

Along The Trail

by

ken legg

It is odd how one discovers certain facts after having suspected them for a long time. We had been visiting a group of old Monterey cypress where we had been finding robin, linnet and hummingbird nests.

Every time we went there I would hear a lisping sound which reminded me of a creeper, and on more than one occasion I mentioned to my companions that creepers were in the vicinity. But sometimes we aren't persistent enough and just drop matters.

The golden-crowned kinglet's call reminds me a lot of the creeper's and often during winter I have been fooled. In this, my third year in Humboldt county, I had the opinion that golden-crowned kinglets must be nesting but could find no support or evidence of this although I had spent much time searching for nests.

When my evidence did come, it came fast. We had spotted a small nest near the end of a cypress branch that we took to be a goldfinch's because goldfinches were in the area. As I climbed the ladder to investigate, a tiny bird, making the lisping call, flew to a branch close by. I immediately saw that it was a male golden-crowned kinglet and had a good view of the top of his head complete with red spot in the center of gold.

At about the time I noticed him the female flew in and I noticed that both carried food. They did not go to the nest which I was

trying to reach but flew off to one side.

I immediately knew that we had found a nest of the golden-crowned kinglet; and in a place where we had least expected to find it—in a cypress tree surrounded by a pasture on one side and a marsh on the other — and right behind a house. Perhaps the reason I was surprised was the fact that I had always thought of the golden-crowned kinglet as being a dweller of wild woods and could associate nothing domestic with him.

The nest was small though not nearly as small of the goldfinch nest which we were investigating, and oddest of all, it was hanging from the underside of the limb instead of being on top like most nests. It seemed to be made entirely of ramalina lichen and one got the impression that it was a suspended pocket.

I did not go up to the nest because before I reached it several large young flew out and one of these landed on a member of our party. The bird showed traces of yellowish color on his wings, and his head had black and white stripes although no gold crown was present.

I want to get back to see the nest and examine it more closely, for it is the first I've ever seen, but I'm waiting until we find out if they want to use it for a second brood. If memory serves me right the warbling vireo hangs its nest by the rims, too, but these are not oriole-type pouches, but rather like a tea cup that has had its rim sewed to a branch.

Many of the accounts of nesting golden-crowned kinglets tell of the nest being at great height and near the tip of the branch, and exceedingly difficult to reach. For this reason, it was especially rewarding to discover one which was only 20 feet above the ground on a sturdy limb.

But our good fortune couldn't hold out and we discovered the nest on the day that the young were leaving home. Now I'm hoping that the little birds that have been making those lisping, insect-like sounds will decide to raise a second family in that lichen cradle in the cypress.

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