had raged for a period of some 30 minutes, the woodpecker made a lunge at the nest, tugged and tugged and tore a piece off the top. It ferociously pecked at all the eggs and threw some pieces of shell overboard. The dirty deed was done! The Kingbirds' eggs and nest were destroyed.

I have observed Red-headed Woodpeckers for many years at Whytewold, but I have never witnessed such an event as this.^{1 2} Godfrey, however, mentions that this bird "is not above taking eggs and young of other birds on occasion."³

Upon referring to A.G. Lawrence I found the following in a 1928 column: "Several years ago we saw a Red-headed Woodpecker in North Kildonan drag a Flicker by its beak from a nesting hole in a telephone pole. This was accomplished only after a tussle, but so vigorous was the Red-head's pulling and so sudden the Flicker's emergence, both birds fell like stones a distance of 20 feet or so to the ground. Which was the rightful owner of the nesting hole we do not know."⁵

In a further column in 1950, A.G. Lawrence mentioned that he had had a report of Red-headed Woodpeckers supposedly attacking and killing young birds in the nest. He states, "we have no personal or reported evidence of this nature but A.C. Bent in his monumental *Life Histories* quotes several observers'

reports of the Red-headed Woodpecker attacking and killing young birds and raiding nests for eggs. Most of them relate to hole-nesting species and go back as far as the 1880's and Mr. Bent writes: 'But not all Red-headed Woodpeckers are cannibals or murderers . . . and all of them have some harmless and useful feeding habits'⁶

The behavioral patterns of our feathered friends never cease to retain the interest of a birdwatcher!

I wish to thank Mr. Herb Copland for providing references from A.G. Lawrence.

¹ BANCROFT, J. 1982. Trees for cavity-

dwellers. *Blue Jay* 40(3):166-167.

² BANCROFT, J. 1983. Red-headed Woodpecker. *Blue Jay* 41(3):164-165.

³ GODFREY, W.E. 1966. The Birds of Canada Nat. Mus. Canada Bull. 203

⁴ HARRISON, H.H. 1975. a Field Guide to Birds' Nests in the United States east of the Mississippi River. Houghton Mifflin, Boston. 257 pp.

⁵ LAWRENCE, A.G. 1928. The Red-head to Blame? *Chickadee Notes* No. 377, Winnipeg Free Press, 14 June, 1928.

⁶ LAWRENCE, A.G. 1950. Reports on Cuckoos and Red-headed Woodpeckers, *Chickadee Notes* No. 1529, Winnipeg Free Press, 8 Sept. 1950.

BIRDS NESTING WITH QU'APPELLE BANK SWALLOWS

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In 1980 and 1981 we studied the nesting ecology of Bank Swallows at 60 colonies in a 6,129 hectare area around Katepwa Lake in the Qu'Appelle Valley.¹ During the course of this study we noted five other species of birds nesting in the Bank Swallow tunnels.

Given the House Wren's propensity for stuffing twigs into any available cavity, perhaps the greatest surprise is that we found only two pairs nesting in Bank Swallow burrows. However, only 12 of the 60 colonies had any wooded vegetation at the bank top. The House Wrens nested in 2 of these 12 potential sites. Both nests were believed to be successful; young were observed fledging at one nest.

Just outside the Qu'Appelle Valley south of Lebret lies a sandy grassland which is used for pasture and exploited for gravel. We observed five Mountain Bluebird nest attempts in Bank Swallow tunnels at these gravel pits. Four of the nests were successful. One pair raised two broods in the same tunnel, another initiated its nest after Bank Swallows had fledged on 5 July.

House Sparrows not only nested in, but apparently were year round residents at certain colonies. Almost all nestings by House Sparrows were at two colonies in the village of Lebret and one on a hillside near the outlet of Katepwa Lake. This latter site, which was at least 0.25 mi.