



In a blur of wings, the flycatcher darts off her nest to find food for her newly hatched chicks.

their nests in early June.

I had been searching the wild rose bushes for Yellow Warbler nests, which were much more common (I had already found several), when I made my discovery. Nestled in a wild rose, it was a tidy nest of grasses and fluff about two and a half feet above the ground. Initially, I thought it was just another Yellow Warbler nest, but when I returned a few days later and found a different-coloured egg in it, I knew I had located a rarity: only the second ever Alder Flycatcher nest to be recorded in Yukon birding history. That summer I managed to find three more nests: one in a wild raspberry plant, another in a small shrub, and the final one concealed in yet another wild rose. All three were extremely low to the ground and well hidden. I was able to photograph three of the four nests. The fourth one



was robbed by a predator during incubation, while the others all fledged young successfully.

In 2004 I returned to Dawson City, secure in the knowledge of where to look for Alder Flycatchers, although there was no guarantee I would find any. By the end of May, I had located two Hammond's Flycatcher nests, high in some willow trees, but knew I couldn't expect the Alders to begin nest building until mid-June. By June 27, I grew worried, after a detailed but fruitless search of several ideal areas. That afternoon, when scouring the shrubbery along one of the many trails beside the Yukon River, I noticed a small discontinuity in the plants. Parting the bushes gently, I laid my eyes on a neat but empty cup that I instantly recognized as the prize I had been seeking. This nest was only eighteen inches above the ground in a wild raspberry bush, and was composed of grasses, fluff, and fine stems, all woven intricately to the raspberry plant. I left quickly, after marking the area, so as not to disturb the birds if they were around.

As is so often the case, I found that good things come in pairs; a few days later, I was photographing a Chipping Sparrow in a wild rose bush when I saw a tiny eye looking at me, just a few feet beyond the sparrow nest. It was a female Alder Flycatcher sitting on four eggs. This nest was two feet off the ground and completely hidden from above. I was elated to have found two flycatcher nests in such great locations, and I intended to shoot them both, hoping to use my experience from 2003 to my advantage. I watched them carefully over the next two weeks, checking them only briefly to see if there were eggs or young before quickly leaving the area. The second nest hatched first, on July 11; when I peered in, it contained two squirming young and two eggs. On July 14, the raspberry bush nest hatched two tiny young from its three eggs.

Not wanting to miss a trick, I set up on the first of the two nests that same day, hoping to get a shot of both parents at the nest and perhaps

Left: Rictal bristles aid in catching flies, much like a cat's whiskers help it judge distance. Right: Flycatchers are opportunists, occasionally adding grasshoppers to a diet of flying insects.