

same dirt bank that my bumper had nosed the night before!

The young were about four days old; they must have been newly hatched when I began my search two days before. I photographed them over the next eight days from a tent-like blind I fashioned out of wooden poles and sheets. I was able to get several nice slide photographs of the parents feeding their young, and the babies fledged successfully on the ninth day. The young were in the area over the next couple of weeks; I caught a glimpse of them occasionally, and I was grateful they had done so well despite having almost been run over by my car!

I was back in Dawson the following summer with superior equipment and my digital camera. Knowing my chances were slim of finding another Lincoln's Sparrow nest, I didn't bother to search for them, other than to revisit the area where I had shot them in 2003. I did see birds there in June, but I saw no direct evidence of nesting, so I didn't return.

Instead, I concentrated on photographing a Hammond's Flycatcher nest I had spotted ten feet up in a willow tree. From my high scaffolding I had a commanding view of the area, which sat beside Bonanza Creek. On June 20, while I waited for the flycatchers to swoop in with mouthfuls of Crane Flies, I watched a single Lincoln's Sparrow repeatedly visit the same area behind a tall willow. I was reluctant to climb down to investigate—remembering the torture of trying to find last year's nest—but my curiosity finally got the better of me and I relented.

The area in question was a patch of horsetail, brambles, grasses, and other weeds along a small pond. I surveyed the plants for a minute until I heard a familiar chink coming from the nearby willow tree: a perturbed Lincoln's Sparrow was looking at me. They were definitely nesting somewhere low in the tangle of plants.

This time experience guided me: I gently and systematically searched the plants one by one until I moved a small dead branch and revealed the nest. It

also had five tiny young—about three days old—and was sitting on a little stump about ten inches above the ground. The vegetation was very pretty: behind the nest was a wild rose bush, and there were several horsetail stalks beside the stump. Elated, I resumed photographing the flycatchers—although I intended to also shoot the sparrows at the first available opportunity.

June 22 was warm and sunny, and by 2:30 P.M. I was ready to begin photographing the birds. I had set up my blind—a much better Doghouse hunting blind—and strobe lights, and I hoped to capture the vivid colours of the sparrows in flight. Based on my recollections from the previous summer, I knew that they were very quick and—unlike thrushes—didn't stay long at the nest after feeding.

It wasn't long until the first parent flew in to feed its young a mouthful of Crane Flies—the same prey the nearby Hammond's Flycatchers were feeding their young. I began to get some great shots right away. Although wintering Lincoln's Sparrows eat primarily seeds, the adults brought in huge quantities of insects for their young. Small moths seemed to be a favourite food, along with the occasional spider or Crane Fly.

Getting shots of the sparrows in mid-flight was difficult—as I had anticipated—but I kept enlarging my frame size to compensate for my slow reaction time. Soon I was able to predict when they would fly, and I started to get some great flight photos. By the end of that first day I had several pictures that did indeed show the beautiful colours of the sparrows.

The next day was rainy, but when I arrived to shoot the sparrow nest the rain had softened to a drizzle. The horsetail and wild rose were covered with drops of rain, and they looked fantastic in the photos I took. I continued to get better and better shots of the flying Lincoln's Sparrows that day—I worked for ten hours—and by the end I was exhausted but proud of my work.

The following day I enlisted the help of a friend, David James, to take a spell in the blind while I began



preparations to set up on a nearby Fox Sparrow nest. David managed to get fourteen shots while he watched the birds, and one of them was spectacular. Both adults were in flight, the male coming in and the female leaving, and their wings were perfectly spread out. David knew he had a good shot, and I was grateful I had asked him to be there for me; it was a shot not to be missed.

As I took my final shift in the blind, I noticed a wandering Northern Waterthrush—a species of warbler—beside the pond. I was sure it had a nest secreted somewhere along the water's edge, and I kept a close eye on the waterthrush as it teetered along on the pond's vegetation. Unfortunately for me, the bird did not give up its watery hideaway.

Other birds were about: Spotted Sandpipers called at the river's

As the male sparrow lands with food, his mate exits the nest.