

NEST SHARING BY ROBIN AND CATBIRD

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Use of the same nest by more than one bird, even of different species, is not uncommon among certain waterfowl, but instances of this behavior in passerine birds are rare. Raney (Auk 56:337-338, 1939) reported a nest shared by a robin and a mourning dove, and Mr. William Hillegas once showed me some photographs of a nest shared by these same two species. The following report is based largely on the observations of Mr. and Mrs. Edgar S. Pitkin, of Loudonville, Albany County, New York, to whom I am indebted for calling this unusual occurrence to my attention.

In late May, 1961, Mr. Pitkin noticed a pair of catbirds, (*Dumatella carolinensis*), building a nest in a lilac bush beside the house. Before the nest was completed, a pair of robins (*Turdus migratorius*) began to evince interest in the nest, eventually taking over the completion of the nest. When the catbird would bring nest material, the female robin would take it from her and incorporate it into the nest. It was evident throughout the nesting that the robins dominated the situation, although there is no doubt that the nest was originally that of the catbirds.

Seven eggs were laid, and although I did not see the eggs, I judge from the description that three were catbird eggs, four robin eggs. Both pairs of birds were in almost constant attendance at the nest, and again the dominance of the robins was clear. The robin brooded the eggs most of the time, and only occasionally was the catbird able to slip in and take over the nesting duties while the robin was away. On some occasions, the male robin was seen to remain near the nest and drive the catbird away until the female robin returned.

Hatching began on June 15, and when I visited the nest on June 16 there were three young. So far as I know, none of the other eggs hatched, for on June 22 there were still three young birds. At that time they were recognizable as two robins and one catbird. During the period the young were in the nest, the dominance of the robins continued. On some occasions the catbirds were seen to pass food to the adult robin, which would then feed the young. So far as could be determined, the adult birds made no distinction between their own young and the young of the other species. Only the robin was seen performing nest sanitation, although the nest was observed so sporadically that this is not necessarily significant.

The behavior of the two species around the nest was interestingly different. The robin would burst into the bush chirping loudly, and go directly to the nest. On the rare occasions when the catbird was seen at the nest, she (or they) would skulk around in the bush for some time and approach the nest cautiously. At the slightest sign of aggression by the robin, the catbird would flee precipitately.

There is some evidence that a state of peaceful coexistence was reached near the end of the nesting. On June 21, both catbirds and one robin were observed at the nest simultaneously, passing food back and forth and feeding the young with every evidence of having settled their differences. On June 22, when I photographed the nest, the catbird was on the nest when I arrived, although the robin was busily going back and forth with food.

The nesting could scarcely be considered successful from the point of view of productivity. Separately, the two pairs of birds might have been expected to produce eight fledglings successfully, instead of the three produced by the joint nesting. That they succeeded in rearing a brood of any size, however, is of some interest.

At the time of writing, the young have not yet left the nest. I shall report later on the success of the brood, as well as on the nest, which appears to have the shape of the robin's nest and the composition of the catbird's nest.