

Egg and Nestling Destruction

BY JULIAN K. POTTER

FOR several years past I have been interested in gathering data with the view of determining approximately the number of nests destroyed, before they ever fulfil their mission—that of keeping the young and eggs in safety until the young reach the fledgling stage of their existence. How often have we in visiting a nest found its contents missing or the nest destroyed! So often indeed that we are led to believe that the majority of nests never fulfil their mission.

The ground covered in this report lies almost entirely within one mile of the limits of Camden, New Jersey, a city of 100,000 inhabitants, and receives no protection whatever, not even a "No Trespass" sign being in evidence. Of course it was impossible to keep track of every nest found and those tabulated are by no means all that were discovered, but refer to those that were actually known to have fulfilled their office or to have failed. Any nest that there was any doubt about was cast off the list. For this reason, no doubt, the list of percentages is somewhat inaccurate and also because too few nests of some species were examined. Nevertheless some interesting facts were brought to light. Investigations were made during the years 1912-13-14-15.

From the table it may be seen, as one would naturally expect, the hollow-tree dwellers show the highest percentage of successes (82%). This is followed by the ground nesters, successes (51%), with the tree and bush dwellers coming last with the lowest percentage of successes (43%). The trees in which the woodpeckers and Starlings had their nests were almost without exception quite high and out of reach of human interference. This accounts to a great extent for the very high average of these birds.

	No. examined,	No. destroyed,	No. raised.	Cause of destruction.						% Successful.
				Man.	Cats.	Sparrows.	Starlings.	Storm.	Unknown.	
Spotted Sandpiper . . .	19	8	11	6	..	..	..	2	..	57+
Killdeer	4	2	2	1	..	..	..	..	1	50
Hairy Woodpecker. . .	3	..	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	100
Downy Woodpecker . .	3	..	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	100
Red-headed Woodpecker.	3	..	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	100
Flicker.	9	3	6	1	..	..	2	..	..	66+
Crow.	4	1	3	1	..	..	..	..	..	75
Starling	15	1	14	..	..	..	..	1	..	93+
Chipping Sparrow . . .	4	1	3	..	..	..	..	1	..	75
Song Sparrow ¹	4	3	1	..	..	..	..	2	2	25
Cardinal	8	5	3	2	1?	..	..	..	1	37+
Rough-winged Swallow.	2	2	..	2	..	..	..	..	..	..
Brown Thrasher	5	2	3	1	..	..	..	..	1	60
House Wren.	4	..	4	..	..	..	..	..	..	100
Tufted Titmouse. . . .	3	2	1	..	2?	..	..	..	..	33+
Wood Thrush	3	2	1	..	..	..	..	..	2	33
Robin.	15	11	4	4	..	4	..	..	3	26+
Bluebird	5	2 ²	3	..	..	1	..	..	..	60
Totals	113	45	68	18	3?	5	2	6	10	60 ¹

The Spotted Sandpipers were very closely watched for three seasons, 1913-14-15. During 1913-14 only one failure was noted and this was due to the nest being flooded. During 1915 a professional egger discovered the whereabouts of the sandpipers, and six out of nine of the nests were robbed of their contents. Of the remaining three one was flooded. It will be of interest to note whether the birds will be as common next spring as usual in this particular locality or not.

While investigating the homes of the Flickers which came to my notice, I was rather surprised to discover that their large broods of five to seven usually dwindled to three or four by the time they are ready to leave the nest, two or three in each brood dying for some unexplainable reason.

¹ A similar record taken several years ago of a larger number of nests of this bird showed only 10% successful.

² Flickers destroyed one.

Five instances were noted in which not only the contents of the nest were destroyed, but also the brooding bird. A Cardinal's nest was discovered one morning with the tail and wing feathers of the female bird scattered over the top of the eggs. In like manner a brooding Song Sparrow suffered the same fate. An owl might have been responsible for these two tragedies. A Rough-winged Swallow built a nest in a pipe leading into a stone wall. A boy came along and, seeing the hole, threw a large-sized stone in the entrance preventing the escape of the bird. A few days later a very much bedraggled swallow was removed from the nest and soon died.

In 1913 two Crested Tits' nests were found, the only ones probably in the neighborhood canvassed. Both of these nests together with the mother birds were destroyed, I think by cats. The male birds promptly left the locality and not a Tufted Titmouse have I seen in that particular woods since, showing how easily a species may be exterminated over a certain area. Will this species ever work back? Probably not, for the tendency of nearly all forms of bird-life about a city, is to contract and decrease.

Attention is called to the large numbers of Robins' nests destroyed by sparrows. These nests were all built in tall trees in close proximity to the city, where sparrows are very abundant. The Robin's nest forms an excellent foundation for the bulky sparrow's nest and they seem to neglect no opportunity to take advantage of it. The Robin seems totally unable to cope with the situation. I knew of a pair of Robins that built three nests last spring among the trees in a little city park and as fast as they were built, they were ceded to the sparrows, the Robins not being allowed to raise a single young. I have no doubt that the Robin would inhabit all parts of the city where there are tall trees, if it were not for the sparrow pest.

The Robin and Song Sparrow with one exception, exhibit the smallest number of successes, yet these are the two most numerous native birds inhabiting the locality under observation. The remarkable fecundity of these two species is probably the factor which must be considered in searching for an explanation of this peculiar situation.