

UNUSUAL NEST SITE OF A BROWN CREEPER IN VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Throughout North America the Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*) primarily nests in small crevices between the trunk and a loose piece of bark of mature and old-growth coniferous and deciduous trees (Figure 1). Usually the nest tree is dead or dying (Hejl et al. 2002). Nest site characteristics are similar in British Columbia with living and dead trees reported about equally (Campbell et al. 1997). In Nanaimo, BC., natural-looking nest boxes have been erected to attract nesting Brown Creepers with some success (Merilees 1987, see Campbell et al. 1997, pg. 296).

On 26 May 1999, I noticed a Brown Creeper moving down a wooden utility pole with food in its bill near the vehicle entrance to Frank Hobbs School on Haro Road at Camelot Place in Victoria, British Columbia. The bird disappeared into the open top of a piece of metal channel iron (Figure 2) that was being used as a support. The I-beam support bolted to the pole was 140 cm in height, 21 cm wide and the top entrance available to the creepers was about 4 cm across (Figure 3). I watched the site for a short time and it appeared that two adults were feeding what I surmised were nestlings. I returned with a flashlight and discovered a nest, about 45 cm down, containing an unknown number of young about seven to 10 days old.

Three days later on 29 May, both adults were observed entering the nest site with food. On this visit I counted five well-feathered nestlings about three-quarters full grown. Unfortunately I left for field work but assume the young had fledged as the nest was empty on my return.

The habitat in the immediate vicinity of the nest is residential with many tall, mature Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) trees and a few large Bigleaf Maple (*Acer macrophyllum*) trees scattered



Figure 1. Typical nest site of Brown Creeper under loose bark of a dead tree. Nest materials are visible protruding from the bottom of the crevice. Due to the precarious position of natural nest sites built behind pieces of hanging bark it had been suspected that Brown Creepers do not reuse nest sites. Francis King Park, Victoria, BC. 26 April 1998 (Mark Nyhof).

throughout the adjacent school yard.

Nest materials were typical for the species and consisted of small twigs, bark strips, mosses, grasses, and a few feathers (see Campbell et al. 1997). Several small strips of plastic lining on the outside of the



Figure 2. Access to the Brown Creeper nest was through a narrow opening, two to four centimetres wide, at the top of a piece of metal I-beam attached to a wooden utility pole for support. Victoria, BC. 31 January 2009 (Mark Nyhof). BC Photo 3684b.

nest were unusual. The actual nest was situated 95 cm above ground.

The nest was re-used in two subsequent years. On 26 May 2000 and 4 June 2001, adults were seen entering the nest site with food and leaving with fecal sacs. The number of nestlings being fed was not determined. Davis (1978) suggested that Brown Creepers do not reuse nests probably due to fragility of the nest site (see Figure 1). In some situations, such as the permanent Victoria site, re-nesting may occur where protection and stability are assured.

Brown Creepers were occasionally heard singing in April and May in the vicinity of Frank Hobbs School between 2002 and 2009. On 11 May 2007 and 20 April 2009, a single bird was seen on the utility pole above the nest site but a dense mat of cobwebs across the entrance suggested it was not being used.



Figure 3. Location of the Brown Creeper nest behind a metal I-beam attached to a wooden utility pole. Victoria, BC. 31 January 2009 (Mark Nyhof). BC Photo 3684a.

(R. W. Campbell pers. comm.).

Other unusual sites reported throughout the species' breeding range include nests built behind a wooden grill (Palmer 1949), in a stack of concrete blocks, under loosened roof shingles and behind window shutters (Hejl et al. 2002), and under the tin roof of an outhouse and in fence posts (Peck and James 1987).

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About the Author

Mark is a well-known Victoria artist and naturalist. He has been a major contributor to the British Columbia Nest Record Scheme since the 1980s. He presently serves as a Director of the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies.