

# THE MARITIMES NEST RECORDS SCHEME

by Allan D. Smith (adapted from an article appearing in the Nova Scotia Bird Society Newsletter-Feb. 1980)

The Maritimes Nest Records Scheme (M.N.R.S.) has been operating for twenty years. From its modest beginnings in 1960 with seven persons contributing 129 cards, the scheme has grown steadily to the present average annual receipt of approximately 1400 cards from over 80 contributors. The repository now contains in excess of 23,000 record cards for over 180 species of birds. Provincially, New Brunswick accounts for 49% of the Scheme's holdings, Nova Scotia for 40% and Prince Edward Island for 11%.

The concept of collecting nesting information, particularly from people who would not otherwise publish their data, first began in England in 1939 by the British Trust for Ornithology. The English idea of a nest records scheme was brought to British Columbia in 1955, and now six nesting data collection schemes are operating in Canada (Newfoundland, Maritimes, Quebec, Prairie, and British Columbia).

The Maritimes Nest Records Scheme was established in 1960 by Tony Erskine of the Canadian Wildlife Service at Sackville, New Brunswick. Tony Erskine served as the coordinator of the Scheme until 1968. The Maritimes Nest Records Scheme moved to Saint John, New Brunswick in 1969 and was housed at the New Brunswick Museum where David Christie was its coordinator until 1973. The Scheme returned to Sackville in 1974 and continues under the auspices of the Canadian Wildlife Service where Wildlife Biologist, Al Smith, serves as its coordinator.

Tony Erskine in his article "A Nest Record Card Program in Canada", published in the Canadian Field-Naturalist in 1971, outlines the purpose of a Nest Record Scheme as follows:

"The main purposes for assembling such observations include studies of (a) breeding success, (b) nesting biology, and (c) breeding distribution. The first objective is of interest to all persons concerned about the continued existence of birds, and particularly those responsible for conservation and management of bird populations. It is the most critical as well as the most difficult objective. The second is probably most often pursued in university research programs, while the third objective is a primary concern of museums. Persons pursuing the other objectives can contribute to the first one, which by other means can only be studied on a local scale. Naturalists are interested in all of these, but especially in the last two objectives.

Nest record schemes are not and never have been a substitute for detailed research, but they can be very helpful. Examination of next record files at the start of a study shows quickly whether nests of a given species are easy or difficult to find, where studies may begin, and which people may be able to give useful advice. Nest records extend the range of special studies by providing data from areas which the research worker could not visit in the time available. And they save for future studies the by-products of other field activities, i.e. observations not bearing on the study in hand, which would otherwise pass unrecorded or remain unheeded in a notebook."

A check on the M.N.R.S. holdings illustrates the vast amount of data that has accumulated over the past twenty years. One species, American Robin, has nearly 2500 cards on file and two species, Barn Swallow and Common Grackle, have over 1000. There are