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NOTES ON THE NESTING HABITS OF SOME MOUNTAIN DWELLING BIRDS IN UTAH⁽¹⁾

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In the course of field work in mountainous portions of Utah during the past few years the writer has had occasion to take note of nesting activities of some of the birds of these higher elevations. These observations have been made mostly on Mt. Timpanogos, Utah County, and on the west end of the Uinta Mountains, Wasatch County, at elevations of 7,000 feet and above. Although the material contained herein is fragmentary it is hoped that it will throw some light upon a subject that is little known.

SPHYRAPICUS VARIUS NUCHALIS Baird. Red-naped Sapsucker

The breeding of this species occurs mostly in mature aspen woods, but a few individuals may occasionally frequent coniferous forests. On April 5, 1940 at Aspen Grove, Mt. Timpanogos, a pair was seen preparing for mating. The male was seen to follow the female closely from tree to tree, uttering series of sharp notes and erecting the crown feathers. No actual copulation was noted at this time. June 12, 1934 a nest was noted in a dead aspen fourteen feet from the ground at Mule Flat, two miles north of Aspen Grove, Mt. Timpanogos. Both parents were seen to carry in food. On June 21, 1937 two nests were noted at Aspen Grove and two at Mule Flat, Mt. Timpanogos. They were situated in dead aspens fifteen to twenty feet from the ground. In all cases young birds could be heard in the nests.

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PICOIDES TRIDACTYLUS DORSALIS Baird. Alpine Three-toed Woodpecker

In my studies thus far this woodpecker has been found only in the densely wooded subalpine forests of the Uinta Mountains. On July 9, 1930 a nest containing young was found at Tryol Lake, Wasatch County, elevation about 9,900 feet. This nest was located in a dead Lodgepole Pine about ten feet from the ground. A hole about two inches in diameter formed the entrance to the nest, and, extending down the center of the trunk a distance of about twelve inches below the entrance, a hollow four inches in diameter had been formed. The nest was located at the bottom of this hollow.

On July 12 the female was found dead at the foot of the tree but the male continued to feed the young until July 14 when he was collected. At the time the male was collected the two young were removed from the nest and made into skins. They were both males and appeared to be about two-thirds grown (wing 82 mm. as compared to 120 mm. in the adult). July 21 of the same year another nest containing young and similarly constructed was located about fifteen feet up in the stump of a dead Engelmann Spruce.

EMPIDONAX HAMMONDI (Xantus). Hammond's Flycatcher

This species and Wright's Flycatcher *Empidonax wrighti* Baird are extremely difficult to distinguish from one another in the field and for this reason the following notes are recorded with some misgivings. Both species are found on Mt. Timpanogos, but our collections thus far indicate that *E. hammondi* is confined largely to aspen and conifer woods, while *E. wrighti* occupies chaparral. However, the two undoubtedly occur together at least at the edges of the woods. A set of four eggs of *E. hammondi* was collected by James Bee at Aspen Grove, Mt. Timpanogos, June 23, 1937. The nest was located in an aspen, but details of its construction are lacking. On July 11, 1937 a pair presumably of this species was seen constructing a nest about twenty feet up on a dead limb of an aspen near the summit of Loop Road, Mt. Timpanogos. This nest was composed largely of fine plant fibers.

EMPIDONAX WRIGHTI Baird. Wright's Flycatcher

The only rather positive nesting record of this species available from my notes is that of June 6, 1940 when a nest was discovered on a chaparral covered hillside directly east of Big Tree Camp, Mt. Timpanogos. This nest was situated in a small oak *Quercus gambellii* about two and a half feet from the ground. It was composed mainly of plant fibers, neatly and compactly woven and was lined with a few

feathers. Behaving in characteristic fashion the birds remained for the most part hidden in the brush appearing only at intervals for brief periods and occasionally uttering sharp chirps of alarm.

EMPIDONAX DIFFICILIS DIFFICILIS Baird. Western Flycatcher

The nesting activities of this species have been noted on Mt. Timpanogos in the vicinity of Lower Falls, Aspen Grove. On June 26, 1937 two nests about 100 yards apart were found on the north-facing cliffs near Lower Falls. They were situated in crevices about six feet up from the base of the cliffs. One of the nests contained four fresh eggs and the other five. In both cases there was water dripping over the nests and the materials of which they were composed were soaking wet. The nests were composed of fine grass covered with green moss and lichens like the surrounding rocks. The birds were extremely shy and it was with considerable difficulty that I was able to make the identifications.

TACHYGINETA THALASSINA LEPIDA Mearns. Violet-green Swallow

This species breeds quite commonly in certain portions of mature aspen forests on Mt. Timpanogos. All of my observations were made at Mule Flat about two miles north of Aspen Grove. On June 21, 1936 John Hutchings and the writer opened up a nest in a live aspen about six feet from the ground. In spite of the noise incident to opening the nests the female refused to leave until plucked off by hand. The nest contained only two fresh eggs. A year later on the same date and in the same locality females were observed carrying material into holes; and there was evidence of at least four or five nests within a half acre area. In this connection Violet-green Swallows were occasionally seen fighting with Tree Swallows over nesting sites. On July 3, 1937 a nest was opened which contained four eggs nearly ready to hatch.

IRIDOPROCNE BICOLOR (Vieillot). Tree Swallow

The nesting habits of this species are similar to those of the Violet-green Swallow described above. The two species frequently nest in the same tree. A nest opened on July 3, 1937 at Mule Flat, contained four newly hatched young. This nest was in a dead aspen about twenty feet from the ground. However, like the Violet-green, this species frequently nests in living trees.

PROGNE SUBIS SUBIS (Linnaeus). Purple Martin

Like the swallows described above the Purple Martin nests in mature aspen forests on Mt. Timpanogos and is often seen in company

with the swallows. At Mule Flat on June 21, 1937 we saw females leave and enter two different holes in the same trees. At this same time males were seen to carry green aspen leaves into the nests. These leaves, we found later, were used as a lining and are apparently continuously replaced by fresh ones throughout the incubation period. On July 3, we opened two of these nests. One situated in a partially dead aspen about thirty feet from the ground contained three newly hatched young. The other, located twenty feet up in a dead aspen stump contained four eggs nearly ready to hatch.

HYLOCICHLA GUTTATA AUDUBONI (Baird). Audubon's Hermit Thrush

The nests of this species have been encountered rather frequently on Mt. Timpanogos. They are generally placed rather low in conifers, aspens, or in brush along streams and at the edges of forests. The following nesting data are available from my notes: A nest containing six fresh eggs was taken from an aspen fork twelve feet from the ground at Salamander Lake, Mt. Timpanogos, June 5, 1937. Another nest containing three newly hatched young and one unhatched egg was observed in a choke cherry bush at Aspen Grove, June 19, 1937. This nest was about three feet from the ground. The outside shell was composed of bark and the inner lining consisted of fine roots. Mr. R. G. Bee has supplied me with a record of four fresh eggs taken in South Fork of Provo Canyon, June 5, 1929. On July 9, 1940 a nest containing four half-grown young was found at Big Tree Camp, Mt. Timpanogos in the top of a small white fir, five feet from the ground. On the ridge immediately to the west of Aspen Grove, a nest was found in the forks of an aspen tree six feet from the ground, June 14, 1940. It contained four eggs just in the process of hatching.

MYADESTES TOWNSENDI (Audubon). Townsend's Solitaire

On June 24, 1937 Mr. Merlin Killpack discovered a nest of this species near Lower Falls west of Aspen Grove, Mt. Timpanogos. It was situated in a niche on a cliff about seven feet up from the base. The outer shell of the nest was composed of rather large dry twigs while the inside was lined with fine grass. There were four well incubated eggs. Both the bird and the eggs were collected. Water was dripping from overhanging rocks in front of the nest but the nest itself was dry. Another similarly constructed nest was found on June 29 only about one hundred yards from the first one. It likewise contained four well incubated eggs. A third nest presumably of this species was located about six feet up in a small white fir at Aspen

Grove, Mt. Timpanogos, June 19, 1937. The young had left or been removed from this nest and only fragments of the shells and general structure of the nest indicated its identity.

ANTHUS SPINOLETTA RUBESCENS (Tunstall). American Pipit
(Pl. I, Fig. 2)

A nest containing four fresh eggs was found at Lost Lake, Uinta Mountains, June 19, 1940, elevation 9,800 feet. It was situated in a rather dry subalpine meadow. The rim of the nest was flush with the surrounding surface of the ground, and the cup was sunken into the sod to a depth of about three inches. The nest was lined with very fine, dry grass. Even though incubation had not begun, the bird sat very close and allowed one to come within two feet or less without leaving the nest. If the observer withdrew fifty feet from the nest site, the bird would return immediately and settle on the eggs. The bird was so fearless that I was able to set up the camera within two feet of the nest and approach close enough to trip the shutter without startling her. Only one bird was seen at any time in the vicinity of the nest.

VIREO GILVUS SWAINSONI Baird. Western Warbling Vireo
(Pl. I, Fig. 5)

The nesting of this species has been observed at Aspen Grove and Mule Flat on Mt. Timpanogos. My notes indicate that the birds confine themselves almost entirely to deciduous woods which at that altitude are chiefly aspens. Although vireos feed generally in the tops of the trees, the nests that we have observed have been low—generally four to eight feet from the ground. The nests were placed between two small forks well out on aspen limbs. They were composed of fine grass compactly formed, and were bound together, and to the branches, with cobwebs. At Aspen Grove a nest containing four incubating eggs was located on June 19, 1937. June 23 these eggs had hatched. Another nest, containing four eggs, was found at Mule Flat, two miles north of Aspen Grove on June 21, 1937. When the nest was again visited on July 3 the eggs had not yet hatched. On June 6, 1940 a pair of vireos was observed constructing a nest at Big Tree Camp, Mt. Timpanogos.

DENDROICA AUDUBONI MEMORABILIS Oberholser. Rocky Mountain
Audubon Warbler

These warblers are found commonly in both deciduous and coniferous woods and undoubtedly breed in both places. All of the nest-

ing activities that we have observed, however, have been in the aspen forests. On June 21, 1937 two nests were located at Mule Flat, Mt. Timpanogos. Both were rather far out on aspen limbs and about twenty feet up from the ground. They were composed of fine plant fibers and lined with a few horsehairs and feathers. One nest contained four, the other five fresh eggs. On June 5, 1940 another nest was discovered on an aspen limb about fifteen feet up and next to the trunk. The female was very active about the nest and was seen to carry food to the young. A nest containing young was found near Aspen Grove on June 14, 1940. It was located in the forks of an aspen about twenty feet up. When flushed from the nest the female did a characteristic "tumbling act" and then moved excitedly about in the tree uttering sharp chirps. Young birds could be heard in the nest but no further investigation was made.

OPORORNIS TOLMIEI (Townsend). Macgillivray's Warbler
(Pl. I, Fig. 7)

This species occurs rather commonly in the chaparral and forest edge on Mt. Timpanogos, but only one definite nesting record is available from my notes. On June 24, 1937 Mr. Merlin Killpack discovered a nest in the chaparral directly east of Aspen Grove, and the site was subsequently visited by the writer. The nest was situated in a small ninebark about three feet from the ground and was loosely constructed of dried plant stems and lined with very fine grass. It contained four fresh eggs on this date. The female was extremely shy and remained quietly hidden in the underbrush while the nest was being photographed.

CARPODACUS CASSINI Baird. Cassin's Purple Finch

The Purple Finch occurs quite regularly throughout the wooded portion of Mt. Timpanogos and the Uintas, but only one nest has been observed. This nest was discovered at Big Tree Camp, Mt. Timpanogos, June 3, 1940. It was situated about a foot from the top of a slender white fir about twenty-five feet from the ground. It was plainly visible from below and my attention was attracted to it by a peculiar chipping sound produced by the female as she sat on the eggs. The only means of access to it was a nearby aspen from which the contents and something of the construction could be made out. The nest appeared quite flimsy and was composed of dried grass and other vegetation. Four eggs were in the nest at the time it was observed. Sticks thrown up into the nesting tree failed to dislodge the

female, but as I climbed up the nearby aspen she left the nest and remained close at hand uttering throaty chirps. The male did not appear at this time. This nest was kept under observation for about four days. During this time, the female only was seen to incubate the eggs. At 6:30 A.M. on June 4 the female was away from the nest, but appeared within five minutes with the male. In the vicinity of the nest the male made an unsuccessful attempt at copulation.

OBERHOLSERIA CHLORURA (Audubon). Green-tailed Towhee
(Pl. I, Fig. 1)

This species breeds in the chaparral at lower elevations on Mt. Timpanogos. On May 22, 1937 a nest containing four fresh eggs was found on the west face of Timpanogos between Dry and Battle Creek Canyons. It was situated on the ground in a clump of stunted oak and sage and was composed of sage bark, fine grass and a few horse-hairs. On June 24, 1937 another nest was discovered at Aspen Grove, Mt. Timpanogos. It was built in a dense clump of choke-cherry about two feet from the ground and contained three partially incubated eggs.

JUNCO CANICEPS (Woodhouse). Gray-headed Junco (Pl. I, Fig. 6)

The Gray-headed Junco is a common breeding bird at forest edges and in deeper woods on Mt. Timpanogos and in the Uintas. The nest is placed on the ground in a deep depression lined with fine grass. The location is often such that there is some protection from above. For example one was placed under an overhanging bank near a small stream, several have been found in the midst of stunted shrubs, another was placed under the end of a fallen log, and still another was built in the middle of a pile of dead conifer branches used by some camper as a bed. The following breeding records are available from my notes: Tryol Lake, Uinta Mts. July 19, 1930, nest and four fresh eggs; Lost Lake, Uinta Mts. June 18, 1940, nest and five fresh eggs; Lost Lake, June 19, 1940, nest and four eggs nearly ready to hatch; Lost Lake, July 18, 1940 nest and four fresh eggs; Elk Park, east end of Uinta Mountains July 28, 1937, two nests containing newly hatched young; Aspen Grove, Mt. Timpanogos, June 25, 1933, nest and four fresh eggs (R. G. Bee); Geyser Pass, La Sal Mts. July 17, 1934, nest containing three newly hatched young and one egg. The breeding of these juncos appears to be less regular than most mountainous birds or else more than one brood is produced in a season. In July it is not uncommon to see young in all stages of growth and to find nests and eggs as indicated above.

SPIZELLA PASSERINA ARIZONAE Coues. Western Chipping Sparrow

In the mountains, the nests of these common sparrows have inevitably been found in conifers, although I have evidence that they may also nest in deciduous trees. The nests that have come under my observation have been placed rather low (three to ten feet from the ground) well out on a limb and protected from above by an overhanging branch. The nest is constructed of fine plant fibers, mostly grass, and lined with horsehairs. The following breeding records may be given at this time: Aspen Grove, Mt. Timpanogos, May 17, 1940, nest under construction; Aspen Grove, June 3, 1940, the same nest noted above contained four eggs. (When this nest was observed again on June 11, four half-grown young were there.) Big Tree Camp, Mt. Timpanogos, June 3, 1940 nest and four well incubated eggs. These eggs hatched on June 7. Aspen Grove June 13, 1937, nest containing newly hatched young; Aspen Grove, June 19, 1937 nest containing four nearly grown young; Lost Lake, Uinta Mts. July 17, 1940, nest containing four newly hatched young. This could have been a second brood.

ZONOTRICHIA LEUCOPHRYS LEUCOPHRYS (Forster). White-crowned Sparrow (Pl. I, Fig. 4)

This species breeds commonly in subalpine forests on Mt. Timpanogos and in the Uintas. It frequents the edges of the woods and the open parks. The nests that we have discovered have been placed on the ground in a deep depression lined with fine grass. The following breeding records are available: Tryol Lake, Uinta Mts. July 16, 1930 nest containing two eggs; Tryol Lake, July 19, 1930, nest and four eggs, also two nests containing newly hatched young; Lost Lake, Uinta Mts. July 17, 1940, nest containing five partly incubated eggs.

MELOSPIZA LINCOLNI LINCOLNI (Audubon). Lincoln's Sparrow

This species breeds rather commonly in swampy areas and along streams throughout the mountains. However, only two nests have been under observation. These were placed on the ground on grassy hummocks in boggy ground. Both nests were discovered June 20, 1937 at Camp Timpooneke, Mt. Timpanogos. They were deep depressions in the sod lined with fine dry grass and sedges. One contained four, the other two fresh eggs.

Nesting Habits
of Mt. Birds

By C. L. Hayward

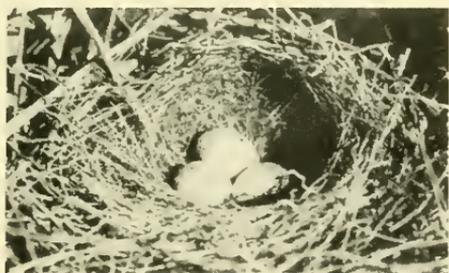


Fig. 1. *Oberholseria chlorura*



Fig. 2
Anthus s. rubescens



Fig. 5. *Vireo g. swainsoni*



Fig. 3
Melospiza l. lincolni



Fig. 4
Zonotrichia l. leucophrys



Fig. 6
Junco caniceps



Fig. 7. *Oporornis tolmiei*

PLATE I