

Interspecific Feeding Among Some Oscines

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American Robin.—In May 1978, Duyck watched an adult American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) of unknown sex feed nestling Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) in a nest box 2 m above ground in the yard of a suburban home. The home was owned by N. Hayes and is located at 171 School Road, near the intersection with Interstate 40 in Oakley, Buncombe County, North Carolina. The robin caught earthworms and other prey on the lawn of the home and made about 15 trips in 2 h to the nest-box, where it fed several large bluebird nestlings at the cavity entrance (Fig. 1). The nesting pair of adult bluebirds was



Fig. 1. An American Robin is perched at the entrance of a nest-box occupied by Eastern Bluebirds. The robin fed the nestling bluebirds soon afterwards. Notice one nestling gaping at the cavity entrance in the upper-left corner. Photo by B. Duyck.

present near the nest-box but did not attempt to interfere with the robin while the latter foraged alone on the lawn or fed the nestlings. However, both adult bluebirds also fed the nestling bluebirds (Figs. 2, 3), which sometimes expelled fecal sacs as they were being fed, a normal behavior (Eltzroth and Robinson, 1984). After fledging, both adult bluebirds and the robin continued to feed the young bluebirds. Throughout these nesting events, neither the adult bluebirds nor the robin appeared to be alarmed.

Shy (1982) reviewed interspecific feeding among birds and listed six reports of the American Robin feeding nestlings of four open-cup breeding species. Consequently, our report appears to be the first to document an

American Robin feeding nestlings of an Eastern Bluebird, of a thrush, and of a cavity-nesting species.



Fig. 2. The male Eastern Bluebird is perched at the entrance of the nest-box, waiting to feed the nestlings, one of which is conspicuously gaping at the entrance. The photograph was taken minutes after the photo of the robin at the nest-box. Photo by B. Duyck.



Fig. 3. The female Eastern Bluebird is likewise waiting to feed the nestlings at the cavity entrance. Photo by B. Duyck.

Three of the six previous reports of interspecific feeding by American Robins concerned nest-sharing (Shy, 1982). That explanation does not apply to our report because the nest-box was completely enclosed and the cavity entrance was too small to admit a robin.

Brown Thrasher.—On 7 June 1982 at Fayetteville, Washington County, Arkansas, J. Neal watched an adult Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*) of unknown sex feed a fledgling female Rufous-sided Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) (Am. Birds 36:988, 1982). The fledgling towhee was fed later by an adult male Rufous-sided Towhee.

Neal's report is apparently the first to unambiguously document a Brown Thrasher feeding young of another species (Shy, 1982). Wayne (1910) mentions that a Brown Thrasher fed nestling and fledgling Northern Mockingbirds (*Mimus polyglottos*) from a single nest, a case of probable interspecific feeding, not interspecific pairing (K. C. Parkes, pers. comm.). Shy (1982) listed the Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*) as the only species of Mimidae known to feed young of a different species.

Cedar Waxwing.—On 14 August 1977, McNair watched a juvenile Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*) beg for food from an adult Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) of unknown sex in young open mixed woodlands near Massachusetts Highway 2 at Florida, Berkshire County. The vireo called loudly as it attempted to solicit food for 30 sec from the waxwing. McNair was uncertain whether the waxwing fed the vireo at that time, but he watched it feed berries to one juvenile waxwing soon afterwards. The waxwings were

among a small flock of waxwings, both adults and juveniles, and foraging nearby were species other than the vireo, e.g., Black-throated Green Warbler (*Dendroica virens*) and Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*). No birds interfered with the adult waxwing as it fed the juvenile waxwing or when the juvenile vireo begged for food.

Our report appears to be the first to suggest a Cedar Waxwing (or any bombycillid possibly feeding young of another species. Shy (1982) did not report any interspecific feeding by bombycillids. Fledglings may solicit food from adults of different species, one proximate cause of interspecific feeding among birds (Shy, 1982).

Northern Oriole.—On one day in June in the 1980's, C. B. Quinlan watched an adult male Northern Oriole (*Icterus galbula*) feed nestling Orchard Orioles (*I. spurius*) at their nest 4 m above ground in a 11-m-tall white pine (*Pinus strobus*) near Lake Chauncy at Framingham, Middlesex County, Massachusetts. The Northern Oriole made several trips in 2 h to the nest, where it fed caterpillars to several Orchard Oriole nestlings. The nesting pair of Orchard Orioles was also present. During the same 2 h, the second-year male made about 8 trips to the nest, where it fed insects to its young. The female did not visit the nest during this period. No interactions between the two species of adults were seen.

Our report appears to be the first to document a Northern (Baltimore) Oriole feeding young of another species (Shy, 1982). Shy listed the Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) as the only species of Icteridae known to feed young of a different species.

Conclusion.—Except for the case of the Cedar Waxwing feeding the Red-eyed Vireo, we cannot assign proximate causes for the interspecific feeding of young reported above, based on the eight categories of Shy (1982), because we do not know the prior history of any of the adult oscines. Shy (1982) and Eltzroth and Robinson (1984) state that misdirected parental care is the most likely explanation when adult birds feed young of different species. Although misdirected parental care may apply to all but one of the reports above, we have no direct evidence that the adult oscines were in breeding condition.

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LITERATURE CITED

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