

## FIRST NEST OF RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH IN OKLAHOMA

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The Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*) breeds in the pine and spruce forests of the North, south at higher elevations in the Rocky Mountains to New Mexico and to eastern Tennessee in the Appalachians (American Ornithologists' Union, 1957, Check-list of North American birds, p. 399). R. J. Gress (1982, Kansas Ornith. Soc. Bull. 33:37-39) reported nesting in Wichita, Sedgwick County, south-central Kansas in the spring of 1982.

G. M. Sutton (1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 30) recorded dates of occurrence in the main body of the state spanning the period 13 September to 13 May. In the Black Mesa country of far western Oklahoma, the Red-breast has been observed as early as 9 August.

V. J. Vacin (1972, Bull. Oklahoma Ornith. Soc. 5:13-14) reported a probable nesting at his home on Silver Lake in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, central Oklahoma. From 18 to 23 June he saw a male and female bird in company with two pale nuthatches that "looked young". These latter individuals fluttered their wings until the female fed them suet from a nearby feeder. Vacin was never able to locate a nest.



### YOUNG RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH

*Apparently the only one from a clutch of four eggs to survive, and the first of its species definitely known to have fledged in Oklahoma. Photographed 11 May 1981 by Jack P. Barrett in his yard in Ponca City, Oklahoma.*

In the spring of 1981 Jack P. Barrett photographed a nest and a young Red-breasted Nuthatch incapable of sustained flight (photo above) in his yard in Ponca City, Kay County, north-central Oklahoma. At his request, I have prepared the following summary from his extensive field notes.

Throughout the winter of 1980-81 Barrett observed both a dark male and a pale female bird feeding in the yard regularly. In early April they began investigating a wren box beside the house, about 10 feet off the ground and three feet from the edge of a patio. The entrance hole was adequate for the female, but too small for the male. Barrett enlarged the hole twice, and on 4 April the pair began nest-building activities. Through April and May he recorded his observations, usually made in the early evening, but often in the morning also.

From 4-7 April, both birds participated in nest building, bringing bits of soft plant fibers and grass clippings to the nest-box. The male made repeated trips (as many as 14 in a single half-hour period on 7 April) to the conifers across the road, returning with pitch which he smeared around the entrance hole. During this time he frequently visited the female at the nest-box, sometimes with, oftentimes without, food for his mate. On occasion, he sang exuberantly. The female was inconspicuous after the first day, spending most of her time in the box, pulling in and arranging the grasses brought by her mate. She left the box infrequently and then only for brief periods. While she was absent, the male remained near the nest-box. On 6 and 11 April a third Red-breasted Nuthatch visited the nest area, but the male promptly drove it away. Barrett checked the nest on 16 April while both birds were gone and found four eggs.

On 26 April the behavior of both nuthatches changed dramatically. Between 1653 and 2002 CDT both were carrying food to the nest-box. The female usually departed before the male arrived but sometimes he entered the nest-box before she left. Occasionally he brought a morsel to her, which she fed to a chick or promptly ate. Near dusk the male resumed his ritual of smearing pitch. Activities ceased at 2002, when the female entered and the male left.

Between 1800 and 2000 on 27 April the female made 18 visits to the nest-box, but the male was not observed then or thereafter. On 28 April, from 0915 to 0922, the female made 11 trips to the box with food, and between 1819 and 2003, 18 trips, finally settling for the night at 1948. The following morning Barrett checked the nest-box again and found two small chicks and two eggs.

Between 29 April and 10 May Barrett took many pictures of the nest and its contents. On 10 May, even though the young birds were calling persistently, the female failed to return to the nest-box after 1600. At 0900 the following morning, she had still not reappeared. One of the chicks was perched in the entrance hole, calling continuously. At 0906 the stub-tailed young nuthatch sprang from the box and landed, practically at Barrett's feet. Barrett checked the nest-box; it was empty. He meticulously tended the young nuthatch until it was able to fly, and on 23 June brought it to me at our sanctuary near Jay in Delaware County, northeastern Oklahoma, and I banded it (no. 1590-49552). On the morning of 27 June, as I was pushing a water pan through the cage door, the young nuthatch suddenly darted out, disappearing among some pines along the roadside. We heard it calling most of the day, but have neither seen nor heard it since.

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