

push the yellowthroat down with his feet, rather than just pecking at an intruder as it usually does during in-flight attacks (Yasukawa and Searcy 1995).

The date of the incident coincides with Red-winged Blackbird egg-laying dates in the Chicago region; the species is extremely aggressive near its nest (Bohlen 1989, Searcy and Yasukawa 1995). It is also interspecifically territorial, including against smaller species such as Marsh Wren (*Cisothorus palustris*) and Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) (Picman 1983, Dunning 1993, Prather et al. 1999). While this particular behavior has never been described in Red-winged Blackbirds, it is consistent with other behaviors of this species, notably its aggressiveness towards other species, including humans (Bohlen 1989, Yasukawa and Searcy 1995).

Why did the blackbird engage in interspecific aggression? It is unlikely that predation was the intent, since birds are not part of the Red-winged Blackbird diet (Yasukawa and Searcy 1995). Interspecific competition may be a reason because there is some overlap in the diet of the two species (Yasukawa and Searcy 1995, Guzy and Ritchison 1999). The sexual selection hypothesis may account for the behavior. If pair formation was still occurring, the male blackbird may have been exhibiting his capacity for nest defense to females, as may occur in Pacific and Common Loons (*Gavia pacifica* and *G. immer*) (Kirkham and Johnson 1988). It is conceivable that Red-winged Blackbirds may be expanding their repertoire of aggressive tactics in areas where urbanization has forced several species to compete for diminishing breeding habitat. Another possible explanation is that the male may have been excessively aggressive, even pathological, or may have been reacting in an inappropriate way for unknown reasons. Common Yellowthroats do not represent a threat to either



Red-winged Blackbird photo by Don DesJardin.

the eggs or the young of Red-winged Blackbirds, so the attack made no sense in terms of potential costs and benefits to the blackbird.

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