

MACALESTER COLLEGE

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55105

■ DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

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Subject: A ROBIN'S NEST at ORDWAY.

It was a Sunday morning in late April (22nd) when she began to build her nest. She started quite early and by six o'clock a mass of twigs "roughed out" the exterior shell of what would be the place of incubation for the eggs she would later deposit there. Of course, she had been around the neighborhood for at least five days and was very busy in locating the precise spot where she would build her nest. This involved a great deal of scouting around and exploring many likely sites.

She finally settled her attention on the elm tree. She would fly into its branches and move cautiously along them to a crotch where she would settle her body, assuming the position she would ultimately repose in during incubating. Not content, she would move along to the next crotch or try another limb and this process had occupied her for four or five days. Now, however, she had made her decision: It was one of the lower limbs of the tree, a medium-sized branch which extended horizontally from the tree and she selected the crotch which formed about three meters from the ground, snuggling her new nest against the bole of the tree and on the south side of it - a very sensibly-selected shelter for her brood-to-be.

Now she was busily collecting twigs the size of a small pencil and these she was placing in a loosely-intricated circular form in the crotch she had chosen. I had placed some bits of twine in a feeder nearby and she used this extensively, lacing it in and out amongst the twigs into a secure nest-form.

The next morning at five o'clock her building activities continued and by Tuesday night the outer sheath appeared to be roughly finished. On Wednesday morning she fidgeted about, adding a few twigs but at 6:30 she began to calk the nest with mud from a small wetland about forty meters away. She continued this mud-cup activity until about midday, making a trip once every two minutes, carrying a mouthful of soft mud matted with grasses and rootlets. This she placed in a circular form inside the rough cup of twigs, settling her body into the inner part of the cup each time and squirming about to form the mud into the desired shape. At about 1:30 in the afternoon she began finishing the inner cup with a lining of soft grasses which she picked up from the base of the tree, adding a small amount of fluffy material and what appeared to be a portion of a used tissue. By late afternoon the whole nest appeared finished.

Now there was a lull in the activity. For four days the robin was not seen except for a few moments very early on Saturday morning when she appeared to do some minor finishing-off of the nest. It was during this hiatus that she had found her mate and completed the liaison which would procreate a new generation of robins.

Finally, on Monday morning - the ninth day after beginning - she returned and sat for a short time on the nest. An examination at 9:00 revealed a single egg - an unmarked blue-green repository of unborn life. After the egg-laying the robin left her nest for the remainder of the day and this pattern continued for the four days during which she deposited a total of four of the beauties. Meanwhile, on Tuesday, May 1st, the male robin put in

an appearance, examining the nest at about 8 o'clock and then retiring to the ground about twenty meters away. He remained in the vicinity thereafter, sometimes appearing propitious toward his mate but more frequently engaging in such activities as squabbling with a molesting Blue Jay. During this time he was most jealous of the immediate environs of the nest and attacked me relentlessly whenever my steps too me near the nest or to examine the progress of the reproduction.

On Monday, May 13th, a marauding Blue Jay plundered the nest of one of its eggs. On Tuesday (15th) I observed the male robin making frequent trips to the nest and when I examined it late that afternoon I found three hatchlings, who had been receiving food from both the parent birds. So it continued and the little ones grew, adding feathers and bulk to their pitifully naked and weak bodies until they soon became hustling and raucous demanders on the parent birds, thrusting their yellow-ringed maws upward to accept the proffer of angl^eworms. Sometime between the 24th and 28th of May the fledglings left the nest and the vicinity was filled with their chirping as they hopped about displaying their newly-acquired spotted waistcoats. Another step in the cycle had been successfully completed.



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