

# General Field Notes

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## Reuse of Nests and Nest Materials by Several Species of Passerines

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In May 1985, Brown Thrashers (*Toxostoma rufum*) nested successfully in an evergreen vine (*Euonymus* sp.) growing on a chain-link fence between my wooded yard and the adjacent fairway of the Zebulon Country Club, 4.5 miles N of Zebulon, Wake County, N. C. In July 1987, Carolina Wrens (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) used the 2-year-old thrasher nest as a platform for a typically domed nest. That nesting was also successful. On 14 May 1988 I discovered a new thrasher nest built atop the old wren nest. Four eggs were being incubated on 28 May. The nest was empty, but otherwise undisturbed, on 5 June. The site was not used again in 1988.

Over the years I have noticed that thrashers tend to build repeatedly in the same vine, shrub, or sapling, either for successive nests in a single season or for single nests in successive seasons. However, I am not aware of another report of exactly the same site used in three out of four years by passerines of two species. The popularity of the euonymous vine is difficult to understand. It overgrows the endpost of the fence, and a white plastic jug hangs from the post. Throughout the day golfers visit the jug to pick up the

lost balls I deposit in it. The distance from the jug to the center of the most recent nest is only 12 inches; the nest and the jug are approximately the same distance from the top of the fence.

In May 1965, Gray Catbirds (*Dumetella carolinensis*) nested in my neighbor's yard at Zebulon, Wake County, N.C. On 21 May four eggs were in a nest built in a shrub growing in a wire fence; the next day the nest was empty and in disarray. Nonetheless, the pair still exhibited territorial behavior on the 23rd; on the 25th I saw them carrying nesting material in the vicinity of the old nest. Further observation revealed that the catbirds were removing twigs from the old nest for use in construction of a new one in a crotch of a nearby crabapple tree.

Reuse of nests built by their own or other species and reuse of nest materials are well documented for many birds. Reports of nest reuse are most common in cavity nesters; in open-cup nesters that build large, sturdy, stick nests (e.g. raptors, herons); and in species such as the Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*; Abbott, 1922; Weeks, 1977) and the Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*; Weeks, 1977; Barclay, 1988) that build substantial nests in sheltered locations.

Accounts of nest reuse are, as would be expected, relatively uncommon for the passerines that build small, complex, open-cup nests in sites exposed to wind and precipitation. Nonetheless, same-season reuse of a nest by the Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) has been reported several times (Gault, 1902; Nice, 1937:93; Dorsey, 1977). One nest housed four successive broods (Nice, 1937). In Texas the Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*) frequently appropriates a nest of the Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) as the site for its own structure (McNair, 1984). Lark Sparrows also build in abandoned nests of Pyrrhuloxias (*Cardinalis sinuatus*), flycatchers, thrashers, orioles, and towhees; reuse their own nests; and reuse nests of other Lark Sparrows (McNair, 1984).

Nest reuse in successive years has been reported in Acadian Flycatchers (*Empidonax vireescens*) by Mumford (1964) and in Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*) by Weeks (1984). Mourning Doves (*Zenaida macroura*) are known to use their nests for several successive broods in a single season (Skutch, 1976), to reuse their nests from previous years (McClure, 1950), and to build in other species' nests that have survived winter storms (Bent, 1932:404-405; McClure, 1943). Cutts (1954) reported a nest used for seven broods during a 4-year period: one brood in 1951, one in 1952, two in 1953, and three in 1954. The sturdy, mud-lined nest of the American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) may be used for two successive broods (Parmelee and Parmelee, 1978) or be refurbished the following season. Robin nests are sometimes appropriated by various species, including the Mourning Dove (Bent, 1932; Quay, 1954; pers. obs.), the Eastern Phoebe (Weeks, 1977; Parmelee and Parmelee, 1979), and the Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*; Butler, 1980). Robins have been known to use an abandoned nest of the

Eastern Phoebe as the foundation for their own nest (Parmelee and Parmelee, 1979).

Use of materials from one nest to build another is difficult to document because the bird must be seen while it is actually removing something for transport to another site. Dismantling of nests appears to be less frequent in temperate species than in tropical ones (Skutch, 1976). In most instances reported from temperate North America, dismantled nests have been ones made chiefly of plant downs or other soft materials with few linear, interlocking pieces that would hinder the process. Moving material from one nest to another is commonplace in the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila caerulea*; Bent, 1949; Root, 1969). In 1963, Root (1969) found 42 nests, 23 of which were known to contain materials from a previous nest. Dismantling of a previously used nest to obtain materials for construction of a replacement nest has also been observed in the Alder Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*; McCabe, 1963). Trail (1987) reported the filching of materials from the nests of other species by the Eastern Wood-Pewee (*Contopus virens*). The victims were a Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) and a Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*). The behavior of the catbirds mentioned above is unusual in that the nest materials were interlocking twigs.

Reuse of nests or nesting materials offers the advantage of saving time and energy, which might be particularly important for pairs that are building a second or third nest and for those species that build large or complex nests. Disadvantages of reuse include instability of a structure that has been exposed to severe weather conditions, presence of parasites, and vulnerability to predators already aware of the site. For a discussion of the relative advantages and disadvantages, see Barclay (1988). For a discussion of the use of green plant materials to reduce the possibility of parasite infestation, see Wimburger (1984). For a discussion of nest appropriation as a probable factor in the development of nest parasitism in cowbirds, see Friedmann (1929).

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### **Specimen of a Cinnamon Teal from North Carolina**

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One of a pair of teal, a female, taken by Mike Brannen (USMC—Cp LeJeune, NC) and ourselves from the Hunting Creek Impoundment of the Goose Creek Gamelands on 20 March 1988, proved to be a Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*).

Five reports of the Cinnamon Teal are available from North Carolina, spanning a period of 53 years (*Chat* 1:51; 26:74-5; 34:76; 39:91; 53:43). These observations cover most of the coast of North Carolina from Knott's Island in Currituck County, Lake Mattamuskeet, Hyde County, Huntley's Impoundment (Morehead City), Carteret County, and Greenfield Lake (Wilmington), New Hanover County. The documented period of occurrence is