

## FIRST UNITED STATES NESTING RECORDS OF THE STREAK-BACKED ORIOLE

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In the United States, the Streak-backed Oriole (*Icterus pustulatus*) has been reported primarily as a casual fall and winter visitor to southern Arizona and southern California. Its main range extends from the western lowlands of Mexico south to Costa Rica in Central America (American Ornithologists' Union 1983). In the Mexican state of Sonora it nests in tropical thorn scrub and deciduous forests (especially riparian) north to about latitude 30° N, the northernmost known nest having been found about 175 km south of the international boundary at Félix Gómez (S. Russell and Monson, unpubl. manuscript).

On 6 June 1993, Corman observed a dull-plumaged female Streak-backed Oriole carrying nesting material along the San Pedro River near Dudleyville, Pinal County, Arizona. This location is almost 280 km north of the nearest known nest site in Sonora. She was accompanied to a nest by an adult male Streak-backed Oriole (Figure 1). The nest appeared to be less than a week under construction. Only the female worked on the nest. The male joined her there periodically but did not bring material or help with any construction.

Monson visited the site on 8 June and located a larger, apparently completed nest approximately 130 m from the nest under construction, without realizing it was not the nest found by Corman. During his visit no activity was discernible at this nest, although an adult male was nearby and a brighter adult female was observed flying past.

Corman revisited the nest under construction on 16 and 17 June and spent many hours watching and videotaping the slow progress of nest building. The dull-plumaged female brought pieces of nesting material one at a time, with some of her visits being more than 30 minutes apart. In the early morning and early evening, the male came into the nest tree each time the dull-plumaged female flew in with nesting material. During the late morning and throughout the afternoon, however, he did not appear very often (once in 2 hours was average).

Not until his next visit, on 23 June, did Monson discover that he and Corman were watching separate nests. Corman visited both nests on 26 June. There was still no activity at the completed nest, but the dull-plumaged female appeared to have completed the outside of the active nest and was adding lining to the inside.

Monson visited both nests on 9 July and saw no activity at the completed nest. The adult male and dull-plumaged female were near the newly finished nest, but neither went into it. Two days later Corman found the dull-plumaged female apparently incubating in her newly completed nest. Surprisingly, when the other nest was checked, the brighter plumaged female was relining the nest with very fine material (Figure 2). She made many trips to the nest during the hour or so it was under surveillance. The adult male also showed up briefly a few times with the brighter female.

We revisited both nests intermittently until 4 August. Except on 11 July, the nest completed earlier appeared inactive. The brighter female may have attempted a nesting or brought off a brood before the nest's discovery on 8 June. The adult male and dull-plumaged female were observed bringing food to the first nest from 20 July through 2 August, the degree of participation by each seemingly being equal. On 30 July, the dull-plumaged female was observed chasing the brighter female from a tree next to the active nest tree. Young could not be seen but were heard begging and their

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motion inside the nest was noticeable on several occasions. The possibility that the begging and movement were of a young cowbird (*Molothrus* sp.) could not be discounted. On a last visit, on 4 August, neither adult nor young Streak-backed Orioles could be found at or near the nest.

We infer that the adult male was paired with both females. The two nests were close enough for him to do this easily, and the birds were not raising young in both nests simultaneously. Polygyny could also explain his long absences during nest construction. The dull-plumaged female was never observed near the nest discovered by Monson, and the brighter adult female was observed only once briefly near the tree with the active nest.



Figure 1. Adult male Streak-backed Oriole about to enter nest, with food, near Dudleyville, Pinal Co., Arizona, 17 July 1994.

*Photo by Troy Corman*

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Both nests were large, being approximately 40 to 50 cm long (Figure 3). This is much longer than nests of other western *U. S. orioles*, which are typically 10 to 16 cm long. Each was supported from the ends of twigs about 8 m above ground in Fremont Cottonwoods (*Populus fremontii*) 18 to 20 m tall. Much of the nest material was strips from the lining of dry cottonwood bark with some grasses. The nests were loosely constructed, with some material dangling from adjacent limbs above the nests and from the bottom of the nest structures. The other chief plants in the surrounding riparian woodland were Goodding Willow (*Salix gooddingii*), Seepwillow (*Baccharis salicifolia*), Velvet Mesquite (*Prosopis velutina*), and Salt Cedar (*Tamarix pentandra*). Interestingly, three other primarily Mexican species at the northern edge of their known ranges, the Gray Hawk (*Buteo nitidus*), Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*), and Thick-billed Kingbird (*Tyrannus crassirostris*), were nesting near (in the same tree in the case of the last) the orioles.

These birds returned to the same general location in 1994. This year, however, two separate pairs nested. The nests were farther apart than the previous year, approxi-



Figure 2. Adult female Streak-backed Oriole with material to line inside of nest near Dudleyville, Arizona, 11 July 1993.

Photo by Troy Corman

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mately 220 m. Nesting also appeared to begin a week or more earlier than in 1993. Young were being fed by mid-July in both nests, and on 24 July a fledgling oriole was observed with both parents near one of the nests.

Surprisingly, another pair, an adult female and a bird thought to be a first-year male, were found by George Hentz on 9 June 1994. The female of this pair was observed constructing a nest in a bare dead pecan tree near the Santa Cruz River northwest of Marana, Pima County. This nest was extremely long, at 66 cm, and constructed primarily of grasses. The nest was found on the ground on 29 June after high winds the evening before and contained shell fragments from a single egg. The female almost immediately started a new nest on the old nest's limb. She continued working on the nest through 13 July. This nest was shorter than the first (52 cm). On July 16, this nest and the limb attached to it were found hanging from an adjacent tree. The orioles could never be relocated.

Little natural-history information is readily available for this species, so we summarize our observations in Arizona. The song and chatters of this species are much like

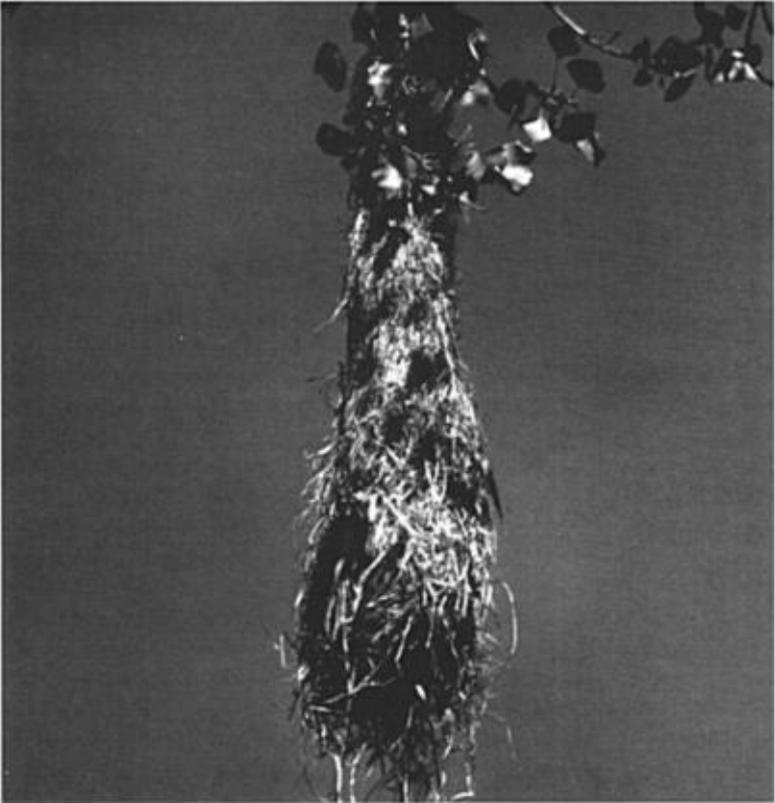


Figure 3. Nest of Streak-backed Oriole near Dudleyville. 30 July 1993.

*Photo by Troy Corman*

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those of Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus galbula bullockii/parvus*) and were heard primarily near the nest. During the nesting period, a true song given by the male was heard on only a few occasions. Females appeared to sing a partial song, sometimes from the nest. The common call given by both sexes was a low "wrank" reminiscent of the higher "weenk" call of the Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*).

Nest construction is accomplished only by the female and takes approximately 25 days. The site selected is in fairly open situations, under the canopy of the tree, 6 to 8 m above the ground. At all active nests, construction evidently began in early June. The eggs were laid during the last few days of June or in early July, possibly in association with the beginning of the summer "monsoon" season.

The female alone incubates. The incubation and nestling periods appear to be much like those of other North American orioles (Bent 1958, Ehrlich et al. 1988), taking approximately 12-14 days for incubation and about 14 days for fledging of the young.

Although there may be no direct connection with the nesting individuals near Dudleyville, Monson observed a wintering adult male Streak-backed Oriole at Cook's Lake, about 6 km south of the oriole nests, on 25 January 1990 (*American Birds* (AB) 44:305, 1990). What may have been the same individual was seen subsequently on 5 October 1990 by Gary Rosenberg, David Stejskal, and Chris Benesh (AB 45:137, 1991), on 17 January and 29 March 1991 by Diane Laush (AB 46:298, 1992), on 27 February 1992 by Tom Gatz and Diane Laush (AB 47:286, 1993), on 23 January 1993 by Diane Laush (pers. comm.), and on 13 April 1994 by Monson (*Natl. Audubon Soc. Field Notes* 48:327, 1994). Yet no Streak-backed Orioles or their obvious nests have ever been found in the immediate Cook's Lake area during the summer.

This first nesting of the Streak-backed Oriole north of Mexico may be related to the changing status of other primarily Mexican species. Within the past 10 years, several, especially riparian species have colonized Arizona. Only time will tell if the oriole will follow the Green Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle americana*), which has gone from a casual fall and winter visitor in Arizona to a rare breeding resident. The Streak-backed Oriole may parallel other species, such as the Eared Trogon (*Euptilotes neoxenus*), Black-capped Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila nigriceps*), and Rufous-capped Warbler (*Basileuterus rufifrons*), that occasionally disperse north into Arizona and attempt nesting. Such species appear to persist or return each year, perhaps until eliminated by fire, bad weather, or some such catastrophe.

We thank Tom Huels, Dwight Lee, David Stejskal, and especially Deb Treadway for all the time they contributed and effort required in taking notes and watching the progress of the nests. We also thank George Hentz for his surveillance, detailed notes, and photos of the Santa Cruz River pair and Gary Schafer for videotaping nest-building. This note was improved by comments and suggestions from Gary Rosenberg and Philip Unitt.

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Accepted 5 December 1994