The incubation of eggs by the whip-poor-will.

1931

Q. L. Selman
the position of the eggs, they were always side by side with their long axes parallel to each other and to the long axes of the female's body. No matter which way she was facing the eggs were always so.

The few times I observed her coming to the nest showed that she never flew directly to it. She would fly down a little distance off, making the noise that movement of her wings always made, and then silently crawl thru the brush to the eggs. She progressed forward with an awkward, waddling, like walk but with no sound. She approached the eggs in the direction in which they were lying and settled herself on them without disturbing their position at all. Once she walked off the nest instead of flying and went at least ten feet away before she used her wings to fly.

While incubating she sat with her body fluffed out and very flat on the ground. The tail and wings varied in position, sometimes elevated, sometimes lowered. She showed no preference as to direction and was found facing any of the points of the compass. She would sit motionless for an hour or less of time. A Hermit Thrush hopping almost on her left her undisturbed, her eyes were almost always closed. Occasionally she would open them and wiggle her throat rapidly, the rest of the body remaining immovable. At times
she would continue this for five to ten minute periods. Often repeated, and again she would not repeat the movement for several days.

At intervals she turned the eggs by rocking the body vigorously from side to side. In doing this she often kept the same position but again orientated the body entirely around, and often back again. As she moved she used both feet and bill to change the eggs and to keep them under her. On some occasions she moved the eggs as frequently as every minute and at other times she remained motostatic for over an hour. At first it seemed as if she was stimulated to greater activity by the sun shining directly on her, but her behavior was the same in sun or shade.

On the afternoon of the seventeenth day the nest site was found deserted with the egg shells scattered in different directions about one and one and one-half feet from it. One was broken about one-third from the end; evenly in most places it looked as if it had been cut. The other was more jaggedly broken near the center. I knew the young were nearby because of the unusual agitation shown by the female. She jumped up and down with wings outstretched much more than usual and almost seemed pregnant. The young were soon found because of their
burly color. One was four feet from the old nest, the other one foot away from this one. Both were set flat on the ground and she seemed not thoroughly dry. Each performed a queer back and forth balancing or breathing movement. Both were mostly active and while being photographed were very restless and constantly made attempts to go to the female who whistled to them near by. Because the female refused to return to the young while I was near, I placed them in front of the blind in order to observe them. They were very still but constantly gave a weak boxing-like call. After seeing them drive and youm for a short time I left to let the female return.

The following morning the female was brooding the young where they were left the night before. She flew away as usual and I put the young in front of the blind window. They both remained low on the ground and did not move. Soon each began to give the low-mewing sound. The head bobbed up and down with each cry. After one-half hour I heard the female fly near by and she settled down about four feet from them. She began to make a chattering clucking sound and immediately both chicks showed activity and went to her. Their movement was more of a hop than a walk or flight but it was accomplished with much stretching of wings and neck. The female did not move but waddled off.
the way and nestled under her. The young were
motivated even with the female audibly flying
near but the instant she began clucking both chicks
moved toward her. As further observation was
impossible from the blind of left them. That afternoon
there was no trace of the family anywhere in the
vicinity of the nest.

Description of young: - Entirely covered with buffy natal
down with the skeetings of bare places on the back,
and under the wing and below. Down on front side
stains to the foot back of tarsus bare. Darker above
with lighter spots on crown and a lighter line across
the throat. Tube-like nostrils darker. Bill, white egg
tooth at tip of upper mandible.

Young A, weight 12.8 gms.?
Young B, weight 11.0 gms.

Young A, 
length 15.5 mm.
bill 2.5 mm.

eye 15 mm.
tarsus 2.25 mm.

Young B, 
length 15.0 mm.
bill 2.5 mm.

Young A, egg tooth.

Date of hatching 1931.

Incubation period
14 days Audubon.
17 " Burns
19 " Atwell

Day nests observed 17.
Day discovered - July 9th 1931.
Day chicks hatched - July 24th 1931.