

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER NESTING IN CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

BY JOHN S. SHACKFORD AND WARREN D. HARDEN

On 16 May 1982, in Kingfisher County, 10 miles west of Okarche, central Oklahoma, the authors and Hubert R. Harris found an Ash-throated Flycatcher's (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) nest that contained five eggs. The nest was built in an old nest cavity about 10 feet high in the side of a wooden gatepost. We caught and banded one adult bird (No. 1211-26033) that had apparently been incubating the eggs just before being captured. For this reason, and because we found a brood patch on its abdomen, we presumed that this was the female of the pair. According to C.E. Bendire, "The female, I think, attends to the duties of incubation exclusively . . ." (Bent, A.C., 1942, Life histories of North American birds, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. No. 179, Wash., D.C., p. 131). Almost exactly a year later, on 10 May 1983, the *very same bird* was recaptured at a nest cavity about a mile to the northwest. Both of these nest-holes had probably been excavated originally by Ladder-backed Woodpeckers (*Picoides scalaris*).

Details of these nestings are of interest. On 3 May 1982, Shackford first saw and heard an Ash-throated Flycatcher in Canadian County about ¼ mile southwest of the gatepost nest site. On 9 May, Shackford and Harden, and on 11 May, Shackford alone, saw an Ash-throat in the same area. It hung around a nearby shelterbelt of bois d'arc (*Maclura pomifera*) and juniper (*Juniperus virginiana*) trees where it may have been roosting, for it was usually seen during late evening. Then on 16 May, Harden was checking the gatepost nest cavity when he heard bill clacking from within; he immediately suspected that a *Myiarchus* flycatcher was responsible. Harden caught the flycatcher with a small mesh net he had been using to capture Ladder-backed Woodpeckers as they emerged from their nest holes. He determined that the nest contained five eggs by lowering a small flashlight bulb and mirror apparatus into the cavity. The adult bird was banded, photographed and carefully identified as an Ash-throated Flycatcher by its tail pattern: the leading edge of each outer tail feather was blackish toward its distal end rather than rufous as in the Great Crested Flycatcher, *M. crinitis*. The wing chord measured 95, tail 87, tarsus, 27 and exposed culmen, 17 mm, and the bird weighed 29.5 gm.

On 18 May the (presumed) female flew from the nest cavity when Shackford "squeaked" nearby, and on 22 May, Harden, his son Wade, daughter Liana, and Shackford verified that the nest still contained five eggs. However, on 27 May, Shackford found only four eggs. The gate at the nest-post had been left open, indicating human activity in the area, and this may well have upset the nesting birds. Shackford, on 4 June, saw an adult in the area and on 5 June one adult carrying nesting material *from* the nest. At this time there were no eggs in the nest and the cavity had a distinct musky odor, perhaps having been invaded by a rat snake (*Elaphe obsoleta*).

On 15 June, E. Wayne Easley saw two adult birds at and near the same nest cavity, and next day Shackford found that the nest now held four *new* eggs. He saw one bird leave the nest. On 27 June both adults were feeding four young, and on 29 June Shackford photographed both the banded female and its unbanded mate from about 35 feet away as they brought large insects to

the nest. Although one or more of the young may have fledged, Shackford could find no flycatcher in the area two weeks later (15 July).

Almost exactly a year later, on 10 May 1983, Harden, Shackford and Monte Setzer caught the same banded female at a second nest cavity about one mile northwest of the 1982 nest. It was about nine feet high in a mesquite tree (*Prosopis juliflora*) and also contained five eggs. They did not see the male. It took three attempts to catch the now-skittish female, who was not captured until after dark. Quite possibly they inadvertently caused this nest to fail, for on 26 May it had been abandoned by the female and held three Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) eggs. The flycatchers were seen no more in 1983 or thereafter.

Sutton ([1982], Species summaries of Oklahoma bird records, Oklahoma Mus. Nat. Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman), listed Ash-throated Flycatcher sightings for the following counties: Cimarron, Beaver, Harmon, Greer, Jackson, Tillman, Pawnee, Kiowa and Comanche. For the following counties he recorded breeding records: Cimarron, Harmon, Jackson, Tillman, Comanche and Beckham. Thus these nesting records in Kingfisher County are well east of the species' previously-known nesting range in the main body of the state.

An interesting question is whether or not the Ash-throated pair, the *first* time they ever nested in central Oklahoma, arrived together already mated, or separately? The chances of two birds of opposite sex turning up independently so far from the normal breeding range seems remote. One suspects such nesting birds arrive as pairs, but this is difficult to prove. Perhaps future radiotelemetry experiments will provide the answer.

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Common Moorhens nesting in the Texas Panhandle. — Prior to the impoundment of Lake Meredith in the 1960s by the construction of Sanford Dam on the Canadian River in southwestern Hutchinson County, local observers in the Texas Panhandle considered the Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) a rarity. The few widespread sightings in spring had not been followed by any evidence of nesting and the species was considered as a bird of passage only. However, with the formation of a permanent marsh downstream from Sanford Dam, sightings became more frequent beginning in the early 1970s.

The first verification of nesting came in August 1976, when an adult Common Moorhen with one chick was found on the stilling basin below the dam by Fern Cain (Williams, F., 1977, Amer. Birds 31:195). The following chronology outlines my own discoveries of its breeding at that location in subsequent years: 5 July 1981, five adults with seven chicks (Williams, F., 1981, Amer. Birds 35:955) — reported in error as 15 July; 6 July 1984, three adults with two juveniles (Williams, F., 1984, Amer. Birds 38:1035); 4 July 1985, two adults with six chicks plus three juveniles; 29 June 1986, one juvenile. Although I have found adult moorhens summering in the marsh every year since 1975, not always have I seen young birds or other indications of breeding.

In the summer of 1983, Winnie Wester reported that a pair of Common Moorhens nested at Southeast Park Lake in Canyon, Randall County, about 55 miles south of Lake Meredith. On 24 June 1979 I observed an adult moorhen on a playa lake northwest of Dimmitt, in Castro County (Williams, F., 1979, Amer. Birds 33:876), and on 4 August 1985 I discovered an adult with three juveniles at a playa 12 miles south and 4 west of Dimmitt (Williams, F., 1986,