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Paul Johnsgard

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2009

Birds of the Great Plains: Family Certhiidae (Creepers)

Paul A. Johnsgard

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, pajohnsgard@gmail.com

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Johnsgard, Paul A., "Birds of the Great Plains: Family Certhiidae (Creepers)" (2009). *Birds of the Great Plains (Revised edition 2009)* by Paul Johnsgard. 44.

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FAMILY CERTHIIDAE
(CREEPERS)



Brown Creeper

Brown Creeper

Certhia familiaris

Breeding Status: Positive records are few, but the bird is known to be an uncommon resident of the Black Hills area of South Dakota and a probable resident of the coniferous wooded areas of north-central Minnesota, with specific nesting records limited to Clearwater and Hubbard counties. There are several old (pre-1900) breeding records for eastern Nebraska and some recent ones for Sarpy County (*Nebraska Bird Review* 44:80, 46:14). Nesting in the Pine Ridge area is also suspected.

Breeding Habitat: In the Black Hills, creepers are associated with pine and spruce forests throughout the year.

Nest Location: The nest is behind the base of a loose piece of bark, on a live or dead tree, and is generally 5-15 feet above the ground. It is a crescent-shaped structure made of twigs, bark fibers, and similar materials.

Clutch Size and Incubation Period: From 4 to 8 eggs, white with reddish brown spotting. The incubation period is 15-16 days. Single-brooded.

Time of Breeding: Active nests in Minnesota have been seen from early May (eggs) to late June (ready to fledge). The estimated breeding season for the Black Hills is mid-May to mid-July.

Breeding Biology: Although a few creepers may remain in the northern states through the winter, they are generally migratory, and in early spring small groups may be encountered foraging in loose flocks, maintaining contact by delicate *cree-cree-cree-ep* notes. At least in the European race of creeper it is known that during cold winter nights the birds frequently roost in cracks in tree trunks. Clinging woodpeckerlike to the bark and supported by the tail, they can withstand subfreezing temperatures even when partly covered by snow. When spring comes the pair begins to work intermittently on the nest, which may require a month to finish. Both sexes bring materials, but only the female does the construction. Observations in America suggest that only the female incubates, whereas in England it has been reported that the male participates in this to some extent. Both sexes also feed the young, which are ready to leave the nest in 13-14 days. Even though their short tail feathers do not provide them any support, the young fledglings are able to cling to vertical branches and move about like adults.

Suggested Reading: Bent 1948; Braaten 1975.

