

FIELD NOTES

Eastern Phoebe Uses Elk Hair as Nesting Material

On 20 April 2003, we found an active Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) nest located under a capstone rock ledge on a reclaimed mine in Breathitt County, Kentucky. The capstone was one of several clustered together on top of a southwestern slope at 420 m in elevation and was located approximately 100 m from the forest-reclaimed grassland edge. The nest was positioned 2 m off the ground near the ceiling-vertical wall interface. The nest contained three eggs and was comprised of a mosaic of moss, mud, and grasses. The lining of the nest was a mixture of grass and elk (*Cervus elaphus*) hair. The dark brown color and length of the hair suggested it was from the neck mane region of an elk.

Elk were restored to Kentucky in 1997 after being absent from the state for more than 150 years (Maehr et al. 1999). The site where elk were first released was less than 5 km from the location of this nest. The construction of the phoebe nest overlapped with the period in which elk molt their winter coat. Although Dixon (1938) observed that Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*) used caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) hair to line its nest, we are unaware of any findings that describe Eastern Phoebe using elk hair for such purposes.

Our finding is not the first documented example of a bird species that has benefited from the return of elk to Kentucky. Cox et al. (2003) and others (C. Logsdon, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, personal communication) have observed the Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) scavenging elk carcasses in this area. Although elk can affect the structure and function of ecosystems at various spatial and temporal scales (Larkin 2001), the use of its hair for nesting material indicates a less conspicuous ecological service provided by this large herbivore.

Literature Cited

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