

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Marg Hendrick

About 15 years ago, I did nest studies for the Quebec Nest Record Programme. In those days I arose early, roared around the house to complete the essential housework, slung an old army bag over my shoulder, grabbed up Snoopy and was off to the countryside. Snoopy? Snoopy was a mirror attached to a sectional metal pole by a universal joint. "He" saved me from climbing trees as I peeked into nests. My second hand bag carried an assortment of things, and had been decorated with rather ugly painted flowers - presumably by some flower child from the past. It also served to carry home all sorts of treasures. If there were wild strawberries to pick, there was a container for same. Other wild foods such as apples, plums, young milk weed pods and cattail pollen all went into the bag. All this caused my family to view my culinary arts with suspicion. "Mother, WHAT is this?" Even in those days, I collected discarded bottles, which then yielded a couple of cents each. Found money! But more important, it represented my effort to clean up the environment.

I was always conscientious about filling out the prescribed record cards for the study, but never did get around to transcribing my rough notes into a form that would make sense to me after the passage of time. It was one of the "should have dones" of my life. However, I found the facts I learned while studying nests, and the actions of birds at nesting time fascinating, and can still remember many details - some of which I'll pass along to you. Before I do this, I must tell you a story.

One day, after my field work was completed, I called in on a friend for tea. Upon returning to the car, I found it full of smoke, and, panic-stricken, tried to find the origin of the problem. Eventually I discovered a large smouldering hole in the ceiling. The magnifying side of Snoopy had caught and focussed the sunlight there, and it was a wonder the whole car was not ablaze. Needless to say, my husband was not impressed, for it was a new car. From then on Snoopy wore a bag over his head!

The materials used in the construction and lining of nests have always been of great interest to me. Each species seems to have special needs, and, for some reason, certain materials seem to be of prime importance to them in the building of their nests. The Chipping Sparrow's neat little cup nest is invariably lined with hair, usually horse hair. If it is not readily available, the persistent little "chippies" manage to find some kind of hair - even human.

Tree Swallows like to line their nest with poultry feathers, and are especially fond of white ones. In fact, white appears to be their favourite colour. I once tore up kleenex



into small pieces, and let it float down from a high place. Before it reached the ground it was snatched up by a swallow and taken to the nest box. After the nesting was over, I checked the box. The nest had been lined with white feathers, kleenex and cigarette butts. The latter did not come from me!

The diminutive Ruby-crowned Kinglet likes to use both feathers and fur in lining its nest which is usually found on the underside of a conifer branch. The only kinglet nest I ever found was lined with soft grouse feathers. They had been carefully placed quill-side down, so that the soft tips arched over and concealed the tiny eggs below. In the area where I did my studies, the Yellow Warbler nearly always padded its silvery nest with pussy willow down. I rather suspect that dryer lint might be acceptable to this species, for the lining resembled the pad of lint that you remove from your dryer - though it was always white. Yellow Warblers are often parasitized by Brown-headed Cowbirds. Frequently, upon finding a cowbird's egg in her nest, the warbler will cover it, plus any of her own eggs with another thick down pad. Sometimes she will build a whole new nest on top of the old one, and start all over. Other times, the interloper's egg goes unnoticed, and the Yellow Warblers raise a cowbird to the detriment of their own brood.

American Goldfinches are late nesters. This gives them access to their favourite lining material - thistle down. Not only is the down useful for the nest, but the seeds make for great eating! One happy experience for me was the day I patched up a broken goldfinch nest with tape and a safety pin. The nearly naked young had fallen to the ground and were returned to the nest. Subsequent follow up revealed that they all fledged successfully!

Mud is used by certain species in making their nests. The American Robin blends the mud with various grasses, weeds, string etc., and then moulds it to shape with its body. The nest is then lined with finer grasses. A Wood Thrush uses mud in a similar fashion, but mixes in forest materials, such as moss, birch bark, leaves and duff as it builds its nest. It is then lined with rootlets.

Another species which utilizes rootlets as a nest lining in

the Gray Catbird. But its nest is bulky, lacks the mud, and is fabricated with a number of different materials. The above three species all have blue eggs, but it is easy to tell their nests apart by the materials used in their construction.

I could write on forever, but I must get to your sightings. Mary Anne Leggett has had Eastern Bluebirds nesting at her place, and John Goodman's bluebirds have fledged. House Wrens have been putting twigs in John's nest boxes and are finally nesting in one of them.

Dave Willison noticed that the Osprey nest on a hydro pole at Lower Beverley Lake is not viable this year, but Eleanor Taylor had good news of an occupied nest on a hydro tower near Jones Falls.

A Killdeer's nest in Sarah Duff's garden narrowly missed being stepped on. Killdeers nest in a scrape on the ground and their nest has little or no lining. Their blotchy eggs are not easily seen. Another Killdeer nested in Enid Soper's yard, but it is thought that a nearby resident fox enjoyed a tasty meal one night, for the nest was deserted.

White-crowned Sparrows remained at Rene Waterfield's feeder until May 13, and Evening Grosbeaks until May 14.

A Wood Thrush crashed into Dave Willison's window, but apparently recovered, as one was heard singing later. Dave has also had a Northern Cardinal fighting its own reflection in his windows and has seen a Caspian Tern over Lower Beverley Lake.

Mary Mutchmore saw a Ring-necked Pheasant in Morton and Pat Wing watched Bobolinks near her home. She was puzzled at first, but Peterson's description of this species as a bird with its tuxedo on backwards left no doubt in her mind as to its identification. Lydia Blancherd, of Athens, phoned about House Finches feeding at her hummingbird feeder. She described the antics this species went through to obtain the syrup. Since her call, a number of people have also remarked on this behaviour.

Have a great summer! The number to call with your sightings is 359-5178, and, until September,

GOOD BIRDING!



THE KITCHEN WITCH



Heather McNally
Portland-on-the-Rideau

After paying almost \$8.00 for a jar of these intensely flavoured nuggets, I went about finding how to make them. Lacking the time or the patience to wait for the hot humid-free summer days and air drying, I used my oven.

DRIED TOMATOES

3 lbs small fully ripe Italian plum tomatoes
salt to taste
3 cloves garlic, peeled
2-3 sprigs rosemary (optional)
olive oil
wire cake racks, not cookie pans
2 or 3 ½ pint jars, sterilized and dried

Oven must maintain temperature of 150 degrees. Wash and dry tomatoes. Slice in half lengthwise. Sprinkle cut side with salt. Place cut side up on trays in single layer. Dry 24 hours or longer in oven. Rotate trays from top to bottom every 2-3 hours. If moisture collects on oven door, leave door ajar until tomatoes begin to dry around the edges. Check tomatoes after 24 hours. Move dried ones to airtight container. Tomatoes will be pliable but not brittle. Pack tomatoes, garlic and rosemary in jars. Cover with oil completely. Cap jars. Let stand in cool dark place 1 month to develop flavours. Refrigerate for long storage. Olive oil will cloud when chilled.

QUICK DRIED TOMATO SWIRL BREAD

2 loaves (16 oz each) thawed frozen bread dough
2 large cloves garlic, pressed
8 oz. marinated dried tomatoes - well drained
3 tbsp grated Parmesan cheese
2 tbsp dried basil
Preheat oven to 400 degrees. On a floured surface, roll and pat dough to a 12 x 7 rectangle. Distribute ½ the ingredients over dough, leaving ½ inch border. Roll up as for jelly roll. Pinch seams. Fold under ends and pinch to seal. Quickly repeat for second loaf. Place loaves on baking sheet. Seams down. Brush with egg. Do not let rise. Bake immediately until browned and hollow sounding. Let cool, slice and serve. (Or wrap tightly in foil and freeze.) Makes about 24 slices.