

Aug 18, 1930

V. 13.
Elmer E. Brown

Nest Report - Bobolink.

On July 11 a friend informed me that he had found a Bobolink nest containing 4 eggs in a hay meadow near Burt Lake. July 16 he and another friend and I visited the site, but, although he thought he knew the exact position of the nest, we could find no trace of it. However, judging from the action of the birds, it still contained eggs.

We tried again the next day and this time were successful, but only because the old birds showed us the nest. After hesitating a few minutes, the female settled down in the grass, and almost immediately the male rose from exactly the same spot. Evidently the two were exchanging places on the nest and were reckless enough to fly straight up from it. We walked directly toward the spot and the female flushed straight from the nest about a yard in front of us. The nest was a thin cup-shaped structure of grasses fitted partially into a depression in the ground and shaded by clover and a thistle. In it were two young, evidently just hatched, and two grayish-white eggs specked, spotted and blotched with grayish-brown and fuscous.

The nest was again visited late in the evening of the 18th for the purpose of erecting a blind. As previously, the female flushed when we were about one yard from the nest, and she remained scolding in close proximity while the blind was being put up. There was no sign of the male bird.

On the 19th I was in the blind, about three feet from the nest, from 8:15 to 11:25 a.m. Neither bird was on the nest when I arrived, but both saw me enter the blind. Thirteen minutes later the female came to the nest, bringing one cutworm as food. The male accompanied her but flew away as soon as she reached the nest. She remained there only about thirty seconds. Both birds were suspicious of the blind and its contents at all times, often chirping nervously nearby for several minutes before mustering up courage to approach the nest. The male's first trip with food was not until 10:13. During the three hours and ten minutes of my observations on this morning, the female fed the young ten times, while the male only made four trips with food. As well as I could see, the food she brought consisted of six cutworms of some

kind and fourteen mayflies, while the male brought three mayflies, one cutworm and two grasshoppers. Then, conservatively speaking, the food brought by both birds together during fourteen visits to the nest was seventeen mayflies seven cutworms and 2 grasshoppers. On two other occasions when the female approached with food, she was too nervous to go to the nest and flew away without having fed the young.

Beginning at 10:20, the female stayed for the first time to brood the young. Between that time and 11:25 she brooded four times, averaging about fifteen minutes on each occasion.

Both birds were rather open about fluttering around the nest and seemed to exercise very little caution in approaching and leaving, the male, however, being most negligent here. He would drop down and fly up almost directly to and from the nest, using, on the few times that I saw him, practically the same path of approach. The female would flutter down from a slightly different direction, always stand at the same side of the nest when feeding, then, moving off two or three feet in the opposite direction, she would rise from the ground.

The faeces of the young were evidently eaten by the adults, as on no occasion during this day did I see either fly away carrying any.

Nor was the male ever heard singing nearby while his mate was feeding or brooding the young.

On the morning of the 21st the hay in this meadow was cut, the blade of the mower passing directly over the nest but, luckily, not injuring the young.

I observed from 7:00 to 9:00 on the evening of this day, but during this entire time the female, which alone came around, would not go to the nest. She remained on nearby hay piles or on the ground, chirping irritably, and at times, would take positions which would allow her to view me through the holes in the blind. Once, she stayed absolutely motionless and without a sound for a full ten minutes watching me, taxing my patience and cramped muscles sorely.

When I arrived on the evening of the 22nd for my vigil from 7:30 to 9:00, the old bird was not in evidence, but she soon came with a bill-full of food, evidently just

2

V.B.

having had a bath. When she approached the nest to feed the young, I heard faint squeaks from them for the first time. This evening, for the first time, I also noticed weak stretchings and scratchings on the part of the young ones. They were, at this time, five days old. During this hour and a half the female visited the nest only twice, and nothing at all was seen of the male. This time of day, incidentally, did not seem very suitable for the making of observations. Probably the old birds were tired out after a long day's work, were snatching a little recreation for themselves, and probably were not especially interested in accommodating the observer by visiting the nest.

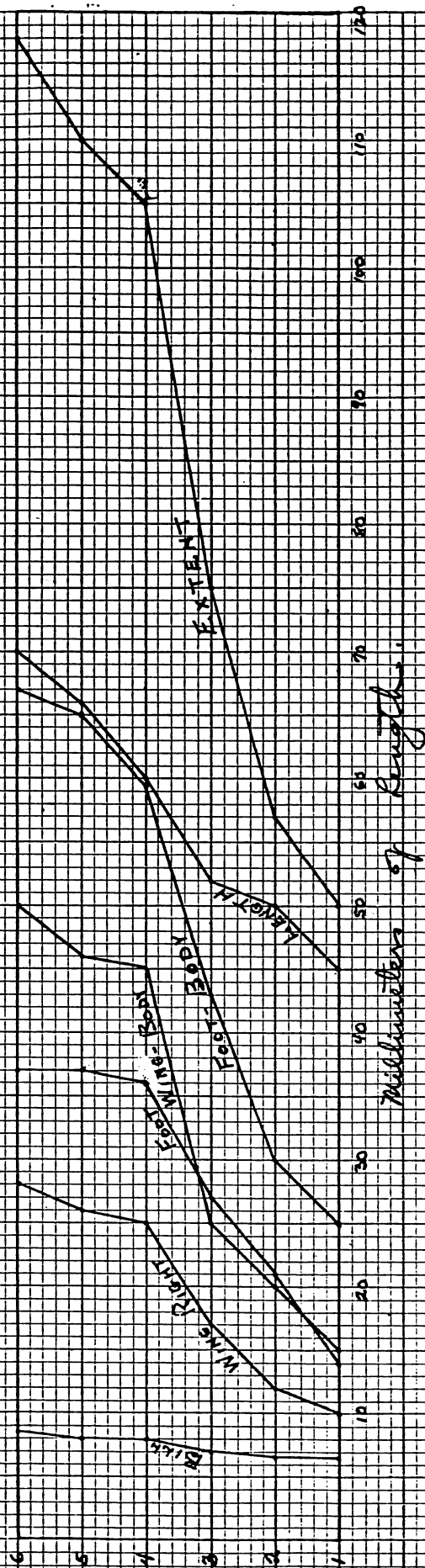
On the 23rd the female fed the young three times between 7:30 and 8:45 p.m. This time, one of the young was found dead in the nest. It had evidently been stepped upon and crushed by a horse or by someone working in the field. Today, with the young six days old, I noticed the old bird remove the faeces of the brood from the nest for the first time. Also, the stretchings of the young were more pronounced. One of them scrambled out of the nest and remained several inches from it for some time.

When I reached the blind on the 24th tragedy had already overtaken the Bobolink family. One young bird was found dead in the nest, while there was no sign either of the other young or of the old birds. I could find no evidence as to the cause of the trouble. Perhaps the sun's heat had been too great since the cutting of the hay, though I had placed a little over the nest for protection. All in all, the female Bobolink seemed a much smarter and more cautious and suspicious bird than either the Maryland Yellowthroats or Goldfinch which I observed.

353

AGE-GROWTH CHART

Bobolinks



Days Old

Growth Record Bobolinks

Age	1 Day	2 Days	3 Days	4 Days	5 Days	6 Days.
Length	45. mm	50. mm	52. mm.	60. mm.	66. mm.	70. mm.
Tail		.5	1.	1.5	1.5	2.
Mid I. F.		.3	.5	1.	1.	1.
Bill	6.5	6.5	7.	8.	8.	8.5
Bill Eye	9.	9.5	10.	10.	10.5	10.5
Bill-Gape	9.	10.	11.	11.5	12.	12.5
Bill-Nostril	3.	3.	4.	4.5	4.5	5.
Eye Diam.	(not open)					(not open)
Extent	50.	57.	75.	105.	110.	118.
Wing Right	10.	12.	17.	25.	26.	28.
Primary			2.	6.	10.	11.
Wing-Body	15.	20.	25.	45.	45.	50.
Foot-Body	25.	35.	43.	60.	65.	67.
Tarsus	10.	13.	17.	22.	22.	23.
Tarsus-Toe	20.	25.	32.	42.	43.	43.
Foot	14.	21.	27.	36.	37.	37.
Toe #1	7.	8.	11.	12.	13.	14.
Toe #2	5.	7.	9.	10.	11.	12.
Toe #3	9.	11.	13.	17.	19.	19.
Toe #4.	6.	7.	9.	10.	10.5	10.5

R O B E R T of L I N C O L N .

Merrily swinging on brier and weed,
Near to the nest of his little dame,
Over the mountain-side or mead,
Robert of Lincoln is telling his name:

Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,

Spink, spank, spink;

Snug and safe is that nest of ours
Hidden among the summerflowers.

Chee, chee, chee.

Robert of Lincoln is gayly drest,
Wearing a bright black wedding-coat;
White are his shoulders and white his crest.
Hear him call in his merry note:

Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,

Spink, spank, spink;

Look what a nice new coat is mine,
Sure there was never a bird so fine.

Chee, chee, chee.

Robert of Lincoln's Quaker wife,
Pretty and quiet, with plain brown wings,
Passing at home a patient life,
Broods in the grass while her husband sings:

Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,

Spink, spank, spink;

Prood kind creature; you need not fease
Thieves and robbers while I am here.

Chee, chee, chee.

Modest and shy as a non is she;
One weak chirp is her only note.
Braggart and prince of braggarts is he,
Pouring boast from his little throat:

Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,

Spink, spank, spink;

Never was I afraid of man
Catch me cowardly knaves if you can!

Chee, chee, chee.

Six white eggs on a bed of hay,
Flecked with purple, a pretty sight!
There as the mother sits all day,
Robert is singing with all his might:

Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;

Nice good wife, that never goes out,
Keeping house while I frolic about,
Chee, chee, chee.

Soon as the little ones chip the shell,
Six wide mouths are open for food:
Robert of Lincoln bestirs him well,
Gathering seed for his hungry brood.

Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;

This new life is likely to be
Hard for a gay young fellow like me.
Chee, chee, ehee.

Robert of Lincoln at length is made
Sober with work, and silent with care;
Off is his holiday garment laid,
Half forgotten that merry air:

Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;

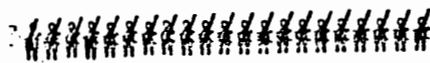
Nobody knows but my mate and I
Where our nest and our nestlings lie.
Chee, chee, chee.

Summer wanes; the children are grown;
Fun and frolic no more he knows.
Robert of Lincoln's a humdrum crone;
Off he flies, and we sing as he goes:

Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;

When you can pipe that merry old strain,
Robert of Lincoln come back again.

Chee, chee, chee.



W. C. Bryant.