

FIRST SWAINSON'S WARBLER NEST DOCUMENTED  
IN OKLAHOMA SINCE 1917

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Swainson's Warbler (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*) was first documented breeding in Oklahoma in Delaware County in 1914 by Albert J. B. Kirn (Nice 1931). Kirn (1918) also reported finding 6 nests in Washington County in 1917. Since then, no Swainson's Warbler nests have been reported in Oklahoma, although Carter (1965) observed an adult feeding a fledgling in 1961. The paucity of nesting records reflects both the scarcity of Swainson's Warblers in Oklahoma and the difficulty of locating their nests (Fig. 1).

Oklahoma is at the northwestern edge of the breeding range of the Swainson's Warbler (Brown and Dickson 1994), and its distribution within the state has greatly decreased since first documented. Currently, Swainson's



Fig. 1. Adult Swainson's Warbler brooding in McCurtain County, Oklahoma, 23 May 2002. While not the first Swainson's Warbler nest located, this one illustrates typical cryptic characteristics. Photograph by Mia R. Revels.

Warblers are reported regularly only in McCurtain County in southeastern Oklahoma. Heck (2001) provided a thorough history of Swainson's Warblers in Oklahoma.

Swainson's Warblers are cryptic both in appearance and behavior. Both sexes have drab coloration and spend most of their time in shady, densely vegetated areas of bottomland hardwood forest. Whereas the nests of many songbirds can be located by using cues provided by the adult birds (Martin and Geupel 1993), Swainson's Warblers are difficult to see and follow through the dense vegetation they inhabit. In fact, this habitat has been described as "impenetrable" by many researchers (e.g., Brewster 1885, Brooks and Legg 1942, Meanley 1971, Simpson and Stephens 1994).

In 2001, I began a project to investigate the breeding biology of the Swainson's Warbler on the Little River National Wildlife Refuge, McCurtain County, Oklahoma. While conducting this study, I documented the first Swainson's Warbler nest in Oklahoma since 1917.

During a systematic search of dense vegetation, I located a Swainson's Warbler nest on 30 April 2001. This area was chosen for nest searching because an adult Swainson's Warbler had responded to song playback near the nest site on 16 April, and the habitat appeared appropriate (Meanley 1971, Brown and Dickson 1994). The nest was located 1.3 m from the ground in red maple (*Acer rubrum*) and willow oak (*Quercus phellos*) branches that had broken and were partially dead and was placed in the dead part of the branches where they interlaced over a moist, low area. There were no eggs in the nest, and no adults present, but the nest appeared complete. It looked like a large clump of leaves from the side, but viewed from the top contained a small, neat cup (5.2 cm diameter, 4.5 cm depth). On 10 May, an adult Swainson's Warbler was present on the nest. When checked later that same day, no adult was present, and the nest contained 4 small, solid white eggs. The nest was monitored daily from a distance with binoculars to determine activity. At 1500 h on 20 May, there were 3 newly hatched nestlings and 1 egg. On 22 May, there were 4 2-day-old nestlings present. When the nest was checked on 25 May, it was intact but empty. There were no adults in the immediate vicinity. The nest was depredated sometime between 22 and 25 May when the nestlings were 2-5 days old.

It is not surprising that this nest was located, because Swainson's Warblers have been reported on the Little River National Wildlife Refuge regularly over the past 10 years (Heck 2001). Since locating this nest, 33 more Swainson's Warbler nests have been located on the Little River National Wildlife Refuge in 2001, 2002, and 2003. These nest sites and the surrounding habitat will be described in a later publication (Revels and Adams in prep). Information regarding the nesting habitat selected by Swainson's Warblers in Oklahoma will provide valuable data so that managers can preserve existing habitat and create new habitat for one of the state's rarest species.

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### NOTES

**Possible sighting of a Black-chinned Sparrow in Oklahoma.** — On 21 June 2001, while conducting the Felt Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) route (67-034) in Cimarron County about 24 km W of Boise City, Oklahoma, I saw a small, rather slender bird that appeared to be a Black-chinned Sparrow (*Spizella atrogularis*). I observed the bird for about 30 sec as it perched on a telephone wire and sang once in the northeast quarter of section 13-T3N-R2E. It then flew north for about 100 m into the southeast quarter of section 12-T3N-R2E and landed