

This species apparently also bred in New Jersey and at least rarely in the mountains of (presumably) northern Maryland (Levine 1998). I was able to locate a minimum of 31 other records (individuals) of this species reported during June or July south (or outside) of its normal breeding range by researching back issues of *North American Birds* (and its predecessors, *Field Notes* and *American Birds*) from the breeding seasons 1990-2001 (inclusive). These records included states as far south as Texas, Georgia, and Mississippi, as well as Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, and Nebraska, as well as additional records for Maryland and Pennsylvania.

Of these 31+ birds, 16 (51.6 %) birds with exact dates were from the period 1-8 June and likely represent very late lingering spring migrants. However, the remaining 15 birds (with known dates) or 48.3 % beg the question: What were these birds doing? 9 birds (29 %) come from the period 12-26 June and 6 birds (19.3%) even come from the incredibly late dates of between 3-26 July. Although the bird present 9-10 July in Oxford, Mississippi, said to be "unprecedented" (Muth 1992), the 3 July bird in Dawsonville, Georgia "defying explanation" (Davis 1994), and the 23 June bird in Van Zandt County, Texas, said to be "an oddity" by Lasley and Sexton (1991) were clearly confused individuals, many others much closer to their normal breeding range may have been birds attempting nesting. Examples under this category follow: one at Bowie, Maryland, 8 June -15 July (Iliff 1998), (apparently) multiple birds at Mt. Davis, Pennsylvania (extreme southeastern Pennsylvania all season (Hall 1995), and the territorial male in the Cheat Mountains, West Virginia noted earlier (Hall 1990). Hall (pers. comm.) also states that "over the years there have been a number of reports of sparrows seen or heard at locations in the mountains in June," and that "it may be that some nest in most every year ... but the mountain bog habitat is limited and somewhat ephemeral ... and observers do not get to some of these remote places except when stimulated by something like the (West Virginia Breeding Bird) Atlas project."

### **2002 Update**

June birds were again located in downtown Chicago. K. Wysocki observed birds in at least 8 locations in downtown Chicago with at least 4 of those still holding birds as of 14-17 June, including the 2001 Gleacher Center breeding area, last year's Wacker Drive abandoned nesting site, Seneca Park, and the Thompson Center on Randolph Street. Interestingly, of these locations, Wysocki says that six of those are in or right next to raised concrete planters containing yews (an evergreen) or similar ornamental shrubbery. In addition, C. Williamson, L. Radtke, and T. Schilling found an additional 3 locations where birds were present, including the Lincoln Park Bird Sanctuary and the Illinois Institute of Technology

(at the Vandercook Music Building); and birds were present at the Gleacher Center and Thompson Center through 12 July, although no breeding evidence was noted.

### **What's Next? Finding an Illinois Nest**

The fact that this bird is already nesting far north of northern Illinois while many birds are still migrating through Illinois makes it difficult to determine when to begin looking for the rare nesting pair(s) that might occur within the state's borders. An intensive and exhaustive study conducted in Ontario showed that nest-building began during the third and fourth week of May, with 74 of 87 of the females in that study who initiated nests in May, laying first eggs between 21-27 May (Falls and Kopachena 1994). Given that this species is initiating nests at least as early as the third week in May at such a northerly latitude as Ontario, it is easily conceivable that the species would begin nest-building activities in Illinois at least one to two weeks earlier, or during the first week in May. Bent (1968) cites egg dates as early as 18-27 May for four Canadian provinces, with the latest egg date noted being 8 August (Peck and James 1987). I also found earliest egg dates between 18-30 May for Minnesota, Vermont, Michigan, and Ontario, Canada (Roberts 1932; Laughlin and Kibbe 1985; Brewer et al 1991, McPeck and Adams 1994; Peck and James 1987, respectively).

Nests are usually placed on or just above the ground and usually well-hidden from above by ground vegetation (Falls and Kopachena 1994), although in rare cases, nests are "as high as three feet above ground" (Harrison 1975). As is the case in many species that normally nest on the ground, re-nesting attempts, after initial nests are depredated, are placed off the ground somewhat (Falls and Kopachena 1994, pers. obs.). Since an actual nest has yet to be found in the state, it would be very interesting to find out some of the more specific information concerning the breeding cycle (e.g., clutch size, timing, nesting materials, etc.) of this species in the state, which can only be determined by locating such a nest.

By the late dates noted in the instances in which adults have been noted feeding fledged young/juveniles in the Chicago breeding records, it would appear that such breeding attempts were re-nesting attempts after an initial nest failure. Of 119 clutches initiated in May in Ontario, 48 were lost to predators and 7 failed to hatch (Falls and Kopachena 1994). Given that any nesting attempt in Illinois should start at least as early as or earlier than the Ontario nests cited above, let's say 7 May for a hypothetical Illinois nest, and given the normal clutch of four eggs laid one per day, one to two days after the nest was completed in ~6 days (usually <7 days for most small passerines to build a nest, pers. obs.), this gives us the date of 19 May for hatching date.