



The Katharine Ordway
Natural History Study Area

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ORDWAY BULLETIN

No. 123

MACALESTER
COLLEGE

located at 9550 Inver Grove Trail (Dakota County Road 77), Inver Grove Heights, Minn.

BLUEBIRDS NESTING at ORDWAY.

One of the more delightful harbingers of each spring is the return of the Bluebirds to Ordway. Despite the snow on the ground at the moment of this writing it will not be long before they return and begin anew the primordial cycle of mating and nesting.

Last year at about 8 o'clock on June 10th I saw a female Bluebird pick up a beakful of dried grasses from the parking-lot behind the building and carry it to the barbed-wire fencepost on which hung a nesting-box. Her entry into the box and exit therefrom took just twenty seconds and she returned to the precise spot for a second load of material with which she repeated her trip to the box, requiring approximately the same period for arranging the grasses inside it. This time though, as she emerged she was intercepted by a male Bluebird who appeared to be pointing out to her some other dried grass he had located. She made two forays here and on the following visit she stopped at an intermediate spot, possibly located for her by the male, who was in that vicinity. The next trips took her back to the original site and in all she made ten trips in 18 minutes. At least twice during these trips the male flew to the box, sat there for a couple of her trips. At no time did he contribute to the nest-building by actually transporting and/or adding any material although once he did seem to pull out a stray strand of grass which extended from the entry-hole.


On June 13 an inspection of the box indicated a completed nest. On June 14 the female bird remained sitting when I looked into the box. I removed and banded her (920-64713); an examination indicated that she carried an egg which she would soon lay. As predicted, the next day the first of four eggs appeared, its turquoise-green form reposing like a small jewel on the tiara of dried grass. By June 18 the entire clutch of four eggs was in place and by July 5 a menage of four wide-mouthed nestlings greeted my inspection of "Nest #13". On July 7 I banded them (890-06676,9) and by July 28 the siblings had flown.

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Footnote: An interesting thing about this nesting is that it followed a tragic nesting-attempt by a pair of Tree Swallows in the same nest-box. A nest had been completed on May 22 and by the 31st there were five alabaster-white eggs therein. On the morning of June 6 I found the dead body of the female bird in the box, her head badly-mauled (probably by another bird, perhaps an English sparrow). I removed her body and left the eggs in the (vain) hope that they might receive attention from another bird, since the swallows are a social species. My records show that I had banded the dead bird on May 24 in the vicinity of the nesting-box. The tragedy of this interrupted nesting was covered up - literally - by the nest of the Bluebird, which was built atop the orphaned eggs.

Once again Nature had balanced one failure with a success, making no rational preference of one species over the other.

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rjc/j


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