

UNUSUAL HOUSE SPARROW (PASSER DOMESTICUS)
NESTING BEHAVIOR

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Some aspects of house sparrow (Passer domesticus) nesting behavior were observed at the Demonstration Farm in Oak Mountain State Park, Pelham, Alabama. Observations were made almost daily between 17 February and 1 June 1982. Twelve pairs of nesting sparrows were observed in the demonstration arena, building large and bulky nests between the supporting steel rafters of the ceiling. Initially, farm workers used rubber green snakes, 12 inches long, to detour nesting of these birds. After only two days the sparrows became habituated to the snakes and began roosting on and near them. In one instance a snake was used for nesting material. To rid the arena of sparrows farm workers then destroyed nests regularly. Regardless of the constant nest destruction, the sparrows continued to build their bulky nests. About 5 days were needed for the sparrows to complete a nest that consisted of hay, chicken feathers, grass, wool and paper. When the nests reached a particular size and weight they began to lose balance, slowly lean, and then fall from the rafters. Surprisingly, the birds continued to add material to the "leaning nests." Thievery of nesting material by other house sparrows on an oversized nest was not contributed to its destruction. Once the nest did fall the sparrows would start rebuilding on the same or adjacent location. As before, these nests slowly lost balance, became awkward and fell. By the middle of May, bird nesting intensity had decreased. Between then and 1 June only two nests were built. These nests also fell. It was not determined if the same sparrows were rebuilding the nests. Whatever the case, the rebuilding of nests occurred during 17 different instances.

Experiments by Sargent (1965) with zebra finches (Poephilia castanotis), showed that experience plays a partial role in nest building behavior. Welty (1975)

stated that birds of many species build better nests as they grow older. Hormonal states (Hind in Welty 1975) may control several different behavior activities such as material gathering. This may stimulate carrying, and carrying material may lead to placing and weaving. In the case of the observed sparrows, the sequence of behavior events started with material gathering, placing and then weaving. These nests soon lost balance, leaned over and slowly fell to the ground. The behavioral cue to stop adding material to the already oversized nest may not of have been learned at this time.

This behavior may be common for unexperienced bird nesters who have not learned from their previous nesting seasons mistakes. Nesting house sparrows were observed in less precarious structures such as barn eaves and ventilation openings of a poultry house. The first eggs (5) were found in one nest on 9 April 1982.

LITERATURE CITED

- Sargent, T. D. 1965. Experience and Nest-building in the Zebra Finch. *Auk*, 82:48-61.
Welty, J. C. 1975. The Life of Birds. Philadelphia, PA, W. B. Saunders Co.

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CATTLE EGRET MANAGMENT IN ALABAMA

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INTRODUCTION

Since the Cattle Egret, Bubulcus ibis, immigrated and dispersed in Alabama, it has mainly been accepted as a desirable addition to the avifauna. Now that it has