

Juncos: From Eggs to Empty-Nesters

Photographs by Roger K. Thomas

Some Bird books report that Juncos, which in Georgia breed only in a small range in the northernmost mountains, make their nests on the ground in a well concealed area. In 2008, we had at least two nests in ferns hanging from our deck. The following nest of eggs was first seen and photographed the next year (May 2009) when they nested in a decorative container of dried evergreen immediately next to the cabin's kitchen door (our only ground-level entrance).



Mama Junco incubates the eggs, and she eventually learned that it was not necessary to fly away each time someone entered or exited. Mama and Papa Junco raise the chicks which means feeding and, especially before they get many feathers, covering them to keep them warm. Papa participates during the keeping-them-warm process. During this stage, one parent would fly each time someone entered or exited the door, but the other (presumably the more experienced Mama) did not.



Eager to be fed. The following photo, taken a few days later, shows they have many feathers now and can huddle for long periods alone and keep each other warm. Neither Mama or Papa has been seen sitting on the nest for the past three or four days, although both can be seen to come and go with food.



After about 3 weeks, I had the good fortune to see the baby Juncos fly from the nest at the beckoning "Chip" of Mama or Papa. Within 5 minutes, all four had flown.

Number 1 outside to the right of the nest gets ready to fly.



Number 2 gets ready.



Number 3.



Number 4 is not sure what this man looking at him is doing, but he soon turned and flew away.



THE END