

TWO THRUSH SPECIES FEED THE SAME NESTLINGS

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I observed Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*) nestlings fed by both their parents and an American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) on the same day. On 2 and 3 July 2015 at Leoni Meadows, south of Grizzly Flat, southeast of Placerville, El Dorado Co., California, at about 1250 m elevation, I observed a solitaire nest with five nestlings that appeared to be within a week of fledging. Shaded by tall Ponderosa Pines (*Pinus ponderosa*), the nest was on the ground, surrounded by pine needles, in a south-facing dirt bank below a parking lot near the busy center of a Christian youth camp (Figure 1; see also this issue's front cover).

I saw only one robin, identified by plumage as a male, come to the nest at a time and I assume that it was the same bird. Both adult solitaires were often present in the nest area at the same time, though I observed only one at a time at the nest itself. I observed the robin at the nest during the early mornings before human traffic increased in the area. The parents fed the chicks regularly throughout the day and removed the fecal sacs. The robin brought insects held crosswise in the bill so the ends of the insects were showing on both sides. The solitaires brought food in the throat so I did not see what the parents were feeding the nestlings. On 3 July 2015 I photographed the nest, the environment, and each species feeding the nestlings. The photographs of the adult birds at the nest were digiscoped (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 1. Situation of a Townsend's Solitaire nest, in the shadowed spot between the two pines, below the distant pickup truck and near the center of photo.

Photo by Larry Siemens

NOTES



Figure 2. American Robin feeding the nestlings.

Photo by Larry Siemens



Figure 3. Townsend's Solitaire feeding the nestlings.

Photo by Larry Siemens

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Apparent altruistic behavior in the form of alloparental care has been reported in at least 150 bird species (Riedman 1981). Many reports are of conspecific birds not genetically related to the young being cared for, but there are also many reports of interspecific feeding. Skutch (1999) wrote, "interspecific helping is sporadic and more or less accidental; no species of bird is known to regularly assist any other species in rearing its young. Never the less, so many incidents of this nature continue to be reported from all over the world that, I suspect, every species has occasionally helped every other species of more or less similar size and habits with which it has long been in contact." Shy (1982) listed 140 cases of avian interspecific feeding, 14 of these in the family Turdidae. The American Robin has been reported feeding the nestlings of the Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*), Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*), Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*), House Finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) (all Shy 1982), and Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) (McNair and Duyck 1991).

LITERATURE CITED

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Townsend's Solitaire

Sketch by Bryce Robinson