

## SUCCESSFUL RELOCATION OF A CEDAR WAXWING NEST WITH EGGS

Zita Conway<sup>1</sup>, David Conway<sup>1</sup> and Evi Coulson<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>18800 Kerr Road, Telkwa, BC V0J 2X2

<sup>2</sup>15087 H. Kerr Road, Telkwa, BC V0J 2X2

On 19 July 2006 we were preparing to replace the rotten foundations of the porch in front of the Conway's house in Quick, a rural area 33 km southeast of Smithers, British Columbia. An excavator was scheduled to come and dig the holes for the new foundation, so we started to cut down a large old lilac bush that was in the way next to the front steps. As we pruned back the lilac we realized that a Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) was sitting on four eggs in a nest hidden in the middle of the bush. Attempting to save the nest, we decided to cut the branch and try to relocate it to some trees at a distance of 18 m from the house, where we hoped it would be well away from disturbance of the building work. The original bush was completely removed and would prevent the bird from searching for the nest there.

The female waxwing became gradually agitated as we removed the surrounding branches that hid the nest, but persisted in staying on the nest. Once the branch was cut free, we attempted to keep it at an angle consistent with its original position, but as far above our body as possible. David and Zita took turns in holding and moving the nest (Figure 1). The process was slow and methodical, moving very short distances and then stopping. Each time we stopped, we would wait for the female waxwing to return to the branch to check the nest, and to briefly incubate for a few seconds before moving any further. This sometimes involved a wait of up to fifteen minutes. We also avoided direct eye contact with the bird and nest.

We relied on the other person to observe the bird, as the person holding the branch was always affecting disinterest and never looking straight at the nest or bird. It was our goal to maintain the bird's ability to locate and recognize her nest, but the waxwing was clearly becoming less comfortable



**Figure 1.** David Conway holding the lilac branch containing the Cedar Waxwing nest and eggs. Telkwa, BC. 19 July 2006 (Zita Conway). BC Photo 3509.

with the whole process the further we got from the original site. She would usually stage her return to the nest by observing for several minutes from the protection of the remaining lilac bush on the other side of the porch steps. After two hours, and a 9-m relocation, the female seemed to become fed up with the move, preened nearby, and then flew off with her mate.

As we were only halfway to the intended new location, we believed that the mother bird would not be able to find the nest there if we completed the move in her absence. We therefore tied the branch with the nest and its contents to a sheltered branch in the middle of the other remaining lilac bush on the opposite side of the steps by the house, where the waxwing had often perched to observe us during the move. This was two m from the original site. About

an hour later the female returned, found the nest, and continued incubating. The subsequent nesting events were recorded:

**1 August** - four recently hatched chicks;

**6 August** - four nestlings, adult not present;

**10 August** - four nestlings growing quickly, nest seems too small;

**13 August** - two young fledged, two juveniles sitting on branches near nest; and

**14 August** - all young have left the vicinity of the nest.

One suggestion why the nest relocation was successful was that the clutch was already three-quarters incubated (see Campbell et al. 1997) and perhaps the female had “bonded” with the eggs and had increased broodiness and attentiveness as the incubation period progressed (Witmer et al. 1997). Another consideration is that, while the original nest site was well hidden, its location was only centimeters from the steps and front door of the house that might suggest that the female may have been habituated to close human proximity. In addition, the waxwing had already indicated some acceptance and preference for the new site - perhaps even confusion between it and the old site - by perching there while observing us during the move.

Other indications of the persistence of this female waxwing in the face of human intrusion and disturbance are the fact that she continued to sit on her eggs while the excavator dug out the old lilac bush, two people clambered and dug by hand under the porch, and a ladder was thrust through the middle of her new lilac bush half a metre from her nest, so that the builder could climb to work on the gutter above her.

The breeding period falls within the range given by Campbell et al. (1997) for the Central Interior ecoprovince. The fledgling stage of 14 days also falls within the range of 14-18 days for the nestling period in North America (Witmer et al. 1997).

We are not aware of other incidences of a

successful relocation of a Cedar Waxwing nest containing eggs and/or nestlings in the bird’s North American breeding range (see Witmer et al. 1997). In addition, there are no records in the files of the British Columbia Nest Record Scheme of an active waxwing nest being translocated (R.W. Campbell pers. comm.).

#### *Literature Cited*

**Campbell, R.W., N.K. Dawe, I. McTaggart-Cowan, J.M. Cooper, G.W., Kaiser, M.C.E. McNall, and G.E.J. Smith.** 1997. The birds of British Columbia. Volume 3 - passerines (flycatchers through vireos). University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, BC. 693 pp.

**Witmer, M.C., D.J. Mountjoy, and L. Elliot.** 1997. Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*). In The Birds of North America, No. 309 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA. and The American Ornithologists’ Union, Washington, DC. 28 pp.

#### *About the Authors*

David and Zita Conway have lived in Quick, BC since 1993, raising goats, horses and vegetables. David is a teacher at the Quick School and two other schools in nearby Houston. Zita is an education assistant working with special needs students.

Evi Coulson is a retired draftsperson who has made her home in Quick, BC since 1980. She is a keen naturalist who has been contributing to the British Columbia Nest Record Scheme for almost 20 years.