

FEATURE ARTICLES

**BREEDING ECOLOGY OF THE ALTAMIRA ORIOLE IN THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY, TEXAS**

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*Abstract.* During 2002–2003, we studied the breeding ecology of the Altamira Oriole (*Icterus gularis*), a permanent resident that builds pendulous nests in remnant tracts of Tamaulipan brushland in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas. We found 76 active oriole nests, seven of which were reused for second broods, for a total of 83 nesting attempts. Nearly 20% of the breeding individuals in our sample were subadults (second-year orioles). Using a microvideo camera, we were able to estimate incubation and nestling periods of 12.5 and 15.5 days, respectively. Fifty-nine percent of nests fledged at least one young, with successful nests averaging 2.3 fledglings. Failed nests were all intact, indicating that predators entered through the small opening in the top of the nest. Six nests fledged Bronzed Cowbirds (*Molothrus aeneus*), although two of these nests produced orioles as well. Vegetation analysis suggested that orioles preferred the tallest trees in the study sites in which to place their nests. A greater number of fallen logs was also a predictor of nest sites, which agrees with previous studies suggesting that orioles prefer open woodlands and edges. Formerly vast, dense forests in the Lower Rio Grande Valley have degraded into open woodlands, perhaps benefiting Altamira Orioles during the last 50 years. However, because of the oriole's preference for tall trees, continued degradation of forested tracts may not be beneficial to this species.

*Key words:* *Altamira Oriole, breeding ecology, Icterus gularis, Lower Rio Grande Valley, Molothrus aeneus, South Texas, Tamaulipan brushland.*