



# WILDLIFE NOTES

## Blue-gray gnatcatcher

Small in size, the blue-gray gnatcatcher (*Poliola caerulea*) is a pygmy that searches for insects while delivering a shrill “psee” to rival other songbirds. The bird is largely found in the brushy canyons, foothills and valleys nearly statewide during the summer. The species migrate widely throughout New Mexico in shrublands and woodlands.

In most years, this species leaves the state by late September and returns in early April; some remain for the winter. A relative, the black-tailed gnatcatcher (*Polioptila melanura*), is somewhat similar in appearance but far more local.

The blue-gray gnatcatcher is bluish-gray above markings, with the top of the head being black in males. It sports a white edge on the edge of its black tail.

Nests are wonderful models of compactness and appeal.

They're made of plant down, shredded bark

and leaves, and are covered with lichen. All but invisible on a limb, they are disclosed by the birds themselves. The species usually nests in May or June. The four or five eggs are greenish white, spotted with reddish brown and purple around the larger end.

The bird is four to five inches long and smaller than a chickadee, so it's hard to confuse it with another species (except for the black-tailed gnatcatcher.) It

carries its long tail cocked up at a jaunty angle, and often flicks it, showing flashes of black and white. Its bill is small and slim, but longer than the black-

tailed gnatcatcher.

Blue-gray gnatcatchers are common from California across the southern states and up into New England. In the winter, they are found from the southern states south to Mexico, Guatemala, and Cuba.

