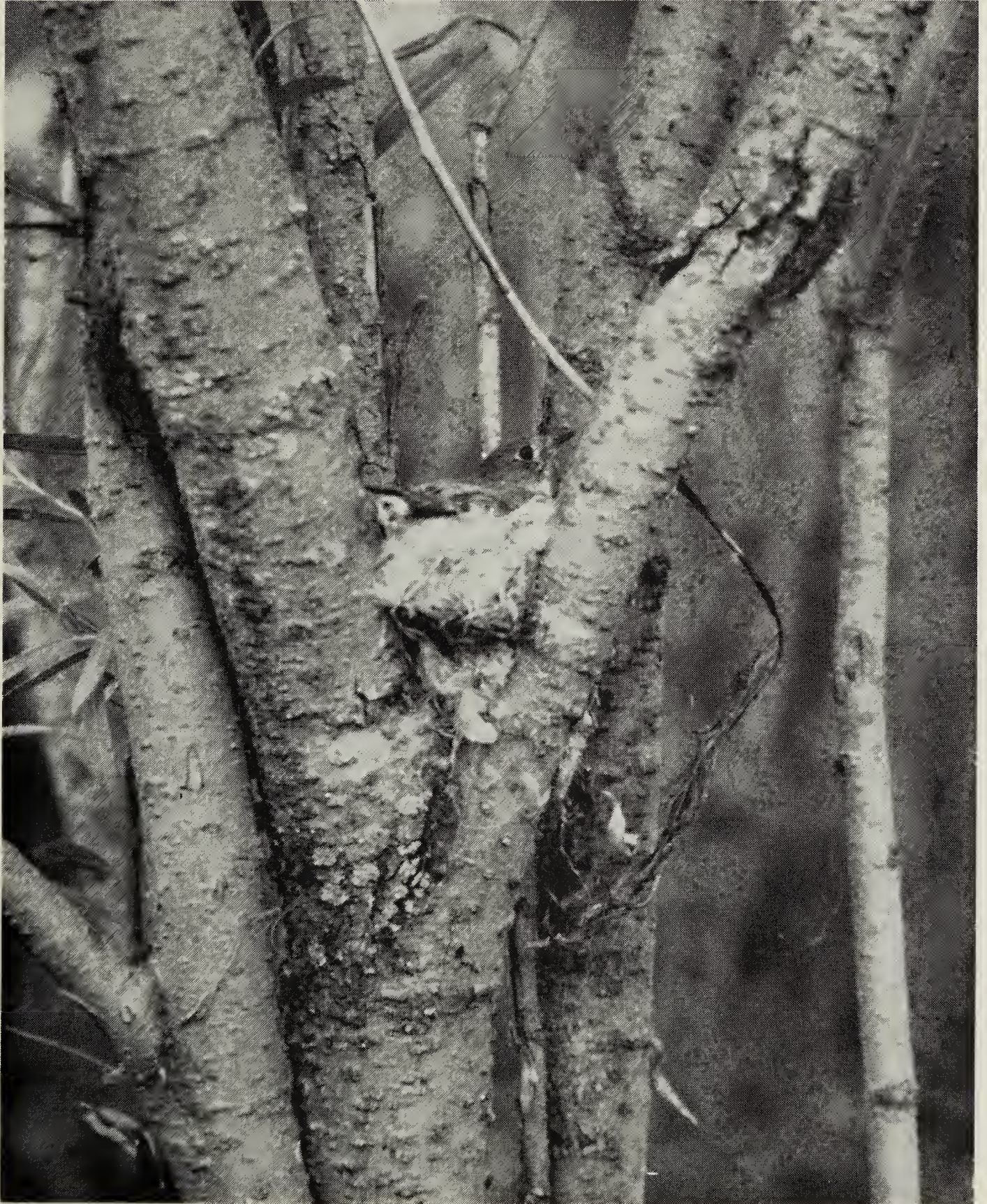


LEAST FLYCATCHER LINES NEST WITH DRAGONFLY WINGS

JAMES V. BRISKIE*, Department of Zoology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba. R3T 2N2



Least Flycatcher on nest lined with dragonfly wings

J.V. Briskie

Least Flycatchers build small, open-cup nests either in the upright crotches of sturdy trees, or less commonly, saddled on horizontal limbs. Constructed from a mixture of fine grasses and other plant materials, they are often woven together with spider webs and then lined with cotton, fine grasses, feathers or hair.^{2 4} Occasionally, unusual materials such as tissue paper or other refuse may be used.^{1 6} This paper describes a nest of the Least Flycatcher lined with the wings of dragonflies.

From 1984 to 1986 Least Flycatchers were studied in a high-density population that nests in the dune-ridge forest separating Lake Manitoba from Delta Marsh, Manitoba.⁵ Over the three summers 406 nests of this species were examined.³

On 15 July 1986 a Least Flycatcher nest was located approximately 1.5 m high in a Sandbar Willow (*Salix interior*). The nest contained two eggs, indicating that laying began the previous day. The nest-shell was constructed mostly of fine grasses; however, unlike every other nest examined, this nest was lined with 14-16 dragonfly wings which formed two to three overlapping layers over the entire inside surface of the nest. On 17 July the fourth and final egg was laid. Only three eggs hatched on 30 July but all three nestlings fledged from 12-13 August. The lining of dragonfly wings was still intact when the nest was re-examined after fledging.

Although damselflies form a minor component of the diet of Least Flycatchers at Delta Marsh, dragonflies were never taken as prey.³ However, numerous detached dragonfly wings were noticed on the pathways and road near this nest, presumably the result of predation by Eastern Kingbirds (S.G. Sealy, pers. comm.). It is possible that this Least Flycatcher salvaged some of these discarded wings when it was lining its nest.

Although these observations indicate the use of dragonfly wings was rare, this example illustrates that Least Flycatchers can be opportunistic when selecting nest materials from the resources available to them.

Acknowledgements

I thank the staff of the University of Manitoba Field Station (Delta Marsh) for providing facilities during the course of my work on Least Flycatchers. The officers of the Portage Country Club allowed me to work on their property. Funding was provided by NSERC grant (A9556) to S.G. Sealy, and a University of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship, NSERC Postgraduate Scholarship and Manitoba Naturalists' Society Scholarship to the author. Dr. S.G. Sealy kindly reviewed an earlier version of this note. This paper is contribution Number 12 of the University of Manitoba Field Station (Delta Marsh).

¹ BANCROFT, J. 1982. Further observations of variations in bird nesting habits. *Blue Jay* 40(2):126-127.

² BENT A.C. 1942. Life histories of North American flycatchers, larks, swallows and their allies. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 179.

³ BRISKIE, J.V. 1985. Growth and parental feeding of Least Flycatchers in relation to brood size, hatching order and prey availability. M. Sc. thesis, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

⁴ HARRISON, C. 1978. A field guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of North American birds. Collins, London.

⁵ MACKENZIE, D.I. 1982. The dune-ridge forest, Delta Marsh, Manitoba: overstory vegetation and soil patterns. *Can. Field-Nat.* 96:61-68.

⁶ WALKINSHAW, L.H. 1966. Summer observations of the Least Flycatcher in Michigan. *Jack-Pine Warbler* 44:150-168.