

To photograph birds that nest high in trees it is necessary to build a platform in the branches or to erect a tower. The latter procedure I used to photograph cerulean warblers forty feet from the ground. They accepted the tower, the equipment on top, and me with such complete indifference that I could stroke the female as she brooded her young. However, for photographing birds that build nests beyond the reach of a scaffolding or where the construction of towers is not feasible, I have hit upon another technique.

Twenty years ago when I was still a relative newcomer to New Mexico I found a Western Tanager's nest in a canyon on the western slope of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. It was situated in a thick mass of needles at the end of a ponderosa pine branch more than thirty feet high. To make matters especially difficult the tree was growing on the steep canyon side. I was very anxious to obtain photographs of these birds because of the attractive setting of the nest and the beautiful mature plumage of the male. I considered building a tower but the complications were great and I was on the point of giving the whole project up when the strategy occurred to me that the obvious alternative to building a tower in order to put the camera near the nest was to bring the nest down to the camera. As I mulled this unorthodox idea over it increasingly appealed to me as a practical scheme. Risks to the safety of the young birds were certainly involved, but by meticulous planning I was sure the risks could be minimized.

My plan involved clamping to the nestlimb a wooden bridle so constructed that when the limb was cut off it would hang by a rope in its natural orientation, or could be brought quickly by other ropes into balance in this position. After the successful

execution of this first critical step and after the adult birds had recovered from their initial agitation, I would proceed to lower the branch a foot or two at a time allowing intervals long enough between lowerings for the birds to adjust to the new position. I was prepared, in case they failed to adjust, to raise the nest back to its original location.

The operation went remarkably smoothly causing little disturbance to the tanagers. The first increment of lowering was the most critical and anxious moment. I watched the birds closely for signs of fatal confusion, but had I known then what I know now I would have worried less. On return^{ing} to the tree following the first lowering the tanagers flew to the empty space formerly occupied by their nest and fluttered about in obvious bewilderment, finally alighting on a nearby branch to look the situation over. To my relief they soon found the nest at its lower site and accepted it without further ado, and after each subsequent lowering they adjusted more quickly to its new position. Within an hour the branch was^{down} to a convenient height for photography when I had no difficulty taking all the pictures I wanted. I then raised the branch to a height where the nest would be safe from ground predators. Every day or two thereafter I revisited the site to check for any mishap. None occurred and the young birds fledged normally.