

Kansas Ornithological Society

BULLETIN

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

Vol. 42

September, 1991

No. 3

Snake predation on nestling Eastern Phoebes followed by turtle predation on snake.

— On 12 July 1990 I visited an Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) nest in a culvert on County Line Rd. about 5 mi east of Vinland, Douglas County, Kansas in anticipation of banding four 7-day-old nestlings. The nest, however, was on the culvert floor, completely torn from its wall moorings. I searched the vicinity for nestlings but found none. I did see a coiled portion of a snake in the creek at the culvert's edge within 2m of the nest site. I noted that the snake was moving, but its head was submerged and its midsection was held by a snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) with a carapace at least 40 cm long. I had some difficulty in wrestling its prey away, and the snake died shortly thereafter.

The snake was a black rat snake (*Elaphe obsoleta*), 149cm long and 5.5cm in diameter at its widest point. A large segment (30cm) of the belly was missing and another 10cm piece was missing behind the head. I dissected the snake and found the intact bodies of two nestling phoebes. The other two must have been in the anterior segment eaten by the turtle.

Fifty percent of total mortality to nest contents for the Eastern Phoebe in eastern Kansas is due to predation. Klaas (1975. Univ. Kansas Occ. Pap. Mus. Nat. Hist. 41:1-18) believed that the principal predator was the black rat snake, based on their numbers around phoebe nests, but actual observations of their depredation are few. Twenty-three percent of their diet consists of birds, and Fitch (1963. Copeia 1963:649-658) found a nestling Eastern Phoebe in this species' stomach upon dissection.

Of equal interest is the predation by the turtle on the snake. It is unusual enough to find direct evidence of one predatory event, but I could find no published observations of subsequent predation on the initial predator. Along the western edge of its range in Kansas, the black rat snake occurs in wooded areas along streams and rivers (Collins. 1982. Amphibians and Reptiles in Kansas. 2nd Ed., Univ. Kans. Mus. Nat. Hist. Publ. Ed. Ser. 8). Snapping turtles frequent nearly every aquatic habitat, and I have observed them in creeks flowing through culverts used by nesting phoebes. It is not unusual that these two reptiles should cross paths, but it surprised me that a normally agile, fast-moving snake was captured by a turtle. Snapping turtles do prey on snakes, but they make up less than one percent of their diet (Alexander. 1943. J. Wild. Manage. 7:278-282). I suspect that having four good-sized nestling phoebes in its stomach made the snake less agile and slowed it down enough to be grabbed by the turtle. The first predatory event increased the probability that the second would occur.

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Fork-tailed Flycatcher in Barton County. — In 1979, my late husband, Robert M. Mengel visited Cheyenne Bottoms for a long weekend dedicated to painting and casual birdwatching. When he was there, he saw a Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*), observed it carefully through binoculars and a spotting scope, and made notes about its plumage. He did not, however, photograph it or sketch it on the scene. On several occasions since then he tried to prepare a note about this occurrence for publication, but always became "derailed" by asking "how could an experienced, professional ornithologist, fully equipped with camera, shotgun, and collecting permit have failed to make better documentation of this observation?" A report of his observations should not

be further delayed by attempts to answer that question.

Figure 1 shows sketches he made six days after he saw the bird. Everyone familiar with his work as an artist and ornithologist knows that his visual memory was extremely good. The following comments are extracts from drafts of several manuscripts he began. "On 13 May 1979 at approximately 1100 hours I saw a Fork-tailed Flycatcher perched on a roadside fence-wire approximately 2 miles east and 3 miles south of Hoisington, Barton County, Kansas (just 1 mile north of headquarters, Cheyenne Bottoms Waterfowl Management area). For the next 15 minutes or so (and again for 5 minutes about one-half hour later) the bird was watched at distances of 6 to 30 meters, perched and fly-



Figure 1. Sketches by R. M. Mengel of a Fork-tailed Flycatcher he saw in Barton County on 13 May 1979.

ing, and observed in excellent light both with 7 X 35 binoculars and a 25X spotting scope. It differed from the related Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*), with which I am thoroughly familiar, in the following ways: it was distinctly smaller, pure white below, with no trace of rosy color, and I saw a black crown with a median coronet of bright yellow. The tail appeared a bit short and perhaps the outer rectrices were less than full length. They were black with the narrow outer webs white. All of these characters were written down the same afternoon without benefit of literature. The principal reason for my presence was painting and I had no field guides. Subsequent consultation of specimens in the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History bird collections makes no other identification possible."

The normal range of the Fork-tailed Flycatcher is tropical South and Central America, north to southern Mexico. The species occurs casually in eastern North America, primarily along the Atlantic coast and there are also records from Michigan, Wisconsin, and southern Texas (Amer. Ornithol. Union, 1983. Check-list of North American Birds, 6th Ed.). The species has not been previously reported from Kansas.

I thank Harrison B. Tordoff for comments relating to this manuscript.

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Breeding recovery of a Kansas Eastern Bluebird banded as a nestling. — On 15 July 1984 Randy Whittaker contacted me about a banded Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) captured on 30 June in the stove pipe of a farm outbuilding about 4 miles NE of Valley Falls, Jefferson County, Kansas (Sec. 31, T7S, R18E). The bird was in the company of another paler bluebird thought to be a female. Two bluebirds had been observed earlier in the day prospecting for nesting cavities around the farm buildings. It was thought that the bluebird was trapped when it explored the stove pipe as a potential nesting cavity. After retrieving the bluebird and recording its band number, it was released.

The bluebird had been banded as a nestling in a box on the Clinton Lake bluebird trail by Tom Rodhouse and me on 17 July 1983. The nestbox is one of 56 maintained in the Clinton State Park about 5 mi west of Lawrence and is about 0.25 mi west of park headquarters. The recovery location is about 32 mi NNW of the banding site. There have been no other recoveries of bluebirds from the Clinton Lake trail to date from

the 460 nestlings banded from 1983-1988. No adults have been banded. We are certain a few banded breeding birds seen each year were probably banded as nestlings in this population.

Although the breeding status of the Eastern Bluebird in Kansas is well known (Johnston. 1964. The breeding birds of Kansas. Univ. Kansas Publ. Mus. Nat. Hist. 12:575-655), little is known about their dispersal. Our knowledge of juvenile dispersal, even throughout their breeding range, is based on a few recoveries of banded birds. Krug (1941. Bird-Banding 12:23-26) recaptured a bluebird about 0.5 miles from where the bird had been banded as a nestling the year before. Laskey (1943. Bird-Banding 14:39-43) found that 3 first year birds had their first nests in the same boxes in which they were hatched. Pinkowski (1971. Jack-Pine Warbler 49:32-50) found that out of 79 bluebirds from Michigan and surrounding states recovered on the breeding grounds at least a year later, 80% were adults, and about 88% of birds recovered at other locations were yearlings. Pinkowski also noted a slight tendency of young to travel northward after fledging, but all his recoveries were within 25 mi of their banding locations. This is similar to that found for the Clinton Lake bird.

The manner in which this bluebird was captured is similar to that observed on U.S. tobacco farms just after 1947 when oil burning curing stoves were installed with unprotected raincaps. Bluebirds exploring these stovepipes slipped down and couldn't get back out. It was estimated that 2 million bluebirds died this way before protective screens were put in place (Zeleny. 1978. The Bluebird: how you can help its fight for survival. Indiana Univ. Press. 170 pp.). It would be interesting to know how often mortality of this kind occurs today in Kansas where woodburning stoves in habitats frequented by bluebirds are becoming increasingly common.

My thanks to Tom Rodhouse for all his help with the banding of bluebirds on the Clinton Bluebird Trail.

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ISSN 0022-8729