

The Friends of the Wild Flower Garden



The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher



On June 4th, 1939 Garden Curator Martha Crone noted in her Garden Log: "Mrs. Ure found a pair of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers building a nest in a white oak tree on hill near SW corner of Reserve, about 20 feet from ground, beautifully constructed similar to a Humming-birds nest, but a little larger and thicker." She noted those birds are very rare here (1). They watched the nest during the summer and on July 2nd a Mr. Yelick came in and took down the nest after the young had fledged and sent it to Dr. Thomas Roberts at the University (2). Roberts is the author of *Birds of Minnesota*.

In May and June 1942 Martha Crone writes that the bird is again nesting in a White Oak near Birch Pond, which is just on the West side of the Garden parking lot. In May one brood was raised and after they fledged, the parents were observed building another nest.(2) Both the 1939 and 1942 nesting areas appear to be the same area. The woods between the Garden and Birch Pond do not have a steady stream of visitors as do the paths in the Garden and that may have been satisfactory for the wary parents.

In the October 1942 issue of the journal *The Flicker*, Lulu May Aller wrote about the appearances of this bird at the Garden. She mentions that the first sighting was actually on August 4, 1936 by a birder visiting the area who lived in an area of the country where the bird was abundant. (3)

The bird was sighted again on the west path within the Garden on May 9, 1943. In 1955 Martha again noted that the bird had been sighted nesting again near the area where it had previously been seen and that "It had not been noted in this locality for many years." (4)

The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher is a slim bird, 10 - 13 cm, with a long tail and a thin straight bill. The color on top is pale blue-gray with the underside grayish-white. The tail is black with white edges, the eye has a white circle and in summer, the male has a black V above the bill on the forehead as seen in the photo. Females have less blue, lack the V, but do have the eye circle.

Photo ©John Crawley

Reference:

(1) Martha Crones Garden Log, June 4 1939.

(2) Martha Crones diary 1939 and 1942.

(3) Miss Lulu May Aler. She was one of the first visitors when the Garden opened in April and Martha Crone would often note in her diary that "Miss Aler in" and sometimes for lunch together. Friends member J. S. Futcher (Collection of Friends Memories, 2003) reports that he knew Miss Aler and she started and maintained a large bird feeding station at the back side of the Garden, so she would visit several time a week. By the early 1950's she had become too old to do the work and Mr. Futcher found some neighbor boys who would do it as they were in the Minneapolis Bird Club, which eventually joined the Audubon Society of Minneapolis, which then took over the task. The feeding table is not maintained today.

The Flicker was a journal published by the Minnesota Ornithologists Union.

(4) *The Fringed Gentian*TM, Vol. 3, # 3, July 1955.