

The  
BIRDS of  
CALIFORNIA











# The Birds of California



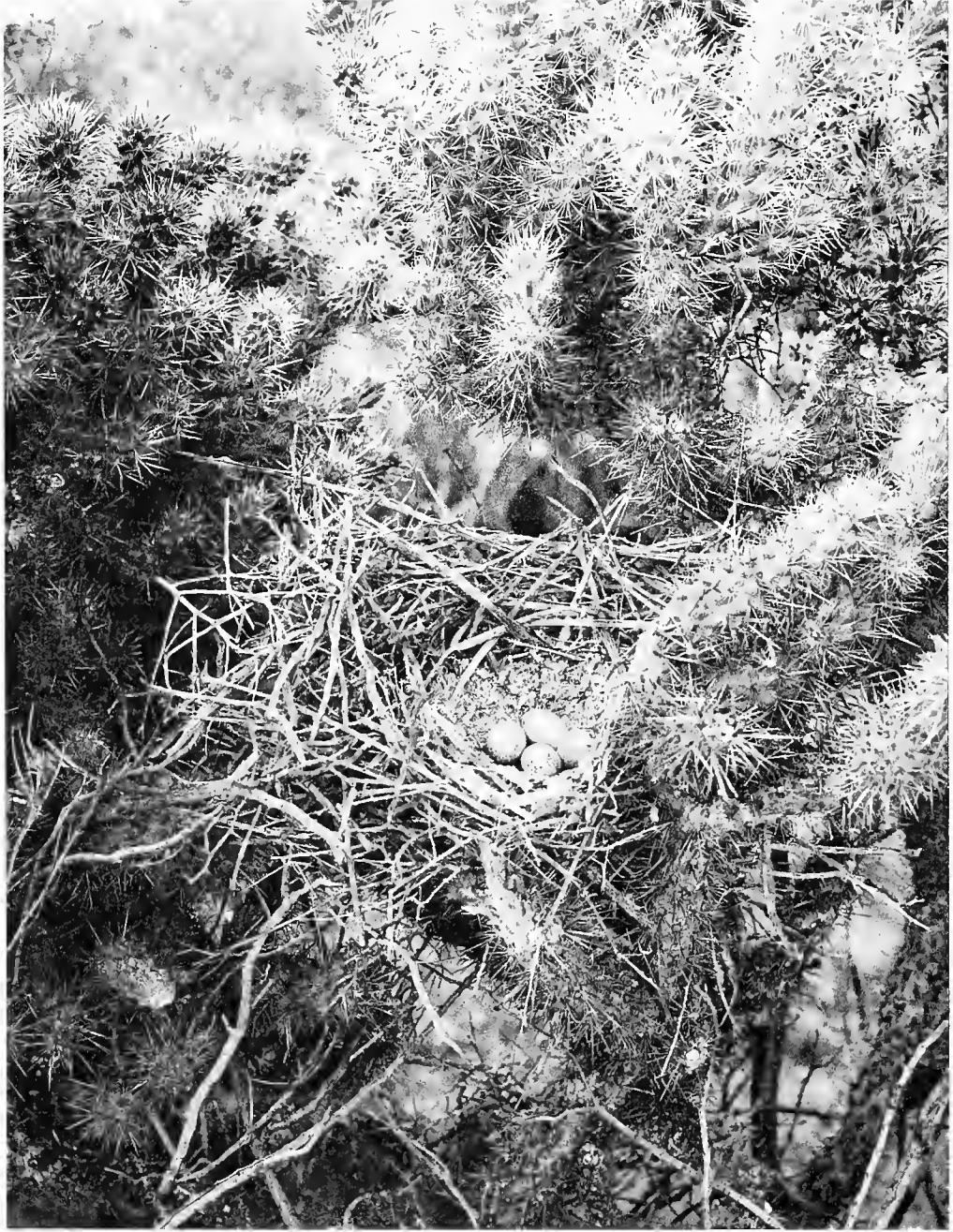


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# The Birds of the Desert

By [Faint Name]



## **Nest and Eggs of Leconte Thrasher in Cholla Cactus**

*From a photograph by Wright M. Pierce*

[Faint text]

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Nest and Eggs of *Leucosticte fuscata* in *Chelia castus*

From a photograph by Wright W. Price

# The Birds of California

A Complete, Scientific and  
Popular Account of the 580 Species and Subspecies of Birds  
Found in the State

By

**William Leon Dawson**

of Santa Barbara

*Director of the International Museum of Comparative Oölogy, Author of "The Birds of Ohio"  
and (with Mr. Bowles) of "The Birds of Washington"*

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Illustrated by 30 Photogravures, 120 Full-page Duotone Plates and More Than  
1100 Half-tone Cuts of Birds in Life, Nests, Eggs, and  
Favorite Haunts, from Photographs

*Chiefly by*

Donald R. Dickey, Wright M. Pierce, Wm. L. Finley  
and the Author

Together with 44 Drawings in the Text and a Series of  
110 Full-page Color Plates

*Chiefly by*

**Major Allan Brooks**

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*Complete in Four Volumes*

*Volume Two*

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**South Moulton Company**

San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco

1923

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# The Birds of California

Vol. II

Description of Species Nos. 103—201





## Cliff Swallow

A. O. U. No. 612. **Petrochelidon albifrons albifrons** (Rafinesque).

**Synonyms.**—EAVE SWALLOW. REPUBLICAN SWALLOW.

**Description.**—*Adult:* A prominent whitish crescent on forehead; crown, back, and an obscure patch on chest steel-blue; throat and sides of head deep chestnut, the color sometimes meeting fellow across nape; breast, sides, and a cervical collar brown-gray; belly white or whitish; wings and tail blackish; rump pale tawny, or pinkish cinnamon,—the color reaching around on flanks; under tail-coverts dusky, edged with whitish. In *young birds* the frontlet is obscure or wanting; the plumage dull brown above; and the throat blackish with white specks. Bill and feet weak, the former suddenly compressed near tip. Length 127-152.4 (5.00-6.00); wing 110.5 (4.35); tail 50.8 (2.00); bill from nostril 5.6 (.22).

**Recognition Marks.**—"Warbler size," but comparison inappropriate—better say "Swallow size"; white forehead and rufous rump. Found in colonies.

**Nesting.**—In colonies with nests often in contact. *Nest:* An inverted stack-shaped, or declined retort-shaped structure of mud; lined scantily, or well, with grass, and depending from the walls of cliffs, sides of barns under the eaves, concrete bridges, and the like. *Eggs:* 4 or 5; white, or, rarely, suffused with pale buffy (cartridge buff to pale pinkish cinnamon), spotted sharply and sparingly, or occasionally broadly, with tendency to confluence, with reddish brown (chocolate to warm sepia and verona brown) and deep vinaceous gray. Av. size 20.8 x 14 (.82 x .55). *Season:* April—July; two broods.

**Range of *Petrochelidon albifrons*.**—North and Middle America, migrating to South America in winter.

**Range of *P. a. albifrons*.**—North America. Breeds in the United States, except Florida and the Rio Grande Valley, and from the western portion of Mexico north to the Arctic Circle (or less easterly). Winter home *undescribed*, but undoubtedly in South America.

**Distribution in California.**—Abundant migrant throughout the State; also a common breeder in favorable sections anywhere below the Boreal zone, but somewhat localized—a general preference for open country instead of timber. Nests on the protected seacoasts, but is curiously absent from the islands. Occurs sparingly in winter in the Imperial Valley (van Rossem).

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Hirundo fulva*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. ii., 1847, p. 31 (Calif.); **Coues**, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 426 (syn., desc., hist. of discovery, habits, etc.; see also p. 364); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 28 (food); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 106, pls. 18, 19 (San Bernardino Mts.; nests built upon a pine tree); **Cooke**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Bull. no. 185, 1915, pp. 19, 26, fig. 6, map (migr. route).

### No. 103a Northern Cliff Swallow

A. O. U. No. 612, part. **Petrochelidon albifrons hypopolia** Oberholser.

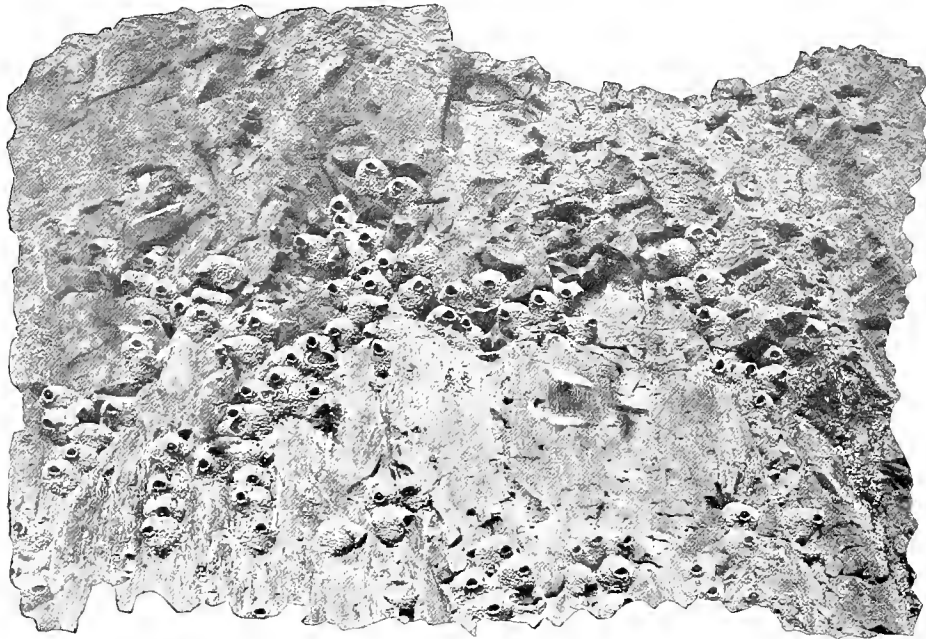
**Description.**—Similar to *Petrochelidon albifrons albifrons* from eastern United States (and California), but larger; frontal band paler, more whitish; breast more grayish (less ochraceous). Length of male: wing 112.1 (4.41); tail 50.7 (2.00); bill 7.2 (.284); tarsus 12.3 (.49). Female: 110.2 (4.34); tail 50.7 (2.00); bill 7 (.27); tarsus 13 (.51).

## *The Cliff Swallows*

**General Range.**—Breeds in northwestern North America north to Mackenzie and central Alaska; west to central British Columbia; south to Montana; and east to Alberta and Mackenzie. Migrates through Wyoming and California. Winters probably in South America.

**Occurrence in California.**—One record: Laguna Station, San Diego County, May 4, 1894.

**Authority.**—Oberholser (*Petrochelidon albifrons hypopolia*), Canadian Field-Naturalist, vol. xxxiii., Nov. 1919, p. 95 (orig. desc.; type locality, Ft. Norman, Mackenzie; one spec. listed from Calif.).



*Taken in Washington*

COLONIAL NESTING

*Photo by the Author*

DOUBTLESS the Lord—to paraphrase Lincoln's aphorism—must love the Cliff Swallows, else he would not have made so many of them. Common they unquestionably are; yet I do not know that they are altogether lovable. Common they are, too, not alone in the sense of abundance, but also in that of familiarity. They harry our pastures, they swarm about our horse-ponds, they appropriate the eaves of our barns, and they even invade our porches and house-gables, if unrebuked. But they are not exactly friendly, as are the Barn Swallows; or dainty and fastidious, as are the Violet-greens. There is something, also, a little detached about their ways. Their colonies are self-sufficient, like those of ants. They dwell, a people apart, like the Jews, who

## *The Cliff Swallows*

do not even ask the fellowship which we would gladly accord them. Perhaps it is for the same reason, viz., that their fathers were bred in the wilderness, where all things are hostile, and that the race has acquired the habit of being repulsed.

But there! every person, even a bird-person, deserves to be judged for what he is, and not for what he is not. Also, doubtless, the Lord loves the Cliff Swallow.

One only special cause of resentment does the author cherish against this bird, and that, admittedly, not a moral fault. In certain sections, as for example, the flower-clad slopes of eastern San Luis Obispo County, Cliff Swallows are so abundant as actually to distract and weary the attention. In their quest for flying insects they race tirelessly

to and fro across the landscape, weaving a magic tapestry of search until it would seem that not a cubic inch of atmosphere remains without its invisible thread of flight. The Swallows appear friendly enough, but upon such occasions it is our coin and not our fellowship they are after. For as man or beast moves about in the luscious grasses, swarms of insects arise, and these the avaricious eye of the Swallow eagerly notes. Bird-study—of anything but the Cliff Swallow—is difficult in such distracting circumstances.

But all resentment vanishes when one sees a colony of these sturdy



*Taken in Santa Barbara County*

*Photo by the Author*

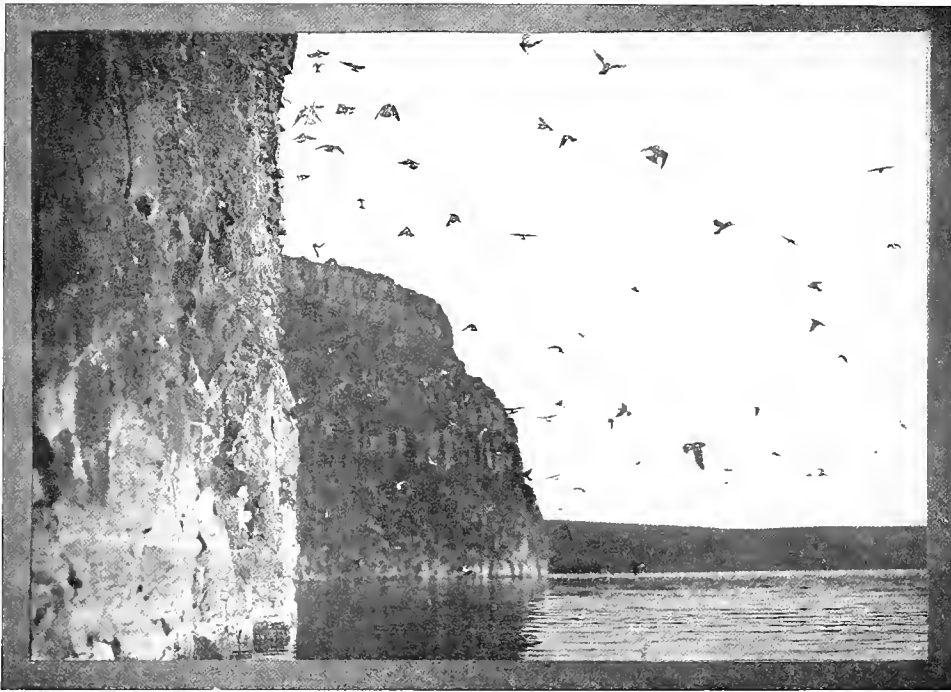
CLIFF SWALLOWS A-WING

## *The Cliff Swallows*

“republicans,” nesting in the wild along the solemn bastions of some river-fronting, lake-fronting, or even sea-fronting, cliff. The particular nesting site may be a matter of a season’s use, populous this year and abandoned the next; but somewhere along this frowning face of granite or sandstone or basalt, Swallows were nesting before Fra Junipero Serra came to California with the touch of civilization. Soon after the sculptor, Ice, unveiled that masterpiece, Yosemite, these fly-catching cohorts must have swept into California to establish themselves forevermore.

Evidence of this age-long occupation of the cliffs is furnished not only by the muddy cicatrices left by fallen nests, but, wherever the wall juts out or overhangs, so as to shield a place below from the action of the elements, by beds of guano and coprolitic stalagmites, which cling to the uneven surface of the rock. Judged by the same testimony, certain of the larger blow-holes, or lava-bubbles, as well as under-cut arches of dobe, must be used at night as lodging places, at least out of the nesting season.

The well-known bottle- or retort-shaped nests of the Cliff Swallow



*Taken in Washington*

CLIFF DWELLERS

*Photo by the Author*



**Even Thine Altars**

Cliff Swallows' Nests in Ruins of Old Mission San Juan Capistrano

*From a photograph by the Author*



## *The Cliff Swallows*

are composed of pellets of mud deposited in successive beakfuls by the industrious birds. It is always interesting to see a twittering company of these little masons gathering by the water's edge and moulding their mortar to the required consistency. Every wing is a-flutter, and so seething is the commotion that no camera can do justice to the scene. Not less interesting is it to watch them lay the foundations upon some smooth rock facet. Their tiny beaks must serve for hods and trowels, and because the first course of mud masonry is the most particular, they alternately cling and flutter, as with many prods and fairy thumps they force the putty-like material to lay hold of the indifferent wall.

There is usually much passing to and fro in the case of these cliff-dwellers, and we can never hope to steal upon them unawares. When one approaches from below, an alarm is sounded, and anxious heads, wearing a white frown, are first thrust out at the mouths of the bottles, and then the air becomes filled with flying swallows, charging about the head of the intruder in bewildering mazes, and raising a babble of strange frangible cries, as though a thousand sets of toy dishes were being broken. If the newcomer appears harmless, the birds return to their eggs by ones



*Taken in the San Bernardino Mountains*

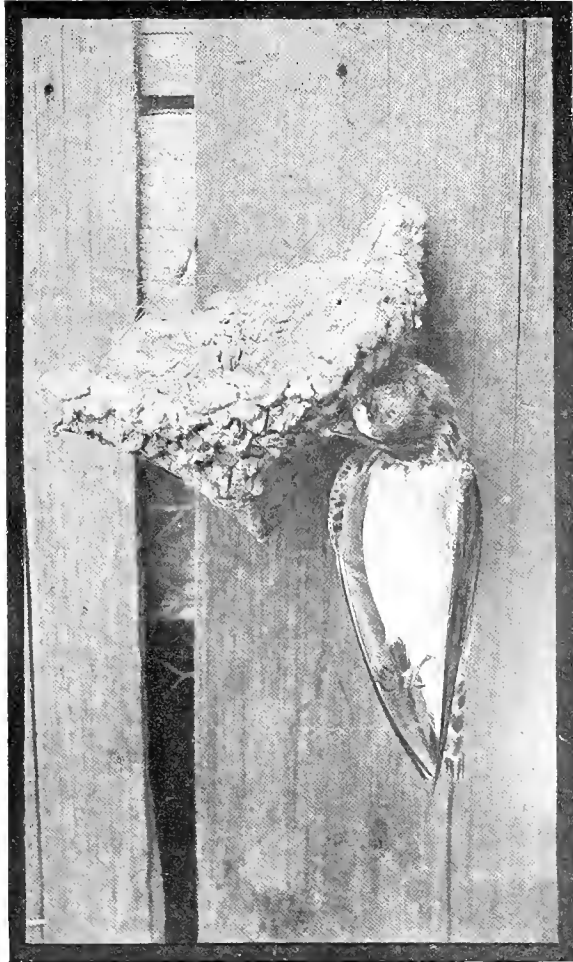
*Photo by Wright M. Pierce*

AN UNUSUAL NESTING SITE—YELLOW PINE AT BEAR LAKE

## The Cliff Swallows

and twos and dozens, until most of the company are disposed again. At such a moment it is great sport to set up a sudden shout. There is an instant hush, electric, ominous, while every little Injun of 'em is making for the door of his wigwam. Then they dislodge themselves from the cliff like an avalanche of missiles, a silent down-sweeping cloud; but immediately they gain assurance in the open, and bedlam begins all over again.

Once, in a wild, separate Paradise, in Kern County, we took lodgings



Taken in San Bernardino County

Photo by Wright M. Pierce

A FAMILIAR TRAGEDY  
BUT BIRDS CANNOT RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO USE HORSEHAIR

528

for a night in a sandstone cave which happened to shelter at its upper and outer rim a small colony of Cliff Swallows. There were ten pairs of them within ten feet of our sleeping heads. And they were more or less upon our minds all night long, as we, no doubt, were upon theirs, for every once in a while some restless bird would make an excursion out into the darkness to settle his nerves. Towards morning I observed a new nest-note, a sort of croaking protest made by a bird when jostled (or so one would judge). Probably Mrs. Swallow was reminding her sleepy spouse that it was time to get up and seize the early bug; while he, poor soul, recalling his disturbed slumbers, grunted disapproval.

During the morning which followed we learned to distinguish the *chirp* in several qualities or emphases, the *dimp*, or china-smashing note of extreme alarm, and the creaking song. This song exhibits, in outline only, the characteristics of the more able Western Martin's, especially when it is uttered from the mouth of the nest, as the Martin is so fond of doing.

Both Grinnell<sup>1</sup> and Willett<sup>2</sup> have recorded how the Cliff Swallows of

<sup>1</sup>The Biota of the San Bernardino Mountains, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup>Birds of the Pac. Slope So. Cal., p. 90.



## *The Rough-winged Swallow*

Bear Valley, hard put to it for nesting sites in an otherwise delectable country, attached their retorts to the sides and under surfaces of great pine trees. On the beach cliffs near Santa Barbara I have found them, not intermingling freely with the Bank Swallows, but sponging more or less upon the latter for nesting sites. The entrance to a Bank Swallow's burrow, whether new or old, is plugged up by a mud wall of conventional appearance, and this mud facing has the customary entrance hole of the Cliff Swallow; but behind the wall there is nothing but the lens-shaped chamber in the sand, as fashioned by the Bank Swallow. This was the usual style of composite nest; but one found by my son William presented a still more curious set of conditions. The mud plug, built some six inches inside the entrance, admitted to an empty chamber, while back of this was a similar partition, which, in turn, guarded a well-lined nest with three fresh eggs (June 28, 1913).

Cliff Swallows have won a bad name as tenants, because their quarters are likely to be infested with bed-bugs, not, as it appears,<sup>1</sup> the unwelcome troubler of human dreams, *Acanthia* (formerly *Cimex*) *lectuaria*, but a related species, *Acanthia hirundinis*. It is not at all probable that this related bug would prey upon mankind, but the suggested association is an unpleasant one. Certainly the birds must suffer tortures from their insect persecutors, for I have seen whole colonies deserted, eggs and all, on this account.

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No. 104

### Rough-winged Swallow

A. O. U. No. 617. *Stelgidopteryx serripennis* (Audubon).

**Description.**—*Adult*: Upperparts warm brownish gray, or snuff-brown; breast and sides a paler tint of the same color, shading insensibly on borders; throat still paler, sooty gray (whitish in winter); wings fuscous. *Young birds* exhibit some rusty edging of the feathers above, especially on the wings; and lack the peculiar, recurved hooks on the edge of the outer primary. Size a little larger than the next. Length 127-146.1 (5.00-5.75); wing 109.2 (4.30); tail 47 (1.85); bill from nostril 5.3 (.21).

**Recognition Marks.**—Medium swallow size; throat not definitely white (nearest so in winter); warmish brown coloration, and brownish suffusion below fading to white on belly. It is easy to distinguish between this and the succeeding species if a little care is taken to note the general pattern of underparts.

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Edward R. Warren of Colorado Springs, Colo., has given this matter special study. See his excellent article in *The Condor*, Vol. XV., Jan., 1913, pp. 14-16.

## *The Rough-winged Swallow*

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* In crevice of cliffs at end of tunnels of earth, or sand-banks, or in crannies of bridges, etc.; of leaves, weed-stems, grasses, feathers, and the like; bulky or compact according to situation. *Eggs:* 4 to 8; white. Av. size 18.8 x 13 (.74 x .51). *Season:* May, June, according to altitude; one brood.

**General Range.**—United States at large, and southern portions of Canada; breeding north to Connecticut, southern Ontario, southern Minnesota, British Columbia, etc.; south to southern border, and in Mexico south to Jalisco. Winters from central Mexico to Costa Rica.

**Distribution in California.**—Of general occurrence during migrations; locally common as a breeder, chiefly in the Lower and Upper Sonoran zones. Less common in the humid coastal regions. Has occurred in winter, but probably only as an early migrant: San Diego, Jan. 27 (J. G. Cooper); Potholes, Feb. 8, 1912.

**Authorities.**—**Heermann**, Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 2, ii., 1853, p. 261 (Calif.); **Cooper**, Orn. Calif. 1870, p. 110 (San Diego, Nov. and Jan.); **Coues**, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 438 (syn., habits, desc., etc.; see also p. 364); **Tyler**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 9, 1913, p. 93 (San Joaquin Valley, nesting habits); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xii., 1914, p. 186 (Colo. Valley; nesting habits, etc.).

IT NOT infrequently happens that some oversight, or want of discrimination, on the part of early observers condemns a species to long obscurity or unending misapprehension. The Bank Swallow was at once recognized by the pioneer naturalists of America as being identical with the well-known European bird, but it was not till 1838 that Audubon distinguished its superficially similar but structurally different relative, the Rough-wing. Dr. Cooper,<sup>1</sup> writing in 1870 under the caption "Bank Swallow," says: "This species . . . seems rather less common on this coast than the next [i. e., the Rough-wing] and resembles that so closely that they cannot be distinguished without examination of specimens. Their habits being exactly alike, I will describe those of both under one heading." And this the good doctor proceeds to do, under the caption of Rough-winged Swallow, to the great confusion of all succeeding literature.

Of course the two species are perfectly, if not easily, distinguishable a-wing; and of course their habits do show marked differences. It may be easier, however, to take the Bank Swallow as a basis, and to say that our subject differs from that species by thus and so.

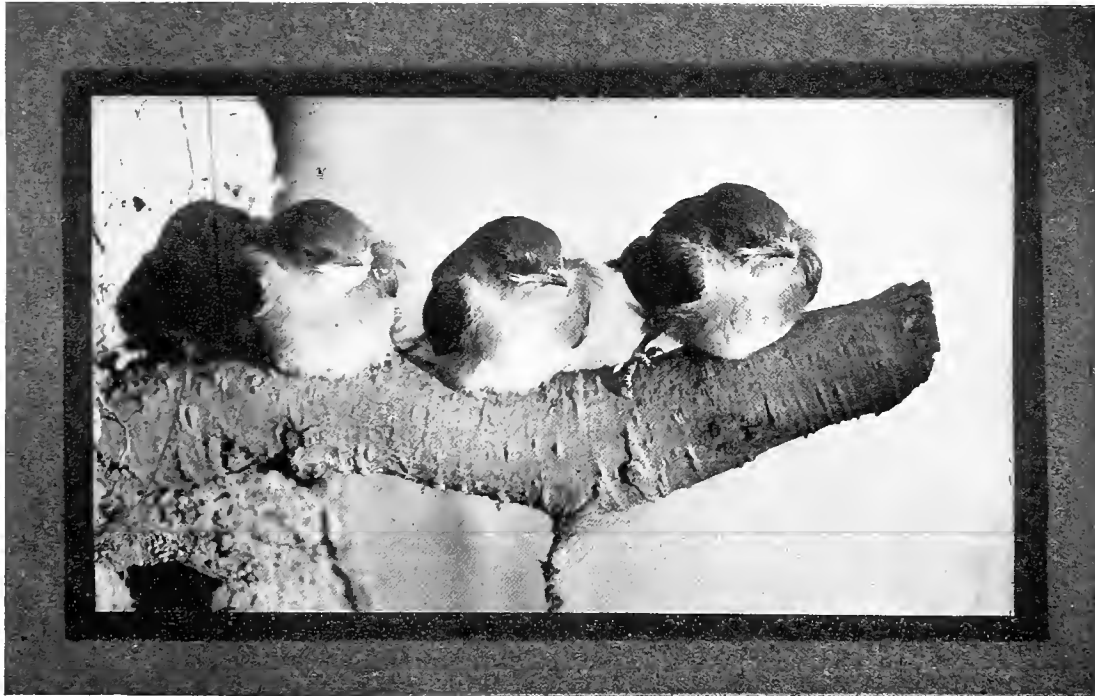
In the first place it has those curious little hooklets on the edge of the wing (especially on the outer edge of the first primary)—nobody knows what they are for. They surely cannot be of service in enabling the bird to cling to perpendicular surfaces, for they are bent forward, and the bird is not known to cling head-downward. It is easy to see how the bird might brace its wings against the sides of its nesting tunnel

<sup>1</sup>Ornithology of Calif., Vol. I., Land Birds, p. 110.

### *The Rough-winged Swallow*

to prevent forcible abduction, but no one knows of a possible enemy which might be circumvented in this way.

Again, the Rough-winged Swallow has a steadier, rather more labored flight than that of its foil. Its aerial course is more dignified, leisurely, less impulsive and erratic. In nesting, although it may include the range of the Sand Martin, or even nest side by side with it, it has a wider latitude for choice and is not hampered by local tradition. If it burrows in a bank it is quite as likely to dig near the bottom as the top. Crevices in masonry, in dove walls, or stone quarries, crannies and abutments of bridges, or even (it is said, although I am very skeptical) holes in trees, are utilized. Unlike the Bank Swallows, the Rough-wings do not colonize to any great extent, but are rather solitary. Favorable conditions may attract several pairs to a given spot, as a gravel pit, but when together they are little given to community functions. In open country, where the cover is scarce but the food supply attractive, I have found them nesting along irrigating ditches with banks not over two feet high. Conditions for nesting sites are very favorable in California, by reason of the steep-walled barrancas which abound along the

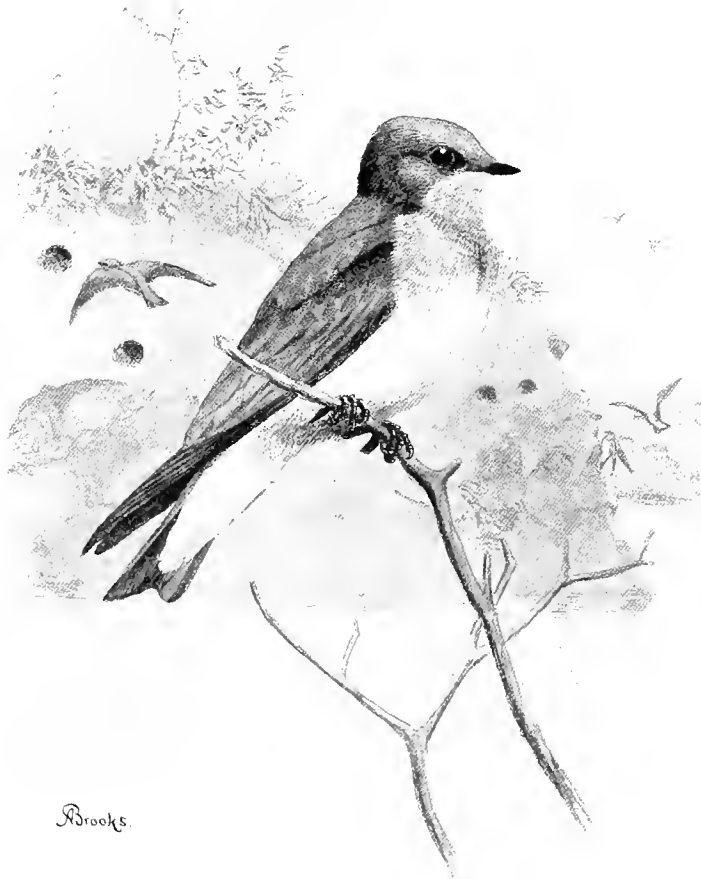


*Taken in Oregon*

BABY ROUGH-WINGS

*Photo by Finley & Bohlman*

## *The Rough-winged Swallow*



ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOWS

lower levels of the treeless foothills. Yet not over a hundredth of these "dry creeks" are utilized, for the birds are rather dependent upon the proximity of water.

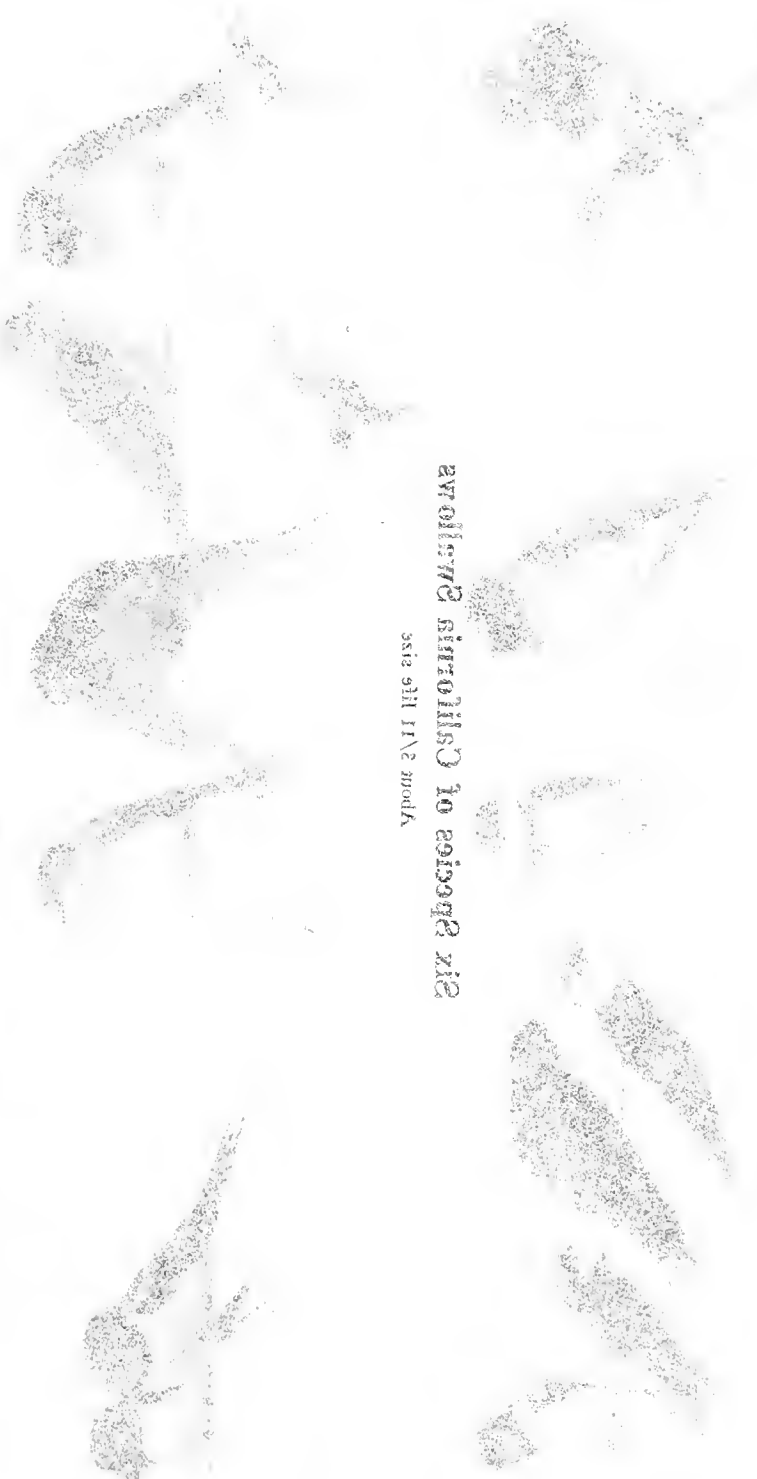
The nesting holes vary widely in their consistency. While the birds are quite capable of excavating for themselves, they prefer some natural lead,—an old Kingfisher's burrow, a hole left by a rotten root or a fallen stone, or something of the sort. One I found near Santa Barbara nesting under a concrete culvert in a small rectangular storm-drain too small to admit the arm. When excavated by the bird, the entrance is quite certain to be round and over-large, as distinguished from the lens-shaped opening of the Bank Swallow's tunnel. Nesting materials are everything or nothing, but loose, open-wrought

cushions of dried grasses are the rule, where the birds have room enough. Some nests are excessively large, quite beyond all possible need, as though the birds had not forgotten some ancient tree-nesting habit.

These Swallows are fairly common throughout the indicated areas of Upper and Lower Sonoran belts, and are evidently on the increase. Dr. Grinnell found them well established in the Colorado River Valley; and they have been noted, as well, in some of the Upper Sonoran "islands" in the upper part of the State. But after all is said, the Rough-wings are a humble folk; and it would require an ardent specialist to ferret out and illuminate all their modest doings.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.

201573 SIMONSON TO AIRBORNE XIS  
 201573 SIMONSON TO AIRBORNE XIS



## Six Species of California Swallows

About 3/11 life size

*Barn S., juv.*—*Barn S., fem.*—*Rough-winged S., m.*—*Barn S., m.*—*Cliff S., juv.*—*Cliff S., f.*  
(Top Row)

(Lower Row)

*Tree S., f.*      *Tree S., m.*      *Bank S., f.*      *Cliff S., m.*      *Violet Green, f.*  
*Tree S., juv.*      *Violet-green, m.*      *Violet-green, juv.*



Allen Brooks  
1912





## Bank Swallow

A. O. U. No. 616. *Riparia riparia* (Linnæus).

**Synonym.**—SAND MARTIN.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Upperparts plain brownish gray; wings fuscous; throat and belly white; a brownish gray band across the breast; a tiny tuft of feathers above the hind toe. There is some variation in the extent of the pectoral band; it is sometimes produced indistinctly backward, and sometimes even interrupted. Length 127-133.3 (5.00-5.25); wing 100.3 (3.95); tail 50 (1.97); bill from nostril 5.1 (.20).

**Recognition Marks.**—Smallest of the Swallows; throat white; brownish gray pectoral band on white ground.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: At end of tunnel in bank, two or three feet in; a frail mat of straws and grasses, or, occasionally, feathers. *Eggs*: 4 to 6 (7 of record); pure white. Av. size 17.8 x 12.5 (.70 x .49). *Season*: May-June; one brood.

**General Range.**—Northern Hemisphere. In America south to West Indies, Central America, and South America; breeding in the East about the latitude of Virginia; and in the West from the southern border states northward to the limit of trees, winters in Brazil and (at least) Peru.

**Distribution in California.**—A common migrant, practically throughout the State; rather rare as a breeder. Known colonies as follows: Alvord (A. K. Fisher); Placerville (Emerson); Paicines (J. & J. W. Mailliard); Oceanside (N. K. Carpenter); near Long Beach (J. Grinnell); Port Los Angeles (Shepardson); Whittier (Willett); Santa Barbara (Author); San Ardo (Author); Santa Cruz (Skirm).

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Cotyle riparia*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., iii., 1846, p. 111 (Calif.); *Coues*, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 435 (syn., desc., etc.; see also p. 364); *Judd*, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 17, 1902, p. 46, pl. ix., fig. 2 (food); *Shepardson*, Condor, vol. xi., 1909, p. 174 (breeding colonies in s. Calif.).

THOSE who know, conceive a regard for this plain-colored bird which is quite out of keeping with its humble garb and its confessedly prosy ways. The fact is, we have no other bird, so nearly cosmopolitan, and we of the West, who are being eternally reminded of our newness, and who are, indeed, upon the alert for some new shade of color upon the feather of a bird for each added degree of longitude, take comfort in the fact that here at least is an unchangeable type, a visible link between Port Los Angeles and Florence on the Arno. Birds of precisely this feather are summering on the Lena, or else hawking at flies on the sunny Guadalquivir, or tunneling the sacred banks of the Jordan; and the flattery is not lost upon us of such as still prefer Weaver Creek and the San Benito.

The life of a Swallow is so largely spent a-wing, that our interest in it centers, even more than in the case of other birds, upon the time when it is bound to earth by family ties. We are scarcely conscious

## *The Bank Swallow*

of the presence of the Bank Swallow until one day we see a great company of them fluttering about a sand-bank which overlooks the river, all busily engaged in digging the tunnels which are to shelter their young for that season. These birds are regularly gregarious, and a nesting colony frequently numbers hundreds.

The birds usually select a spot well up within a foot or two of the top of a nearly perpendicular bank of soil or sand, and dig a straight, round tunnel three or four feet long. If, however, the soil contains stones, a greater length and many turns may be required to reach a safe spot for the slight enlargement where the nest proper is placed. The bird appears to loosen the earth with its closed beak, swaying from side to side the while; and, of course, fallen dirt or sand is carried out in the mouth.

Sometimes the little miner finds a lens-shaped tunnel more convenient, and I have seen them as much as seven inches in width and only two in height. While the members of a colony, especially if it be a small one, usually occupy a straggling, horizontal line of holes, their burrows are not infrequently to be seen in loose tiers, so that the bank presents a honey-combed appearance.

Communal life seems a pleasant thing to these Swallows, and there is usually a considerable stir of activity about the quarters. A good deal of social twittering also attends the unending gyrations. The wonder is that the rapidly moving parts of this aerial kaleidoscope never collide, and that the cases of turning up at the wrong number are either so few or so amicably adjusted. The nesting season is, however, beset with dangers. Weasels and their ilk sometimes find entrance to the nesting burrows, and they are an easy prey to underbred small boys as well. The undermining of the nesting cliff by the swirling river sometimes



*Taken near Santa Barbara*

*Photo by the Author*

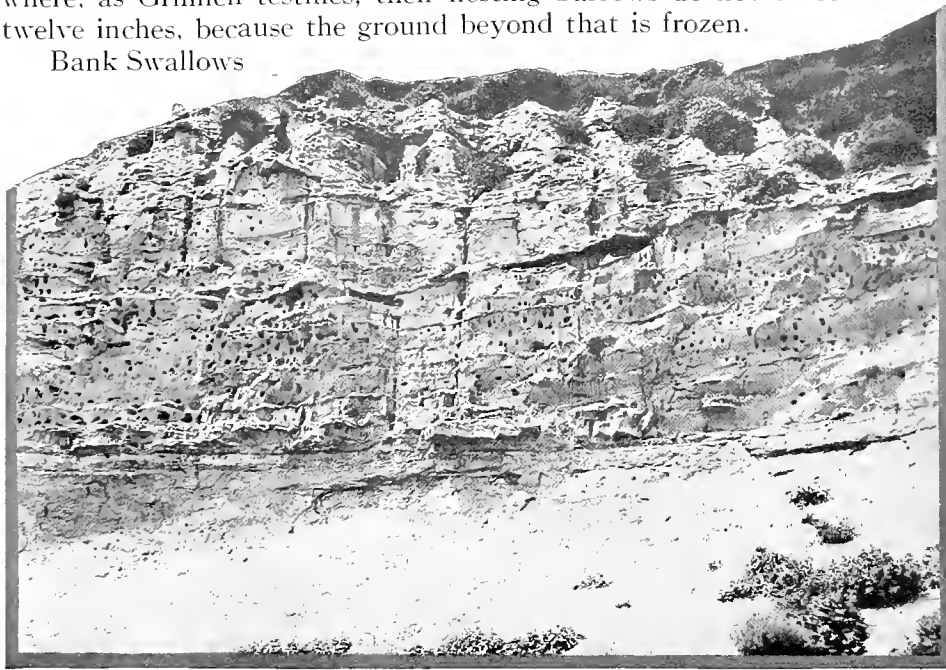
NEST AND EGGS OF BANK SWALLOW

## *The Bank Swallow*

precipitates an entire colony—at least its real and personal property—to destruction.

June is the nesting month, and this whether the colony elects to breed on a Santa Barbara sea-cliff (where March would do just as well) or within the Arctic Circle (where it is June or nothing). June seems to be a sort of sacrament which keeps this widely dispersed species bound together. How diverse are the conditions under which these stout-hearted gypsies will consent to live, may be realized from two record stations of the West: Alford in Inyo County, where the mercury owns a friendly acquaintance with 110; and the Kowak River in Alaska, where, as Grinnell testifies, their nesting burrows do not exceed twelve inches, because the ground beyond that is frozen.

Bank Swallows



*Taken near Santa Barbara*

A NESTING CLIFF

*Photo by the Author*

are the least musical of the Swallow kind,—unless, perhaps, we except the Rough-winged species, which is naturally associated in mind with this. They have, nevertheless, a characteristic twitter, an unmelodious sound, like the rubbing together of two pebbles. An odd effect is produced when the excited birds are describing remonstrant parabolas at an intruder's head. The heightened pitch in the tones of the rapidly approaching bird, followed instantly by the lower tone of full retreat, is enough to startle a slumbering conscience in one who meditates mischief on a Swallow's home.

## Barn Swallow

A. O. U. No. 613. **Hirundo rustica erythrogaster** Boddaert.

**Synonyms.**—AMERICAN BARN SWALLOW. FORK-TAILED SWALLOW.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Above lustrous steel-blue; in front an imperfect (interrupted) pectoral collar of the same hue; forehead chestnut; lores black; throat and breast rufous; remaining underparts, including lining of wings, more or less tinged with the same, according to age and season; wings and tail blackish, with purplish or greenish reflections; tail deeply forked, the outer pair of feathers being from one to two inches longer, and the rest graduated; white blotches on inner webs (except on middle pair) follow the bifurcation. *Immature*: Forehead and throat paler; duller or brownish above; lateral tail-feathers not so long. Length of adult 177.8 (7.00) wing 120.6 (4.75); tail 76.2-114.3 (3.00-4.50); bill from nostril 6.1 (.24).

**Recognition Marks.**—Aerial habits; rufous of throat and underparts; *forked tail*; nest usually *inside* the barn.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A neat bracket or half-bowl of mud; luxuriously lined with grass and feathers; and cemented to a beam of barn or bridge. In the West still nests occasionally in original haunts, viz., cliffs, caves, and crannied sea-walls. *Eggs*: 3 to 6; ovate or elongate ovate; white, or, rarely, pinkish white, spotted sharply and sparingly and rather uniformly with reddish brown of several shades and vinaceous gray. Av. of 23 southern-taken eggs: 18.8 x 13.2 (.74 x .52). *Season*: May, June; one or two broods.

**General Range.**—North America, breeding from northwestern Alaska, southern Manitoba and southern Ungava, south to North Carolina, northern Arkansas, and southwestern Texas, thence throughout the southwestern states, and in Mexico south to Jalisco and Tepic. Winters from southern Mexico to Brazil, Argentina, and central Chile.

**Distribution in California.**—An abundant migrant practically throughout the State; remains to breed in favorable sections west of the Sierras, more sparingly and locally east of the Sierras and in southern California. Most abundant in the Tulare-Merced section and in the vicinity of San Francisco Bay. Found interruptedly along the sea-coast and commonly upon the islands. Occurs sparingly in winter in the Imperial Valley (van Rossem).

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Hirundo rufa*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 2, ii., 1853, p. 261 (Calif.); **Coues**, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 407 (syn., habits, etc.; see also p. 364); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 30 (food); **van Rossem**, Condor, vol. xiii., 1911, p. 133 (Imperial Valley in winter); **Tyler**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 9, 1913, p. 91 (Fresno; occurrence, habits, nesting).

ONE hardly knows what quality to admire most in this boyhood's and life-long friend, the Barn Swallow. All the dear associations of life at the old farm come thronging up at sight of him. You think of him somehow as a part of the sacred past; yet here he is today as young and as fresh as ever, bubbling over with springtime laughter, ready for a frolic over the bee-haunted meadows, or willing to settle down on

## The Barn Swallow

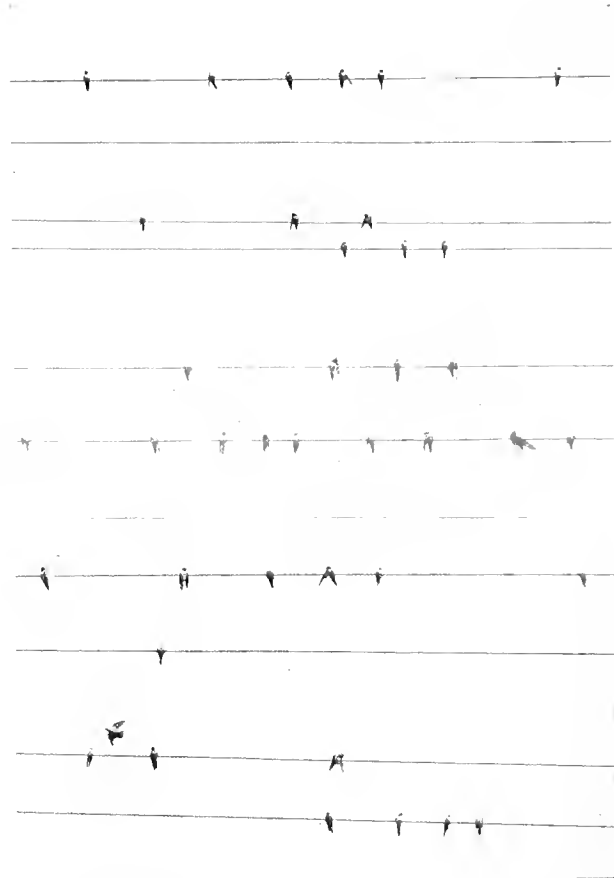
the nearest fence-wire and recount to you with sparkling eyes and eloquent gesture the adventures of that glorious trip up from Mexico.

Perhaps it is his childlike enthusiasm which stirs us. He has come many a league this morning, yet he dashes in through the open doors and shouts like a boisterous schoolboy, "Here we are, you dear old barn; ar'n't we glad to get back again!" Then it's out to see the horse-pond; and down the lane where the cattle go, with a dip under the bridge and a few turns over the orchard—a new purpose, or none, every second—life one full measure of abounding joy!

Or is it the apotheosis of motion which takes the eye? See them as they cast a magic spell over the glowing green of the young alfalfa, winding about in the dizzy patterns of a heavenly ballet, or vaulting at a thought to snatch an insect from the sky. Back again, in again, out again, away, anywhere, everywhere, with two-miles-a-minute speed and effortless grace.

But it is the sweet confidingness of this dainty Swallow which wins us. With all the face of Nature before him he yet prefers the vicinage of men, and comes out of his hilly fastnesses as soon as we provide him shelter. We *all* like to be trusted, whether we deserve it or not. And if we don't deserve it—well, we will, that's all.

Truth to tell, the transition of the Barn Swallow from a state of nature to one of human dependence has been less conspicuous and less perfect in California than it has further north. With us the bird is still to be found nesting, sparingly, in little caves or rock-pockets in wild ravines, or, still more commonly, in sea-washed caverns. On the Santa Barbara Islands, especially, Barn Swallows are a familiar feature of shore life; and they show no disposition to forsake their haunts nor to avail

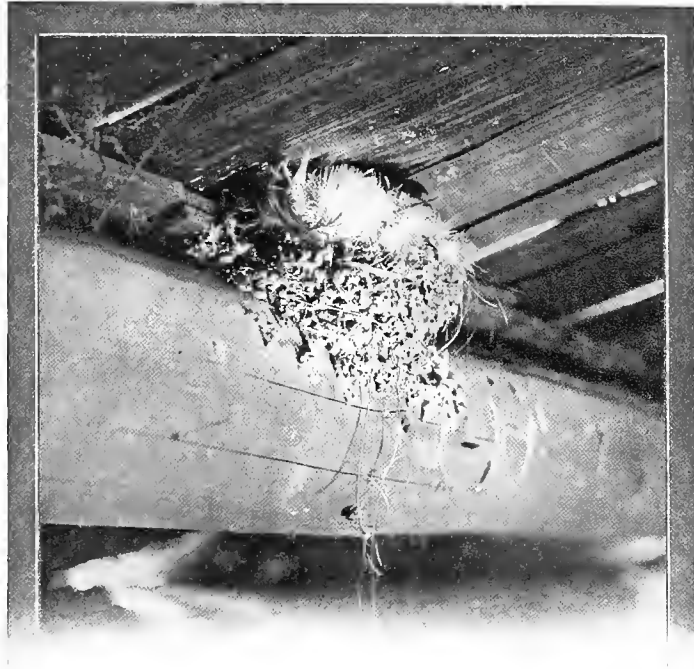


Taken in Washington

Photo by the Author

BARN SWALLOWS ON TELEGRAPH WIRES

## The Barn Swallow



Taken in Washington

NEST OF BARN SWALLOW

Photo by F. S. Merrill

themselves of the shelter offered by ranch buildings. By way of contrast, I recall a town in western Washington, Hoquiam, where a pair of these swallows had placed their nest under the porch roof of a tailor shop on one of the main streets. This nest held young birds nearly ready to fly on the 30th of August, 1910, and is perhaps one of the latest records known.

*A via media* has been found in California, however, for the Barn Swallow has enthusiastically accepted the wooden bridge as his portion. In the San Francisco Bay region,

and especially in the San Joaquin Valley, where the country is intersected by a network of drainage or irrigating canals, these birds abound. Almost every bridge from the least to the greatest is utilized. The smaller one will harbor a pair or two, while the greater may boast a hundred. In nesting, thus, over running water, the birds secure a certain immunity from predatory animals, and they are near their work, for insects abound over these canals. Two broods are reared each season, one in April or May, and another in June or July. At the time of flood water, in early June, there are anxious days for the nesting swallows. I have seen them much agitated on such occasions, as though knowing that danger impended; but a heroic mother will not fail to visit her brood, even though the stringers of the bridge clear the flood by no more than three or four inches.

The nest of the Barn Swallow is quadrispherical, or bracket-shaped, with an open top; and it usually depends for its position upon the adhesiveness of the mud used in construction. Dr. Brewer says of them: "The nests are constructed of distinct layers of mud, from ten to twelve in number, and each separated by strata of fine dry grasses. These

## *The Tree Swallow*

layers are each made up of small pellets of mud, that have been worked over by the birds and placed one by one in juxtaposition until each layer is complete." The mud walls, thus composed, are usually an inch in thickness, and the cavity left is first lined with fine soft grasses, then provided with abundant feathers, among which the speckled eggs lie buried and almost invisible.

Bringing off the brood is an event which may well arrest the attention of the human household. There is much stir of excitement about the barn. The anxious parents rush to and fro shouting *tisic, tisic*, now in encouragement, now in caution, while baby number one launches for the nearest beam. The pace is set, and babies number two to four follow hotly after, now lighting safely, now landing in the hay-mow, or compromising on a plow-handle. Upon the last-named the agonized parents urge another effort, for Tabby may appear at any moment. He tries, therefore, for old Nellie's back, to the mild astonishment of that placid mare, who presently shakes him off. Number five tumbles outright and requires to be replaced by hand, if you will be so kind. And so the tragedy wears on, duplicating human years in half as many days, until at last we see our Swallows among their twittering fellows strung like notes of music on the far-flung staff of Western Union.

If birds really mean anything more to us than so many Japanese kites flown without strings, we may surely join with Dr. Brewer in his whole-souled appreciation of these friendly Swallows: "Innocent and blameless in their lives, there is no evil blended with the many benefits they confer on man. They are his ever constant benefactor and friend, and are never known even indirectly to do an injury. For their daily food and for that of their offspring, they destroy the insects that annoy his cattle, injure his fruit trees, sting his fruit, or molest his person. Social, affectionate and kind in their intercourse with each other; faithful and devoted in the discharge of their conjugal and parental duties; exemplary, watchful, and tender alike to their own family and to all their race; sympathizing and benevolent when their fellows are in any trouble,—these lovely and beautiful birds are bright examples to all, in their blameless and useful lives."

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No. 107

### Tree Swallow

A. O. U. No. 614. *Iridoprocne bicolor* (Vieillot).

**Synonym.**—WHITE-BELLIED SWALLOW.

**Description.**—*Adult male:* Above, lustrous steel-blue or steel-green; below, pure white; the axillaries, sides, and lining of wings dusky; lores black; wings and tail

## The Tree Swallow

black, showing some bluish or greenish luster; tail slightly forked. *Female*: Similar to male, but duller. *Immature*: Upperparts mouse-gray instead of metallic; below whitish. Length about 152.4 (6.00); wing 116.1 (4.57); tail 55.6 (2.19); bill from nostril 6.4 (.25).

**Recognition Marks.**—Aerial habits; steel-blue or greenish above; pure white below; a little larger than the next species.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: In holes in trees, preferably “drowned” trees, or those surrounded by water; a heavy lining of soft materials, especially feathers. *Eggs*: 4 to 6; pure white—a pinkish white before removal of contents. Av. size 19.1 x 13.7 (.75 x .54). *Season*: May–July; one or two broods.

**General Range.**—North America. Breeds from Virginia, Kansas, and southern California, north nearly to the limit of trees. Winters from central California, southern Texas, and the Gulf States, south to Cuba, and through Mexico to Guatemala.

**Distribution in California.**—Common migrant throughout the State. Breeds widely but very locally, notably upon the lakes east and west of the Sierras up to (at least) 9000 feet, and in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley; but also in the coastal valleys even at sea-level and down to San Diego County. Winters sparingly and irregularly in the lowlands of west central and southern California; also upon the Colorado Desert (Indian Wells, Jan. 30, 1913; Mecca, Feb. 3, 1913).

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Chelidon bicolor*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., iii., 1846, p. 110 (Santa Barbara); *Coues*, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 413 (syn., habits, early hist., etc.; see also p. 364); *Ray*, Auk, vol. xx., 1903, p. 190 (Sierra Nevada; desc. nest); *Willett*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 7, 1912, p. 90 (status in s. Calif.); *Tyler*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 9, 1913, p. 92 (Fresno; occurrence, habits, nesting).

THE SWALLOW is the symbol of summer, and by this token we know that we are in the land of perpetual summer, for does not the Tree Swallow “winter” with us? The “Merry Christmas” of the Tree Swallow is, I think, the sweetest greeting the season offers in the Southland. For these birds symbolize purity, liberty, daintiness, and all of gladness that the heart holds dear. In their immaculate garb of dark blue and white, they seem like crystallizations of heaven and its templed clouds, truth and beauty blended, winged fancies, tender tokens of constancy, fragile, yet potent, perennial pledges of the eternal Becoming of Nature.

The Tree Swallow is a lover of water, though doubtless for economic—or shall we say gastronomic?—rather than esthetic reasons. Ponds and lakes are the surest source of supply for insect food, not alone because of the variety and luxuriance of plant life which their borders afford, but because of the comparatively warm atmospheric areas which persist over their surfaces when the weather is turning cold. Swallows are very much attracted, therefore, to favorite watering places; and whatever their wanderings between whiles, they report back every hour or so to headquarters. It is over such places that the migrant species linger longest in the autumn, and it is here that the hardiest of the returning hosts join the Tree Swallows in early spring. This close dependence upon water gave rise to the



## *The Tree Swallow*

early belief that swallows hibernated by plunging beneath the waves, burying themselves in the mud of the bottom to await the return of spring. So stubborn was this conviction, and so circumstantial were the reports upon which it was based, that the tradition remains as one of the most curious examples of pseudo-science and human gullibility in the annals of all history. Even so recent a writer as Dr. Elliott Coues, cleverest exponent of American ornithology, treated the evidence with respect, and refused to express an adverse judgment.

The Tree Swallow remains faithful to its winter love, and nests by preference along streams or in dead trees whose roots are protected by standing water. The stretches of submerged forests made by the back water of mountain reservoirs are sure to be used as nesting sites. The piling of abandoned wharves, as at Lake Tahoe, is deemed exactly fit. The birds are not themselves able to make excavations in the wood, but they have no difficulty in possessing themselves of the results of other birds' labors. Old holes will do, if not too old, but I once knew a pair of these swallows to drive away a pair of Flickers from a brand-new nesting hole, and to occupy it themselves.

Even more startling was a situation we found on the banks of the Pajaro River, in Santa Cruz County, May 20,



*Taken in San Bernardino Mountains*

*Photo by Wright M. Pierce*

"FEATHER BEDS WILL ALWAYS BE IN FASHION"

## The Tree Swallow



*Taken in Santa Cruz County*

*Photo by the Author*

AN AIRY PERCH

1914. The swallows were visiting a hole about five feet up in a willow tree, and the female was caught on the nest, though events proved she was only building. At the bottom of the hole, beneath a massive cushion of chicken-feathers, lay the desiccated body of a Willow Woodpecker, brooding in death upon five discolored eggs. We recoil in self-righteous horror over such an exhibition of callousness. But what do we better? Certain monastic orders play at pyramid building with the bones of their departed friars. Cemetery picnics are things not unknown, and many an amour has braved the voiceless protests of the dead. The tragedy of the Woodpecker was doubtless that of the previous year. To Mistress Swallow, house-hunting, this devoted mother perishing at her post was only a bundle of feathers, a seasonable legacy for a new home.

Feather beds will always be in fashion in Swallowdom. As a ribbon to a maid or a bonnet to a dowager, so is a feather to a Tree Swallow. It is one seduction she cannot resist. As a result, the sign of the feather

protrudes from the nest, and the youngsters are brought up in a swaddled ease which bodes ill for future usefulness. (Yet we recall that the redoubtable Prussian sleeps between two feather-beds!) If the home is disturbed, both parents are very solicitous; and should a feather from the nest be tossed into the air, one of them will catch it and fly about awaiting a chance to replace it. Or if there are other swallows about, some neighbor will snatch it first and make off with it to add to her own collection.

In the West, Tree Swallows are beginning to avail themselves of artificial nesting sites, as they have for years in the East. In fact, there is no reason why we should hesitate to recognize the changing order of things, and we may well bestir ourselves to make the birds at home. Bird-boxes are evidently the order of the new day; wherefore, let us build



WILLIAMS HENRY JAMES  
1897-1910

1897-1910

**Violet-green Swallow**

Male, about 2/3 life size





## The Northern Violet-green Swallow

bird-boxes. No more welcome tenants can be lured from the wilds than birds of this and the succeeding species. Besides the fascination of their endless wing-play, one comes to love as a thing apart their amiable creakings and twitterings. At the height of the nesting season, both Tree and Violet-green Swallows will dedicate the first hour of the morning twilight to song; and they will sail about slowly in the darkness uttering continuous notes for minutes at a stretch. The rhythm (but not the sentiment) may be embodied as follows: *Sweetie kickup, sweetie kickup, sweetie sweetie kickup, sweetie kickup kickup*, etc. It is very difficult to distinguish between the notes of the two species, but those of the smaller bird, *T. thalassina*, are perhaps of a lighter character and more often musical.

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No. 108

### Violet-green Swallow

A. O. U. No. 615. *Tachycineta thalassina lepida* Mearns.

**Synonym.**—NORTHERN VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW.

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Upperparts, including pileum, hind-neck, back, upper portion of rump, scapulars, and lesser wing-coverts, rich, velvety bronze-green, occasionally tinged with purple; crown usually more or less contrasting with color of back, greenish-brown, or olive-green, rather than bronze-green, and more strongly tinged with purple; a narrow cervical collar, lower rump, and upper tail-coverts velvety violet-purple, or with more or less admixture of green; wings (except lesser coverts) and tail blackish, glossed with violet or purple; lores grayish; underparts, continuous with cheeks and area over and behind eye, and with conspicuous flank-patch, nearly meeting fellow across rump, pure white; under wing-coverts pale gray, whitening on edge of wing. Bill black; feet brownish black; iris brown. *Adult female*: Like male, but usually much duller; bronze-green of upperparts reduced to greenish brown, or brown with faint greenish reflections; the cheeks brown with white skirtings. *Young birds* are plain mouse-gray above, white or pale sooty gray below, and their inner secondaries are tipped with grayish. Length 114.3-139.7 (4.50-5.50); wing 112 (4.41); tail 45 (1.77); bill 5.2 (.20).

**Recognition Marks.**—Smaller; green and violet above, white below; white-cheeked and white-rumped (apparently), as distinguished from the Tree Swallow.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: Of dried grasses, with or without feathers; placed in cranny or crevice of cliff (especially in vapor holes of volcanic formations), or in old woodpecker holes—latterly and less commonly in bird-boxes, or in cranny of building. *Eggs*: 4 to 6; pure white. Av. size 18.3 x 12.2 (.72 x .48). *Season*: May or June, according to altitude; one brood.

**General Range.**—Western North America, breeding from western Nebraska to the Pacific, and from central Lower California and northern Durango north to

## *The Northern Violet-green Swallow*

central Alaska and Yukon; wintering sparingly in southern California and in Mexico, south to Guatemala and Costa Rica.

**Distribution in California.**—Abundant migrant throughout the State. Breeds in the mountains and throughout the State at Transitional levels; also well down into Upper Sonoran zone in the coastal valleys, and upon the southern coastal ranges—altitudinal breeding range from sea-level to about 10,000 (Granite Basin, eastern Fresno Co., July 13, 1913). Winters sparingly in the Imperial Valley and casually in the San Diegan district, north to Santa Barbara (Dec. 19-24, 1914; Dec. 24, 1918). However, most February records and some in January are of returning migrants. Accidental (?) on the Farallons (June 1st, 1911).

**Authorities.**—**Audubon** (*Hirundo thalassina*, Synop. Birds N. Am., 1839, p. 36 ("California")); **Ridgway**, Orn. 40th Parallel, 1877, p. 443 (Nevada; habits; nesting in rocks); **Coues**, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 419 (syn., habits, desc., etc.; see also p. 364); **Mearns**, Proc. Biol. Soc. Wash., vol. xv., 1902, p. 31 (*Tachycineta lepida*, orig. desc.; type locality Campbell's Ranch, Laguna Mts., San Diego Co.); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 32 (food).

IF WE lavished any superlatives on the Tree Swallow—and our memory misgives us that we did—we regret it now. Not but that the Tree Swallow is strictly deserving—oh, a very deserving bird—but we needed all our superlatives for present use, and one hates to repeat. What shall we do for the Violet-green Swallows? Simply this: we will call them children of heaven.

To appear to the best advantage, this child of heaven should be seen on a typical California day, burning bright, when the livid green of back and crown may reflect the ardent glances of the sun with a delicate golden sheen. The violet of upper tail-coverts and rump comes to view only in changing flashes; but one catches such visions as a beggar flung coins, and adds image to image until he has a full concept of this rainbow hue. At such a time, if one is clambering about the skirting of some rugged precipice in Yosemite, he feels as if the dwellers of Olympus had come down in appropriate guise to inquire his earth-born business. Not, however, that these lovely creatures are either meddlesome or shrewish. Even when the nest is threatened by the strange presence, the birds seem unable to form any conception of harm, and pursue their way in sunny disregard. Especially pleasing to the eye is the pure white of the bird's underparts, rising high on flanks and cheeks, and sharply contrasting with the pattern of violet and green, in such fashion that, if Nature had invited us to "remold it nearer to the heart's desire," we must have declined the task.

Before the advent of the white man in California these birds nested, altogether, as they still do largely, in deserted woodpecker holes and in natural cavities in trees, or in the fastnesses of rocky cliffs. In the last-named situations they utilize the rocky clefts and inaccessible crannies,



## *The Northern Violet-green Swallow*

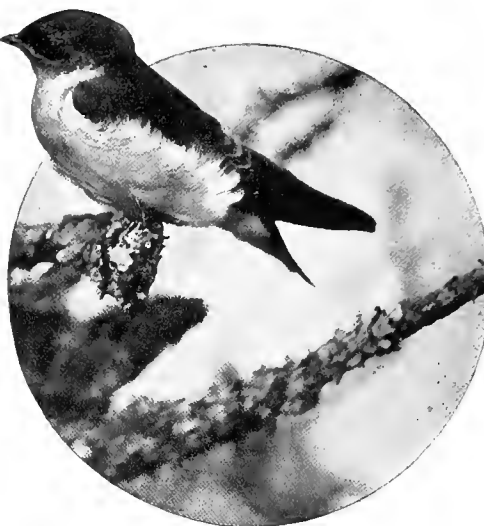
and are especially fond of the smaller vapor holes which characterize the basaltic formations. Favorable circumstances may attract a considerable colony, to the number of a hundred pairs or more, but even so it is not easy to find a getatable nest. If one is able to reach the actual nesting site, the mouth of the ancient gas-vent, which the birds have chosen for a home, may prove too small to admit the hand.

Though the near presence of water is not a fundamental requirement of this bird, I have found nests about some of the lesser sea-walls; and a mountain stream is more to the bird's taste than an insipid lake or a brackish pool.

The Violet-green Swallows seem to be on excellent terms with those reckless meteors, the White-throated Swifts; and while they will not follow them into some of their Lower Sonoran fastnesses, they are likely to share with them the austere hospitality of the wildest granite walls, Tehipite Dome or El Capitan. In a charmed spot I know near Santa Barbara, an epitome of romance which is yet but a doll's house compared with Sentinel Rock or the desert-frowning bastions of San Jacinto, the following birds rear their young in perfect peace within the space of a stone's cast: Western Red-tailed Hawk, Pacific Horned Owl, Cliff Swallow, White-throated Swift, and Violet-green Swallow.

But throughout the State these children of heaven are exhibiting a most commendable willingness to dwell among the children of men. We are not yet half alive to our privileges, but there are authentic records of Violet-greens nesting in the heart of the city, while such towns as happen to be near their ancient fastnesses are likely to be blessed in triple measure. It is a pretty sight on a sunny April day to see Violet-green Swallows fluttering about a suburban cottage, inspecting knot-holes or recessed gables, or, in default of such conveniences, daintily voicing their disappointment at such neglect on the part of careless humans.

Although not formerly so fastidious—I have found cliff nests composed entirely of dried grass—these birds have become connoisseurs in upholstery of feathers, and their unglossed white eggs, five or six in number, are invariably smothered in purloined down, until we begin to



*Taken in Oregon*

*Photo by Finley & Bohlman*

YOUNG VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW

## *The Bohemian Waxwing*

suspect that our fowls rather than our features have favored our adoption.

In these birds and in the Barn Swallows, the well known twittering and creaking notes of Swallows most nearly approach the dignity of song. Indeed, Mr. Rathbun contends that the song heard at close quarters is a really creditable affair, varied, vivacious, and musical.

The Violet-greens are less hardy and venturesome than the Tree Swallows, although they do winter sparingly as far north as the Imperial Valley. In the spring migrations the pioneers enter the State from the South about the middle of February, but the species is nowhere common before the middle of March. Last year's nesting site becomes at once the spring rendezvous for the returned birds, and to see them twittering about in the upper branches of a dead tree riddled by woodpecker holes, or to see a Swallow enter a hole with a feather in its beak, you would imagine them to be early nesters; but these are only happy anticipations. Egg-laying never occurs before late May, and middle June is a more nearly average date.

As the nesting season draws to a close, the Violet-green Swallow yields in fullest measure to the social instinct, and the young are mustered in great happy companies. Whether instruction is meted out on such occasions, we do not know; but evidently good fellowship promotes good manners. Even the hobble-de-hoy stage is believed to be less acute and painful in the case of these heavenly children.

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No. 109

## Bohemian Waxwing

A. O. U. No. 618. *Bombycilla garrula pallidiceps* Reichenow.

**Synonyms.**—NORTHERN WAXWING. GREATER WAXWING.

**Description.**—*Adults:* A conspicuous crest; body plumage soft, grayish brown or drab, shading by insensible degrees between the several parts; back darker passing into bright russet on forehead and crown, and through dark ash of rump and upper tail-coverts into black of tail; tips of tail-feathers abruptly yellow (wax-yellow); breast with a vinaceous cast, passing into light russet of cheeks; a narrow frontal line passing through eye, and a short throat-patch velvety black; belly narrowly and centrally yellowish white; under tail-coverts deep cinnamon-rufous (russet); wing blackish ash, and tips of the primary coverts and tips of the secondaries on outer webs, white; tips of primaries on outer webs bright yellow (lemon chrome to wax-yellow), whitening outwardly; the shafts of the secondaries produced into peculiar flattened red "sealing wax" tips. Bill and feet black. Length 203.2 (8.00); wing 114 (4.49); tail 63 (2.48); bill 11.4 (.45).

## The Bohemian Waxwing

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size; grayish brown coloration. As distinguished from the much more common Cedar-bird: belly not noticeably yellow; white wing-bars; under tail-coverts cinnamon.

**Nesting.**—Does not breed in California. Much like that of next species. *Eggs:* Larger. Av. size 24.9 x 17.5 (.98 x .69).

**Range of *Bombycilla garrula.***—Boreal zones of Northern Hemisphere.

**Range of *B. g. pallidiceps.***—North America, breeds west of Hudson Bay nearly to the limit of trees, and south to southern British Columbia, Alberta, and northern Idaho; winters east to Nova Scotia and south regularly through the northern tier of states, and occasionally to California, Colorado, southern Illinois, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, etc.

**Occurrence in California.**—Of irregular occurrence in winter; sporadically abundant. There were especially notable invasions in 1882, in 1911, and in 1919, —the last named extending clear to San Diego County.

**Authorities.**—W. E. Bryant (*Ampelis garrulus*), *Zoe*, vol. iv., 1893, p. 226 (Susanville, February, 1892); *Maillard and Grinnell*, *Condor*, vol. viii., 1895, p. 77 (Victorville, Mohave Desert); *Pierce*, *Condor*, vol. xxii., 1920, p. 110 (Claremont); *Stephens*, *Condor*, vol. xxii., 1920, p. 159 (Vallecito, San Diego Co.); *Coues*, *Birds Col. Val.*, 1878, pp. 451, 459 (desc., hist., bibliog., syn., etc.); *Oberholser*, *Auk*, vol. xxxiv., 1917, p. 330 (syst. rev.); *Swarth*, *Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool.*, vol. xxiv., 1922, p. 266, col. pl., figs., map (habits, desc. nests and eggs, plumage changes, etc.).

IT WAS not a very happy inspiration which dubbed this bird "Bohemian";<sup>1</sup> for however accurate the term in its prime literary sense of "wandering," it does violence to the character of the Northern Waxwings in all other respects. These are very decorous Gypsies. Though they be nomads, their manners have suffered no breach thereby; and irregularity of conduct is a thing not to be thought of in their polished circles. Nothing could exceed the refined elegance of these "gentlemen in feathers" who occasionally cross our northern borders in winter. Demure, gentle, courteous to a fault, and guileless to the danger point, and beyond, these lovely creatures exceed in beauty, if possible, their more familiar cousin, the Cedarbird. They move about in flocks, sometimes to the number of hundreds, and as the rigors of winter come on they search the orchard and berry-patch for ungarnered fruit, or divide with hungry Robins the largess of rowan trees. Much time is spent in amiable converse, but it is not at all fair to call them "chatterers," or *garrulus*,<sup>2</sup> as though they were monkeys. Dignity is of the very essence of their being, and, as fond as they are of good living, they would starve rather than do anything rude or unseemly.

<sup>1</sup>"Bohemian, the French appellation of Gypsies, involves an error similar to ours; they were taken at first by the common people of France to be the expelled Hussites of Bohemia, and hence this name" (Trench).

<sup>2</sup>Originally named *Lanius garrulus* by Linnaeus in 1758.

## *The Bohemian Waxwing*

An observer in Utah<sup>1</sup> relates how an ill-mannered Robin, jealous of the good behavior of a company of these visitors, in an apple tree, set about to abuse them. "He would bluster and scream out his denunciations till



*Taken at Claremont*

*Photo by Wright M. Pierce*

A SPRING GATHERING

he seemed unable longer to restrain himself, when, to all appearances, absolutely beside himself with rage because the objects of his wrath paid no attention to his railings, he did the catapult act—hurling himself straight at the intruders. Several of the Waxwings, in order to avoid an actual collision, left the places where they were feeding, and alighting on twigs near by, paused for a moment, as if to observe the antics of the furious Robin, when they would resume their feeding. Their indifference to the loud bullying protests of the Robin, and their persistence in remaining on the premises after he had ordered them off, so exasperated Mr. Redbreast that with screams of defiance he dashed from group to group without stopping to alight, until, exhausted quite as much by the

heat of anger as by the unusual exertions he was making, he was glad to drop to a branch and pant for breath"—while the Waxwings continued to ignore the churl, as gentlemen should.

There was a notable invasion of this species in the winter of 1892

<sup>1</sup> Rev. S. H. Goodwin in "The Condor," Vol. VII., July, 1905, p. 100.

## *The Bohemian Waxwing*

and again in 1911, with record stations for the latter at Dutch Flat, Galt, Tower House, and Helena. Of the last-named Miss Kellogg says: "At Helena the birds came into the orchard in the afternoon to feed and roost for the night in the trees. They seemed especially fond of the rotten apples left on the trees or fallen on the ground, and they showed so little fear that it was possible to approach within a few feet of them, and when one got too close they would only fly up into the trees near by. They kept up an incessant soft twittering noise, and for several days we had excellent opportunities for observing them at close range."

Most notable of all was the invasion of 1919-1920, for during that winter the species established the record of furthest south, not only for California but for America as well. Swarth saw two birds at Danby, some 50 miles west of Needles, Dec. 21, 1919. A little earlier, Dec. 18th, he had observed others at El Tovar in the brush of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, in Arizona. Wright M. Pierce found Bohemian Waxwings in considerable numbers in January and February, 1920, at Claremont, in eastern Los Angeles County. He estimated their number at 150, and noted that they consorted freely with the Cedarbirds and that they fed, like their congeners, almost exclusively upon pepper berries. Lastly, Stephens, on the 29th day of March, 1920, found two dead and badly decomposed Bohemian Waxwings on the camping ground at Vallecito, eastern San Diego County. Some fool with a gun had shot them and left them to rot. Thus in all probability *Bombycilla garrula* passed to the southern extremity of our border during the winter of 1919-20.

There are also records of two wanderers taken on the Mohave Desert, Dec. 31, 1901, and Dec. 13, 1910; so it is altogether probable that the bird is of more frequent occurrence than our meager records would bear witness. The species is essentially sporadic, both in winter and in summer. Indeed, its breeding range was shrouded in mystery for nearly a century after the bird had been recognized by science; and it was not until the year 1856 that Mr. H. Wolley (founder of *Oötheca Wolleyana*) discovered the first nests, in Lapland.

For many years the single eggs taken by Kennicott at Fort Yukon on July 4, 1861, remained unique in America; but latterly we are learning that it also nests much further south. Mr. Brooks took four sets, one from a Murray pine and three from Douglas firs, at 158-Mile House, B. C., in June, 1901.<sup>1</sup> Dr. C. S. Moody<sup>2</sup> reports the taking of a set of five eggs at Sandpoint, Idaho, July 5, 1904. On June 26, 1904, Robert G. Bee, of Provo City, found a nest near Sunnyside, Utah.<sup>3</sup> With such examples before us it is not impossible that the species may one day be

<sup>1</sup>The Auk, Vol. XX., July, 1903, p. 283.

<sup>2</sup>Pacific Sportsman, Vol. 2, June, 1905, p. 270.

<sup>3</sup>The Condor, Vol. V11., July, August, 1905, p. 100.

## *The Cedar Waxwing*

found breeding in this State. It is not to be supposed, however, that the Bohemian Waxwing is a *regular* breeder at any of the stations listed above. The Waxwings of both species are a law unto themselves, and their comings and goings and nestings (usually in small colonies) are subject to what we call caprice.

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No. 110

## Cedar Waxwing

A. O. U. No. 619. *Bombycilla cedrorum* Vieillot.

**Synonyms.**—CEDAR-BIRD. CHERRY-BIRD. CAROLINA WAXWING. LESSER WAXWING.

**Description.**—*Adults:* A conspicuous crest; extreme forehead, lores, and line through eye velvety black; chin blackish, fading rapidly into the rich grayish brown (snuff-brown to buffy brown) of remaining foreparts and head; a narrow whitish line bordering the black on the forehead and the blackish of the chin; back darker, shading through ash of rump to blackish ash of tail; tail-feathers abruptly tipped with gamboge yellow; belly sordid yellow; under tail-coverts white; wings slaty gray, primaries narrowly edged with whitish; secondaries and inner quills without abrupt white markings, but obscurely whitish and grayish along exposed inner webs, and bearing tips of red "sealing wax"; the tail-feathers are occasionally found with the same curious, horny appendages. Bill black; feet plumbeous. Sexes alike, but considerable individual variation in number and size of waxen tips. A very common "imperfect" plumage lacks the waxen tips altogether, and such lack is usually, though not always, correlated with an emphatic narrowing of the yellow terminal band of the tail. *Young:* Darker and duller,—olive-brown above and on breast and sides; throat pale to whitish and dark areas of underparts much broken up by whitish streaking; without waxen tips. Length 152.4-177.8 (6.00-7.00); wing 94 (3.70); tail 55 (2.17); bill 10.2 (.40).

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; soft grayish brown plumage; crest; red sealing wax tips on secondaries; belly yellow; wings without white bars or spots, as distinguished from preceding species.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* (Desc. of California-taken specimens in M. C. O. coll.) Of twigs, fern-stems, grass, moss, string, hair, and especially gray "moss" (lichen) of the usnea type; placed 5 to 20 feet up in young fir or mountain lilac (*Ceanothus*). *Eggs:* 4 to 6, usually 4 or 5; dull bluish gray (pale smoke-gray, light mineral gray, or pale court gray, to pale olive-gray), spotted sharply and sparingly with purplish black. Av. size 22.6 x 15.5 (.89 x .61). *Season:* Midsummer; one brood. Eureka dates fall between June 30 and August 4.

**General Range.**—North America. Breeds chiefly in Transition and Canadian zones, from central British Columbia, southern Keewatin, northwestern Quebec, etc., south to northwestern California, northern New Mexico, northern Arkansas, and



Ocher Waxwings

About 2/3 life size

From water-color painting by Major Brooks

**Cedar Waxwings**

About  $\frac{2}{5}$  life size

*From water-color painting by Major Brooks*







## The Cedar Waxwing

North Carolina. Winters irregularly from about 49th Parallel south to Cuba and Panama.

**Distribution in California.**—Fairly common but erratic winter visitor, locally abundant in Upper and Lower Sonoran zones, chiefly west of the Sierras. Three known occurrences east of the Sierras and desert divides: Lone Pine (A. K. Fisher); Victorville (Mailliard & Grinnell); and Palm Springs, Jan. 29, 1913 (Author). Also recorded casually from some of the islands: San Clemente (Grinnell); Santa Cruz, April 11, 1915 (Author); Farallons, May 30, 1911 (Author). The migrations are desultory and the species lingers into May or even June; but the only established breeding point for the species in California is Eureka, Humboldt County.

**Authorities.**—**Baird** (*Ampelis cedrorum*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. ix., 1858, p. 318 (San Francisco, winter); *Coues*, Birds Col. Val., 1878, pp. 451, 470 (bibliog., syn., desc., habits, etc.); *Beal*, U. S. Dept. Agric., Farmers' Bull. no. 54 (revised), 1904, p. 38 (food); *Davis*, Condor, vol. xvi., 1914, p. 182 (Eureka, nesting); *Howell*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 12, 1917, p. 88 (San Clemente and Santa Cruz Ids.).

OUT OF THE pepper-tree comes a chorus of excited squeaks. The passerby pauses to see what the commotion may be, and finds the tree



Taken in Claremont

CEDAR AND BOHEMIAN WAXWINGS IN WINTER

Photo by Wright M. Pierce

## *The Cedar Waxwing*

alive with birds,—birds of a ravishing beauty, albeit engaged in a scramble for food as unseemly as that of an American pie-eating contest. You would suppose that a bird so beautiful would behave with becoming decorum, or at least pause for admiration. But no, it is gobble, gobble, gobble, and the red berries disappear almost faster than one can count. At a squeak, a little louder than the rest, perhaps, though we cannot tell it, the whole company bursts out of the sheltering greenery, effects an instant and graceful squadron formation, and either retires, squeaking, to a conspicuous outpost, such as a leafless sycamore tree, or else plumps unquenched into some other green fountain of peppery consolation.

Thus the normal *Bombycilline* day divides itself into frequent periods of disgraceful gluttony, alternating with periods of dignified retirement. Needless to say, the latter period is concerned chiefly with digestion; but when we know how little these greedy beauties really get out of their food, we may pardon their apparent voracity. As Dr. Grinnell<sup>1</sup> has pointed out, it is only the viscid coating of the kernel of a pepper berry which has an agreeable flavor and furnishes nourishment, so that the papery hulls and the peppery centers require to be disgorged. This operation appears to involve momentary distress, and is accomplished by two or three coughs and a sidewise jerk of the head, which disposes of several kernels at once. Aside from these expulsive interruptions, the sight of a snug company of Cedarbirds lined up on a telegraph wire, or bunched in a treetop, is pleasing in the extreme. The soft body-plumage of melting browns and saffrons and Quaker drabs, set off by the abrupt black "trimmings" of the head, the military crest, and the erect soldierly pose of the figure, give one a somewhat awed impression.

And that squeak! The Cedarbird, being so singularly endowed with the gift of beauty, is denied the gift of song. He is, in fact, the most nearly voiceless of any of the American Oscines, his sole note being a high-pitched, sibilant squeak. Indeed, so high-pitched is this extraordinary note, that many people, and they trained bird-men, cannot hear it at all, even when the Waxwings are squeaking all about them. Cedarbirds are especially noisy when scrambling for food but the self-same squeaks issue from a motionless company in the treetop; and the bird seems to have settled upon this note because it requires least effort. Discussion is liveliest just before flight, and the squeaking continues while the birds are a-wing.

The food of the Cedarbirds is 87 per cent vegetable. Insects, especially noxious beetles, are levied upon moderately the year around, and are fed to the young almost exclusively in August. Wild fruits and berries are, however, the staple diet, and of these, because their "caloric"

<sup>1</sup>Auk, Vol. XIV., July, 1897, p. 318.



**Cedar Waxwings in Winter**

*From a photograph by the Author*

Taken at Los Colibris



## *The Cedar Waxwing*



*Taken at Los Colibris*

*Photo by the Author*

### CEDAR WAXWINGS EN FLOCK

value is low, enormous quantities must be consumed. Cherries come in for a share of attention, enough to merit for this Waxwing the name of Cherrybird in the northern states; but it may be asserted emphatically that by reason of its absence from the State during the cherry season, the bird does no harm in California. Mr. John G. Tyler, of Fresno, reports<sup>1</sup> a winter company of Waxwings which formed the habit of eating raisins, resorting daily for this purpose to the culm piles of "Raisin Row." On the neighboring buildings they would remain "motionless for an hour at a time, perched with almost military precision along the edge of the roof, suddenly to become an animated mass of hissing, excited birds that greedily scratched and tore through the piles of stems in search of the few raisins that still adhered thereto." In this frantic search a few were over-lucky, for Mr. Tyler knows of several birds which choked to death trying to swallow raisins too big to go down.

<sup>1</sup>C. O. C. Pacific Coast Avifauna, No. 9, p. 94.

## *The Phainopepla*

Cedarbirds are the gypsies of the feathered kind. They rove about in companies numbering from a dozen or a score to several hundred, nesting for the most part much further north, and wintering irregularly throughout the State. There seems to be a sharp accession of numbers into southern California from the first of February on, and these newcomers clean up whatever pepper-berries the thrushes have left. If conditions are favorable, the Waxwings may linger well into May. There are sporadic records of summer birds, even as far south as the San Jacinto range,<sup>1</sup> but the only authentic account of the bird's nesting within the State comes from Humboldt County.

The dilatory habits of Waxwings are well shown in their nesting, which they put off until late June or July, for no apparent reason. In constructing the nest the birds use anything soft and pliable which happens to catch the eye. Some specimens are composed entirely of the green hanging mosses, while others are a complicated mixture of twigs, leaves, rootlets, fibers, grasses, rags, string, paper, and what not. The nest may be placed at any moderate height up to fifty feet, and a great variety of trees are used, although orchard trees are favorites. The birds are half gregarious, even in the nesting season, so that a small orchard may contain a dozen nests, while another as good, a little way removed, has none.

The female sits closely upon her eggs, not infrequently remaining until forcibly removed. Once off, however, she makes away without complaint, and pays no further attention to the incident until the intruder has departed.

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No. 111

## Phainopepla

A. O. U. No. 620. **Phainopepla nitens** (Swainson).

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Conspicuously crested. General plumage shining black, with violet and steely reflections; the inner webs of primaries extensively pure white centrally, save on outer edges, thus forming a regularly interrupted (latticed) patch, conspicuous in flight. Bill and feet black; iris bright red. *Adult female*: Nearly uniform mouse-gray, deeper (deep mouse-gray) on back, browner (hair-brown) on belly; crest chiefly slaty or dusky mesially; wings and tail dusky to blackish; the wing-coverts and remiges with much narrow white or grayish margining, the conspicuous primary patch of male faintly echoed by pale gray; crissum margined and varied by white. *Young birds* are much like their mothers, and the males take on color

<sup>1</sup> Grinnell-Swarth: Birds and Mammals of San Jacinto, 1913, p. 288.





**Phainopepla**

Male and female, about life size  
From water-color painting by Allan Brooks



The Dove

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### **Phainopepla**

Male and female, about 3/4 life size  
*From water-color painting by Allan Brooks*





## *The Phainopepla*

in patches. Length 177.8-203.2 (7.00-8.00); wing 95 (3.74); tail 96 (3.78); bill 11 (.43); tarsus 18 (.71). Females average somewhat smaller.

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; slender proportions and erectile crest; shining black with latticed white wing-patch of male; nearly uniform mouse-gray of female.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A rather shallow cup of soft vegetable materials of almost every conceivable sort, bound together with cobwebs, and without special lining; placed in fork of tree—mesquite, elderberry, sycamore, or live oak—often at considerable elevations. A typical example is 2½ inches wide across the bowl, and one inch deep, with walls ¾ of an inch in thickness. *Eggs*: 2, occasionally 3, 4 of record; ground-color light yellowish gray (yellowish glaucous) fading to pale mineral gray or grayish white, usually broadly belted at the larger end with dull violet (light Varley's gray), which fades entirely out, speckled sharply and with practical uniformity (or, rarely, with tendency to wreath formation), with dull olive-black or olive-brown and violet-gray. Av. of 32 eggs (15 sets) in the M. C. O. coll., 22.1 x 15.8 (.87 x .62). *Season*: Varies with local conditions: March–April on the deserts; May–July, but chiefly June, elsewhere.

**General Range.**—The southwestern states and Mexico, breeding from central California, southern Utah, and southwestern Texas, south to Cape San Lucas, Vera Cruz, Puebla, and the valley of Mexico. Winters from the Mohave Desert southward, or casually farther north in west central California.

**Distribution in California.**—Abundant winter resident and fairly common summer resident in suitable sections of the deserts, Mohave and Colorado, north to Owens and Panamint valleys; common summer resident in the San Diegan district and north,—west of the Sierras along the western ridge to Alameda County (Pemberton); in the interior valley, to Chico and Marysville (Belding); and along the western foothills of the Sierras to Butte County, or even (at least formerly) Shasta County (Townsend). Rare in winter in the San Diegan district, but found at sheltered stations along the western coastal ranges to Paicines (J. Mailliard). Reported in summer from Catalina Island (Bryant).

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Ptilogonys nitens*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 2, ii., 1853, p. 262 (s. Calif.); *Coues*, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 45 (general account; syn., desc., habits, hist., etc.); *Evermann*, Auk, vol. iii., 1886, p. 183 (habits; desc. nest and eggs); *Fisher*, N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, 1893, p. 113 (occurrence in Calif.; food, nest and eggs, etc.); *Merriam*, F. A., Auk, vol. xiii., 1896, p. 38 (nesting habits; song).

CERTAIN baffling contradictions, and many elusive qualities besides, mark this wayward son of the desert. Handsome he is, indeed; and they have given him a high-sounding Grecian title in appreciation of his magnificence. Yet is he ever the soul of modesty, and the sudden consciousness of a spying eye will scatter all his show of finery, and send him dashing into the bush with “peps” of disgust. Shy he is to a fault, insomuch that the other side of a bush has always the preference both in approach and in escape. The waste places are his proper home; yet he will conduct his small affairs in a crowded suburb, and he will set his nest in a spreading oak tree which overshadows a human habitation. Curiosity will tempt him to answer a cat-call from the depths of a mes-

## *The Phainopepla*



*Taken at Palm Springs*

SONS OF THE DESERT  
"PEPS" IN WINTER

*Photo by the Author*

quite—a cat-call, mayhap, with a gun behind it—while caution will drive him forth at a hundred yards and keep him a skulking wraith in the offing while the home-trees are being searched. Gallantry struggles in his breast with spiteful tyranny, daintiness with gourmandizing greed, dignity with buffoonery, courage with cowardice, and last but not least, diligence and devotion alternate in his purpose with the most shocking caprice.

To speak soberly, therefore, of the Phainopepla, one's first impression is of a shining black beauty, graceful and active, enlivened by a mobile crest, a fiery red eye, a snowy mantle (in interrupted pattern, shown only in flight), and a bird possessed, withal, of a voice which promises all sorts of good things. But this favorable first impression pales with familiarity, and one admits after long acquaintance that the Phainopepla is, without doubt, a little queer, his voice a little disappointing, his

## The Phainopepla

psychology not quite understandable, and his manners hopelessly alien.

Having said so much, we have perhaps said too much. Any prisoner at the bar is entitled to the services of an attorney, and any bird sitting at the bar of our poor human judgment is entitled to sympathetic consideration. He is entitled, moreover, to be judged by a jury of his peers; and if we would deal exact justice, or even approximate justice, to the Phainopepla, we must doubtless become birds ourselves for the nonce. Here is a motion, then, for a new trial.

*Pep pep*—it is a musical, half-plaintive, haunting note which first apprises us of the arrival of the “shining flycatchers” from their winter home in the desert. The males arrive first, but are followed in four or five days by the modest gray females, who, likewise, call *pep pep*, or *perp perp*, in solicitude, or resentment of human attention. The male is discreet, but a well-screened observer may sometimes catch one in a transport of ecstasy. He leaps into the air, turns a somersault, returns to the perch with quivering wings, swaps ends violently, displays the crest to the utmost, and produces all the while a flood of jumbled, weak notes intended for song. In soberer moments one catches constricted phrases of a yodeling character: *ahcuhcheziweerp*, *cleerp*, *zweep*, and, most characteristically, “*wheedle ah*” (Mrs. Bailey). These vocal efforts are casual and disconnected, and they never by any possibility attain the dignity “of a superb song, powerful and finely modulated,” as alleged by Coues in his single encounter with the bird in Arizona. Besides the song and call notes, one hears a *scrat* or *kuteerp*, which betoken apprehension, or distress, or at least disagreement of opinion at home.

All these vocal expressions are subdued, as though the performer had stuck a mute in the throat of his little cornet, and had never been able to remove it again.



Taken at Los Colibris Photo by the Author

AN UNOBTRUSIVE OBSERVER  
A FEMALE PHAINOPEPLA TAKING NOTES

## The Phainopepla

The Western Mockingbird not only plagiarizes the Phainopepla's notes most outrageously, but it seems to take a special delight in persecuting these timorous little mortals. Once, in winter, I heard the round *perp*-note of a Phainopepla sounding from a clump of mistletoe, in a tall cottonwood at Potholes. He had scarcely uttered his note three times when he was set upon and ousted by some enemy which I could not plainly see. Suspecting a Sharp-shin, I raised my gun and fired at the first show of form. I had intended to lay out the miscreant with a charge of 8's; but the wrong hammer struck, and from out the harmless shower of "dust" emerged a well-rebuked Mockingbird.

The flight of the Phainopepla, though oftenest *direct*, is both languid and ostentatious, so that one catches distinct views of the white blotch (the *πέπλος*) on the wing of the male, or the corresponding pale area on

that of the female. In going any considerable distance, the birds rise to several times the height of the tallest vegetation, so as to obtain an unobstructed view; and upon reaching the intended destination, they dive abruptly down, with much display of putting on brakes by means of the ample tail. Now and then some smart Aleck will play drunk, and go reeling about hither and thither in the air in the most eccentric fashion. But on other occasions apparent eccentricity of flight may be explained by the presence of myriads of insects. The Phaino will launch out on fluttering wings, and instead of returning to its perch after each capture, will maintain itself in mid-air for several minutes at a time, attacking each insect



Taken in the Ojai  
Photo by D. R. Dickey

"A SHINING BLACK BEAUTY"  
HIS PEPSHIP RESENTS THE  
PHOTOGRAPHER'S PRESENCE





**A Complicated Complaint**

Female Phainopepla at Nest

*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*

Taken in the Ojai



## *The Phainopepla*

from below, and not deigning to retreat until twenty or thirty captures have been registered.

Insects form, undoubtedly, an important element of the food supply of the Phainopepla in summer; but as in the case of the Cedar Waxwings, their distant cousins, berries constitute their chief food at all times of the year. The staple winter diet is the mistletoe berry (of that variety which grows chiefly on the mesquite tree). In spring and summer, or irregularly in winter, the birds subsist chiefly on the berries of the pepper tree; but their diet also includes berries of the juniper tree, night-shade, manzanita, and, indeed, any small edible berry which grows in profusion. Like the Cedar Waxwing, again, the Phainopepla has the habit of disgorging the indigestible kernel of the pepper-berry; and it is evident that it must consume enormous quantities of this food in order to derive a sufficient sustenance from the thin, viscid inner surface of the berry, which alone is wholesome.

In building a nest the male Phainopepla takes the initiative and does at least nine-tenths of the work. Indeed, he seems to be jealous of any attention to this drudgery on the part of the female, and will even drive her away if she meddles over much. Visits of inspection are, however, permitted, and the virtuous architect is not insusceptible to words of praise. "Architect" is, perhaps, an over-pretentious word; for a Pep's nest is a mere aggregation of soft substances, such as, by reason of a general stickiness, will under pressure assume some sort of coherence. Twigs there may be, but these are used for filler rather than as structural support. Sage-leaves, string, catkins, dried flowers, lichens, bits of wool, cobwebs, soft shredded bark,—anything which will lend itself to a soft gray or greenish gray ensemble, is acceptable. The nest is settled into branching twigs or forks, whether upright, horizontal, or declining; or occasionally it may be balanced upon the shaft of a bare branch. Bunches of mistletoe in mesquite trees are the almost invariable hosts of the early spring desert nestings. In the interior return-nesting, elderberry trees (*Sambucus glauca*) are prime favorites, with live oaks a close second. After these come pepper trees and sycamores, with rare chances for almost anything else. My son has found nests in the mountain lilac (*Ceanothus spinosus*) here at Santa Barbara.

Nests are placed at any height from five to sixty feet, though fifteen would be a near average for those which are placed in mesquite and elders. The builder reserves the right to change his mind as to location at any stage of construction; so you may waken to find a nest which you had supposed about done, being carried off piecemeal into a neighboring tree. Similarly, the architect is never quite satisfied with the finish, and a particularly seductive catkin goes into the outside in spite of the clamor of hungry babies.

## *The Phainopepla*

A Phainopepla's egg is quite unlike anything else. Speckled eggs there are in abundance, but none others in America are so uniformly speckled,—fly-specked as it were—as these. An average egg plotted and computed with considerable care, was estimated to have upwards of ten thousand spots on it. The markings, while of a nearly uniform size, vary greatly in depth; and so run from palest lavender-gray to black; or, more rarely, from lavender through a yellowish olive series to sepia. The ground-color, too, has a high individual variation, being either white, pale greenish, greenish gray, or, more commonly, purplish gray. Now and then specimens are found which are strongly suffused with purplish in irregular areas. The number of eggs is usually two, but sometimes three; and, according to Mr. Morcom, threes predominate in certain favorable seasons.

The male bird shares the duties of incubation (or does considerably more than half of it), although he does not



*Taken in the Ojai*

PALE BUT RESOLUTE

*Photo by Dickey*

## The Phainopepla

monopolize it, as in the case of nest-building. There is frequent change of shifts at the nest, so that the birds are likely to betray their secret to an attentive observer at any hour of the day.

The young are hatched upon the fourteenth day after the deposition of the last egg; and they would look much like blackberries a little under-ripe, if their appearance were not relieved by generous tufts of long white down. The edges of the mouth are bright yellow, but the lining proper is flesh-colored. The parents do not feed by regurgitation; but berries are carefully crushed and perhaps invested with parental mucous before being fed. The fledglings look a good deal like their mother when they are ready to fly. According to Mrs. Harriet Williams Myers, who has made a careful study of this species, the birds first leave the nest in about nineteen days. They do not, however, leave it for keeps, as most birds do, but will make it headquarters for a day or so, as though loth to sever home ties. The parental solicitude is expressed by many flutterings to and fro, or by elongation of the form with maximum erection of the crest. The bird sways to and fro, or shifts position with an exaggerated swinging or flirting of the tail, and utters often and earnestly that sonorous *mew*, which is its only means of vocal relief.

But not all Phainopepla parents are so solicitous; and I suppose the instance which I am about to narrate is largely responsible for my deep-seated distrust of the species. The birds in question had made a nest at a moderate elevation in a live oak tree which overshadows our front porch. (They were quite as welcome to nest elsewhere if they feared intrusion.) We discreetly noted three eggs, and were careful to make only gentle advances, and to consider the seclusion prized by sitting birds. At a time when the babies were about one-third grown, we arranged a little photographic sitting, but took care, in view of the parental hesitations, not to touch or to molest the little birds in any way. The parents, who were both visible on a distant telephone wire, showed considerable agitation, but they would not venture within eighty feet of the scene. We retired seasonably and completely, but the old birds *never came back*. The next day it rained, and the little ones died of exposure and starvation.

Although sensible of my own culpability in connection with this



Taken in the Ojai Photo by D. R. Dickey

VOICES OF HUNGER AND PROTEST

### *The Phainopepla*

tragedy, I cannot escape a sense of deep resentment toward such unfeeling and cowardly parents. It was monstrous! Such conduct brings us to realize anew that the intelligence of birds is a very imperfect and undeveloped thing at best. Birds are moved rather by deep, unconscious promptings, which we in our ignorance have dubbed instincts. These instincts, however they may have arisen, have to do only with the usual, the regular, the ordained. A chance variation, an accident of difference too slight for human detection, may throw the whole mechanism out of gear. We are brought face to face, then, with the irrational, and it plagues us. But the mother instinct! It is that which we have counted upon as being infallible. Failure here outrages us. Pity we may, and forgive, but no longer trust.

But the eccentricity of the Phainopepla is best exemplified in its distribution. Here it is easily first cousin to the Cedar Waxwing (as the taxonomists aver). The Waxwing is a nomad, and acknowledges no tyranny, not even that of the season. Similarly, the Phainopepla society, if it ever had any coherence, has been disrupted by individual or partisan caprice. Now the birds appear in a given section in considerable numbers, now they are scarce, and now they absent themselves altogether. Why this difference, we cannot altogether tell, though we surmise it may be largely due to variation in food supply. All fruit-eating birds are more or less at the mercy of changing seasons. This question of migration and distribution is, however, so interesting in case of the Phainopepla that we will endeavor to re-state it in detail. The Phainopepla winters chiefly in Lower Sonoran areas, from the Mojave and Colorado deserts south to Cape San Lucas and the Valley of Mexico. Within our limits the bird is chiefly confined in winter to the mesquite-bearing areas of the deserts and the lower Colorado River Valley. But where the food supply warrants it, scattering individuals, or little groups, may winter as far north as Mt. Hamilton, in Santa Clara County. Joseph Mailliard found them common one winter at Paicines, in San Benito County, and I have seen them at San Ardo, on the lower Salinas River.

The desert-wintering birds remain to breed in late February, and in March; and then in April migrate to the cooler sections of the State, west and north. Whether these desert-nesting birds breed again when they arrive at their summer home, we do not know; but it is more probable that they remain as a non-breeding element in the local summer population. The bulk of the birds, coming from places and directions unknown, irregularly invade the western portions of southern and central California about the middle of April, with fresh accession of numbers up to June 1st. They abound in the San Fernando and neighboring valleys, clinging, rather fatuously, to the dwindling desert washes, although they appear to be

## *The Red-eyed Vireo*

relatively less common in San Diego County. The Coast Range is shot full of visiting Peps, at least as far north as Alameda County, where they have been known to breed. In the great interior valley they are only occasionally found in the lower portion, as at Fresno (Tyler), Tracy (Grinnell), and Marysville; but they abound throughout the Upper Sonoran and Lower Transition belt of the western Sierran foothills, and have been taken as far north as Chico. Throughout this extensive, irregular area, nesting may be undertaken at any time from middle or early May up to late June; but it is probable that only one brood per pair is raised.

The movements and distribution of this species are, thus, very complicated, and we shall never know the whole truth about it until a thorough-going system of trapping and banding (the placing of aluminum bands bearing registered numbers upon the legs of fledglings) is carried out.

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No. 112

### Red-eyed Vireo

A. O. U. No. 624. *Vireosylva olivacea* Linnæus.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Crown grayish slate (deep mouse-gray), bordered on either side by blackish; a broad white line above the eye, and a dusky line through the eye; remaining upperparts light grayish olive-green (the olive-green element present as a gloss or overlay over dark gray,—in its pure aspect course green or mignonette green); wings and tail dusky with narrow olive-green edgings; below dull white, with a slight greenish yellow tinge on lining of wings, sides, flanks, and crissum; first and fourth, and second and third primaries about equal, the latter pair forming the tip of wing. Bill blackish at base above, thence dusky or horn-color; pale below; feet leaden blue; iris red. Little difference with age, sex, or season, save that young and fall birds are brighter colored. Length 139.7-158.8 (5.50-6.25); wing 80 (3.15); tail 53.5 (2.11); bill 12.5 (.49); tarsus 18 (.70).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; largest; white superciliary line contrasting with blackish and slate of crown; red eye. Note smoother, and utterance a little more rapid than in *L. s. cassini*.

**Nesting.**—Does not breed in California. *Nest*: A semi-pensile basket or pouch of bark-strips, "hemp," and vegetable fibers; lined with coarse coiled bark-strips or grasses, and fastened by the edges to forking twigs near end of horizontal branch; five to twenty feet up. *Eggs*: 3 or 4; white, flecked very sparingly, and chiefly near the larger end with dark brown (bone-brown to natal brown) or blackish. Av. size 19.8 x 14.2 (.78 x .56).

## *The Red-eyed Vireo*

**General Range.**—North and South America. Breeds from central British Columbia, southern Mackenzie, northern Ontario, etc., south to southeastern Washington, eastern Wyoming, eastern Colorado, western Texas, northern Coahuila, and central Florida; migrates through Yucatan, eastern Mexico, and Central America, to Colombia and Ecuador, and east to southern Brazil. Accidental in California, Nevada, Greenland, and England.

**Occurrence in California.**—One record: San Diego, Oct. 6, 1914, adult male taken by Laurence M. Huey.

**Authorities.**—Huey, Condor, vol. xvii., 1915, p. 58 (San Diego, Oct. 6, 1914, one spec.); *Coues*, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 495 (syn., desc., habits, song, nest and eggs, food); *Cooke*, U. S. Dept. Agric., Bull. no. 185, 1915, p. 36, figs. 18, 19, maps (distr. and migr. route).

IN ALL probability the single example of this species taken by Mr. Lawrence M. Huey on the 6th of October, 1914, at San Diego, was not an "accidental" nor a wanderer, but a duly accredited representative of a small migratory movement which has been going on through our borders for several years. That the Red-eye, familiarly known throughout the East, is also steadily increasing in numbers in the Pacific Northwest, we know full well. Our veteran ornithologist, the late Lyman Belding, of Stockton, told me that the first appearance of this species west of the Rocky Mountains was noted in Washington by his friend, Dr. J. W. Williams, of Walla Walla, and that he took specimens on June 4 and 24, 1885. The first published record for the Coast is that of Chapman (1890)<sup>1</sup>, who took birds at Ducks, and Ashcroft, British Columbia. These birds have now become common throughout northern and eastern Washington, and were found breeding near Seattle as far back as 1908. It is altogether probable, therefore, that the species has become a regular if still rare migrant through California; and it is not impossible that its breeding range may gradually extend southward along the flanks of the Sierra-Cascade Range, as it has along the Rockies.

Although undoubtedly a recent immigrant, the Red-eye may have been confused at first with the better-known Cassin Vireo; and we shall never know the precise manner of its entrance into the West. In habit the two species are not unlike, and their ordinary notes do not advertise differences, even to the mildly observant. Those of the Red-eye are, however, higher in pitch, less mellow and soft in quality, and are rendered with more sprightliness of manner. Its soliloquizing notes are often uttered—always in single phrases of from two to four syllables each—while the bird is busily hunting, and serve to mark an overflow of good spirits rather than a studied attempt at song. His best efforts are given to the entertaining of his gentle spouse when she is brooding upon the

<sup>1</sup> Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist., N. Y., Vol. III., p. 149.



The California Vireos

shown at life size

-From water-color painting by Major Banks



Cassini's (Top)

Red-eyed

Yellow-green

Hutton's

Warbling

Lease

Gray

The California Vireos

Yellow-green  
Red-eyed  
Gray  
Least  
Warbling  
Hutton's

Yellow-green  
Red-eyed  
Gray  
Least  
Warbling  
Hutton's

### The California Vireos

About  $\frac{2}{3}$  life size

From water-color painting by Major Brooks

Yellow-green  
Red-eyed  
Gray  
Least  
Warbling  
Hutton's

Cassin's (Top)

Red-eyed  
Yellow-green  
Hutton's  
Gray  
Least  
Warbling





## *The Yellow-green Vireo*

nest. A bird to which I once listened at midday, in Ohio, had chosen for his station the topmost bare twig of a beech tree a hundred feet from the ground, and from this elevated position he poured out his soul at the rate of some fifty phrases per minute, and without intermission during the half hour he was under observation.

Since the chances that this bird may eventually be found breeding in northern California are not altogether remote, I append a word concerning the breeding habits of the Red-eye, which, save for the distance from the ground and the precise materials composing the nest, will apply almost equally to any of our vireos:<sup>1</sup>

"So thoroughly possessed does our little hero become with the spirit of poesy, that when he takes a turn upon the nest he indulges, all unmindful of the danger, in frequent outbursts of song. Both birds are closely attached to the home, about which center their fears and their hopes; and well they may be, for it is a beautiful structure in itself. The nest is a semipensile cup, bound firmly by its edges to a small fork near the end of some horizontal branch of tree or bush, and usually at a height not exceeding five or ten feet. It is composed largely of fibers from weed-stalks, and fine strips of cedar or clematis bark, which also forms what little lining there is. A curious characteristic of the entire Vireo family is the attention paid to the outside instead of the inside of the nest. The outside is carefully adorned with lichens, old rags, pieces of wasp nests, or bits of newspaper, with no idea of furthering concealment, for the result is often very conspicuous. The walls are not over a third of an inch thick, but are so strong that they not infrequently weather the storms of three or four seasons."

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No. 113

## Yellow-green Vireo

A. O. U. No. 625. *Vireosylva flavoviridis* Cassin.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Somewhat similar to *V. olivacea*, but sides and flanks more extensively and uniformly olive-yellow; under tail-coverts deeper, sulphur-yellow; without distinct dusky post-ocular area; top of head and hind-neck plain mouse-gray, the former bordered indistinctly, or not, with dusky; remaining upperparts bright olive-green; an ill-defined superciliary of pale gray; lores dull gray; auriculars light olive-green; chin, throat, median line of chest and breast, and belly, white; the contiguous portions of sides and flanks olive-yellow, shading into olive-green of upperparts; under tail-coverts, wing-linings, and axillars clear sulphur-yellow. Bill and feet much as in *V. olivacea*; iris red or brownish red (compiled from Ridgway). Length about 152.4 (6.00); wing 78 (3.07); tail 55 (2.17); bill 14.4 (.57); tarsus 18.4 (.72).

<sup>1</sup>From "The Birds of Washington."

## *The Western Warbling Vireo*

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; much like foregoing species, but color pattern of head duller, with less contrast; general color tone brighter yellow.

**Nesting.**—Does not breed in California. *Nest* and *eggs* said to be indistinguishable from those of *V. olivacea*.

**General Range.**—Mexico, from the states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, and Sinaloa, south to Peru.

**Occurrence in California.**—One record: Riverside, Sept. 29, 1887, by W. W. Price.

**Authorities.**—Price, *Auk*, vol. v., 1886, p. 210 (Riverside, Oct. 1, 1887); *Cherrie*, *Auk*, vol. vii., 1890, p. 329 (Costa Rica; habits, desc. nest and eggs).

THE OCCURRENCE of an example of this species near Riverside in 1887 seems to have been entirely an accident; that is, an appearance without known cause or probability of recurrence. The bird looks most nearly like the still rare Red-eyed Vireo; and report of its alleged recognition afield, if based on anything short of specimens in hand, would not carry conviction to the scientist.

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No. 114

## Western Warbling Vireo

A. O. U. No. 627a. *Vireosylva gilva swainsoni* (Baird).

**Description.**—*Adult*: Above dull mouse-gray, pure on crown, elsewhere glossed with dull olivaceous; the olive-green element clearest on rump and edgings of remiges; wings and tail otherwise plain grayish brown ("fuscous"); extreme forehead paler; lores and space about eye chiefly (and variously) whitish, save immediately in front of eye, where dusky, and behind eye, where connecting with color of upperparts; chin, throat, and underparts, centrally, white,—the chest and belly faintly glossed with olive-yellow; the crissum and axillars definitely pale yellow, shading into color of upperparts through olive-yellow of sides and flanks, and olive-buffy of sides of neck and breast; "first" (outermost) primary spurious—only about a third as long as the others; the point of wing formed by third, fourth and fifth primaries (old style reckoning); the second shorter than the sixth. Bill horn-color above, paler below; feet and legs bluish dusky; iris brown. *Young birds* are brighter with access of yellow; bright olive-green above (save on crown), and bright olive-yellow below (save on throat). Length 127-139.7 (5.00-5.50); wing 67 (2.64); tail 49.3 (1.94); bill 10 (.39); tarsus 17.5 (.69).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; *without* wing-bars; general absence of positive characteristics. A difficult, nondescript bird, best known by notes and associations, but also by plain shading, olive-gray and whitish coloring, and by imperfect whitish (broad) ring about eye.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A semi-pensile pouch of bark-strips, grasses, vegetable fibers, and other available soft substances; sometimes ornamented with moss, catkins, etc.; and lined carefully with fine grasses or horsehair, or, rarely, plant-down; hung usually from fork of small limb, at any height. *Eggs*: 3 or 4; white, very sparingly and sharply

## The Western Warbling Vireo

dotted or spotted or very rarely blotched, chiefly at larger end, with dark brown or brownish black. Av. of 20 California-taken eggs, 18.3 x 13.2 (.72 x .52). Season: May-June, according to altitude; one brood.

**Range of *Vireosylva gilva*.**—Temperate North America, south in winter to Guatemala.

**Range of *V. g. swainsoni*.**—Western North America, breeding from southern British Columbia, southwestern Mackenzie and northeastern Alberta, south to Lower California, Sonora, and western Texas, to the eastern border of the Rocky Mountain states; south in winter to Guatemala.

**Distribution in California.**—Summer resident from uppermost Transition zone down to wooded and watered portions of uppermost Lower Sonoran zone, practically throughout the State. Found only in or near deciduous trees of riparian association. More broadly distributed and abundant during migrations.

**Migrations.**—Spring arrival: Pasadena, March 23, 1895 (Grinnell); Gaviota pass, April 1, 1912; Santa Barbara, March 29, 1913; March 28, 1914; March 20, 1915; March 13, 1916; March 18, 1920. Autumn, last seen: Los Angeles, October 4, 1901.

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Vireo gilvus*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 2, ii., 1853, p. 269 (Calif.); **Baird** (*Vireo swainsonii*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. ix., 1858, p. 336, in text (orig. desc.; type from Petaluma); **Coues**, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 501 (syn., desc., habits, nests and eggs, food, etc.); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 39 (food); **Rust**, Condor, vol. xxii., 1920, p. 85, figs. (nesting habits); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 108 (San Bernardino Mts.).

IS THERE a moment in springtime more delicious than that in which the greeting of the returning Vireo falls upon the ear! Fresh as apples and as sweet as apple blossoms comes that dear, homely song from the willows. How the heart feeds upon it! We tell another bead on life's jewelled rosary; and, somehow, I think that bead is emerald. The old-fashioned name "Greenlet," as applied to the Vireos, was a misnomer, if a description of plumage was intended; but if it was intended to memorialize the bird's fondness for greenery, nothing could have been more apt. The Warbling Vireo's surroundings must be not only green, but freshly green, for it frequents only deciduous trees in groves and riverside copses.



Taken in Oregon

Photo by Dickey

WESTERN WARBLING VIREO AT NEST

## The Western Warbling Vireo



Taken in the Yosemite  
Photo by the Author

"WILL LINE UP OBEDIENTLY ON A STICK"

It is not an abundant bird, therefore, in California, although equally distributed, whether in the willows and cottonweeds which gather about some lonesome spring in the cattle country, or among the crowded alders and maples of the turbid McCloud. Moreover, the bird is not so frequently found about parks and shade trees as in the East, although it looks with strong favor upon the advent of orchards. And the orchardist may welcome him with open arms, for there is not among all his tenants a more indefatigable gleaner of bugs and worms.

Because he is clad in Quaker gray there is little need for the Vireo to show himself as he sings, and he remains for the most part concealed in the dense foliage, a vocal embodiment of the living green. Unlike the disconnected fragments which the Cassin furnishes, the song of this bird is gushing and continuous, a rapid excursion over pleasant hills and valleys. Continuous, that is, unless the bright-eyed singer happens to spy a worm *in medias res*, in which event the song is instantly suspended, to be resumed a moment later when the wriggling tid-bit has been dispatched. The notes are flute-like, tender, and melodious, having, as Chapman says, "a singular alto undertone." All hours of the day are recognized as appropriate to melody, and the song period lasts from the time of the bird's arrival, early in May, until its departure in September, with only a brief hiatus in July.

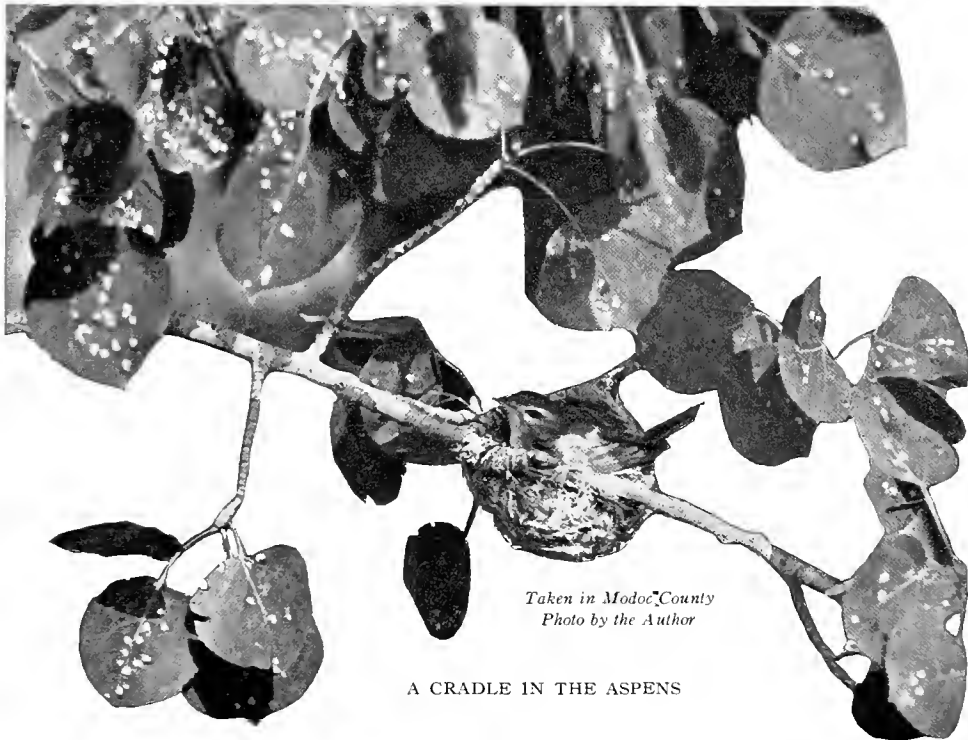
In sharp contrast with the beautiful canzonettes which the bird showers down from the treetops, come the harsh, wren-like scolding notes, which it often delivers when searching through the bushes, and especially if it comes across a lurking cat.



## *The Western Warbling Vireo*

The Warbling Vireo's cradle is swung midway from the fork of some nearly horizontal branch in the depths of a shady tree. In height it may vary from fifteen to twenty-five feet above the ground; but I once found one in a peach tree without a shadow of protection, and within reach from the ground. The structure is a dainty basket of interwoven grasses, mosses, flower-stems, and the like. It is not, however, so durable as that of some other Vireos, since much of its thickness is due to an ornamental thatching of grass, bark-strips, green *usnea* moss, and cottonwood down, which dissolves before winter is over. The female is a close sitter, sticking to her post even though nearly paralyzed with fear. The male is usually in close attendance, and knows no way of discouraging the inquisitive bird-man save by singing with redoubled energy. He takes his turn at the eggs when his wife needs a bit of an airing, and even, it is said, carries his song with him to the nest.

Baby vireos are among the most engaging objects in Nature's crèche. If not too much discouraged by parental counsels, they will sit confidently upon a finger, or line up obediently on a horizontal stick. If the birdies only knew when to be trustful! Nothing so moves one's heart to tender-



*Taken in Modoc County  
Photo by the Author*

A CRADLE IN THE ASPENS

## *The Solitary Vireos*

ness and pity as does the cuddling confidence of a baby bird. You would not harm the tiny creature for the world. On the other hand, nothing is more irritating—at times fairly maddening—than the frantic efforts of some bantling to escape at all hazards. No delicacy of overture, no titillation, no proffered finger-hold will appease him. You are an ogre and he *will* escape, if it be with but a single feather. Suggestion is a powerful influence, even though it come from a bird, and it takes a real saint to live down an ogre reputation.

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No. 115

## Solitary Vireo

### No. 115a Cassin's Vireo

A. O. U. No. 629a. *Lanivireo solitarius cassini* (Xantus).

**Synonyms.**—CASSIN'S SOLITARY VIREO. WESTERN BLUE-HEADED VIREO.

**Description.**—*Adult male:* Top and sides of head deep mouse-gray, the pileum glossed with olivaceous; a supraloral stripe and conspicuous narrow eye-ring, white, the latter interrupted by bluish dusky of lower lore; remaining upperparts mouse-gray, increasingly tinged posteriorly with bright olive-green; wings and tail dusky with edgings of greenish yellow; the edge of the wing, the tips of middle and greater coverts (forming two conspicuous transverse bars), the edges of the tertials and extreme tips of the secondaries, the rectrices upon extreme inner edges and tips, and the outermost pair of rectrices on the outer edge, white or yellowish white; chin, throat, breast, and belly (centrally), and the under tail-coverts, pure white; the sides of breast shading into color of upperparts; the sides and flanks mingled olivaceous and pure greenish yellow; the crissum, especially on sides, axillars, and lining of wing, light greenish yellow. Bill black; feet deep plumbeous; iris brown. *Adult female:* Like male, but somewhat duller in color, the gray of head more brownish. *Immature:* Color of head, scarcely different from that of remaining upperparts, dull olive-brown; supraloral space, orbital ring, and underparts strongly tinged with brownish buffy. Length about 139.7 (5.50); wing 72.2 (2.84); tail 52.2 (2.06); bill 10 (.39); tarsus 19 (.75).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; slaty gray head, contrasting with olivaceous back; narrow white eye-ring distinctive; voice has more of an edge than that of *V. olivacea*; whitish wing-bars and varied tertials as compared with *V. g. swainsoni*; more olivaceous than *L. s. plumbeus*.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A semi-pensile basket of woven bark-strips, grasses, and vegetable fibers, variously ornamented externally with white flower-petals, spider-cases, bits of paper, and the like; lashed to fork of horizontal or descending bough of sapling (oak, maple, fir, etc.) at a height of from 5 to 30 feet; bulkier and of looser construction than that of most other vireos; measures  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches across by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches deep inside; walls often  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch in thickness. *Eggs:* 3 to 5, usually 4; white or creamy white, sparingly marked with spots, which vary from rich red-brown to almost black; but unmarked eggs are of record. Av. size 19 x 13.9 (.75 x .55). *Season:* May–July, according to elevation; one brood.

**Range of *Lanivireo solitarius.***—North America, breeding from Great Slave



Taken in San Diego County

Photo by Dickey

A LITTLE UNCERTAIN  
CASSIN VIREO APPROACHING NEST

Lake and Cape Breton Island south to Lower California and the mountains of Mexico; wintering from the Gulf States and Mexico south to Guatemala.

**Range of *L. s. cassini*.**—The Pacific district, broadly defined; breeding in Transition zone from central British Columbia, southwestern Alberta, and western Montana south through California and western Nevada to the San Pedro Martir Mountains; migrating through the Great Basin states to a winter home in Mexico.

**Distribution in California.**—Common during migrations, practically throughout the State; remaining to breed only in the Transition zone and that chiefly in the Sierras and cognate ranges. Not common as a breeder in west central California nor in the humid coast strip.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Vireo solitarius*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., iii., 1847, 158 (Calif.); **Xantus** (*Vireo cassini*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., 1858, p. 117 (orig. desc.; type locality Ft. Tejon); **Barlow**, Condor, vol. iii., 1901, p. 175 (Sierra Nevada; desc. nests, etc.); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 40 (food); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 109 (San Bernardino Mts.; occurrence, desc. nest and eggs, etc.).

#### No. 115b Plumbeous Vireo

A. O. U. No. 629b. **Lanivireo solitarius plumbeus** (Coues).

**Description.**—**Adult:** Like *L. s. cassini*, but the olivaceous and greenish yellow elements much reduced; scapulars entirely gray; the rump gray, tinged with olivaceous;

## *The Solitary Vireos*

the marginings of wings and tail broader and more purely white; the sides faintly tinged with yellow; also somewhat larger. Wing 80 (3.15); tail 58 (2.28); bill 11.2 (.44); tarsus 19.8 (.78).

**Recognition Marks.**—As in foregoing—grayer.

**Nesting.**—Quite as in preceding form.

**Range of *L. s. plumbeus*.**—Breeding in Rocky Mountain and intra-mountain districts from northern Nevada, northeastern Wyoming, etc., south through Arizona and southwestern Texas to Chihuahua and the mountains of Vera Cruz; wintering south to Oaxaca and Colima; accidental in California.

**Occurrence in California.**—One record: an adult female taken near Fort Tejon, Aug. 1, 1875, by H. W. Henshaw.

**Authorities.**—Henshaw (*Vireo solitarius* var. *plumbeus*). Rep. Orn. Spec. Wheeler's Surv., 1876, p. 236 (Ft. Tejon, Aug. 1, 1875, one spec.); Scott, Auk, vol. v., 1888, p. 32 (Ariz.; occurrence, habits); Mearns, Auk, vol. vii., 1890, p. 260 (Ariz.; habits, song, etc.).

NOTHING so endears a bird to a human admirer as a frank exhibition of confidence. Overtures of friendship on the bird's part may traverse all rules of caution and previous procedure, but henceforth there is a new relation established between them, bird and man, and the man, at least, is bound to live up to it. At the oncoming of a smart shower the bird-man once put into a fir-covered nook for shelter, and had not been there two minutes before a pair of Cassin Vireos entered for the same reason. They were not in the least disturbed by the man's presence, but cheerfully accepted him as part of Things as They Are. Therefore, they proceeded to preen their dampened feathers at distances of four or five feet, while the bird-man sat with bated breath and glowing eyes. The birds roamed freely about the nook and once, I think *he* made a grimace behind the bird-man's back; for when they came around in front again, I judged she was saying, "Ar'n't you the wag!" while he tittered in droll recollection.

These Vireos roam the half-open woods at all levels, like happy school children; and their childish curiosity is as little to be resented. If one hears a bird singing in the distance, he need only sit down and wait. Curiosity will get the better of the bird, and under pretense of chasing bugs it will edge over, singing carelessly now and then, by way of covering the inquisitive intent. At close range the song is stifled, and you feel for the ensuing moments as you do when you have overtaken and passed a bevy of ladies on a lonesome street, *all* hands and feet with a most atrocious swagger. Inspection done, the bird suddenly resumes the discarded melody, and you no longer have to "look pleasant."

Like most Vireos, Cassin sings as he works; and, as he works a good deal of the time, albeit in leisurely fashion, he sings in tiny phrases, separated by unembarrassed intervals of silence, a sort of soliloquizing



**Cassin Vireo and Nest**

*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*

Taken in San Diego County



## The Solitary Vireos

commentary on life, very pleasant to the ear,—*Weé ee-tsiwéeoo-tsoo psooi-petewer-ptir-sewtrs-piti-wee-sueeé-pisoor*. But our schoolboy does not fully express himself in music so staid and delicate. He has at command a rasping, nerve-grating war-cry, possibly intended by Nature as a defense against cats, but also used, on occasion, when the bird is in particularly fine spirits. The note in question, which I call the nutmeg-grater note, may perhaps be more fitly likened to the violent shaking of a pepper box,—a rattling, rubbing, shaking note, of three or more vibrations, ending in a little vocal flourish.

This startling vocalization proves to be the master call of the woods. When it is sounded, other birds leave their nests and hasten to the scene of conflict. At a time when a Cassin Vireo's nest was threatened, I have seen Black-throated Gray, Hermit and Lutescent Warblers, Creepers, Western Flycatchers, Pine Sis-



Taken in Washington

Photo by Bowles and Dawson

A DECORATED NEST

kins, Juncoes, and Western Winter Wrens among those present. The parent birds resent all such intrusion upon their privacy, and they divide their time between scolding and driving fiercely at the invading neighbors. At such a time, also, I have seen the female keep up an incessant delivery of the nutmeg-grater notes, in spite of a beakful of worms. The male's most characteristic utterance on this occasion was a low, buzzing, or purring sound, having not above one-fourth the volume of his mate's cry. For the rest, he gave a thin, interrogatory squeak,—a roguish sound, obviously not intended as humor—and outbursts of song. Curiously enough, the bird sang during his most passionate anxiety; and although he broke off now and again to dash at my head, the notes themselves could express naught but pure serenity.

These Vireos swing a bulky basket from the lower or middle heights of oak trees, fir trees, alders, or saplings of various sorts. Usually no dependence is placed in cover, save that the ornamented nest cor-

## *The Solitary Vireos*

responds roughly with its general surroundings of leaf, moss and lichen. In sheltered places, the texture of the nest is so well preserved that it may require close inspection the second season to distinguish it from a new nest. One such I examined, green with growing moss, and stark at the lowermost branch-tip of an unleafed cornel sapling, and I could not have determined its age save for a tiny weed-shoot germinating from the bottom of the cup. Exterior decoration is the specialty of the *V. solitarius* group, whether it be *solitarius* proper of the East, or *V. s. cassini* or *V. s. plumbeus* of the West. White spider-egg cases in profusion are the acknowledged acme of elegance, but in default of these the bird will use cherry petals, catkins, or bits of paper.

Mr. J. H. Bowles says further of their nesting habits: "Both birds assist in the duties of incubation, the male singing most assiduously while on the nest, and usually singing close to his mate while she is sitting. His turn at sitting seems to come between nine o'clock in the morning and noon, and the nest is not hard to find if his song can be traced. The bird student must work quietly, however, as the song



*Taken in San Diego County*

A FEARLESS DEFENSE

*Photo by Dickey*



## *The Solitary Vireos*

at once ceases should any unusual noise occur. They are most courageous while on the nest, seldom leaving until removed by hand, when both birds remain within a few feet of the intruder, scolding vigorously.

Of this courageous confidence on the part of sitting birds we have abundant testimony. While it is characteristic of the species, there are wide individual departures. Of a pair I had under close observation for three weeks in Modoc County, the fe-

male would submit to being lifted from the nest, while the male would fly at three or four feet. The male, moreover, was greatly disturbed over what he considered my undue familiarity with his mate.

Bird psychology is sometimes a very disappointing thing. Psychological experimentation, likewise, is often inconclusive, because of our lack of insight into many of its operating causes. After two weeks' study of the nest, shown indifferently on this page, having nursed the brood through two storms and otherwise proven myself a good fellow, and having, as I supposed, made a decided hit with the mistress of the manse, I sought to secure better photographs than the shaded situation allowed. So, finding the female Cassin astride of her three ungainly youngsters, I first stroked her gently, then insistently pressed her foot until she clambered up on the edge of the nest to be rid of annoyance. Presently she flew for food, and after her return I cut the nest branch and lashed it to another sapling in the sunlight 25 feet away, then retired to await results. Neither bird made the faintest move to follow or to seek the young in a new location. Both, however, moped in the old home tree, or took turns examining the severed branch. The only sound made was an occasional low chuckle, much as a farmer who has mislaid his specs might ejaculate, "Sho," in deprecation of his carelessness.



*Taken in Modoc County*

*Photo by the Author*

A SHADED SITUATION

## *The Hutton Vireo*

Finding that the Vireos were making no progress, I returned the branch with the nest and lashed it into place. The female made prompt acknowledgment of the restored status, but was rather more curious as to the new fastenings than solicitous as to the welfare of the young. Only after the lapse of some minutes did she visit the young, and then for sanitary purposes. Next, I again removed the nest, very slowly this time, holding the branch aloft so that my movements might be followed. The male dashed at me repeatedly, snapping the mandibles when nearest my head, and alternating this cavalier treatment with snatches of song. When I had proceeded six feet, he desisted and paid no further attention to me. Again I lashed the branch to the new situation, and this time met only frigid indifference. Neither bird appeared at the old site, nor was any outcry made. Again, in despair, I lashed the branch in the old situation. Neither bird attended my efforts. The male thereafter spent his entire time preening his feathers, at a point thirty feet away, while the female absented herself outright. Finally, after about fifteen minutes, the mother bird returned bearing a large white moth. She offered this to each youngster in turn, but it was disdainfully refused. Then she ate it herself and proceeded to brood. The male made no move to rustle food, but sang a little, or else gave the greater note of disquiet—all rather inconsequential, it seemed to me, considering the very unusual experience which they had been called upon to undergo. Thus do our idols disappoint us, and thus does the commonplace thrust its dull shoulder across life's gleaming horizon.

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No. 116

## Hutton's Vireo

A. O. U. No. 632 and 632c. *Vireo huttoni huttoni* Cassin.

**Synonyms.**—DUSKY VIREO. COAST VIREO. Includes northern form, previously recognized as ANTHONY'S VIREO.

**Description.**—*Adults:* Above dull olive (olive on head and cervix, olive-citrine on back and scapulars); wings and tail dusky, edged chiefly with pale olive-green; two prominent wing-bars of pale olive-yellow (barium yellow to reed-yellow) or whitish, formed by tips of middle and greater coverts; tertials broadly edged with pale olive-yellow on outer, and with palest olive-yellow on inner webs; outer web of outermost rectrix whitish; underparts dingy olive-yellow (marguerite yellow), and more or less washed, chiefly on breast and sides, with olive-buffy; lores pale; an orbital ring of pale olive-yellow, interrupted midway of upper lid by spot of dusky. Bill



**Defiance**  
Female Hutton Vireo and Nest  
*From a photograph by the Author*  
Taken in Santa Barbara



## The Hutton Vireo

horn-color above, pale below. *Young*: Like adult, but olive of upperparts grayer, especially paler and grayer on sides of head and neck; underparts paler. Length 101.6-120.6 (4.00-4.75); wing 60 (2.36); tail 48.5 (1.91); bill 8.8 (.35); tarsus 19 (.75).

**Remarks.**—The characters alleged for *V. h. obscurus* Anthony, viz., darker coloration and more definite olivaceous, seem not to be supported by the evidence, and the form *V. h. huttoni* exists in unbroken uniformity from San Diego County, Cal., to Vancouver Island, B. C.

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy to warbler size; dingy coloration; whitish wing-bars serve to distinguish bird from *Vireosylva g. swainsoni*, but throw it into confusion in summer with the Western Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*), which it otherwise closely resembles, and in winter with the Sitkan Kinglet (*Corthylio c. grinnelli*). From the Flycatcher it may be distinguished by its shorter, narrower and yet thicker bill, and by its more restrained yellowness; from the Kinglet by its greater size and much stouter bill, more prominent wing-bars, and rather less prominent eye-ring; and from both by its demure ways.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: Chiefly of moss (gray *usnea* lichen); carefully lined with fine grasses and occasionally horsehair; suspended from forked branch at any height in tree, preferably live oak. *Eggs*: 3 or 4; white, speckled lightly, chiefly at larger end, with reddish brown or brownish black. Av. of 23 California-taken specimens in M. C. O. colls: 18 x 13.2 (.71 x .52). *Season*: March–July, but chiefly May and June; two broods. Extreme dates: Pasadena, March 7, 1896, 3 eggs, fresh (Grinnell); Pasadena, July 15, 1894, 4 eggs, fresh (Gaylord).

**Range of *Vireo huttoni*.**—Western United States and Mexico.

**Range of *V. h. huttoni*.**—Resident in the Pacific Coast district from southern British Columbia and Vancouver Island to San Diego County, California.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident in timbered portions of Upper Sonoran zone and (northerly) of the Transition zone west of the Sierran divide. Casual (?) on the desert side: Victorville, Dec. 28, 1904 (J. Mailliard & J. Grinnell); Palm Springs, Jan. 25, 1913 (Author). Found on Catalina Island; common on Santa Cruz Island.

**Authorities.**—Cassin, Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., v., 1851, p. 150; vi., pl. 10, fig. 1 (orig. desc.; type locality Monterey); W. A. Cooper, Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club, vol. iii., 1878, p. 68 (Santa Cruz; breeding habits, nest and eggs); Grinnell, Condor, vol. v., 1903, p. 157 (*Vireo mailliardorum* described, from Santa Cruz Id.); *ibid.*, vol. xi., 1909, p. 66 (crit., discussing *V. h. oberholseri*); *ibid.*, vol. xxiv., 1922, p. 32 (crit., *V. h. huttoni* considered as the only recognizable subspecies of *Vireo huttoni* in California and northward).

*CHU WEEM* - - - - - *chuwêem* - - - - *chuwêem*, rings across the quiet woodland on a sunny winter's day. The sound does not, at first, suggest a Vireo to the uninitiated; but it does command attention, and it demands explanation forthwith. When you have traced it to a small, yellowish, demure-looking bird who languidly pursues his task of bug-hunting over the smaller branches of a live-oak, you will begin to suspect the truth; and if you are at all expert in eastern Vireonine lore, and if you are so fortunate as to hear the bird at close quarters, you will detect in

*The Hutton Vireo*



Taken in Santa Barbara

Photo by the Author

"LOOKS HIM EARNESTLY IN THE EYE"  
MALE HUTTON VIREO NEAR NEST

the notes a certain edge, or timbre, which proclaims the bird's affinities.

Hutton's Vireo is leisurely, almost sluggish, in all his movements. He never hurries. Why should he? He is at home. It is California, to be sure; but it has always been California. The sun shines. Tomorrow will be like today. Or maybe it will rain. No matter. *Chu wêem* - - - - *chu wêem*. Besides, it is not necessary to get excited over a bug-hunt. What's one bug more or less? It's all in the day's work. *Chu wêem*.

In winter the Hutton Vireo associates tolerantly with our lesser guests,—Dusky Warblers, or perhaps a Townsend in the South, Chickadees in the North, and Kinglets everywhere. When moving about silently, it bears a striking resemblance to the Ruby-crowned Kinglet. It is, of course, slightly larger and much more deliberate, lacking especially the wing-flirt of the little king. The region about the eye is more broadly whitish, and the wing-bars concede a difference, upon inspection, but the resemblance is so close as altogether to deceive the unwary.

As spring approaches, the bird separates itself from its late companions and begins to explore the budding alders or sycamores. As the season advances the bird plants itself in some thicket and complains by the hour in strange, monotonous, unvireonine notes. The songs vary endlessly in different individuals, but have this in common, that they are a deliberate, unvarying succession of double notes, usually, but not always, of a slightly nasal character. *Chu-wêem* - - - - *chu-wêem* - - - - *chu-wêem* - - *ad lib.*, is the common type; *Pu-cheéaã* - - - - *pu-cheéaã* - - - - *pucheéaã*, is a French variation; *Poo-êp'* - - - - *poo-êp'* and *jüreê'* - *jüreê'* - *jüreê'*, are types lacking the nasal quality. On several occasions I have heard the notes pronounced quite rapidly,

## The Hutton Vireo

*pe-eg'*, *pe-eg'*, *pe-eg'*, *pe-eg'*, *pe-eg'*, *ad infinitum*. Occasionally the first syllable is accented; as, (*pe*)*chéé-oo* or *chéé-oo*, *chéé-oo*. A bird in San Roqui Canyon gave us from 63 to 66 *peegs* per minute under repeated tests, whereupon Son William suggested that he ought to be called the Clock-bird. When disturbed, this bird dropped his pitch and brought out a full, rich *ka zum*, for a dozen times or so—after which he fell silent.

Before he has found a mate *huttoni* roams about with some degree of restlessness, shifting his burden of song from place to place with a view to effect, and uttering now and then coaxing little requests which are certainly meant to win the heart of the lady in hiding. This squeaking note is sometimes raised to the dignity of song, at which times it is not unlike the whining of a dog, a most extraordinary sound to come from so tiny a throat. And if one mentions a chirp, or chuck, like that of a Red-wing Blackbird on a small scale, we have most of the representative efforts of this eccentric genius.

The female also has her perturbations. According to Miss Jennie V. Getty,<sup>1</sup> "The female is exceedingly sensitive. Her peevish *ank ank ank* from the thickets may mean one of several things; namely, she may be hunting a home-site, building, incubating, or feeding young in the trees. She reminds one of an adolescent school-girl, who screams upon any and all occasions for the mere pleasure of being actively protected. At her cry of alarm the male is almost certain to appear. Sometimes he sings to quiet and reassure her. Again he comes almost



Photo by Dickey

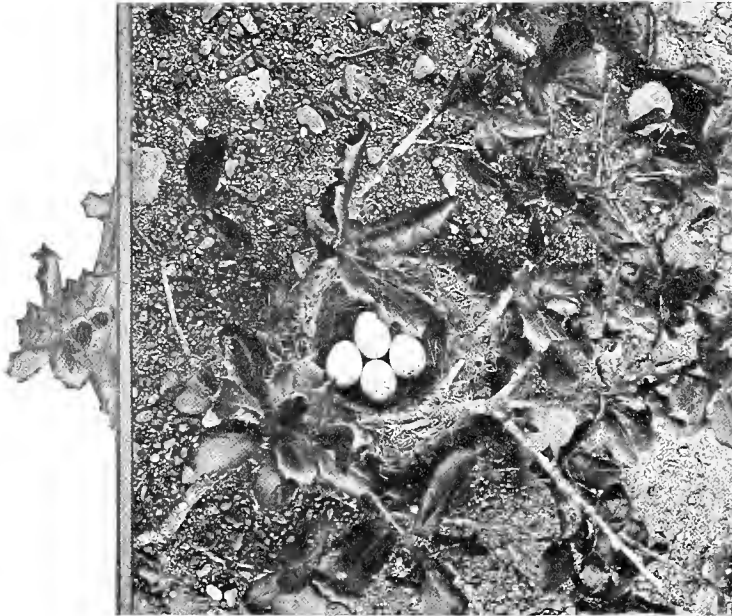
THE LADY IS QUITE SURE SHE WILL GET THE BUG

<sup>1</sup> Condor, Vol. XIV., p. 75. The report concerns "*Vireo huttoni obscurus*" since determined to be synonymous with *V. huttoni*.

## *The Hutton Vireo*

to the bird-lover, looks him earnestly in the eye, as though he would determine the intruder's mission there."

Lives there a man with soul so dead that it is not ravished by the sight of a Vireo's nest? I will admit, if you like, that an appreciation of birds' eggs is the survival of the monkey in us, but an appreciation of the consummate elegance of a Hutton Vireo's nest is only the tribute which one artist soul must pay to another. Hutton Vireo is *Artium Magister*. An example before me is a three-quarter sphere composed of sycamore



*Taken near Santa Barbara*

*Photo by the Author*

NEST AND EGGS OF HUTTON VIREO  
NOT IN SITU

down, and the familiar gray-green usnea (a lichen, of course, but we all call it "moss") lashed together with cobwebs. The edges are made fast to forking twigs of live oak, and are exquisitely rounded, while a convenient twig below supports the bottom of the nest in graceful security. The nesting hollow, almost as deep as it is wide, is daintily lined with the finest of dried grasses. Its dimensions are three inches in width by two and three-quarters in depth, outside; and two and three-eighths in width by one and three-quarters in depth inside.

Another nest, in a bay tree, lacks the supporting twig below, and is of a rather bolder, more open construction. Conspicuous cinctures of vegetable fiber lash, or undergird, the entire structure, externally; while in the open meshes of the dried usnea are embedded decorating fragments of paper—a linen envelope, I should judge—torn to convenient shreds. The effect of the whole is as striking as that of any Red-eye or Solitary.

The eggs, normally four in number, are pure ovate as to shape, pure dull white as to color, and are coarsely though sparingly sprinkled about the larger end with deep sepia or purplish black. As to the why of this color-pattern, which, with variations as to shading and abundance runs



## *The Hutton Vireo*

consistently through the entire family of Vireos, science makes no conjecture. It simply and delightfully *is*.

That the birds themselves have the highest opinion of their treasures, universal opinion attests. Finding a nest near Pasadena placed some fifteen feet up in a dead willow sapling, and utterly devoid of local cover, save the general umbrage of taller trees, we speculated in bewilderment as to its affiliations. The nest itself, an elegant creation of willow-down, was so placed that we could reach and control the limb it was swung to from an adjacent live tree. But it was so out of character, and the Least Vireos of the neighborhood were so abundant, that we determined to capture the owner, if possible, and establish her identity. Mr. A. B. Howell accepted this disagreeable role, and approached the sitting bird by slow degrees until he could pounce upon her. Seizing the bird successfully by the bill, and with some necessary severity, he lifted her from the nest. We examined the wing, saw that the third primary was decidedly shorter than the fourth, and let the bird go. While I still held the limb in my hand, the



*Taken in Santa Barbara*

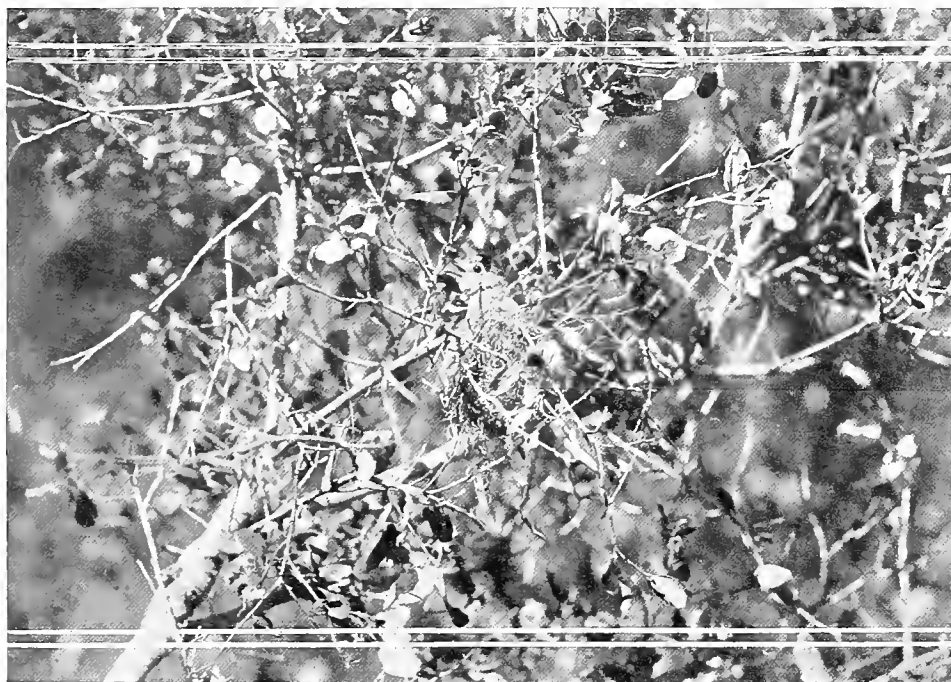
YOU SIMPLY DAR'N'T DO IT

*Photo by the Author*

### *The Hutton Vireo*

bird returned and settled with an air of quiet determination to her eggs. William put his finger up to her bill, and she pecked at it with a few dainty dabs. I put first my nose and then my lips to her beak, but she did not show any further spite. Finally, I photographed her in various positions, and Howell lifted her gently and *without constraint*, from her eggs, while I photographed the group. Soon after the final release, the male bird approached the scene, and visited the nest. The female quitted it for a few moments while he inspected its contents critically,—and to his evident satisfaction, for she immediately returned and resumed her duties.

This species being at the time unrepresented in *Oötheca Dawsoniana*, we cherished feelings of conscious virtue over our forbearance; but our hopes of better luck next time were dashed when Mr. J. H. Bowles, then resident at Santa Barbara, said that of the four nests he had taken he had been obliged, in each instance, to lift the bird from the nest. In one case he had been obliged to cut away a large willow branch, and the foliage was so heavy and so one-sided that the branch had turned over in his hands, insomuch that the Vireo's nest, which hung near the tip, was nearly upset, lacking only an eighth turn, that is, a quarter of a half, of



*Taken in Santa Barbara*

VIREOS OFTEN SING UPON THE NEST

*Photo by the Author*

being upside down. But the bird clung to the nest, and it was her presence alone which saved the eggs! Even when the branch was hauled in, she required to be removed by hand. A large experience with this bird, unfolding with the years, shows it to be, without exception, the most confiding species within our borders. Only a few of the Hummers, Calliope, Costa, Anna perhaps, are at all comparable in this respect.

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No. 117

## Gray Vireo

A. O. U. No. 634. *Vireo vicinior* Coues.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Upperparts plain mouse-gray, scapulars and lower back very slightly glossed with olivaceous; wing and tail nearly uniform grayish dusky, with some paler edgings; edge of wing white; outer margins of tertials grayish white; underparts dull white, the sides slightly tinged with pale greenish yellow; cheeks like back; lores dull grayish white; an inconspicuous whitish eye-ring. Bill (drying) bluish dusky; feet and legs leaden black; iris brown. *Young birds* are much like adults, but slightly browner above and purer white below; the edgings of wings and tail tinged with olivaceous. Length 127-139.7 (5.00-5.50); wing 65 (2.56); tail 58 (2.28); bill 9.6 (.38); tarsus 19.1 (.75).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; definite gray coloration distinctive (the slight olivaceous tinge will escape notice afield); a haunter of chaparral.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: Semi-pensile; of weathered leaves, grasses, strips of weed-bark, etc.; of rather loose construction without special lining; placed at moderate heights in bush of chaparral. *Eggs*: 3, rarely 4; white, finely and sparingly flecked with dark brown or blackish. Av. size 17 x 12.5 (.67 x .49). *Season*: c. May 20; one brood. Riverside, Apr. 26, 1889 (F. Stephens); Cajon Pass, June 4, 1886 (F. Stephens).

**General Range.**—The Southwestern States and Mexico. Southern California, southern Nevada, the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, and southeastern Colorado south to Lower California, Sonora and Durango.

**Distribution in California.**—Resident in summer in Upper Sonoran chaparral of mountain ranges in southern California—of local distribution: Campo (Stephens); Cajon Pass (Morcom, Stephens); Riverside (Stephens); San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains (Grinnell & Swarth). Also Bodfish, Kern Co., June 16, 1911 (Grinnell).

**Migrations.**—Spring arrival: Campo, March 24, 1876 (Stephens); Mecca, March 26, 1911 (van Rossem).

**Authorities.**—Stephens, Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club, vol. iii., 1878, p. 42 (Campo, San Diego Co.); Morcom, Bull. Ridgway Orn. Club, no. 2, 1887, p. 51 (Cajon Pass); Grinnell and Swarth, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. x., 1913, p. 291, pl. 10, fig. 2 (San Jacinto Mts.; occurrence, habits, song, nest and eggs, etc.); Grinnell, Condor, vol. xxiv., 1922, p. 211 (distr. in Calif., song, appearance, etc.).

## The Gray Vireo



Taken in San Bernardino County

Photo by Pierce

GRAY VIREO AND NEST  
THE "HOST TREE" IS THE HOMELY SAGE, *Artemisia tridentata*

southern mountains. It is, therefore, a "dry forager," and its habits contrast sharply with those of our other vireos, which we naturally associate with purling brooks and bosky dells. But so devoted is the Gray Vireo to his prosaic haunts that he rarely appears above the chap-

A VOICE, a flitting shape, an association, and an attachment: these be the brief annals of the Gray Vireo. To speak of the association first, and in the words of Grinnell and Swarth:<sup>1</sup> "The distribution of *Vireo vicinior* is capable of more exact definition than is usually the case with birds. It is, namely: The *Adenostoma minor* association, of the chaparral major association, of the San Diegan faunal division, of the Upper Sonoran zone." That is to say, the Gray Vireo keeps pretty close to the chamise on the lower middle slopes of our

<sup>1</sup>An account of the Birds and Mammals of the San Jacinto Area of Southern California; U. of C. Press, Oct. 31 1913, p. 291.

arral tops, and seldom tarries within range of vision at those middle levels which are his chosen home. It is from such depths, therefore, that his song emerges, a surprising and delightful contribution which vindicates all the bird's vireonine claims.

According to the authorities above cited, "the song of the Gray Vireo is loud and full-toned in volume and quality. In these respects it reminds the hearer strongly of the Cassin Vireo, yet with the twang and less deliberate utterance of a Western Tanager. In measure, and in the suggestion of rising and falling inflection, it recalls the Least Vireo." I noted this resemblance to Cassin's song in 1913; but the phrases seemed to me to come more rapidly, vivaciously, and energetically. They were a good deal more varied in character, and showed broader powers. Now and again the singer would rise to a rhythmic medley, a sort of rhapsody, wherein the diverse elements were connected by a musical *ku-ching*,—a clashing of tiny cymbals after each phrase.

The song will rarely betray the singer alone, for he easily contrives to slip away from his pursuer; but it will, alas! sometimes betray the "attachment." For how could one ever expect to "meet up" with these elusive sprites, these flitting genii of the interminable chamise, except that they are obliged to pin their faith to some one spot? Some certain one of ten thousand stalks must serve to support the annual cradle. "Weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable," the situation seems to us; but the birds not only make the best of it, but they seem to draw from the endless store of common things high inspiration for song and for life. Moreover, when the nest is found, the birds prove to be very much attached. The first-known nest, secured by W. E. D. Scott in 1885, proved to have no eggs; yet Mr. Scott had been obliged to displace the sitting bird with his finger in order to ascertain the fact. This habit of resting in the nest, or of trying it out for a few days previous to laying, is characteristic of many birds, but notably of the vireos; yet scarcely any other will submit to be handled under such circumstances.

The nest of the Gray Vireo is placed at about three feet above the ground, and conforms to the usual vireonine type,—a semi-pensile basket, made fast by the edges; yet by reason of the density of its cover, it is likely to be partially supported by underlying twigs, or even to be settled down into them. The materials, too, which compose this basket are simpler than usual in character, with less attempt at ornament. Two nests found by Messrs. Grinnell and Swarth had on the very outside unbroken, tridentate, gray leaves of the sage-brush—a rather pathetic commentary on the meager resources of the pioneers.

## Least Vireo

### No. 118a California Least Vireo

A. O. U. No. 633a, part. *Vireo belli pusillus* Coues.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Upperparts plain mouse-gray, shading on sides of head, neck, and breast, the pileum faintly varied by brownish gray; back, scapulars, and rump, faintly, sometimes very faintly, glossed with olivaceous; underparts white, the breast sometimes lightly tinged with palest grayish olive; sides lightly washed, or not, with pale greenish yellow; axillars pale sulphur-yellow; a pale whitish supraloral area; lores, narrowly, dusky; eyelids, narrowly, especially below, black, then white; the major feathers of wings and tail with paler edgings; the greater coverts definitely tipped with pale grayish white. Bill horn-colored above, pale or flesh-colored below; feet and legs bluish dusky; iris brown. Length about 120.6 (4.75); wing 55.3 (2.18); tail 51 (2.01); bill 9.5 (.37); tarsus 19 (.75).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; plain gray above, white below; slight tinge of olivaceous, especially on sides; song of "breathless jumbled notes."

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A semi-pensile basket lashed by edges to fork of horizontal or descending branch of tree, at lower levels—2 to 5 feet above ground; composed of bark-strips, dry leaves, and grasses; lined with fine grasses or, rarely, felted with plant-down. *Eggs*: 3 or 4, rarely 5; white, speckled and spotted sparingly, and chiefly at larger end, with reddish brown or brownish black. Av. size, as in next form. *Season*: May–June; one brood. Extreme dates given by Willett, on authority of H. Robertson, Los Angeles, Apr. 1, 1900, 3 newly hatched young; Los Angeles, June 30, 1898, 3 eggs.

**Range of *Vireo belli*.**—Western United States east to the Mississippi Valley, and Mexico.

**Range of *V. b. pusillus*.**—Central and southern California and northern Lower California, and east possibly to southwestern Nevada; breeding south to San Pedro Martir Mountains and San Fernando, Lower California; south in winter to Cape San Lucas and probably the west coast of Mexico.

**Distribution in California.**—Summer resident in riparian associations of the Lower Sonoran zone, breeding north in the central valley to Marysville (Belding), and in the coastal counties, north at least to southern Monterey County (San Ardo, May 14, 1916, eggs taken); recorded east of the Sierras north to Bishop Creek (A. K. Fisher). Status of bird's breeding in desert counties east of the main divide undetermined—may be *V. b. arizonæ*.

**Authorities.**—**Coues** (*Vireo pusillus*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., 1866, p. 76, part (orig. desc.; type locality Cape San Lucas, Lower Calif.; also ascribed to "Southern California"); **McAtee**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Yearbook, 1906, p. 194 (feeding on scale insects); **Grinnell**, Condor, vol. xiv., 1912, p. 106 (song); **Tyler**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 9, 1913, p. 98 (Fresno; habits, song, nest and eggs, etc.); **W. C. Hanna**, Condor, vol. xx., 1918, p. 211 (San Bernardino Valley; descr. of nests occupied by Cowbirds).

### No. 118b Arizona Least Vireo

A. O. U. No. 633a (part). *Vireo belli arizonæ* Ridgway.



**Sweetly Confiding**  
California Least Vireo and Nest  
*From a photograph by the Author*  
Taken near San Ardo





## The Least Vireos

**Description.**—Similar to *V. belli pusillus*, but browner gray above, with decided increase of olivaceous; underparts less purely white, more strongly tinged with olive-yellow on breast, and with olivaceous on sides.

**Nesting.**—Quite as in preceding form, save for narrower choice of nesting trees—chiefly confined to mesquite. Av. size of 34 eggs in the M. C. O. colls: 16.5 x 12.2 (.65 x .48). *Season:* In the Colorado Valley, April.

**Range of *V. b. arizonæ.***—Southeastern California and southern Arizona east to western Texas and south through the Mexican states of Chihuahua, Sonora, and Sinaloa.

**Distribution in California.**—A common breeder in the Colorado River valley; possibly entitled to recognition throughout the southeastern desert area.

**Authorities.**—**Cooper** (*Vireo bellii*), Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., 1861, p. 122 (s. e. Calif.); **Brewster**, Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club, vol. vii., 1882, p. 144 (s. Ariz.; descr. nest, meas., etc.); **Auk**, vol. ii., 1885, p. 197 (descr. young); **Morcom**, Bull. Ridgway Orn. Club, no. 2, 1887, p. 51, part (Fort Yuma, breeding); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xiii., 1914, p. 189 (Colo. Valley; habits, desc. nest and eggs).

UNLESS one is already acquainted with the vivacious White-eyed Vireo of the East, or, better, with *Vireo belli* of the Middle West, he is likely to be somewhat mystified at first in his efforts to place this little stranger. At least, he will hardly be helped by any recollection of sedate Cassin or drawling Hutton. The Least Vireo hunts from the lower levels, from the ground up to a height of six or eight feet. He is very partial to the willow association, but includes alders and sycamores and whatever else may grow in the near vicinity of water. Those who know the bird as a familiar spirit of the irrigating ditches,



*Taken in the Ojai  
Photo by Dickey*

A DOLL'S HOUSE

## *The Least Vireos*

such as intersect the Fresno district, or who have found him to be the inevitable concomitant of willow trees on the banks of the Colorado, can scarcely conceive of the Least Vireo apart from running water. Yet I have seen the bird, in mid-May, in the cactus and chaparral belt near Claremont, as much at home, apparently, as was the Western Gnatcatcher.

There is, for me, a whimsically childish quality in both the voice and behavior of the Least Vireo. The bird is as agile and restless as a four-year-old; while his "song," a gushing outburst of childish confidences, an incoherent medley which you will not take seriously the first time, you will be obliged to hear again and again. Whether you intend to or not, you will soon find yourself puzzling over his bright gibberish, and trying to make out what the youngster is driving at. *Hooly doopity doolity todaw'it*, evidently means nothing at all, unless it happens to be the Chinese for "I wish you a happy New Year." A merry elfin over on the San Jacinto kept telling us *I'm surely happy to meet' yer*. He'd possibly got wind of our coming, for he insisted, *I'm surely happy to meet yêou*. This same youngster haunted certain thickets near camp, and took a lively interest in our domestic affairs,—an



*Taken in Monterey County*

*Photo by the Author*

A CONTENTED LITTLE HOUSEWIFE  
CALIFORNIA LEAST VIREO ON NEST



Northwestern Shrike

About 7/12 life size  
from painting by Major Brooks

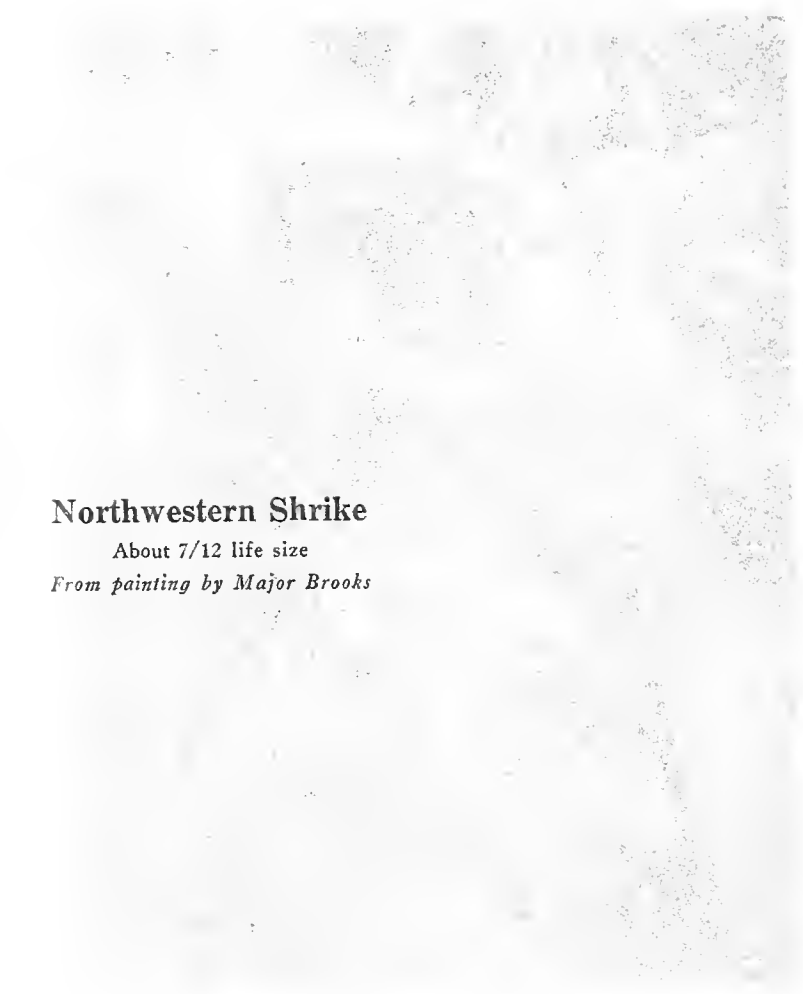
PLATE 111

PLATE 111  
The  
Shrike  
Brooks

**Northwestern Shrike**

About 7/12 life size

*From painting by Major Brooks*







interest which we warmly, but vainly, endeavored to reciprocate. (It was absurd to think that this flibbertigibbet should be wedded; but if not, wherefore this hurried recitative they call his "song"?) Anyhow, if his observations were directed at us, they showed a certain lack of discrimination, for his stock remark was, *I sh'd think that'd be worth a great deal*. Capital! when a White-throated Swift's egg was being held up for William's inspection! But it was to laugh that the same remark was made when the cook was ruefully inspecting a mess of sour beans. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings!

The bird's song, when it is not innocently (or cunningly?) misleading, will take you straight to the nest, the little hempen basket, swung this time from the tip of a descending branch, at a height of not over two or three feet from the ground. Nests twelve feet off the earth are of record, but those only one foot up are less rare. Quite frequently, also, nests are placed like those of Flycatchers, over a running stream. There is, perhaps, a general disposition to place the basket, however humble, in the open, a disposition that, according to Dr. Grinnell, results in a considerable loss when the nests line cow-paths, as they do in the Colorado River bottom. On the other hand, I once saw a nest on the upper Salinas River in shade so dense that one could not see to read on a bright afternoon. In this case, we may suppose that the birds had been overtaken by an unforeseen rankness of the surrounding growth.

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No. 119

## Northwestern Shrike

A. O. U. No. 621, part. *Lanius borealis invictus* Grinnell.

**Synonyms.**—GREAT NORTHERN SHRIKE. BUTCHER-BIRD.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Upperparts clear bluish gray, lightest—almost white—on upper tail-coverts and tips of lowermost scapulars; extreme forehead and line over eye (increasing behind) whitish; wings and tail black, the former with conspicuous white spot at base of primaries, and with narrow white tips (increasing inwardly) on the inner primaries and the secondaries, the latter with large white terminal blotches on outer feathers, decreasing in size inwardly; a black band through eye, including auriculars; below grayish white, the feathers of the breast and sides narrowly tipped with dusky, producing a uniform fine vermiculation which is always present. Bill blackish, lightening at base of lower mandible; feet black. *Young birds* are more heavily vermiculated below, and are heavily washed all over with dull rusty brown. The plumage of adult is sometimes overcast above with a faint olivaceous tinge. Length 235-273.1 (9.25-10.75); wing 114.3 (4.50); tail 110 (4.33); bill 17.7 (.70); tarsus 27.3 (1.07).

**Recognition Marks.**—Robin size; gray and black coloring; sharply hooked bill; breast vermiculated with dusky as distinguished from next species.

## *The Northwestern Shrike*

**Nesting.**—Does not breed in California. *Nest:* A well-constructed bowl of sticks, thorn-twigs, grasses, and trash, heavily lined with plant-down and feathers; in bushes and low trees. *Eggs:* 3 to 7; dull white or greenish gray, thickly dotted and spotted with olive-green, brown, or vinaceous gray. Av. size, 27.2 x 19.8 (1.07 x .78).

**Range of *Lanius borealis*.**—Northern North America; south in winter to the middle and southern portions of the United States. Breeds north of the United States, except sparingly in New England.

**Range of *L. b. invictus*.**—Alaska south in winter, sparingly, to Pacific Coast states. Eastern delimitations of range imperfectly made out.

**Occurrence in California.**—Rare midwinter visitor in northern California—half a dozen records.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Lanius septentrionalis*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1847, p. 201 (Calif.); **Feilner**, Ann. Rep. Smiths. Inst., 1865, pp. 422, 425 (Shasta and Siskiyou counties); **Coues**, Birds Col. Val., 1878, pp. 535, 538 (syn., habits, hist., nomencl., etc.); **Belding**, Land Birds Pac. Dist., 1890, p. 197 (Nicasio and Marysville); **Judd**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 9, 1898, p. 15 (food); **Grinnell**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 1, 1900, p. 54 (orig. desc.; type locality Kowak River, Alaska; meas., habits, etc.).

FLITTING like a gray ghost in the wake of the cheerful hosts of Juncoes and Redpolls, comes this butcher of the North in search of his accustomed prey. If it is his first visit south he posts himself upon the tip of a tree and rasps out an inquiry of the man with the gun. Those that survive these indiscretions are thereafter faintly descried in the distance, either in the act of diving from some anxious summit, or else winging swiftly over the inequalities of the ground.

All times are killing time for this bloodthirsty fellow, and even in winter he "jerks" the meat not necessary for present consumption—be it chilly-footed mouse or palpitating Sparrow—upon some convenient thorn or splinter. In spring, the north-bound bird is somewhat more amiable, being better fed, and he pauses from time to time during the advance to sing a strange medley, which at a little remove sounds like a big electric buzz. This is meant for a love song, and is doubtless so accepted by the proper critics, but its rendition sometimes produces about the same effect upon a troop of finches which a cougar's serenade does upon a cowering deer.

Experts try to make out that this creature is beneficial, "on the whole," because of the insects he devours, but I have seen too much good red blood on this butcher's beak myself. My gun is loaded!

Fortunately, owing to the retarding influence of the milder climate of the Pacific Northwest, this bloodthirsty species does not often appear below our northern boundary. But when he does so, it is not to be supposed that there is always a birdman with a gun right at hand, so the five or six scattered records which have been preserved hint at hundreds which might have been made.





**Baby White-rumped Shrikes**

*From a photograph by Wright M. Pierce*

Taken near Palmdale



## White-rumped Shrike

### No. 120a White-rumped Shrike

A. O. U. 622a. *Lanius ludovicianus excubitorides* Swainson.

**Description.**—*Adult male:* Dark bluish gray above, changing abruptly to white on upper tail-coverts; scapulars chiefly white; wings chiefly black, the edges white, a small white patch at base of primaries, and the inner quills narrowly tipped with white; tail black, the outer pair of feathers chiefly white, the succeeding broadly tipped with white in descending ratio until color disappears in two central pairs; below white, slightly soiled, or buffy-tinted, on breast and sides, but everywhere strongly contrasting with upperparts; a narrow frontal line, nasal tufts, lores, and ear-coverts, black—continuous and passing mostly below eye. Bill and feet black. *Adult female:* Similar to adult male, but somewhat duller; the gray of upperparts faintly washed with olivaceous; the buffy of underparts deeper, more sordid, with some showing of darker vermiculation. *Immature males of the second year* are also glossed with olivaceous and retain vermiculation below. *Young of the year:* Colors of adult, less strongly contrasted; lower parts washed with brownish; loreal bar obscure; more or less vermiculated with dusky all over (in younger birds), or upon the underparts alone (save throat and crissum, which are immaculate); ends of wing-quills, coverts, and tail-feathers often with ochraceous or rusty markings. Length of adult male about 215.9 (8.50); wing 100.6 (3.96); tail 99 (3.90); bill 15.3 (.60); tarsus 28 (1.10).

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size or larger; dark gray above; whitish below; longitudinal black patch of head; wings black and white; breast of adult unmarked, as distinguished from both *L. borealis invictus* and *L. l. gambeli*.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A bulky but well-built structure of sticks, thorn-twigs, sage-bark, dried leaves, etc.; heavily lined with wool, hair, and feathers; placed at moderate heights in bushes or trees. *Eggs:* 5 to 7; dull grayish or greenish white, thickly speckled and spotted with grayish olive or buffy brown. Av. size, 24.6 x 18.5 (.97 x .73). *Season:* April, June; two broods.

**Range of *Lanius ludovicianus.***—North America from southern Canadian provinces south to southern Mexico.

**Range of *l. l. excubitorides.***—Western North America from the Great Plains westward, except Pacific Coast district, and from Manitoba and the plains of Saskatchewan south over the tablelands of Mexico; south in winter over the whole of Mexico, intergrading with *L. l. migrans* in region of the Great Lakes.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident east of the desert and Sierran divides—exact area of intergradation with succeeding form indeterminable, but lies west of the Sierras.

**Authorities.**—**Baird** (*Collyrio excubitorides*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. ix., 1858, p. 327, part (spec. listed from Fort Yuma); **Coues**, Birds Col. Val., 1878, pp. 535, 561 (syn., habits, hist., nomencl., etc.); **Judd**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 9, 1898, p. 20, part (food); **Swarth**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 4, 1904, p. 48 (s. Ariz.; habits, nesting dates, molt); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xii., 1914, p. 188 (Colo. Valley; crit.; habits, etc.).

## The White-rumped Shrikes

### No. 120b California Shrike

A. O. U. No. 622b. *Lanius ludovicianus gambeli* Ridgway.

**Description.**—Similar to *L. l. excubitorides*, but slightly darker, duller gray above; underparts more sordid, tinged with brownish, or with more or less distinct transverse vermiculation of pale brownish gray on chest and sides of breast (even in adult male); averaging slightly smaller. A "light" form, not always readily distinguishable from the westernmost members of *excubitorides*.

**Recognition Marks.**—As in preceding—duller.

**Nesting.**—As in *L. l. excubitorides*.

**Range of *L. l. gambeli*.**—Pacific Coast district from southwestern British Columbia to northern Lower California; south in winter to Cape San Lucas and western Mexico.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident, locally abundant west of the Sierran divide. The differentiating factor of this very "light" race is the humidity of the coastal airs; hence the race is found in its purity only in the northwestern humid coastal strip south to Monterey. Elsewhere, and especially in the heated interior valley, *gambeli* approaches, or "intergrades with," *excubitorides*.

**Authorities.**—**Vigors** (*Lanius ludovicianus*), *Zoology of Beechey's Voyage*, 1839, p. 17; *Ridgway*, *Man. N. Am. Birds*, 1887, p. 467 (orig. desc.); *Atkinson*, *Condor*, vol. iii., 1901, p. 9 (Santa Clara County; nesting habits); *Strong*, *Am. Nat.*, vol. xxxv., 1901, p. 271, figs. (crit.); *Tyler*, *Pac. Coast Avifauna*, no. 9, 1913, p. 95 (San Joaquin Valley).

**Remark.**—Inasmuch as the characters which distinguish these two subspecies, *excubitorides* and *gambeli*, are so slight, and the area of their intergradation so broad and undefined, they are treated below as practically synonymous. There is no recognized difference in notes or habits, and in nesting only such as would be dictated by the more arid character of the range of *excubitorides*.

OPEN or half-open country is the basic requirement of this audacious and familiar little Butcher-bird. Bird-of-prey he is for all economic purposes, but he is no prowler, nor yet is he a hoverer, wearing out his wings with incessant flight. He is, rather, the fearless watcher, and he must have for his purpose some practical, elevated station where he may mount his marvelous field glasses; for his eyes are scarcely less in their keenness than in their length of focal range. Telephone poles suit him to a T, and so devoted is the bird to this marshalled soldiery of civilization, that one wonders how he ever fared before the advent of telephone poles. It is on their account, doubtless, that the traveller gets such a strong impression of the Shrike's abundance; for telephone poles and roads are ever close friends.

Professor Beal has noted that the California Shrike dances close attendance upon the Kestrel, who is, likewise, fond of telephone poles, or wires; and Professor Beal thinks that although the lesser bird does not dare to disturb the Hawk, he is, nevertheless, jealous of his presence within the domain of his insect preserves, and means to keep close tab on his consumption of victuals. Be that as it may, their methods have nothing in common beyond use of the telephone service. From a



CALIFORNIA SHRIKE

## The White-rumped Shrikes



*Taken in Merced County Photo by the Author*

### AN ANXIOUS FATHER

commanding station, if it be no better than a weed-top, this Shrike searches the ground with his eye until he detects a suspicious movement of insect, mouse, or bird. The bird can spot a cricket at sixty feet, Tyler says, and I think that is well within the mark. Then he darts toward his quarry, settles, and strikes with his beak, or else skirmishes nimbly in mid-air if the creature seeks to elude him. From a successful foray the Shrike returns to devour at leisure; but if the victim is large or ungainly, he must have help from a sharp crotch, or a splinter, or the barb of a fence-wire even, to hold it; for here again he is no hawk, and does not know how to clutch with his feet.

In flight, the Shrike moves either by successive plunges and noisy ascensions, or else pitches down from his perch and wings rapidly over the surface of the vegetation. He does not exhibit much local attachment, but rather roves restlessly from post to post, so as not to wear out his welcome with the crickets. All the Shrike's operations are direct and

business-like; and if he pauses a moment to look over his shoulder as you whirl by in your automobile, you get an impression of a very alert bird-person,—no loafer, but a Twentieth Century brother in feathers.

The nervous energy which characterizes the California Shrike has got him into trouble with the ladies. He has to be doing something, so when his appetite is satisfied, he just goes right on killing—for the fun of it. He doesn't waste the game, exactly—at least he doesn't mean to—for having killed a mouse or a grasshopper, he hunts up a splinter or a thorn, and neatly impales his victim upon it. He might be hungry some time, you know. That the bird does occasionally return to feast upon this stored-up provender is pretty clearly known; but at the best his killings are far in excess of his needs.

Insects, according to Professor Beal, form more than eighty per cent of the bird's food. These include a few useful ground beetles; but the consumption of pests—moths, caterpillars, stink-bugs, crickets, and, above all, grasshoppers—is so enormous that we count him among the most useful of birds, and are even prepared to forgive him for occasional inroads upon the bird-world.

## The White-rumped Shrikes

There is less excuse for this lesser butcher to turn upon his fellows than for his greater kinsman from the North (*L. borealis invictus*), because insect food is plentiful in California the year around. Nevertheless, it is notable that most published instances of his defection have occurred in the winter months. Tyler<sup>1</sup> has seen them capture House Finches and Goldfinches, but regards the Western Vesper Sparrow (*Poæcetes gramineus confinis*) as a more frequent victim than either. Mr. Charles H. Richardson saw a California Shrike overtake and kill a Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia coronata*), near Pasadena, and on examination of the victim he found that its neck had been cut and the vertebrae broken.<sup>2</sup> The date was Feb. 6th; so that even in this mild climate some provocation of hunger may be urged in extenuation of this dreadful act. Mrs. Stephens thus summarizes her experience with these birds in San Diego:<sup>3</sup> "For the last two or three years a pair of California shrikes (*Lanius l. gambeli*) have inhabited the eucalyptus trees growing in our yard. In the yard are also two large century plants. The thorns on these century plants are favorite shambles of the shrikes. Some of the food items observed sticking on the thorns are: Lizards of several species including 'horned toads' (*Phrynosoma*), scorpions, centipedes, Jerusalem crickets, beetles, young quail, adult and young horned

<sup>1</sup>Birds of the Fresno District, by John G. Tyler (1913), p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>Condor, Vol. X., p. 92.

<sup>3</sup>Mrs. Kate Stephens in The Condor, Vol. 8, p. 130.



Taken in San Diego

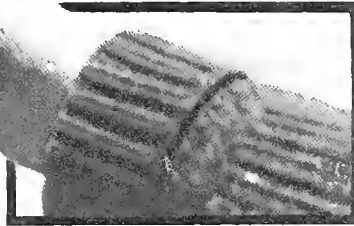
CALIFORNIA SHRIKE AND YOUNG

Photo by Dickey

## The White-rumped Shrikes



larks, a meadow mouse, and young pocket rats. The heads of the mice and rats were eaten first; but the heads of the horned toads were usually allowed to remain on the thorns. The shrikes do not appear to care for the lizards as they are usually allowed to remain and dry on the thorns. I have broods of young chickens running about the place, including one brood without a mother. None of these have been molested by the shrikes."



A CONFIDING CHILD

The Shrike possesses to perfection the power of disgorging indigestible portions of its quarry. Whether it be the elytra of beetles or the bones and hair of a mouse, after an hour or so of digestive attention, during which time the nutritive materials have all been

extracted, up comes a compacted pellet of waste—a cough and a sneeze and the trouble is over for that time. The Shrike has, therefore, no need to "Fletcherize," for he possesses an ironclad guarantee against dyspepsia. "Tummy aches" are presumably a thing unknown in the Shrike nursery, and babies have never to be warned against the unhappy consequences of greed. If a stink-bug or a *Calosoma* beetle proves recalcitrant before digestive amenities, he has only to unswallow the offending morsel, and the incident is closed without prejudice.

Every one has heard the harsh churning or buzzing notes of the Shrike, but few know him as a songster. Those who have not heard the White-rumped Shrike *sing*, have missed a treat. He begins with a series of rasping sounds, which are probably intended to produce the same receptive condition in his audience which Ole Bull secured by awkwardly breaking one string after another on his violin till only one was left. There, however, the resemblance ceases, for where the virtuoso could extract a melody of marvelous variety and sweetness from his single string, the bird produces the sole note of a struck anvil. This pours forth in successive three-syllabled phrases like the metallic and reiterative clink of a freely-falling hammer. The chief difference which appears between this love song and the ordinary call of warning or excitement is that in the latter case the less tender passions have weighted the clanging anvil with scrap iron and destroyed its resonance. Heard at close quarters, as when the observer is tampering with a nest, these scolding notes are exceedingly offensive, even terrifying; yet I



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have never heard in the interior such a supreme of venom as the Island Shrike (*L. l. anthonyi*) is able to inject into its exorcism.

The California Shrikes are prolific and attentive breeders. In a large portion of their range first broods are brought off in early April, and another toward the end of May. Middle March records for fresh eggs are common; and there is one, by H. J. Lelande,<sup>1</sup> near Pasadena, for February 14.

The nests are placed at moderate heights in small trees or bushes, or even, in extreme cases, on the ground. A sage bush or a clump of



*Taken in San Diego*

ALERT

*Photo by Dickey*

greasewood is a very acceptable support in certain regions, while isolated clumps of willow or cottonwood, in regions otherwise treeless, are almost sure to harbor a pair of Shrikes.

The Shrike, being of a stock well entrenched in the North, is a builder of handsome and substantial nests. An example before me,

<sup>1</sup> Grinnell, Pub. 2, Pasadena Acad. Sci., 1898, p. 43.

### *The White-rumped Shrikes*

taken from the heart of a clump of mistletoe in an oak tree near Shandon, has a generous foundation of criss-crossed twigs, chiefly oak. Within this is a matrix, or cup, of interwoven grasses and rootlets, compactly felted with fine vegetable substances of a dozen sorts,—frayed stems, flower-heads, pappus, inner bark of weeds teased to a silky fineness, and a few, a very few, feathers. The inner walls are at no point less than an inch in thickness and, I scarcely doubt, would hold water. The cup is three inches across by two and a half inches deep, while the nest measures externally some four and a half inches by ten.

Another nest from the same section is made almost entirely of the macerated and frayed-out fibers of cottonwood bark, with a scanty lining of fine, black wool, obtained, apparently, from some old garment, or perhaps a felt hat. Its hollow is two and three-quarters inches deep by quite three and a half wide.

The eggs, from five to seven in number, are pale bluish gray, or dull grayish white, as to ground, with a generous and nearly uniform spotting of yellowish brown and cold gray-brown.

The parent birds are singularly indifferent, as a rule, to the welfare of a nest containing eggs alone. The female sits close, but once flushed, stands clinking in the distance, or else absents herself entirely. When the young are hatched, however, the old birds are sure to put up a spirited and deafening defense. The babies themselves are most engaging little fellows. Their confidence is easily won, and they are said to make excellent pets.

#### No. 120c Island Shrike

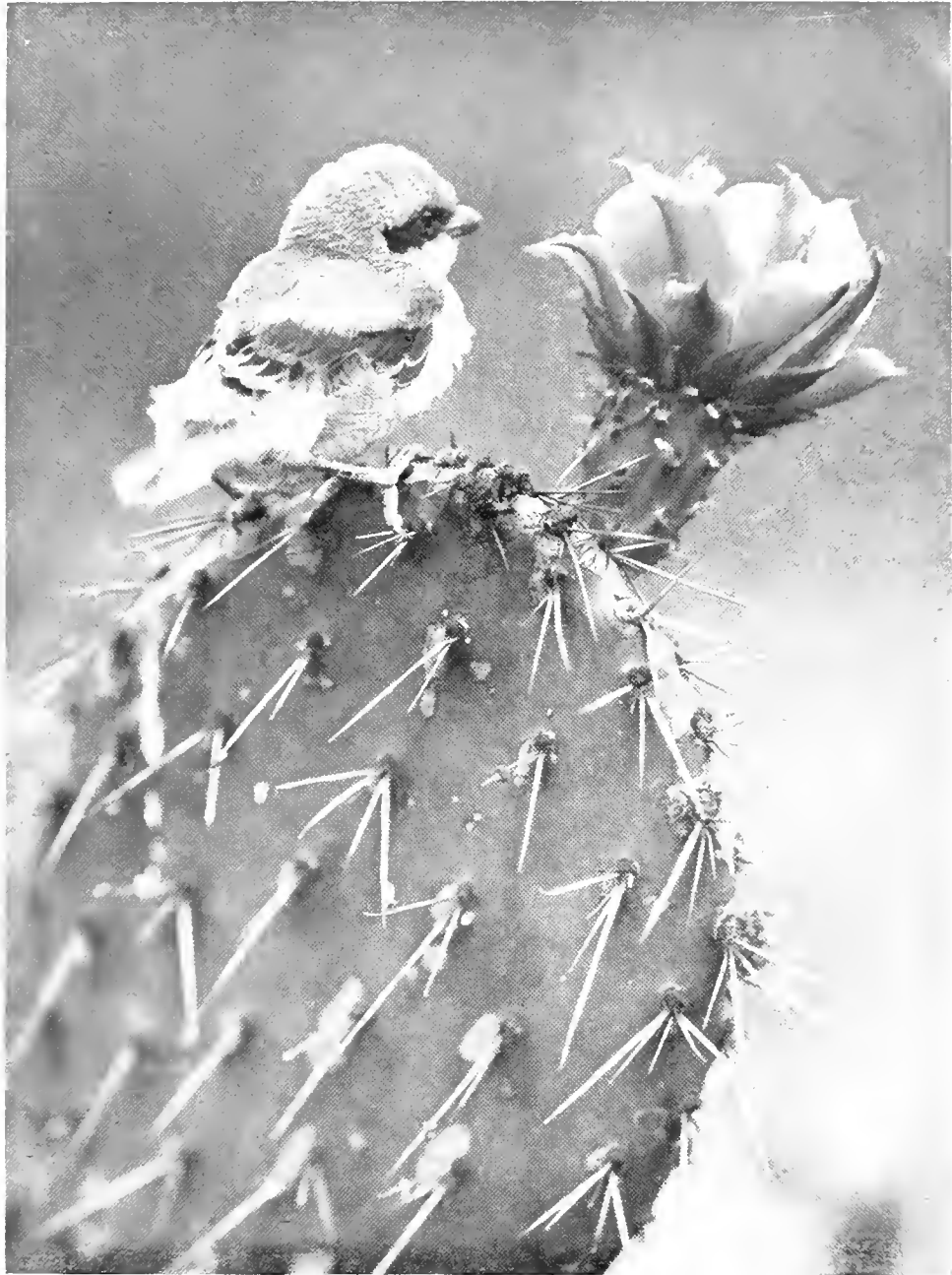
A. O. U. No. 622c. *Lanius ludovicianus anthonyi* Mearns.

**Description.**—Similar to *L. l. gambeli*, but gray of upperparts much darker (deep neutral gray); rump light bluish gray (not white); white of scapulars duller, or else invaded by light bluish gray; the white patch at base of primaries much reduced; and white of tail less extensive; the underparts darker—definitely dingy brownish gray, but not exhibiting so strong a tendency toward vermiculation. Size about as in *gambeli*.

**Nesting.**—As in *excubitorides*. Av. of 36 eggs in M. C. O. colls: 24.4 x 18 (.96 x .71). *Season:* April.

**Range** (Wholly contained within California).—Resident on the timbered members of the Santa Barbara Island group; hence, found on Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, Santa Catalina, San Clemente, and even Anacapa; but *not* on San Miguel or San Nicolas.

**Authorities.**—Henshaw (*Collurio ludovicianus* var. *excubitorides*), Rep. Wheeler Surv., 1876, App. Hs. p. 237, in text (Santa Cruz Id., crit.); Mearns, Auk, vol. xv., 1898, p. 261 (orig. desc.; Santa Cruz Id.); Howell, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 12, 1917, p. 88, part (Santa Cruz Id.; syn., habits, etc.).



**Cactus Blossoms**

Baby Island Shrike on Tuna

*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*

Taken on San Clemente Island



## *The White-rumped Shrikes*

THIS slightly darker form appears to be well established on the Santa Barbara Islands, where it is supposed to be strictly resident. It was originally described from Santa Cruz Island; but its numbers there have possibly suffered from the limelight of "scientific" scrutiny ensuing. One party, in 1907, took off sixteen "skins"; whereas I did not see half that many birds in an eighteen-day visit in the spring of 1915. For some unaccountable (?) reason, these Island Shrikes are universally characterized as "very shy." Dr. Mearns says:<sup>1</sup> "In the daytime they never permitted us to come within range of them." Dr. Joseph Grinnell says<sup>2</sup> of one defiant fellow who persisted in singing in his neighborhood: "The rustle of the tent door or the click of a gun lock, however, was sufficient to send him up over the ridge, not to appear again for hours." And Mr. Rollo H. Beck, who, nevertheless, managed to secure a modicum of ten birds, testifies:<sup>3</sup> "They were the wildest land birds I ever saw, by far."

Island Shrikes are early breeders. The first brood is brought off in March and a second by the first of May. It is my conviction that the matured birds, at least of Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa Islands, in order to escape the ensuing drought, repair to the mainland. At any rate, along the Santa Barbara coast, where *L. l. gambeli* is at best a rare breeder, there is a sudden accession, or irruption, of Shrikes in July. For the ensuing two months they are greatly in evidence, not so much for their numbers, which are moderate, as for their excessive and unique noisiness. An entry in the notebook, under date of August 11, 1911, faithfully records first impressions: "A series of violent, explosive, and altogether offensive notes has been traced definitely to the local Shrikes. I have heard the rudiments of the same sounds before from eastern birds, but these local sounds are from three to seven times harsher. Your Santa Barbara Shrike [sic] is a very pirate, and he bursts out, with no apparent provocation at all, into a perfect torrent of abuse—excoriation is the word which most accurately describes it: *Scrat, scrat, scrat, scrat, scrat, scrat, scrat, scrat*, with somewhat diminishing intensity. The outburst lasts for several seconds, and consists of a nearly uniform series of harsh, rasping notes of an intensity and repulsiveness calculated to shatter the nerves of a cat. However, I am not even sure that this bird is displeased, for the malediction is uttered oftener in solitude than elsewhere, and is delivered from fence-post or telephone wire without any apparent regard to audience. It seems to mark rather an overflow of good spirits, such as we might expect from an otherwise unoccupied devil. This evening in going across country to a farmer neighbor's, I heard not one but half

<sup>1</sup> Auk, Vol. XV., July, 1898, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> Pub. I., Pasadena Acad. Sci., Aug., 1897, pp. 19, 20.

<sup>3</sup> So quoted by Dr. Edgar Mearns, Auk, Vol. XV., p. 261.

### *The White-rumped Shrikes*

a dozen of these birds in various places, having no apparent relation to each other, unless, indeed, they be offspring of one vicious pair."

Now this note, common at this season all along the Santa Barbara coast, I never heard elsewhere until we arrived at Santa Cruz Island in April, 1915. *Scrat, scrat, scrat*, cried the first bird we met in Prisoners' Harbor, and he might have been the very bird we had listened to in August, as he shouted from a fence-post overlooking Neighbor Johnson's bean-field. And all the shrikes of Santa Cruz Island *scattered* us in the same tones.

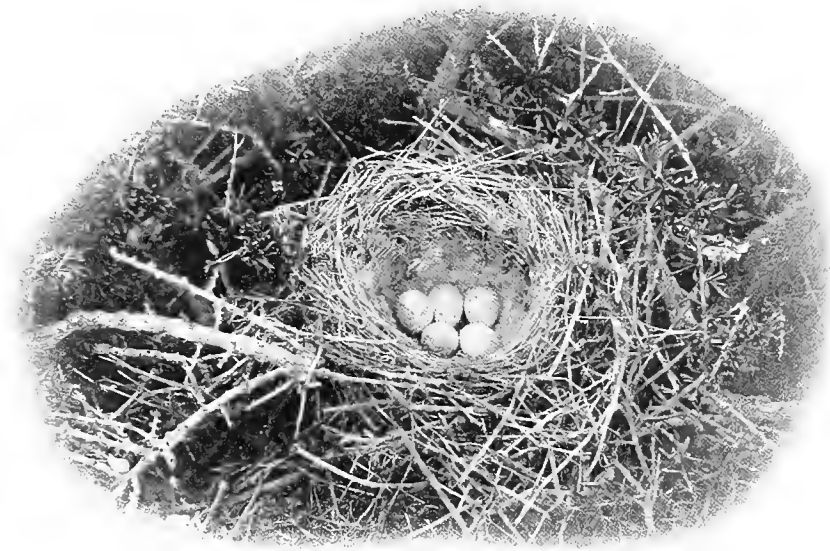
I am thus explicit regarding the testimony on this point because certain friends who, at my instigation (people in glass houses always throw stones), have collected August Shrikes at Santa Barbara, report that they can detect no difference between them and the mainland form, *L. l. gambeli*. Perhaps the plumage characters assigned (with some show of justice) to *L. l. anthonyi* bleach out and become unrecognizable in late summer. Perhaps the ear-test is, on occasion, more trustworthy than the eye-test. Perhaps there are here differences worthy of recognition as between *gambeli* and *anthonyi*, but differences which inhere in psychology rather than in shades of pigment or length of toenails. A distinction in notes or song may be as valid (and I hold that it is) for purposes of sub-specific discrimination, or "race" determination, as length of bill or breadth of wing-bars. Anyhow, we are very sure that there is a difference here; and we are pleased to find that Dr. Mearns bears us out, for he says,<sup>1</sup> speaking of his experiences on Santa Cruz Island: "At night when we went out to shoot bats, Shrikes would dash about us uttering loud harsh screams, different from the voices of any Shrikes I have heard elsewhere."

A nest of the Island Shrike, found six feet up in an acacia tree at Prisoners' Harbor, was empty on the 4th of April (1915), but on the evening of the 8th it held one egg of a large, light-colored type. On the afternoon of the 11th, three days later, it held *six* eggs, which we took, together with the nest. This was throwing them in pretty fast, and reminded us of the "two eggs a day and three on Sunday" record of the model hen of childhood's tradition. However, two eggs of this set were strikingly large and light-colored, and three were of a small, dark type; while the sixth, which might have belonged to either, so far as its mediating appearance was concerned, probably should be credited to the "large, light" account. On the 19th, eight days later, we found a more hastily constructed nest in a pollard willow, near the site of the first, and undoubtedly the product of the same birds, though it was still empty. Two days later, at five p. m., this new discovery held three eggs, and on the following

<sup>1</sup> Auk, Vol. XV., July, 1898, p. 263.

## *The Plain Titmice*

morning (viz., April 22) at nine o'clock, it held *five* eggs. Close examination showed two types, two light and three dark, precisely those of the set previously taken. Casting about for explanation, we found *three* birds scolding us. This was a polygamous household, rare, indeed, among Passerine birds. Whether the evil doctrine of Joseph Smith has penetrated to this remote isle, or whether the Shrikes of Santa Cruz have



*Taken on San Clemente Island*

*Photo by D. R. Dickey*

NEST AND EGGS OF ISLAND SHRIKE

been reduced, through persecution, to the pitiable condition described in Scripture when seven women take hold on one man, we are unable to say. Unfortunately, the whistle of the departing steamer "Santa Cruz" cut investigation short, and we nearly broke the eggs in our mad scramble to get aboard. Why, yes; they belonged to us, the confiscated product of palpable malefactors.

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No. 121

## Plain Titmouse

A. O. U. No. 733, part. **Bæolophus inornatus inornatus** (Gambel).

**Description.**—*Adults* (sexes alike) and *immature*: Crested; upperparts plain hair-brown with olivaceous reflections on rump and on wing-edgings, shading on sides

## The Plain Titmice

into dull grayish white or pale brownish gray, the brownish element strengthening posteriorly. Bill grayish horn-color with paler tomia; feet and tarsi bluish gray. *Young birds* are buffier, especially posteriorly. Males average: length (skins) 127 (5.00); wing 68.7 (2.70); tail 57 (2.24); bill 11.3 (.44); tarsus 21.1 (.83).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; "plain" gray coloration distinctive.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A deep cushion of rabbit-fur or other soft substances, placed in natural or "worked" cavity in tree or in adobe cliff; also variously in artificial nesting-boxes. *Eggs:* 5 to 7; plain white or spotted sparingly or variously, sometimes wreathed with yellowish brown. Av. size 18.5 x 12.95 (.73 x .51). *Season:* March-June; two broods.

**Range of *Bæolophus inornatus*.**—Resident chiefly in the Upper Sonoran zone of the United States from the northern border of Lower California and Mexico north to Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and northern California.

**Range of *B. i. inornatus*** (Wholly within California).—Common resident, chiefly in the oak association of the Upper Sonoran zone west of the Sierra divide and north of the Tehachipe, north to Mendocino and Siskiyou counties.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Parus inornatus*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. ii., 1845, p. 265 (orig. desc.; Monterey); **Adams**, Osprey, vol. ii., 1898, p. 81 (habits, eggs, etc.); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 68, pl. v., part (food).

## No. 121a San Diego Titmouse

A. O. U. No. 733, part. **Bæolophus inornatus murinus** Ridgway.

**Description.**—Similar to *B. i. inornatus*, but said to be slightly larger; tone of upperparts a trifle lighter; the gray of underparts slightly darker. An intergrade between *inornatus* and *griseus* whose recognition in nomenclature is of doubtful wisdom.

**Range of *B. i. murinus*** (Almost wholly within California).—Resident in the San Diego district, from the northern border of Lower California north to Ventura and Santa Barbara counties, east to the desert divide.

**Authorities.**—**Baird** (*Lophophanes inornatus*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. ix., 1858, p. 386, part (Ft. Tejon); **Willett**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 7, 1912, p. 104 (s. Calif.; occurrence, nesting dates).

## No. 121b Gray Titmouse

A. O. U. No. 733a. **Bæolophus inornatus griseus** (Ridgway).

**Description.**—Similar to *B. i. inornatus*, but decidedly grayer, less olivaceous above, nearer light grayish olive and smoke-gray; slightly longer.

**Range of *B. i. griseus*.**—That of the species, save for California, west of the Sierran and desert divides.

**Range in California.**—Sparingly resident in the Upper Sonoran zone of the desert ranges, east of the Sierras. Northern limit "the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada . . . at the head of Owens River" and Benton, Mono County (A. K. Fisher).

**Authorities.**—**Fisher** (*Parus inornatus griseus*), N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, 1893, p. 138 (Panamint Mts., etc.); **Stephens**, Condor, vol. v., 1903, p. 105 (Providence Mts.); **Coues**, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 114, part (Ariz.; syn., desc., etc.).





PLAIN TITMOUSE

## The Plain Titmice

*SSIC-RAP sssicrap* comes from the depths of an oak tree on an April day, and unless one is used to this accusing expletive, he is apt to start up like a guilty cat, before he recovers his aplomb and decides to face his accuser. The bird is only trying your nerves, and if they stand the ordeal, he will utter a *tsay tsay tsay* of reassurance, and fall to hammering on the bark in a quite abstracted way. If the bird's mate is not sitting on the eggs, she is in close company with her lord, and you will hear scraps of conversation in sibilant squeaks and merry *day days*, which win the ear and delight the heart. The Plain Tit's repertory of song is highly varied, like that of the eastern Tufted Titmouse (*B. bicolor*). Many of the notes bear a close resemblance to those of the eastern birds, but the two most characteristic cries of *bicolor*, the *chééy*, *chéévy*, *chéévy*, and the clearer *péto*, *péto*, *péto*, are rarely heard from *inornatus*; and the utterances of the latter are both less emphatic and less distinct.

It takes an experienced ear to recognize all of Master Plain's achievements; and after one has familiarized himself with generic lines of effort, there remain charming individual variations and surprises which assure a sustained interest on the part of the student. It's dollars to doughnuts that this very plain bird will give you momentary visions of rare exotics—Troupials and golden

Tanagers, and what not—before you acquire the habit of attributing all strange noises to *B. inornatus*. What should I do, for instance, upon catching the golden crests of a mellow bassoon in the acacia tree across the road? Why, rush to the house for the binoculars and hard after, of course. At near approach



Hope Ranch, Santa Barbara

SUCH SHADES AS TITMICE LOVE

Photo by the Author

## The Plain Titmice

it sounded like *di di di tipoong, di di di tipoong*, the *di* notes very wooden and prosaic, the concluding member suddenly and richly musical. An escaped cage-bird from Brazil, at least! No; a "plain" Titmouse!

West of the Sierras the range of the Plain Titmouse is nearly coextensive with that of oak trees (with the exception of the tan-bark oak, which would take it into the redwood country, where it is almost never found). From the oak trees as a base, the bird occasionally ventures up into the pines in the Sierran foothills—even nests there; and excursions into the chaparral, of almost any distance, are matters of course. The eastern form of the species, *B. inornatus griseus*, scarcely different to appearance, even under scrutiny, inhabits the pinyons and junipers of the northeastern desert ranges. And this *griseus*, although it appears at suitable submountainous stations all the way to New Mexico, does not occur in the valley of the Colorado, even where it is well timbered. Wherever found, a crested Titmouse is lively and officious, a sort of major domo of the woods, before whom every invader must give account. He is, perhaps, at times a bit too inquisitive. Once when the author was offering a morning orison from a wayside camp near Los Olivos, thanking God, if I remember correctly, for the rare beauty of that country—a billowy sea of green embossed with jade oaks—a clear voice in the foliage overhead suddenly shouted *péto péto péto*. I do not know whether this was an inopportune demand for passports, or whether the little fellow was really meaning to join our worship. Whatever he wanted, the good Lord no doubt heard his petitions as well as ours.

Plain Titmice enjoy a mixed diet. Insects of many kinds reward the relentless scrutiny of twig and trunk; and because we find among them a sensible proportion of the black olive-scale, a notorious pest, we count Tom Tit among our most valuable horticultural allies. Vegetable food



Taken  
in the  
San Jacinto  
Mountains

Photo  
by the  
Author

A SORT OF MAJOR DOMO

## The Plain Titmice

forms a larger proportion of this bird's fare—57 per cent, Professor Beal says—than in that of any other Titmouse. Fruit is sampled in season, but eaten chiefly out of season, that is, in late autumn and winter, when other forage fails. Weed-seeds, leaf-galls, and poison oak seeds make up a quarter of the half, but the staple article of diet is the acorn. This is oftenest secured from the ground, but the bird takes it up into the tree and opens it with many a yeoman blow, holding it tight in a crack of the bark the while.

Early authorities asserted that the Plain Titmouse used only hollows already provided—old woodpecker holes and the like—for its nest. This is quite a mistake, although it is true that the birds will gratefully accept a "start," whether from woodpecker, wind crevice, or incipient decay. Two of the nests I have found (and *not* rifled) were excavated in the heart wood of live limbs of the blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*), not less than ten inches in diameter. A five-inch wall of oak affords good protection even from humans; but resolute collectors report that pure white or fairly spotted eggs, to the number of five or six, are to be found within upon a luxurious cushion of fur.

I once traced a Plain Titmouse to a hole about twenty feet up in one of those cliffs of mingled gravel and "dobe" which line the

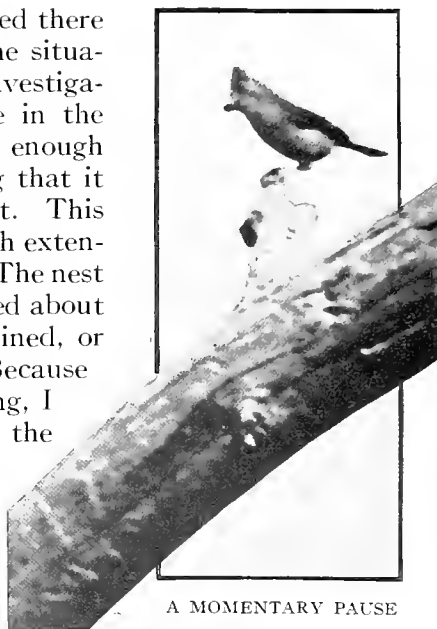


Taken in San Diego County

Photo by D. R. Dickey

## The Oregon Chickadee

banks of the San Jacinto River. We judged there were young—on May 23rd, 1913—but the situation was so remarkable as to demand investigation. We found a neat, round aperture in the earth, which must have been barely large enough to admit the bird, being, in fact, so snug that it showed two separate “scores” for the feet. This opened rapidly into an ample chamber with extensive inner recesses,—a monument of toil. The nest proper, a great bed of rabbit-fur, was placed about one foot from the entrance, and it contained, or tried to contain, six full grown young. Because we had been obliged to enlarge the opening, I pushed all the little fellows back along the passage for safety's sake—all but one (there is always a smart Aleck in every brood), who insisted upon scrambling out over my arm and making a break for liberty. He got an awful tumble for his pains, but we rescued him, a sadder, etc.



Taken  
in the  
San Jacinto  
Mountains

Photo  
by the  
Author

A MOMENTARY PAUSE

No. 122

## Oregon Chickadee

A. O. U. No. 735b. *Penthestes atricapillus occidentalis* (Baird).

**Synonym.**—WESTERN BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE.

**Description.**—*Adult:* Top of head (including eye) and nape shining black; throat and chest dead black with whitish skirting posteriorly; a white band on side of head and neck, increasing in width behind; “back varying from deep mouse-gray to very slight buffy slate-gray in spring and summer to deep hair-brown to light olive in fall and winter plumage”; wings and tail dusky, more or less edged, especially on outer webs of tertials, with ashy or whitish; breast and belly white, centrally; sides and flanks pale buffy in spring, strong brownish buff or pale wood-brown in fall plumage. Bill and feet blackish. Length 114.3-133.3 (4.50-5.25); wing 62 (2.44); tail 56 (2.20); bill .95 (.37); tarsus 16.8 (.66).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; black of crown not broken by white, i. e., no white stripe over eye, as distinguished from *P. gambeli*; back gray as distinguished from *P. rufescens*.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* a heavy mat of moss, grasses, and plant-down, lined with

## *The Oregon Chickadee*

rabbits' fur, wool, hair, or feathers, in made hole or natural cavity of stump or tree, usually not over ten feet from the ground, and near water. *Eggs*: 5-8, white, marked sparingly with reddish brown, in small spots, tending to gather about larger end. Av. size, 14.7 x 11.9 (.58 x .47). *Season*: April 15-May 15; one brood.

**Range of *Penthestes atricapillus*.**—North America from limit of trees south to about the middle of the United States.

**Range of *P. a. occidentalis*.**—Transition zone of northwest coast district from British Columbia to extreme northern California.

**Occurrence in California.**—Breeds sparingly in Siskiyou County. One definite record, four specimens: Scott River, June 10 and 13, 1911, by Miss A. M. Alexander and Miss L. Kellogg.

**Authorities.**—Grinnell, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 11, 1915, p. 163 (near Callahan, Siskiyou Co., June); *Belding*, Condor, vol. vii., 1905, p. 82 (crit.; early records in Calif.).

THERE is only one record of the occurrence of this black-capped Chickadee of the North within our borders; but as that was a breeding record, we may suppose that the species is of regular occurrence in that ornithologically neglected region, western Siskiyou County. The Oregon Chickadee does not greatly differ in habit from our more familiar Chestnut-backed species; but it has a predilection for water, and its nests should be looked for in some low, swampy woods, or in deciduous timber lining some stream, rather than in the uplands and evergreens frequented by *P. rufescens* and *P. gambeli*. Any appreciation of the "Oregon" Chickadee drawn from Californian material would be so inadequate that I venture some conclusions drawn from northern studies, and only regret that we lack excuse for more extended consideration of a most engaging bird.

Chickadees are friendly little folk (and this remark applies, irrespective of species), so that wherever they go, except in the busy nesting season, they form the nucleus of a merry band, Western Golden-crowned Kinglets, Sitkan Kinglets, Creepers, Juncoes, Towhees maybe, and a Bewick Wren or two to guard the terrestrial passage, and to furnish sport for the federated fairies. The Chickadees are undisputed leaders, though their name be legion. While they remain aloft, we may mistake their dainty squeakings and minikin ways for those of Kinglets, but if we can only determine what direction the flock is pursuing, we may count on the vanguard's being composed of these sprightly, saucy little Black-caps.

Chickadee refuses to look down for long upon the world; or, indeed, to look at any one thing from any one direction for more than two consecutive twelfths of a second. "Any old side up without care," is the label he bears; and so with anything he meets, be it a pine-cone, an alder catkin, or a bug-bearing branchlet, top-side, bottomside, inside, outside, all is right side to the nimble Chickadee. Faith! their little brains must have

## The Oregon Chickadee

special guy-ropes and stays, else they would have been spilled long ago, the way their owners frisk about. Blindman's buff, hide-and-seek, and tag are merry games enough when played out on one plane, but when staged in three dimensions, with a labyrinth of interlacing branches for hazard, only the blithe bird whose praises we sing could possibly master their intricacies.

But Chickadee is as confiding and as confidence-inviting as he is capable. It is precisely because you babble all your secrets to him at the first breath that the whole wood-side comes to him for news. With the fatuity of utter trust he will interrogate the fiercest looking stranger; and the sound of the "sweetee" call is the signal for all birds to be alert. At the repetition of it the leaves begin to rustle, the moss to sigh, and the log-heaps to give up their hidden store of sleepy Wrens, bashful Sparrows, and frowning Towhees. Juncoes simper and Kinglets squeak over the strange discovery; the Steller Jay takes notice and sidles over to spy upon the performance; while the distant-faring Crow swerves from his course and bends an inquiring eye toward the mystery. *Dee-dee-dee* says the Black-cap. A hundred beady eyes are bent upon you, trying to resolve your domino of corduroy or khaki. *Carw* says the Crow in com-



Taken in  
Washington

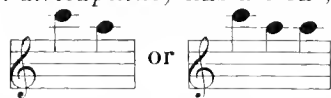
Photo by  
the Author

NEST AND EGGS OF OREGON CHICKADEE  
THE FRONT WALL OF THE CONTAINING STUMP HAS BEEN REMOVED

## The Oregon Chickadee

prehension, and you know that the game is up,—up for all but the Chickadee. He will stay and talk with you as long as you may endure to pucker your lips to his fairy lispings.

It is no exaggeration to say that the "Swee-tee" note of the Chickadee, passably imitated, is the quickest summons in the bird-world. It is the open sesame to all woodland secrets. One drawback, however, attends its use: you cannot compass it when the air is chilly and the lips thick. Now the eastern bird (*P. atricapillus*) has a clear, high-pitched call-note, *Swee-tee*, or *Swee-tee tee* which must be taken as the type of this genus and the calls of the western bird are best understood by reference to this norm. In the song of *occidentalis* the first note of the



type, "high C," is oftenest repeated three or four times, and has a double character impossible to represent on paper; while the whole ends, or not, with the lower note of *atricapillus*. These notes may be called the *deo deo deo day* series. In rare instances they become a ravishing trill on high C, beyond imitation or analysis. For the rest, Chickadee's notes divide themselves into squeaks, vocal notes, and whistles of such a variety that Chickadee's friends have always a sufficient excuse to stop midway of prosy labors and listen to the latest news from fairyland.



Taken in Oregon

LADEN WITH DAINTIES

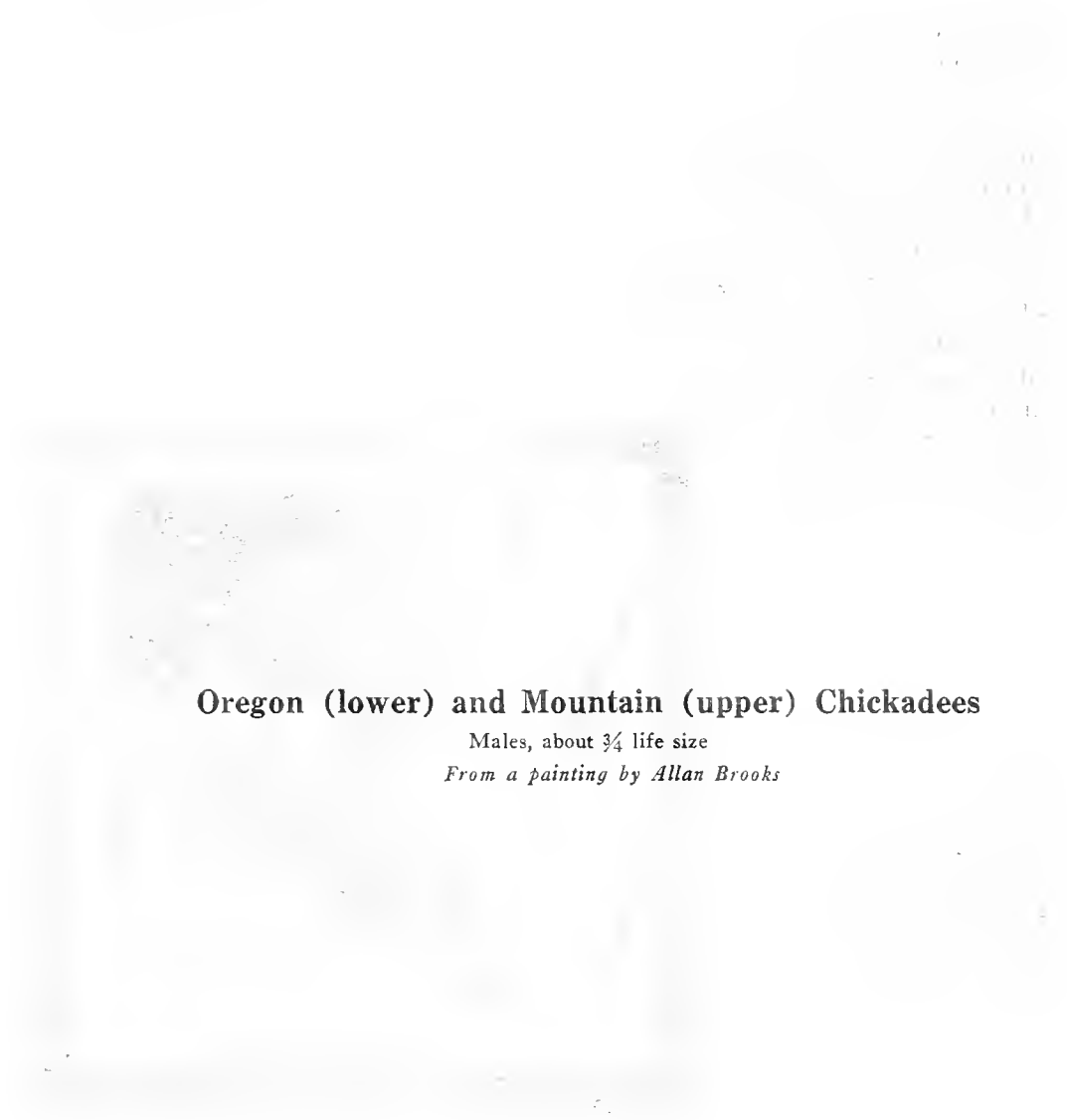
Photo by W. L. Finley



Oregon (lower) and Mountain (upper) Chickadees

Male, about 1/2 life size  
From a painting by Allan Brooks





**Oregon (lower) and Mountain (upper) Chickadees**

Males, about  $\frac{3}{4}$  life size

*From a painting by Allan Brooks*





## Mountain Chickadee

### No. 123a Short-tailed Chickadee

A. O. U. No. 738, part. ***Penthestes gambeli abbreviatus*** Grinnell.

**Description.**—*Adults in spring and summer:* Somewhat as in *P. atricapillus occidentalis*. Head and throat similar, but black interrupted by strong white superciliary stripe, nearly or quite meeting fellow on forehead; upperparts plain deep olive-gray, or mouse-gray; wings and tail deeper gray, with some pale grayish edging; sides of head, below the black trans-ocular stripe, and neck, white; underparts (except throat) dull white, more or less washed on sides, flanks, and under tail-coverts with pale olive-gray. *Adults in fall and winter:* Upperparts washed with buffy (cartridge buff); brownish on sides; some white edging on forehead; and superciliary stripe broader. *Young birds* are duller as to black of head and neck, and have a less distinct superciliary. Length 127-139.7 (5.00-5.50); wing 70 (2.75); tail 60 (2.35); bill 10.2 (.40); tarsus 18 (.70).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; much like Oregon Chickadee, but white superciliary distinctive; range higher (on the average) than that of other species.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A thick mass of rabbit-fur placed in cavity of tree whether natural or artificial, but chiefly in holes excavated by parent birds. *Eggs:* 5 to 8; usually plain white, but sometimes faintly or even sharply marked with reddish brown. Av. size, 16.5 x 11.9 (.65 x .47). *Season:* May-June, according to altitude; one brood.

**Range of *Penthestes gambeli*.**—Mountains of western North America from British Columbia (centrally) and east-central Montana south to northern Lower California and western Texas.

**Range of *P. g. abbreviatus*.**—The Sierra Nevada and northern coast ranges in California north into Oregon and, presumably, east into northern Nevada. Intergrades with *baileyæ* in the extreme southern Sierras, and with *inyoensis* in the Mono Lake region, and thence along the eastern flank of the Sierras.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Parus montanus*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1847, p. 155 ("California"; subspecies uncertain); **Belding**, Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club, vol. iii., 1878, p. 102 (breeding habits); Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. i., 1879, p. 400 (Big Trees; desc. nest and eggs) **Barlow**, Condor, vol. iii., 1901, p. 183 (Sierra Nevada; desc. nest and eggs); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xvii., 1918, p. 510 (orig. desc.; Siskiyou Mts.).

### No. 123b Bailey's Chickadee

A. O. U. No. 738a. ***Penthestes gambeli baileyæ*** Grinnell.

**Synonym.**—MRS. BAILEY'S MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE.

**Description.**—Similar to *P. g. abbreviatus*, but darker, "smoke-gray" on sides and flanks, "mouse-gray" on back. Bill a little larger.

**Range of *P. g. baileyæ*.**—The mountain ranges of southern California northwest to the Santa Lucia Mountains in Monterey County, south, presumably, to northern Lower California; intergrading with *P. g. abbreviatus* in the southern Sierras.

**Authorities.**—**Baird** (*Parus montanus*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. ix., 1858, p. 394, part (Ft. Tejon); **Grinnell**, Condor, vol. x., 1908, p. 29 (orig. desc.; type

## The Mountain Chickadees

locality, Mt. Wilson, Los Angeles Co.); Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 124 (San Bernardino Mts.).

### No. 123c Inyo Mountain Chickadee

A. O. U. No. 738, part. **Penthestes gambeli inyoensis** Grinnell.

**Description.**—Similar to *P. g. abbreviatus*, but paler, in worn plumage more ashy; tail averaging a little longer.

**Range of *P. g. inyoensis*.**—"The higher mountains of eastern California lying east and southeast of Owens Valley, from the vicinity of Mono Craters and the White Mountains, in Mono County, south to the Panamint Mountains, in Inyo County" (Grinnell).

**Authorities.**—**Fisher** (*Parus gambeli*), N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, 1893, p. 139, part (Panamint Mts., etc.; desc. nest); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xvii., 1918, p. 509 (orig. desc.; type locality, Jackass Spring, Panamint Mts.).

IT MAY BE only the partiality of a fellow mountaineer, but somehow I have fancied that we have in the Mountain Chickadee the sweetest and most winsome of his clan. That white line above the eyebrow adds a little distinction to the mountaineer, but we will not ground our hopes on so slight a claim. Is it, then, that in sweet confidingness it



Taken in San Diego County

SWEET BABIES!

Photo by Dickey

## The Mountain Chickadees

outdoes its eastern cousin, Black-cap, justly renowned? or is it, rather, that it loves the high, thin air of the Sierras, and fears not the groans of dying glaciers, nor the outbursts of unseasonable atmospheric wrath? This, undoubtedly; for it takes the touch of adversity, well met, to bring out the admirable traits of bird character, as well as human.

For myself, I have fallen in love with these brave midgets a dozen times over, and I hold my heart ever ready to cast at the feet of the next beady-eyed charmer who hops into view on a pine bough and licks her name, "Sweet Baby."

Mountain Chickadees fear isolation as little as they fear cold; and although they move about in family troupes in autumn, and do not despise the wintry fellowship of juncoes and kinglets, they are not dependent, like Chestnut-backs (*P. rufescens*), on the near presence of their kin. With the world before them, they enjoy plenty of "searoom," and nest anywhere, from two to three thousand feet—in California; a thousand will do in Washington—to the limit of trees. It

should be added, also, that they prefer open timber, especially pine, and varied cover; hence, they experience little temptation to invade the woodland fastnesses which are consecrate to Chestnut-backs.

Family life is the keynote to appreciation of the Penthestine character, and while the writer cannot profess always to have deserved the confidence reposed in him, memory adverts to half a dozen scenes of Penthestine home-life, and conscience is untroubled by reproaches which were more like fairy blessings.

The first occasion was the finding of a nest three feet up in a wild cherry stub. This contained fresh eggs on the 18th of May. Their color had been pure white, but they were much soiled through contact



Taken in San Diego County

Photo by Dickey

A BEADY-EYED CHARMER

## *The Mountain Chickadees*



*Taken on Mt. Shasta*

FELLOW MOUNTAINEERS

*Photo by the Author*

with the miscellaneous stuff which made up the lining of the cavity: moss, cow-hair, rabbits' wool, wild ducks' down, hawks' casts, etc. The birds were not especially solicitous, although once the female flew almost into my face as I was preparing the eggs for the cabinet (alma mater's). And then she sat quietly for several minutes on a twig not above a foot from my eyes.

On the well-kept grounds of a northern magnate I came upon a nestful of these Chickadees, which the thoughtfulness, or possibly the inattention of a gardener had spared. The nest was two feet up in a stump, concealed by a clump of second-growth maples, picturesquely nestled at the base of a volcanic knob. Upon first discovery the parent birds both appeared with bills full of larvæ, and scolded

daintily. Finally, after several feints, one entered the nesting hole and fed, with our eyes not two feet removed. Photography was impossible because of the subdued light, but it was an unfailing source of interest to see the busy parents hurrying to and fro and bringing incredible quantities of provisions in the shape of moths' eggs, spiders, wood-boring grubs, and winged creatures of a hundred sorts. Let us hope the gardener knew what he was about in sheltering these unpaid assistants. Why, when it



Владимир Иванович Давыдов  
Владимир Иванович Давыдов  
У Давыдова Иван

**A Decorous Brood**

*Bailey Mountain Chickadees*

*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*







## *The Mountain Chickadees*

comes to horticulture, three pairs of Chickadees are equal to one Scotchman any day.

The young were fully fledged, and the irrepressible of the flock (there is always an irrepressible) spent a good deal of time at the entrance shifting upon his toes, and wishing he dared venture out. The old birds fed incessantly, usually alighting upon the bark at one side of the



*Taken in San Diego County*

### EXACT JUSTICE

A MOTHER BIRD ALWAYS APPEARS TO KNOW EXACTLY WHOSE TURN IT IS

*Photo by Dickey*

hole and debating for a moment before plunging into the wooden cavern, whence issued a chorus of childish entreaties.

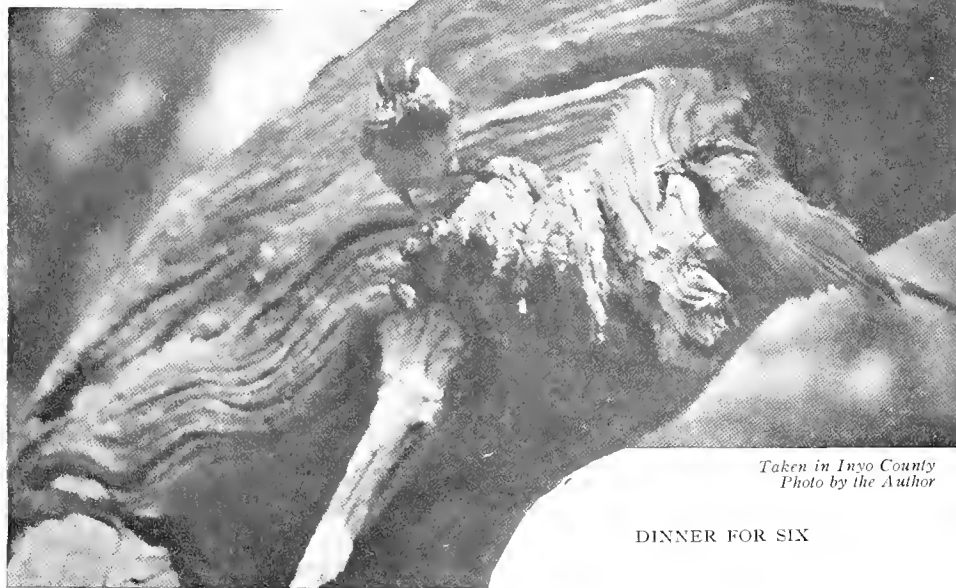
The next morning our Chickadees had all flown, and upon breaking into the abandoned home we found a nest chamber some six inches in diameter, with its original warm lining mingled with fallen punk and trodden into an indistinguishable mass by the restless feet of the chick Chickadees. A special feature of the interior construction was a knot, which had persisted as a hard core when the surrounding punk had been removed. This had evidently been no end of amusement to the young birds and of service to the parents as well, for its surface was polished by the friction of many Penthestine toes.

The pair figured next (indifferently well) had a home in the upturned

### *The Mountain Chickadees*

root of a pine tree overlooking the Cottonwood Lakes in Inyo County, at an elevation of over 11,000 feet. The first stage of photographic preparation involved sawing off the end of the root where the Mountain Chickadees held forth, so as almost to expose the babies. The old birds were considerably disconcerted at first, and they were especially afraid to trust the heavy felted material, chiefly marmot fur, of their own providing, which lapped over the edge of the sawed-off stump. They seemed to fear being smothered in its abundance, for as often as they lighted in it, they sprang out in great alarm. After many efforts I had the good fortune to catch both parents at the nest for three consecutive exposures, though the roar of the shutter never failed to frighten them. The last exposure was made while both were standing crowded in the cavity, and they jumped as if shot. This circumstance of their being caught together in a narrow place seemed to impress them, for when a few moments later they found themselves in the same position, they bethought them of their recent experience and jumped so suddenly (although the camera did not go off at that time) that they looked like fragments of an exploding bomb.

After these experiences it was a relief to find, in the Warner Mountains, a nest with four white eggs, from which the



*Taken in Inyo County  
Photo by the Author*

DINNER FOR SIX

## The Mountain Chickadees

owner was absent. She with her mate had "gone a-hunting," and true to the old nursery rhyme, she had left the Baby Buntings (in ovo) wrapped in a piece of rabbit skin. The nest, which was a great mass of rabbit fur, occupied an old cavity made by a Batchelder Woodpecker in a pine stub, at a height of four feet from the ground. The set was, of course, incomplete, so pending its completion, the eggs had been left by the mistress soundly covered up under a blanket of rabbit fur at least an inch in thickness.



Taken in Inyo County

THE EXPLOSION

Photo by the Author

The notes of the Mountain Chickadee closely resemble those of the more familiar Black-cap (*P. atricapillus*), and our knowledge of such distinction as undoubtedly does exist, is still incomplete. The *Swee-tee* call may be either of two notes (see under Oregon Chickadee) or three, *Swee-tee-tee*, or both notes may be doubled. Dr. Grinnell says explicitly of the Mountain Chickadees which he heard in the San Bernardino Mountains, that their "clearly whistled song" was of four notes, the first two pitched higher than the others. Now the song phrase of the birds heard, not once nor a hundred times only, in the San Jacinto Moun-

tains, in the season of 1913, was of quite a different order: *hoo* <sup>hee</sup> *hee*, or



The tones were really ravishing sweet, of a quality which put them on a par with the product of the most gifted of mountain songsters. Half a dozen times during a stay

## *The Chestnut-backed Chickadees*

of a fortnight I started to my feet thinking I heard the song of the Sierra Hermit Thrush—only to find that it was a nearer Chickadee who had stolen his voice and accent. This type of song was constant, so far as observation went, and may possibly serve to distinguish a separate race of Mountain Chickadee in the San Jacintos.

No. 124

## Chestnut-backed Chickadee

A. O. U. No. 741. *Penthestes rufescens rufescens* (J. K. Townsend).

**Synonym.**—CHESTNUT-SIDED CHICKADEE.

**Description.**—*Adults*: Crown and nape dull sepia brown, becoming sooty toward lateral border—black before and behind eye, separated from sooty black throat-patch by large white area, broadening posteriorly on sides of neck; back, scapulars, rump, and sides of body bright chestnut (nearer auburn); lesser wing-coverts grayish brown; upper tail-coverts hair-brown or more or less tinged with chestnut; wings and tail deeper grayish brown, edged with paler gray; remaining upperparts (centrally) white; under tail-coverts washed with brownish. Bill black; feet brownish dusky; iris brown. The brown of crown and hind-neck deepens in winter. *Young birds* are duller in coloration, especially as to the chestnut of back and sides. Length about 120.6 (4.75); wing 60 (2.35); tail 48.3 (1.90); bill 9.5 (.37); tarsus 16.5 (.65).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; chestnut of *back* and sides distinctive—otherwise not easily distinguished in the treetops from *P. a. occidentalis*. Frequents thicker timber, and usually drier situations.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: In hole in dead stub, usually some natural cavity enlarged, and customarily at moderate heights, 10-20 feet; a couch of fine bark-shreds, green moss, etc.; heavily felted with squirrel-, rabbit-, or cow-hair, and other soft substances. *Eggs*: In California 5 or 6; 9 of record in the North; pure white as to ground, and sparingly sprinkled with reddish brown dots (sayal brown to snuff-brown), chiefly about larger end. Av. of 47 eggs from Eureka, 15.2 x 11.7 (.60 x .46). *Season*: April 25–June 15 (according to altitude); one brood.

**Range of *Penthestes rufescens*.**—Pacific Coast district of North America from Prince William Sound, Alaska, south to Monterey County, California.

**Range of *P. r. rufescens*.**—The Pacific Coast district from southeastern Alaska, south to Sonoma County, California; east (centrally) to western Montana.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident in Canadian and Transition zones of the northwest humid coastal region, east regularly to the Siskiyou Mountains, casually to west base of Mt. Shasta, south on coast to Freestone, in Sonoma County, and interiorly to Mount Saint Helena.

**Authorities.**—Audubon (*Parus rufescens*), Birds of America, vol. ii., 1841, p. 158 (Upper California); Fisher, Condor, vol. iv., 1902, p. 135 (redwood belt of Humboldt and Del Norte counties); Grinnell, Auk, vol. xxi., 1904, p. 364, 3 maps (origin, distr., etc.); Beal, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull. no. 30, 1907, p. 70 (food); Bowles, Condor, vol. xi., 1909, p. 55 (nesting habits, etc.; in Washington).



**Chestnut-backed Chickadees**

Winter (upper), summer (lower)

Feathers about life size

From water-color painting by Major Brock



The Chickadee

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### Chestnut-backed Chickadees

*Rufescens* (upper), *barlowi* (lower)

Females, about  $\frac{3}{4}$  life size

From water-color painting by Major Brooks

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CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE

## *The Chestnut-backed Chickadees*

### No. 124a Marin Chickadee

A. O. U. No. 741a. *Penthestes rufescens neglectus* (Ridgway).

**Synonym.**—CALIFORNIA CHICKADEE.

**Description.**—Like *P. r. rufescens*, but chestnut duller and paler, that of sides and flanks much reduced in area, and admixed with dull mouse-gray.

**Range of** *P. r. neglectus* (Wholly included in California).—"Common resident of humid Transition in Marin County, from Nicasio west to Point Reyes" (Grinnell).

**Authorities.**—**Brewster** (*Parus rufescens*), Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club, vol. iii., 1878, p. 20 (Nicasio; desc. young); **Ridgway** (*Parus rufescens neglectus*), Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. i., 1879, p. 486 (orig. desc.; type locality Nicasio, Marin Co.); *J. Mailiard*, Condor, vol. x., 1908, p. 181 (distr. of *P. r. rufescens* and *P. r. neglectus*).

### No. 124b Santa Cruz Chickadee

A. O. U. No. 741b. *Penthestes rufescens barlowi* (Grinnell).

**Synonym.**—BARLOW'S CHICKADEE.

**Description.**—Like *P. r. neglectus*, but chestnut of sides and flanks entirely wanting, or, if present, only as rusty or pinkish tinge over light mouse-gray.

**Range of** *P. r. barlowi* (Wholly included within California).—"Common resident of Transition in the coast district south of Golden Gate and San Francisco Bay, from Presidio to Little Sur River, Monterey County" (Grinnell). Ranges a little way into interior in autumn and occurs, thus, as far north as Berkeley.

**Authorities.**—**Nuttall** (*Parus rufescens*), Man. Orn. U. S. and Can., vol. i., 1840, p. 268, part (Upper California); **Grinnell**, Condor, vol. ii., 1900, p. 127 (orig. desc.; Stevens Creek Canon, Santa Clara Co.); *ibid.*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 11, 1915, p. 164 (dist.); **Ray**, Condor, vol. xviii., 1916, p. 226 (desc. nests and eggs).

THE PLEASANT traditions which have grown up about the name Chickadee in the East, applying as they do to *Penthestes atricapillus* and its scarcely different kinsman, *P. carolinensis*, have operated to discourage independent study of this roughly related but wholly distinct species, *P. rufescens*. The public curiosity being already measurably satisfied as to Chickadees, we have been allowed to suppose that the Chestnut-backed Chickadee was about the same sort of a bird, while careless writers have described *P. rufescens* in terms boldly borrowed from *P. atricapillus*. There is, however, a more creditable excuse for our continued ignorance. The associational range of the Chestnut-back is the heavy conifer forest of the West, notably, in California, the Redwood belt; and the bird's days are largely passed in wooded depths beyond the reach of common observation. The birds pay less attention to the human presence than do the eastern Black-caps, because they have felt no such need of a wintry dole of suet or chopped nuts to tide them over hard weather; nor has our presence been forced upon them through destruction of their forest fastnesses. It is possibly true, also, that the somber forests of the humid belt have had a restraining effect upon the spirits of our coastal Chickadee, so that he is neither quite so lively nor so noisy as his giddy eastern

## The Chestnut-backed Chickadees

cousin. But having said so much, we have perhaps said too much in apology of *Penthestes rufescens*, for he is one of our darlings, one of the daintiest and most alluring of the dwellers in the redwoods.

What busy little midgets these are as they go trooping through the treetops intent on plunder! The forest spaces are vast, so they muster a whole regiment for service, in order that they may always have some of their own kind within hail. And what a merry war they wage on beetle and nit, as they scrutinize every crevice of bark and bract! The bird eats insects at all times of year, but his staple diet is formed by the eggs and larvæ of insects. These are found tucked away in woody crannies, or else grouped on the under surface of smaller limbs and persistent leaves, as of oak or madrone.

On this account the Chickadee must frequently hang head downward; and this he does very gracefully, using his tail to balance with, much as a boy uses his legs in hanging from a "turning pole," swinging to and fro as though he thoroughly enjoyed it.

As nearly as we have made out, to date, the commoner notes of the Chestnut-backed Chickadee closely simulate those of the Oregon. The *sweetee* call is either indistinguishable or a mere shade smaller. The sneezing note becomes more distinct as *kechézarwick*; and "*Chickadee*" becomes *kissadee*, the latter given so caressingly that you want to pinch the little darling. The Chestnut-backed Chickadee has a really truly song, but it is anything rather than musical. When the emotion of springtime is no longer controllable, the minikin swain mounts a fir limb and raps out a series of notes as monotonous as those of a Chipping Sparrow. The trial is shorter and the movement less rapid, so that the half dozen notes of a uniform character have more individual distinctness than, say, in the case of the Sparrow: *Chick chick chick chick chick chick*. Another performer may give each note a double character, so that the whole may sound like the snipping of a barber's shears: *Chulip chulip chulip chulip chulip*.

The best account of the nesting habits of the Chestnut-backed Chickadee has come to us from the pen of J. H. Bowles,<sup>1</sup> and I draw largely upon his experience to supplement my own in reaching more exact conclusions. Chestnut-backs nest often in loose colonies; that is, a certain stretch of half-open woods containing forty acres may have a dozen nests, while it might be a mile to the next "village." Nesting is at lower levels of the forest, from two to ten feet, and in drier situations; though I have found nests as high as eighty feet in a fir stub; and in two instances in a dead tree wholly surrounded by water.

In beginning a nesting cavity this bird almost always avails itself

<sup>1</sup>"Notes on *Parus rufescens* in Western Washington," by J. H. Bowles, Condor, Vol. XI., Mar., 1909, p. 55.

### *The Chestnut-backed Chickadees*

of some natural advantage; as, a place from which a bit of wood has been torn away, or a hole made by a grub of one of the Cerambycid beetles. On this account, and because opportunities or prospects are legion, the nest is rather difficult to find. Dr. Brewer, writing in 1874, thirty-seven years after the discovery of the bird by Townsend, had to say: "Their eggs are not as yet known."

Whatever the nature of the wood encountered, the Chickadee is prepared to take pot luck. It will sometimes chisel out a cavity in hard wood with all the industry of a woodpecker, or it will revel, instead, in the punk of some rotting branch. Or, again, with no labor at all, it will enter a hollow chamber by means of some knot-hole. But, as if to atone, it will in the last-named instance immediately set to work to fill up the hollow, if not chock full, at least to a becoming level. I have a nest wonderfully composed of moss, fur, and feathers, which is six inches across the top (and as level as a board), yet the nest cup proper occupies a space not over an inch and a half in diameter, in this relatively broad expanse. Mr. Milton S. Ray<sup>1</sup> records two instances where Santa Cruz Chickadees (*P. r. barlowi*) occupied natural cavities in eucalyptus trees.

Every furred creature of the woods and some of the pastures may be asked to contribute to the furnishing of a Chickadee's home. But however luxurious the upholstery inside, the foundation is the ancestral green moss. Eggs to the number of seven, or even nine, are snugly bestowed in the inner cavity; and these, because they have so much of external protection, are of the frailest, white as to ground-color, and sparingly dotted with pale rufous. Incubation begins with the first egg laid; and the female is lavishly supplied with food by her attentive mate. If, however, she wishes to excuse herself for a bit of exercise or a bath in a woodland pool, she has only to pull the fur coverlet snugly over her treasures, and they are safe against chilling for a very considerable time.

"The female is very brave in defense of her eggs, and frequently cannot be made to leave the nest until it is broken open. In looking into a nesting hole that is occupied by the bird, I have never been able to overcome being badly startled by the sudden flutter of wings and the fierce cat-like hiss with which she dashes at the face of the intruder when he applies an eye to the entrance of their home. When she is forced to vacate, her complaints always bring up her mate, and then both birds hop about within two or three feet of the student, of whom they seem to lose all fear in anxiety over their treasures. Their only

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<sup>1</sup> Condor, Vol. XIII., p. 211.





**Verdin**

From another color painting by Allan Brooks.  
About life size



### Verdin

About 2/3 life size

*From water-color painting by Allan Brooks*



Faint vertical text on the right side of the page, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side or a secondary column of text.





note of complaint is a weak, squeaking peep, not in the least what one would expect from a true chickadee" (Bowles).

Young Chickadees are such cunning little creatures that the temptation to fondle them is sometimes irresistible. The parents may have very decided views as to the propriety of such action, or they may regard you as some benevolent giant, whose ways are above suspicion. Not infrequently, if the young are kindly treated, the parent bird will venture upon the hand or shoulder to pursue its necessary offices.

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No. 125

## Verdin

A. O. U. No. 746. *Auriparus flaviceps flaviceps* (Sundevall).

**Description.**—*Adult male:* Whole head yellow, the yellow often extending to chest (and, rarely, down middle line of breast), clearest (lemon chrome) on throat, more olivaceous (citrine) on auriculars and crown, especially laterally and posteriorly (forehead in highest plumage touched with chestnut); space just before eye dusky; lesser wing-coverts bright chestnut (burnt sienna); remaining upperparts plain drab, the rump sometimes faintly glossed with yellow; remaining underparts pale smoky gray or buffy gray. Bill dusky horn-color; feet and legs bluish dusky; iris brown. *Adult female:* Like male, but slightly paler. *Young birds* lack the yellow of head and chestnut of wing, but are extensively washed above with yellowish; paler, nearly white, below. Length 101.6-114.3 (4.00-4.50); wing 53 (2.09); tail 47 (1.85); bill 8.5 (.33); tarsus 15.4 (.61).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; yellow head contrasting with drab body; bright chestnut patch on wing; quite distinctive in range.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A ball of interlaced twigs, usually thorny; 6 or 7 inches in diameter; placed at moderate heights in desert shrubs, without attempt at concealment. Entrance is effected by small, round, overarched hole in side, and interior is lined with soft substances, chiefly felted plant-downs. *Eggs:* 4 or 5; pale bluish green, finely wreathed or capped and sparingly sprinkled with reddish brown (sayal brown or mikado brown). Av. size, 14.5 x 10.7 (.57 x .42). *Season:* April 1st–June 10th.

**Range of *Auriparus flaviceps.***—Desert areas of southwestern United States and Mexico.

**Range of *A. f. flaviceps.***—"Sonoran deserts of southwestern United States and Mexico from southern California, southern Nevada, southwestern Utah, southeastern New Mexico, and southern Texas south to northern Lower California, northern Sonora, Durango, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas" (A. O. U. Check-List).

**Distribution in California.**—Resident in Lower Sonoran areas of the deserts of southeastern portion of State, north to Resting Springs, Inyo County, west to Victorville and Whitewater. Most abundant in Colorado River valley and in Imperial Valley.

**Authorities.**—Sundevall (*Aegithalus flaviceps*), Öfv. K. Vet-Akad. Förk. Stockholm, vii., 1850, p. 129 (orig. desc.: "Sitka or California"); Coues, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 129 (syn., structural peculiarities, habits, etc.); Sennett, Bull. U. S. Geol. and Geog. Surv. Terr., vol. v., no. 3, 1879, p. 378 (Texas; nesting habits, crit., meas., etc.); Oberholser, Auk, vol. xiv., 1897, p. 390 (crit. study of the genus *Auriparus*); Gilman, Condor, vol. iv., 1902, p. 88 (San Gorgonio Pass; desc. nests, eggs, habits, etc.).

## *The Verdin*

THE DESERT is the final testing ground of character. To despise its austere beauties, to wince before its hardships, to shudder at its solitudes, is to mark one's self ignoble. And there are ignoble souls, else would the desert be over-populated.

Aye, it is a cruel place, the desert! Cruel, that is, to the body. It denies food to the hungry stomach, and withholds water from the parched lips. The hot sands burn the toiling feet, and there is no living thing which the hand may touch without being pricked or stung or lacerated or enmeshed. If one would shout there is no man to hear, and if one would run there is no whither. A cruel, cruel place is the desert, the abode of all discomfort. But who wants to be comfortable? Not the noble soul; for to be comfortable is to be oblivious, to be unaware of livingness, to be in so far forth unalive. No one can be exactly comfortable in the desert; so when he is goaded and scorched and stung into a sufficient alertness, the noble soul knows that he is alive, and, living, he rejoices. Rejoicing, he rejoices with all that is alive, and chiefly with the living things of the desert.

And so we love (only the noble have read thus far),—we love the bristling cholla cactus, which in its eagerness to impart its delicious pain seems to fairly leap at the passerby. We love, too, the giant cactus, the majestic sahuaro, defending its soft flesh with shiny rows of enduring spines. We love the thorny mesquite, and the zizyphus, "all thorns," which hides the hardy Thrasher in its depths. And we love, oh, how we love the bland cat's claw, which welcomes mildly but will not let the guest depart. We love the green-barked Parkinsonia, "palo verde," which being denied, ever and anon, by a merciless sun, the use of leaves, breathes pluckily through its skin instead, and which when the sky relents a little, flings back unresentful *gratias* of splendid golden blossoms. Oh, we love them all, but most of all we love the tiny fearless Gnatcatcher and the tiny golden Verdins, the Verdins who cruise about in this parched sea of terrors with never a luffing sail. Surely here is intrepid nobility, or else magic, outright, that a golden-visaged atom should brave these myriad frowns of nature and pronounce them good, should move happily from thorn to thorn and stop ever and anon to proclaim his boundless satisfaction. It was in the desert that Samson found honey in a lion's carcass, and it is in such another desert that Samson's little brother passes a honeyed existence.

The Verdin is without doubt the least restricted in its local ranging of all the desert birds. It is at home alike in the depths of the mesquite forest or in the monotonous mazes of atriplex, which border the shores of the Salton sea, alike in the unending leagues of creosote, or in the varied flora of the "washes," such as sweep down from the Chocolate Moun-



Taken near Palm Springs

Photo by the Author

A PALO VERDE

(GREEN TREE), WHICH "BREATHES THROUGH ITS SKIN"

tains; and so the very first sound one listens for upon revisiting the desert is always the pensive *shthilp* of a passing, or it may be an approaching, Verdin.

Truth to tell, there is something a little plaintive and melancholy about the authentic voice of the desert. The birds seem happy enough, and they must be so, else they would not tarry; but their notes confess something of the pathos of unending sands. My note book contains a dozen efforts at syllabification of one of Verdin's call-notes, but there is still an elusive tang about it which defies record. *Tseelp; tslit; chsthilp; chilp; tschink;* and even *ching;* are among the attempts, but they are alike unavailing. It is doubtful if the Verdin has a song, in the proper sense of the word; but I have heard *tew tew tew teep*, like the peeping of a young turkey, a pathetic sort of would-be song, followed or interspersed with the more familiar *silp* notes. Again, I have heard *chu'it chu'it chu'it*, which set me involuntarily looking for titmice; and a sweet *che'wit*, a chickadee-like challenge which was very sweet indeed.

## *The Verdin*

Verdins are not gregarious, like Bush-tits; but also they are never solitary, for they roam the desert in pairs, or, in small family groups, or in loose association. It is here that the remarkable penetrative, or carrying power, of the *silp* note serves the Verdin in good stead, for it allows mated birds to hunt, say, a hundred yards apart, without actually losing each other.

Once, in the Colorado River bottom, I heard a sudden piteous outcry, a miniature uproar, *jeeb, jeeb, jeeb, jeeb*, from an unsuspected number of Verdins at once. The notes were specifically new, but generically similar to the universal Sharp-shin alarm of the smaller birds. Sure enough, there was a Sharp-shin (*Accipiter velox*), the slinking devil! hiding in a Lycium bush and glowering wickedly over the recollection of a missed stroke.

The strong local attachments of the Verdins are evidenced by the successive ages of their nests, placed as likely as not in a single tree. These interesting objects are monumental, as well in size and prominence as in durability. Save when bedded in the heart of a mistletoe (*Phoradendron californicum*), the sturdy globular nests of the Verdin are as prominent as so many tin cans would be if lodged at random in all but leafless branches. These structures owe their comparative immunity from attack to their very rugged walls of interlaced twigs, whether mesquite or cat's claw, or, better yet, of "all thorns," and to the tiny hole in one side, just large enough to admit the tiny owner. The ingenuity as well as sheer physical strength shown by the birds in the construction of these fortresses almost taxes comprehension. I have before me a nest built in a hackberry, and composed externally of bristling thorn twigs, each six or eight inches long, and so adroitly enmeshed that no single twig may now be removed without virtually wrecking the entire structure.

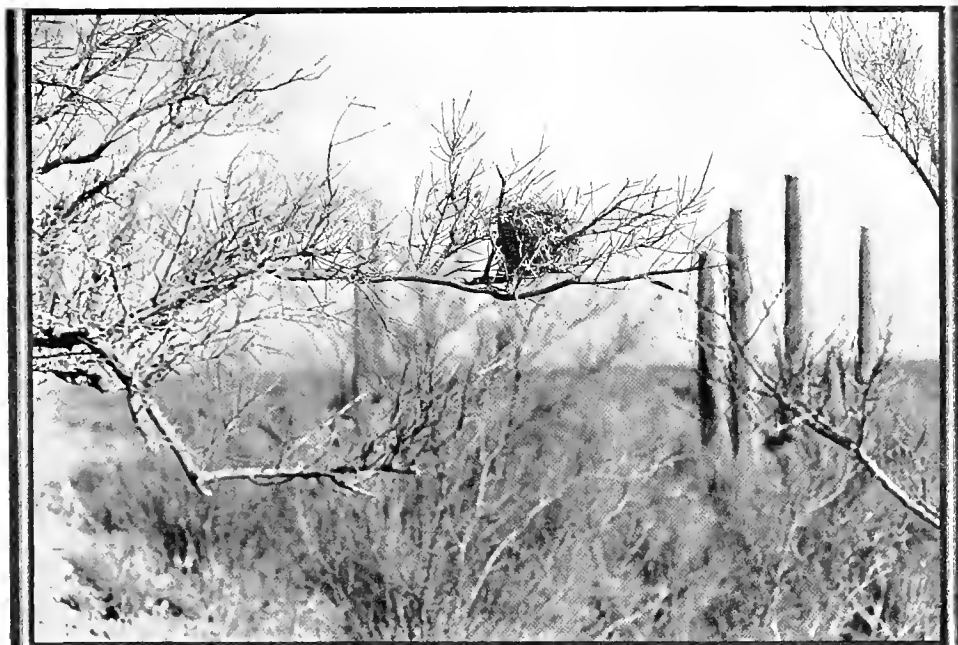
During incubation the birds are rather careful not to be seen in the vicinity of the nest, and the female does not quit her charge without being rudely disturbed. On May 14, 1917, I sighted a likely looking domicile four feet up in the midst of one of those terrible "allthorn" bushes. I was thrusting in an exploratory finger when a struggling and very irate female forced a passage out, and ruffled with indignation, sat at four feet demanding what right I had to enter a lady's boudoir. My! but she was beautiful, and imperious, with every jewel of color flashing a double radiance—or so it seemed to excited fancy. The bad man apologized, of course, and proceeded to cut down the nest and to invert it very carefully—for this is the only way one can possibly determine the contents of a Verdin's nest without ruining it. Four opalescent gems rolled out slowly, one after another, upon the "floor" of the inverted porch roof, or cowl, which normally protects the entrance. To return the



## *The Verdin*

eggs in reverse fashion and to reinstate the nest in some other thorny tangle equally secure was but the work of a moment. The birds both attended closely, as the male came up at the first sign of disturbance, and they exhausted the Verdinian vocabulary from *tslit* down,—all, it must be confessed, quite daintily and inoffensively.

Not less remarkable than these fortified nurseries are the structures



*Taken in Arizona*

NEST OF VERDIN (OCCUPIED) IN PALO VERDE

*Photo by the Author*

which the birds erect as roosts or winter lodges. According to Mr. M. French Gilman,<sup>1</sup> who has made a special study of these birds upon the Colorado desert, these lodges are built in the fall or early winter and are of two types.

“The nests of male and female differ a little, the former being less elaborate, smaller, with not so much lining in it. The female winter nest differs but little from the breeding nest and I am inclined to believe in some cases is used as such, possibly by inexperienced or lazy birds.”

Two male lodges in the M. C. O. are each only three inches in length over all, with openings at either end, and about two and a half inches of

<sup>1</sup> Condor, Vol. IV., No. 3, July, 1902, p. 88.

## *The Bush-Tits*

clear space inside—not room enough to turn around in, but just sufficient protection from the pounce of an Elf Owl.

From the circumstance that the nests, both winter and breeding, are found miles from water, it is inferred that these hardened devotees of desolation are quite independent of that supposedly necessary element. Literal bug juice may be presumed to supply all the needs of these simple-hearted citizens of "dry territory."

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No. 126

## Bush-Tit

### No. 126 Coast Bush-Tit

A. O. U. No. 743. *Psaltriparus minimus minimus* (J. K. Townsend).

**Synonyms.**—LEAST BUSH-TIT. PACIFIC BUSH-TIT.

**Description.**—*Adult in fresh fall plumage:* Pileum, broadly, olive-brown, shading through drab on sides of head and sides to light drab of underparts; back and remaining upperparts, in abrupt contrast to pileum, hair-brown or mouse-gray; the remiges and rectrices fuscous, with some paler or ashy edging. Bill and feet dark brown; iris light yellow. *Adult in worn (spring and summer) plumage:* Pileum lighter (buffy) brown; back grayer; underparts lighter, almost whitish centrally. *Young birds* are much like adults in spring, but plumage somewhat mottled in appearance, and wing-coverts and rectrices varied by lighter brown. Length about 101.6 (4.00); wing 47.5 (1.87); tail 52 (2.05); bill 6.9 (.27); tarsus 15.8 (.62).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; grayish and drab coloration, contrasting with warm brownish cap; darker and browner than next.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A pendulous pouch 8 or 9 inches in length and 3 or 4 inches in diameter at the widest point, with small entrance hole in side near top; an exquisite fabrication of mosses, plant-down, and other soft vegetable substances, bound together by cobwebs and ornamented externally with lichens, etc.; lined with plant-down and feathers; placed at moderate heights in bushes, rarely from 10 to 20 feet up in trees. *Eggs:* 5 to 8, usually 7; dull white. Av. size 13.2 x 10.2 (.52 x .40). *Season:* April–July; two or more broods.

**Range of *Psaltriparus minimus*.**—The Pacific Coast district from southern British Columbia to Cape San Lucas, east centrally to the interior of Oregon and in northern California to the Nevada line.

**Range of *P. m. minimus*.**—The Pacific Coast strip, narrowly, from southern British Columbia to northern Lower California.

**Distribution in California.**—Resident in the coastal districts, more broadly in the northern and southern portions of its range; thus, east to Tower House, Shasta County, and Victorville on the Mohave Desert; inosculating with *P. m. californicus* along its eastern border and throughout the northern two-thirds of its range. Found also on Santa Cruz Island.

**Authorities.**—Nuttall (*Parus minimus*), Man. Orn. U. S. and Can., vol. 1,

1840, p. 269 (Santa Barbara); *Grinnell*, *Condor*, vol. v., 1903, p. 85 (call notes); *Finley*, *Condor*, vol. vii., 1905, p. 91, figs. (habits); *Swarth*, *Auk*, vol. xxxi., 1914, p. 510, map (crit.; distr., changes of plumage, etc.); *R. C. Miller*, *Condor*, vol. xxiii., 1921, p. 121, map (flock behavior).

No. 126a California Bush-Tit

A. O. U. No. 743a. *Psaltriparus minimus californicus* Ridgway.

**Synonym.**—INTERIOR BUSH-TIT.

**Description.**—Similar to *P. m. minimus*, but paler and grayer, especially whiter below, with less of contrast between fresh and worn plumage; pileum buffy brown; back, etc., mouse-gray; throat and breast pallid mouse-gray or whitish; belly drab-gray; sides vinaceous buff; the skirtings of wings and tail, especially the remiges, bluish ash.

**Range of *P. m. californicus*.**—Upper Sonoran and Transition zones, interiorly, from northeastern Oregon south to the southern end of the Sierras.

**Distribution in California.**—Resident in the valley and on the slopes of the San Joaquin-Sacramento trough, broadly; and in northern California east of the humid Pacific coastal strip and east to the Nevada line. Range curves around the southern end of the Sierras to (at least) the latitude of Lone Pine.

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Psaltria minima*), *Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila.*, ser. 2, ii., 1853, p. 264, part; *Ridgway*, *Proc. Biol. Soc. Wash.*, vol. ii., 1884, p. 89 (orig. desc.; type locality, Baird, Shasta Co.); *Beal*, U. S. Dept. Agric., *Biol. Surv. Bull.*, no. 30, 1907, p. 74, pl. (food); *Tyler*, *Pac. Coast Avifauna*, no. 9, 1913, p. 106 (Fresno: habits, occurrence, etc.); *Swarth*, *Auk*, vol. xxxi., 1914, p. 516, map (crit.; distr., changes of plumage, etc.).

HOP O' MY THUMB is one of the six most characteristic examples of California bird-life. Whether as a member of the bug-hunters' brigade, or as a very domestic person devoted to architecture, his ways are engaging and his achievements memorable. Of his movements *en troupe* Dr. Joseph Grinnell, dean of western ornithologists, has given, perhaps, the best account:<sup>1</sup>

"During three-fourths of the year the California bush-tits forage about in flocks. These bands may consist of as many as thirty individuals, but generally there are from fifteen to twenty. Although we call them flocks, they are not such in the sense that blackbirds or linnets form flocks; for the bush-tits never bunch together and mount high in air to take a prolonged flight. But they form a loitering company, scattered among several scrub-oaks or brush-clumps. There may be a general onward movement, for if a person locates himself in the midst of the restless drove, in a few minutes they will have almost all gone off in some particular direction. A few stragglers sometimes forget themselves, and suddenly feeling lost, fly helter-skelter after the main company with excited calls. Evidently there are some, perhaps two or three adults,

<sup>1</sup>"Call Notes of the Bush-Tit," by Joseph Grinnell: *The Condor*, Vol. V., No. 4, July, 1903, pp. 85-87.

## *The Bush-Tits*

who take the initiative, and involuntarily direct the movements of the younger or more timid individuals which follow along after. During such slowly moving excursions, each individual is rapidly gleaning through the foliage, assuming all possible attitudes in its search for tiny insects among leaves and twigs. The attention of each is on himself as a usual thing, but each is continually uttering a faint but characteristic simple location-note, a note of all's-well which indicates safety and also the whereabouts of the main body to stragglers, and each individual to any other."



*Taken in Washington*

NEST OF BUSH-TIT, IN SITU

*Photo by the Author*

The question of the number of Bush-Tits which may occur in a winter troupe perhaps deserves further attention. While twenty may be a fair average, I recall having seen very much larger troupes near Santa Barbara. One day while working along a south-sloping oak- and chaparral-covered hillside beyond the Riviera I saw what I judged might be a hundred birds cross a certain opening. Then as the route halted, the discharge tree, or positive pole of the Psaltriparine battery, was seen to be still "full" of Bush-Tits. Presently some fairy recall was sounded, whereupon seventy-seven birds, by actual count, returned across the open.

Those who have followed the fortunes of these little gleaners with any degree of care must have heard at some time or other the confusion-

## The Bush-Tits

chorus which attends the presence, or immanence, of a Sharp-shinned Hawk or other smaller depredator. Upon the first suspicion of danger every birdling becomes motionless, and sets up a sharp chittering note of distress which grips the heart of any human witness, a piteous outcry of helpless minimity. And yet this distress note, which seems to be the outcome of sheer ter-



Taken in Oregon

BUSH-TIT

Photo by Bohlman & Finley

ror, not only serves to apprise all members of the troupe of the danger, but it seems to actually distract the enemy. Where everything is vocal nothing is localized, and ten to one the baffled marauder goes off in a huff.

Apart from their pleadings, our sympathies are all with the little fellows, and they would be even if we regarded only self-interest, for it is probably impossible to exaggerate the usefulness of these little titmice in the preservation of some of our most important fruit crops. Says Mr. Beal:<sup>1</sup> "Examination of the stomachs of a number of California Bush-Tits (*Psaltriparus minimus*) revealed the presence in considerable numbers of the black scale (*Lecanium oleæ*), which infests the olive. This insect has been a serious pest to the olive trees on the Pacific Coast, and any bird that will destroy it should certainly be encouraged by western fruit growers. The usefulness of titmice depends largely upon the small size of the birds. In dealing with pests of any kind, the more minute they are the less the probability that man can by his own unaided efforts succeed in exterminating them. . . . The eggs of insects, especially those of such small species as plant lice, are often so minute as to escape the closest search of man; but the more microscopic eyes of these small birds detect them even in crevices of buds or bark." And that they do not despise these, to us, insignificant sources of nourishment is abundantly attested.

Although among the most useful of citizens, it is as artists, architects, and decorators that the Bush-Tits are best known to fame. Nest-building is a passion with these dun-colored atoms. In the exercise of this function they seem to express all the pent-up longings of an obstructed

<sup>1</sup> "How Birds Affect the Orchard," by F. E. L. Beal, Reprint from Year Book of Dept. of Agr. for 1900, p. 296.

## *The Bush-Tits*

race. A beautiful home is more than meat or drink to them. For its construction they are ready to forswear the delights of foreign travel, and to its embellishment they devote every surplus energy, even after the babies have come. Your Bush-Tit is no songster. A prosy keep-in-touch-note, *tsit* or *shlit*, and an excited chitter, *créééé*, are all he can achieve from year's end to year's end; but, by the same token, he is an esthete when it comes to choice of harmonious settings, to selection of materials, and linings and draperies and laces withal.

Nest-building begins universally some time in March, and this irrespective of whether the setting is a live oak with its perennial cover, or a spiræa bush just struggling into leaf, or a bleak grayness of dead branches with no cover at all. Indeed, when one regards the openness of some of the situations chosen, it is a marvel that the nests should ever escape notice. But however exposed the nest may be, the materials used in its construction are likely to be harmonious in color, if not in texture, with their surroundings. Besides, it is really astonishing how many accidental collections of leaves, sprays of mistletoe, withered pannicles of spiræa, hanging bunches of moss, and what not, simulate, and so abet the escape of an object so boldly shaped as a Bush-Tit's nest.

In the northern or coastal portion of this bird's range the pendent pouch is likely to be composed chiefly of mosses, but in the south other vegetable fibers must do duty; and always, everywhere, cobwebs are the webbing of the most diverse woof. Dead leaves already beplastered with spider webs are dragged in entire. The lining of the nest is composed variously, sometimes of felted plant downs exclusively, but often of felt mingled with wool, fur, or feathers.

Egg-laying may begin as soon as the nest is decently framed, or again, it may be deferred for a week or ten days after the structure is practically complete. But, however that may be, the birds never rest from their artistic labors. A Bush-Tit's nest is like the Jamestown Fair, never finished. The nest must be ornamented with lichens, petals, spider-egg cases, bits of tissue paper,—in short, whatever takes the fancy of the birds in the course of their restless forays. Acacia blossoms are an undying favorite in the Southland. The interior furnishings, likewise, must be continually augmented. If the bottom of the nest was only an inch thick at the outset, it is built up from within until it attains a thickness of two or three inches. Even though the eggs be near hatching, the thrifty housewife, as she returns from an airing, must needs lug in a beakful of feathers, which it would have been a shame to waste, you know. Besides this, the male bird has two or three shanties under construction in the neighborhood, upon which he can profitably put in those tedious hours between three a. m. and sunset.

The mother Tit lays six or eight pearly white eggs, and these the Coast and California Jays count quite the daintiest item on their bill of fare. Hence, of all the Bush-Tits' nests one sees in a season, fully half of them have been slit open and rifled by these heartless freebooters. It is possible that this interference accounts for the "second nests" found in May and June; but I am inclined to believe that many Bush-Tits raise second broods even where the first have been successful. In one instance, at least, I knew of a second set of eggs being deposited (May 8), in a nest which had held young in March. Thereto, perhaps, agrees a phenomenon which several of us believe we have observed, viz., a late brood of youngsters being supplied with food *by more than two adults*. Either unoccupied aunts and old maid cousins turn to and help the embarrassed couple with their clamoring family, or else, as is more likely, the children of the first brood are doing their duty by their younger brothers and sisters.

One who has approached a "loaded" Bush-Tit's nest at flying time will never forget the infantile eruption which follows a rude touch upon the nest. Like fire balls from a Roman candle, but with notably less reluctance, the youngsters emerge in swift succession. One flies east and one flies west, while fourteen at least—or so it seems to excited fancy—are left to flutter wildly over the Cuckoo's nest.

### For Younger Readers

BUSH-TITS are bird children who never grew up. That would be very sad if they were really truly children, but you see most bird people grow up so very, very fast that half the time there ar'n't any bird babies. And so bird-life would be very dull, in the fall and winter, say, if it were not for these happy-hearted children in feathers who are forever young.

To see a flock of these merry mites trouping over the bushes you would think they were playing an endless game of tag. It does look that way, for they always keep hopping and dodging about, and if one bird flits to a nearby tree, why another one takes after him, and another and another. By and by some little birdie, who wasn't paying attention just then, looks up to find himself all alone, and when he does, he is scared and he hops up on the tip top branches and shouts, *creeee*, meaning "*Where are you?*" And at that the last bird who flew across to the other tree shouts back, *tsit—tsit—tsit*, meaning

*The Bush-Tits*



*Taken in the Ojai*

COAST BUSH-TIT AT NEST

*Photo by Dickey*

*Here we are. Hurry up!* But the Bush-Tits are not really playing tag; they're only hunting. And they find it a most interesting game. Little beetles hiding under shreds of bark, bugs that look as big as rabbits (to them), and funny little insects, called scales, that look as big as oysters to a Bush-Tit, and taste quite as good, I am sure.



Best of all, perhaps, are the shining rows of eggs they find. Now a moth's egg isn't as big as a hen's egg, even to a Bush-Tit, but if you were to find forty dozen Hummingbirds' eggs all in one spot, I guess you'd think you were in for a square meal. So the Bush-Tits have merry hunting and high living.

The best part of it all is that these little Bush-Tits are the gardener's best friends; and that means, of course, that the birds are our best friends too. If it wer'n't for these birds, and others like them, I don't know what we'd do for something to eat. The gardener can catch the rats and the gophers and the squirrels, and he can chase away the rabbits, but he never could see to catch the sneaking little bugs, and he couldn't find the moths' eggs, not even forty dozen at once; and if he didn't, or if somebody didn't, the eggs would hatch out worms, and the worms would eat our peaches and our apples and our cabbage and our corn, until we wouldn't have much of anything left. So who says that the merry little Bush-Tit with his tiny, beady eyes and his great big appetite isn't our best friend?

But if you think that's all a Bush-Tit is good for, just to eat bugs and moth eggs, you'll have to guess again. The Bush-Tit is an architect. What? Yes, an architect. That's a person who builds houses, you know. And the Bush-Tits build the most beautiful bird houses. No, I don't mean houses made *for* birds, I mean houses made *by* birds—the most beautiful bird houses that there are in the world, I guess. To be sure, they look like pockets, these Tit-houses, like fat, round pockets, hung up by the tops in trees, and with, oh, such a tiny, round hole in the side to get in at. The hole is big enough for the bird to get in, and it wasn't meant for prying fingers, nor yet for the Jays' snooping beaks. But if we could look into one of these pocket-houses, we'd find six or eight tiny white eggs, like pearls; and we'd find them resting on a cushion of the softest down—cotton and flower blossoms and spider webs, and anything else that is soft.

And this pocket-house is as beautiful outside as it is inside, for the birds never tire of bringing in anything that pleases their fancy—a white spider cocoon, an acacia blossom, or a moth's wing—and hanging it up outside for an ornament. Why, some of these beauty-

### *The Lead-colored Bush-Tit*

lovers get so interested in a new blossom or bit of moss, even when the babies are crying for food, that they will forget what they went after, seize the blossom and hurry home with it. I could imagine a hungry Bush-Tit baby saying, "But where's my dinner?" And I could imagine the Bush-Tit mamma saying, "Well, now, dear child, it's too bad that mamma forgot you were hungry. But look at the perfectly *be-eautiful* moth-wing I brought to you. See; I'll hang it up where we can all see, and we'll forget that we haven't had anything to eat. Anyhow, that'll stay your stomach until I can get back with some real victuals."

But Mr. and Mrs. Bush-Tit are pretty good providers, after all, and the babies grow and they grow until they fill the nest chock up. Then by and by they get restless and tired of taking turns peeping out of the little round hole. The biggest one makes up his mind to strike out for himself, whereupon his brothers and sisters follow so fast that a Bush-Tit's nest giving up its young reminds you of nothing else in the world so much as a Roman candle sputtering and spitting out balls of colored light. And every one of those youngsters will hunt bugs and build nests and lug in useless pretties to hang on the walls to the end of the chapter.

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No. 127

## Lead-colored Bush-Tit

A. O. U. No. 744. *Psaltriparus plumbeus* Baird.

**Synonym.**—PLUMBEOUS BUSH-TIT.

**Description.**—Somewhat similar to *P. minimus*, but pileum of the same color as back. *Adult:* Above neutral gray, tending to drab (especially on forehead in worn plumage); wings and tail hair-brown to fuscous, with edgings of bluish gray (gull gray); sides of head drab (darkening on eyelids and lores in fresh plumage); chin, sides of throat, and sides light drab; remaining underparts drab-gray, paling—whitish—on throat and chest. Bill and feet blackish; iris pale yellow. *Young:* Much like adult, but sides of head less brownish, more like crown; and texture of plumage looser. Length about 114.3 (4.50); wing 51 (2.01); tail 56 (2.20); bill 7 (.275); tarsus 16 (.63).

## The Lead-colored Bush-Tit

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; nearly uniform gray coloration—crown not contrasting with back, as in *P. minimus*.

**Nesting.**—Much as in preceding species, but nest a little shorter, 7 or 8 inches long, and more compactly built; sage leaves and dismembered hummingbirds' nests are favorite materials, together with blossoms, catkins, cobwebs, etc. *Eggs:* av. 13 x 10.2 (.51 x .40).

**General Range.**—Resident in Upper Sonoran and Transition zones of the arid interior from eastern Oregon and western Wyoming south to Sonora and western Texas, and from southeastern California east to central Colorado.

**Distribution in California.**—Resident in the Upper Sonoran zone in the east central desert ranges, and sparingly along the eastern slope of the Sierras from Carroll Creek north (at least) to Bridgeport (Aug. 2, 1918).

**Authorities.**—Cooper (*Psaltriparus plumbeus*), Orn. Calif., 1870, p. 49 ("to Sierra Nevada, Cal. (?) Gruber"); Coues, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 125 (syn., desc., habits, etc.); Bendire, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. x., 1888, p. 557 (habits; food; desc. nest and eggs; Ariz.); Swarth, Auk, vol. xxx., 1913, p. 399 (crit.; discussion of *Psaltriparus plumbeus*, *P. m. lloydi*, and *P. santaritæ*); Auk, vol. xxxi., 1914, p. 520, map (crit.; distr., changes of plumage, etc.).

While the Lead-colored Bush-Tit is lighter, grayer, and more uniform in color than examples of *P. minimus*, the degree of relationship existing between *minimus* and *plumbeus* is admittedly a closer one than can be accurately expressed in current nomenclature.<sup>1</sup> It is enough, perhaps, to understand this relationship on its own merits without forcing our knowledge into taxonomic moulds, whether new or old. *Plumbeus* is the bird of the central Southwest, and so of the central-southern, semi-arid ranges of eastern California. Along the eastern slopes of the Sierras, in Inyo and Mono counties, *plumbeus* overlaps the range of *P. minimus californicus*, and probably interbreeds with it.<sup>2</sup> We may conceive the two forms as having recently diverged (speaking phylogenetically—the process was really a very slow one, for *Psaltriparus* is a comparatively implastic type) from a common southern stock. From new differentiation centers, in Arizona and western California, respectively, and separated by a long interval, the two evolving forms have recently flowed toward each other (speaking distributively) until they now meet and hybridize along a narrow line, still undefined, in eastern California.

ALTHOUGH undeniably different in color-tone from our more familiar California Bush-Tits, the lighter, grayer bird from the desert ranges does not appear to differ from its darker relative either in voice or action. Without pausing, then, to give it separate appreciation, I copy briefly some excellent notes furnished me by Mr. Frank C. Willard, lately of Tombstone, Arizona. In the Huachuca Mountains, near the recognized center of distribution for this species, Mr. Willard finds the Lead-colored Bush-Tits nesting chiefly in the oak trees, junipers, grape-vines, and firs, though occasionally in pine trees, and that up to a height of forty

<sup>1</sup> See Swarth in "The Auk," Vol. XXXI., Oct., 1914, pp. 522-524.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*, p. 221 and following.

## *The White-breasted Nuthatches*

feet. The nest is composed typically of interlaced oak blossoms, felted with down from the oak leaves, and lined copiously with feathers. Both sexes assist in nest-building, and the mated birds hunt together for suitable material, to a distance of several hundred yards. The birds display considerable anxiety whenever the nest is approached, and are very likely to betray the presence of an otherwise inconspicuous home. Unlike other titmice, however, the female is seldom caught at her task of incubation.

As is the case with northern members of this genus, even *P. m. saturatus* of Puget Sound, *plumbeus* starts building in March or early April, and in many assured instances nests again in late May, June, or even July. A special accommodation to southern climate may be noted in the custom which the birds observe of breaking a hole through the fabric of the nest-wall, at a level with the floor, as soon as their babies are half-way grown. That this is actually for ventilation only is assured by the fact that the parents continue to go and come by the established entrance overhead. One cannot help wondering whether these birds close the window at night.

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No. 128

## White-breasted Nuthatch

### No. 128a Slender-billed Nuthatch

A. O. U. No. 727a. *Sitta carolinensis aculeata* Cassin.

**Description.**—*Adult male:* Top of head, nape, and upper boundary of back shining black, with a slight greenish reflection; remaining upperparts ashy blue (clear green-blue-gray to clear Payne's gray); outer wing-quills fuscous, the second and three or four succeeding primaries narrowly touched with white on outer web in retreating order; inner quills and coverts edged narrowly with blue-gray or whitish; tail-feathers, except upper pair, black, the outer pairs squarely blotched with white in subterminal to terminal order; sides of head, and neck well up including eye, and underparts, white with a faint bluish tinge; distinctly marked, or washed more or less, on flanks and crissum with rusty brown. Bill stout, subulate, the under mandible slightly recurved, blackish plumbeous above, lighter at base of lower mandible; feet dark brown; iris brown. *Adult female:* Similar to male, but black of head and back more or less veiled by color of back. Length 139.7-154.9 (5.50-6.10); wing 87 (3.43); tail 46 (1.81); bill 19.5 (.77); tarsus 18.2 (.72).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler to sparrow size; tree-creeping habits; black and ashy blue above; white below.



**The Nuthatches**


Red-breasted (upper), Flycatcher (left), Slender-billed (right)  
From a collection by Allan Brooks



## The Nuthatches

Red-breasted (upper), Pygmy (left), Slender-billed (right)

*From a water-color by Allan Brooks*









## The White-breasted Nuthatches

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A deserted woodpecker hole, or newly made cavity in stump or tree, usually at a considerable height from ground; and lined with leaves, feathers, or hair; often rabbit-fur is used exclusively. *Eggs:* 5 to 8, sometimes 9 or even 10; white, thickly speckled and spotted with reddish brown (mikado brown, pecan-brown). Av. size 18.3 x 13.5 (.72 x .53). *Season:* April, May; one brood.

**Range of *Sitta carolinensis*.**—Temperate North America south, in the mountains, to Coahuila and Lower California.

**Range of *S. c. aculeata*.**—Pacific Coast States and British Columbia (to Ashcroft); in the northern portion of its range east to the Cascades. Non-migratory.

**Distribution in California.**—Resident in Transition and Boreal zones, practically throughout the State, save in the humid northwestern coast strip, and in the desert ranges (where replaced by *S. c. tenuissima*); also breeding locally in the oak-belt of the Upper Sonoran zone. Wanders to lower levels and casually to the deserts in winter.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Sitta carolinensis*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 3, iii., 1846, p. 112, part (Calif.); **Feilner**, Ann. Rep. Smith. Inst. for 1864 (1865), p. 425 (Fort Crook; habits); **Carriger**, Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club, vol. 1, 1899, p. 83 (nesting habits); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 68 (general nature of food); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool. vol. v., 1908, p. 123 (San Bernardino Mts.; nests, etc.).

*QUOOK-quook-quo-ew-ew-ew-ew*, goes the California Screech Owl in broad daylight. There is an instant hush on the oak-clad hillside—a hush followed by an excited murmur of inquiry among the scattered members of a winter bird-troop. If *you* happen to be the Screech Owl, seated motionless at the base of some large tree and half obscured in its shadows, perhaps the first intimation you will have that the search party is on your trail will be the click, click, click, of tiny claws on the tree-bole above your head, followed by a *quank* of interrogation, almost comical for its mixture of baffled anxiety and dawning suspicion of the truth. He is an inquisitive fellow, this Nuthatch, for, you see, prying is his business; but he is brave, as well. The chances are that he will venture down within a foot or two of your face before he flutters off with a loud outcry of alarm. When excited, as when regarding a suspicious object, he has an odd fashion of rapidly right-and-left facing on a horizontal bough,—swapping ends, as Jones puts it—as though to try both eyes on you and lose no time between.

Nuthatch is the acknowledged acrobat of the woods—not that he acts for display; it is all business with him. A tree is a complete gymnasium in itself, and the bird is master of it all. In all positions, any side up, this bird is there, fearless, confident; in fact, he rather prefers traveling head downward, especially on the main trunk route. He pries under bark-scales and lichens, peers into crevices, and explores cavities in his search for tiny insects, larvæ, and insects' eggs, especially the last-named.

## The White-breasted Nuthatches



Taken in Inyo County Photo by the Author  
A HESITANT APPROACH

The value of the service which this bird and his associates perform for the horticulturist is very considerable. There should be as heavy a penalty imposed upon one who wantonly kills a Nuthatch or a Chickadee, as upon one who enters an enclosure and cuts down an orchard or a shade tree.

The Nuthatch has a variety of notes, all distinguished by a peculiar nasal quality. When hunting with the troop he gives an occasional softly resonant *tut* or *tut-tut*, as if to remind his fellows that all's well. The halloo note is more decided, *tin*, pronounced *à la française*. By means of this note and by using it in combination, they seem to be able to carry on quite an animated conversation, calling across from tree to tree. During the mating season, and often at other times, they have an even more decided and distinctive note, *quonk, quonk, quonk*, or *ho-onk, ho-onk*, in moderate pitch, and with deliberation. They have also a sort of trumpeting song, but this is rarely heard in the West; and, indeed, all the notes of the Slender-billed Nuthatch have a softened and subdued character as compared with those of the eastern bird, typical *S. carolinensis*.

In selecting a nesting site the Slender-billed Nuthatch oftenest chooses an opening prepared by other species,—a rotting knot-hole, a weather crack, or a woodpecker's food prospect, giving access to some capacious interior. The hollow may be laboriously remodelled; and this Nuthatch does, on occasion, excavate a nest *de novo*; but the very general avoidance of unnecessary labor on the part of the western bird has probably given rise to its special character, viz., a relatively slenderer and weaker bill. Both sexes share the labor of excavation, and when the cavity is somewhat deepened, one bird removes the chips while the other delves. Like all the hole-nesting species of this family, but unlike the woodpeckers, the nuthatches provide for their home an abundant lining of moss, fur, feathers, and the like. This precaution would not be necessary so far as warmth is concerned, in the lower portions of its range, even though it appears to nest in March; but elsewhere the bird crowds the season, and in the mountains is quite indifferent to lingering snows.

## *The White-breasted Nuthatches*

The male is a devoted father, feeding the female incessantly during incubation, and sharing with her in the care of the large family, long after many birds have forgotten their young. The young birds early learn to creep up to the mouth of the nesting hole to receive food when their turn comes; and they are said to crawl about the parental tree for some days before they attempt flight.

While the Slender-billed Nuthatch is mildly indifferent to the presence of man on ordinary occasions, it becomes exceedingly wary at nesting time. The mother of the birdlings here shown nearly wore out our patience with her eternal suspicions. She was not long in making the first attempt, but she "swapped ends" an incredible number of times before she actually dived into the nesting crevice; and she was out in a trice, having had time merely to jab her burden down the nearest throat. Once

outside, she hesitated not a little, as knowing full well that she had another duty to perform. But she concluded it was less important, after all, and went off without removing an excrement. Four successive times she did this, judging that digestion was more to the present need than sanitation. The fifth time she went into the hole resolutely, as having made up her mind that duty must be done whether or no, and as resolutely she returned to bear off an enormous faecal envelope with its contents. I snapped her at this, and she never forgave me for the indignity. Only once again in two hours did she attempt sanitary work. Although we were twenty-five feet away, this Nuthatch flinched as often as she heard the shutter roar, and it invariably set her back a minute or so in her progress. Once she deserted outright, and she must have eaten the food intended for her babies, for she was a long time gone.



*Taken in Inyo County*

*Photo by the Author*

CORNERED

YOUNG OF SLENDER-BILLED NUTHATCH IN NESTING CAVITY

## *The White-breasted Nuthatches*

In this case the husband and father, usually so devoted, did not put in an appearance; and the entire care of this lusty brood devolved, for the time being at least, upon the tired mother. Her intervals of feeding were very irregular—whether due altogether to the fortunes of the chase or an occasional effort to “smoke me out,” I could not tell. Once she was gone fifteen minutes, and again a half hour. She did tire us out this time, and I believe she was tricking us, for she returned promptly, upon our withdrawal, from some unseen vantage point.

Trickery is quite within the bird's range of intelligence. Mr. Frank C. Willard tells of a clever pair which did him out of a coveted set of eggs:<sup>1</sup> “May 18, 1910. I heard a pair of these birds talking to each other, and began to trail them. One soon secured some bit of food and started up the steep mountainside, with me in hot pursuit. I soon lost sight of it, but discovered the mate close by with some grass or bark or something of that character in its beak. It dived into a cavity of a small oak, and shortly reappeared without its nesting material. After a few minutes calling it was joined by the other one of the pair, and both were soon busy carrying nesting material into the oak. I quietly withdrew to return ten days later. There were no birds about so I examined the cavity, and was chagrined to find only the few bits of grass and fur I had seen them carry in. Some time later I found the real nest with its family of large young in an oak some distance further up the mountainside.”

The Slender-billed Nuthatch does not, with minor local exceptions, appear to be a common bird anywhere in its range. Certainly it is not one-fourth as abundant as is *carolinensis* in the East. “Rare but regular,” would probably best characterize its appearance at lower levels. Not being harrassed by the rigors of winter, it has not shown that disposition to make friends (at the price of a bit of suet) which is making the eastern bird famous. It does, however, fall back somewhat before the Sierran snows; and it invades in winter certain lowland sections, which are promptly deserted in early spring. Even so, it enjoys a most extraordinary breeding range, from sea level (irregularly) up to the limit of trees in the Sierra Nevada.

### No. 128b Inyo Slender-billed Nuthatch

A. O. U. No. 727d, part. *Sitta carolinensis tenuissima* Grinnell.

**Description.**—“Similar to *S. c. aculeata* from west-central California, but bill much longer and slenderer, size larger, back of a darker tone of gray, and flanks paler; similar to *S. c. nelsoni* from southern Arizona, but bill much slenderer, and sides, and lower surface generally, whiter.” Av. of 7 males: wing 89.5 (3.52); tail 49 (1.93); length of bill 20.5 (.81). Depth at base 3.8 (.15).

<sup>1</sup> Condor, Vol. XIV., 1912, p. 214. The incident refers to *S. c. nelsoni*, a scarcely distinguishable form.

## The Red-breasted Nuthatch

**Range of *S. c. tenuissima*.**—At least the Panamint and White Mountains of California; probably also the western rim of the Great Basin north to eastern Oregon.

**Authorities.**—**Fisher** (*Sitta carolinensis aculeata*), N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, 1893, p. 136, part (Panamint Mts.); **Grinnell**, Condor, vol. xx., 1918, p. 88, fig. (orig. desc.; type locality, Panamint Mts.; meas., etc.).

THIS interesting subspecies, described by Grinnell from the White Mountains, which occupy the eastern border of Inyo and Mono counties, would not deserve special mention here save for a circumstance connected with its nesting. The slenderer and, therefore, weaker bill of this form requires accounting for. I think it may be due to this fact, that at the upper levels, say 10,000 alt., where the bird nests, it is usually able to avail itself of natural cavities, instead of being required to make with its beak a laborious excavation for the nest. The bird's bill, therefore, became debilitated through lack of exercise. At least the three nests we examined, May 26-28, 1919, were natural cavities in the lodge-pole pine (*Pinus contorta*), although one of them had been partially enlarged by the birds.

The male Nuthatch is indefatigable in his devotion to his sitting mate; and when we wished to spy upon domestic secrets, we had only to watch diligently the comings and goings of male birds until the nest location was made. The notable paucity of bird life at this level was of assistance also, in that it simplified the quest.

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No. 129

## Red-breasted Nuthatch

A. O. U. No. 728. *Sitta canadensis* Linnæus.

**Synonyms.**—RED-BELLIED NUTHATCH. CANADIAN NUTHATCH.

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Crown and nape shining black; white superciliary lines meeting on extreme forehead; a black band through eye; remaining upperparts grayish blue; wings fuscous, unmarked; tail-feathers, except upper pair, black; the outer pairs subterminally blotched with white in retreating order; chin, and sides of head, and neck below the black, pure white; remaining underparts rusty, or ochraceous-tawny. Bill short, subulate, plumbeous-black; feet dark brown. *Adult female*: Similar, but crown like the back with only traces of black beneath; lateral head-stripe blackish; usually paler rusty below. *Immature male*: Like adult male, but paler below and black of head not glossy. *Young female*: Like adult, but duller. Length 101.6-120.6 (4.00-4.75); wing 66.3 (2.61); tail 36.3 (1.43); bill 14.4 (.57); tarsus 16 (.63).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; black and grayish blue above; rusty below; tree-creeping habits.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: Of grasses, feathers, etc., in a hole of tree or stub, excavated by the bird, usually at lower levels. *Eggs*: 4 to 6; white or creamy white, speckled

## The Red-breasted Nuthatch

and spotted with reddish brown. Av. size 16 x 12.2 (.63 x .48). *Season:* First week in May; one brood.

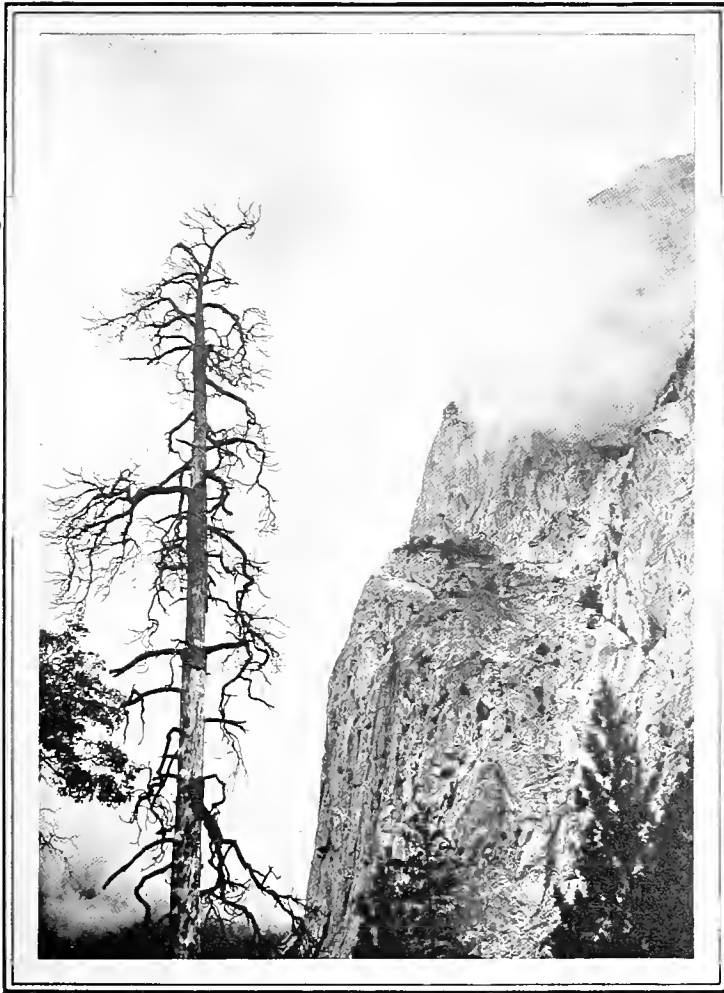
**General Range.**—North America at large, breeding from northern New England, northern New York, and northern Michigan northward, and southward in the Alleghanies, Rocky Mountains, and Sierra Nevada; also on Guadalupe Island, Lower California, and Santa Cruz Island, California; in winter south to about the southern border of the United States.

**Distribution in California.**—Summer resident of the Canadian zone in the Sierras and other ranges, as, the Warners, Trinities, San Jacintos, and sparingly in the

humid coast belt south at least to Cazadero in Sonoma County. Perhaps irregularly resident on Santa Cruz Island. Winters irregularly, sometimes abundantly, in wooded valleys at lower levels, practically throughout the State, or even at the edges of the desert. Casual upon the Farallon Islands (Bryant, and May 24, 1911, Author).

**Authorities.**—**Gambel**, Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1846, p. 112 (Calif.); **Coues**, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 136 (syn., desc., habits, etc.); **Averill**, Auk, vol. v., 1888, p. 118 (feeding habits); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Yearbook, 1900, p. 296 (food; relation to orchards); **Howell**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 12, 1917, p. 99 (Santa Cruz Id., probably breeding).

THERE is nothing big about the Red-breasted Nuthatch save his voice. If undisturbed, birdikins pursues the even tenor of his ways, like any other winged bug-hunter; but once provoke his curiosity or arouse suspicion, and he publishes forth with a broadside of sen-



Taken in Fresno County

Photo by the Author

A NUTHATCH MAY LOOK AT A KING  
AND DOUBTLESS MANY NUTHATCHES HAVE USED THIS OLD TREE TO OBTAIN A CLOSE-UP OF  
TEHIPITE DOME

## The Red-breasted Nuthatch

sational editorial matter which no thoughtful reader of the woods can overlook. The full war-dance song of the Red-breasted Nuthatch, executed, for instance, when he hears the false notes of the California Screech Owl, is something like this:

Nyää                    nyää                    nyää  
nyää    nyää    nyää    nyä    nyä  
nyä    nyä    nyä    nyä    nyä    nyä    nyä  
nyä    nyä    nyä and so on, in an incoherent strain of wild excitement, until he runs clean out of breath and quits, exhausted. The early notes of this orgic rhapsody are interrogative and penetrating; the succeeding notes are a sort of trumpeting challenge for the intruder to show himself; failing which, the irate creeper drops into a lower, non-resonant series, of doubtful meaning and more doubtful morals. But the bird is not always angry, and the nasal call sounding on migration has a friendly quality about it which brings one hastening out-of-doors to greet the traveler again.

When Dr. Cooper could write:<sup>1</sup> "I have not myself met with the bird in California," it is perhaps not to be wondered at that our ideas of its relative distribution are still somewhat hazy, and accounts of its precise nesting habits in California lacking. It is a boreal-breeding, migratory species, and occurs in summer sparingly in the higher ranges of southern California, regularly throughout the timbered Sierras, and irregularly throughout the mountainous timbered districts of the north-western counties. The occurrence of birds in the mountains of Santa Cruz Island as late as May 2nd (1911),<sup>2</sup> I do not regard as conclusive evidence of breeding, as this species is very irregular in its migratory movements; and those individuals which do not purpose nesting until



RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH

<sup>1</sup> Ornithology of California, 1870, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Vide Howell in "Condor," XIII., 1911, p. 210.

## *The Pygmy Nuthatches*

June in the high Sierras linger late in the Southland. For instance, I saw a migrant Red-breast on the Farallons on the 24th of May of that same year (1911).

Canadian Nuthatches nest at any height, and their lack of consideration in this respect accounts for much of our relative ignorance. I located a nest, in Seattle, in a nearly limbless live fir tree, at a height of 120 feet. Obligations to a growing family forbade attention to details. On the other hand, a nest taken near Tacoma on the 8th of June, 1906, was found at a height of only seven feet, in a small fir stump. It would be unsafe to suggest that the cost of living in these rival towns had anything to do with the birds' choices: I only know that Tacoma nests adorn many collections. The wood of the last-named nesting stub was very rotten, and the eggs rested only four inches below the entrance. The nest-lining, in this instance, was a heavy mat an inch in thickness, and was composed of vegetable matter—wood fiber, soft grasses, etc.—without hair of any sort, as would surely have been the case with that of a Chestnut-backed Chickadee, for which it was at first taken.

The Nuthatches appear to leave their eggs during the warmer hours of the day, and one must await the return of the truant owners if he would be sure of identification. One mark, but not infallible, is the presence of pitch, smeared all around, and especially below, the nesting hole. The use of this is not quite certain, but Mr. Bowles's hazard is a good one; viz., that it serves to ward off the ants, which are often a pest to hole-nesting birds. These ants not only annoy the sitting bird, who is presumably able to defend herself, but they sometimes destroy unguarded eggs, or young birds.

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No. 130

## Pygmy Nuthatch

A. O. U. No. 730. *Sitta pygmæa pygmæa* Vigors.

**Synonym.**—CALIFORNIA NUTHATCH (early name).

**Description.**—*Adults:* Crown, nape, and sides of head to below eye, deep grayish olive; a buffy white spot on hind-neck (nearly concealed in fresh plumage); lores and region behind eye (bounding the olive) blackish; remaining upperparts grayish blue (dark green-blue-gray to clear Payne's gray), browning (brownish slate) on flight-feathers, etc., becoming black on rectrices (except central pair); longer primaries usually with some edging of white; central pair of tail-feathers with elongated basal white spot; two outer pairs crossed obliquely with white, and the three outer tipped with slate; underparts sordid white, smoky brown, or even pale ferruginous, clearest (nearly white) on chin and cheeks; sides, flanks, and crissum washed with color of back. Bill plumbeous, lightening below; feet plumbeous; iris black. *Young:* Like adults, but crown and hind-neck nearly color of back; sides and flanks washed



## The Pygmy Nuthatches

with brownish. Length 101.6 (4.00) or less; wing 65 (2.56); tail 34 (1.34); bill 14.2 (.56); tarsus 15 (.59).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; top of head olive-gray, contrasting with plumbeous of back; gregarious habits.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A hole in dead stub or dead top of pine tree, excavated by birds, smeared about entrance with pitch, and lined with soft substances,—grass, hair, and feathers. *Eggs*: 5 to 8; pure white, flecked more or less heavily with reddish brown. Av. size 15.8 x 11.4 (.62 x .45). *Season*: May 1-20; one brood.

**Range of *S. pygmæa*.**—Western North America from southern British Columbia south, in the mountains, to Lower California and Mexico.

**Range of *S. p. pygmæa*.**—As above, except southern California and Lower California.

**Distribution in California.**—Locally distributed in high Upper Sonoran or Transitional areas, chiefly in the Sierra Mountains, and in northern ranges from Shasta to the Warners, and in the vicinity of Monterey (the type locality). Found also sparingly elsewhere in the southern humid coastal district north to Mendocino County. A slight movement, or none, to lower levels in winter.

**Authorities.**—**Vigors** (*Sitta pygmæa*), Zool. Voy. "Blossom," 1839, p. 25, pl. 4, fig. 2 (orig. desc.; type locality, Monterey); **Feilner**, Ann. Rep. Smith. Inst. for 1864 (1865), p. 426 (n. Calif., habits); **Coues**, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 139 (syn., desc., hist., habits, etc.); **Fisher**, N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, 1893, p. 137 (localities in Calif.); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 67 (food).

### No. 130a White-naped Nuthatch

A. O. U. No. 730a. *Sitta pygmæa leuconucha* Anthony.

**Description.**—"Similar to *S. p. pygmæa*, but larger, especially the bill; color of pileum and hind-neck grayer, the latter with the buffy or pale buff spot decidedly larger; gray of back, etc., less bluish, and underparts less strongly buffy" (Ridgway). *Adult male*: wing 66.8 (2.63); tail 36.7 (1.45); bill 16.3 (.64); tarsus 16 (.63).

**Range of *S. p. leuconucha*.**—Resident in Transition and Lower Canadian zones in the mountain ranges of southern California, south to the San Pedro Martir Mountains, Lower California.

**Authorities.**—**Cooper**, Am. Nat., vol. viii., 1874, p. 17 (Cuyamaca Mts., San Diego Co.); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 123 (San Bernardino Mts.; habits, desc. nest and eggs, etc.); **Grinnell and Swarth**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. x., 1913, p. 310 (San Jacinto Mts.; occurrence; crit.).

AS FOR THE Pygmy, the pine tree is his home. It is not quite proper, however, to speak of this Nuthatch in the singular. Lilliputians must hunt in troops and make up in numbers what they lack in strength. Pygmy Nuthatches are not merely sociable; they are almost gregarious. Where a company of Kinglets would be content to straggle through a dozen trees, a pack of Pygmies prefers to assemble in one. Yet there is no flock impulse here, as with Siskins. Each little elf is his own master, and a company of them is more like a crowd of merry schoolboys than anything else. It's "come on, fellers," when one of the boys tires of a given tree, and sets out for another. The rest follow at leisure but

## *The Pygmy Nuthatches*

are soon reassembled, and there is much jolly chatter with some good-natured scuffling, as the confederated mischiefs swarm over the new field of opportunity.



*Taken in the San Jacinto Mountains*

*Photo by the Author*

"THE PINE TREE IS HIS HOME"

Nuthatches are not methodical, like Creepers, in their search for insects; they are haphazard and happy. The branches are more attractive to them than the tree bole, and the dead top of the tree is most alluring of all. The Pygmies are never too busy to talk. The more they find the more excited their chatter grows, pretty lispings and chirpings quite too dainty for our dull ears. It makes us sigh to watch their happiness, and we go off muttering, "We, too, were young."

Again, it shocks us when we find these youngsters in knickerbockers and braids paired off for nesting time. Tut, tut! children, so eager to taste life's heavier joys? A nest is chiselled out with infinite labor on the part of these tiny beaks, in the dead portion of some pine tree. The cavity is from four to twelve inches in depth, with an entrance a trifle over an inch in diameter. The owners share the taste of the Chickadees, and prepare an elaborate layette of soft vegetable fibers, fur, hair, and feathers, in which the eggs are sometimes quite smothered.

## The Pygmy Nuthatches

The parents are as proud as peacocks, and well they may be, of their six or eight oval treasures, crystal white, with rufous frecklings, lavish or scant. When the babies are hatched, the mother goes in and out fearlessly under your very nose; and you feel such an interest in the little family that you pluck instinctively—but alas! with what futility—at the fastenings of your purse.

Those of our readers who are not interested in collecting, or who profess disdain for its quasi cruelties, are admonished to pause here; for we cannot forbear to recite the circumstances attending the taking of two sets of eggs now in the Museum of Comparative Oology: No. 56, 6-13, White-naped Nuthatch, May 25, 1913, San Jacinto Mountains; elevation 4000 feet; discovered by tracing male bird to nesting hole 45 feet up in lone yellow pine, where he made frequent trips to feed his mate. The nesting cavity, approached by an entrance hole  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter, had evidently been carved out by the birds; but it was very irregular in shape, the sides being deeply fluted by intrusive pillars of harder wood. The interstices and pockets so fashioned had been carefully calked with fur and feathers of the same general character as that of the material used in the remainder of the nest. On the face of this lateral padding, had been arranged an elaborate system of draperies, consisting chiefly of the wing quills of the California Woodpecker (*Balanosphyra formicivorus bairdi*). The



Taken in the San Jacinto Mountains

Photo by the Author

No. 56/6-13, IN SITU

## The Pygmy Nuthatches

hollow was thus a feather-lined shaft, with the nest proper built up half way from the bottom.

The second set, taken on the 2nd of June, 1913, at an elevation of 6000 feet in the San Jacinto Mountains, came from a naked stub of black oak. An inquiring rap on the trunk had brought the excited mistress from a hole 15 feet up. But she returned almost immediately and no amount of disturbance at the foot of the stub would induce her to feint or loaf around for photographic purposes. I suspected young and so dug in with proper precautions for restoring the front wall if necessary, but found instead only an empty cavity six inches deep. Upbraiding myself for a dub, I descended in a daze, wondering how an excavating bird could have been so fearless and so persistent. Once on the ground

again, however, I saw the back of the cavity, which in my strained position in the tree I had not seen. Midway there was another entrance to an *inner chamber*. William, my assistant, went up and developed it, reporting first two eggs, then four, then six. Inasmuch as the position was very straining, he retired and left me to finish. As soon as I put my fingers under the nest to lift it a deluge of eggs poured out. The nest was so thin that the bottom fell out when it was touched. Fortunately, a detaining chip poised on edge prevented the oval cascade from rushing down into the hollow of the tree which now yawned below. I worked my handkerchief in to reinforce the chip, and managed to lift the fallen eggs one by one, four of them, unbroken. It was a delicate task, for my sartorius muscles, by which alone I retained my hold on

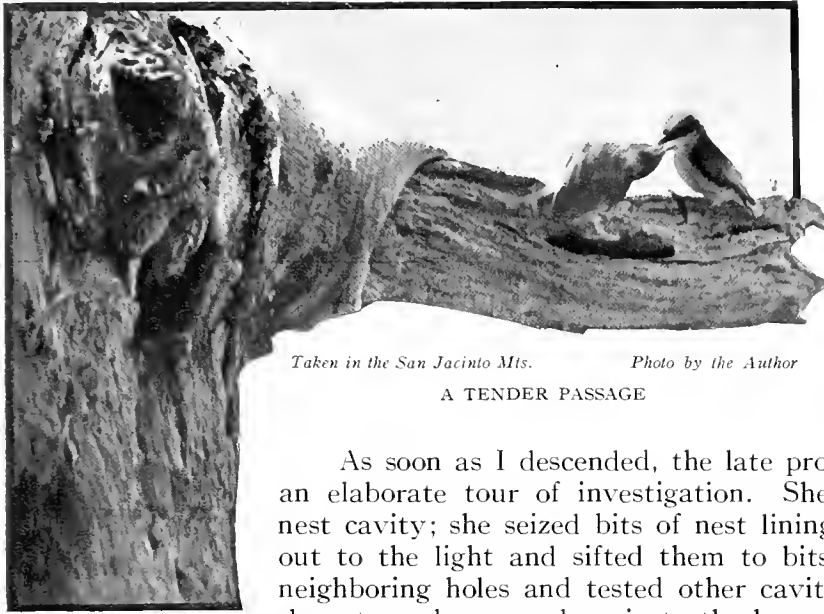


Taken in the San Jacinto Mountains

Photo by the Author

"A NAKED STUB OF BLACK OAK"

THE FEMALE NUTHATCH MAY BE SEEN JUST ABOVE THE ENTRANCE HOLE



*Taken in the San Jacinto Mts. Photo by the Author*  
A TENDER PASSAGE

the smooth tree-trunk, were quaking like cowards. One by one the eggs went into the open hat, and then I felt inside,—one, two, three, four more. Most bountiful! And *fresh* at that.

As soon as I descended, the late proprietress began an elaborate tour of investigation. She inspected the nest cavity; she seized bits of nest lining, carried them out to the light and sifted them to bits. She entered neighboring holes and tested other cavities; but chiefly she returned ever and again to the home cavity to peck and peck and peck. Time after time she came back, and chip after chip she removed as though in hopes to discover some secret panel through which her treasures had disappeared. The male bird paid little attention to the catastrophe and did not appear to understand its gravity at all. Once he came to feed his mate, in the regular way of business, and she came out to meet him on a neighboring branch, receiving his present with quivering wings and tender twitterings, as though nothing had gone wrong. But immediately thereafter the male disappeared and the female returned to her fruitless quest.

A sympathetic Hummer, however, showed a morbid interest in her neighbor's mishap. Several times she fluttered inquiringly in front of the ruined house, and once she followed the male off, like an excited gossip demanding the news. But *Sitta pygmæa* answered never a word. He had sighted another bug.

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No. 131

## Brown Creeper

No. 131a Sierra Creeper

A. O. U. No. 726d. *Certhia familiaris zelotes* Osgood.

Synonym.—CALIFORNIA CREEPER (Ridgway).

## The Brown Creepers

**Description.**—*Adults*: Above brownish black, varied by rusty brown, broadly and loosely streaked with ashy white; more finely and narrowly streaked on crown; rump bright reddish brown (argus brown to russet); wing-quills crossed by two pale ochraceous buffy bars, one on both webs near base (white on inner web), the other on outer webs alone; greater coverts, secondaries, and tertials tipped with whitish or grayish buff; tail graduated, fuscous with pale brown shafts; a narrow superciliary stripe dull whitish or brownish gray; underparts white, pure on throat, becoming sordid posteriorly, tinged on sides and flanks with dull brownish gray; crissum ochraceous buff. Bill slender, decurved, brownish black above, paler below; feet and legs brown; iris dark brown. Length of adult male about 139.7 (5.50); wing 63.5 (2.50); tail 60.8 (2.39); bill 16 (.63); tarsus 15 (.59). Female a little smaller.

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; singularly variegated in modest colors above; the only *brown* creeper in its range. Blacker above and whiter below than the next form.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: Of twigs, bark-strips, moss, plant-down, etc.; crowded behind a warping scale of bark, whether of cedar, pine, or fir. *Eggs*: Usually 5 or 6, sometimes 7 or 8; white or creamy white, speckled and spotted with cinnamon-brown or hazel, chiefly in wreath about larger end. Av. size 15.5 x 11.4 (.61 x .45). *Season*: May–June; one brood.

**Range of *Certhia familiaris*.**—The greater part of Northern Hemisphere, except Africa.

**Range of *C. f. zelotes*.**—The Cascade-Sierra Mountain system, broadly, in Oregon and California, and south to the Cuyamaca Mountains, retiring regularly to adjacent lowlands in winter.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident in Canadian and Transition zones throughout the Sierra Nevada and associated ranges, south to the southern border of the State; also west along the inner northern coastal ranges, and in the pine belt of the San Rafael group. Winters irregularly and sparingly at the lower levels, e. g., Santa Barbara and the Mohave Desert.

**Authorities.**—**Woodhouse** (*Certhia familiaris*), in Sitgreaves' Rep. Expl. Zuni and Colorado Rivers, 1853, p. 66, part (Calif.); **Barlow**, Condor, vol. ii., 1900, p. 59 (Eldorado Co., breeding; desc. nest and eggs); **Osgood**, Auk, vol. xviii, 1901, p. 182 (orig. desc.; Battle Creek, Tehama Co.); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 120 (San Bernardino Mts.; desc. nest and eggs, habits, etc.).

### No. 131b California Creeper

A. O. U. No. 726c. ***Certhia familiaris occidentalis*** Ridgway.

**Synonym.**—TAWNY CREEPER.

**Description.**—“Similar to *C. f. zelotes*, but browner and more suffused with buffy above; wing markings more pronouncedly buff; underparts more buffy” (Ridgway); also rusty of rump averaging brighter (light amber-brown). Length of male: wing 61.9 (2.44); tail 61.2 (2.41); bill 15.2 (.60); tarsus 15.5 (.61).

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: As in preceding; placed behind sprung bark scale, preferably of fir or redwood, and usually at moderate heights—3 to 20 feet up (one record of 60). Inner diameter of one nest 1¾ inches, depth 2½. *Eggs*: 5 or 6; as in *C. f. zelotes*. *Season*: May–June; two broods.

**Range of *C. f. occidentalis*.**—The Northwest Pacific coastal strip, broadly in the north, to Sitka, Alaska, narrowly in the south to Monterey County, California.



Sierra Creeper

About the size

from a small one found by Allen Brooks

24. 11. 1914

Sierra Creeper

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## Sierra Creeper

About  $\frac{3}{4}$  life size

*From a water-color painting by Allan Brooks*





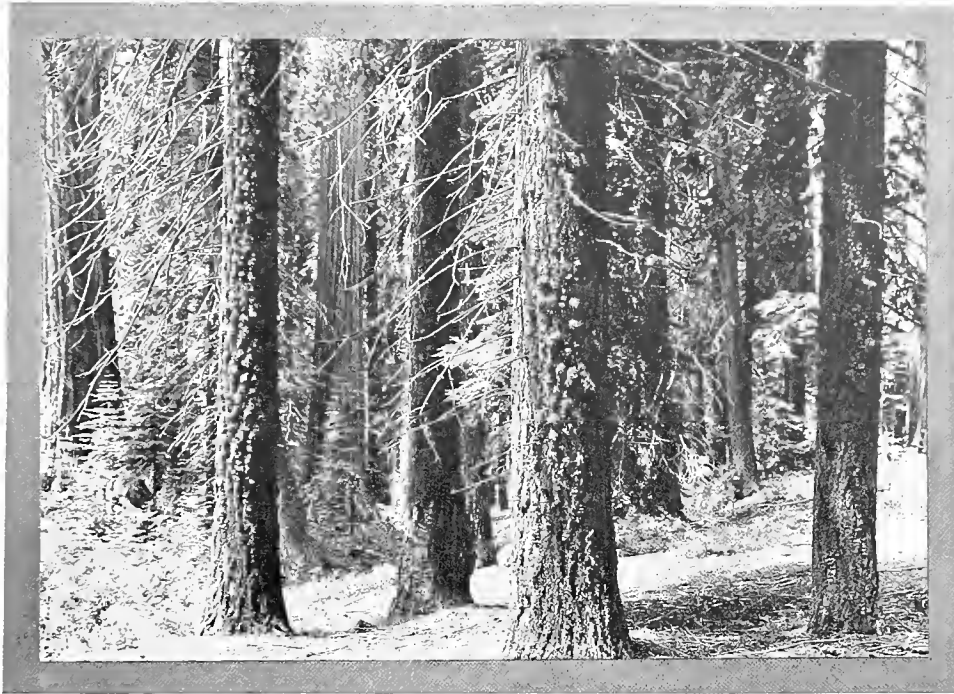
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## The Brown Creepers

**Distribution in California.**—Resident in the northwest humid coastal strip south to Big Creek, Monterey County; occurs in winter in the San Francisco Bay region and doubtless elsewhere at lower levels.

**Authorities.**—**Cooper** (*Certhia mexicana*), Orn. Calif., 1870, p. 58, part (Coast Ranges, south to Santa Cruz); *Ridgway*, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. v., 1882, p. 257, part (orig. desc.; distr. in Calif.); *Grinnell*, Condor, vol. iv., 1902, p. 126 (Monterey Co.; habits); *Beal*, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 66 (food); *Pemberton and Carriger*, Condor, vol. xvii., 1915, p. 199 (Monterey Co., nesting).



Taken in Fresno County

CREEPER COUNTRY

Photo by the Author

TO ONE who loves birds with an all-inclusive passion—such as the undecided bachelor is wont to confess for the fair sex—the temptation to use superlatives upon each successive species, as it is brought under review, is very strong. But here, perhaps, we may be pardoned for relaxing our attention, or, it may be, for being caught in the act of stifling a little yawn. *Certhia* is a prosy drab, and all the beauty she possesses is in the eyes of her little hubby—dear, devoted creature.

This clerkling (hubby, of course, I mean) was brought into the world behind a bit of bark. His first steps, or creeps, were taken along the bark of the home tree. When the little wings got stronger and when

## The Brown Creepers

the little claws had carried him up to the top of tree Number One, he fluttered and spilled through the air until he pulled up somehow, with

heart beating fiercely, at the base and *on the bark* of tree Number Two. Since then he has climbed an almost infinity of trees (but I dare say he has kept count). Summers and winters have gone over his head, but never a waking hour in which he has not climbed and tumbled in this worse than Sisyphæan task of gleaning nits and eggs and grubs from the never-ending bark. Why, it gets upon the nerves! I pray you think, has not this animate brown spot traveled more relative miles of ridgy brown bark in his wee lifetime than ever mariner on billowy sea! Work, work, work! With the industry of an Oriental he seeks to shame the rollicking caprice of Chickadee, and to be a "living example" to such spendthrifts as Goldikins, the Kinglet.

But wait! I am not sure. *Could* anyone live in these majestic forests, could anyone breathe this incense of perpetual balsam, could



Taken in Washington

Photo by the Author

NEST OF CALIFORNIA CREEPER IN DEAD OAK TREE  
THE NEST APPEARS UNDER THE BARK-SCALE AT THE RIGHT, AND THE MARVEL IS HOW  
IT MAINTAINS ITS POSITION



Taken in Fresno County

"GENERAL WASHINGTON"

Photo by the Author

THE GIANT TREE OF THE MCKINLEY GROVE, PARTIALLY DESTROYED BY FIRE

anyone mount triumphantly these aspiring tree-boles, way, way up into the blue, without growing the soul of a poet? Hark! *Tew, tewy, tewy, piñg, tewy*,—an angel ditty lisp'd in the tree-tops where the tender green fir-fronds melt into the sky—some Warbler, I guess; the Hermit, perhaps, rounding out his unsaid devotions. And again, *kee kus wit it tee swee* like a garland of song caught up at either end and made fast to the ether. No! Would you believe it! It is our prosy clerkling! He has turned fay, and goes caroling about his task as blithely as a bejeweled *artiste* with nothing to do. Love? Yes; love of the woods, for it is the middle of September.

All of which leads me to apologize for the rude epithets previously used; for one who can sing belongs to the immortals; and never again will we judge a brother harshly, for who knows the vaulting heart of the seeming plodder!

The ordinary, working note of the Tawny Creeper is a faint *tsip*, and this is varied from time to time by a longer double note, *tsue tsee* (of a resonant quality which cannot be made to appear in the transcript).

### *The Brown Creepers*

This latter it is which one can never quite certainly distinguish from that of the Western Golden-crowned Kinglet. The full song is, indeed, very sweet and dainty, with a bit of a plaintive quality, which serves to distinguish it from the utterances of the Wood Warblers, once you are accustomed.

A knowledge of the Creeper's nesting habits would be quite unattainable were the bird to choose the tree-tops; but with characteristic humility it seeks the lower levels at the nesting season, so that one need not look much above his head in searching for its nest. The dainty charm of the Creeper's nest, as well as its cunning seclusion, gives zest to a search which in the case of several veteran nidologists has been almost a passion. If the Creeper had not told us, we should scarcely be aware of the tendency of bark, especially in the case of dead trees, to warp and curl away from the parental stem. But the Creeper found this out early in the game, so behind the sprung bark scale his nest is neatly and often invisibly ensconced. Showing, as it does in California, a strong preference for evergreen trees, the bird uses only such other deciduous host-trees as happen to be closely associated with firs or pines. Its commoner preference is for the incense cedar (*Libocedrus decurrens*) in the Sierras, or for the Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) in the coastal region. In both these trees great vertical strips of bark are likely to become detached at the lower end and to warp up slowly from the bottom. In such case the Creepers avail themselves of the certain shelter from rain which is provided by the uppermost angle of attachment, even though the yawning space below has to be bridged or floored, by twigs and bark-fragments laboriously braced. For the felted mass of the nest proper the bird requires little besides the fine shredded bark, as soft as satin, of cedar or redwood. But if the host-tree happens to be a fir or maple scorched by a quick running fire and so yielding a bent plate or two, the excess space of the cavity chosen is first filled up with sticks, bark-strips, moss, cotton and every other sort of woody loot. As the top is approached, only materials of exquisite fineness are chosen, and into the upper stratum of the crescent-shaped cushion so formed (its outlines being determined by the curve of the tree trunk, and the sharper curve of the springing bark scale) a deep cup is sunk,—the nesting hollow proper.

Bark scales of exactly suitable dimensions are not always to be had; and the very charm of Creeper nests lies in their great variety, and in the pluckily skillful adaptiveness displayed in their construction. Here is a nest which enjoys a three inch fairway between trunk and bark—room to burn! while here is another so scanted, one and a quarter inches, that the wood must serve for sidewalls in the inner cavity, while

the bird herself is obliged to sit lengthwise of the crescent. In a nest which the author took on Sugar Hill, in Modoc County, the entrance crevice was only five-eighths of an inch across!

So great is the scarcity of suitable nesting sites in country otherwise desirable for the birds, that an ingenious friend of mine has hit upon the scheme of putting out an extensive line of decoys. In the depths of the woods he nails up curling bark strips, as inconspicuously as possible, against sound tree boles. And from a line of, say, thirty-five or forty traps he gathers an annual vintage of five or six sets of Creepers' eggs. It is only fair to add that the birds profit in the long run by this arrangement for they are allowed to raise second broods undisturbed throughout an area which offers no other shelter.

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No. 132

## Marsh Wren

### No. 132a Tule Wren

A. O. U. No. 725a. *Telmatodytes palustris paludicola* (Baird).

**Synonyms.**—MARSH WREN (locally). WESTERN MARSH WREN (now restricted to *T. p. plesius*). CALIFORNIA MARSH WREN (inappropriate). PACIFIC MARSH WREN.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Similar to *T. p. plesius*, but smaller and with coloration decidedly darker. Length about 120.6 (4.75); wing 50 (1.97); tail 44 (1.73); bill 13.2 (.52); tarsus 20 (.78).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; brownish coloration; reed-haunting habits and sputtering notes distinctive.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: Shaped like a cocoon, of reeds and grasses, lined with plant-down, and with entrance in side; placed two or three feet high in reeds; rarely, high in bushes of swamp. *Eggs*: 5 or 6, ground-color grayish brown, but so heavily dotted and clouded with varying shades of brown as to be frequently obscured. Av. size 16 x 12.2 (.63 x .48). *Season*: Last week in March to July; two broods.

**Range of *Telmatodytes palustris*.**—United States and southern Canada, wintering south into Mexico.

**Range of *T. p. paludicola*.**—Pacific Coast strip, breeding from British Columbia to the San Diegan district, wintering from Puget Sound south to Cape San Lucas and northwestern Sonora.

**Distribution in California.**—"Resident locally in marshy tracts. In northern California, the region west of the Coast ranges; south of San Francisco Bay, along the coast, in the Santa Cruz and San Diegan regions, probably to the Mexican boundary line" (Swarth).

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Troglodytes palustris*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1846, p. 113 (Calif.); *Coues*, Birds of the Northwest, 1874, p. 34, part (syn.; life hist.); *Beal*, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 62 (food); *Ray*, Condor, vol. xviii., 1916, p. 226 (San Francisco; nesting dates); *Swarth*, Auk, vol. xxxiv., 1917, p. 308, map (syst.; desc.; range in Calif., etc.).

## *The Marsh Wrens*

NEXT AFTER the frogs, the Tule Wrens are the noisiest choristers of all sunlit February swamps. One hesitates to call the medley of clicking, buzzing, and sputtering which welters in the reeds, music; but if one succeeds in catching sight of a Tule Wren, holding on for dear life to a cat-tail stem, and vibrating like a drill-chuck with the effort of his impassioned utterance, he feels sure that music is at least intended.

Wrens are ever busybodies, and if they could not sing or chatter, or at least scold, they surely would explode. It is a marvel, too, that they find so much to interest them in mere reeds, now green, now brown, set above a foot or so of stagnant water. But, bless you! Do not waste your sympathies upon them. They have neighbors—Red-wings, Yellow-throats, and the like—and is it not the gossips of the *little* village who are most exercised over their neighbors' affairs?

The name "Tule" which we have applied to our Pacific Coast bird must not be taken to imply any divergence in general habits from the Marsh Wrens of the remoter interior. They are Marsh Wrens all, and they avail themselves of whatever cover offers,—tules (*Scirpus lacustris occidentalis*) on Tulare Lake, cat-tails in the intersecting channels of the Monterey Gun Club, salicornia (*S. ambigua*) in the San Francisco Bay region and in all coastal marshes where the supply of cat-tails is inadequate. In autumn the Tule Wrens leave the sheltered precincts of the ponds, and go roaming about through dry weed patches and adjacent chaparral. Here they are as noisy and as elusive as ever, and are in nowise awed by their less usual surroundings. There is, doubtless, some invasion from the north and consequent crowding in winter. The swamps of Los Angeles County certainly contain (or fail to contain) more birds in winter than in summer; but whether our local birds stand by their guns in winter, we shall never know until we have put into force some comprehensive passport system.

Nesting is a less urgent matter in the South, and Willett's record of "six, slightly incubated," April 15, 1904, seems to be the earliest record for southern California. We used to find them in March at Tacoma, and full sets were the rule by the first week in April. It is possible, however, that, as in so many other cases of California birds, this species, long familiarized to observation in the East, has not been closely studied in our State. Our students have been ever on the lookout for novelties, and it is a curious fact that Condors and Solitaires are better known to California ornithologists than Jenny Wrens and Titmice—*mihī conscius sum culpæ*.

The eggs of Marsh Wrens, usually five or six in number, are so overlaid with tiny dots as to appear of an almost uniform wood-brown (wood-brown, army brown or verona brown to natal brown, scarcely



## The Marsh Wrens

“mahogany” or “chocolate”),—very dark, except occasionally in the case of the last-laid egg. These eggs are not only among the handsomest known, but they form another exception to the “rule” that eggs laid in holes are white. We may scarcely suppose that the hole-nesting habit is one recently acquired, and yet I once found at Los Baños a Tule Wren’s nest whose contents, four eggs, were entirely exposed, as in a blackbird’s nest. The sitting bird must subject her eggs to frequent turning in the nest, for they become highly polished during incubation.

### No. 132b Western Marsh Wren

A. O. U. No. 725c. *Telmatodytes palustris plesius* (Oberholser).

**Synonym.**—INTERIOR MARSH WREN.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Crown blackish; forehead warm brown (brussels brown), centrally,—color sometimes spreading superficially over entire crown; hind-neck and scapulars a lighter shade of brown; rump bright brown (sudan brown); a triangular patch on back blackish, with prominent white stripes and some admixture of brown; wings and tail fuscous or blackish on inner webs, brown with black bars on exposed surfaces; upper and under tail-coverts usually more or less distinctly barred with dusky; sides of head whitish before, plain brown or punctate behind; a white superciliary line; underparts white, tinged with ochraceous buff across breast, and with pale cinnamon-brown on sides, flanks, and crissum. Bill blackish brown above, paler brown below; feet and legs brownish. Length 114.3-146 (4.50-5.75); av. of 10 males: wing 54 (2.12); tail 46.4 (1.82); bill 14.2 (.56); tarsus 20.1 (.79).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; brown and black pattern of back with white stripes distinctive; white superciliary stripe and long bill distinctive in haunts. Strictly confined to bulrushes and long grass of marshes. Lighter and larger than *T. p. paludicola*.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A ball of reeds and grasses, chinked and lined with cattail-down, with entrance in side, and suspended in growing cattails, bulrushes, or bushes. *Eggs*: 5 to 7; so heavily speckled with snuff-brown or bister as to appear almost uniform brown. Av. size 16 x 12.2 (.63 x .48). *Season*: May–July; two broods.

**Range of *T. p. plesius*.**—The Great Basin region, broadly; breeding in Upper Sonoran zone from central British Columbia south to northeastern California and Mexico; wintering from California and central Texas south to the Tropic of Cancer.

**Authorities.**—**Cooper** (*Cistothorus palustris*), Orn. Calif., 1870, p. 75, part (Lake Tahoe); **Grinnell**, Condor, vol. v., 1903, p. 133 (occurrence in s. Calif.); **Swarth**, Auk, vol. xxxiv., 1917, p. 308, map (syst.; desc.; range in Calif., etc.).

### No. 132c Suisun Marsh Wren

A. O. U. No. 725a, part. *Telmatodytes palustris æstuarinus* Swarth.

**Synonyms.**—SAN JOAQUIN MARSH WREN. SWARTH’S MARSH WREN.

**Description.**—Like *T. p. paludicola*, but larger and somewhat darker; like *T. p. plesius* in size, but much darker.

**Range of *T. p. æstuarinus*** (Wholly confined to California).—Breeds in the

## *The Marsh Wrens*

estuary region of the Sacramento River and in the San Joaquin Valley; winters irregularly south to the San Diego district.

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Troglodytes palustris*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 2, ii., 1853, p. 263 (Sacramento Valley); **Swarth**, Auk, vol. xxxiv., 1917, p. 308, map (orig. desc.; type locality, Grizzly Id., Solano Co.).

“TO THE COOTS and Rails belong the ooze-infesting morsels of the swamp; but all the little crawling things which venture into the upper story of the waving cat-tail forest belong to the Marsh Wren. Somewhat less cautious than the waterfowl, he is the presiding genius of flowing acres, which often have no other interest for the ornithologist. There are only two occasions when the Marsh Wren voluntarily leaves the shelter of the cat-tails or of the closely related marshables. One of these is when he is driven South by the migrating instinct. Then he may be seen skulking about the borders of the streams, sheltering in the weeds or clambering about the drift. The other time is in the spring, when the male shoots up into the air a few feet above the reeds, like a ball from a Roman candle, and sputters all the way, only to drop back, extinguished, into the reeds again. This is a part of the tactics of his courting season, when, if ever, a body may be allowed a little liberty. For the rest, he clings sidewise to the cat-tail stems or sprawls in midair, reaching, rather than flying from one stem to another. His tail is cocked up and his head thrown back, so that, on those few occasions when he is seen, he does not get credit for being as large as he really is” (The Birds of Ohio).

Since his sphere of activity is so limited, we may proceed at once to the main interest, that of nest-building. And this is precisely as the Marsh Wren would have it, else why does he spend the livelong day making extra nests, which are of no possible use to anyone, save as examples of *Telmatodytine* architecture? It is possible that the female is coquettish, and requires these many mansions as evidence that the ardent swain will be able to support her becomingly after marriage. Or, it may be, that the suitor delights to afford his lady love a wide range of choice in the matter of homes, and seeks thus to drive her to the inevitable conclusion that there is only one home-maker for her. However this may be, it is certain that one sometimes finds a considerable group of nest-balls, each of apparent suitability, before any are occupied.

On the other hand, the male continues his harmless activities long after his mate has selected one of his early efforts and deposited her eggs; so that the oölogist may have to sample a dozen “cock’s nests,” or decoys, before the right one is found. Some empty nests may be perfectly finished, but others are apt to lack the soft lining; while still

## *The Marsh Wrens*

others, not having received the close-pressed interstitial filling, will be sodden from the last rains.

The Marsh Wren's nest is a compact ball of vegetable materials, lashed midway of cat-tails or bulrushes, living or dead, and having a neat entrance-hole in one side. A considerable variety of materials is used in construction, but in any given nest only one textile substance



*Taken in Fresno County*

NEST OF MARSH WREN, IN SITU

*Photo by the Author*

will preponderate. Dead cat-tail leaves may be employed, in which case the numerous loopholes will be filled with matted down from the same plant. Fine dry grasses may be utilized, and these so closely woven as practically to exclude the rain. In shallow lakes where rankly growing bulrushes predominate in the nesting areas, spirogyra is the material most largely used. This, the familiar, scum-like plant which masses under water in quiet places, is plucked out by the venturesome birds in great wet hanks and plastered about the nest until the required thickness is attained. While wet, the substance matches its surroundings admirably, but as it dries out it shrinks considerably and fades to a sickly light green, or greenish gray, which advertises itself among the obstinately green bulrushes. Where this fashion prevails, one finds it

## *The Cactus Wren*

possible to pick out immediately the oldest member of the group, and it is more than likely to prove the occupied nest.

The nest-linings are of the softest cat-tail down, feathers of wild fowl, or dried spirogyra teased to a point of enduring fluffiness. It appears, also, that the Wrens often cover their eggs upon leaving the nest. Thus, in one we found on the 17th of May, which contained seven eggs, the eggs were completely buried under a loose blanket of soft vegetable fibers. The nest was by no means deserted, for the eggs were warm and the mother bird very solicitous, insomuch that she repeatedly ventured within a foot of my hand while I was engaged with the nest.

The Marsh Wrens regard themselves as the rightful owners of the reedy fastnesses which they occupy, and are evidently jealous of avian, as well as human, intruders. In one instance a Wren had constructed a sham nest hard against a completed structure of the Yellow-headed Blackbird, and to the evident retirement of its owner. Another had built squarely on top of a handsome Blackbird nest of the current season's construction, and with a spiteful purpose all too evident.

While there is no other conspicuous distinction in habit between *T. p. plesius* and *T. p. paludicola*, it is worthy of note that the interior birds, breeding at high levels east of the Sierras, are obliged to retire in winter to the meager fastnesses of our southeastern deserts, and the more ample overflowed margins of the Colorado River and "New" River. Many, however, spill over at this season into the San Diego district, where they mingle with the resident form, *paludicola*, and there is a suspicion that the resident stock of the Great Valley (San Joaquin-Sacramento) is slightly diluted in winter.

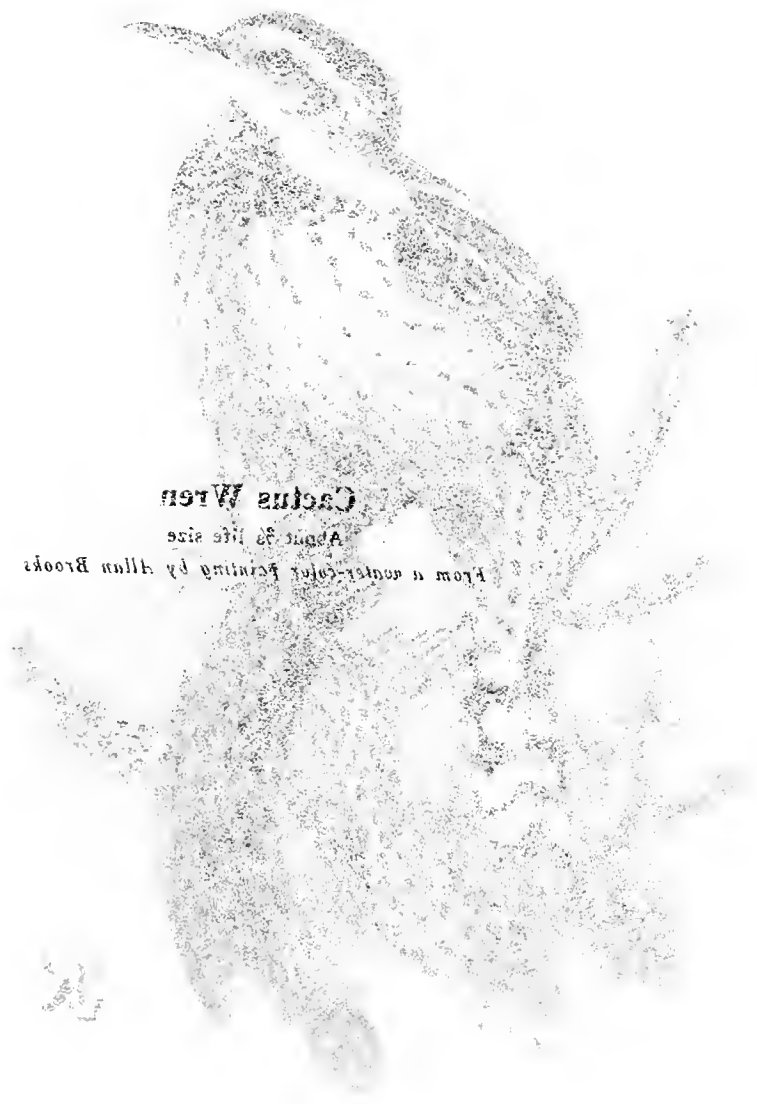
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No. 133

## Cactus Wren

A. O. U. No. 713. *Heleodytes brunneicapillus couesi* (Sharpe).

**Description.**—*Adult*: Pileum and nape warm brown (argus brown to Prout's brown), the former with dusky mesial streaks; back and scapulars, broadly, pale grayish brown, highly varied by mesial white in streaks and stripes, and submesial dusky; flight-feathers (and in a lesser degree their coverts) dusky, spotted with white and brownish on outer webs, and broadly with white on inner webs (the spots forming bars on closed wing); tail (upper aspect) blackish, finely and irregularly barred with pale grayish brown; concealed webs of lateral rectrices chiefly black, the outermost pair black-and-white-barred throughout; the remaining pairs with at least a subterminal band of white; a prominent superciliary, continued to bill, white; post-ocular area clear brown; cheeks mingled brown and white; underparts basally white, immaculate on chin and upper throat, tinged with pale cinnamon on belly and crissum; the sides of



**Cactus Wren**

From a water-color painting by Allan Brooks  
Approx. life size

**Cactus Wren**

About  $\frac{2}{3}$  life size

*From a water-color painting by Allan Brooks*







## The Cactus Wren

throat, lower throat, and chest heavily spotted with black,—the spots nearly or quite confluent in high plumage; at other times, perhaps in less mature specimens, V-shaped or various; breast, sides of belly, sides, and crissum sharply and rather finely spotted with black—the spots rounded, rhomboidal, elongate, or various. Maxilla dusky horn-color; mandible and feet light horn; irides red. *Young birds* are more sparingly spotted below, especially on chest. Length about 203.2 (8.00); average of 29 males: wing 86.7 (3.41); tail 80.7 (3.18); bill 23.3 (.92); tarsus 28.3 (1.11). Females average somewhat smaller.

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size—largest of American wrens; highly varied (white-striped) upperparts and heavily black-spotted underparts, unmistakable.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A cylindrical mass of dried grasses, heavily lined with feathers; placed horizontally, with entrance at one end, and well-shaded above; in top of cholla cactus, yucca, or at base of sahuaro branch, or, more rarely, in mesquite, or other desert shrub. Cylinder about a foot long and 6 inches thick; entrance not large enough to admit hand without forcing. *Eggs:* 4 or 5, rarely 6 (7 of record); pale pinkish cinnamon to pinkish cinnamon, finely, heavily, and uniformly sprinkled or spotted with deeper cinnamon—sometimes faintly wreathed or capped. A rare type shows a white ground upon which the pigment is sharply outlined in largish spots. Av. of 203 eggs in the M. C. O. colls: 23.5 x 17 (.925 x .67). Index 72.4. Range 19.6-26.4 by 15-18 (.77-1.04 by .59-.71). *Season:* March, April–June two broods.

**Range of *Heleodytes brunneicapillus.***—Southwestern United States, Mexico, and Lower California.

**Range of *H. b. couesi.***—Lower Sonoran deserts of southern California, southern Nevada, and Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and western Texas, with northern Lower California and the northern states of Mexico.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident of the Lower Sonoran portions of the southeastern deserts, north to southern end of Owens Valley; also locally resident in the San Diego district north to Simi and, formerly, Santa Paula; found by Grinnell at Weldon. Local range nearly coincident with that of the *Opuntia* cacti (especially *O. fulgida*), and the tree yuccas (*Yucca arborescens* (Torr.), and *Y. mohavensis* Sargent).

**Authorities.**—**Baird** (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. ix., 1858, p. 355 (Los Angeles, Fort Yuma, etc.); **Heermann**, Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. x., pt. iv., 1859, p. 41 (Mohave Desert; habits; desc., nest); **Swarth**, Condor, vol. vi., 1904, p. 17 (distr.; crit.); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 64, pl. (food); **Woods**, Condor, vol. xxiii., 1921, p. 47, figs. (nesting in s. Calif.; photos); **Grinnell**, Condor, vol. xxiii., 1921, p. 169 (crit.; *H. b. bryanti* not found in Calif.).

*BRUNNEICAPILLUS* is the northern outpost of a vigorous genus which in Mexico and South America boasts twenty-seven species. Of these the South American members are known as Marsh Wrens, but the Middle American branch of the genus affects the driest situations, and their northern range is almost exactly delimited by the occurrence of the larger species of *Opuntia* cactus and the tree yuccas (*Yucca arborescens* and *Y. mohavensis*).

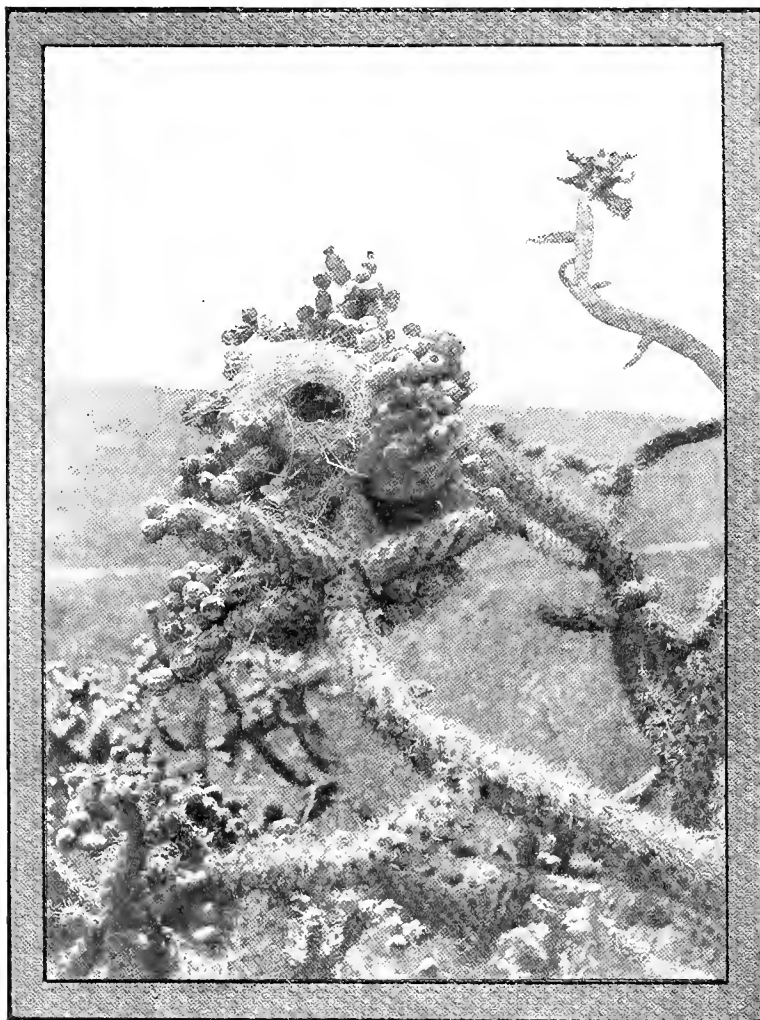
Fully conscious of his larger size and of the envy which it may incite, our giant wren is the most wary and secretive of the Troglodytine race. We are welcome to study his architecture, since there is no help for it, but his person is sacred from all eyes.

## The Cactus Wren

We have no choice, then, but to begin our studies with an investigation of those great globular, or foot-ball-shaped, masses of grass and fine weeds which we shall find imbedded in almost any cactus patch, or upborne by some taller stem of cholla, in fine scorn of concealment. The mistress will inevitably have slipped away—the conspicuous position of the nest guarantees that; but if incubation is well along, or young are in the basket, an anxious head will presently be thrust up from a concealed vantage point in a neighboring thicket. A glance, and down

again. Or if the bird is descried on top of a cholla in the distance, it is in a strained, alert attitude. The male parent voices his anxiety by song, the very same with which he charmed his mate, for he has never felt the urge of harsher passions. Soft and low it comes, a rich yodelling alto of uniform tone—uniform, that is, save for the light crescendo with which the series opens, and the fading murmur of its closing note. Adroit use of the pedals is the performer's one claim to distinction, for he can breathe *amoroso con espressione* (soft pedal), or else fetch out a clashing, metallic *fortissimo*. In extreme cases I have known the bird to enter the very bush in which the nest was placed and plead most eloquently.

Ah, the nest! it is a wonderful affair, as big



Taken near San Diego

Photo by Dickey

NEST OF CACTUS WREN IN "CHOLLA" CACTUS



**Young Cactus Wrens on Dead Cholla**

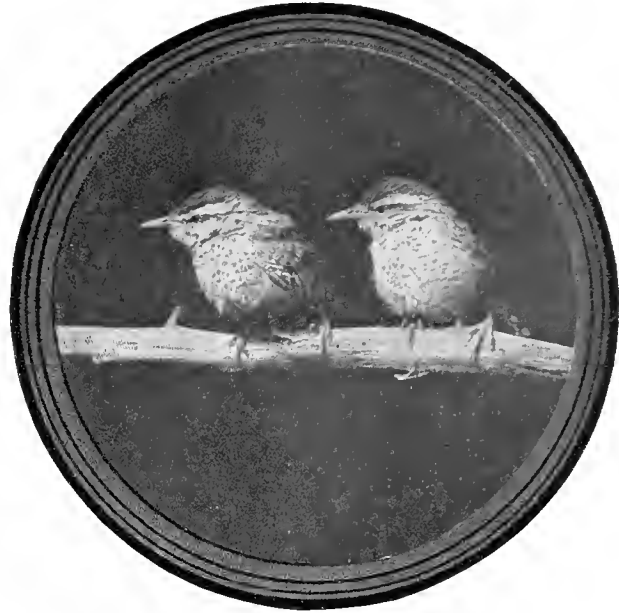
*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*

Taken near Hesperia



## The Cactus Wren

as a peck measure, sometimes a perfect sphere, but oftener an ellipsoid, resting on one side and with an entrance in one end. Whoever he was that first called it "purse-shaped" had either too much imagination or none at all. Is a foot-ball purse-shaped? Yet every compiler in recent literature has dutifully repeated this epithet and will, I suppose, to the end of time. Purse-shaped it certainly is not, for it is neither pendent, nor wide-mouthed, nor open at the top—nor even flat, as most of our purses are—only hollow. But one might well wish for a purse or even a treasure-chest of such a size.



Taken near San Diego

Photo by Dickey

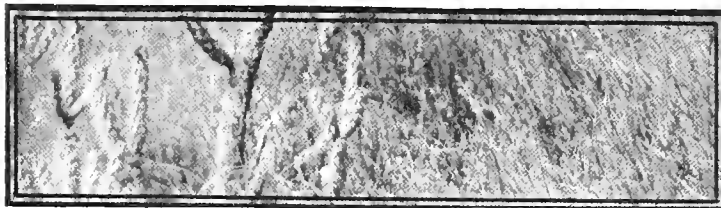
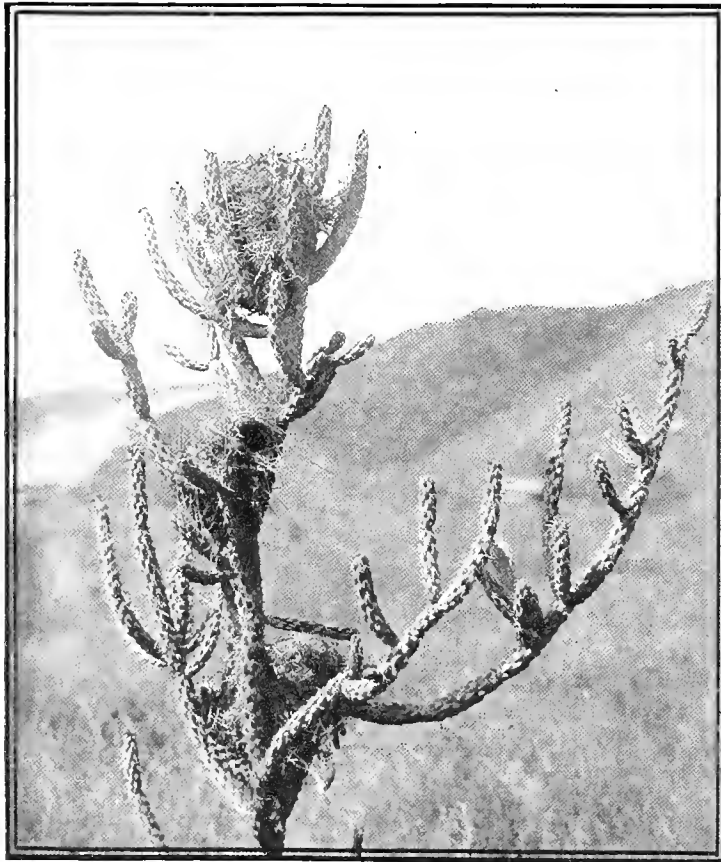
YOUNG CACTUS WRENS

The nesting ball, whatever its shape, is composed externally of fine twigs, chiefly those of the artemisia (*A. dracunculoides*, etc.), dried flower pedicels, and stiff grasses, all of which, being unyielding in character, impart a bristly, dishevelled appearance to the outside, especially in that portion surrounding the entrance hole, which is purposely left "out of focus." The body of the structure is made of finer, more tractable materials,—grasses, rootlets, dried flower-heads, bark-strips, etc., artfully coiled; while the capacious hollow is heavily lined with the shredded inner bark of weeds, spider cocoons, and feathers, wherever the last-named are obtainable. The eggs, four or five in number, are quite the handsomest of the wren kind, pale ochraceous salmon as to ground-color, but so finely dotted with orange-cinnamon, mikado brown, or russet, as often to appear of a uniform vinaceous cinnamon. There is a tendency toward annulation of color about the larger end, and this ring is notably near the apex, sometimes including it.

The stock host of this bird in the desert patches of the San Diego-Ventura district and on the margin of the Colorado Desert is the cholla cactus, *Opuntia bernardina*, and its related forms. On the margin of the Mohave Desert the Joshua trees, or tree yuccas, are largely resorted to. Elsewhere in the desert valleys, mesquites, palo verdes, indigo bushes, canotias and cat's claw (*Acacia greggi*) are resorted to freely, as well as any other

## *The Cactus Wren*

sort of support which promises to scratch the enemy sufficiently. In the San Fernando Valley I found one nest in a gooseberry bush (*Ribes hesperium*). Mr. Frank S. Daggett found a nest in an apricot tree, and another one, still more remarkable, on the cross arm of a power-line pole, near Azusa, at a height of thirty feet.



*Taken in Los Angeles County*

A THREE-STORY FLAT

*Photo by Wright M. Pierce*

Cactus Wrens tend to colonize in loose association of from ten to twenty pairs. Their individual attachments to locality are, moreover, very strong, and a practiced eye can identify the nests of several successive years in one immediate neighborhood. The older nests are gray and discolored, while "this year's nests" may include the one in occupation, the one recently quitted by the first brood of the season, and a cock-nest or two in good repair. The males, quite certainly, use these extra nests as roosts during the breeding season, and it is probable that some of them are in commission the year around.

The remaining wonder is how these birds, be they never so agile, can make their way about through the cruel cactus spines with impunity. They do not achieve immunity by instinct, for I have seen young birds lacerate

themselves cruelly in first attempts. Yet they took their punishment uncomplainingly, or exhibited but the mildest surprise that their world should be so beset. Theirs is a hard life, inexplicable, save as we cast the blame upon the "lure of the desert," which claims many victims, and those most willing, among human kind.

All proper desert areas west of San Geronio Pass are being threatened sharply by the human invasion. Those joyous bits of desert "washes" which the canyons of the San Gabriel Mountains shoot down like arrows into the heart of the plains, have become so cluttered up with bungalows and chicken coops that one is ashamed to be caught prowling around. The last nest I found, near Roscoe, was stuffed with "Plymouth Rock" chicken-feathers. Recognizing the futility of further effort the birdman adjourned next door and had a drink of ice cream soda—"All ices received fresh from the city daily."

The Cactus Wren has receded from many parts of the San Diego-Ventura section already, and is in danger of being altogether cut off. It is a pity, for he not only brought us the authentic breath of the wilderness, but so long as his home was untouched he waged unceasing warfare on spiders, wasps, beetles, and grasshoppers, while from the neighboring olive-yard he culled the dreaded scale insect.

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No. 134

## Bewick's Wren

### No. 134a Desert Wren

A. O. U. No. 719b, part. *Thryomanes bewicki eremophilus* Oberholser.

**Synonyms.**—BAIRD'S WREN (part). DESERT BEWICK WREN.

**Description.**—Similar to the next form, but larger and much paler above and below. Length of males (skins) 129 (5.08); wing 58 (2.28); tail 53 (2.087); bill 14.8 (.58); tarsus 18.4 (.72).

**Nesting of *Thryomanes bewicki*** in California.—*Nest:* Indescribably varied in construction; in general, any available soft or pliable material to fill any available hole or cranny; basally of sticks, twigs, weed-stems, grasses, bark, or moss; lining of fine grasses, hair, fur, or feathers; placed in old woodpecker holes, in crannies about buildings, in trash-piles, or, not infrequently, in crannies and crevices of 'dobe cliffs, or barranca walls. *Eggs:* 3 to 6, usually 5; white, sprinkled rather sparingly with reddish brown; sometimes handsomely wreathed. Av. size 16 x 12.2 (.63 x .48). *Season:* April-June; two broods.

**Range of *Thryomanes bewicki*.**—The United States, southerly, and Mexico.

**Range of *T. b. eremophilus*.**—Southern Great Basin region, broadly, and Mexico south to Zacatecas.

**Distribution in California.**—Breeds in the desert ranges and higher valleys (Lone Pine, June 16, 1911; George Creek, May 19, 1919) southeast of the Sierra Nevada; retires to the adjacent valleys and the southern deserts in winter.

## The Bewick Wrens

**Authorities.**—A. K. Fisher (*Thryothorus bewickii bairdi*), U. S. Dept. Agric., N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, 1893, p. 134 (localities in s. e. Calif.); Oberholser, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxi., 1898, p. 427 (monogr.; orig. desc.; spec. listed from Death Valley, White Mts., etc.); Grinnell, Condor, vol. vi., 1904, p. 44 (Palm Springs, winter); Grinnell, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xii., 1914, p. 209 (Lower Colorado Valley, winter; habits; crit.); Swarth, Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., 4th ser., vol. vi., no. 4, 1916, p. 80, map (monogr.; distr. in Calif.).

### No. 134b San Diego Wren

A. O. U. No. 719d. *Thryomanes bewickii charienturus* Oberholser.

**Description.**—*Adult* (sexes alike) and *Immature*: Upperparts and auriculars, shading on sides of neck, warm brown (mummy brown); the exposed surfaces, greater coverts, tertials, upper tail-coverts, and rectrices finely barred with black or blackish; a sharply defined superciliary, white; underparts ashy gray, clearing almost to white on chin and throat, darkening to pale neutral gray on sides; distal portions of prolonged flank-feathers touched with brownish; under tail-coverts barred with black. Bill blackish above, lighter below; feet brownish. *Juvenals* are much like adult, but lighter above, and more or less spotted by dusky below. Av. length of adult males (skins): 120 (4.72); wing 52.7 (2.07); tail 52.8 (2.08); bill 14 (.55); tarsus 19 (.75). Females average smaller.

**Recognition Marks.**—Midget to warbler size; warm brown above, whitish to gray below; white superciliary line distinctive, especially as contrasted with House Wren (*Troglodytes aëdon*).

**Range of *T. b. charienturus*.**—Southern California, chiefly west of the desert divide, south to about Latitude 28°, Lower California.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident, chiefly in the Upper Sonoran zone of the San Diego district north, at least, to Santa Barbara and Mount Pinos; wandering down to adjacent portions of the Mohave and Colorado deserts in winter.

**Authorities.**—Baird (*Thryothorus bewickii*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. ix., 1858, p. 363, part (Ft. Tejon); Oberholser, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxi., 1898, p. 435 (monogr.; orig. desc.; spec. listed from s. Calif. localities); Grinnell and Swarth, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. x., 1913, p. 307 (San Jacinto Mts.); Swarth, Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., 4th ser., vol. vi., no. 4, 1916, p. 74, map (monogr.; distr. in Calif.).

### No. 134c Catalina Island Wren

A. O. U. No. 719d, part. *Thryomanes bewickii catalinæ* Grinnell.

**Description.**—Similar to *T. b. charienturus*, but "averaging darker dorsally (more sepia and not so umber brown), and with heavier bill and conspicuously and constantly larger feet" (Grinnell).

**Range of *T. b. catalinæ*.**—Common resident on Santa Catalina Island.

**Authorities.**—Oberholser (*Thryomanes bewickii charienturus*), Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxi., 1898, p. 435, part (monogr.; comment upon spec. from Catalina Id.); Richardson, Condor, vol. x., 1908, p. 68; Grinnell, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1910, p. 308 (orig. desc.; Avalon, Catalina Id.); Howell, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 12, 1917, p. 97, part (syn.; distr.; habits; crit.).



No. 134d San Clemente Wren

A. O. U. No. 719.1. **Thryomanes bewicki leucophrys** (Anthony).

**Description.**—Similar to *T. b. charienturus*, but averaging paler and duller throughout, with reduction of black barring (especially on under tail-coverts) and increase of white in superciliary.

**Range of *T. b. leucophrys*.**—Common resident on San Clemente Island.

**Authorities.**—**Cooper** (*Thryothorus bewickii*), Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., vol. iv., 1870, p. 78, part; **Anthony**, Auk, vol. xii., 1895, p. 51 (orig. desc. of *Thryothorus leucophrys*; San Clemente Id.).

No. 134e Santa Cruz Island Wren

A. O. U. No. 719d, part. **Thryomanes bewicki nesophilus** Oberholser.

**Description.**—Similar to *T. b. charienturus*, but flanks much more strongly tinged with brownish.

**Range of *T. b. nesophilus*.**—Common resident on Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa Islands.

**Authorities.**—**C. H. Townsend** (*Thryothorus bewickii bairdi*), Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xiii., 1890, p. 141 (Santa Cruz Id.); **Oberholser**, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxi., 1898, p. 442 (orig. desc.; Santa Cruz Id.); **J. Mailliard**, Bull. Cooper Orn. Club, vol. i., 1899, p. 42 (habits); **Howell and van Rossem**, Condor, vol. xv., 1913, p. 92 (nest).

No. 134f San Joaquin Wren

A. O. U. No. 719d, part. **Thryomanes bewicki drymæcus** Oberholser.

**Description.**—Similar to *T. b. charienturus*, but "upperparts decidedly browner," "tail shorter" [about one millimeter], "bill longer" [.9 and .8 mm respectively in male and female], and "feet smaller" [Heaven only knows how much].

**Range of *T. b. drymæcus*** (Wholly contained within California).—Resident in the Upper Sonoran zone of the great interior valley, broadly defined—involves the inner coast ranges, possibly to the sea in San Luis Obispo and northern Santa Barbara counties, west as far as Helena in Trinity County, north to Baird in Shasta County, northeast to the Warner Mountains (Grinnell), east well into the Sierran foothills (Kenawyer's south fork of Kings River, July 9, 1913), south to the Tejon Mountains.

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Troglodytes Bewickii*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 2, ii., 1853, p. 263 (Calif.); **Oberholser**, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxi., 1898, p. 437 (monogr.; orig. desc.; type locality, Baird, Shasta Co.); **Barlow**, Condor, vol. iii., 1901, p. 182 (Fyffe; song); **Swarth**, Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., 4th ser., vol. vi., no. 4, 1916, p. 68, map (monogr.; distr.; etc.).

No. 134g Vigors's Wren

A. O. U. No. 719a, part. **Thryomanes bewicki spilurus** (Vigors).

**Description.**—Similar to *T. b. charienturus*, but decidedly browner (darker than *drymæcus* even) and slightly smaller.

**Range of *T. b. spilurus*** (Wholly contained within California).—"Common resident of the Upper Sonoran chaparral association in the humid coast belt, from northern Monterey County north up to the Golden Gate; east around the south arm of San Francisco Bay at least to Berkeley" (Grinnell).

## *The Bewick Wrens*

**Authorities.**—**Vigors** (*Troglodytes spilurus*), Zool. Voyage "Blossom," 1839, p. 18, pl. iv., fig. 1 (orig. desc.; Monterey or San Francisco); **Oberholser**, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxi., 1898, p. 438 (monogr.); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 57, part (food); **Allen**, Condor, vol. xvii., 1915, pp. 82-84 (Berkeley; nesting); **Swarth**, Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., 4th ser., vol. vi., no. 4, 1916, p. 67, map (monogr.; distr.; crit.).

### No. 134h Nicasio Wren

A. O. U. No. 719a, part. **Thryomanes bewicki marinensis** Grinnell.

**Description.**—Similar to *T. b. spilurus*, but dorsal coloration brighter brown, of a vandyke tone, and flanks and light intervals on crissum strongly washed with vandyke brown" (Grinnell).

**Range of *T. b. marinensis*** (Wholly contained within California).—Resident in the humid coastal strip from San Francisco Bay north through Marin, Sonoma, and Mendocino counties, at least to the Eel River in Humboldt County (Elinor, June 15, 1916).

**Authorities.**—**Oberholser** (*Thryomanes bewickii spilurus*), Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxi., 1898, p. 438, part (monogr.; comment upon spec. from Marin Co.); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1910, p. 307 (orig. desc.; Nicasio, Marin Co.).

A CAREFUL LIST of the dozen most prominent birds of California must make early mention of the Bewick Wren. "Prominent" is not exactly the word to use, either, if it suggests large size or brilliant plumage or bold behavior. The Bewick Wren has none of these marks,—but he is one of the dozen most abundant, best distributed, most versatile, most adaptable, and most characteristic birds of the West. *Dominant* is, perhaps, a better epithet, though "prominent" is recognized as suitable by one who has mastered the intricacies and varieties of the Thryomanian song.

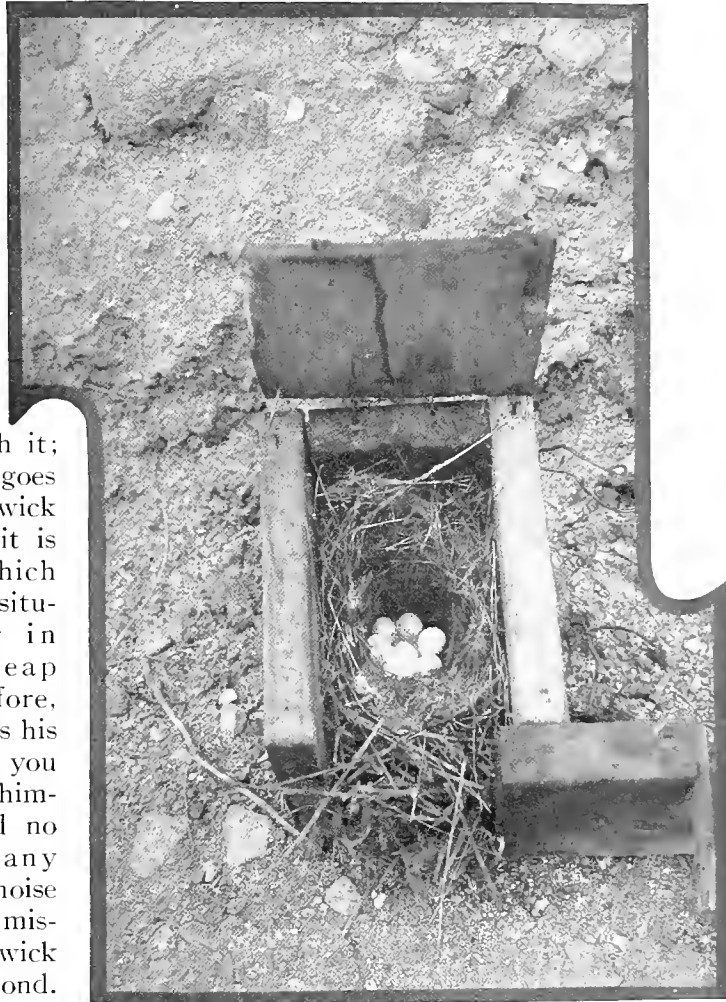
That our hero's tenure of Californian soil is of long standing is evidenced by the several varieties which are now recognized within our borders—each reflecting, if we had skill to read the evidence, some reaction of local environment—and by the fact that the species enjoys a great altitudinal range, viz., from sea level up to 8000 or 9000 feet. These minute differences, whether of relative length of bill and wing or barring of tail, it is not worth our while to follow out in this connection; nor is it often worth while to trace these shades of physical change anyway, unless it can be clearly shown that they are accompanied by contrasting behavior characters, or by constant differences in song. This our present knowledge of the several races of the Bewick Wren does not permit us to do, and we feel justified in treating them practically as one.

But as compared with the Bewick Wren of the East, one hastens to say that the western races bulk larger in the scheme of things, and have acquired a greater versatility in song. For to the characteristic

## The Bewick Wrens

ditty of *bewicki* proper, sprightly as it is, *spilurus* and *nesophilus* and their clan have introduced so many trills and flourishes that the original motif has been almost lost to sight. *Calophonus* (having a beautiful voice) Oberholser calls a variety found still further north, but the name is descriptive of all western forms; and so important an element is the song of the Bewick in the western chorus that there are many sections where it bulks larger than that of any other species.

The Bewick Wren freely invades the haunts of men; it even disputes much territory claimed by the House Wren (*Troglodytes aëdon parkmani*) but timberlashings, rocky hillsides, sunny arroyos, and the chaparral are more to its taste. Thus, the Canon Wren, the Rock Wren, the House Wren, the Winter Wren, and the Wren-Tit are brought into active competition with it; and while each in turn goes to places where the Bewick Wren will not follow, it is the Bewick Wren which dominates the general situation. Whether in chaparral or log-heap or cactus bed, therefore, the Bewick Wren knows his ground. And he lets you see exactly as much of himself as he intends and no more. If there is any unusual appearance or noise which gives promise of mischief afoot, then the Bewick Wren is the first to respond. Flitting, gliding, tittering,

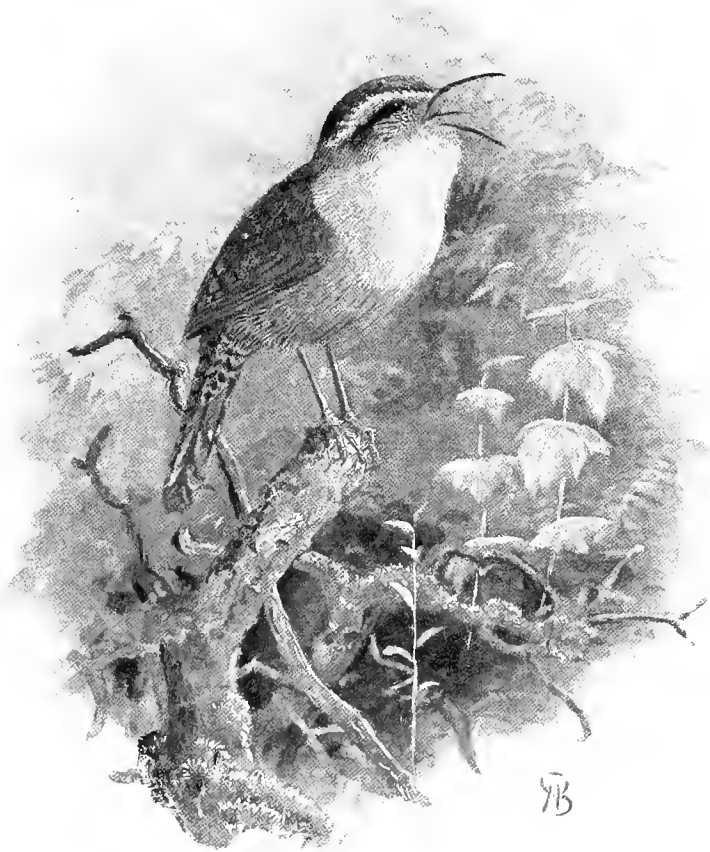


Taken in Los Angeles County

Photo by Wright M. Pierce

NEST OF SAN DIEGO WREN IN DECOY BOX

## The Bewick Wrens



SAN DIEGO BEWICK WREN

oak sapling or the top of a stump. Here, at short intervals and in most energetic fashion, he delivers extended phrases of varied notes, now clear and sparkling, now slurred or pedalled. Above all, he is master of a set of smart trills. One of them, after three preliminary notes, runs *tsu' tsu' tsu' tsu' tsu'*, like an exaggerated and beautified song of the Towhee. Another song, which from its rollicking character deserves to be called a drinking song, terminates with a brilliant trill in descending scale, *rallentando et diminuendo*, as though the little minstrel were actually draining a beaker of dew.

At another time it is the sudden outburst which nearly upsets you. *Prrank, see, see, see, see*. Now "*see see see see*" is soothing enough, but

the bird comes up and moves about the center of commotion, taking observations from all possible angles and making a running commentary thereon. His attitude is alert and his movements vivacious, but the chief interest attaches to the bird's mobile tail. With this expressive member the bird is able to converse in a vigorous sign language. It is cocked up in impudence, wagged in defiance, set aslant in coquetry, or depressed in whimsical token of humility. Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that the bird makes faces with its tail.

While spying along the lower levels, the Wren giggles and chuckles—titters, or else gives vent to a grating cry, *moozeerp*, which sets the woods on edge. But in song the bird oftenest chooses an elevated station, a scrub-

## The Bewick Wrens

that fiercely accusing "prrank!" is not good for the nerves. And the wren is laughing at you; be sure of that.

The Bewick Wren is altogether a hilarious personage. He sets the canons of criticism at defiance, and when you think you have mastered all his tricks, he springs another one on you just to drive dull care away. The wren does not indulge in conscious mimicry; but since his art is self-taught, he is occasionally indebted to the companions of the chaparral for a theme. The *maculatus* Towhee motif is not uncommon in his songs, and the supposed notes of a Willow Goldfinch, a little off color, were once trailed to his door. On Santa Cruz Island I caught him filling in the intervals of song with a sort of buzzing lullaby, which reminded me very strongly of the *biz biz* note of the Western Gnatcatcher. Indeed, I am led to suspect that the record of the reputed occurrence of *Polioptila* on that island was really due to the activities of *T. bewicki nesophilus*.

For all that the bird is so common, nests of the Bewick Wren type are comparatively rare in collections. This is due, perhaps, as much to the lawless variety of sites used, as to the caution of the bird. A cranny of suitable size is the *sine qua non*, and this may be in a rock-pile, in a canyon-wall, in an old woodpecker-hole, in the mouth of an old tunnel of a Rough-winged Swallow, under a root, behind a sprung bark-scale, in an old shoe or a tin can, or the pocket of a disused coat. It may even be, as frequently upon Santa Cruz Island, in the bedded leafage of the forest floor. The Bewick Wren is rather chary of materials, especially sticks, and so far as known, he does not waste his energies constructing useless decoys or cocks' nests, as almost all other species of wrens do. Eggs are five or six in number, white, sparsely but sharply dotted with cinnamon. The lining materials are of the finest, and an occasional cast-off snake-skin lends its quatum of interest to the aggregate of blanketings.

If the Bewick Wren is sly and secretive during the nesting season, a more generous spirit fills its breast when the young are well astir. Nothing could be more charming than the sight of a family group of *bewickis* taking a Sunday stroll. Bugs are the ostensible object of pursuit, but bug-hunting languishes when the stranger seats himself on a mossy log, and a gentle ripple of veiled inquiry assures him that he is of more interest than many bugs. One by one the questing babies hop out into the open, select a comfortable perch and survey the big brother with friendly curiosity. Many childish comments are passed, and the mischief of the party may even start a snicker, but it is all in good part, and the birdman feels the flattery of a dozen admiring eyes. Even the mother, a little reluctant, is lured into the open by the confident declarations of her children; and under pretense of righting a rumpled feather, accepts compliments upon the fine appearance of her gentle brood. Admiring eyes

## *The Western House Wren*

have signed a truce, and the ancient misunderstanding is forgotten. It is at such a time that the heart of man softens. A wave of sympathy sweeps over him, sense of his own ill desert, and a great yearning for fellowship with all these tiny voyageurs upon the common stream of life. Out of the storm and chaos of human experience certain moments hold sacred to recollection,—moments in which a baby bird flashed us a look of confidence, or yielded, perchance, to the gentle pressure of a proffered finger.

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No. 135

## Western House Wren

A. O. U. No. 721a. *Troglodytes aëdon parkmani* Audubon.

**Synonyms.**—PARKMAN'S WREN. PACIFIC HOUSE WREN.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Above grayish brown, duller and lighter (Saccardo's umber) on foreparts; brighter (dresden brown) on rump, which has concealed downy, white spots; back and scapulars barred (rarely indistinctly) with dusky; wings on exposed webs and tail all over distinctly and finely dusky-banded; sides of head speckled grayish brown, without definite pattern; below light grayish brown (tulle buff), indistinctly speckled or banded with darker brownish on foreparts; heavily speckled and banded with dusky and whitish on flanks and crissum. Bill black above, lighter below; culmen slightly curved; feet brownish. Length 114.3-133.3 (4.50-5.25); wing 52.8 (2.08); tail 44.6 (1.75); bill 13 (.51); tarsus 17.2 (.68).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; brown above, much lighter brown below; everywhere more or less speckled and banded with dusky, brownish, or white. Larger, lighter, and with longer tail than Western Winter Wren.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: In holes or crannies, natural or artificial; basally of criss-crossed sticks, often absurdly large for bird; lined, meanly, with weed-stems, rootlets, or bark-flakes; or luxuriously, with anything soft,—grass, horsehair, wool, snake-skins, and especially feathers. *Eggs*: 6 or 8, sometimes 9; basally white, but usually so finely sprinkled with warm reddish brown as to appear pink on the less heavily marked portions; applied color tends to gather in handsome coronal wreaths. Av. size 16.5 x 13.2 (.65 x .52). *Season*: Early and often—March or April to July or August.

**Range of *Troglodytes aëdon*.**—United States and southern Canada; south in winter to Mexico.

**Range of *T. a. parkmani*.**—Western United States and the southern portion of the western Canadian provinces; east to Manitoba and southern Illinois; breeding south to southwestern Texas, southern Arizona, and the San Pedro Martir Mountains of Lower California; wintering from California and Texas south to Oaxaca.

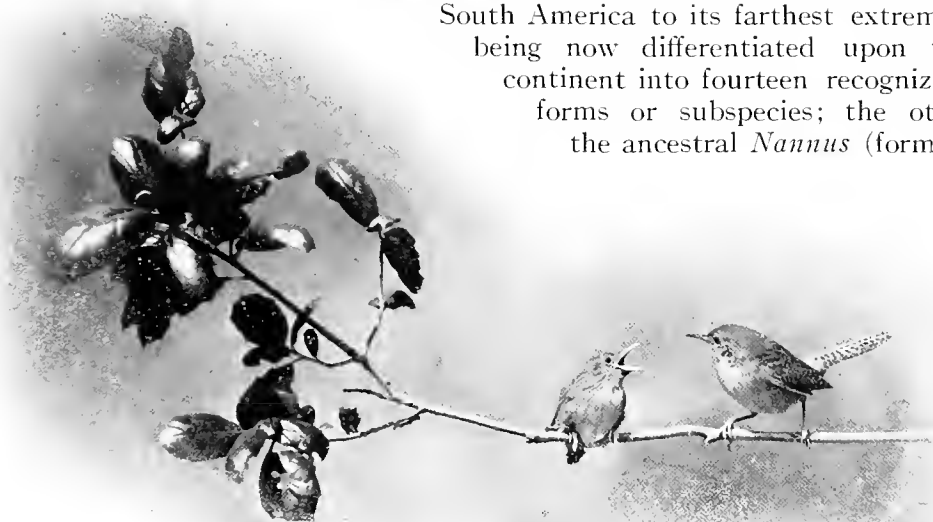
**Distribution in California.**—Common summer resident in Upper Sonoran and Transition zones, nearly throughout the State. Breeds sparingly in Lower Boreal zone, and ascends to limit of trees in late summer. Winters in the valleys of the San Diego district and in the valley of the Colorado, and casually northward.

**Authorities.**—Gambel (*Troglodytes sylvestris*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., iii., 1846, p. 113 (Calif.; name proposed as substitute for *T. americanus* Audubon, preoccupied); Cooper, Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club, vol. i., 1876, p. 79 (nesting habits); Beal, U. S.

## The Western House Wren

Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 39, 1907, p. 60 (food); *Grinnell*, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., p. 120 (San Bernardino Mts.; habits; migr.; etc.); *Willett*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 7, 1912, p. 102 (s. Calif.; occurrence, nesting dates, etc.).

THE ARCHÆOLOGY of birds is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating departments of ornithology. Our materials are of quite a different order from those left by humans. In fact, they are all contemporary, or nearly so. There are no shards or tombs or "artifacts" of any kind, by which we may trace the earlier stages of avian culture, no mummies or skeletons, or at least so few of them that we cannot read from them the story of "ethnic" movements among the birds. We must read the history of birds in their present structure, plumage, habits, voices, nidification, and distribution. Fortunately, these are enlightening to those who scan closely, and who are able to exercise a vigorous historical imagination. From such sources we learn that the Wrens are an ancient American family, having their ancestral birthplace, or at least their more modern center of distribution, within the Tropics, probably in Central America. From this center two aggressive types first emerged. One, the ancestral *Troglodytes musculus*, proceeded south and conquered South America to its farthest extremity, being now differentiated upon that continent into fourteen recognizable forms or subspecies; the other, the ancestral *Nannus* (formerly



Taken in Pasadena  
Photo by Dickey

WHERE IS THAT BUG YOU PROMISED ME?

## The Western House Wren



Taken in San Diego County

Photo by Dickey

WESTERN HOUSE WREN AT NESTING HOLE

called *Anorthura* and *Olbiorchilus*, and in Europe miscalled *Troglodytes*), himself in all probability a brother of *T. musculus*, *père*, at some date preceding the great Ice Age worked north and spread westward to the Eurasian Continent. Driven south again by the engulfing disaster of ice, the *Nannus* stock broke up, its separated fragments taking refuge in northern Africa and India and the southern United States. These slightly differentiated forms returned again upon the heels of the retreating ice to dominate Europe, the Himalayas, Japan, and northern North America, as the European House Wren (*Nannus troglodytes troglodytes*, *N. t. fumigatus*, *N. t. nipalensis*) and (to omit many connecting links) the Winter Wrens (*Nannus t. hiemalis*).

Following close upon the return of this doughty dwarf (i. e. *vávvoς*, dwarf) to its northern domains, the *Troglodytes* stock put forth another shoot, *T. aëdon*, which now occupies most of the United States in summer, and retires chiefly into Mexico in winter. This *T. aëdon* stock, in

turn, is differentiating by East and West, as so many do; and our western bird, *T. a. parkmani*, neither goes so far north in summer (only slightly exceeding the 49th parallel), nor so completely retreats in winter. Our western bird, therefore, is somewhat quieter, less aggressive, and much less domestic, than the eastern bird.

The name House Wren, universally applied to this bird and its congeners, is perhaps less deserved in California than anywhere else. We may believe that the bird is an old residenter, and that his established modes of life have been less disturbed by the white invasion than have those of the House Finch (*Carpodacus frontalis*), for example. Also the Bewick Wrens (*Thryomanes bewicki* sub. sp.) are a well established group hereabouts; and they were as prompt to avail themselves of whatever advantages civilization might offer as were the *Troglodytes* Wrens.



## *The Western House Wren*

As a consequence, our California House Wren is rather a bird of the woods; and there are ten times as many nests in holes in trees as there are attached to human domiciles.

Once upon the scene, however, one little House Wren goes a great ways, East or West. He is bursting with energy, and music escapes from his busy mandibles like steam from a safety valve. The first task after the spring return is to renovate last year's quarters; but there is always time on the side to explore a new brush-heap, to scold a cat, or to indulge innumerable song-bursts. In singing his joyous trill the bird reminds one of a piece of fireworks called a "cascade," for he fills the air with a brilliant bouquet of music, and is himself, one would think, nearly consumed by the violence of the effort. But the next moment the singer is carrying out last year's feather bed by great beakfuls, or lugging into some cranny sticks ridiculously large for him.

During the nesting season both birds are perfect little spitfires, assaulting mischievous prowlers with a fearlessness which knows no caution, and scolding in a voice which expresses the deepest scorn. The rasping note produced on such an occasion reminds one of the energetic use of a nutmeg grater by a determined housewife.

Wintering birds, or at least young ones, in Southern California have a note which, though still rasping, seems quite different from anything I have heard in the breeding season. It is a loud, harsh, compelling note of complaint, uttered either singly, *wuzeeerp*, or in a breathless series, *zeerp, zeerp, zirp zirp*



*Taken in San Bernardino County*

*Photo by Pierce*

NEST AND EGGS OF WESTERN HOUSE WREN  
PORTION OF INVESTING WOOD REMOVED

## The Western House Wren

*zirp zirp*. It does not appear to answer any social need, for it is uttered by lone birds as they prowls about the garden shrubbery, or thread their way through a hillside thicket. I have fancied the notes were most in evidence in early fall and died out by spring; but whenever heard, they are among the most notable of bird cries heard in the year's round.

In nesting the Wrens do make free of the haunts of men, but are in

nowise dependent on them. Old cabins afford convenient crannies,—forgotten auger holes, tin cans, bird boxes, a sleeve or pocket in an old coat hanging in the woodshed,—anything with a cavity will do; but, by the same token, an unused woodpecker's hole, or a knot-hole in a stump, miles from the haunts of men, will do a good deal better. In any case, the cavity, be it big or little, must first be filled up with sticks, with just room at the top for entrance. Into this mass a deep hollow is sunk, and this is heavily lined with horsehair, wool, feathers, bits of snake-skin, anything soft and "comfy."

Large families, six or eight, are the rule, and the Wrens nest twice in a season. Possibly the second nesting takes place at higher altitudes. I know I have found their nests in late June miles from a human habitation, and at elevations which would not be agreeable in April or May. The highest records I can vouch for were in the Warner Mountains, where at an altitude of over 7000 feet I found a House

Wren's nest with small young on the 3rd of July, and another with five fresh eggs on the 8th of July. A member of the M. C. O. party of 1922, Lawrence Stevens, found two nests with young above Lake Mary, in southern Mono County, and at an altitude of over 9000 feet. Besides this, it is certain that an extensive invasion of the upper mountain areas follows the close of the breeding season.



Taken in Oregon

A VERY BUSY WREN

Photo by W. L. Finley

NOT QUITE SO BUSY AS APPEARS, HOWEVER. THE PICTURE IS A COMPOSITE, PRESENTING THE SAME BIRD TWICE

## *The Western Winter Wren*

It is quite the fashion, East, to make provision for Jenny Wren's wants,—to set out bird boxes, or cans, or old teakettles with missing spouts, care being always taken that the entrance to the nesting hollow shall be too small to suit the English Sparrow. This is not done extensively in the West. Major Allan Brooks insists that the House Wren is a very bad neighbor. He says that in his neighborhood, on Okanogan Lake (B. C.), the little spite makes a business of destroying the eggs of Bluebirds and Tree Swallows by driving her thorn-like beak into them. This is not for love of the egg, apparently, but because she is jealous of too much company and claims all cavities for herself. However this may be, it is certain that Jenny Wren is an indefatigable gleaner of insects, and that her services in this field are altogether commendable.

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No. 136

### Western Winter Wren

A. O. U. No. 722a. *Nannus troglodytes pacificus* (Baird).

**Description.**—*Adult*: Above warm dark brown (deep raw umber), duller anteriorly, brighter on rump and tail, obscurely waved or barred with black on back, wings, and tail—barring more distinct on edges of four or five outer primaries, where alternating with buffy; concealed white spots on rump scarce, or almost wanting; a pale brownish superciliary line; sides of head speckled brown and ochraceous; underparts everywhere finely mottled, speckled, or barred,—on the throat and breast mingled brownish and cinnamon-buff or clay-color, below blackish and dull umber, the dusky element predominating over brown on flanks and crissum, where also admixed with white. Bill comparatively short, straight, blackish above, lighter below; feet light brown. Length 101.6 (4.00); wing 46 (1.81); tail 30 (1.18); bill 11.6 (.46); tarsus 18 (.71).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; dark brown above, lighter below; more or less speckled and barred all over; tail shorter than in preceding species.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: In holes or crannies of root, stump, or rockwall, usually near water; chiefly of moss or with some inclusion of twigs, and lined or not with feathers. Nest ideally a ball with tiny entrance on side near top, or else completely filling cavity. *Eggs*: 5 or 6, rarely 7; white, sparingly and sharply dotted with reddish brown. Av. size 15.2 x 12.2 (.60 x .48). *Season*: April–June; two broods.

**Range of *Nannus troglodytes*.**—The Temperate zone of the Northern Hemisphere; in North America, breeding, save in the mountains, chiefly north of the United States; wintering south to the Gulf Coast, and sparingly to southern California.

**Range of *N. t. pacificus*.**—Western North America. Breeds from Prince William Sound and western Alberta south to central California and northern Colorado; winters south from southern British Columbia to southern California and New Mexico.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident in the humid coastal strip as far south as Big Creek, Monterey County (Jenkins); also not common summer resident in northern high Sierras as far south as the Yosemite Valley (Torrey, Grinnell). In

## *The Western Winter Wren*

winter common resident and visitant in suitable localities of northern and central California west of the Sierras, and sparingly south through the San Diegan district. A record for Santa Cruz Island (by C. B. Linton, Oct. 23, 1908).

**Authorities.**—**Xantus** (*Troglodytes hyemalis*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. xi., 1859, p. 191 (Ft. Tejon); *Sheldon*, Condor, vol. x., 1908, p. 120 (desc. nests and eggs); *Grinnell*, Sierra Club Bull., vol. viii., 1911, p. 122 (Yosemite Valley; desc. nests); *Willett*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 7, 1912, p. 102 (occurrence in s. Calif.); *Davis*, Condor, vol. xx., 1918, p. 190 (Eureka; nest and eggs; nesting dates); *Oberholser*, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. lv., 1919, p. 236 (monogr.; syst.).

*CHICK*—*chick chick*—*chick chick*; it is the Winter Wren's way of saying How-do-you-do? when you invade his domain in the damp forest. The voice is a size too large for such a mite of a bird, and one does not understand its circumflexed quality until he sees its possessor making an emphatic curtsy with each utterance. It is not every day that the recluse beholds a man, and it may be that he has stolen a march under cover of the ferns and underbrush, before touching off his little mine of interrogatives at your knees. If so, his brusque little being is softened by a friendly twinkle, as he notes your surprise, and then darts back chuckling to the cover of a fallen log.

Again, if your entrance into the woods has been unnoticed, so that the little huntsman comes upon you in the regular way of business, it is amusing to watch with what ruses of circumvention he seeks to inspect you. Now he appears above a root on your right, gawking on tiptoe; then drops at a flash behind its shelter to reprove himself in upbraiding *chick chick*'s for his rashness. Then, after a minute of apprehensive silence on your part, a chuckle at your other elbow announces that the inspection is satisfactorily completed on that side. The Lilliputian has you at his mercy, Mr. Gulliver.

The Western Winter Wren is one of the commonest birds in the humid coast belt of western California as far south as middle Monterey County. Not only is it the most characteristic inhabitant of rugged stream beds and romantic dells, but it may be found throughout the somber depths of the fir and redwood forests, from sea-level nearly to the tops of the northern mountains. It is fond of the wilderness, and has learned no necessity of dependence upon man, although it by no means shuns the edges of town, if there be sufficient damp cover available. Because of the broken and discontinuous character of the fir forests of the western Sierras, the Winter Wren is found there only rarely and locally in summer, and it has not yet been reported as breeding south of the Yosemite. Pine country is altogether too dry for our hero, or perhaps he feels that his dark costume is out of place in full sunshine. On the other hand, I once encountered these birds, in some numbers and

## The Western Winter Wren

repeatedly, in late May and early June, haunting the lava cliffs of an Upper Sonoran region miles from timber. They were almost sure to have been non-breeding waifs. Their migrations are not extensive, and consist chiefly in retiring to adjacent lowlands to avoid the heavy snows of the upper levels. It is, thus, probably the Sierran birds which are most completely driven out in winter, and such birds go as far south as Los Angeles County, or as far west as Santa Barbara.

It is the Winter Wren, chiefly, which gladdens the depths of the ancient forest with music. Partly because of its unique isolation, but more because of the joyous abandon of the little singer, the song of the Winter Wren strikes the bird-lover as being one

of the most refreshing in the West. It consists of a rapid series of gurgling notes and wanton trills, not very loud nor of great variety, but having all the spontaneity of bubbling water,—a tiny cascade of song in a waste of silence. The song comes always as an outburst, as though some mechanical obstruction had given way before the pent-up music. Indeed, one bird I heard near the coast preceded his song with a series of tittering notes, which struck me absurdly as being the clicking of the ratchet in a music-box being wound up for action.



*Taken in Santa Cruz County*

*Photo by the Author*

### BREEDING HAUNT OF THE WESTERN WINTER WREN

AN OCCUPIED NEST IS TUCKED AWAY IN THE DEPTHS OF THE ROOT MASS UNDER THE NEAREST FERNS

## *The Western Winter Wren*

Heard at close quarters the bird will occasionally employ a ventriloquial trick, dropping suddenly to *sotto voce*, so that the song appears to come from a distance. Again, it will move crescendo and diminuendo, as though the supply pipe of this musical cascade were submitted to varying pressure at the fountain head.

A singing bird is the best evidence available of the proximity of the nest. Usually the male bird posts himself near the sitting female and publishes his domestic happiness in musical numbers. But again, he may only be pausing to congratulate himself upon the successful completion of another decoy, and the case is hopeless for the nonce.

For nesting sites the Wrens avail themselves of cubby holes and crannies in upturned roots or fallen logs, and in fire-holes of half-burned stumps. A favorite situation is one of the crevices which occur in a large fir tree when it falls and splits open. Or the nest may be found under the bark of a decaying log, or deeply bedded in a mossy bank.

In the coastal streams of Santa Cruz County the Winter Wrens have almost a monopoly of the stream-bed, and they stick very closely to it. Crannies in boulders and rock-walls are quite as acceptable as an upturned root or a log-jam; and most of the nests are actually over running water. If the site selected has a wide entrance, this is walled up by the nesting material, and only a smooth round aperture an inch and a quarter in diameter is left to admit to the nest proper. In default of any such shelter, birds have been known to construct their nests at the center of some baby fir, or in the drooping branches of an evergreen tree at a height of a foot or more from the ground. In such case, the nest is finished to the shape of a cocoon, with an entrance-hole in the side a little above the center.

In all cases the materials used are substantially the same, chiefly green moss, with an abundance of fir or redwood twigs shot through its walls and foundations. This shell is heavily lined with very fine mosses, intermingled with rabbit fur, deer hair or other soft substances; while the inner lining is almost invariably of feathers.

"Cocks' nests," or decoys, are the favorite diversion of this indefatigable bird, so that, as with the restless activities of four-year-old children, one sighs to think of the prodigious waste of energies entailed. The aboriginal cause of this quaint instinct, so prevalent among the Wrens, would seem to be the desire to deceive and discourage enemies, but in the case of the Winter Wren one is led to suspect that the hard-working husband is trying to meet a perpetual challenge to occupy all available sites—a miser hoarding opportunities.

A troop of young Wrens just out of the nest is a cunning sight. The anxious parents counsel flight and the more circumspect of the brood



**Rock Wren**

About 28 life size

From a water-color painting by Walter Hill Brown

1910

1911

1912

1913

1914

1915

1916

1917

1918

1919

1920

1921

1922

1923

1924

1910  
 1911  
 1912  
 1913  
 1914  
 1915  
 1916  
 1917  
 1918  
 1919  
 1920  
 1921  
 1922  
 1923  
 1924

### Rock Wren

About 2/3 life size

*From a water-color painting by Major Allan Brooks*

1910  
 1911  
 1912  
 1913  
 1914  
 1915  
 1916  
 1917  
 1918  
 1919  
 1920  
 1921  
 1922  
 1923  
 1924







obey, but now and then one less sophisticated allows a little pleasant talk, "blarney," to quiet his beating heart. Then a little titillation of the crown feathers will quite win him over, so that he will accept a gently insistent finger in place of the twig which has been his support. The unfaltering trust of childhood has subdued many a savage heart, but when it is exemplified in a baby Wren, one feels the ultimate appeal to tenderness.

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No. 137

## Rock Wren

A. O. U. No. 715. *Salpinctes obsoletus* (Say).

**Description.**—*Adults*: Above soft grayish vinaceous brown (between benzo brown and drab), changing on rump to orange-cinnamon or fawn-color, most of the surface speckled by fine, dusky, arrow-shaped marks, containing, or contiguous to, rounded spots of pinkish buffy; wing-quills color of back, faintly barred with pinkish buff on outer webs; tail rounded or fan-shaped; middle pair of tail-feathers color of back, barred with dusky; remaining rectrices barred with dusky on outer webs only, each with broad subterminal bar of blackish, and tipped broadly with cinnamon-buff area, varied by dusky marbling; outermost pair broadly blackish-and-cinnamon-buffed on both webs; a superciliary stripe of whitish or pinkish buff; a broad post-ocular stripe of grayish brown; sides of head and underparts dull pinkish white, shading into pale cinnamon or vinaceous buff on flanks and under tail-coverts; sides of head, throat, and upper breast spotted, mottled, or streaked obscurely with grayish brown or dusky; under tail-coverts barred or transversely spotted with black. Bill dark horn-color above, paling below; feet and legs brownish dusky; iris brown. *Young birds* are more or less barred or vermiculated above, with increase of vinaceous, without white speckling; and are unmarked below. Length 139.7-152.4 (5.50-6.00); wing 70 (2.76); tail 53 (2.09); bill 17.7 (.70); tarsus 21 (.83).

**Remarks.**—An alleged subspecies, *S. o. pulverius*, was described by Mr. Joseph Grinnell (Auk, vol. xv., July, 1898, p. 238) from San Nicolas Island in the following language: "Pattern of coloration similar to that of the mainland *S. obsoletus*, but entire plumage, especially the upper parts, suffused with ochraceous or dust color, almost identical with the tint of the soil on San Nicolas Island." The describer also claimed distinction for this proposed form on the ground of "notably greater size of the bill and feet." A later reviewer, Mr. H. S. Swarth (Condor, vol. xvi., Sept., 1914, pp. 211-217), decided that the peculiar color of the San Nicolas specimen of *Salpinctes* was due to contact with the soil, just as the reddish color of certain specimens of *S. guadaloupeensis* was due to contact with reddish soil. In concluding his comparison of specimens of *S. o. obsoletus* and *S. o. pulverius*, Swarth says: "I am unable to distinguish the slightest significant difference in color or pattern," although he concedes a slightly larger bill to the San Nicolas birds, an excess of 1.3 millimeters, or 7 percent in the case of males and .2 of a millimeter, or 1 percent in the case of females. Such average differences might occur between two handfuls of bird-skins seized at random from any collection tray. And in this very case, the *individual variation* in the ten examples (males) of *S. o. obsoletus* amounts to 2 millimeters, or 11 percent of the smaller.

## The Rock Wren

But if the difference claimed were actually significant and constant, as is not impossible, it would still be too slight a matter to recognize in nomenclature. It is through such tithing of mint and anise that descriptive ornithology has brought itself into disrepute.

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; variegated fan-shaped tail, with broad buffy tips distinctive; rock-haunting habits.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* In crannies of cliffs at end of tunnels, in barranca walls, or even (Farallon Islands) in burrows in ground; of twigs, grasses, and rootlets; lined with rootlets, fine bark-strips, or hair; invariably approached by runway of rock-flakes or pebbles. *Eggs:* 5-7; white, sometimes immaculate, but usually sprinkled sharply and very sparingly with reddish brown. Av. size 18.3 x 13.7 (.72 x .54). *Season:* April-July, according to altitude; one or two broods.

**General Range.**—Western United States and Mexico to Guatemala.

**Distribution in California.**—Resident. Breeding in rupestrine associations, but chiefly in arid portions of the State from sea-level to snow-line; retires before the snows to Sonoran zones of valleys and deserts. Found on all the larger islands including the Farallons.

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Troglodytes obsoletus*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 2, ii., 1853, p. 263 (Calif.); **Bryant, W. E.**, Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., 2nd ser., i., 1888, p. 49 (Farallon Ids.; desc. nest and eggs; meas.); **Willett**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 7, 1912, p. 101 (s. Calif.; distr., nesting dates, etc.); **Swarth**, Condor, vol. xvi., 1914, p. 211 (crit.; distr.; etc.); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xii., 1914, p. 208 (Lower Colorado Valley; occurrence, desc. nest, etc.).



Taken in Fresno County

A REAL ROCK  
A NEAR VIEW OF TEHIPITE DOME

Photo by the Author

## The Rock Wren

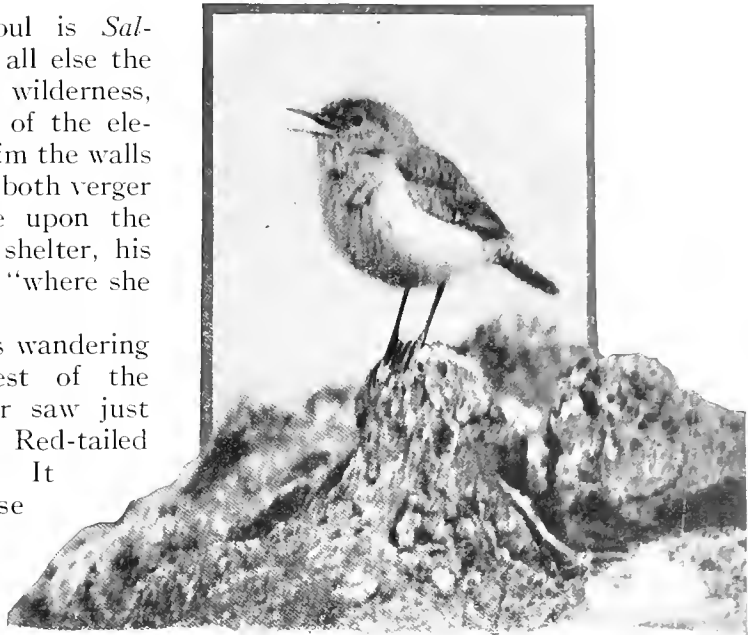
*"So the folks all shy from the desert land  
'Cept mebbe a few that kin understand."  
—Clark*

A DISCERNING soul is *Salpinctes*. He loves beyond all else the uplifted ramparts of the wilderness, the bare lean battlements of the elemental eld. They are to him the walls of a sanctuary, where he is both verger and choir master, while upon the scarred altars which they shelter, his faithful spouse has a place "where she may lay her young."

In a certain half day's wandering on a desolate range west of the Colorado River the writer saw just three birds, a Vulture, a Red-tailed Hawk and a Rock Wren. It was a winter day, else the heat would have been intolerable. Water was a thing unthought of, and vegetation was of the scantiest, and that the most forbidding,

harsh, weird, and thorn-begirt. The rounded stones which covered the ground were as of yesterday in their careless arrangement, but their surfaces were burnt to a uniform brown by atmospheric acid, the product of volcanic activities which may have been stilled a hundred millenniums ago. Three birds! two of them transients, like myself, viewing the desolation indulgently, as knowing they could escape at any moment; and only one who lived there, who stayed from choice, who hugged the solitude to his breast, and loved it,—only one who understood!

The Rock Wren is nestled among the most impressive surroundings, yet he gives no evidence of a chastened spirit. There is nothing subdued or melancholy about his bearing. Indeed, he has taken a commission to wake the old hills and to keep the shades of eld from brooding too heavily upon them. His song is, therefore, one of the sprightliest, most musical and resonant to be heard in the entire West. The rock-wall makes an



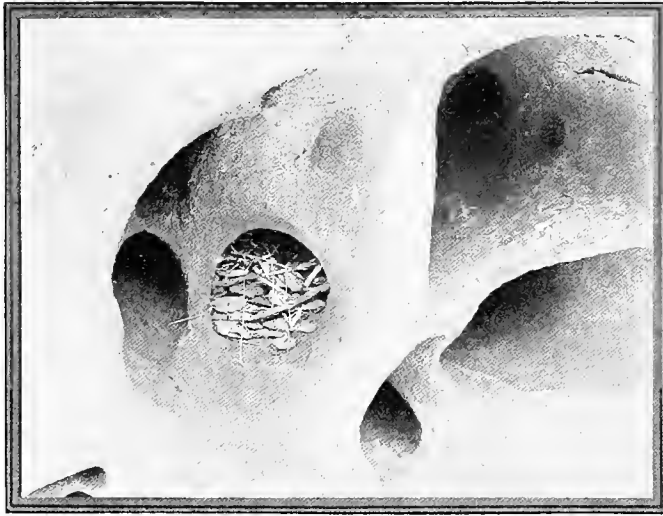
*Taken on Anacapa Island*

*Photo by D. R. Dickey*

WAKING UP THE OLD HILLS

## The Rock Wren

admirable sounding-board, and the bird stops midway of whatever task to sing a hymn of wildest exultation. *Whit'tier, whit'tier, whit'tier*, is one of his finest strains; while *ka-whée, ka-whée, ka-whée*, is a sort of challenge which the bird renders in various tempo, and punctuates with nervous



Taken in Kings County

Photo by the Author

NEST OF ROCK WREN IN SANDSTONE CRANNY  
NOT QUITE TYPICAL, HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF RATHER ABBREVIATED APPROACH

bobs to enforce attention. For the rest his notes are so varied, spontaneous, and untrammelled as hardly to admit of precise description. Once, in February, I caught a Rock Wren near San Diego, rehearsing in an undertone for the coming concert season. The bird was only twenty feet away from me (and I had eight-power glasses), but by no visible indication could one guess the source of the music, save as the score now and then led up to the *whittier* note, which obliged the bird to part the mandibles slightly.

The Wren was really singing

through his nose, a ventriloquist, as well as a vocalist of no mean order.

Another Rock Wren, held under full survey on Santa Cruz Island, was producing an extraordinary series of squeaking and rubbing notes, which I should have attributed to the Anna Hummer. In fact, a moment later an indubitable Anna did tune up in practically the same fashion, only a good deal better, and I could see that the Wren had been taking a lesson in this music of the fairies.

Save in the vicinity of his nest, the Rock Wren is rather an elusive sprite. If you clamber to his haunts, he will remove, as a matter of course, a hundred yards along the cliff; or he will flit across the mesa with a nonchalance which discourages further effort. Left to himself, however, he may whimsically return—near enough perhaps for you to catch the click, click of his tiny claws as he goes over the lava blocks, poking into crevices after spiders here, nibbling larvæ in vapor holes there, or scaling sheer heights yonder without a thought of vertigo.

At nesting time the cliffs present a thousand chinks and hidey-holes, any one of which would do to put a nest in. The collector is likely to be dismayed at the wealth of possibilities before him, and the birds

*The Rock Wren*



NO LOVER OF ROCKS COULD AFFORD TO OVERLOOK THE FARALLONS



*Taken on the  
Southeast Farallon*

*Photos by  
the Author*

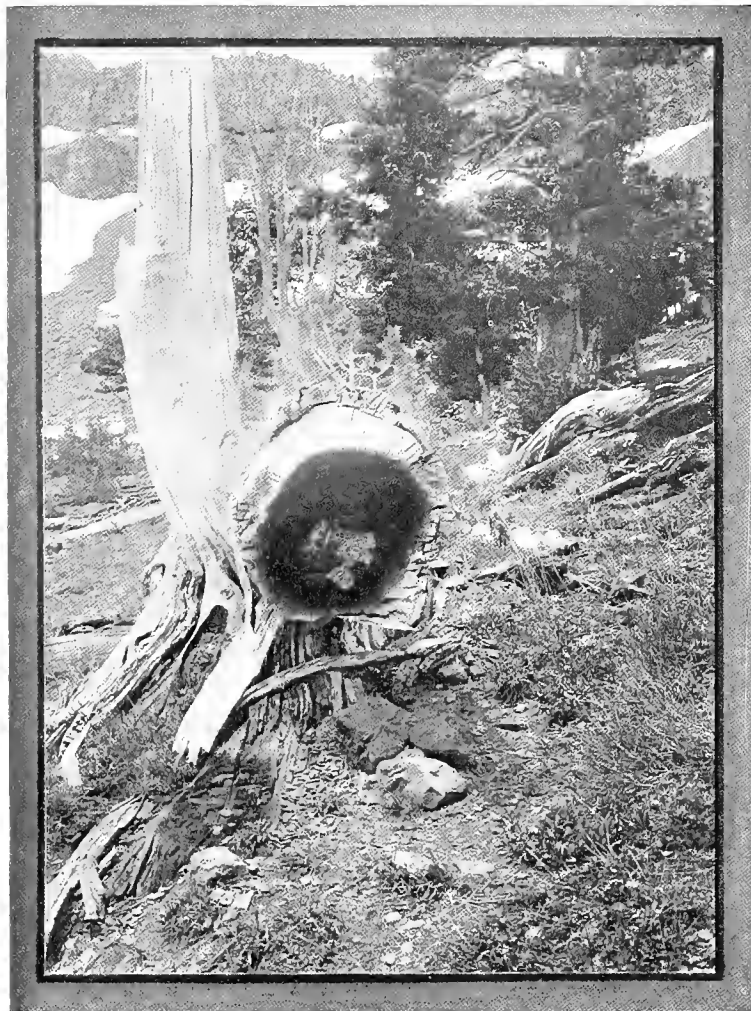
"THE PRESIDING GENIUS OF THE FARALLONS"

## The Rock Wren

themselves appear to regret that they must make choice of a single cranny, for they "fix up" half a dozen of the likeliest. And when it comes to lining the approaches to the chosen cavity, what do you suppose they use? Why rocks, of course—not large ones this time, but flakes and pebbles, whether of sandstone, limestone, granite, basalt, or whatever the country rock may be. These rock-chips are sometimes an inch or more in diameter, and it is difficult to conceive how a bird with such a delicate beak can compass their removal. Here they are, however, to

the quantity of half a pint or more, and they are just as much a necessity to every well-regulated Salpinctian household as marble steps are to Philadelphians.

In two instances which have come under my observation where the nesting cranny was too cramped to allow the full complement of pebbles, the theme was taken up on the *next available level space below*. In the case pictured here, that level space was the ground. The nest proper, also composed basally of rock-flakes, occupies the innermost recess of the burnt-out log-end. But the lower lip of this log would not harbor additional rock-flakes by reason of steepness. Instead, however, of being suffered to pile up in an aimless heap on the ground, they are methodically arranged,



Taken in the Warner Mountains

Photo by the Author

AS PER REGULATIONS



## The Rock Wren

and as carefully as though they connected directly with the nest. What the purpose of all this activity may be, no one knows for certain. Your guess may be as good as mine, but I hazard that it is the noise made by rattling pebbles which rouses the sitting bird to attention—a sort of burglar alarm, in fact.

The nest itself is a shallow saucer composed of rootlets and fine grasses, and, sometimes, with a scanty lining of hair or wool. Two broods are raised in a season, or, rarely, three, and the dates vary interminably according to the elevation of the range. The eggs vary from four to seven in number and are pure white in color, with a sparse sprinkling of reddish brown dots; or, occasionally they are immaculate. An authority on Wrens<sup>1</sup> says of their range, "An altitude of eleven thousand feet is attained in certain cases." This modest claim may have been based on reports of the Rock Wren, or it may refer to some Andean species. I have seen the Rock Wren in the Sierras (near Mt. Langley) at an altitude of 12,500 feet, where it was evidently breeding (June 26, 1911). I presume that it goes to the very summit of Mount Whitney (alt. 14,500 ft.) as the season advances. Whether this latter surmise be correct or not, we have here the most remarkable altitudinal breeding

range of any bird in the world; for the Rock Wren is equally at home in the summer upon the Santa Barbara Islands, the Farallons, and at various sea-level points along the mainland coast. At the same moment Rock Wrens are incubating in superheated furnaces at sea-level on the borders of the Colorado Desert, in granite niches of the high Sierras two thousand feet above the level of nightly frosts, and out at sea amid the teeming hosts of sea-fowl on the Southeast Farallon.

The Rock Wren is the presiding genius of the Farallons, fearless, inquisitive, thrifty, and always happy. Not a secret on the island which the Rock Wren does not know, for she pokes and pries into every crevice, examines every movable fragment of rock, stick, or bone with a view to appropriation, scrutinizes every form of insect life with a view to assimilation, bugles from every rock crest, greets the descending light-keeper in the cool gray of the morning, chirrup at "Snoozer," the island mascot, as she passes in her go-cart, titters at the Cassin Auklet brooding in her gloomy cell, mocks at the dignified Sea Parrot, and stirs things up generally. At the time of our visit (May 20-June



*Taken on Anacapa Island  
Photo by Dickey*

MERELY AN OBSERVER

<sup>1</sup> A. H. Evans: Cambridge Nat. History, Vol. IX., Birds, p. 321.

## *The Canyon Wrens*

3, 1911) the first broods of young were shifting for themselves and the adult population was busy with second nesting. We found five occupied nests, besides several promising "empties," without half trying. Of these, two contained pure white eggs, five and six respectively. The set of five was normal in size and shape, but the eggs of the larger set were much undersized and absurdly shaped,—chopped off, squared or flattened, like plaster pellets done by hand instead of in nature's workshop. One egg, by way of exception to these exceptions, was elongated instead of shortened,—evidently amateur work.

All the Rock Wrens wore their old clothes. Either their seclusion had made them indifferent to the prevailing fashions, or else they had worn out their wedding garments earlier in the season. The "splitters" have had their jealous eyes on these Farallon birds, but so far they have managed to keep within the bounds of Salpinctian propriety—a wide enough range, to be sure.

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No. 138

### Canyon Wren

#### No. 138a Nevada Canyon Wren

A. O. U. No. 717a. *Catherpes mexicanus conspersus* Ridgway.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Throat and upper breast, broadly, pure white, shading sharply on sides to brown of remaining plumage; above warm grayish brown (nearest snuff-brown on pileum), changing gradually to bright dark reddish brown (amber-brown, argus brown, to russet) of rump, tail, and posterior underparts; the head, neck, back, scapulars, and posterior underparts speckled by fine, dusky, arrow-shaped marks containing, or contiguous to, rounded spots of whitish; wing-quills fuscous, finely barred with dusky on exposed surfaces; tail bright dark brown throughout, crossed sharply and narrowly by 7-10 wavy bars of blackish. Bill horn-color above, paling on sides and below; feet and legs brownish dusky; iris brown. *Young birds* lack the white speckling; are more extensively marked with dusky above, but are nearly unspotted on belly. Length about 139.7 (5.50); wing 59.7 (2.35); tail 52.4 (2.06); bill 20.5 (.81); tarsus 18.1 (.71). Female a little smaller.

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; rock-haunting habits; throat broadly white, contrasting with rich rusty red of hinder underparts; tail finely barred with black, its feathers without buffy tips, as distinguished from *Salpinctes obsoletus*. Has magnificent descending scale song.

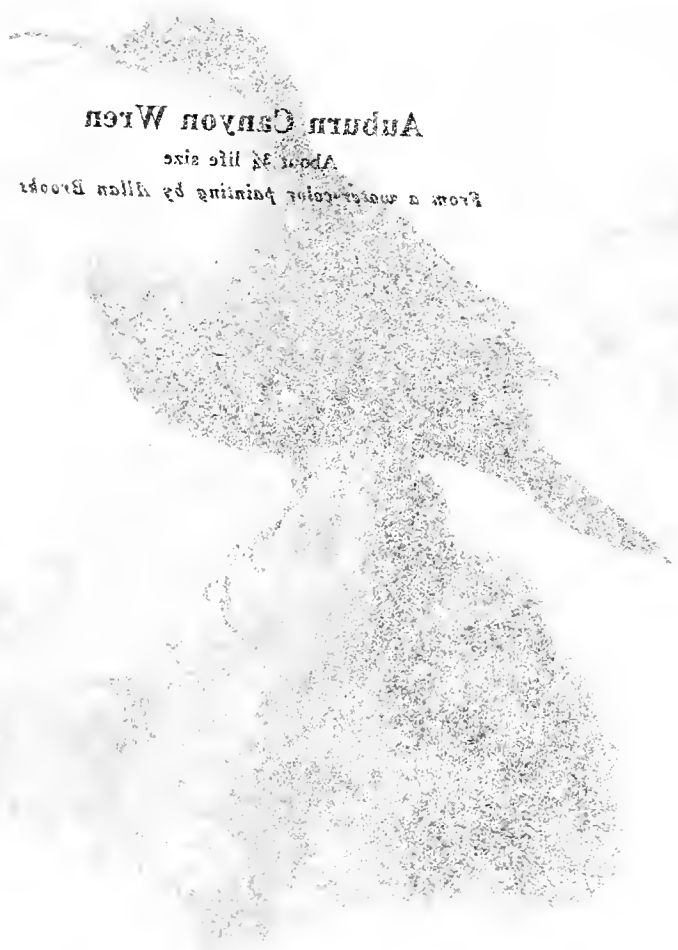
**Nesting.**—As in following form.

**Range of *Catherpes mexicanus*.**—Arid portions of western United States and Mexico.

**Range of *C. m. conspersus*.**—"Upper and Lower Sonoran zones of Great Basin and Rocky Mountain region from eastern California (Mono Lake), Nevada, and south-eastern Colorado south to Lower California, western Texas, Sonora, and Chihuahua" (A. O. U.).

**Distribution in California.**—Breeding east of the Sierras, chiefly in the desert ranges, from Mono Lake (Negit Island, June 5, 1919) south to the Providence Mount-

Arizona Canyon Wren  
About 1860  
From a water-color painting by Allen Brooks



**Auburn Canyon Wren**

About  $\frac{3}{4}$  life size

*From a water-color painting by Allan Brooks*



Alan Brooks.



## The Canyon Wrens

ains. Also sparingly in the Warner Mountains (Grinnell). Occurs commonly in winter on the southeastern desert and in the valley of the Colorado.

**Authorities.**—**Fisher, A. K.** (*Catherpes mexicanus conspersus*), U. S. Dept. Agric., N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, 1893, p. 133 (Panamint Mts.); *Lamb*, Condor, vol. xiv., 1912, p. 40 (Yermo, Mohave Desert); *Grinnell*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 11, 1905, p. 157 (distr. in Calif.); *ibid.*, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xii., 1914, p. 209 (Lower Colorado Valley; occurrence, etc.).

### No. 138b Auburn Canyon Wren

A. O. U. No. 717b. *Catherpes mexicanus punctulatus* Ridgway.

**Synonym.**—DOTTED CANYON WREN (misleading because bird not more conspicuously dotted than other forms).

**Description.**—Like *C. m. conspersus*, but decidedly darker; the brown of tail and belly averaging about auburn.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: In potholes or crannies of rock-walls; basally of sticks, but body of nest built up bulkily of substances increasingly soft, the exterior and lining exquisitely felted of wool, plant-down, moss, catkins, cocoons, spider-egg-cases, and cobwebs—the handsomest of all wrens' nests. *Eggs*: 5; white, very variable as to marking, sometimes nearly immaculate, or finely and sparingly sprinkled, or coarsely and sharply spotted with reddish brown. Av. size 17.8 x 13.5 (.70 x .53). *Season*: May; one (?) brood.

**Range of *C. m. punctulatus*.**—Upper and Lower Sonoran zones from west central Idaho, southeastern Washington, and eastern Oregon south through California, chiefly west of the Sierra Nevada.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident in the mountainous portions of southern California; less common resident along both slopes of the Sierra Nevada and through the coast ranges, at least the inner ones, north irregularly to Shasta County. Occurs regularly on Santa Cruz Island.

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Troglodytes mexicanus*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 2, ii., 1853, p. 263 (Calif.; Cosumnes and Calaveras rivers); *Ridgway*, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. v., 1882, p. 343 (orig. desc.; Forest Hill, Placer Co.); U. S. Nat. Mus. Bull. 50, part iii., 1904, pp. 659, 660 (monogr.; name *C. m. polioptilus* used for some Calif. spec.); *Pierce*, Condor, vol. ix., 1907, p. 16 (desc. of nest; San Gabriel Mts.); *Willett*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 7, 1912, p. 101 (s. Calif.; nesting dates, etc.).

SAVE in the brimful Sierras and along the dank coasts of the North, the cataracts of California go dry in the summer season. The torrential water-courses which carry off the surplusage of March are silent by April, and in May a worm might crawl unrebuked across the face of a rock worn smooth by the flood waters of winter. How the moment is redeemed, then, when a bird comes tumbling down a precipice of song, hurling himself recklessly from rock to rock till he seems to lay the vocal tribute at your very feet. "Seems," I say, for it is all a vocal artifice, a *tour de force* of the artistic imagination which has called up the imagery of winter. We know it is a trick, and we have seen the singer clinging the while with his eight sharp toes to a boss of rock, yet we shall never hear the "dropping song" of the Canyon Wren without

*The Canyon Wrens*



*Taken near Santa Barbara*

*Photo by the Author*

A CANYON WREN PORTRAIT

an amazed stopping of the heart and a thrilling sense of physical adventure. Especially when the bird is really near at hand, you feel as if you were being made the target of a salvo of musical bombs, which, starting from a far height, detonate with unceasing nearness until the last are exploding against your very person. The descent is through nearly two octaves; and the notes, whose crest, heard in the distance, seem purest whistle-tones, are seen at near quarters to be double and vibrant in character. The notes are normally seven or eight, with a full tide of passion thrown into the last three; but as often as not the singer adds one or two entirely different, as though, having sung his heart out, the mountaineer should fling down hat and gauntlet with a rustic *whoop* of exhaustion. It

becomes then, *cuick cuick cuick para para goric goric goric poozt teell.*

Heard across the wastes of chaparral, or in the cool depths of some rugged ravine, this song of the Canyon Wren is at once the most stirring and imaginative, and the most delightful which the wilderness of California has to offer. Heard a dozen times, perhaps, or ever its author is seen, one has formed in advance a picture of a very engaging bird person. And for all save dignity (no Wren can be dignified) the Canyon





**Auburn Canyon Wren**

*From a photograph by the Author*

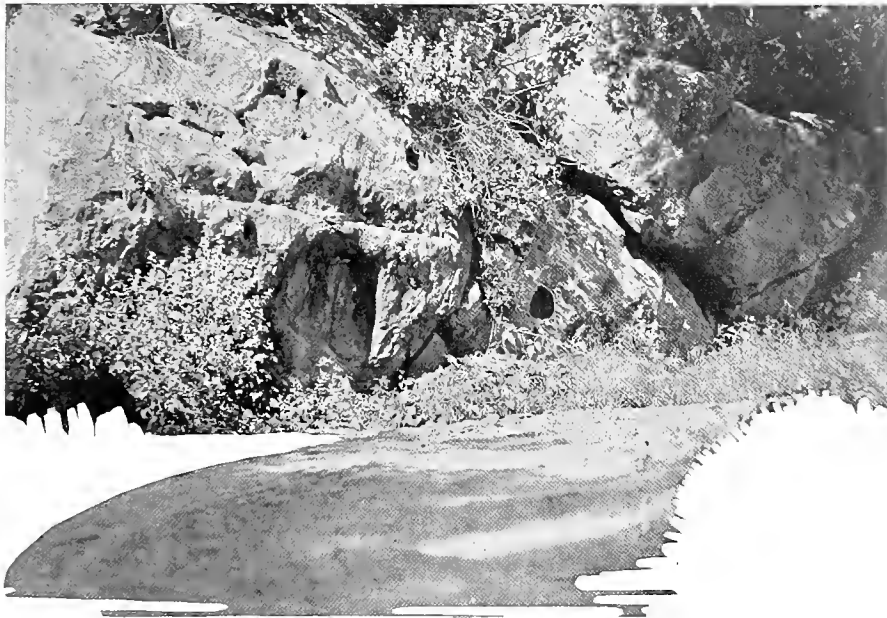
Taken near Santa Barbara



## *The Canyon Wrens*

Wren meets the expectation. Whether the bird plays at hide-and-seek through trailing vines, or posts quietly on a rock-knob, or comes clinking over the face of a rocky exposure, it is easily seen to be the handsomest of North American wrens. The white of the throat, where alone the plumage is immaculate, shades on the breast into the rich warm brown or auburn of the hinderparts; and everywhere else there is speckling of black-and-white or a barring of black. The bird, however attentive, cannot resist a peeping spider or an insulting midge, and whatever the danger, he manages to divide his time impartially between observation and insect-catching. If he is disturbed, as at nesting time, a musical *clink*, or *cleink*, bursts from his mandibles, moment by moment, accompanied by an emphatic bob or squat. Now and then these *clinks* are grouped hastily into an imitation of the dropping song, but with only a trifling change in pitch.

There is no place forbidden to a Canyon Wren, no rock wall which frights him, no tunnel's mouth, nor intricacy of talus bed. He has no special predilection for the picturesque, however, as his name might seem to imply. A brush pile or a heap of old tin cans will do as well as a miner's cabin or an old Mission. What a merry soul it is, and his life how full of adventure! There is a wondrous variety in the world



*Taken near Santa Barbara*

A TYPICAL NESTING SITE

*Photo by the Author*

### *The Palmer Thrasher*

which he explores,—log-heaps, stone-piles, crannied walls, labyrinths of roots undermined by a stream, stemmy jungles, tangled vines, rain-fretted gullies, and all the infinite disarray of nature. And the plucky bird charges into some cavern, dark with nameless terrors, as though it were a nesting-box, and he exorcises all its dank ghosts with a merry *clink clink*, which is sunshine itself. Now and then he does make amazing discoveries, which he reports in a sudden explosion of *clinks*. After such a passage, it is moments on end before he gets calmed down enough to *clink* coherently. In and out, down, around, across and under—who would not envy the happy diversity of this midget's daily round!

The Auburn Canyon Wren nests almost anywhere, in crannies of rock-walls or about upturned roots on mossy banks, or about old buildings. It does not favor holes in trees, as do House Wrens and Bewick Wrens; and it doesn't seem to care a bug about water. If the cranny is big enough, the Wren will lay a foundation of sticks; but if not, it has sense enough to forego these Troglodytine talismans. The nesting cup proper is wonderfully compacted of all soft substances,—mosses, cocoons, spiders' nests, caterpillar-silk and spider-webs. The finished hollow is as soft as a baby's cheek, a monumental tribute to the tireless skill of the builder.

The nest whose owner is pictured on p. 692 occupied a rounded cranny in a weatherbeaten rock overlooking a travelled road, and not above five feet from it. On the 1st of May it held five eggs; but its mistress, when disturbed, returned presently lugging a huge stick. She was just *thinking* about building, you know. But she dropped the bluff, along with the stick, under a friendly gaze, and after a few feints she resumed her place upon the eggs, *clinking*, softly, like a watch dog rebuked but unconvinced.

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No. 139

## Palmer's Thrasher

A. O. U. No. 707a. *Toxostoma curvirostre palmeri* (Coues).

**Synonym.**—WESTERN CURVE-BILLED THRASHER.

**Description.**—*Adult* (sexes alike): Above plain hair-brown (wearing or bleaching to drab), shading on sides, and maintained across breast as broad fan-shaped spots on a lighter ground; chin and upper throat immaculate white or buffy white; crissum cinnamon-buff; lateral rectrices lightly or scarcely tipped with whitish. Bill and feet blackish; tarsi brown. Length of males about 254 (10.00); wing 110 (4.33); tail 118 (4.65); bill 32 (1.26); tarsus 33 (1.30).

## The Palmer Thrasher

**Recognition Marks.**—Jay size; dull brown coloration; curved beak. Differs from *T. redivivum* in much smaller size and paler coloration of underparts; from *T. bendirei* (with which perhaps it is most closely associated) in larger size, longer, more decurved bill, less extensive white on tips of tail-feathers; and from *T. lecontei* in much darker coloration.

**Nesting.**—Not known to breed in California. *Nest:* A bulky bowl of coarse twigs, interlaced and lined sparingly with light-colored grasses and rootlets; placed 2 to 10 feet high in cholla cactus or other desert bush. *Eggs:* 3, very rarely 4; light niagara green to pale niagara green, finely and quite uniformly dotted with reddish brown. Av. of 97 eggs in M. C. O. coll.: 28.2 x 19.8 (1.11 x .78); index 70; range 24.8-32.5 by 18.5-20.8 (.98-1.28 by .73-.82). *Season:* March-June, according to altitude; two broods.

**Range of *Toxostoma curvirostre.***—Southern borders of the western United States, and Mexico.

**Range of *T. c. palmeri.***—Lower Sonoran deserts from south-central Arizona and southwestern New Mexico south to Sonora and Chihuahua.

**Occurrence in California.**—One record, a female taken three miles north of Bard in Imperial County, Dec. 31, 1916, by Laurence M. Huey.

**Authorities.**—**Huey**, Condor, vol. xxii., 1920, p. 73 (Bard, Imperial Co., Dec. 31, 1916, one spec.); **Brown, H.**, Zool., vol. iii., 1892, p. 243 (habits and nesting; details of nests and eggs; s. Ariz.).

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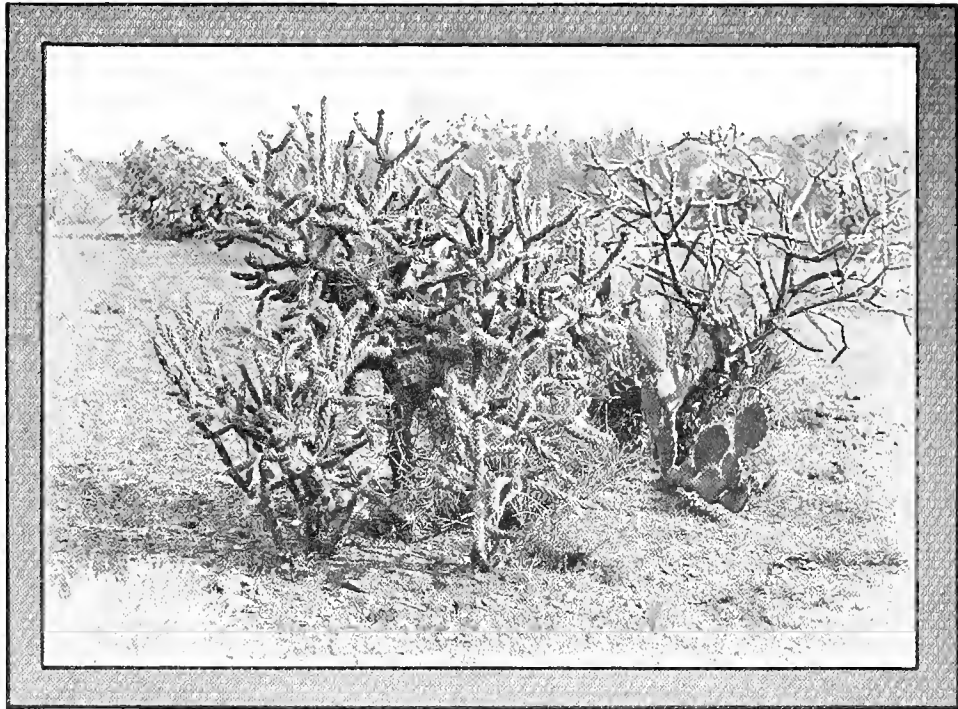
ACCORDING to Dr. Joseph Grinnell,<sup>1</sup> the addition of "accidentals" to the California list is going on at the rate of 1-3/5 species per annum; so that in 410 years, viz., in the year 2333, we shall have recorded the entire list of North American birds, some 1250 entries, as birds of California. Be that as it may, we are glad to welcome this Ishmael of the desert, *T. c. palmeri*, who is without exception the most characteristic bird of the Arizonian wastes, and so our proper near neighbor.

The Palmer Thrasher shares with the Cactus Wren (*Icthyodes brunneicapillus couesi*) the horrendous bosom of the Cholla Cactus (*Opuntia fulgida*, *O. bigelovii*, and, more rarely, *O. mamillata*). Language cannot exaggerate the diabolical hostility of one of these armed shrubs. It is one incarnate menace, and it seems to exist solely that it may inflict torture. Yet the birds thread these bristling mazes without trepidation; and since their bodies are as tender as others, we must suppose that they have become so expert as actually to avoid the prick of them. They make their nests in the heart of the plant, and sometimes are so closely beset that a single false motion would insure destruction.

That the nesting birds are not entirely insensible to this thousand-sworded Damoclean menace, is proved by the example of one determined mother near Tucson. She had succeeded in plucking, or breaking in two, every spike within reach of her nest—they are desperately tough.

<sup>1</sup>"The Role of the 'Accidental,'" in the Auk, Vol. XXXIX., July, 1922, p. 375.

## *The Palmer Thrasher*



*Taken in Arizona*

NEST OF PALMER THRASHER IN CHOLLA CACTUS

*Photo by the Author*

The arm, or joint, immediately overhead had been plucked clean on the underside; whereas the remoter thorns had only the tips broken off. Evidently *her* children were going to have their chance in the world.

A cynic would not see what there could be to sing about under such circumstances; but your Palmer Thrasher is undoubtedly gifted in song. The "joy of life" evidently comes from the inside, and a happy heart finds heaven in a thorn-bush. If that heaven is invaded by a rude outsider, the bird finds relief for his (or her) feelings by lurking in the offing and shouting *quick, quick, quick*, in upbraiding tones.

Palmer's Thrashers are, of course, non-migratory; and while they rove about somewhat in winter, they show strong local attachments at nesting time. If undisturbed, the birds use the same or neighboring chollas for a nesting site year after year; and my son once investigated a bush which held *fourteen nests*, all on a graduated scale of destickidation.

## Bendire's Thrasher

A. O. U. No. 708. *Toxostoma bendirei* (Coues).

**Description.**—*Adults*: Upperparts plain grayish brown or drab, with slight increase of brown posteriorly; tail darker brownish gray (fuscous), the three outer pairs of rectrices narrowly tipped with white; cheeks drab streaked with buffy; underparts chiefly dingy white or pale buffy; crissum and flanks pinkish buff, immaculate; the breast and sides more or less shaded with pale buffy brown; sides of throat, chest, breast, and sides streaked with pale grayish brown, the streaks sharpest and narrowest on chest, broader and more diffuse posteriorly. Bill slightly curved; dusky horn-color, paling basally on lower mandible; tarsi light brown, the feet dark; iris yellow. *Immature*: Much like adult, but upperparts largely brighter brown (especially rump), contrasting with dusky of scapulars, remiges, and tail. Length about 254 (10.00) or less; wing 105 (4.13); tail 110 (4.33); bill 24 (.94); tarsus 33.5 (1.32).

**Recognition Marks.**—Robin size; to appearance and in size intermediate between Leconte's Thrasher and Sage Thrasher; drab of upperparts slightly darker than in *T. lecontei*, smaller, feet much paler, bill much shorter and less curved, underparts faintly spotted; larger and much lighter than in *Oreoscoptes montanus*, bill larger and longer, underparts only faintly spotted.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A loose assemblage of twigs, coarse or fine, lined variously with rootlets, grasses, horsehair or waste—the most varied in this respect of all thrashers—and placed at moderate heights in desert bush or tree. *Eggs*: 3, rarely 4; white, or grayish- or bluish-white, spotted sharply or diffusely, or faintly clouded with fawn-color (light vinaceous fawn to army brown) and vinaceous gray. Av. of 34 eggs in the M. C. O. coll.: 25.2 x 18.5 (.99 x .73); index 73.7; range 22.6-29.7 x 16.5-19.6 (.89-1.17 x .65-.77). *Season*: April-June; one brood.

**General Range.**—Lower Sonoran deserts of Arizona, California and Mexico. Breeds in southern Arizona and northern Sonora, less commonly in California; winters south to Sinaloa; accidental in Colorado.

**Occurrence in California.**—Not common breeder on the Mohave Desert (at least near Victorville), probably also on the Colorado Desert; seven records of occurrence as below.

**Authorities.**—A. O. U. Check-List (*Harporhynchus bendirei*), 2nd ed., 1895, p. 293 (Agua Caliente [Palm Springs]); see Grinnell, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 11, 1915, p. 154; Heller, Condor, vol. iii., 1901, p. 100 (Warren's Wells, Mohave Desert "fairly common in May, 1896"); Brown, II., Auk, vol. xviii., 1901, p. 225 (s. Ar z.; range, habits, desc. nest and eggs); Miller, Condor, vol. xv., 1913, p. 41 (Los Angeles); Pierce, Condor, vol. xxi., 1919, p. 123 (Victorville, May); *ibid.*, vol. xxiii., 1921, p. 34, fig. (Victorville; nesting).

THE HIGH-SOUNDING names which we have given to our Western Thrashers suggest a degree of difference between them which does not exist. While perfectly distinct as species, it is rather their striking similarity in appearance which impresses the bird student. Children of the desert all, it is only because the Crissal Thrasher has sought the cover of the mesquite woods that its browns have become the

## *The California Thrasher*

darkest of the group. And similarly, it is the incorrigible wildness of the Leconte Thrasher which has driven him to the remoter wilderness and subjected him to the most severe bleaching action of the sun. Bendire's Thrasher occupies a mediating position. While the smallest of the California quintet, it is not so pale as Leconte's yet very much lighter than California or Crissal. Never bold or saucy, like a Mockingbird, Bendire will nevertheless, on occasion, submit to rather close inspection, and it has shown a tendency of late to attach itself to the outer circle of farmyard birds and the general vicinage of men.

The scattered California records of this bird are rather puzzling, and do not seem to fully define its status. The clearest examples of occurrence, including breeding records, were made by Mr. Wright M. Pierce near Victorville, on the southern edge of the Mohave Desert, in April, 1920; and it is believed that the species is well established in this section. However, if one wants to study the bird closely, he would better take a trip through southern Arizona. This Thrasher will first be seen in the lowlands bordering the Gila River, and unless one catches the note of white on the outer corners of the tail, it will be difficult to distinguish it from the scurrying Towhees. Elsewhere throughout its range, this bird will come into constant comparison with the larger, longer-billed, but only slightly darker, Palmer Thrasher.

Like the Palmer, Bendire nests freely in the open desert, especially in the cholla, and its whitish eggs, with the softly diffused dull reddish markings, may be instantly distinguished from the sharply dotted greenish eggs of *palmeri*. But again, when brought into comparison with the Western Mockingbird, which is likewise attached to outlying ranches, the eggs of *bendirei* require the closest scrutiny.

In a season's nesting in Arizona I scarcely heard this Thrasher sing; but a chance visit in January discovered a songster of rare merit and charm. The songs were dainty and varied, reminding me of nothing else so much as those of a Catbird, although they were at the same time sprightlier and less impassioned. The bird is something of a ventriloquist, too, and on such occasions drops liquid notes like beaded custard for richness.

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No. 141

## California Thrasher

A. O. U. No. 710. *Toxostoma redivivum* (Gambel).

**Description.**—*Adult:* Above plain dark brown (mummy-brown to bistre and sepia); the tail barely darker, the edges of rectrices and upper tail-coverts slightly warmed with an ochraceous wash; cheeks darker brown, streaked with pale buffy;





**California Thrasher on Stump**

*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*

Taken in Pasadena



## The California Thrasher

color of back shading on sides to slightly lighter, grayer brown on breast; chin and throat light buff to whitish, shading posteriorly; crissum and flanks ochraceous tawny, shading insensibly on belly, through cinnamon-buff and pinkish buff to grayish buffy brown on breast. Bill black; feet brownish dusky; iris brown. Length 11.00 to 12.00 (279.4-304.8); wing 102 (4.02); tail 130 (5.12); bill 36.3 (1.43); tarsus 38 (1.50).

**Recognition Marks.**—Robin size; curve-billed; nearly uniform brown coloration; brilliant song (often confused with that of Mockingbird); coloration darker than in two succeeding species.

**Remark.**—Specimens from interior and southern localities average slightly paler and grayer, and were formerly recognized by Grinnell under the name *Toxostoma redivivum pasadenense*. Specimens from the northern interior and the coastal region north of San Francisco Bay are slightly larger and darker, and have been described as *T. redivivum sonomæ* Grinnell.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A rough bowl of coarse interlaced sticks and finer twigs, lined with brown grasses, bark-strips, and rootlets, placed at moderate heights in bushes or trees, or well concealed in thickets. *Eggs*: 3 or 4; light niagara green, faintly and finely or sparingly and rather coarsely spotted with reddish brown. Av. size 29 x 21.1 (1.14 x .83). *Season*: March-June; one or two broods.

**General Range.**—"Foothills and valleys of California west of the Sierra Nevada, breeding in Sonoran zones from Shasta County south to the San Pedro Martir Mountains and San Quentin, Lower California" (A. O. U. Check-List).

**Authorities.**—**Milet-Mureau** (*Promerops de la Californie Septentrionale*), Voy. de la Perouse, 1797, Atlas, pl. 37 (Monterey); **Gambel** (*Herpes rediviva*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. ii., 1845, p. 264 (orig. desc.); **Merriam, F. A.**, Auk, vol. xiii., 1896, p. 121 (habits); **Grinnell**, Auk, vol. xv., 1898, p. 237 (desc. *Harporhynchus redivivus pasadenensis*, Pasadena); *ibid.*, Condor, vol. ii., 1900, p. 19 (nesting in Dec.); *ibid.*, vol. xxiii., 1921, p. 165 (syst.; *T. r. pasadenense* relegated to syn.); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 55 (food); **Oberholser**, Auk, vol. xxxv., 1918, p. 52 (syst.; syn., meas., range, crit.).

HOMELY APOLLO, historian of the chaparral, poet of the common weed, apostle of dewy morn, mediator of sun and shadow, woodland recluse, and shy intimate of back-yard tryst, minstrel alike of blue-gray-green spring and dun summer, brown wraith of California, thou dost work alike havoc in our gardens, harmony in our ears, and a heavenly hubbub in our hearts. Would, oh, would that there were more of thee, and more beautiful and more constant.

The California Thrasher is preëminently a chaparral bird, and as such enjoys a fairly uniform distribution up to about 6000 feet. It seeks its food chiefly upon the ground, where it rustles among the leaves and fallen wastage for beetles, ants, and scattered seeds. After a fresh rain it loves to delve in the earth itself—for grubs and cut-worms, however, rather than buried seeds; and the "havoc" wrought occasionally in an out-lying garden is really beneficial plowing. Berries and wild fruit are eaten freely in season; and Rhus seeds, both harmless and poisonous, are a staple article of diet. The bird is strong on its feet, but rather

## The California Thrasher



Taken in  
Los Angeles  
County  
Photo by Pierce

### A PUNGENT BOWER

THE WHITE SAGE (*Salvia apiana*) IS HIGHLY AROMATIC

to the observer who carries glasses. The song of the California Thrasher is most nearly comparable to that of the Mockingbird. It is, however, more broken, more impetuous, and a partisan might say of a fresher quality—at any rate, less conventional and civilized. The variety of utterance is so great, and the changes so incessant, that further characterization is useless. Well sounding phrases are often repeated, but hardly ever more than once. Indeed, I suppose it is this habit of double phrasing to which the California Thrasher, in common with its eastern kinsman, the Brown Thrasher (*T. rufum*), owes the frequent misnomer, "Thrush." For everyone recalls, instinctively, Browning's words:

weak a-wing, and oftener escapes by hopping through the shrubbery or running along the ground, than by exercise of the grand manner.

Screeching in the brush is always generously responded to, for *redivivum* has a lively bump of curiosity. He is, moreover, a duly constituted patrolman of the under chaparral; and because he is always dressed in service khaki, instead of the loudly advertised blue of Sergeant Aphelocoma, he is able to come to closer grips with the lesser malefactors of the leafy half-world.

It is the impulse of song alone which brings the Thrasher to plain view. Song requires the topmost bough of ceanothus or scrub oak, and the earnest gesticulations of the sickle-shaped mandibles are a commonplace

## The California Thrasher

*"That's the wise thrush; he sings the song twice over  
Lest you think he never could recapture  
The first fine careless rapture."*

But Browning wrote of an English bird, *Turdus musicus*, doubtfully a very distant relative of our American Thrashers. Now and then a singing Thrasher borrows from his neighbors, and we have unquestionable imitations, of Wren-Tit, Flicker, or Jay, interspersed with his own improvisations. The effect is rarely as convincing as in the case of our true Mockingbird, breathless, hurried, and disguised rather; but here, as always, it is individual ability which counts.

These common powers bring Thrasher and Mocker into frequent comparison, and some of us have been privileged to hear the two species comparing notes on their own account, with no little suspicion of jealousy in the premises; but we shall decline a decision. It is the age-old question of country-mouse and town-mouse, and such are settled by prejudices, not judgments.

Nests of the California Thrasher are rather casual affairs of masses of twigs lined with coarse rootlets or brittle weed-stalks, and placed in the depths of the denser bushes, or, more rarely, in live oaks. Nesting begins early, March or April, in southern latitudes, and continues with varying fortunes well into June. Being from the nature of its food rather independent of season, the bird makes also unseasonable nesting records. Mr. H. J. Lelande, the genial clerk of Los Angeles County, took two incubated eggs near Pasadena on the 27th of January, 1897; Mr. Grinnell broke all California records by taking, near Azusa, a set of three eggs in which incubation had begun, on the fifteenth day of December, 1899.



*Taken in Pasadena*

*Photo by Dickey*

PORTRAIT OF CALIFORNIA THRASHER

## The California Thrasher



Taken at Los Colibris

Photo by the Author

“EXPRESSED HER DISPLEASURE BY LOOKING AS SOUR AS POSSIBLE”

On the 12th of June, 1913, I had the good fortune to find a Thrasher's nest at Los Colibris in the live oak over our garage. The female was sitting tightly on three eggs, and she proved to be almost as tame as an old hen. On first acquaintance she let me stroke her head, then heave her over gently to have a look at the eggs—all without resistance or evasion. The day following I returned for a systematic course with the cameras. After a little preliminary clearing away of minor limbs, which milady did not resent, I hoisted a major branch out of the way by means of ropes, and so exposed the bird to full sunlight. This proved to be decidedly uncomfortable, and the bird shifted around to face away from the light. Thereupon, I took hold of her, lifted her up, and set her down face to the sunlight. She grasped the nest lining with her feet in transit and succeeded in mussing it up needlessly. Moreover, she bit me peevishly (but harmlessly) and further expressed her displeasure by looking as sour as possible. But of

course she never thought of leaving the nest!

On the 25th of June the youngsters hatched out, and were soon covered with a coat of long gray down. Moreover, they have the biggest heads and the yellowest mouths, and the slimmest, longest, wobbiest necks that I remember ever to have seen among Passerine forms. On my approach, too jejune no doubt, the brooding bird slid off hastily, leaving, as she did so, one of the youngsters sprawling on the skirt of the nest. My next approach was more judicious, and I was able to photograph the brooding mother repeatedly at four feet. The interesting thing this time was the occasional eruption of a great yellow demand for food (supported by a slender, wobbling pedicel) from under the fluffy flank-feathers



**Look Sour, Please!**  
California Thrasher on Nest  
*From a photograph by the Author*  
Taken at Los Colibris





*The California Thrasher*



*Taken in Monterey County*

"RATHER CASUAL AFFAIRS"

*Photo by the Author*



*Taken at Los Colibris*

JE DEMANDE

*Photo by the Author*

### *The California Thrasher*

of the mother. The indications are that the male bird is accustomed to feed his chicks in this fashion while his mate is brooding; but he was far too bashful to visit his brood while I was about.

On August 5th, after an absence of six weeks, while I was seated on the ground, Turk-fashion, with the Graflex in my lap, two California Thrashers advanced along the top rail of the fence with great show of caution, but also without sincerity of fear. They scolded me dutifully with that harsh, indescribable, beak-snapping note, *schthubb*, just as they heard their mother doing in a live oak beyond. They were the birds hatched in the live oak, for they each bore on one leg an aluminum band which my son had put on them just a month before. Their earlier experience had undoubtedly made them bold, for they came within five feet of me. At a later moment, when I turned loose my best screeps, the old mother hopped up excitedly over the ground and *schthupped* in her best manner, while I pressed the button.

If Christendom went to war over the difference of a syllable (homo-



*Taken at Los Colibris*

*Photo by the Author*

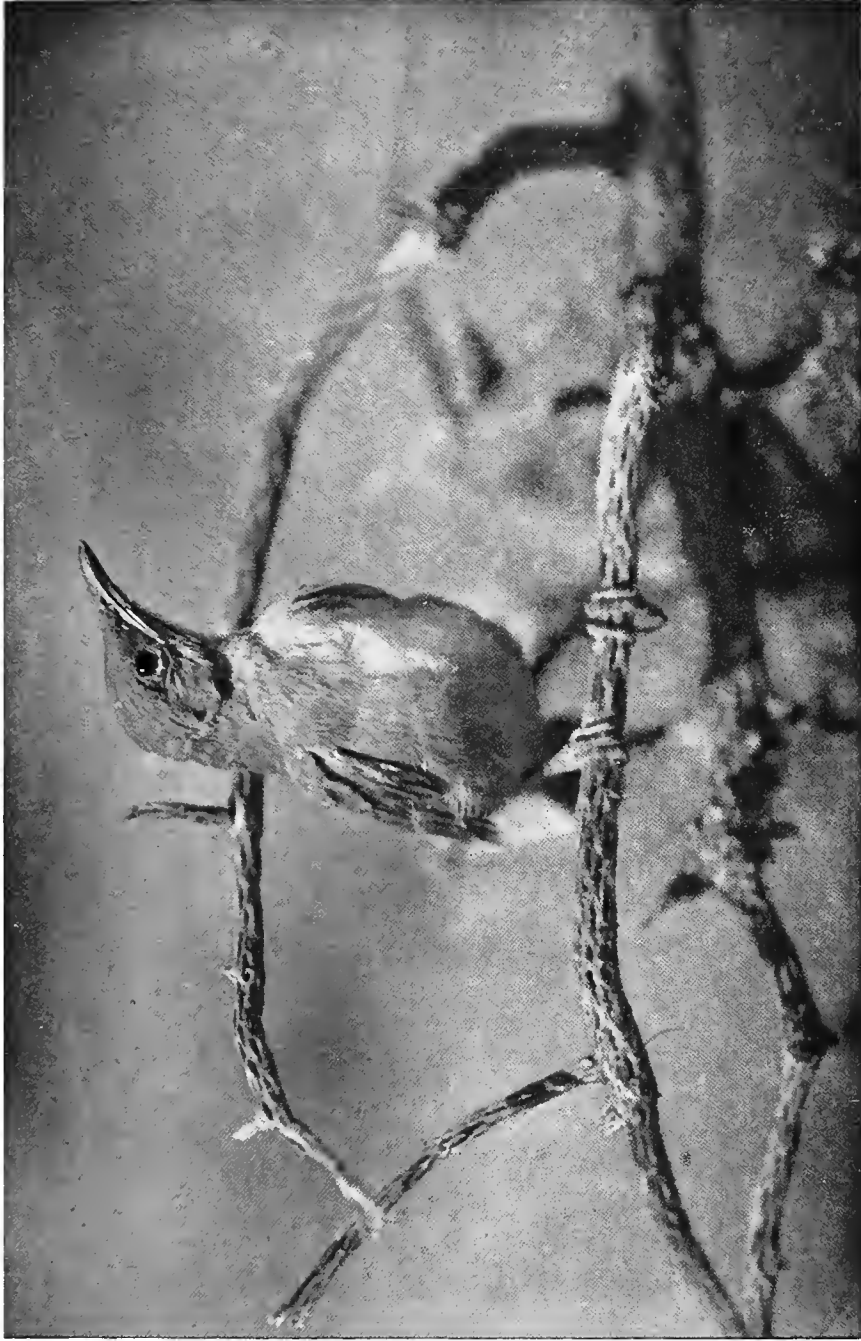
THE HUNGRY CHILD GROWN UP



*Taken at Los Colibris*

THE MOTHER HOPPED UP EXCITEDLY

*Photo by the Author*



**A Friendly Caller**  
Young Leconte Thrasher  
*From a photograph by Wright M. Pierce*  
Taken on the Mohave Desert



ousia and homoiouasia), we suppose we shall be rated out of order for complaining of those who are ready to fight for the adoption of a pet trinomial in bird nomenclature. But, really, the height of absurdity has been reached in the case of these Thrashers. Thrashers from Pasadena and those from Sonoma may exhibit average differences; but if they do, their own ornithological god-mother wouldn't know the difference if some wag were to change labels on the specimens submitted. And if a man were to attempt the trinomial separation of a litter of kittens on the basis of longer or shorter whiskers, or darker "tabby" color, he would be laughed out of a nursery. A plague on these quiddities, anyhow! Why, to hear tell of a "Pasadena" Thrasher and a "Sonoma" Thrasher, you would think that one of the birds was sky-blue, and the other wine-purple at least; but when you are taken into the secret, you learn that the breast of one is the color of a properly roasted peanut, while that of the other has been left in the roaster a second too long.<sup>1</sup>

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No. 142

## Leconte's Thrasher

A. O. U. No. 711. *Toxostoma lecontei lecontei* Lawrence.

**Synonyms.**—DESERT THRASHER (name now restricted to *T. lecontei arenicola*); YUMA THRASHER.

**Description.**—*Adult*: General coloration pale grayish brown (drab to pale drab-gray) darkening to fuscous on tail; breast paler; throat and abdomen much paler, pale buffy to buffy white; crissum and flanks cinnamon-buff or pinkish buff—a thoroughly bleached form! Bill blackish; feet and legs dusky brown; iris reddish brown. Fall specimens are darker, with white of throat more strongly contrasting. Length about 254 (10.00); wing 98 (3.86); tail 120 (4.72); bill 32.8 (1.29); tarsus 31 (1.22).

**Recognition Marks.**—Robin size; curved bill with pale (grayish brown) "desert" coloration unmistakable; lighter and smaller than next species.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A shallow bowl of careless construction, often misshapen, composed basally of coarse twigs, mesially of fine weed-stems or grasses and interiorly of gray felted flower-heads of "a small woolly plant"; placed at moderate heights in cholla cactus, mesquite tree, or tree yucca. *Eggs*: 3 or 4; light to pale niagara green, very sparingly dotted, chiefly at the larger end, with reddish brown. Av. size 27.7 x 19.1 (1.09 x .75). *Season*: Feb. 15–June 1; one or two broods.

**Range of *Toxostoma lecontei*.**—Arid portions of southwestern United States, north Sonora and Lower California.

**Range of *T. l. lecontei*.**—Lower Sonoran deserts of southern California, southern Nevada, and southern Utah, south through Arizona to Cape Lobos, Sonora, and San Felipe Bay, Lower California.

**Distribution in California.**—Of fairly common occurrence in suitable cover in southeastern deserts, west regularly to Banning and Antelope Valley, north casually

<sup>1</sup> The claims of an alleged subspecies, *T. r. pasadenense* Grinnell, have since been abandoned, although Dr. Grinnell still holds "*T. r. sonoma*" as a valid form.

*The Leconte Thrasher*



*Taken on the Mohave Desert*

HOW D'YE DO?  
IMMATURE LECONTE THRASHER

*Photo by Wright M. Pierce*

to Benton; also irregularly and locally distributed in the Tulare basin; thus, colonies at Buena Vista Lake, Onyx, Bakersfield, McKittrick, and northwest of Tulare Lake between Huron and Arroyo Los Gatos. Casual near Julian, San Diego County.

**Authorities.**—**Cooper** (*Harporhynchus lecontei*), Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., vol. ii., 1861, p. 122 (Mohave R.); **Stephens**, Auk, vol. i., 1884, p. 355 (Colorado Desert; habits, etc.); **Mearns**, Auk, vol. iii., 1886, p. 299 (syn., hist., biog., etc.); **Morcom**, Bull. Ridgway

## *The Leconte Thrasher*

Orn. Club, no. 2, 1887, p. 53 (Colorado Desert; breeding habits); *Gilman*, Condor, vol. vi., 1904, p. 95 (habits); *Grinnell and Swarth*, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. x., 1913, p. 304 (possible hybrid, *lecontei* x *redivivum*); *Pemberton*, Condor, vol. xviii., 1916, p. 219, figs. (desc. nests; photos).

SMOKE-BUSH, yucca, palo verde, cholla, creosote! the very names envisage something different, while they recall to the mind of the devotee a sum of allurements for which he will periodically forswear comfort, companionship, civilization,—everything that life holds dear, save the easing of that mystic pain for which alone the desert has an antidote. Take the creosote, that mere cumberer of the ground, which grows only where nothing else will or can. What good is it? Yet a crushed spray, redolent as a drug store, looses a fever in the blood. At its summons one spreads wide arms of welcome to the appalling sun, greets the shimmering, gashed desert ranges as brothers, and wants to hug the whole pitiless, precious, awful aggregation of burning terrors to his starved bosom. Why—I cannot tell. Ask the Leconte Thrasher. He was here first, he the pioneer, the authentic desert rat! He came skipping merrily over the desert sands or ever the creosote was sprouted. He saw the first smoke-bush, that miracle of the eternal campfire, forever billowing its gray browns and its outer eddies of clearer blue-green grays, yet forever unconsumed. He paused with tail uplifted, or else pumping gently from the exertion of the run; and he glanced over his shoulder at the first horned toad who had dared to match his skin against the burning sands. And when the first cholla set its angular array of bristling spines, the Leconte Thrasher chirruped to his mate and said, "Go to, we will build our home in yon spiny heart"; and it was so. Wherefore, if you would know anything of the desert, ask old man Leconte. He knows.

He knows; but he will not tell; for of all recluses he is the shyest. Among all capable songsters, likewise, his voice is the rarest. The testimony<sup>1</sup> of Mr. M. French Gilman, of Banning, is emphatic on this latter point. "For some time I doubted the statement made by some writers that this Thrasher was a fine singer, but was finally 'shown' by the bird himself. While standing one evening on a high-drifted hill of white sand about two miles west of the rim of ancient Salton Sea I heard the sweet strains of a new bird song and began to look for the singer. I expected to find a mockingbird whose individuality had been developed by the desert solitudes and who had learned a new song. On an adjoining sand-hill, perched on the exposed tip of a sand-buried mesquite I saw the singer, a Leconte Thrasher. Perhaps environment enhanced the music, for the spot was a most lonesome God-forsaken one, near an

<sup>1</sup> Condor, Vol. VI., July, 1904, p. 96.

### *The Leconte Thrasher*

ancient Indian encampment and burial ground, but I have heard no sweeter bird song, and the memory still lingers. Since then I have heard the song a few times, but not oftener than once or twice a year, though I have been frequently among the birds. Not only do they seldom sing, but the whistling call note is not often heard. They appear to be silent unsociable creatures, never more than a pair being found

together, unless a brood of young birds and parents, and then only till the former can fight for themselves."

One morning, in February, 1913, I set out on foot for a reconnaissance in the desert north of Mecca, bearing a gun in a perfunctory way, for possible "specimens." The fluted rampart of hills, mother naked under the pitiless sun, seduced my steps, and I entered the mystic depths of one of the myriad canyons which pierce the range. In the course of an hour's travel I saw exactly one living creature, a solitary house-fly! Nothing did I see, either, for miles on the return save another fly. Then, suddenly, I heard a Leconte Thrasher singing—improvising little wild snatches of song. Murder rose in my heart and died almost immediately as I rapidly reviewed the rationale,



Taken on the Mohave Desert

Photo by Wright M. Pierce

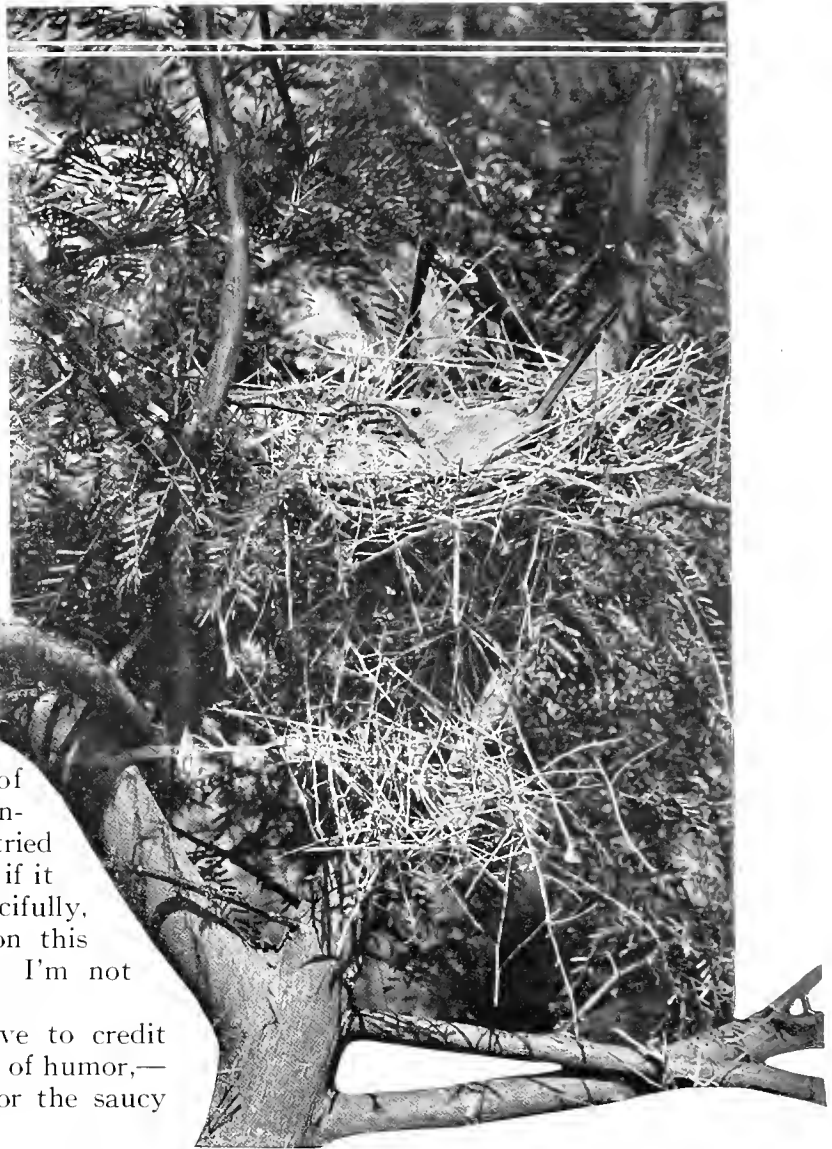
NEST OF LECONTE THRASHER IN *Opuntia ramosissima*



## The Leconte Thrasher

or rather the immoral, of the whole d—d business of bird-killing. A moment more and I might have flung my gun into a bush and taken to my heels, but on that instant I spied a bird on the ground, at half the distance I had supposed the singer to be, and blazed away. The Thrasher bounded off lightly and flung back a snatch of song as he went. Again I saw him standing at the foot of a sage bush at thirty paces. This time, villain to the heart's core, I aimed most carefully and hurled the murderous "8's." Like a thing of magic the bird emerged unscathed, flitted to a bush, tried his voice as though to see if it were still intact, and, mercifully, disappeared. A plague on this weary killing business! I'm not strong for it.

I think we shall have to credit this Thrasher with a sense of humor,—either that or bravado, for the saucy tilt of its tail invites pursuit, and the bird is so sure he can outrun and outdodge you that he scarcely troubles to take to wing. Cowboys used to take up the challenge, according to Mr. Gilman, and run them on horseback until the panting birds would take refuge in hole or bush and so be captured.



*Taken on the Colorado Desert near Mecca*

*Photo by Dickey*

LECONTE THRASHER WITH NEST IN MESQUITE

## *The Crissal Thrasher*

Near its nest, however, Leconte Thrasher is the soul of discretion. It slips away from its eggs like a wraith, and unless incubation is far advanced will not be seen again. At the best, a mellow call note, *whooit*, or *kooik kooik*, will be heard in the offing, now on one side and now on the other. The nest, oftener than otherwise, occupies the very center of a cholla cactus at an elevation of two or three feet, and how the bird itself escapes injury in passing and repassing that bristling parapet of spines, passes human comprehension. The nest itself is a slimy affair, for great dependence is placed upon the closely supporting array of cactus branches; but whatever the quantity of foreign twigs which may be smuggled into the bush, the bottom of the nest is sure to be composed almost exclusively of the densely matted flower-heads of a certain gray weed which abounds in the desert. This custom is inexorable, at least in the Colorado and Mohave deserts. What the birds who nest in the Atriplex bushes of the Buena Vista Lake region do for linings, I do not know.

Nesting begins in February on the Colorado Desert, though early April is the best average season for fresh eggs. Sometimes a second brood is brought off in May or June, but second nesting, or indeed any nesting, depends upon a favorable season. When the February rains have been copious, so that the desert blossoms as the rose (and there is no glory like the glory of the desert in blossom!) then the Thrashers are sure of support for their putative families, and they nest with a will. But if the rains fail and the desert languishes, the birds refrain from breeding. One wonders if the human kind is as wise, or indeed, as "natural" as the birds.

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No. 143

## Crissal Thrasher

A. O. U. No. 712. *Toxostoma crissale* Henry.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Somewhat similar to *Toxostoma redivivum*, but underparts much darker in coloration, with greater contrast between ground-color and white of throat and rufous of crissum. Above plain grayish brown or drab, shading on sides into lighter drab-gray of underparts; throat and malar area pure white, interrupted by dusky maxillary stripe; cheeks brown speckled with white; crissum and flanks dull chestnut. Bill black; feet brownish dusky. Length 279.4-304.8 (11.00-12.00); wing 100 (3.94); tail 40 (1.57); bill 35.3 (1.39); tarsus 32.8 (1.29).

**Recognition Marks.**—Robin size; curved bill and dark coloration; red crissum.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: Of coarse twigs, preferably thorny; lined with dead grasses, usually weathered and frayed; placed in center of "all thorns" (*Zizyphus*) bush, or in other dense cover, as Atriplex bush. *Eggs*: 3, rarely 4; pale to light niagara green,



Crissal (upper) and Leconte (lower) Thrashers

About the size  
from a water-color painting by Allan Brooks



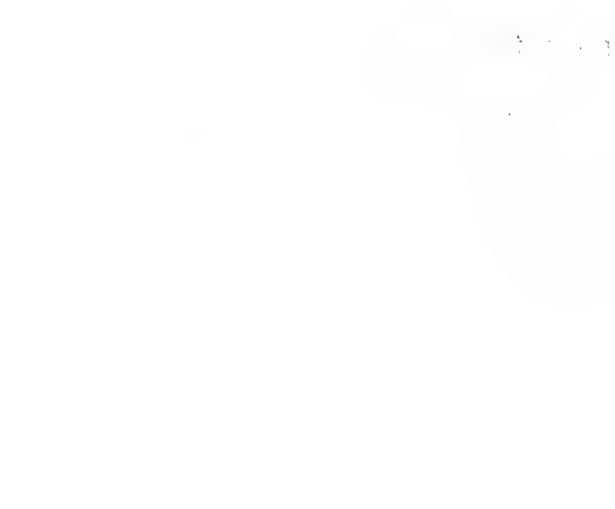
in the lower part  
of the bill is the  
point of the bill  
the rest of the bill  
is the point of the  
bill. The bill is  
slightly curved for  
the purpose of carrying  
the food. It may be  
seen that the bill is  
composed of two parts  
the upper part is the  
bill and the lower part  
is the mandible. I do not

know whether birds  
will fly in a series  
of steps or in any  
other way. This  
is a question which  
will be answered  
in the future.

**Crissal (upper) and Leconte (lower) Thrashers**

About 1/2 life size

*From a water-color painting by Allan Brooks*



the upper part  
of the bill is the  
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the rest of the bill  
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the food. It may be  
seen that the bill is  
composed of two parts  
the upper part is the  
bill and the lower part  
is the mandible. I do not





## The Crissal Thrasher

immaculate. Av. of 56 eggs in M. C. O. coll.: 26.4 x 19.1 (1.04 x .75); index 72; range 23.6-29.2 by 17.5-20.1 (.93-1.15 by .69-.79). *Season*: Feb. 15-June; two broods.

**General Range.**—The deserts of southwestern United States and northern Mexico. Breeds from Sonora and Chihuahua north to southern Nevada and Utah, and from the Colorado Desert east to western Texas.

**Distribution in California.**—Resident in the mesquite association in the bed of the Colorado Desert west to Palm Springs, and in the Colorado River Valley north at least to Needles.

**Authorities.**—**Baird** (*Harporhynchus crissalis*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. ix., 1858, p. 923 (Fort Yuma); *Mearns*, Auk, vol. iii., 1886, p. 292 (syn., hist., biog., etc.); *Morcom*, Bull. Ridgway Orn. Club, no. 2, 1887, p. 54 (Yuma, breeding); *Gilman*, Condor, vol. iv., 1902, p. 15 (Colorado Desert; desc. nests, etc.); *Grinnell*, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xii., 1914, p. 207 (Colorado Valley; habitat, etc.).

ONE WOULD SUPPOSE that the extreme of modesty had been reached in the case of the Leconte Thrasher. Perhaps it has, so far as disposition is concerned, but the scantily clad desert sometimes betrays its votaries into involuntary exposure. The Crissal Thrasher has both disposition and opportunity, for he courts the seclusion of the mesquite forests, or of the Atriplex beds which border the desert sink, so that in the agelong effort to evade the public eye, the Crissal is more completely successful. Full many a nest have we found buried in the thorny heart of a jujube bush, but what we do *not* know about the Crissal Thrasher itself would fill a volume.

Somewhere in the forest depths one may hear the Crissal Thrasher singing. The tracing of it, however, will be a laborious task; because if the bird even suspects human approach, it will cease upon the instant and dive for cover. The song is rather a mild version of that of the Western Mockingbird. It is largely a mocking song, but is softened, subdued, refined, and has little of the dash or distinction of either the Mocker or the California Thrasher.

A little can be learned of the bird's behavior, if one posts himself beside the nest. This, although it occupies the heart of a thorn-bush, or else has been clustered amid supporting thorn twigs on the under side of a protecting mesquite limb, will have been uncovered so adroitly by the sitting bird that no movement of hers has been discovered. By and by, however, a solicitous note, *pichôôry*, *pitchôôry*, or *pitchree'*, will sound from the brush some twenty yards away. One very earnest fowl, near Tucson, remarked, *Pichôôri karrik'*, *pichôôri karrik'* in quite a brisk manner. At this sound birds of other species swarm up to the seat of trouble; but the mistress and her still more backward mate lurk ever in the offing. On such occasions I have seen a Palmer Thrasher, *T. curvirostre palmeri*, march boldly up to the nesting bush of *crissalis*

## *The Catbird*

and eye the intruder sternly at six feet, while the rightful owner hovered in the background wailing *pichôôri*.

This association of Thrashers is always interesting. At one spot in the open desert in middle Arizona we found these four species within a stone's throw of camp, Bendire, Palmer, Crissal, and Western Mocker. "Open" desert hardly expresses the case, either, for Crissal, for where the others nested starkly in the scattered bushes of the level, Crissal had found a tiny sink-hole crowded with thorn-bushes. Here the lack of distant cover forced an unwonted audacity upon *crissalis*, and I saw a Crissal, a Leconte, and a Mockingbird so closely associated on a sparsely foliated mesquite limb that one might have gathered in the group with a sweep of the arm.

To my mind, the most interesting thing about the Crissal Thrasher is that its egg is bluish green (pale to light niagara green), *unmarked*. In this respect it stands alone among the eggs of the *Toxostomata* (I have not, however, seen the eggs of *T. ocellatum* from southern Mexico), although the markings of *T. lecontei* are often very light and occasionally absent. This immaculateness has, no doubt, a considerable phylogenetic significance, if we could only read it. If *crissalis* were the lightest of the Thrashers instead of the darkest, we should say that the egg of *crissalis* was the logical evolution of the *lecontei* tendency; but the bird relates itself rather with *redivivum*, whose eggs are emphatically spotted. The threads of developmental history are here, and the clew is a big one; but we are not wise enough yet to follow it out.

Perhaps the neottologist (that is, the student of young birds) will be able to help us out. For his guidance I may say that young Crissal Thrashers are covered at an incredibly early age with a heavy *blackish* down, and that their mouth-linings are light wax-yellow.

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No. 144

## Catbird

A. O. U. No. 704. *Dumetella carolinensis* (Linnaeus).

**Description.**—*Adult*: Slate-color, lightening almost imperceptibly below; black on top of head and on tail; under tail-coverts bay, sometimes spotted with slaty. Bill and feet black. Length 203.2-237.5 (8.00-9.35); wing 91.2 (3.59); tail 92.7 (3.65); bill 15.8 (.62).

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size; almost uniform slaty coloration with thicket-haunting habits distinctive; lithe and slender as compared with Water Ouzel.

**Nesting.**—(Does not breed in California). *Nest*: Of twigs, coiled bark-strips, weed-stalks, vegetable fibers, and trash; carefully lined with fine rootlets; placed at indifferent heights in bushes or thickets. *Eggs*: 4 to 5; deep niagara green (the most





Taken in Idaho

CATBIRD AND NEST

Photo by H. J. Rust

intense example of "robin's egg blue," or "bird-egg color"); glossy. Av. size 24.1 x 17.5 (.95 x .69). *Season:* First two weeks in June; one brood.

**General Range.**—Eastern United States and British Provinces, west regularly to and including the Rocky Mountains, irregularly to the Pacific Coast in British Columbia and Washington. Breeds from the Gulf States northward to Saskatchewan, and south in the West to northeastern Oregon, northern Utah, and northeastern New Mexico. Winters in the Southern States, Cuba, middle America to Panama. Resident in Bermuda. Accidental in Europe, and on the Farallon Islands.

**Occurrence in California.**—Accidental on the Farallon Islands; one record: Sept. 4, 1884.

**Authority.**—Townsend, C. H. (*Mimus carolinensis*), Auk, vol. ii., 1885, p. 215.

THE PURELY ACCIDENTAL occurrence of a single Catbird, as recorded above, will hardly afford us a decent excuse to rehearse the virtues of one of our prime favorites, the peer in song of any of the eastern singers. But the date of this capture, September 4th, is not without significance in its support of our general thesis, that such eastern species as have recently extended their range to include the Pacific Northwest may be found virtually feeling their way down the coast in autumn in search of a shorter route to their winter home. The Catbird is a regularly established resident of eastern Washington, and recently has made its

## *The Western Mockingbird*

appearance in certain valleys tributary to Puget Sound. It is almost certain, therefore, that a few of these birds are regularly traversing our borders, and it is quite within the bounds of possibility that they may one day establish a residence in northern California.

My friend, Dr. James Ball Naylor, of Malta, Ohio, tells the following story in answer to the oft-repeated question, Do animals reason? The poet's house nestles against the base of a wooded hill and looks out upon a spacious well-kept lawn which is studded with elm trees. The place is famous for birds, and the neighborhood is equally famous for cats. Robins occasionally venture to glean angle worms upon the inviting expanses of this lawn, but for a bird to attempt to cross it, unaided by wing, would be to invite destruction, as in the case of a lone soldier climbing San Juan hill. One day, however, a fledgling Catbird, overweening and disobedient, we fear, fell from its nest overhead and sat helpless on the dreaded slopes. The parents were beside themselves with anxiety. The birdie could not fly and would not flutter to any purpose. There was no enemy in sight, but it was only by the sufferance of fate, and moments were precious. In the midst of it all the mother disappeared and returned presently with a fat green worm, which she held up to baby at a foot's remove. Baby hopped and floundered forward to the juicy morsel, but when he had covered the first foot, the dainty was still six inches away. Mama promised it to him with a flood of encouragement for every effort, but as often as the infant advanced the mother retreated, renewing her blandishments. In this way she coaxed her baby across the lawn and up, twig by twig, to the top of an osage-orange hedge which bounded it. Here, according to Dr. Naylor, she fed her child the worm.

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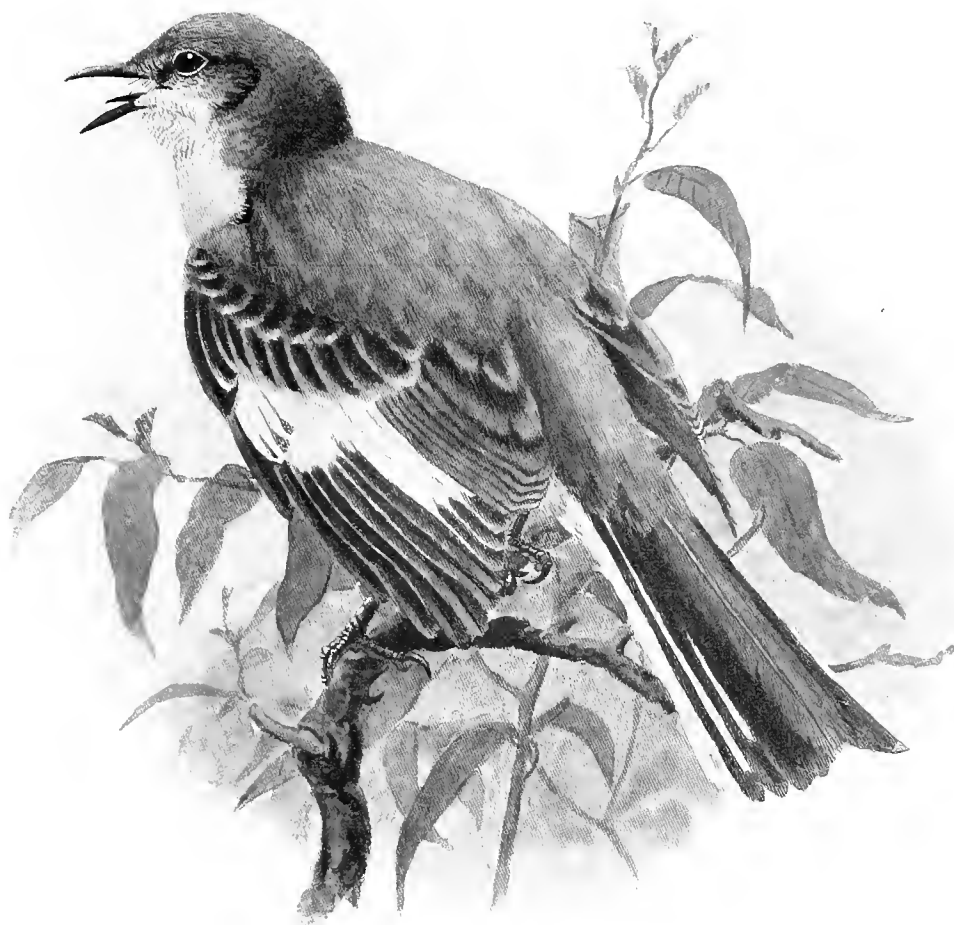
No. 145

## Western Mockingbird

A. O. U. No. 703a. *Mimus polyglottos leucopterus* (Vigors).

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Upperparts and shading on sides of breast plain brownish gray (hair-brown); wings and tail slaty black, varied by white; some white spotting on top of middle and greater wing-coverts and tertials; a large white patch in wing formed by primary coverts and basal half of primaries (abruptly extended to near end of two innermost primaries); outermost pair of rectrices wholly white, the two succeeding pairs chiefly but decreasingly white; lores dusky; a whitish superciliary; cheeks mottled brownish gray and whitish; underparts dingy white, the chest and breast tinged with pale buffy brownish; wing-linings pure white, marked with dusky. Bill chiefly blackish; legs dusky; iris pale yellowish gray. *Females* are duller and with less of white on wings and tail. *Young birds* are much like adults, save that the breast and sides are heavily spotted with grayish. Length about 254 (10.00); wing 115 (4.53); tail 120 (4.72); bill 18 (.71); tarsus 32.5 (1.28).

*The Western Mockingbird*



WESTERN MOCKINGBIRD

**Recognition Marks.**—Black-and-white-and-gray coloration; prominent white wing-patch; long tail; lithe form.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* Basally of coarse twigs, mesially of weeds, flower-heads, grasses, and trash; interiorly of rootlets, fine grasses, or horsehair, but highly variable, according to local supply; placed at moderate heights in bushes, thickets, vines, or trees, often near houses. *Eggs:* 4 or 5; pale niagara green, or pale glaucous green, handsomely spotted, or clouded and washed, with grayish brown (army brown to verona brown or even russet) and vinaceous gray. Av. size 25.2 x 18.3 (.99 x .72). *Season:* April–June; two broods.

## The Western Mockingbird

**Range of *Mimus polyglottos*.**—United States south into Mexico and the West Indies.

**Range of *M. p. leucopterus*.**—Southwestern United States and Mexico. Breeds in Lower and Upper Sonoran zones from northwestern Nebraska, southern Wyoming, and central California (casually northwestern Nevada, Sunkist, July 28, 1918) south to Cape San Lucas and Oaxaca. Accidental on Guadalupe Island.

**Distribution in California.**—Resident chiefly in the Lower Sonoran zone; wandering into lower reaches of Upper Sonoran in fall and winter, notably in the counties tributary to San Francisco Bay. (One record also for Humboldt County, Dec. 1922, Ferndale.) An abundant breeder in the San Diegan district north to Santa Barbara and, less commonly, on the southeastern deserts north to Owens Valley (Lone Pine, June 18, 1911), formerly to the head of that valley (Fisher, N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, p. 127); also, sparingly, in the San Joaquin-Sacramento Valley, north to Marysville and Chico, and in the warmer valleys of the south central coast system, Santa Maria, San Juan (in San Luis Obispo County), Salinas, San Benito, etc. Resident on Santa Cruz, Catalina, and San Clemente Islands, and has occurred on Anacapa.

**Authorities.**—Gambel (*Mimus polyglottis*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1846, p. 114 (Santa Barbara); Mearns, Auk, vol. xix., 1902, p. 70 (the Mockingbird of the west separated as *Mimus polyglottos leucopterus* (Vigors)); Beal, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 52 (food); Grinnell, Auk, vol. xxviii., 1911, p. 293, map (distr. in Calif.); Dickey, Condor, vol. xxiv., 1922, p. 153 (song).

IF GALLI-CURCI were to warble in your own dooryard day in and day out, year in and year out, the chances are you would come to feel yourself disqualified as a critic of coloratura singing. As I write these words on a November day, Old Faithful, the Los Colibris Mockingbird, showers music upon me from his favorite perch, a dead eucalyptus which overlooks the study. It is beautiful music, wonderful music, and I would not willingly spare it from the daily sum of life's joys.

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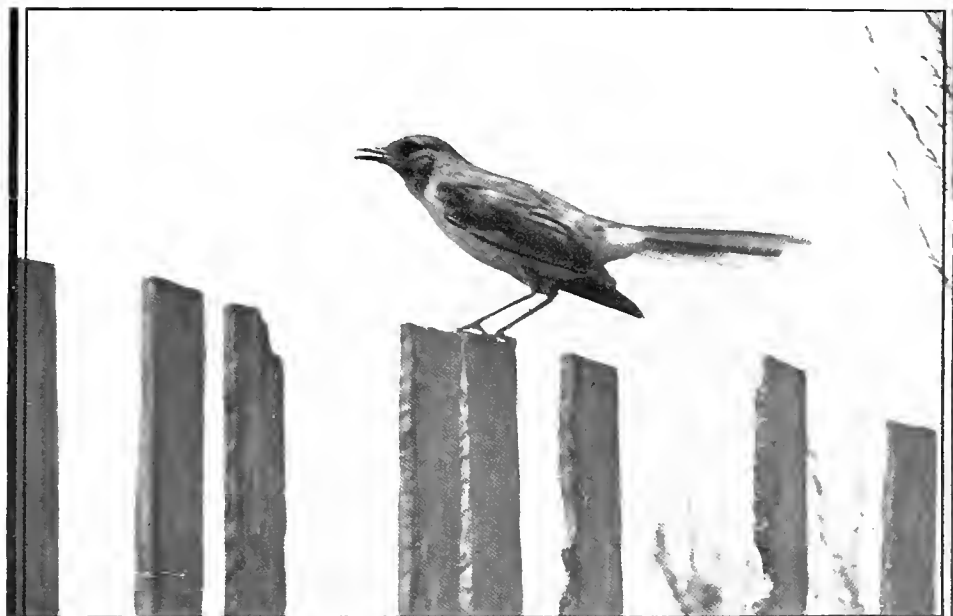
Taken at  
Los Colibris

Photo by  
the Author

ATTENTIVE



## The Western Mockingbird



Taken at Los Colibris

Photo by the Author

### "CONTRALTO CADENCES OF GRAVE DESIRE"

Yet my appreciation of Mockingbird music is undoubtedly dulled by long familiarity. Even angels will become commonplace in time, as witness the sluggish enthusiasm which marks an approaching "silver wedding." It is rather for the lady visitor, fresh from the snows of New England, to go into ecstasies over our Mockingbird, to answer his raptures with her own, as she stands reluctant at the study door, dreading to enter and so shut off the torrent of music. Come in, Lady. *Que voulez vous?* Oh, of course, I am the spoiled Californian, blasé, unresponsive. It is you, my Lady from Massachusetts, who must sing the Mocker's praise, while your interest is fresh.

Ah, yes; but let one even hint that my bright particular angel (for whom the silver chimes are soon to ring) is not the most beautiful, the most gifted, the most deserving of all help-meets, and he—well, he shall taste my steel upon the instant; and if some miscreant were to kill our Mockingbird, we should suddenly know ourselves bereft of a portion of heaven, the choicest, the most dependable of avian consolations; and the trouble we should make for that person would be measured only by the Government's ability, or sincerity, in enforcing the federal regulations. Wherefore, the degree of our consolation and the quality of its source will evidently repay examination. Sir Mockingbird, we will do our best.

## The Western Mockingbird

*"Trillets of humor,—shrewdest whistle-wit—  
Contralto cadences of grave desire,  
\*\*\*\*\* midnights of tone entire,—  
Tissues of moonlight shot with songs of fire;—  
Bright drops of tune from ocean's infinite  
Of melody, sipped off the thin-edged wave  
And trickling down the beak,—discourses brave  
Of serious matter that no man may guess,—  
Good fellow greetings, cries of light distress"*



'Twas Sidney Lanier who with such unerring finger pointed out the cadence, the content, and the very spirit of the Mockingbird's song. No admirer has done the bird more equal justice and none is likely to. And it is no disparagement of other songsters to admit that the Mockingbird is the best-known and the best-famed of all American song birds. In the mouths of the world's best critics, only the Nightingales of Europe and the Bulbuls of the Orient are brought into comparison with the American Mockingbird. As virtuosos these others may possibly excel, but the Mockingbird gains a favorable decision, however biased, because he frankly commits his cause to human keeping. By establishing his mate in our climbing rose bush, and himself

Taken at Los Colibris

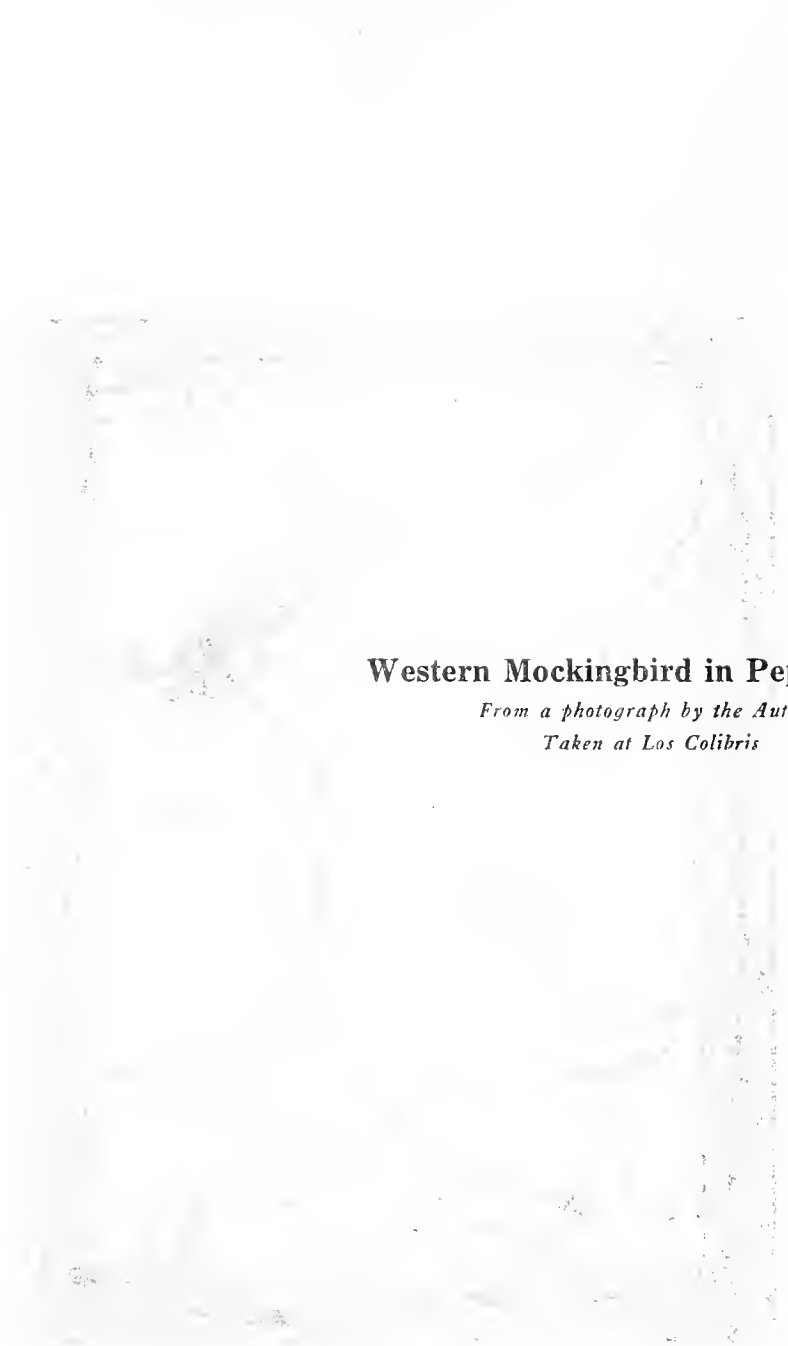
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"TISSUES OF MOONLIGHT"

Photo by the Author

Western Mockingbird in Pepper Tree

From a photograph by the author  
Taken at Los Colinas



**Western Mockingbird in Pepper Tree**

*From a photograph by the Author*

*Taken at Los Colibris*

The Western Mockingbird is a very common bird in the West. It is a very hardy bird and is found in all parts of the West. It is a very social bird and is often found in large flocks. It is a very intelligent bird and is able to learn to open doors and to steal food. It is a very beautiful bird and is a great addition to any garden. It is a very hardy bird and is able to survive in all climates. It is a very intelligent bird and is able to learn to open doors and to steal food. It is a very beautiful bird and is a great addition to any garden. It is a very hardy bird and is able to survive in all climates. It is a very intelligent bird and is able to learn to open doors and to steal food. It is a very beautiful bird and is a great addition to any garden.







## The Western Mockingbird

mounting guard above upon the cottage chimney, he has made us partners in interest. His cause is ours, and woe betide him who dares impugn the musical virtues of the American Mockingbird. He has touched our honor.

The Nightingale sings only in a northern springtime—or so they tell us. With the Mockingbird it is eternal Spring. If bird-song expresses, as we hold, joy in life, rather than merely a passing desire to capture a mate, then is the Mockingbird the most joyful of birds. He is always at it, winter and summer. Or if in the springtime his songs are a little more earnest,

a little more passionate, he is not more partial than the rest of us. Spring is the joy-time par excellence, and if one sings in the autumn, is it not because spring has been entrapped and carried over in the heart? Or if in winter, this is doubtless, also, because spring is coming.

Song is the Mocker's *raison d'être*. It is his own true love, his passion, his obsession, no less than his trade. Not content with his own inspirations, masterly, varied, and abundant as these are, the singer lays under tribute everything else that sings, or yodels, or squawks withal. The plaintive notes of a Say's Phoebe and the regal scream of the Western Redtail interest him alike. No other bird-song is too foreign, too intricate, or too delicate for his own rendition. Of the passing migrants he takes toll, no less than of his familiar neighbors. Two Mockers that I heard in Arizona, and these a hundred miles apart, had each preserved the recollection of the exquisite gushing song of the Lincoln Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*). These mimics, too, had been unusually favored,

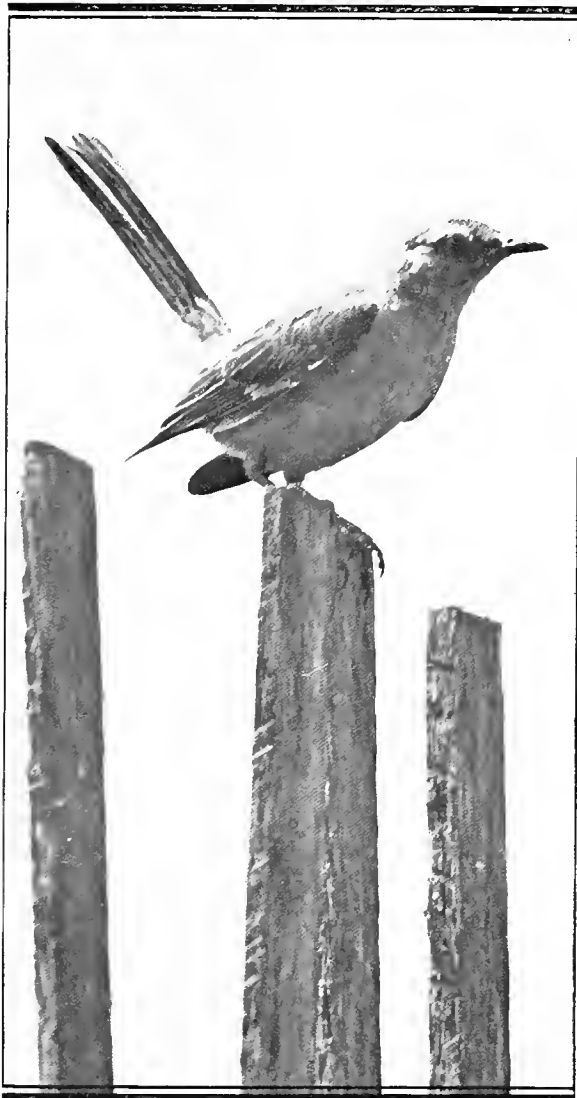


Taken in Los Angeles County

Photo by the Author

AN ORPHEAN INFANT

## The Western Mockingbird



*Taken at Los Colibris*

INQUISITIVE

*Photo by the Author*

for I myself never heard the Lincoln Sparrow sing, save in his breeding haunts high in the mountains, where, of course, the Mocker does not penetrate.

A captive Mockingbird which I once observed in the East proclaimed unconsciously the history of his early life. He reproduced not merely the songs of the village, where he had been kept some months, but those of the wilderness, as well, where he must have been reared. Besides these, the various songs and noises to be heard in the average bird store were faithfully represented. Some of his mimicry was irresistibly fetching, and I stood rooted to the pavement as the bird sang from a suspended cage at some distance from the street. What puzzled me most, however, about his performance, was that he always stood silent when a bantam rooster some two blocks away crowed. When his mistress assured me that it was the Mockingbird who crowed, I could scarcely believe my ears. Having always heard the rooster at a distance, the Mocker reproduced the sound in exactly the same way, with the ventriloquistic effect manifestly resulting. The crowing of the bantam was a favorite trick of his, and I noticed that he usually followed it by the scream of a hawk.

The challenge of the cock followed by the cry of his enemy was certainly as clever a piece of stage work as ever a glee club did in a melange. In the course of an hour, songs and cries of seventeen species of birds were recognized, besides numerous baby calls not so clear. Among his many bird-store reminiscences, I made sure at one time that the monkeys were quarreling in their cage. His torrent of borrowed songs was continually

## *The Western Mockingbird*

changing, like a kaleidoscope. I timed him once, and the tune was changed eighty-seven times in seven minutes.

A western performer phrases the borrowed song three or four or five times, rather than twice only, as does the Thrasher; though I think I have detected a tendency to phrase his own original offerings twice, in general thrasher-fashion. But perhaps this itself is an imitative form taken bodily from the California Thrasher, whose notes cannot be differentiated at all times from the Mocker's own.

A list of bird-songs imitated by the Western Mockingbird would be simply a repetition of the California Check-list. Two examples, however, occur to me as worthy of special note. On the 19th of March, 1917, I heard two Mockingbirds imitating *each other*. Bird Number One would sound a phrase, doubled, and pause, while Bird Number Two, some sixty yards away, repeated it very faithfully. This antiphonal arrangement lasted through a dozen bars or more; and then Bird Number Two held the theme, while Number One echoed him through half a dozen measures. But the performance of Number One turned mimic was half-hearted and listless. Perhaps he began to realize, for the first time, what an ungracious thing it might



*Taken in Los Angeles County*

*Photo by Pierce*

NEST AND EGGS OF WESTERN MOCKINGBIRD IN ORANGE TREE

## *The Western Mockingbird*

be to mock another's efforts. Anyhow, mocking a Mocker is idle business.

The other incident was connected with a concert which began at ten o'clock in the evening. First, by way of overture, came a Barn Owl's snarl. This appeared to cost the bird considerable effort—it really is an agonizing sound—and was, perhaps, a bit overdone; but it was at least so well done that we were some minutes in determining that the Barn Owl and the Mockingbird, who immediately succeeded him, were sounding from *precisely the same spot*. This effect was repeated at least half a dozen times and was invariably preceded by quite an interval of silence. It goes without saying that the illusion was all the more effective because of this foil.

Unquestionably the most memorable aspect of life in the citrus belt is the nocturnal singing of the Mockingbird. Every night in spring and early summer, and especially every moonlight night, no matter at what hour, so it be after 9:30 or thereabouts, the Mocker is likely to be holding forth in impassioned strain. Of course he does not sing *all* the time, but the quiet intervals are at least less extensive than the periods of song. It is noteworthy, as Nehrling has pointed out, that the singer relies more upon his own genius at night. Imitations are forgotten and the performer is lifted up by the viewless wings of poesy.



*Taken in Los Angeles County*

HARD LINES

*Photo by the Author*

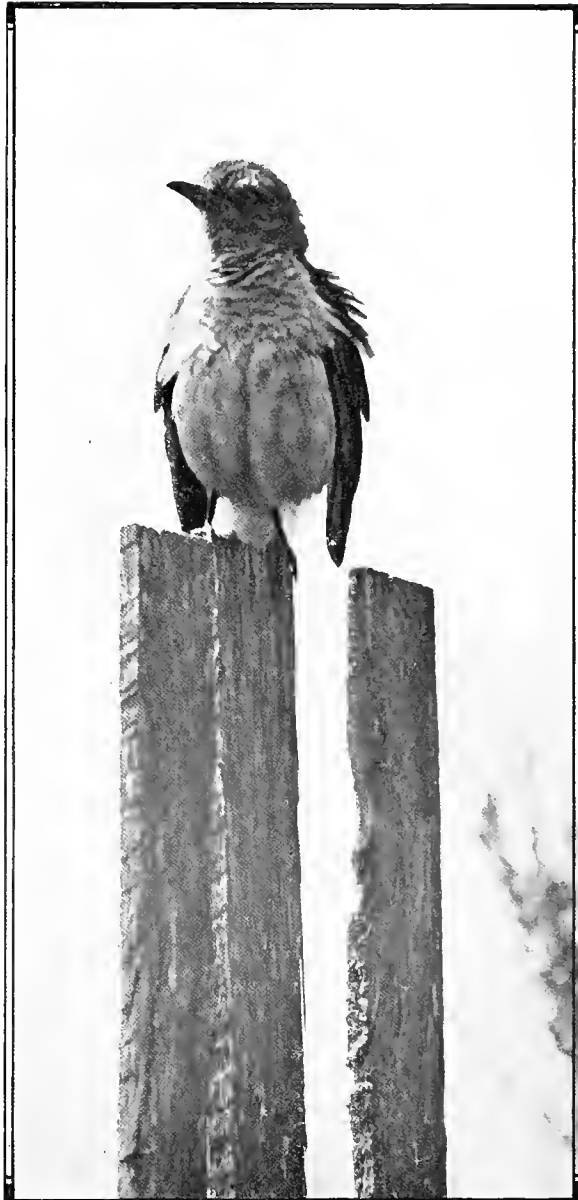
## The Western Mockingbird

One cannot swear that this Mocker's music improves at midnight, but some of his tenderer offerings are at least more acceptable when displayed against a background of silence.

What more touching than the devotion of this midnight minstrel! His heart is hot, and life—Oh, life is short—*Dum vivimus vivamus*. Let boobies slumber, and let churls berate us—we will celebrate the hours of love. Truth to tell, the midnight eloquence of the Mockingbird becomes at times a severe test of loyalty. For the spring of 1918 "Old Faithful" elected a station on the cornice just eight feet from the author's slumbering ear. "Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast"; but, ahem! it hath also potencies calculated to awaken the less savage. By the time Opus 16, Fugue in A Minor, is reached, viz., at about 2 a. m., one humbly wonders whether Song and an early breakfast are compatible joys.

Pasadena is called the City of Roses. It ought, rather, to be called the City of Mockingbirds. Those who have contrived that heaven on earth have not neglected to people it with these indefatigable angels; or perhaps the birds have set the seal of their approval upon it by forsaking the minor paradises of the surrounding deserts and flocking to the major Valhalla.

Anyhow, if your nerves trouble you at the midnight hour, avoid Pasadena. No; the police will not shoot that Mockingbird in order to assuage your petulant (and even pluto-



Taken at Los Colibris

Photo by the Author

INCREDULOUS

## *The Western Mockingbird*

cratic) indignation. The Audubonites are incorrigible, and—you are in the minority. Possibly the birds have something to say to you in the quiet midnight watches, which you ought to hear.

\*\*\*\*\*  
"Lo, this tearful night,  
Methinks I see thee, fresh from death's despite,  
Perched in a palm grove wild with pantomime  
O'er blissful companies couched in shady thyme.  
Methinks I hear thy silver whistlings bright  
Mix with the mighty discourse of the wise,  
Till broad Beethoven, deaf no more, and Keats,  
'Midst of much talk, uplift their smiling eyes,  
And mark the music of thy wood conceits,  
And halfway pause on some large courteous word,  
And call thee 'Brother,' O thou heavenly bird!"

But the Mockingbird is, after all, very "human." We shall not leave him in Heaven, even for the space of this page; nor shall we hasten to deify him without having first examined the feet of clay. Even in the utterance of song he is something of a wag, not to mention a buffoon; while the elsewhere noble instinct of solicitude for young has in the Mockingbird degenerated into an exaggeration of petulance, which would be repulsive, were it not so entertaining and harmless.

To speak of the buffoonery first: It is well known how the Mocker plays the fool whenever his lady love appears. Though he flutters up to her with drooping wings, his flattery is mingled with intentional bombast, and she cries *yăă yăă* in the same mocking tone with which a girl in pigtails greets an awkward brother: "Yăă, Mr. Smarty, why don't you stand up and fall over?" It is fair enough, of course, that music should enter a bird's feet, as it does a man's; but when the Mocker attempts to dance, he invites ridicule rather than respect. His heart interferes with his heels, until one cries in derision, "Softy, softy!"

"*Los Colibris, June 24, 1915:* A Mocker singing before me on the cross-piece of a telegraph pole is leaping every now and then into the air to emphasize his ecstasy. The wings are fluttered slowly, revealing to the full their white areas; and the tail with its white border is displayed to the utmost. Singing is not interrupted, and as the bird moves off on a level through the air, he minces or drags with rakish affectation. Yet he is ever, to my mind, a somewhat serious fool, and he never achieves either the acrobatic distinction or the clownish abasement of the Western Chat."

"*Los Colibris, September 22, 1912:* There is such a thing as too





**Four Studies of a Western Mockingbird**

*From photographs by the Author*

Taken at Los Colibris



## *The Western Mockingbird*

much Mockingbird. His song, save when set on fire by the passion of springtime, may be characterized as a bit too noisy, and his behavior is, on occasion, anything but gentlemanly. This morning a glorious Meadowlark lighted on the tipmost branch of one of our live oak trees, breasted the sunshine and began to gurgle ecstatic reminiscences of springtime. There was music in his heart and magic in his throat, and for all he played with the soft pedal on, the face of the listener cleared and 'his herte gan swell.' Then, all at once, a jealous Mockingbird levelled a glance of hate at the gifted visitor and bade him begone. Suiting the action to the word, he drove the Lark off, pained and crest-fallen. A gentle Mourning Dove had, meanwhile, taken refuge in the center of the tree, or perhaps she had come to listen to the cooling lark song. Anyhow, her the vixenish Mockingbird sought out and drove forth with scurrilous reproach. A pair of California Woodpeckers, however, stood their ground when attacked, and gave as good as they got both in abuse and blows. But the Mocker does not shine always as a gentleman! (There were seven Mockingbirds in the yard at the time, and it may be that some stirring of the parental, protective instinct moved the passion of the ugly Mocker)."

When the young birds are hatched out, the Mockingbirds become the most jealous and aggressive of guardians. Not content with persecuting all other birds and driving cats out of bounds, they quarrel with their most intimate human friends, no matter of how long standing. The ordinary note of appraisal, *choop* or *tsook*, comes out like the crack of a whip, beyond imitation, the most intense and upbraiding sound of which a California bird is capable. If the danger is very real, the birds fall back on an ancestral Thrasher cry, *choory*—sometimes piteously prolonged, *chooory*—and this is moving enough, but they spoil it all by floods of those mocking *yäää* cries, which arouse only resentment.

Once a pair of Mockers built in the live oak tree hard beside my study door. All went well enough until the youngsters were leaving the nest (because I pretended not to know); but when they were a-wing, or at least a-crawl, instead of feeding their babies with diligence, or spiriting them away to what they might consider safer quarters, this precious pair spent most of their time scolding members of my family, or berating my guests. I was invariably set upon the moment I stepped out of the study. If the attack could be delivered from behind, the bird swooped down suddenly, and when almost touching my head exploded in a volley of *yäääs*, which were fairly insulting. All of our movements in the hinder portion of our yard were dogged and protested for a week or more, and until the joke nearly wore our patience threadbare.

It is the greatest sport of all, though, to see the Mockingbird dis-

## *The Western Mockingbird*



*Taken in Los Angeles County*

A PEACHY POSE

*Photo by the Author*

cipline the family cat. If Tabby is docile or wise, she takes to cover forthwith; but if she pauses to "sass back," the Mockingbird rises gloriously to the occasion. With mocking cries and jabs, whether of beak or claw, which are at least sufficient to make the fur fly, the winged fury returns again and again to the attack. I have seen a perfectly respectable family cat spitting and howling with vexation under these humiliating assaults, until the very orange trees shook with laughter. The game is being evened up for once.

What the Mockingbirds eat is only a matter of curious interest—insects and wild fruits chiefly. If they required avocados or poached eggs on toast (eggs are ninety-five cents a dozen now, remember), we would furnish them cheerfully. It is surmised that if the range of the Mockingbird ran more strongly northward, some harm might be done to cherries, and the like; but as it is, there is absolutely no complaint in the citrus belt, and the good accomplished by this very domestic purveyor of bugs and grubs is quite considerable. Mistletoe berries are a staple article of diet wherever found, and the birds eat the yucca and cactus fruits of the desert, no less than the pepper berries of civilization.

The distribution of the Mockingbird has been the subject of no little

## *The Sage Thrasher*

inquiry. Dr. Grinnell<sup>1</sup> concluded a dozen years ago that it had increased about five times in numbers throughout the Pacific slope of Los Angeles County. There has certainly been a marked increase during my twelve years' residence in Santa Barbara, which is rated an extreme section of the bird's southern and residential range. In general, it may be said that the bird profits by the introduction of cultivation, and so long as no untoward event arises, we may expect an increasingly heavy population throughout those portions of California which do not suffer unduly from either heat or cold. In areas liable to frost, such as the elevated Owens Valley, the birds are present in summer only; while such as are found freely in winter upon the Mohave and Colorado deserts are surmised to be northern breeders only. A rather anomalous condition exists in the Pacific-bordering counties from Marin County south, for here Mockingbirds turn up irregularly in fall and winter only, adventurers, perhaps, from the crowded interior.

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No. 146

### Sage Thrasher

A. O. U. No. 702. **Oreoscoptes montanus** (Townsend).

**Synonyms.**—SAGE MOCKER. MOUNTAIN MOCKINGBIRD (early name—inapropos).

**Description.**—*Adults:* General plumage ashy brown, lighter below; above grayish- or ashy-brown, the feathers, especially on crown, streaked mesially with darker brown; wings and tail dark grayish brown with paler edgings; middle and greater coverts narrowly tipped with whitish, producing two dull bars; outer rectrices broadly tipped with white, decreasing in area, till vanishing on central pair; lores grayish; a pale superciliary line; cheeks brownish varied by white; underparts whitish tinged with buffy brown, most strongly on flanks and crissum, everywhere (save, usually, on throat, lower belly, and under tail-coverts) streaked with dusky, the streaks tending to confluence along side of throat, sharply distinguished and wedge-shaped on breast, where also heaviest; bill blackish paling on mandible; legs and feet dusky brownish, the latter with yellow soles; iris lemon-yellow. *Immature birds* are browner and more decidedly streaked above; buffier and more broadly streaked below. Length 203-222.3 (8.00-8.75); wing 97 (3.82); tail 90 (3.54); bill 16.4 (.65); tarsus 30.5 (1.20).

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size; ashy-brown plumage appearing nearly uniform at distance, but underparts showing abundant spotting at near range; sage-haunting habits; impetuous song.

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<sup>1</sup>"Distribution of the Mockingbird in California," *The Auk*, Vol. XXVIII., July, 1911, pp. 293-300.

*The Sage Thrasher*



SAGE THRASHER

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A substantial structure of thorny twigs (*Sarcobatus* preferred), sometimes slightly domed, with a heavy inner cup of fine bark-strips (sage); placed without attempt at concealment in sage-bush or greasewood. *Eggs:* 4 or 5; rich dark bluish green (niagara green), heavily spotted or blotched with chocolate and "egg-gray"—among the handsomest. *Av. size* 24.9 x 18 (.98 x .71). *Season:* May 1–June 15; one or two broods.

**General Range.**—Western United States and southern British Columbia. Breeds in the artemisia of Upper Sonoran and Lower Transition from south-central British Columbia south to east-central California and east to central Montana, western Nebraska, and northern New Mexico. Winters from southern California and central

## The Sage Thrasher

Texas south to northern Mexico and Cape San Lucas, and casually to Guadalupe Island.

**Distribution in California.**—Breeds locally in the high Upper Sonoran, sagebrush areas, east of the Sierra Nevada, south to the Panamint Mountains. Also sparingly in isolated (?) colonies southwest of the Sierras; Bakersfield (Swarth); Walker Pass (Grinnell); Rockwood Valley, Ventura County (Willett). Winters on the southeastern deserts and sparingly in the San Diegan district north to Santa Paula (Evermann).

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Mimus montanus*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1846, p. 113 (Calif.); *Coues*, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 48 (syn., desc., life hist.); *Fisher*, N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, 1893, p. 126 (localities in s. e. Calif.); *Willett*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 7, 1912, p. 99 (status in s. Calif.; breeding near Mt. Pinos); *Stone*, Condor, vol. xviii., 1916, p. 9 (hist. of disc.).

IN A LAND so blessed with arid and semi-arid vegetation, we are apt to overlook the virtues of that homely plant, the "sage" (*Artemisia tridentata*). To be sure, its area of maximum distribution lies to northward and eastward, but we have here and there wholesome touches of it; while upon our eastern, and especially our northeastern borders lie great areas which entitle California to recognition among the Also Blest. It is a wonderful weed, not alone for its pungent odor—the sweetest of life's bitters—but for its hospitality, its sturdy heroism, and, above all, for its fidelity—unflinching in its task of covering the hills, be they never so unending. I love the sage! So does our hero, miscalled, "*Oreoscoptes*," "Mountain Viewer." Call him rather *Agapatos Artemidos*, Beloved of Artemis, from whom his favorite flower is named. Born of the sage, he has no outlook beyond it, and needs none. Listen!

The hour is sunrise. As we face the east, heavy shadows still huddle about us and blend with the ill-defined realities. The stretching sage-tops tremble with oblation before the expectant sun. The pale dews are taking counsel for flight, but the opalescent haze, pregnant with sunfire, yet tender with cool greens and subtle azures, hovers over the altar, waiting the concomitance of the morning hymn before ascent. Suddenly, from a distant sage-bush bursts a geyser of song, a torrent of tuneful waters, gushing, as it would seem, from the bowels of the wilderness in an ecstasy of greeting and gratitude and praise. It is from the throat of the Sage Thrasher, poet of the bitter weed, that the tumult comes. Himself but a gray shadow, scarce visible in the early light, he pours out his soul and the soul of the sage in a rhapsody of holy joy. Impetuous, impassioned, compelling, rises this matchless music of the desert. To the silence of the gray-green canvas, beautiful but incomplete, has come the throb and thrill of life,—life brimful, delirious, exultant. The freshness and the gladness of it touch the soul as with a magic. The heart of the listener glows, his veins tingle, his face beams.

## *The Sage Thrasher*

He cannot wait to analyze. He must dance and shout for joy. The wine of the wilderness is henceforth in his veins, and drunk with ecstasy, he reels across the enchanted scene forever more.

And all this inspiration the bird draws from common sage and the rising of the common sun. How does he do it? I do not know. Ask Homer, Milton, Keats.

The Sage Thrasher appears to live life in its ultimate simplicity, for there is no other bird bred amidst more uniform surroundings; and yet if we could know, I suppose life would seem to be made up of pleasant variety enough—a thousand sorts of bugs to choose for food, a thousand fair ladies from whom to win a mate, and twice ten thousand times ten thousand sage-bushes, any one of which is fit to support that modest cradle which shall house his children. What d'ye lack, my masters?

Recollections of the Southland have prompted Taylor to say in his Nevada report:<sup>1</sup> "To a considerable extent the birds resemble the true Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos leucopterus*) as regards habits of



Taken in Idaho

NEST AND EGGS OF SAGE THRASHER

Photo by Rust

<sup>1</sup>Field Notes on Amphibians, Reptiles and Birds of Northern Humboldt County, Nevada, by Walter P. Taylor U. of C. Pub. in Zool., Vol. 7, No. 10, 1912, pp. 413-416.



## *The American Dipper*

movement and song. When running along the ground the tail is held in much the same manner, and we noted that they preferred running along the ground to flying. The pose while singing and the manner of flight, also remind one of the Mockingbird."

While actually engaged in nesting the bird gives over all attempts at song. So great is the irregularity of the nesting season, however, even among local birds, that two or three appear to be in song continually through the breeding time; and thus a very inadequate idea of the birds' actual numbers is obtained. At the close of the season, or when the young are able to fly well, the birds, all absolutely silent now, resort in numbers to the hillside springs and brushy draws to feed on berries,—wild currants, wild gooseberries, and to a lesser extent, service berries. This fondness for small fruit has betrayed the birds into conspicuous mischief in the case of isolated ranches and pioneer reclamation projects. Almost devoid of fear, the birds troop into the gardens in late July and August to strip the currant bushes or blackberries, and later the grapevines. The transformation from shy, elusive poet of the sage, to stolid glutton of the back-yard garden, is as complete as that which overtakes the minstrel Bobolink, and makes him a prosaic "rice-bird."

If time allowed, I should like to sing a little pæan to the Sage Thrasher's egg, easily the most beautiful among those of an endowed family, the *Mimidae*, and one of the handsomest of all eggs. The ground-color of this gem is niagara green, or beryl green, and it is half covered with bold spots of liver-brown, with some adumbrations of mars brown. So high an opinion do some of the birds have of them, that I have seen nests completely roofed over with twigs; but this custom does not seem to be established.

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No. 147

## American Dipper

A. O. U. No. 701. *Cinclus mexicanus unicolor* Bonaparte.

**Synonyms.**—WATER OUZEL. AMERICAN WATER OUZEL.

**Description.**—*Adults in spring and summer:* General plumage slaty gray or deep neutral gray, changing on pileum to hair-brown of remaining head and neck; wings and tail darker, blackish slate; eyelids touched with white. Bill black; feet yellowish. *Adults in fall and winter, and immature:* Feathers of underparts margined with whitish, and some whitish edging on wings. Bill lighter, brownish. *Young birds* are much lighter below; the throat is nearly white and the feathers of remaining under plumage are broadly tipped with white, and have wash of rufous posteriorly; tips of

## *The American Dipper*

wing-feathers and, occasionally, tail-feathers extensively white. Bill yellow. Length about 178 (7.00); wing 90 (3.54); tail 50 (1.97); bill 17.3 (.68); tarsus 28.5 (1.12).

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size but *chunky*, giving impression of a "better" bird. Slaty coloration and water-haunting habits distinctive.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A large ball of green moss lined with fine grasses or dead leaves, and with entrance on side; lodged among rocks, fallen timber, roots, etc., near water. *Eggs:* 4 or 5; pure white. Av. size 1.02 x .70 (25.9 x 17.8). *Season:* April–June; one or two broods.

**General Range.**—The mountains of western North America from the northern boundary of Mexico and northern Lower California to northern Alaska. Resident.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident along all permanent streams in the timbered mountains. Found on both slopes of the Sierra Nevada in the Transition and Boreal zones, on the Warners, San Jacintos, San Bernardinos, etc. Breeds at lower levels in all the coast ranges, save the inner arid members, and from Ventura north in numbers approximately increasing with humidity. Retires to somewhat lower levels in winter, especially in the Sierras.

**Authorities.**—**Audubon** (*Cinclus americanus*), Synopsis Birds N. Am., 1839, p. 86 (n. Calif.); *Coues*, Birds of the Northwest, 1874, p. 10; *ibid.*, Birds Col. Val., 1878, p. 84 (syn., hist., habits, etc.); *Shufeldt*, Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club, vol. vii., 1882, p. 213, fig. (osteology); *Muir, John*, The Mountains of California, 1894, p. 276; *Stejneger*, Smithsonian Misc. Coll. (Quart. Issue), vol. xlvii., 1905, p. 421 (monogr.; distr. of the genus *Cinclus*); *Bryant, H. C.*, and *Bryant, Amy M.*, Condor, vol. xvii., 1915, p. 98 (desc. nest; habits and actions of adults and young).

*"ADVANCING and prancing and glancing and dancing,  
And dashing and flashing and splashing and clashing;  
And so never ending, but always descending,  
Sounds and motions forever and ever are blending,  
All at once and all o'er, with a mighty uproar;  
And this way the Water comes down at Lodore."*

But the scene of aqueous confusion was incomplete unless a leaden shape emerged from the spray, took station on a jutting rock, and proceeded to rub out certain gruff notes of greeting, *jigic, jigic, jigic*. These notes manage somehow to dominate or to pierce the roar of the cataract, and they symbolize henceforth the turbulence of all the mountain torrents of the West.

The Water Ouzel bobs most absurdly as he repeats his inquiry after your health. But you would far rather know of his, for he has just come out of the icy bath, and as he sidles down the rock, tittering expectantly, you judge he is contemplating another one. Yes; without more ado the bird wades into the stream, where the current is so swift you are sure it would sweep a man off his feet. He disappears beneath its surface and you shudder at the possibilities; but after a half minute



**American Dipper and Nest**

*From a photograph by the Author*

Taken near Kenawyer's



## The American Dipper



Taken in Fresno County

A BIT UNDECIDED

Photo by the Author

of suspense, he bursts out of the seething waters a dozen feet below, and flits back to his rock, chuckling cheerily. This time, it may be he will rest, and you have opportunity to note the slightly *retroussé* aspect of the beak in its attachment to the head. The bird has stopped springing now, and stands as stolid as an Indian, save as ever and again he delivers a slow wink, upside down, with the white nictitating membrane.

Some discussion has been evoked as to the Ouzel's mode of progression in or under the water, and I was inclined myself, for some years, to believe that the bird did not use its wings, save in reaching the surface of the water when the bottom of the stream had been quitted. But the evidence seems to be against me. The fact is that the bird progresses by all means, or any. It is absolutely at home over, on, in, or under the water. Sometimes it lights upon the surface of a stream and paddles about quietly, using only its feet for propulsion. Again, or when "game" is sighted, it flounders about rapidly by means of its wings; and it is certain that in diving the wings are chiefly relied on. The breasting of a mountain stream is no longer an adventure to be entered upon circumspectly. The water is the bird's instinctive refuge

### *The American Dipper*

and I have, on several occasions, surprised flying birds who plumped instantly into the water, rather than attempt to change the direction of their flight.

The Water Ouzel feeds largely upon the larvæ of the caddis, or "May" fly, known locally as periwinkles. These are found clinging to the under surface of stones lining the stream, and their discovery requires quite a little prying and poking on the bird's part. Great numbers of the adults of this and other forms of *Ephemeroidea* fall upon the surface of the water, and are snapped up before the greedy trout can get them.

The Ouzels are also said to be destructive to fish fry, insomuch that the director of a hatchery in British Columbia felt impelled to order the destruction of all the Ouzels, to the number of several hundred, which wintered along a certain protected stream. This was a very regrettable necessity, if necessity it was, and one which might easily lead to misunderstanding between bird-men and fish-men. We are fond of trout ourselves, but we confess to being a great deal fonder of this adventuresome water-sprite.



*Taken in Fresno County*

A FULL MARKET BASKET

*Photo by the Author*

## *The American Dipper*

Apropos of visitations to hatcheries, another observer, also in British Columbia, tells how a bird one day found his way into the hatching-house through an aperture which admitted the water from a flume outside. Although the top of this hole was three inches under water, the bird, frightened by the strange surroundings, made for it instantly and so escaped.

The Ouzel is non-migratory, but the summer haunts of the birds in the mountains are largely closed to them in winter, so that they find it necessary at that season to retreat to the lower levels. This is done, as it were, reluctantly, and nothing short of the actual blanketing of snow or ice will drive them to forsake the higher waters. The bird is essentially solitary at this season, as in summer, and when it repairs to a lower station, along late in November, there is no little strife engendered by the discussion of metes and bounds. In the winter of 1895-6, being stationed at Chelan, in Washington, I had occasion to note that the same Ouzels appeared daily along the upper reaches of the Chelan River. Thinking that such a local attachment might be due to similar occupation down stream, I set out one afternoon to follow the river down for a mile or so, and to ascertain, if possible, how many bird-squatters had laid out claims along its turbulent course. In places where there was an unusually long succession of rapids, it was not always possible to decide between the conflicting interests of rival claimants, for they flitted up and down, overlapping by short flights each other's domains; but the very fact that these overlappings often occasioned sharp passages at arms, served to confirm



*Taken in Fresno County Photo by the Author*

THE AMERICAN DIPPER AT HOME

## *The American Dipper*

the conclusion that the territory had been divided, and that each bird was expected to dive and bob and gurgle on his own beat. Thus, twenty-seven birds were found to occupy a stretch of two miles.

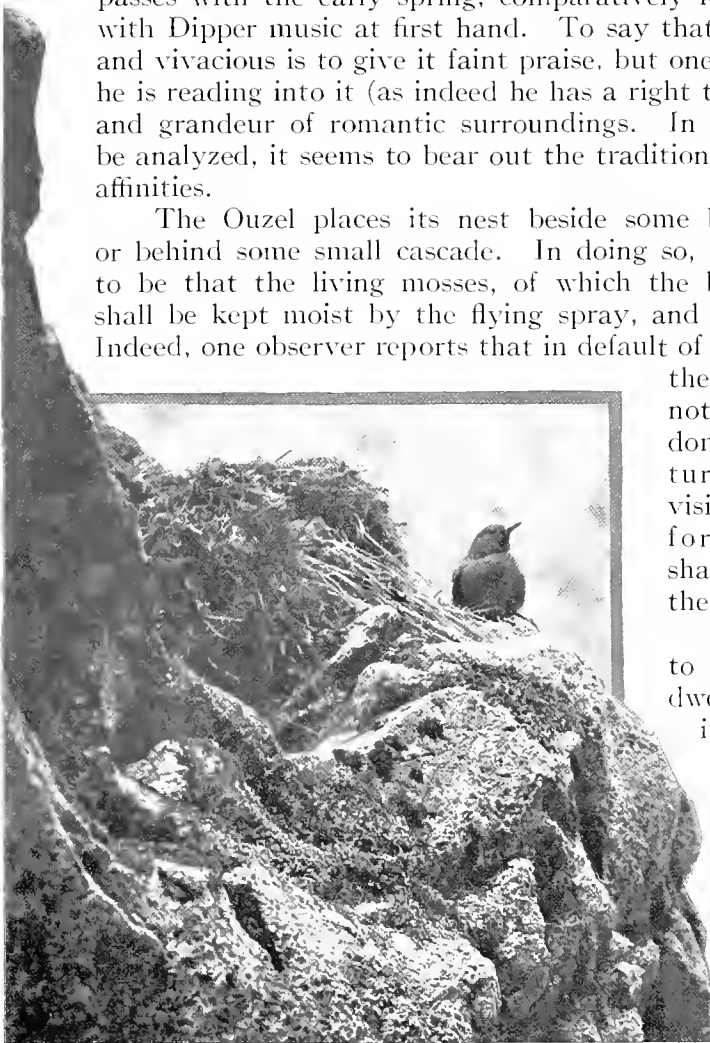
In such winter quarters as these the first courting songs are to be heard. As early as Christmas the birds begin to tune up, and that quite irrespective of weather. But their utterances, at best, are comparatively rare; and from the circumstance that their song impulse passes with the early spring, comparatively few people are acquainted with Dipper music at first hand. To say that the song is clear, strong, and vivacious is to give it faint praise, but one suspects that in listening he is reading into it (as indeed he has a right to do), much of the charm and grandeur of romantic surroundings. In so far as the strain may be analyzed, it seems to bear out the traditions of Thrasher and Thrush affinities.

The Ouzel places its nest beside some brawling stream, or near or behind some small cascade. In doing so, the chief solicitude seems to be that the living mosses, of which the bulky globe is composed, shall be kept moist by the flying spray, and so retain their greenness. Indeed, one observer reports that in default of ready-made conveniences,

the bird itself turns sprinkler, not only alighting upon the dome of its house after returning from a dip, but visiting the water repeatedly for the sole purpose of shaking its wet plumage over the mossy nest.

While one is accustomed to think of the Dipper as a dweller of the high Sierras, it is pleasant to remember how accessible some of its nearer haunts really are.

For example, take this note: "*Pasadena, May 11, 1911*: By the magic of the auto we are whisked from the lowland lake (Lake Wilson) where the morning was spent, and within 20 minutes are



*Taken in Fresno County*

FAIRLY RECONCILED

*Photo by the Author*



## *The American Dipper*

losing ourselves in the romantic depths of one of those wild cañons which pierce the San Gabriel range. We have twisted about for a mile or so following the tortuous course of a fierce little mountain torrent, and now find ourselves confronted by a wall of rock a hundred feet or so in height, down the face of which a waterfall has cut a notch to within 40 feet of the bottom. We had scarcely seated ourselves in the bottom of the glen when the Water Ouzel made her appearance, and after a few genuflections made straight for her nest, a massive ball of moss some 15 feet above the pool and 10 feet to one side of the fall proper. The shrill outcries which followed upon her arrival left no doubt as to the occupancy of the nest. We visited the spot later and found a bunch of callow young,



*Taken in the Yosemite*

BELOW VERNAL FALLS

*Photo by the Author*

too young to be worried about our appearance, but not too young to 'holler.' Their voices are amazing shrill—and good need, when we consider the roar of the waterfall hard by."

The nest figured in our illustrations was found on the South Fork of the Kings River near Kenawyers, July 11, 1913. Unfortunately, it lay in shadow on the north side of the rock, so that the photographic opportunities involving the nest itself were disappointing. When we finally

### *The American Dipper*

established ourselves with the cameras, we found the Ouzel infants with their heads thrust out of the entrance and gasping for breath, for the day was very warm. The female fed almost immediately, and it was very amusing to see her stretching to the utmost from a point below, as though the youngsters must be fed whether or no, but she wasn't coming a mite nearer the ogres than necessary. Thereafter, on the occasions of several visits, she tarried a long time without feeding, in spite of the outcries of her children only a foot away. Thenceforth, also, she insisted upon obtaining food from nearby waters as though to keep an eye on me. Several periods of comparative inactivity were spent in the offing, especially upon the pebbly shore opposite.

It was noteworthy that the male appeared at no time with the female, but after an hour's watching an exchange of offices was effected somewhere upstream, and the male took up the duties of feeding. He proved to be more venturesome and more demonstrative, and he voiced his uneasiness from time to time by singing snatches of the old-time spring song. Many of the phrases were rarely delicate and expressive, but none had the strength of mating days.

A parental function no less important than that of feeding—and this is true of most Passerine birds—is the frequent removal from the nest of the juvenile excrement. That this lowly office may be attended with as little unpleasantness as possible, kindly nature has contrived a sort of self-wrapping device, so that the excreta are voided periodically in neat bundles, each enclosed in a viscous, whitish, and not uncleanly sac, or envelope. After each feeding, or each alternate feeding, the attendant parent seizes the fresh-dropped sac, or even receives it into her bill, and takes it off to drop it at some distance. This arrangement doubtless serves a double purpose: that of sanitation, whereby the health and comfort of the offspring is assured; and that of disguising the exact neighborhood of a nest, and so diverting hostile attention, which would otherwise inevitably be attracted by the presence of droppings on the ground below. This latter precaution, at least, would seem to be unnecessary in the case of the Water Ouzel, but it is interesting to note that the parents take unusual precaution instead. Thus, when the fœcal sac is seized in the beak, the bird immediately seeks the stream and dives under water before releasing it. Whether or not this release is followed by some cleansing manipulation of the mandibles, it is impossible to say, but I should judge such to be the fact. No more favorable opportunity for the study of intimate home life exists than in the case of the Water Ouzel. And be assured that the birds are full of "human nature"; that is, they are enough like us in behavior to be understandable. So far from behaving like mere automatons, the birds show artifices, shrewdnesses, tenderesses, as well as

## *The Hermit Thrushes*

deficiencies, tempers, conceits, and waywardnesses. And above all things else, they show as between themselves those psychological differences which connote individuality. They are always bird *persons*. As such their conduct is unique, variable, unpredictable—and therefore interesting.

In some such light the incident related below<sup>1</sup> by Dr. William Frederic Badé must be regarded. The professor had an Ouzel home under observation behind a waterfall in a small canyon tributary to Kern. After a day or so of peaceful overtures under the guise of a fisherman, he set a camera near the nest. "Such close approach again excited suspicion and alarm. For considerably more than an hour they (the parents) refused to carry food to their nestlings. Then the female began to reconnoitre. Seeing that I was apparently whipping her home pool as I had whipped many another pool in the neighborhood, she decided to risk a visit to her nest with a load of tidbits. The distribution must have been made with unseemly haste, for she immediately appeared again through her doorway of spray. She was, however, in no haste to leave the neighborhood, but lit on a boulder a few feet away and warbled the equivalent of a 'Coast clear' to her lubberly husband, who was still nursing his suspicions on a distant rock in the spring. He would not come. His bill was full of May-flies. A second and a third time she signalled, and now he very circumspectly approached the cascade that hid the nest, flitting hesitatingly from rock to rock until he was almost beside her. But suddenly his fears again overcame his courage and he darted precipitately back to the place from which he had started. He wasn't going to risk his neck, not he! This churlish behavior seemed to rouse the ire of his spouse. Instantly she lit beside him and running her bill several times vigorously into his fluffy plumage she took his catch of May-flies from him and carried them to the hungry nestlings. Her example no less than the little explosion of wifely indignation seemed to recall him to a sense of his duty. My presence was soon ignored and he came and went as regularly as she."

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No. 148

### Hermit Thrush

No. 148 Alaska Hermit Thrush

A. O. U. No. 759. *Hylocichla guttata guttata* (Pallas).

**Synonym.**—KADIAK DWARF THRUSH (Ridgway).

**Description.**—*Adult:* Upperparts plain grayish brown (hair-brown to near broccoli brown), changing on rump to dull cinnamon-brown of upper tail-coverts and

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<sup>1</sup>"The Water Ouzel at Home," *Sierra Club Bulletin*, Vol. V., No. 2, p. 105.

## The Hermit Thrushes

tail; a prominent whitish orbital ring; sides of head mingled grayish brown and dull whitish; underparts dull white, clear only on belly; sides of throat, and breast, tinged with pale creamy buff; sides and flanks washed with pale grayish brown; throat, in confluent chain on side, and lower throat, chest, and upper breast, spotted with dusky or sooty, the spots narrow and wedge-shaped on lower throat, broadening and deepening on chest, fading and becoming rounded on breast. Bill drab-brown, paling on mandible basally; feet and legs brown; iris dark brown. *Winter specimens* are brighter and more strongly colored throughout. *Young birds* are streaked with buffy above, and the spotting of underparts inclines to bars on breast and sides. Length 160-188 (6.30-7.40) [Skins 154 (6.06)]; wing 88 (3.46); tail 64 (2.52); bill 12.7 (.50); tarsus 29 (1.14).

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; cinnamon of tail and upper coverts contrasting more or less with duller brown of remaining upperparts. Larger, paler, and grayer than next form.

**Nesting.**—Does not breed in California. *Nest and Eggs* as in *H. g. sequoiensis*.

**Range of *Hylocichla guttata*.**—"Northern North America and mountains of western United States; in winter southern United States, Cuba, and Mexico, to tableland of Guatemala" (A. O. U. Com.).

**Range of *H. g. guttata*.**—Western North America. Breeds in Alaska, chiefly in the Hudsonian zone, from the south-central portion south to Kadiak Island and Cross Sound. Winters south to Lower California and Mexico, and occurs during migrations east to Nevada and New Mexico.

**Distribution in California.**—A common winter resident practically throughout the State, but most common in the San Diego district.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Turdus nanus*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. i., 1843, p. 262, part (Rocky Mts. and Calif.); **Belding**, Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., ser. 2, ii., 1889, p. 63, part (biog.); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 92 (food); **Howell**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 12, 1917, p. 101 (s. Calif. islands); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Chronicle, Oct., 1921, p. 392 (manner of seeking food).

### No. 148a Dwarf Hermit Thrush

A. O. U. No. 759c. *Hylocichla guttata nanus* (Audubon).

**Synonyms.**—PACIFIC HERMIT THRUSH. SITKAN DWARF THRUSH (Ridgway).

**Description.**—"Similar to *H. g. guttata*, but coloration darker and browner, the color of back, etc., more sepia brown, upper tail-coverts more russet, tail more chestnut, and spots on chest larger and darker" (Ridgway). Adult male: wing 86.8 (3.42); tail 65.5 (2.58); bill 12.2 (.48); tarsus 28.8 (1.13).

**Recognition Marks.**—As in *H. g. guttata*.

**Nesting.**—As in *H. g. sequoiensis*.

**Range of *H. g. nanus*.**—Pacific Coast district. Breeds in Canadian and Transition zones from Cross Sound, Alaska, south to southern British Columbia. Winters south to California, Arizona, and New Mexico.

**Distribution in California.**—Common winter resident throughout the humid coastal strip, broadly defined. Diminishes in numbers south of Santa Barbara. Recorded at Palm Springs (Grinnell).

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Turdus nanus*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. i., 1843, p. 262, part; **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1909, p. 240 (s. e. Alaska; desc. nest and eggs); *ibid.*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 11, 1915, p. 170 (occurrence in Calif.; crit.).

Dwarf Hermit Thrush

About 4 1/2 lbs. size

From a semi-color painting by John G. Harter

**Dwarf Hermit Thrush**

About 4/7 life size

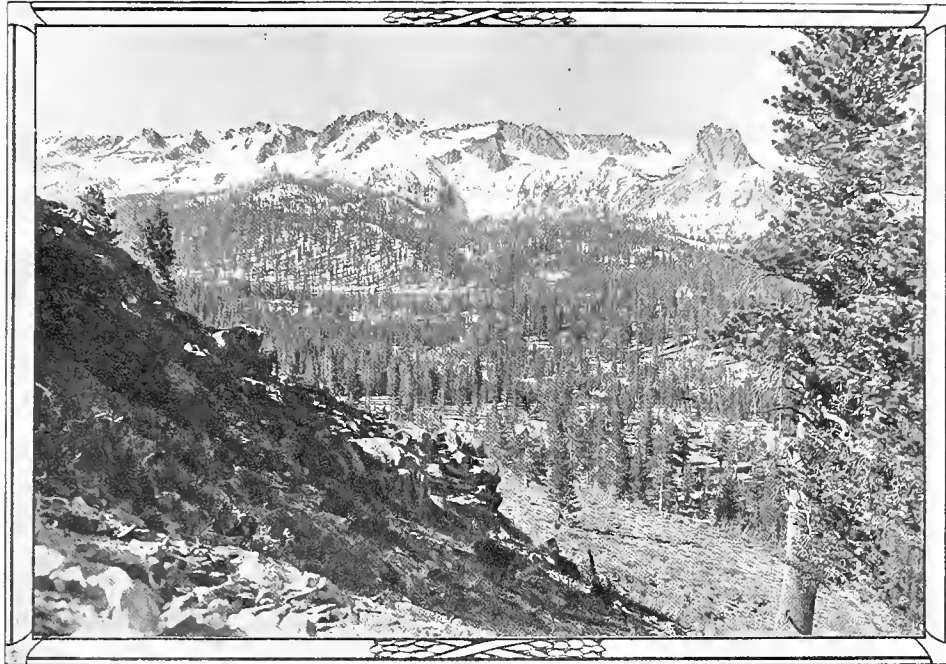
*From a water-color painting by Major Allan Brooks*







*The Hermit Thrushes*



*Taken in Mono County*

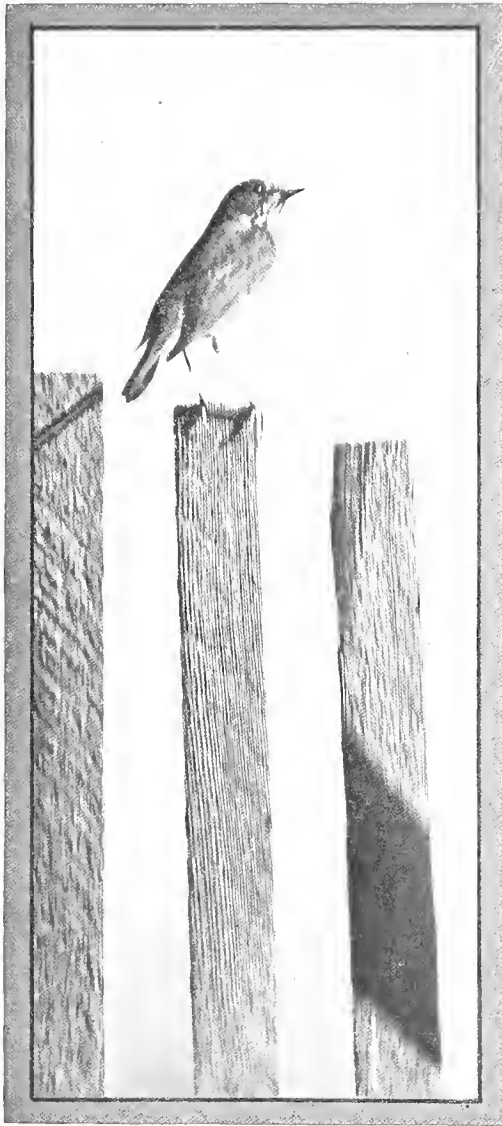
LAKE MARY AND MAMMOTH CREST

*Photo by the Author*

SIERRA HERMIT THRUSHES ARE NESTING THROUGHOUT THE TIMBERED SECTION SHOWN

"*LOS COLIBRIS*, Feb. 14, 1914:—At one of the clock and 74 degrees Fahrenheit the miracle happened—the Hermit Thrush broke his long silence and called softly to his Sierran love. Oh, voice of ecstasy and all longing! Oh, voice of aspiration and all fulfillment! Never do I hear thee but I think first of an angel choir, and only conclude after moments of hesitation that it is a voice of earth. Where hast thou suffered? and who gave thee victory? and where is that land of utter rest thou singst about? Thou art a thing apart, a seeking of the Infinite made audible, and I dare not call thee bird. More than half I am afraid of thee, as though that gentle mien might veil a soul too pure for mortal ken, and as though a glance, meant mildly, might seem all too covetous to one of spirit so exalted. It was only a reminiscent snatch, a *sotto voce* trial of that glory song which is to be, but it sounded from a live oak and it thrilled to very prickling the cockles of a heart grown chill with winter and work. Work! Oh, rather, rest! achievement! victory! Oh, crowned hero in a myrtle bower! Oh, lovers, engarlanded with arms entwined! Oh, breath of eternal summer blown from Orion's peaks! Oh, ecstasy of heaven apportioned to one mortal here! Oh,

*The Hermit Thrushes*



Taken at Los Colibris Photo by the Author  
AN EERY POSE

keeper of the heavenly voice, blow not in vain, for as many as thrill to that voice know God—or shall know Him.”

“*Los Colibris*, March 12, 1915: —The call to prayers can come from no throat sweeter or more devout than that of the Hermit Thrush. A certain pepper tree next the studio is forever consecrated as a chapel, because this gentle exile from the heavenly wilderness tried the strings of his harp and found them still resonant. Oh, sweeter than our best imaginings and purer than the resolves of a purged heart come those limpid tones of bliss. Ah! Hermit, I marvel and I tremble before you. If the Master hath taught your little heart so much of blessedness, what shall be for the Sons of God?”

To speak soberly of the Hermit Thrush as a mere bird is scarcely possible to one whose feeling for it is akin to worship. But in the name of Science we will try to tear ourselves away from the altar. We will put on our working clothes and repair to Nature’s laboratory, the great out-of-doors.

Over several thousand square leagues of west-central and southern California one will find the Dwarf Hermit Thrush (or, upon the border, the scarcely distinguishable Alaska Hermit Thrush) among the common birds of the open chaparral or the

more secluded under shrubbery of the forests. If there is shade, one sees scarcely more than a moving shape, a little browner than the earth, but scarcely outlined in the uncertain light, start up from the ground with a low *chuck* and pause for a moment on a fallen branch. Before you have made out definite characters, the bird flits to a branch a little

## *The Hermit Thrushes*

higher up and more removed, to stand motionless for a minute or so, or else to chuckle softly with each twinkle of the ready wings. By following quietly one may put the bird to a dozen short flights without once driving it out of range; and in so doing, he may learn that the tail is abruptly rufous in contrast with the olive-brown of the back, and that the breast is more boldly and distinctly spotted than is the case with the Russet-backed Thrush.

Perhaps the most prominent characteristic of the Hermit Thrush, and the one which does most to remove it from the commonplace, is the incessant twinkling of the wings—the action is so rapid and the return to the state of repose so incalculably quick that the general impression or silhouette is not thereby disturbed; but we have an added feeling of mobility or tensity on the part of the bird which gives one the impression of spiritual alertness, a certain high readiness. I tried on a time to count these twinkles, with the compensatory flirt of the tail, as the bird was hopping about on the ground in my rose garden. The movements occurred about once per second, yet oftenest in groups, and so rapidly, that not a twentieth part of the bird's time seemed so consumed.



*Taken in Inyo County*

*Photo by the Author*

A NESTING HAUNT OF THE SIERRA HERMIT THRUSH

## *The Hermit Thrushes*

The introduction of pepper trees into southern California has put the birds in our debt, and has brought them a little more into public notice. At Los Colibris (and I speak of our home acre only because it is typical) when the pepper trees were in heavy bearing, we have had as many as forty Hermit Thrushes wintering at a time. Some of these, at least, return every year and I am quite sure from certain mannerisms that one bird came four years in succession. Arriving as they do about the 20th of October, they depend chiefly upon an insect diet for a few days, but when a nippy morning comes, a month or so later, they tackle the pepper berries, and rather awkwardly at first. It is evidently new business for some of them, and they make hard work of it. One bird that I particularly observed would fly up to a bunch, hover a moment in midair, snatch a berry, and return to a more secure position. This he did repeatedly, without once endeavoring to alight on the berry cyme itself, or trying to find a place where he might eat his fill unmolested. Another dashed up and fell to eating the berries as they lay strewn upon the ground. He fed very daintily, taking care in each instance to discard the red husk, but he seemed rather pleased than otherwise with my attention, for he hopped nearer and nearer until he stood within seven feet. He attended strictly to business though, and had eaten, I should say, 16 or 18 berries; whereupon, considering meditatively, and deciding that he had enough aboard for once, he flashed away.

One of our garden faucets drips incessantly and this is the favorite drinking place of the Hermit. A bird will light on the faucet and, stooping over, will pluck the drops one by one as they fall. One morning I saw five birds at a time either waiting their turn or else making suggestive dives at the fellow who seemed to be tarrying too long at the faucet. And it was ten to one the fellow who was having his "innings" defended himself with spirited snapping of his beak.

Besides the frequent low *chuck*, or *choop choop*, with which the bird notes advance or intrusion, one hears a harsh *murry* of protest or alarm, the same with which the Sierran birds rebuke those who meddle with their nests. On several occasions, also, I have heard a sharp piercing *key'ring* note of alarm. One such I traced to a bird who was standing disconsolate and complaining, for no apparent reason, while her mate fed on the pepper berries near by. I recall having heard this sound, also, in the mountains at a time when the Thrush's nest was threatened. But those sounds are of earth and forgettable. Not so the high requiem which is Heaven's own.

*A Hermit Thrush's Minute:* Santa Barbara, Jan. 2, 1920. I had been gazing abstractedly out of the north window of my study. This placid brown ghost appeared on the ground just outside the wire fence



**n/3 Sierra Hermit Thrush**

*From a photograph by the Author*

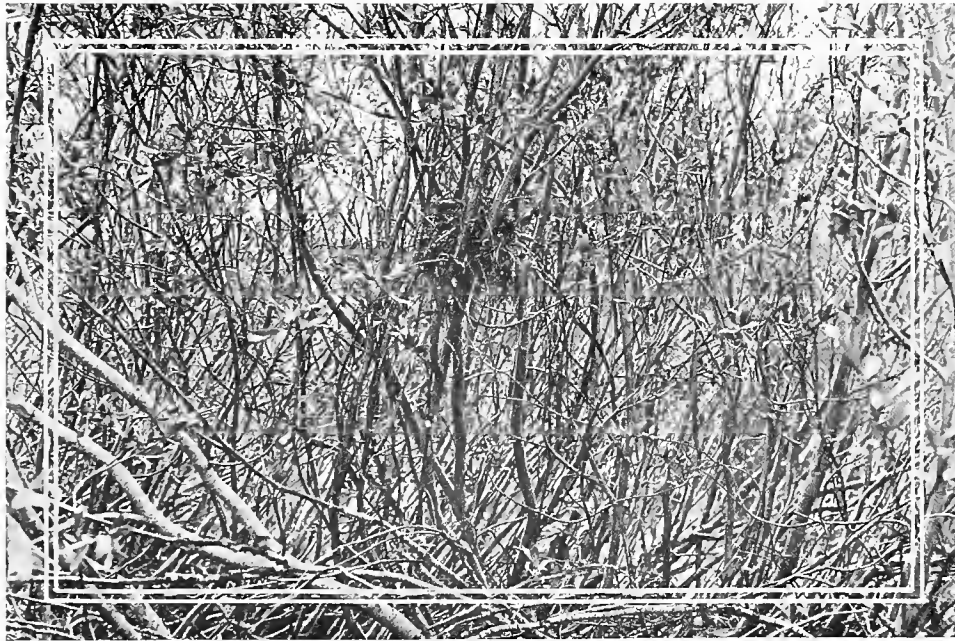
Taken in Inyo County; Alt. 11,000 feet



## *The Hermit Thrushes*

running parallel to the study, and some five feet away from it. I was startled by the sudden apparition of the white-breasted bird, streaked though he was with gentle russets. The bird could not see me through the screen, so his movements were perfectly natural and ordinary. Moreover, in the minute which I record, nothing remarkable nor in any way extraordinary occurred. It was only an average minute. Full forty seconds of the time was spent at rest, as much as the Hermit Thrush ever does rest, viz., standing and gazing about alertly, but fearlessly and composedly, and punctuating its thoughts momentarily by the wing-twinkle, which is so rapid that the eye may only guess whether the wings have really quitted the body. In one station which the bird occupied, being not over seven feet from me, I could, by closing one eye and focussing the other upon a closely placed background of greenery, note the extreme limit of the wing-motion. The tip, in each instance, traveled at least two inches from the body; yet the return was so instant and the dress so quickly composed that no detail of the readjustment could be traced.

At least thirteen seconds of the time were spent hopping from place to place—first, up from the ground beyond to a mesh in the fencing sufficiently large for the bird's passing—this involved a little struggle with interfering weed-stems to achieve the position—a momentary



*Taken in Inyo County*

NEST OF SIERRA HERMIT THRUSH IN WILLOW

*Photo by the Author*

### *The Hermit Thrushes*

pause on the wire, and a dive which had to clear the fence before the wings could be spread. There were numerous zig-zag and quartering motions across the face of the ground, each punctuated by flashing dabs at the surface, followed by a little movement of swallowing and a longer twinkle-winged pause. Once, the bird hopped up on the window-ledge where he had either spied, or suspected, the presence of a morsel. After alighting, and previous to the motion of seizure, there was a little pause, wary but dignified, in which the bird took account of the possible effect of its general action upon the neighborhood. Then an instant dab secured the prize—a spider, I think—an effort of swallowing, with just a gleam of satisfaction, a period of rest and wing-twinkling, and then a return to the ground.

The consumption of food, distributed over eight or ten episodes, did not occupy above seven seconds, and I think not above four.

It is a prosaic register of a prosaic minute, yet within that time, or within a tenth of that time, the bird managed to convey to me a sense of power, and poise, and self-sufficiency, which not even a philosopher could surpass. There was gentility and high breeding, as well as courage and discretion there. Above all, there was a sense of life, steadily controlled, yet free, flashing, electric, with boundless reserves. And think how much happens in the bird's minute! Doubtless this charming creature is geared up to a quicker time schedule than we. Its history runs a cycle while ours is groping from cog to cog. The consciousness of the bird is unimpeded by a sense of the drag of things. It is unoppressed by the mesh of events, past or impending. There is, doubtless, always present the fear thought, the contingency of evil, but for this the bird feels competent, and it pays merely the tribute of alertness. The reaction of the momentary fear is the instant joyous reassertion of freedom, with proof as instant.

The bird's physical satisfactions are, on the other hand, short-lived. It is not, after all, wholly involved nor even largely occupied in the "eternal quest" for food. The necessity of food is taken for granted, but the gratifying of appetite does not bulk large in the bird's day. Even in the minute which is interspersed with it, there is ample time for a sort of optimistic leisure, a wooing of the soul, perhaps, or at least a manifest enjoyment of outlook. Life is full and sweet and friendly. Life is free and engaging, or mildly amusing withal. If I were a bird, I think I would be a Hermit Thrush.

#### No. 148b Monterey Hermit Thrush

A. O. U. No. 759d. *Hylocichla guttata slevini* Grinnell.

**Description.**—Similar to *H. g. guttata*, but paler and grayer and much smaller.



## The Hermit Thrushes

Similar to *H. g. sequoiensis*, but much smaller (although with relatively longer tail), and slightly darker and browner. Wing, male, 84 (3.31); female, 81 (3.19); tail, male, 71 (2.795); female, 69 (2.716).

**Range of *H. g. slevini*.**—Humid coastal strip of California; south in winter to Lower California and Sonora.

**Distribution in California.**—Breeds locally in the hilly regions of the humid coastal strip from southern Siskiyou County (head of Rush Creek, July 29, 1911, Kellogg) and Humboldt County (Myers' Ranch, June 5, 1921, Mailliard) to Sur River, Monterey County. Grinnell enumerates the following localities, presumably breeding stations: Sherwood, Mendocino County; South Yolla Bolly Mountain; Gualala River and Cazadero, Sonoma County; Britano Creek and Big Basin, Santa Cruz County; Pacific Grove and Point Sur, Monterey County; to which I add three more: 12 miles northwest of Harris, Humboldt County, June 15, 1916; Bridgeville, Humboldt County, July 1, 1916; Knob, Shasta County, July 3, 1916. Has been taken during migrations at Raymond (Grinnell); Redlands (Bishop); and Pasadena (Grinnell, Daggett).

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Turdus nanus*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. x., pt. iv., 1859, p. 45 (breeding near San Francisco); *Grinnell*, Auk, vol. xviii., 1901, p. 258 (orig. desc.; type locality Point Sur, Monterey Co.); *Sheldon*, Condor, vol. x., 1908, p. 121 (Sonoma Co.; desc. nest and eggs); *Mailliard*, Condor, vol. xx., 1918, p. 192 (song.).

THERE BE THOSE who care supremely whether one bird's tail is a thirty-second of an inch longer than another bird's tail; and these tell us that the local breeding birds found from Monterey County north to Mendocino have wings a quarter of an inch shorter than birds found in the Sierras, and tails a quarter of an inch longer (think of that!) than those belonging to the Hermits of Southern Alaska. Besides that, they are "paler"! All right, it must have been a "Monterey," for it was the palest Hermit Thrush I ever saw, who suddenly flew toward me, as I strolled along a path at Los Colibris, and alighted at my feet. The action was so unusual that I glanced about quickly, seeking explanation—just in time to see a Cooper Hawk emerge from a nearby thicket, bearing a Robin in its talons.

Ah, that is the grief of the birds who take shelter with us in winter! What with neighbors' cats and Screech Owls and Cooper Hawks, we are always coming upon pathetic little heaps of brown feathers, on the ground or on the horizontal limbs of oak trees. Have a care, you varmints, these are angels you are eating! Expensive diet, I ween, for even a coddled Angora.

One of the happiest experiences of a trip through northern Mendocino County came toward the close of a day, as we were passing through a bit of unbroken fir forest, for here the "Monterey" Hermit Thrushes held forth in melodious numbers. There were no less than six birds within earshot at one time, and one had only to close the eyes to be caught up into Paradise forthwith. Certainly I heard things there "which it is not lawful for a man to utter." After the mountain heights,

## The Hermit Thrushes

I know of no more fitting spot for the hymning of the Hermit Thrush than that provided by one of our stately primeval forests with their dim aisles and lofty pillars.

### No. 148c Sierra Hermit Thrush

A. O. U. No. 759e. *Hylocichla guttata sequoiensis* (Belding).

**Synonyms.**—WESTERN HERMIT THRUSH. CASCADE HERMIT THRUSH. MOUNTAIN HERMIT.

**Description.**—Similar to *H. g. guttata*, but slightly larger and much paler and grayer. Similar to *H. g. slevini*, but decidedly larger and very slightly paler. *Young birds* are streaked with paler buffy above, and are very slightly washed with buffy below—a striking antithesis to the young of *H. g. nanus*, which are heavily tinged with ochraceous buffy below. Length adult (skins): 158 (6.22); wing, male, 92.8 (3.65); female, 90.1 (3.54); tail, male, 71.8 (2.87); female, 67.7 (2.665); bill 13.5 (.53); tarsus 28.5 (1.22).

**Recognition Marks.**—As in *H. g. guttata*, paler.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: Basally of twigs; mesially of bark-strips, grass, rootlets, leaf-skeletons, and moss (sparingly); lining, if any, of rootlets or coiled grasses. *Eggs*: 3 or 4; light niagara green, unmarked. Av. size 21.6 x 16.5 (.85 x .65). *Season*: May–July, according to altitude; one brood.

**Range of *H. g. sequoiensis*.**—Breeds in Boreal zones from southern British Columbia to high mountains of southern California; south in migrations and in winter to Lower California and Sonora.

**Distribution in California.**—Summer resident in the Boreal zones of the Sierras north to Mt. Shasta. Also found in the San Bernardino Mountains and in the Warners.

**Authorities.**—**Ridgway** (*Turdus swainsoni ustulatus*), Bull. Essex Inst., vol. vi., 1874, p. 172 (w. slope Sierra Nevada, 5000 ft.); **Belding**, Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., ser. 2, ii., 1889, p. 18 (orig. desc.; type locality, Big Trees, Calaveras Co.); *ibid.*, Bull. Cooper Orn. Club, 1, 1899, p. 21 (desc. nests, etc.); **Barlow**, Condor, vol. iii., 1901, p. 184 (Sierra Nevada; song; desc. nest); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 130 (San Bernardino Mts.; nest and eggs; meas.; crit.).

### No. 148d White Mountains Hermit Thrush

A. O. U. No. 759c, part. *Hylocichla guttata polionota* Grinnell.

**Synonym.**—GRINNELL'S HERMIT THRUSH.

**Description.**—Similar to *H. g. sequoiensis*, but much grayer ("olive-brown," Ridgway) above; entire coloration paler, or "colder." Av. of 12 males from White Mountains: wing 98.6 (3.88); tail 73.8 (2.90); bill 12.7 (.50); tarsus 29.8 (1.17).

**Range.**—So far as known, only the White Mountains, in California; but presumably also the Panamint and Inyo ranges and adjoining sections of Nevada.

**Authorities.**—**Fisher, A. K.** (*Turdus aonalaschkae auduboni*), N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, 1893, p. 146, part (White Mts.); **Grinnell**, Condor, vol. xx., 1918, p. 89 (orig. desc.; type locality, Wyman Creek, White Mts.).

HE WHO has not in his heart a separate place for the Hermit Thrush is no bird lover. He who has never heard the evening requiem of the



**East Vidette Peak**  
A Summer Home of the Sierra Hermit Thrush  
*From a photograph by the Author*



## *The Hermit Thrushes*

Hermit has missed the choicest thing which Nature in California has to offer. He who, having listened to that song, does not feel a responsive glow and a quickening of the spirit, has need of more than Nature's ministries. He needs most to find his God and to have his sins forgiven.

It is not alone for the lofty associations of Alpine meadow and Sierran grove that we prize the bird, though such choice of setting were gratifying evidence of a poetic nature. It is not for any marked vivacity, or personal charm of the singer that we praise his song; the bird is gentle, shy, and unassuming, and it is only rarely that one may even see

him. It is not that he excels in technique such conscious artists as the Catbird, the Thrasher, and the otherwise matchless Mockingbird; the mere comparison is odious. The song of the Hermit Thrush is a thing apart. It is sacred music, not secular. Having nothing of the dash and abandon of Wren or Ouzel, least of all the sportive mockery of the Western Chat, it is the pure offering of a shriven soul, holding acceptable converse with high heaven. No voice of solemn-pealing organ or cathedral choir at vespers ever hymns the parting day more fittingly than this appointed chorister of the eternal hills. Mounted on the chancel of some low-crowned fir tree, the bird looks calmly at the setting sun, and slowly phrases his worship in such dulcet tones, exalted, pure, serene, as must haunt the corridors of memory forever after.

The associations of timberline, otherwise delectable, are unalterably hallowed by the recollection of that shy, modest presence and that voice "all breathing human passion far above." And although I have dwelt



SIERRA HERMIT THRUSH

## *The Russet-backed Thrushes*

among the Sierra Hermit Thrushes for happy weeks, I never could get up any enthusiasm for making the bird a subject of scientific inquiry. I have found nests, of course, and left them. Also we may suppose that the birds



*Taken in Fresno County*

A HAUNT IN THE CENTRAL SIERRAS: ALT. 11,000

*Photo by the Author*

eat something or other. Mischa Elman is said to have a weakness for pretzels, and Galli-Curci spends a certain number of hours out of the twenty-four in bed—snores, perchance; but it is not by these things that Art is remembered or the divinity of Song made glorious. I refuse to spy upon the Hermit Thrush, or to prattle of cosmetics and preferences in cheese.

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No. 149

## Russet-backed Thrush

A. O. U. No. 758. *Hyllocichla ustulata ustulata* (Nuttall).

**Synonym.**—"WOOD THRUSH" (name properly restricted to *H. mustelina* of the East).



**Russet-backed Thrush and Nest**

*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*

Taken near San Diego

Taken in Fresno County





## The Russet-backed Thrushes

**Description.**—*Adults*: Above olive-brown (bright sepia—not nearly so red as the name “russet” would indicate), substantially uniform; a conspicuous orbital ring of pale buff; sides of head warm buffy, mingled or streaked with olive-brown; chin, throat, and chest buff (or lightening to buffy white toward chin); sides of throat and entire chest with triangular marks of deep olive-brown, smaller and narrower on throat, larger and broader (sector-shaped) posteriorly; breast, especially on sides, transversely spotted with light brown; sides and flanks heavily marked with brownish; remaining underparts white. Bill blackish, paling basally on mandible; feet and legs brown; iris brown. *Winter specimens* are brighter, more deeply tinged with buff before, and with under tail-coverts buffy. *Young birds* are more or less marked and streaked with buffy and tawny above on a rich sepia ground, and the markings of underparts are mostly transverse; underparts, save on middle of belly, heavily tinged with buffy. Length 165.1-190.5 (6.50-7.50); wing 97 (3.83); tail 73 (2.87); bill 13.7 (.54); tarsus 28 (1.10).

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; uniform olive-brown above; heavy spotting and buffy wash on chest; sides of head and eye-ring buffy; warm brown above, as compared with *H. u. swainsoni*.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: Of twigs, grasses, and macerated vegetation, or else chiefly of moss with inner matrix of dead leaves and leaf-skeletons, laid in wet; no special lining. *Eggs*: 4, rarely 5 (in these latitudes); light bluish green (glaucous green to pale niagara green, or else grayer), spotted rather uniformly but sparingly, sometimes diffusely, with reddish brown (walnut-brown to russet). Av. size (of southern specimens): 22.4 x 16.5 (.88 x .65). *Season*: May–July; one brood.

**Range of *Hylocichla ustulata*.**—North America; breeding chiefly north of the United States, but also in the mountains and in the Pacific Coast States; wintering from southern Mexico, south to Brazil, Argentina, and Bolivia.

**Range of *H. u. ustulata*.**—Breeds in the Pacific Coast district from Juneau, Alaska, south to San Diego. Winters from Vera Cruz and Guatemala south to northern South America, from British Guiana to Ecuador.

**Distribution in California.**—Abundant and of general distribution during migrations. Common summer resident along timbered streams of Upper Sonoran and Transition zones west of the Sierran divide. Breeds south to Poway, in San Diego County. More sparingly distributed on the slopes of the Sierras and in the northern humid coastal belt.

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Turdus solitarius*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 2, ii., 1853, p. 265 (Calif.); **Ridgway**, Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., 1869, p. 129 (relationships of *ustulatus* discovered through character of eggs); **Belding**, Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., ser. 2, ii., 1889, p. 57 (range, migr., song, nesting); **Oberholser**, Auk, vol. xvi., 1899, p. 23 (syst.; orig. desc. *Hylocichla ustulata oedica*, type locality Santa Barbara); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 86 (food); **J. Mailliard**, Condor, vol. xx., 1918, p. 192 (song).

THE RUSSET-BACKED THRUSH is the happy incarnation of the underforest, the authentic dryad of the Farther West; for wherever shaded waters empty into the blue Pacific, the shifting browns of this bird's upperparts melt and blend with the tints of fallen leaves, dun roots, and the shadows of tree-boles cast on the brown ashes of fallen comrades. Not content, either, with such protective guarantee, this gentle spirit clings to

## *The Russet-backed Thrushes*



RUSSET-BACKED THRUSH

power. This song, too, shines by happy absence of comparable merit throughout most of its range; and when we recall that there are twenty Russet-backs sounding in the lowlands to one Hermit on the heights, we need not begrudge to this poet of the people his mede of praise.

There dwelt once in that high-favored city of Berkeley a gentle artist who spent the evening of her life painting sunsets. Her studio was tucked back in a little copse of mingled evergreens and shrubbery, a haven of rest for which the formal front on Piedmont Avenue left one

cover, and reveals itself only as a flitting shade and a haunting voice. Now and then a brown gleam does cross some open space in the forest, but the action is hasty and the necessity much regretted.

Those who have not heard or clearly distinguished the incomparable Hermit are likely to give to this bird a high place for its song. There is nothing, perhaps, very remarkable about the song as music, but when it comes from the cool twilight depths of a fir forest, with echoing overtones and subtle whisperings of peace, one must confess its spell. Or when at evening the bird takes a station on the alders, such as overlook some murmuring stream, and lets his voice blend with the waters, or else trail off into suggestive mysteries, or again, speak out with startling distinctness, like an appraising conscience, there is no denying either its sweetness or its

### *The Russet-backed Thrushes*

quite unprepared. Here the Sunset Lady shared bits from her table with her birds, and here she painted her soul into the sunsets, such sunsets as made the breath of the beholder catch,—convincing, uplifting, emancipating sunsets. And here one day the gates of the sunset parted to admit their gentle votary. The bird-man heard and could not come; but months later he came to pay his homage; and lo! from the thicket beside the door came the voice of this thrush, tender, passionate, thrilling, and with such full, rich, organ-tones as he had never heard before. He stood with bared head, and as one entranced, for it seemed as if the soul of the Sunset Lady had found voice again,—a vocal sunset. Surely, not even she could have asked a fitter requiem.

To analyze or revocalize the song of the Russet-backed Thrush is not exactly easy, either; so much depends upon the singer's nearness or remoteness, and so much more upon the resonance of the surrounding



*Taken in  
Santa Cruz County*

*Photo by  
the Author*

NEST AND EGGS OF RUSSET-BACKED THRUSH IN SITU

## *The Russet-backed Thrushes*

woods. I am persuaded that the *weeloo weelo weelooee* of this bird, heard ecstatically in the overarched twilight, would be inglorious coming from the top of a fence-post in the full glare of day. Nuttall represented the song as "*wit-wit, t'villia-t'villia*"; and a northern observer has left "*Holsey, govendy govindy govendy*" as his contribution. Where doctors disagree so radically, we may please ourselves. The minor notes are, fortunately, more distinctive, as well as more frequent, and by these we may trace the bird's every movement without recourse to sight. *Quit*, or *hwit*, is a soft whistled note of inquiry and greeting, by which the birds keep in constant touch with each other, and which they are nowise disinclined to use in conversations with strangers. At the friendly call, the Thrush comes sidling over toward you through the brush, until you feel that you could put your hand on it if you would; but the bird remains invisible, and says, *quit, quit*, with some asperity, if you disregard the *convenances*.

A longer call-note, of sharper quality, *queee*, may be as readily imitated, although its meaning in the bush is uncertain. The bird has also a spoken note, a sort of happy purring, which I call the *coordaddy* cry. In this the *daddy* notes are given in from one to six syllables, and are spoken "trippingly on the tongue."

Recalling again the *queee* note, we are surprised to find that it is the commonest sound heard during migrations. At midnight when a solemn hush is over all besides, this weird note comes down from the sky at any height, from every angle, a greeting *en passant* from the voyageurs, the tenderest, the most pathetic, the most mysterious voice of Nature. There are a dozen variations of pitch and tone, *quééé*, *quee*, *kooo*, etc., but the theme is one, and the quality is that of the Russet-backed Thrush. Now while it is almost incredible that any one species should so abound to the exclusion of all others, or that one alone should speak while others flit by silently, it is more incredible that there should be a language, or even a call-note, used in common by different species of migrants.<sup>1</sup> We must conclude, therefore, that the Russet-backed Thrushes (and their compeers, the Olive-backs, further East) are a long time passing, and that their aggregate numbers are prodigious.

Much, also, of the apparent difference in the call-notes of these night birds is explained when it is remembered that they are reaching us from different angles. Thus, the *quee* of a rapidly approaching bird is raised sharply and shortened, *quêê*; while the same voice, in passing, falls to a ghostly *kwoo*, at least a musical third below. It is, perhaps, needless to add that practiced lips may join this mystic chorus and hold delightful

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<sup>1</sup>The author has himself advanced this theory (see "Birds of Washington," p. 233), but now abandons it as lacking either evidence or probability.

## The Russet-backed Thrushes

converse with these brothers of the air,—may, indeed, provoke them to trebled utterance in passing.

Russet-backed Thrushes are among the later arrivals of the season. Those which nest in southern latitudes, however, arrive first; and others bound for Alaskan ports are sometimes passing over their heads while the local birds are sitting on their nests. Late May, therefore, is the nesting month for such as remain at the lower levels; but June nests are the rule in Transition areas, and July nests in the upper mountain valleys.

In home building this Thrush makes no effort at nest concealment, trusting rather to the seclusion of its haunts. The materials which enter into the construction of the nest are themselves in a measure protective, especially in those numerous instances in which the exterior is composed entirely of green moss. At other times, twigs, bark-strips, and grasses are used; but the two things which give character to the nest of this Thrush are the mud-cup, or matrix, of mud and leaf-mold, and the lining of dried leaf-skeletons. I have surprised a mother Russet at her task of cup-moulding, and verily her bib was as dirty as that of any child making mud pies. For although the beak serves for hod and trowel, the finishing touches, the actual moulding, must be accomplished by pressure of the bird's breast.

In favored regions the nests of this Thrush are excessively common. A small party of us, working together, found twelve in two hours on the Pajaro River bottom. During a season's nesting in the northern humid belt (of Washington) Mr. D. E. Brown located about a hundred sets of the Russet-backed Thrush, taking no account of nests in other stages of occupation. In distance from the ground, nests varied from six inches to forty feet, although a four or five-foot elevation was about the average.



*Taken in Oregon  
Photo by Bohlman and Finley*

MOTHER RUSSET AND HER BROOD

## *The Russet-backed Thrushes*

Nests were found in thickets, where they were supported by the interlacing of branches, or else saddled upon the inclined stems of vine maples, or in fir trees. In the last-named places, nests might be set against the trunk on a horizontal limb, but were more often at some distance from it. The birds were very sensitive about molestation before eggs were laid, and would desert a nest in process of construction on the merest suspicion that a stranger had looked into it. After deposition, however, the mother Thrush was found to be very devoted to her charges, and great confidence was often engendered by carefully considered advances.

As an illustration of the difficulties of identification which beset the earlier ornithologists, we cannot cite a better instance than that offered by Dr. Cooper's outstanding records of the nesting and distribution of this Thrush. Under the head of *Turdus nannus* Audubon, now recognized as our Dwarf Hermit Thrush, *Hylocichla guttata nanus* (Audubon), Cooper describes<sup>1</sup> the nesting of our Russet-backed Thrush as he knew it at Santa Cruz, the eggs being "pale bluish green speckled with cinnamon brown, chiefly at the larger end." Under *Turdus ustulatus* Nuttall, known as "The Oregon Thrush," the Doctor says:<sup>2</sup> "This more northern species is the exact counterpart of *T. nanus* in habits. I found their nests north of the Columbia, about the middle of June, 1854, containing four or five bluish white eggs, thickly speckled with brown." Of *Turdus swainsoni* Cabanis (i.e., our Olive-backed Thrush) he says:<sup>3</sup> "The eggs are blue, with numerous reddish spots, and nests and eggs indeed are scarcely to be distinguished from those of *T. ustulatus*!" Yet in 1860 he had elsewhere recorded<sup>4</sup> of *Turdus ustulatus* Nuttall, "The eggs, unlike those of most thrushes, are white, spotted thickly with brown, and four or five in number." Possibly the good doctor had encountered a freak set; but if so, it must remain the envy of all oölogists.

### No. 149a Olive-backed Thrush

A. O. U. No. 758a. *Hylocichla ustulata swainsoni* (Tschudi).

**Synonyms.**—SWAINSON'S THRUSH. EASTERN OLIVE-BACK. ALMA'S THRUSH (*H. u. alma* Oberholser, disallowed by A. O. U. Committee).

**Description.**—*Adults*: Similar to *H. ustulata*, but grayer and more olivaceous; "color of upperparts varying from olive to grayish hair-brown in summer, from deep olive to slightly brownish olive in winter"; ground-color of underparts lighter buffy (yellowish buff or creamy buff); sides and flanks grayish instead of brownish olive. *Young birds* are decidedly darker, more blackish, above, with paler, less ochraceous, streaks; underparts with less extensive but more blackish markings; also much more

<sup>1</sup> Geological Survey of California, Ornithology, Vol. I., Land Birds, edited by S. T. Baird from the MS. and notes of J. G. Cooper, 1870, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Rep. Proc. R. R. Surv., Vol. XII., Book II., 1860, p. 171.

## The Russet-backed Thrushes

extensively white, with lighter, more creamy-buffy, wash on breast and sides. Size of last, save for wing, which averages mm 3 longer.

**Recognition Marks.**—As in preceding; grayer above, lighter buffy below.

**Nesting.**—*Nest* and *Eggs* indistinguishable from those of typical form, *H. u. ustulata*.

**Range of *H. u. swainsoni*.**—North and South America. Widely distributed during migrations save along Pacific coastal strip. Breeds chiefly north of the United States nearly to the limit of trees, from northwestern Alaska to Newfoundland; south in the mountains of the West to east-central California and Colorado; and in the East to Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Winters from southern Mexico through South America to Argentina.

**Distribution in California.**—Sparingly resident in summer in the mountains of the northeastern plateau section, and along the east slopes of the Sierra Nevada, at least to Mono Lake (June 6, 1919) and Mammoth Camp (June 11–July 5, 1919).

**Authorities.**—**Belding** (*Turdus ustulatus swainsonii*), Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., ser. 2, ii., 1889, p. 60 (biog., song, etc.); **Fisher**, N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, 1893, p. 145 (Panamint Mts.); **Grinnell**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 11, 1915, p. 170 (status in Calif.); **Swarth**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xxiv., 1922, p. 301 (life hist., desc. nest and eggs, etc.; n. British Columbia).

THE MORE OPEN WOODS and more abundant suns of the interior districts effect that reduction of color in the "burnt" Thrush, which henceforth characterizes the species clear through to the Atlantic. It would be idle to trace in detail all accompanying changes of manner and habit, but we can hardly fail to note the improved quality of the Olive-backed's song. This is most nearly comparable to that of the Wilson Thrush, and has something of the same rolling, vibrant quality. It is, however, less prolonged and less vehement. It may or may not retain the liquid l's, but it discards outright the rich r's which the Veery rolls under his tongue like sweet morsels; and the pitch of the whole rises slightly, perhaps a musical third, as the volume of sound diminishes toward the end: *We-e-o, we-e-o, we-o, we-o, weee.*

The Olive-backed Thrush was recorded first by the M. V. Z. party of 1911, from the Warner Mountains, where I, also, found them breeding in the summer of 1912. Whether or not this race overlaps *ustulata* in its distribution further west, has not been determined, but even if it did so, it would probably be found that the two forms are maintaining their distinctness, as they are known to do elsewhere. Indeed, it is not even certain that *ustulata* and *swainsoni*, although resembling each other so closely, do really occupy a conspecific relation. Perhaps the two groups were separated, and so differentiated, during the Ice Age, and have not reunited within the brief time since elapsed.

## Robin

[No. 150 Eastern Robin

A. O. U. No. 716. *Planesticus migratorius migratorius* (Linnaeus).

**Synonyms.**—AMERICAN ROBIN. MIGRATING THRUSH.

**Description.**—*Adult male in spring and summer:* Head black, interrupted by white of chin and white with black streaks (or nearly confluent black stripes) of throat; eyelids and a supraloral spot white; tail blackish, the outermost pair of rectrices broadly tipped with white (more broadly on inner web), the succeeding pair narrowly white-tipped; flight-feathers dusky, the edges of outer webs ashy; remaining upperparts grayish slate, sometimes light'y glossed with olivaceous; below,—breast, sides, upper belly, and lining of wings, cinnamon rufous (rich tawny to—in extreme cases—Sanford's brown), the feathers of belly white-skirted in early spring; lower belly and crissum white, touched irregularly with slate. Bill yellow with blackish tip; feet black with yellow soles. *Adult female in spring and summer:* Similar to male, but dull; the black of head, especially, veiled by brownish. *Adults in winter:* Upperparts tinged with brown; the rufous feathers, especially on belly, with white skirtings. *Immature in first fall plumage:* Much like adult, but pileum olive-brown (of the same shade as back), finely streaked with black; throat white, more finely and sparingly streaked with blackish; white of belly and skirtings more extensive; the rufous of breast and sides clouded with pale slaty. *Nestlings* are streaked above, especially on back, with pale buffy, and spotted with terminal black; below, throat and belly immaculate white; crissum chiefly dusky with mesial white streaks, the breast and sides more or less washed with pale tawny or ochraceous buff, and heavily spotted with black, the spots tending to fall into bars on the sides. Length of males about 254 (10.00); wing 129 (5.08); tail 95.3 (3.75); bill 19.8 (.78).

**Recognition Marks.**—"Robin" size; cinnamon-rufous breast; the "corners" of the tail conspicuously white-tipped, as distinguished from *P. m. propinquus*.

**Nesting.**—Does not breed in California. *Nest* and *Eggs* as in *P. m. propinquus*, save that eggs number 4 or 5, sometimes 6.

**Range of *Planesticus migratorius*.**—North America, breeding from Cape San Lucas, the Mexican plateau, and the northern portion of the Gulf States north to the limit of trees.

**Range of *P. m. migratorius*.**—Eastern and northern North America westward nearly to the Rocky Mountains and northwestward to valley of Kowak River, in Alaska; breeds from the southern Alleghenies, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Iowa, etc., northward; winters in Gulf States; south irregularly across the Western States during migration.

**Supposed Occurrence in California.**—Believed to be casual during migrations—imperfectly made out.

**Remark.**—The situation regarding the Robin in the West is evidently more complicated than we used to suppose. The common stock, *P. migratorius*, was originally, as in so many cases, divided in its northward advance by the tongue of the Cordilleras, the western element losing in its progress the white corners of the tail, and suffering to some extent a bleaching of the rufous. This latter tendency was disguised from our eyes by the frequent occurrence in winter of dark-breasted birds; but the



## The Western Robin

recognition of *P. m. caurinus*, a resaturated form from Vancouver Island and broadly contiguous mainland territory, has made us aware that resident birds of the Southwest are really lighter-breasted.

Moreover, the presence of white in the tail of certain western birds is scarcely the casual factor we had thought. Variable this character undoubtedly is, but its decided presence is never found in southwestern breeding birds. The case seems, rather, to be analogous to that of the *Dendroica auduboni-coronata* group: The more aggressive eastern form passing in a northwesterly direction (along the line of the retreating ice-sheet?), has long since outstripped its western rival in the race to northwestern Alaska. Now instead of following the ancestral line of autumnal retreat through Saskatchewan and Manitoba, *P. m. migratorius*, like *D. c. coronata*, has begun to cut "cross-lots," and even to go straight south (like *D. c. hooveri*) in search of a winter home. At any rate, I so construe the presence in winter of certain of our white-tailed dark-breasted birds which are found in Californian collections.]

**Addendum.**—At the earnest representation of Mr. H. S. Swarth, and since there is not time to review the evidence upon the eve of going to press, I am bracketing the treatment of the Eastern Robin. Mr. Swarth holds that all "white-cornered" birds in California are to be accounted for by individual variation in *P. m. propinquus*. He may be right, and I am willing that the foregoing treatment should be regarded as an expanded "hypothetical" out of place; but I am quite confident that Mr. Bowles and I have encountered flocks of pure *P. m. migratorius* stock, during the migrations, in western Washington. They may have cut in at a point further north, but the theory of a Californian flight line deserves consideration.

### No. 150a Western Robin

A. O. U. No. 761a. **Planesticus migratorius propinquus** (Ridgway).

**Description.**—Similar to *P. migratorius*, but white on inner web of outer rectrices much reduced, or wanting; gray of upperparts grayer and more olivaceous, more sharply contrasting with black of head; cinnamon-rufous of underparts averaging paler; wing, tail, and tarsus slightly longer. *In winter* upperparts more distinctly tinged with olivaceous. Length of males about 260.3 (10.25); wing 140 (5.52); tail 105 (4.13); bill 20.3 (.80); tarsus 34.1 (1.34). Females slightly smaller.

**Recognition Marks.**—"Robin" size; cinnamon-rufous below—everyone knows the Robin—without white on "corners" of tail, as distinguished from *P. m. migratorius*.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A thick-walled but shapely bowl of mud (rarely, felted vegetable fibers instead), set about with twigs, leaves, string, and trash, and lined with fine grass-stems; placed anywhere in trees, or variously, but usually at moderate heights. *Eggs*: 3 or 4, rarely 5; bluish green (niagara green to light niagara green), unmarked. Av. of 21 eggs from Eureka 27.9 x 20.6 (1.10 x .81); index 73. *Season*: April 15–July 10; two broods.

**Range of *P. m. propinquus*.**—Western United States, Mexico, and southern British Columbia (interiorly). Breeds from southern British Columbia and central Montana south to southern California, Jalisco, Oaxaca, and Vera Cruz, and from the western borders of the Great Plains west to the Pacific, save in the extreme northwest humid coastal district. Winters irregularly in regions of milder temperatures, practically throughout its range, and south to highlands of Guatemala.

**Distribution in California.**—Probably largely resident *within* the State: in summer at the upper levels; in winter irregularly but abundantly at the lower levels. Breeds in Boreal and Transition zones throughout the Sierras, and at lower levels

## The Western Robin

contiguous to them, especially along their eastern base, even down to recognized Lower Sonoran areas (as at Lone Pine, Inyo County, June 16 and 19, 1911; George Creek, Inyo County, May 19, 1919). Also in the Sierra Madre and San Bernardino Mountains, Mt. Pinos, the Warner Mountains, the Trinity Mountains, and throughout the north-western humid coastal strip, south (at least) to San Geronimo in Marin County. Birds destined to nest at the higher mountain levels often linger through April, or even May, at the lower levels, and so establish a false presumption of breeding (e. g., Sacramento, May 30, 1912). In winter irregularly abundant at lower levels, even upon the deserts,—range at this season evidently being determined by supply of berries or edible fruits. Casual (?) on the Channel Islands.

**Authorities.**—**Vigors** (*Turdus migratorius*), Zool. Beechey's Voy., 1839, p. 17 (Monterey); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 93 (food); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 132 (San Bernardino Mts.; nest and eggs, habits, etc.); **H. E. Hansen**, Condor, vol. xviii., 1916, p. 170, fig. (nesting in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco); **Howell**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 12, 1917, p. 101 (occurrence on s. Calif. islands).

### No. 150b Northwest Robin

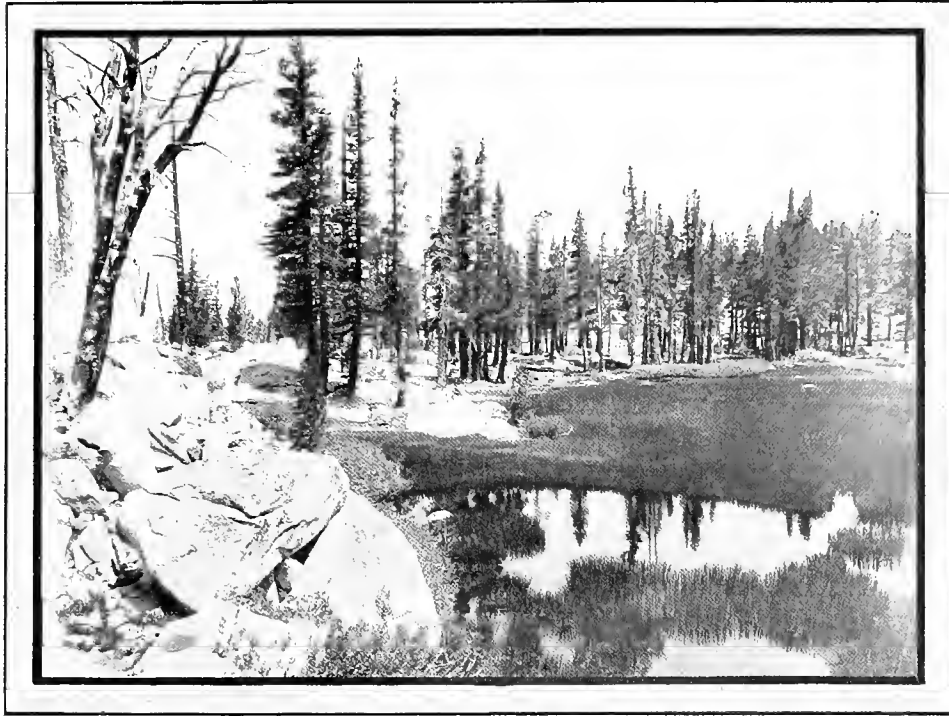
A. O. U. No. 761a, part. **Planesticus migratorius caurinus** Grinnell.

**Description.**—Similar to *P. m. migratorius*, but with white on tips of outer rectrices reduced or wanting (when present, often pale slaty); the rufous of underparts (in males) less variable and averaging darker (Sanford's brown or amber-brown). *Young birds* especially averaging darker, both as to extent of black in upperparts and the strength of cinnamon-rufous of underparts (nearest mars yellow or raw sienna, but a little grayer and darker); the throat usually tinged with ochraceous. Likewise, similar to *P. m. propinquus*, but richer and darker and averaging a little smaller.

**Remark.**—The inclusion of this form as a bird of California is largely presumptive, and is based on the fact that many winter birds and early spring migrants are much darker-breasted than are the breeding birds of our own mountains. Specifically, a specimen, a male #19709 of the Mus. Vert. Zool. series, taken by Dr. Grinnell at Tracy, March 9, 1911, is as dark as any specimen from Vancouver Island. On the other hand, Robins are known to winter irregularly north to British Columbia, and only successful banding can establish the fact of their California range beyond a doubt.

**Presumptive Range.**—The Pacific Northwest, breeding in the Sitka district of Alaska, south at least to Vancouver Island and northwestern Washington. Winters from southern British Columbia south irregularly (?) to California.

“*JIP, jip—Dzip, dzip—Drick, jick—dink, dink.*” However that earnestly protesting note of the Robin may vocalize itself to your ears, you know what I mean. And you know, within one, of what *it* means—either a cat skulking under the lilac bush, or else a small boy toiling painfully up the stem of an apple tree to see what that mud cup has got in it. Dear, familiar sound, homely expletive, none the less sweet because it is meant to be upbraiding. Dear because familiar, and because its shrill staccato calls up the vernal scenes of childhood. We will hasten to the rescue, of course, but we will chuckle as we go. “S-cat, Pussy; don't you know better than to scare our Robins? If you didn't belong



*Taken in Fresno County*

A BREEDING HAUNT IN THE SIERRAS

*Photo by the Author*

to my good neighbor X—, I suppose I'd have to shoot you." Or, "Well, young man, wha' d'yuh think y're doin' there? 'Robins' aiggs,' hey? Well, don't you know better'n to scare the poor birdies like that? Come down out o' there this minute. The idea!" (Chorus of inner protests at the rank injustice of this method of dealing with childish curiosity, and much mental panorama of oval objects done in "Robin's egg blue"—say about a thousand of them. Ha, this ineluctable oölogical propensity—common to men and monkeys! It is to laugh!)

"Everybody knows Robin. He is part and parcel of springtime, chief herald, chief poet, and lord high reveler of that joyful season. It is a merry day when the first flock of Robins turns itself loose on the home landscape. There is great bustle and stir of activity. Some scurry about to note the changes wrought by winter, some wrestle with the early and unsophisticated worm, while others voice their gladness from the fence-post, the gable, the tree-top, anywhere. Everywhere are heard interjections of delight, squeechings and pipings of ardent souls, and no end of congratulations over the home-coming.

## The Western Robin



Taken in Oregon

Photo by  
W. L. Finley

BACK FROM MARKET

“Robin has cast in his lot with ours, for better or for worse. Our lawns are his lawns, our shade trees were set on purpose to hold his homely mud-cup, and he has undertaken with hearty good will the musical instruction of our children. He serves without pay—Oh, a cherry now and then, but what of that? The fruit-grower never had a more useful hired man; and it is written: ‘Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.’ I wonder if we realize how much of life’s good cheer and fond enspiriting we owe to this familiar bird.” (The Birds of Washington.)

All of which foregoing is only partially true of California. We have brought with us, most of us, our eastern prejudices and associations, just as our forebears did theirs from Merry England, and we cling to prepossessions, half unwittingly, in much the same fashion. The original Robin Redbreast (*Erithacus rubecula*) is a much smaller bird (albeit still a Thrush), but the colonists hailed the first gleam of friendly “red” which shone from the breast of this new world thrush, and transferred their affections promptly to the new-found “Robin.” And Robin has lived up to expectations well enough to deserve still further indulgence in California, where he is both less well-known and less well-behaved. For save in favored sections of the Sierran uplands, the northeastern plateau region, and the humid coast belt south to, and lately including, San Francisco, the Robin is not the familiar of childhood nor the poet of common day. For the most part the bird nests in our cooler mountain climate in “Transition” or “Canadian” faunal zones, even up to the limit of trees, so that it is only as an irregular winter visitant—shy, silent, fugitive, but often excessively numerous—that urban California knows the Robin. Only the stout-hearted Sierran, the prospector, or the semi-professional camper-out knows the Western Robin as he deserves to be known.

Dr. Grinnell gives the picture of Robin in the Yosemite Valley:<sup>1</sup> “Robins hop familiarly along the paths between the rows of tents, or dash in heedless flight close past the many people. Often a robin will

<sup>1</sup> Sierra Club Bulletin, Vol. 8, June, 1911, pp. 118-124.

## *The Western Robin*

permit an approach as close as ten feet, especially when foraging on the greensward of the meadows among the tethered ponies. At times during the day we hear bursts of robin melody. But at early morning and late evening the robin chorus pervades far and wide what would otherwise be a nearly perfect stillness. The trite word 'carol' to my mind and ear describes the robin's song satisfactorily; and several robins caroling at once furnish a type of bird music unapproached in pleasing quality by any other species I have ever heard."

The robin's song in its common form is too well known to most of us to require particular description, and too truly music to lend itself well to syllabic imitation. There is something homey and substantial about it which makes us give thanks for common things, and accept without analysis—as we do salt and sunshine and breath of orange blossoms.

Robin conceives many passages which are too high for him, and these he hums inaudibly, or follows in silent thought, like a tenor with a cold. When the theme reaches his compass again, he resumes, not where he left off but at the end of the unheard passage. It must be confessed, however reluctantly, that the song of the Western Robin is a little more subdued in character than that of the Eastern. The bird is a little less devoted to his art, and the total volume of sound yielded by any one chorus has never equalled, in my experience, that of a similar effort in the East.



*Taken in Idaho*

*Photo by H. J. Rust*

NEST AND EGGS OF WESTERN ROBIN

## *The Western Robin*

When the Robin is much given to half-whispered notes and strains unusually tender, one may suspect the near presence of his fiancée. If



*Taken in Idaho*

A PROMISING LAD

*Photo by Rust*

you are willing to waive the proprieties for a few moments you will hear low murmurs of affection and soft blandishments, which it would tax the art of a Crockett to reproduce. And again, nothing can exceed the sadness of a Robin's lament over a lost mate. All the virtues of the deceased are set forth in a coronach of surpassing woe, and the widower declares himself forever comfortless. It is not well, of course, to inquire too particularly as to the duration of this bereaved state—we are all human.

The Robin is an ardent lover, no doubt of that; and by the same token he is willing to back up his claims against all comers. Before Robins have become common about the streets and yards of a mountain village, partners have usually been selected; but there still remains for many of the cocks hard-contested battles before peaceful possession is assured. These are not sham fights either; a Robin will fight a hated rival beak and claw, till he is either thoroughly winded or killed outright.

And he is no less brave as the head of a family or as an upright neighbor. No other protestations, as of invaded nesting rights, have quite the moral earnestness of Robin's. (I should hate to gather Robins' eggs for a living!)

## *The Western Robin*

Once, at Goose Lake, while the bird-man was perched aloft, with cameras, awaiting the return of a reluctant Vireo, a terrific commotion broke out in a big thorn bush. I looked to see a tumbling mass of birds, but could distinguish nothing until the contestants hit the ground and fell apart for a tense moment, whereupon I made out a Sierra Junco, a Sparrow Hawk, and two Robins. The Junco stirred first; the Sparrow Hawk took after him; but the Robins joined pursuit with such instant vigor that the Junco was able to drop out unnoticed. The Robins chased that Sparrow Hawk, like avenging furies, for at least a hundred yards, and I'll wager the would-be assassin was glad to get away. Your Robin Redbreast has one of the bravest hearts that beats.

At nesting time the Robin displays little caution, its homely mud-walled cup not being withdrawn from the most familiar observation. Indeed, as in the case of the accompanying illustration (of an Eastern Robin), the bird appears to court notoriety. From five to fifteen feet is the usual elevation, but nests are sometimes found in a pine or fir tree up to sixty feet. When civilization has been frankly adopted—and the tendency to “come out of the woods” is very marked, as the records of recent



*Taken in Michigan*

*From a Photograph, Copyright 1908, by L. G. Linkletter*  
THE ROBIN'S NEST

## *The Western Robin*

nesting in Golden Gate Park bear witness—window sills and beams of porches, barns and outbuildings are favorite places; and in default of these, brush-piles or log-heaps will do.

The mud used in construction is, of course, carried in the beak. Arrived at the nest with a beakful of mud, the mother bird drops her load, or plasters it loosely on the inside of the cup. Then she hops into the nest, settles as low as possible, and begins to kick or trample vigorously with her feet. From time to time she tests the smoothness or roundness of the job by settling to it with her breast, but the shaping is altogether accomplished by the peculiar tedder action of her feet.

Western Robins do not usually nest twice, although they may venture to do so where their relations to man are thoroughly dependable. Three eggs is the rule for the Western Robin; four is unusual, save in the Humboldt region, and there is only one published record of five in California. In this respect, therefore, the Western Robin falls decidedly behind her eastern cousin.

Young Robins are darling creatures; that is conceded by everyone,—even by the cat. And hungry! Oh, so hungry! It is estimated that if the appetite of a man was proportioned to that of a young Robin, he would consume daily the equivalent of a sausage four inches in diameter and twelve feet long!

The Robin's appetite is, unfortunately, more than a matter of passing interest to his friends. So long as it can be directed towards insects, or towards the wild fruits which form so large a portion of its normal bill-of-fare, we do not complain. The madrona tree (*Arbutus menziesii*) often fruits in such abundance that hordes of Robins can thrive upon it throughout the winter. Christmas berries (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) are another staple of winter fare, while haws, service berries, cascara berries, and all available representatives of the genera *Rhus*, *Prunus*, *Cornus*, *Pyrus*, *Celtis*, *Juniperus*, and a dozen others, furnish their quota. But when all these sources of supply fail, the Robins, to the number sometimes of tens of thousands, invade the orchards of ripening olives, and there they make sad havoc. A Robin can take care of five or six ripe olives at a time, and a regiment of them can strip an orchard faster than a crew of men, although the birds really prefer to pick up the fallen fruit off the ground. In such circumstances, there really seems nothing for it but to shoot the birds—under governmental permission. Olives are olives, and we cannot alter their midwinter season of maturity to suit Sir Robin's convenience. With other winter fruits it is a little different. A neighbor of mine, who raises February raspberries at fifty cents a thimbleful, complains bitterly of their attractiveness to the Robins; but I tell him that if he insists on raising such unseasonable luxuries, he can afford chicken



## The Western Robin

wire at eight cents a foot to cover them.

Fruits which ripen in summer suffer to some extent from Robin's depredations, but his appetite for cherries, even, is by no means insatiable; and the best protection for any orchard is an outside row of thrifty mulberry trees.

And of course Robins eat bugs, oodles of them, besides thousand-legs, sow-bugs, snails, and angle worms. One governmental expert, with monumental patience, has identified 194 species of beetles found in Robins' stomachs. The birds had even swallowed *Platynus brunneo-marginatus*, *Sphæridium scarabæoides*, *Ædionychis interjectionis*, *Cercopeus chrysorrhæus* and *Conotrachelus anaglypticus*, without apparent injury to their inner works. By this same authority, Dr. Beal, the Robin was credited with only one species of fly, *Bibio alpennis*, whose larvæ were gleaned from the ground.

I wonder, then, what the birds could have been feeding on at Vidette Meadow in the central Sierras (alt. 9,700 feet), where I saw them hawking out from the tree-tops like Flycatchers. One Robin sailed out from a full hundred feet, snatched a shimmering something midair with a graceful fillip, then recovered and alighted upon the nearest convenient tree. "Fish-worms" and fallen



Taken in Idaho

Photo by Rust

"YOUNG ROBINS ARE DARLING CREATURES"

## The Varied Thrushes

olives at sea-level; lace-winged flies and scarabs on ice at timberline—there's an epicure for you!

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No. 151

### Varied Thrush

A. O. U. No. 763. *Ixoreus naevius naevius* (Gmelin).

**Synonyms.**—MOUNTAIN ROBIN. WINTER ROBIN. OREGON ROBIN. COLUMBIAN ROBIN. VARIED ROBIN. PAINTED ROBIN.

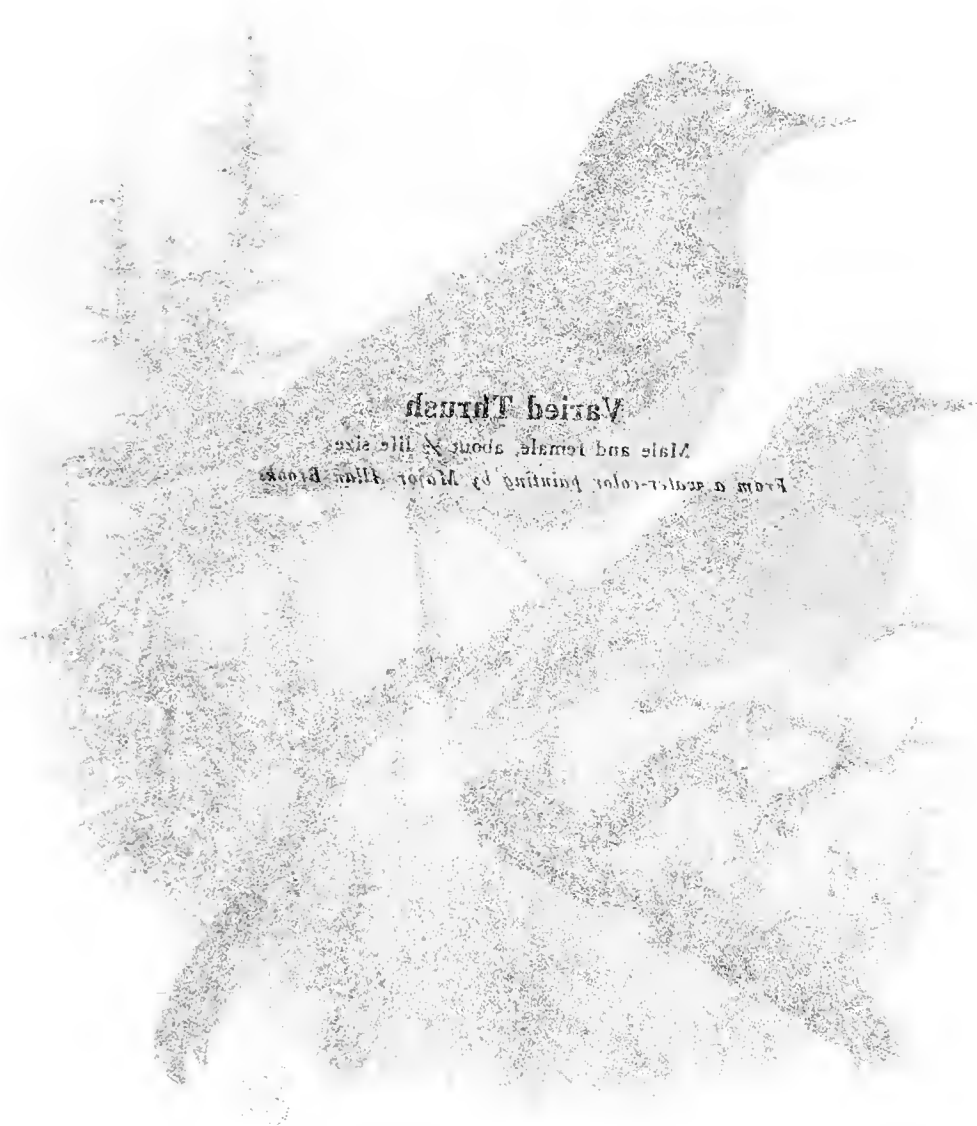
**Description.**—*Adult male:* Above dark slate-color (plumbeous slate to blackish slate), sometimes, especially in winter, tinged with olivaceous; wings dusky, edged more or less with slaty, the flight-feathers varied sharply by ochraceous-buff, the middle and greater coverts tipped broadly with tawny or ochraceous, forming two conspicuous bars; tail blackish, the outermost of several lateral rectrices tipped with white on inner web; a conspicuous lateral head-stripe, originating above eye and passing backward to nape, ochraceous or ochraceous-buff; area on sides of head, including lores, suborbital space, and auriculars, black or slaty black, connected narrowly on side of neck with a conspicuous pectoral collar of the same shade; chin, throat, and remaining underparts tawny-ochraceous (raw sienna to deep mars yellow), paling on sides and flanks, where feathers broadly margined with slaty-gray, changing to white on abdomen; under tail-coverts mingled white, slaty, and ochraceous; axillars and under wing-coverts white basally, broadly tipped with slaty gray, and under surface of flight-feathers crossed basally by band of white or buffish. Bill brownish black, paling basally on mandible; feet and legs ochre-brown; irides brown. *Adult female:* Similar to adult male, but paler and duller; upperparts olive-slaty to olive-brownish; tawny of underparts much paler and pectoral collar narrower—of the shade of back or a little darker; more extensively white on abdomen. *Young birds:* Like adult female, but browner, washed with warm sepia above; more yellowish ochraceous below; pectoral band broader and less distinctly defined, composed of ochraceous feathers having darker edges; other feathers of throat and breast more or less tipped with olive dusky. Length of adult 241-254 (9.50-10.00); wing 125 (4.92); tail 87 (3.43); bill 21 (.83); tarsus 22 (.87).

**Recognition Marks.**—Robin size; blackish band across chest distinctive; wings conspicuously varied by tawny markings; head pattern distinctive—otherwise very Robin-like in bearing and deportment.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* Of sticks, twigs, grasses, and rotten wood, smothered in moss; a bulky handsome structure, placed in saplings or trees at moderate heights, without attempt at concealment. *Eggs:* usually 3, rarely 4; pale to light niagara green, sparingly speckled or spotted, rarely blotched, with chocolate and its dilutions. Av. size 29.5 x 21.1 (1.16 x .83). *Season:* April 20–May 10, June 10–July 1; two broods.

**Range of *Ixoreus naevius.***—Western North America.

**Range of *I. n. naevius.***—The Pacific coastal district; breeding from Yakutat Bay, Alaska, south to Humboldt County, California; wintering from southern Alaska to



**Varied Thrush**

From a water-color painting of Victor Allen Brown  
Male and female, about 1/2 life size







## The Varied Thrushes

Monterey County, California, and casually to Guadalupe Island; accidental in eastern localities, even to New England.

**Distribution in California.**—Breeds sparingly in Humboldt, Del Norte, and western Trinity (10 miles west of Peanut, July 3, 1916) Counties; winters commonly south to Monterey County, less commonly to Santa Barbara, and casually further south.

**Authorities.**—**Vigors** (*Turdus naevius*), Zool. Voy. "Blossom," 1839, p. 17; *McAtee*, U. S. Dept. Agric., Yearbook, 1906, p. 197 (food); *Grinnell*, Condor, vol. xvi., 1914, p. 40 (Berkeley; dates of arrival and departure); *J. Mailliard*, Condor, vol. x., 1908, p. 118 (migr. "wave"); *ibid.*, vol. xviii., 1916, p. 200 (Eureka; nesting).

### No. 151a Northern Varied Thrush

A. O. U. No. 763a. *Ixoreus naevius meruloides* (Swainson).

**Description.**—Similar to *I. n. naevius* but slightly paler, the female, especially, paler and grayer with white markings more extended, wings longer and more pointed.

**Range of *I. n. meruloides*.**—Western North America, except the humid coastal strip. Breeds from the Yukon Delta, the Kowak Valley and the Mackenzie Delta south through eastern British Columbia to northwestern Montana and northeastern Oregon (A. O. U. Com.). Winters chiefly in the interior of California and the San Diegan district.

**Distribution in California.**—Common but locally irregular winter resident, chiefly in the interior and southern sections, west of the main divide. Occurs as far south as Witch Creek, San Diego County (Willett) and San Clemente Island (Linton). Also Santa Cruz Island (Apr. 5, 1915; March 18-30, 1916).

**Authorities.**—**Grinnell**, Auk, vol. xviii., 1901, p. 143 (revived name; desc.; winters in s. Calif.); *ibid.*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 1, 1900, p. 62 (habits, nest and eggs, song, etc.; n. Alaska); *ibid.*, no. 11, 1915, p. 172 (status in Calif.); *Howell*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 12, 1917, p. 101 (s. Calif. islands).

TO HAVE EARNED the right to speak appraisingly of the Varied Thrush as a bird of California, one must have lingered in some deep ravine of Humboldt County, where spruce trees and alders and crowding ferns contend for a footing, and where a dank mist drenches the whole with a fructifying moisture. Here and here only, in California, is the Varied Thrush at home, but his domain extends northward to the limit of trees in northwestern Alaska. For the Varied Thrush loves rain as a fish loves water; while as for the eternal drizzle, it is his native element and vital air. Sunshine he bears in stoical silence or else escapes to the depths of the forest glade. But let the sun once veil his splendors, let the clouds shed their gentle tears of self-pity, let the benison of the rain-drops filter through the forest, and let the leafage begin to utter that myriad soft sigh which is dearer than silence, and our poet Thrush wakes up. He mounts the chancel of some fir tree and utters at intervals a single long-drawn note of brooding melancholy and exalted beauty,—

## *The Varied Thrushes*

a voice stranger than the sound of any instrument, a waif echo stranding on the shores of time.

There is no sound of the northwestern woods more subtle, more mysterious, more thrilling withal, than this passion song of the Varied Thrush. Somber depths, dripping foliage, and the distant gurgling of dark brown waters are its fitting accompaniments; but it serves, somehow, to call up before the mind's eye the unscaled heights and the untried deeps of experience. It is suggestive, elusive, and whimsically baffling.



*Taken in Humboldt County  
Photo by Pillsbury*

IN THE REDWOOD FOREST: A  
HAUNT OF THE VARIED THRUSH

Never colorless, it is also never personal, and its weird extra-mundane quality reminds one of antique china reds, or recalls the subdued luridness of certain ancient frescoes. Moreover, this bird can fling his voice at you as well from the tree-top as from the ground, now right, now left, the while he sits motionless upon a branch not fifteen feet above you.

Fantastic and varied as is this single note, which is the Thrush's song, it may be fairly reproduced by a high-pitched whistle combined with a vocal undertone. At least, this imitation satisfies the bird, and it is possible to engage one after another of them in a sort of vocal contest in which curiosity and jealousy play unquestioned parts. Sometimes the Thrush's note is quite out of reach, but as often it descends to low pitches; while now and then it is flatted, and the resonance crowded out of it, with an indescribable effect upon the listener, somewhere between admiration and disgust. At other times a trill is introduced, which can be taken care of by a trained palate, in addition to the vocal sound and the whistle.

This weird strain is, of course, not entirely forgotten in the winter season, when the birds deploy through the Southland in immense if inconspicuous numbers; but its stealthy repetition finds one incredulous, this muted blast of *Hesperocichla*'s<sup>1</sup> horn, when it comes from the frivolous mazes of a pep-

<sup>1</sup> Formerly so called.



## *The Varied Thrushes*

per tree or a sterile eucalyptus, instead of the darkling depths of an authentic fir.

The Varied Thrush is known by a variety of names, none more persistent or fitting than that of "Winter Robin." It is a Robin in size, prevailing color, and general make-up; and it appears in the lowlands in large numbers only in the winter time, when the deep snows have driven it out of the hills. The Thrush is much more shy than the Robin, and although it moves about in straggling companies, and does not shun city parks, it keeps more to cover. It also feeds largely upon the ground, and when startled by a passer-by it flutters up sharply into the trees with a wing-sound whose quality may soon be recognized as distinctive. At such times the bird makes off through the branches with a low chuck, or *tsook*, or else tries the air by low notes which are like the song, only very much more subdued. This is manifestly an attempt to keep in touch with companions, while at the same time attracting as little hostile attention as possible. This note is, therefore, barely audible, and has very little musical quality, *aarue*, or *üür*.

Of course the bulk of our winter population is furnished by Alaskan migrants, for the few who summer in the northwestern counties would scarcely be noticed in the myriad canyons of southern California; and the occupation of the Southland is so complete that a few spill over upon the Channel Islands. For the most part the October migrations occur silently and unnoticed; but Mr. Mailliard records, from Marin County, an instance<sup>1</sup> in which returning migrants—to the aggregate of tens of thousands, a regular bird wave, were seen. Upon arrival in the State these Thrushes fall at once upon the dropped acorns, and Beal found that mast constituted 76% of the bird's food in November. This fondness for acorns is quite an unusual trait in the Thrush family and deserves further study. One instance<sup>2</sup> is on record where a bird lost its life because of a stout acorn shell which became so firmly wedged over its upper mandible that it could not be pried off. Like pussy with her head in the cream-pitcher, the poor bird had dashed its brains out in a frantic effort to escape.

Another Thrush, more resourceful in the presence of danger, did effect a sensational escape. My father, the late Rev. William Edwy Dawson, tells the story: "The other day I surprised a Varied Thrush in the chicken yard. In great alarm the bird flew round and round the chicken-wire enclosure looking for an exit. Finding none, and forgetting in its haste the partly uncovered space overhead where it must have entered, the bird took the width of the yard for a running or rather flying start, and darted straight for an aperture on the other side. These holes are

<sup>1</sup>"Condor," Vol. X., p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>"Condor," Vol. X., p. 91.

### *The Varied Thrushes*

not more than two inches across the principal part, but measuring horizontally from sharp angle to sharp angle a little more. He went through that wire without perceptible loss of velocity, and though you could hear a slight rubbing sound, indicating that he had found the wire a close fit, nothing like a blow. The bird must have had its wings close-folded at the instant of passage. Even so, I do not think it could have passed without complete contact on every side. One can see how such an engineer could thread the thickets at full speed."

The Varied Thrush is chiefly a ground-feeder and nothing edible that is likely to strew the ground comes amiss. It is on this account that the birds venture out from hedges and coppices to take sly nips at the festive angleworms. Never shall I forget how, while seated by the window in one of the most luxurious homes of Montecito, I saw a Varied Thrush not twenty feet away, hopping across the perfect lawn in search of a vulgar worm. The audacity! and, like the Robin, the Varied Thrush gratefully accepts the largess of fallen olives. Indeed, it is to be suspected that the wily Thrush gets about two olives to Robin's one, for, mind you, he is "devilish cute." Or, where olives fail to tempt, or birds resist, the Christmas berry yields its yuletide cheer, and the unfailing pepper berry (*Schinus molle*) gives a palatable consolation.

To find the bird at nesting time we must repair again to the humid forests—no matter where. My own experience has been chiefly confined to Washington.

Here are the woods that abound in moss-bunches,—great balls of thrifty green which grow, without apparent excuse, alike from the flimsiest and from the most substantial supports. It is in view of the abundance of these, that the Varied Thrush builds as it does, right out in the open of the underwood, near the top, or at least well up, in a small fir tree. The searcher has only the advantage of knowing that in order to secure adequate support the bird must build close up to the stem of the tree. An occasional exception to this rule is when branches intersect and so offer additional strength. Owing to the fact that the large timber affords considerable protection to the younger growth below, and because of the superior construction of the nests, they prove very durable. Old nests are common; and groups of half a dozen in the space of a single acre are evidently the consecutive product of a single pair of birds.

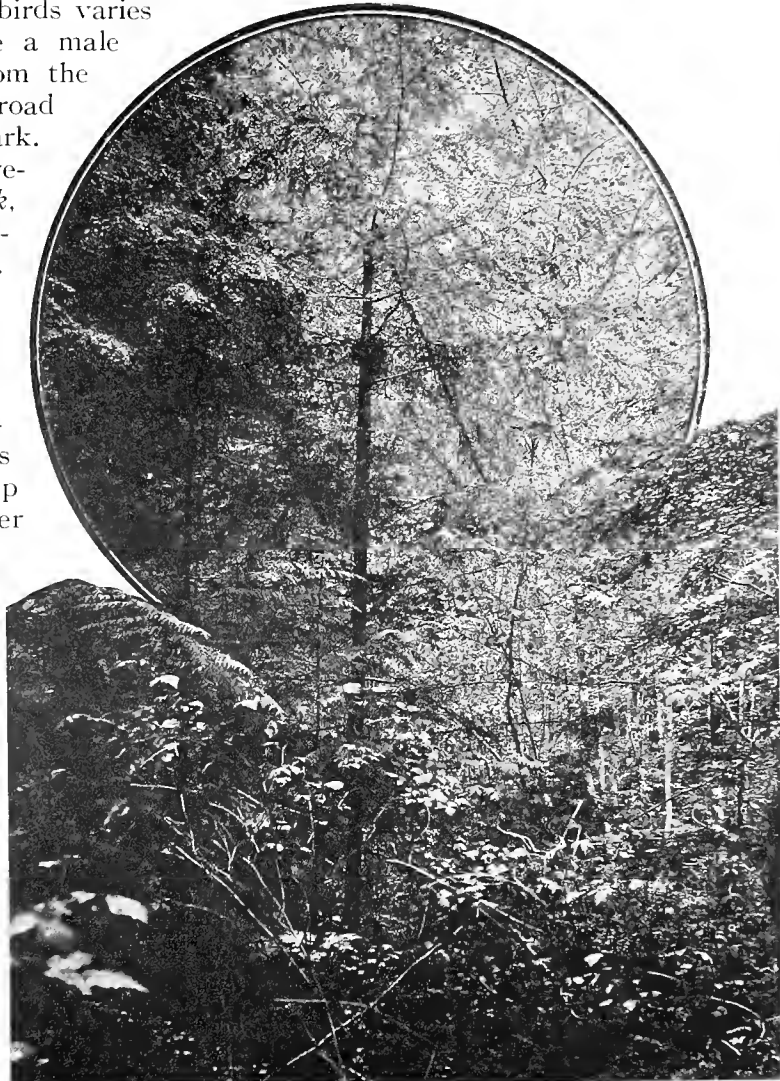
There is a notable division of territory among these Thrushes. As a rule, they maintain a distance of half a mile or so from any other nesting pair. In two instances, however, one observer found nests within three hundred yards of neighbors.

When one approaches the center of a nesting reserve, the brooding

## The Varied Thrushes

female slips quietly from the nest and joins her mate in denouncing the intruder. The birds flit restlessly from branch to branch, or from log to log, uttering repeatedly a stern *tsook*, which is almost their sole recourse. If the nest is discovered and examined, the birds will disappear silently; and the chances are that they will never again be seen in that locality. But the degree of interest evinced by the nesting birds varies interminably. Once a male Thrush was startled from the side of the government road in Rainier National Park. Upon an approach he removed with a low *chuck*, and flew down the highway to a distant point. Now and then he made sallies into the timber, and we saw before long that he was accumulating a billful of comestibles. But as often as we lost him, he bobbed up serenely at some lower station on the trail. In this fashion this curious or vigilant fowl piloted us for at least *half a mile*. Whether he was consciously trying to decoy us, or merely anticipating our plans by some sort of subtle telepathy, I do not know.

A neighboring pair evinces such anxiety that we are led to a little fir sapling which, emerging from a *four foot snow bank*, holds aloft,



Taken in Washington

Photo by the Author

"THE VARIED THRUSH BUILDS . . . IN THE OPEN OF THE UNDERWOOD"

### *The Western Bluebird*

triumphantly, a nest with three eggs. The next pair have shown better taste, for they have placed their domicile full sixty feet up and eight feet out on the first limb of a stately hemlock. A tap on the bole sends the female off like a silent ghost, but such high pickings offer no temptation.

A typical nest, freshly examined, is placed at a height of six feet in the top of a tiny fir sapling, which required the support of a chance armful of leaning vine-maple poles. The nest proper is an immense affair, eight and a half inches deep and twelve inches by eight in diameter outside, and two and a half in depth and four in width inside. It would weigh about three pounds, and is, therefore, quite compact, although the moss, which is the largest element in its composition, holds a large quantity of moisture. Twigs from six inches to a foot in length enter into the exterior construction, and these are themselves moss-bearing. Stripping off the outer moss-coat, one comes to the matrix or crucible-shaped vessel of rotten wood, an inch or more in thickness throughout, and sodden with moisture. Within this receptacle, in turn, appears another cup with walls three-quarters of an inch in thickness, and composed solely of dried grasses and moss, neatly woven and turned. The innermost lining comprises the same materials, not very carefully smoothed, but amazingly dry, considering the character of their surroundings. The brim of the nest is strengthened by bark-strips, the inner fiber of cedar bark being exclusively employed for this purpose; while the finishing coat consists of moss, compacted and flawless. There are, in fact, few nests to compare with that of the Varied Thrush in strength, elaborateness, and elegance.

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No. 152

## Western Bluebird

A. O. U. No. 767. *Sialia mexicana occidentalis* Townsend.

**Synonyms.**—CALIFORNIA BLUEBIRD. MEXICAN BLUEBIRD. TOWNSEND'S BLUEBIRD.

**Description.**—*Adult male:* Head and neck all around and upperparts rich, smalt blue, brightest on crown, rump, and wings, paler and grayer on sides of neck and on throat, where gentian blue; the shafts of wing-quills and tail-feathers, and the exposed tips of the former, black; more or less dull chestnut on scapulars, usually irregularly continuous across back; sides of breast and sides, continuous across breast, grayish chestnut; belly, flanks, crissum, and under tail-coverts dull grayish blue (campanula blue to pearl blue). Bill black; feet blackish; iris dark brown. *In winter:*

**Western Bluebird**

Male, female, and young, about 7/9 life size





**Western Bluebird**

Male, female, and young, about 7/9 life size









## The Western Bluebird

The chestnut of scapulars increases broadly, sometimes involving the whole upper back; touches of chestnut appear on crown, hind-neck, and sides of head and neck; and the blue of throat is slightly veiled by grayish brown skirting. *Adult female*: Somewhat like male, but everywhere paler and duller; blue of upperparts clear only on rump, tail, lesser and middle wing-coverts, and outer edges of primaries, there lighter than in male (amparo blue to flax-flower blue); first primary and outermost rectrices edged with white; chestnut of scapulars obsolete, merged with dingy mottled bluish or brownish gray of remaining upperparts; exposed tips of remiges dusky; blue of underparts replaced by sordid bluish gray, and chestnut of subdued tone (pale cinnamon-rufous) veiled by grayish brown tips of feathers. *Young birds* somewhat resemble the adult female, but the blue is restricted to flight-feathers and rectrices, that of the male being brighter and bluer, that of the female duller and greener. In both sexes the back and scapular areas are brownish, heavily and sharply streaked with white; and the breast (jugulum, sides of breast, and sides) is dark sepia brown, so heavily streaked with white as to appear "skeletonized." Length of adults 165-177.8 (6.50-7.00); wing 105 (4.13); tail 65 (2.56); bill 12.5 (.49); tarsus 21.5 (.85).

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; rich blue and chestnut coloring of male; darker blue coloration of wings in female distinctive, as compared with that of *S. curruoides*.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: In cavities, natural or artificial, old woodpecker holes, hollow trees, stumps, posts, bird-boxes, etc., lined with grasses and, occasionally, string, feathers, and the like. *Eggs*: 4 to 6; pale bluish green, unmarked. *Av. size* 20.8 x 15.7 (.82 x .62). *Season*: May-July; two broods.

**Range of *Sialia mexicana*.**—Western North America from British Columbia south to the highlands of Mexico.

**Range of *S. m. occidentalis*.**—The Pacific Coast States, broadly in the North to include southern British Columbia, northern Idaho, and western Montana, south to the southern border of California.

**Distribution in California.**—Of regular occurrence as a breeder at middle levels of Transition and Canadian zones nearly throughout the State. Occasionally breeds at lower levels, even in Lower Sonoran. Winters sparingly in Transition, and abundantly at the lower levels, including the deserts.

**Authorities.**—**Audubon** (*Sylvia occidentalis*), vol. v., 1839, p. 41 (Santa Barbara); **Ridgway**, Auk, vol. xi., 1894, p. 154, part (monogr., localities in Calif.); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 97 (food); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 132 (San Bernardino Mts.; desc. nest and eggs; crit.); *ibid.*, vol. xii., 1914, p. 216 (Colorado Valley; crit.); **Grinnell and Swarth**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. x., 1913, p. 316 (San Jacinto Mts.; crit., regarding *S. m. anabelae*).

*MIU-MIU-MIU*—mute you are, or next thing to it, you naughty little beauties! Why don't you sing, as do your cousins across the Rockies? You bring spring with you, but you do not come shifting your "light load of song from post to post along the cheerless fence." Is your beauty, then, so burdensome that you find it task enough to shift that?

Alack-a-day! our Bluebird does not sing! You see, he comes from Mexican stock, *Sialia mexicana*, and since we will not let him talk Span-

## The Western Bluebird



Taken in  
Washington

Photo by  
F. S. Merrill

LITTLE BOY BLUE

ish or, Aztecan, or Zampeyan, he flits about silent in seven languages. Er--but--what's this? Can we be mistaken? Here is what Dr. J. K. Townsend<sup>1</sup> says of the Western Bluebird: "Common on the Columbia River in the spring. It arrives from the south early in April, and about the first week in May commences building. \* \* \* A flock of eight or ten of these birds visited the British fort on the Columbia, on a fine day in the winter of 1835. They confined themselves chiefly to the fences, occasionally flying to the ground and scratching among the snow for minute insects, the fragments of which were found in the stomachs of several which I killed. After procuring an insect the male usually returned to the fence again, and warbled for a minute most delightfully. This note although somewhat like that of our common *Wilsonii* [i. e., *S. sialis*], is still so different as to be easily recognized. It is equally sweet and clear but of so little compass (at this season) as to be heard only a short distance. In the spring it is louder, but it is at all times much less strong than that of the common species."

Dr. Brewer, condensing Nuttall, says:<sup>2</sup> "He [Nuttall] speaks of its habits as exactly similar to those of the common Bluebird. The male is equally tuneful throughout the breeding season, and his song is also very similar. Like the common species he is very devoted to his mate, alternately feeding and caressing her and entertaining her with his song. This is a little more *varied, tender, and sweet* [editor's italics] than that of the Eastern species, and differs in its expressions."

Our own Dr. Cooper testifies:<sup>3</sup> "It also differs [i. e., from *S. sialis*] in its song, which is not so loud as sweet, and is curiously performed to sound as if two birds were singing at once and in different keys." Here the tradition begins to waver. More recent writers say: "The song of the Western Bluebird is not full but is, like his manners, gentle and sweet" (Lord); and, "It has the soft warble of its kind" Mrs. Bailey). But again Dr. Brewer writes:<sup>4</sup> "In regard to their song Mr. Ridgway states that he did not hear, even during the pairing season, any note approaching in sweetness, or indeed similar to, the joyous spring warble which justly renders our Eastern Bluebird (*S. sialis*) so universal a favorite." The doctors disagree. Some one has been dreaming!

It is always interesting and sometimes amusing thus to trace the early struggles of truth. Preconceptions die hard. The Eastern Blue-

<sup>1</sup> Narrative (1839), p. 344.

<sup>2</sup> Baird, Brewer & Ridgway, Land Birds, Vol. I., p. 65 [Reprint].

<sup>3</sup> Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., Vol. XII., 1859, p. 173.

<sup>4</sup> Baird, Brewer & Ridgway, Land Birds, Vol. I., p. 66 [Reprint].

## The Western Bluebird

bird warbles delightfully; therefore, the Western Bluebird *ought* to—but it doesn't! In an experience of some thirty-nine years, the author has never heard from the Western Bluebird's beak an utterance which deserves the name of song, or anything more musical than the threefold *miu*. As an instance of this pathetic ineffectiveness, I recall a morning at Idyllwild (in the San Jacinto Mountains), where I heard a concert in which not less than six Bluebirds joined. They were in deadly earnest, for favors were at stake, but their best offering was, *kititick*, *miu*; *kitick miu*, *miu, miu*.



Taken in Oregon

Photo by Finley and Bohlman

WESTERN BLUEBIRD AT NEST

Akin to this intrusive, rattling *kitick*, is the phrase used in alarm or rebuke, *chewtew*, or *chewtew queelp*, where the last note has a faintly-dawning musical quality. At the nest one hears a shorter note of protest, which sounds remotely like the *kek* of a distrustful Guinea-fowl; and the bird indulges also certain very unmusical chittering and clucking notes, when endeavoring to attract the attention of its young.

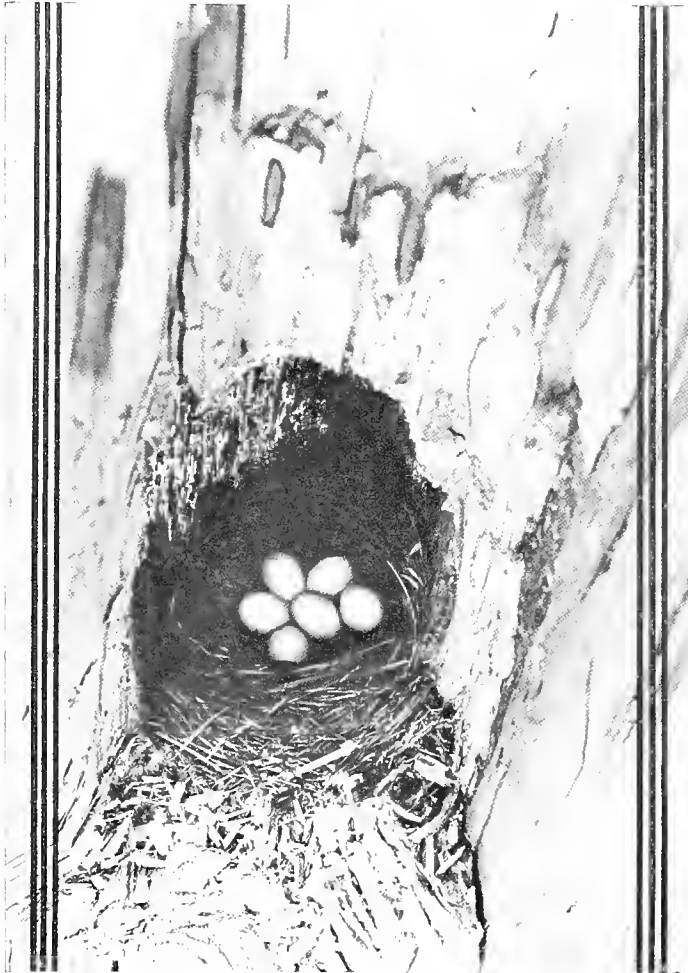
## *The Western Bluebird*

From this it is clear that the Western Bluebird is no musician, but he *is* a beauty; and he does have the same gentle courtesy of bearing which has endeared the Bluebird wherever known. It is impossible to treat of Bluebird's domestic life without recourse to humanizing terms. Bluebird is a gentleman, chivalrous and brave, as he is tender and loving. Mrs. Bluebird is a lady, gentle, confiding, and most appreciative. And as for the little Bluebirdses they are as well-behaved a lot of children as ever crowned an earthly affection.

Both parents are unsparing in their devotion to the rising generation,

and so thoroughly is this unselfish spirit reflected in the conduct of the children that it is the subject of frequent remark. Mr. Finley tells<sup>1</sup> of an instance in which a first brood, just out of pinafores, turned to and helped their parents provide food for another batch of babies, and this not once, nor twice, nor casually, but regularly, until the second brood were well matured. Instinct! Instinct! say you? But, wherefor? Is it not rather a foregleam of ethical life, an out-cropping of that altruistic tendency which hints a deeper kinship with the birds than we have yet confessed?

And real gallantry between the sexes



*Taken in Modoc County*

*Photo by the Author*

NEST AND EGGS OF WESTERN BLUEBIRD

<sup>1</sup>"American Birds," by William Lovell Finley (1907), p. 170

## *The Western Bluebird*

may not be less ethical. On a day in Ohio, I located a Bluebird's nest in the knot-hole of an apple tree, and planted the camera in a commanding and somewhat threatening position. The cavity held callow young, but after the parents had visited their charges once and were somewhat relieved in anxiety, I saw a very pretty passage which took place between them. In a neighboring apple tree the male secured an elegant fat grub and was most devoutly thrashing it, when the female appeared upon the scene. With a coaxing twitter she approached her mate; but he backed off, as much as to say,

"Wait, wait, dear, he isn't dead yet!" But she was hungry and pressed her suit, until he in good-natured impatience flitted across to another limb. Here he whacked the worm vigorously, striking him first against one side of the limb and then the other by a swinging motion of the head. The female followed her lord and cooed: "Oh, I know that will taste good. Um! I hav'n't tasted one of those white grubs for a week. So good of you, dearest! Really, don't you think he is done now?"

The valiant husband gave the luckless grub just one more whack; and then, with every appearance of satisfaction, he hopped over toward his better half and placed the morsel in her waiting beak, while she received the favor with quivering wings and a soft flood of tender thanks. Altogether I think I never saw a prettier exhibition of conjugal affection, gallantry, and genuine altruism than the sight afforded. It was not only like the behavior of humans; it was like the best in human life, a pattern rather than a copy, an inspiration to nobility and gentleness of the very highest type.

Bluebirds have a decided preference for human society, or at least are very quick to appreciate hospitality of proffered bird-boxes. Being chiefly insectivorous, their presence is a benediction to any neighborhood, and is an especial advantage in the orchard. A friend of mine in the East, who owns two young orchards and a small vineyard, maintains upon his premises upwards of fifty Bluebird boxes, each composed of a section of a hollow limb closed with a board at top and bottom, and provided with a neat auger-hole in the side. The boxes are made fast to the apple-



*Taken in San Luis Obispo County  
Photo by the Author*

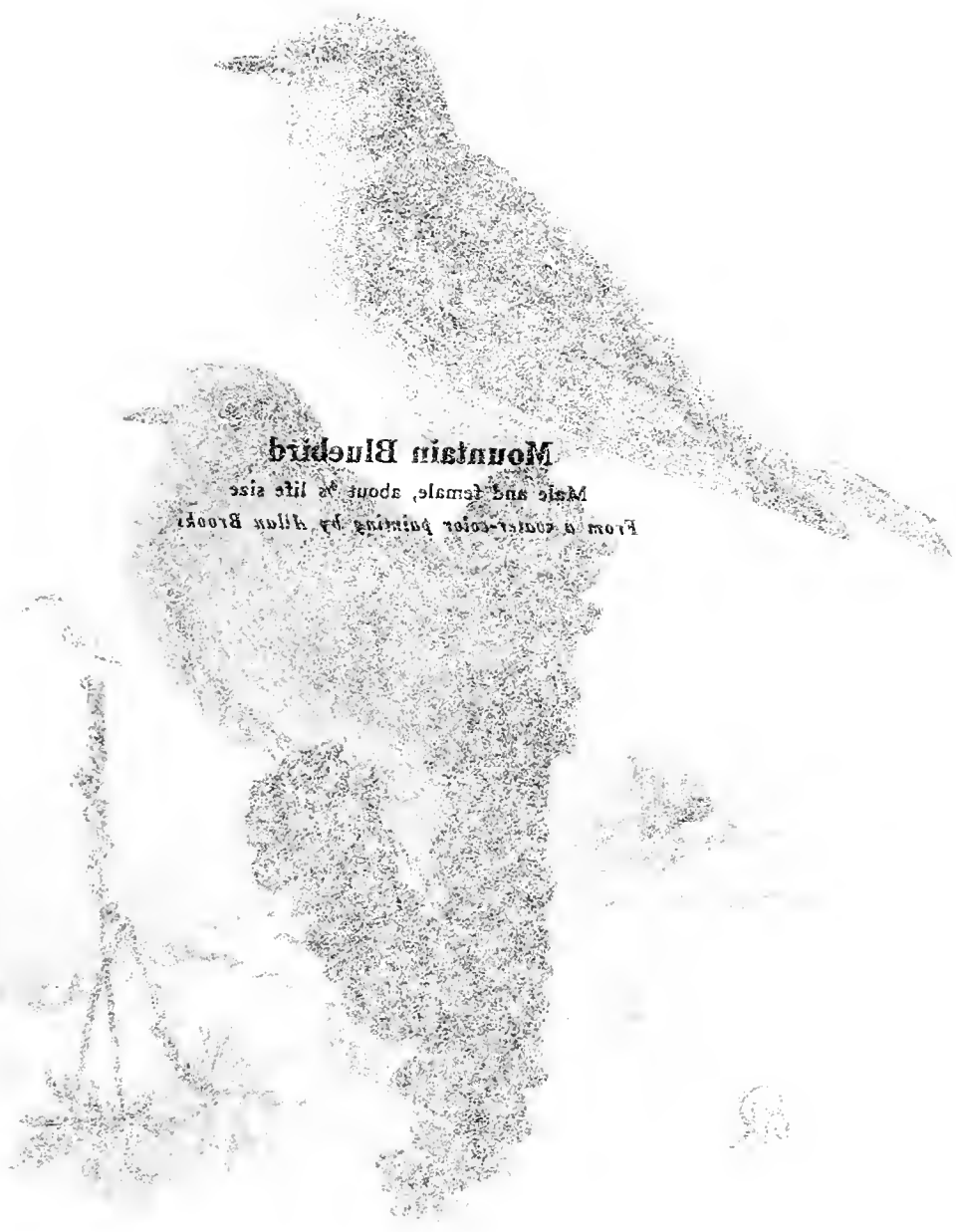
WESTERN BLUEBIRD

### *The Western Bluebird*

trees or lodged at considerable intervals along the intersecting fences. The experimenter finds that more than half of the boxes are occupied each season, and he counts the birds of inestimable value in helping to save the grapes and apples from the ravages of worms.

In providing for Bluebird's comfort, care must be taken to expel cats from the premises; or at least to place the box in an inaccessible position. English Sparrows, also, must be shot at sight, for the Bluebird, however valorous, is no match for a mob. Tree Swallows or Violet-greens may covet the nesting-box—your affections are sure to be divided when these last appear upon the scene—but the Bluebirds can take care of themselves here. For the rest, do not make the box too nice; and above all do not make it of new lumber. Nesting birds do not care to be the observed of all observers, and the more natural their surroundings, the more at ease your tenants will be. An occasional inspection will not be resented, if the Bluebirds know their landlord well. There may be some untoward condition to correct,—an overcrowded nestling, or the like. At the end of the season the box should be emptied, cleaned, and if possible sterilized.

While the Western Bluebird raises, or attempts to raise, two broods in a season, the stock is not a very vigorous one, at least in the South. Possibly those birds which do nest in a desultory fashion at the lower levels, even as far south as San Diego, are of a residual, unprogressive stock, destined in time to perish. Be that as it may, quite a different account comes down to us of the bird's status and behavior further north. On Puget Sound, for example, the Western Bluebird is distinctly on the increase. An observer in Seattle unintentionally brought to light the exceptional vigor of the northern stock, when he tried to prevent a pair of Western Bluebirds from nesting in a bird-box which he had prepared for the Violet-green Swallows. Being a thrifty oölogist, the observer did not intervene until the Bluebirds had completed a nest and filled it with six eggs. This the gentleman removed entire, and considered the incident closed. But the Bluebirds thought otherwise, and two weeks later presented the egg-man with another set of six, which he accepted—with nest. Nothing daunted, the Bluebirds fought off the insistent Swallows and tried again. Result, six eggs and another rebuke. In this fashion the indomitable birds provided six nests of six eggs each in the same box in one season.



**Mountain Bluebird**

From a color-painting by Allan Brooks  
Male and female, about life size

1918

1903

1. Length of male, 160 mm.  
2. Length of female, 150 mm.  
3. Length of male, 160 mm.  
4. Length of female, 150 mm.  
5. Length of male, 160 mm.  
6. Length of female, 150 mm.  
7. Length of male, 160 mm.  
8. Length of female, 150 mm.  
9. Length of male, 160 mm.  
10. Length of female, 150 mm.  
11. Length of male, 160 mm.  
12. Length of female, 150 mm.  
13. Length of male, 160 mm.  
14. Length of female, 150 mm.  
15. Length of male, 160 mm.  
16. Length of female, 150 mm.

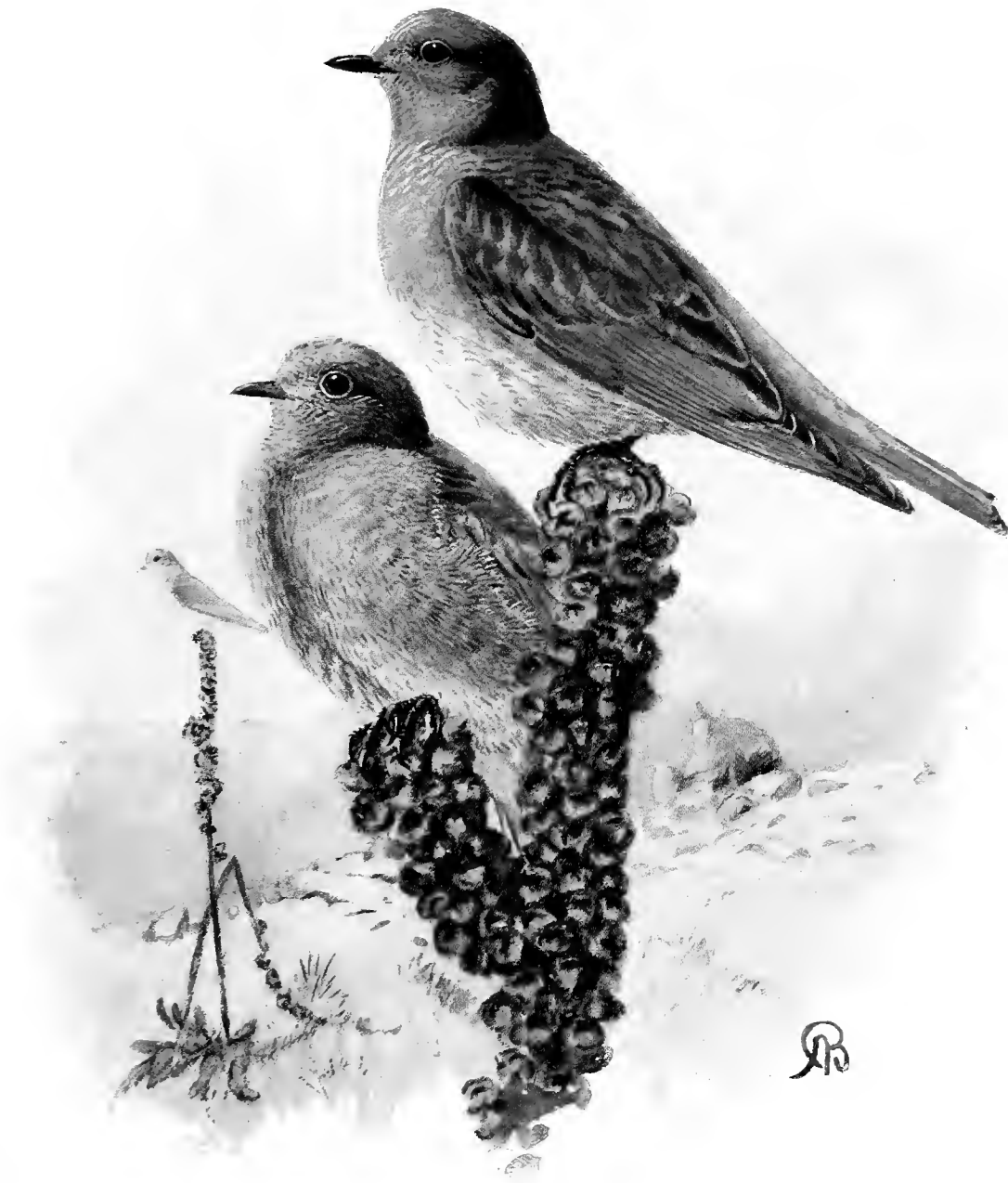
**Mountain Bluebird**

Male and female, about 3/4 life size

*From a water-color painting by Allan Brooks*

1. Length of male, 160 mm.  
2. Length of female, 150 mm.  
3. Length of male, 160 mm.  
4. Length of female, 150 mm.  
5. Length of male, 160 mm.  
6. Length of female, 150 mm.  
7. Length of male, 160 mm.  
8. Length of female, 150 mm.  
9. Length of male, 160 mm.  
10. Length of female, 150 mm.  
11. Length of male, 160 mm.  
12. Length of female, 150 mm.  
13. Length of male, 160 mm.  
14. Length of female, 150 mm.  
15. Length of male, 160 mm.  
16. Length of female, 150 mm.







No. 153

## Mountain Bluebird

A. O. U. No. 768. *Sialia currucoides* (Bechstein).

**Synonym.**—ARCTIC BLUEBIRD.

**Description.**—*Adult male in summer:* Above rich cerulean blue (quite variable, light cerulean blue to Bradley's blue), palest (cendre blue) on forehead, brightest on upper tail-coverts, darkest (spectrum blue) on lesser wing-coverts; below pale blue (cendre blue) on chest, shading on sides of head and neck to color of back, paling on lower belly, crissum, and under tail-coverts to whitish; exposed tips of flight-feathers dusky. Bill and feet black; iris dark brown. *Adult male in winter:* Blue somewhat duller, and feathers skirted more or less with brownish above and below, notably on hind-neck, upper back, breast and sides. *Adult female:* Like male, but paler blue; clear on rump, tail, and wings only; elsewhere quenched in gray; pileum, hind-neck, back, and scapulars mouse-gray, tinged with greenish blue; outer edge of first primary and outer web of outermost rectrix, basally, white; a whitish orbital ring; underparts tinged with pale brownish gray, fading to white posteriorly. *Young birds* somewhat resemble the adult female, but are darker and duller (benzo brown); the blue of rump and upper tail-coverts is replaced by ashy gray; the back is faintly streaked with white; the throat and jugulum are pale gray, indistinctly streaked with whitish; breast, sides, and flanks chiefly drab (benzo brown), each feather having a white center. Length 177.8 (7.00) or over; wing 117 (4.60); tail 72 (2.83); bill 13.4 (.53); tarsus 22.6 (.89).

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; azure blue coloration of male, and bluish gray and azure of female unmistakable.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* Much as in preceding species. *Eggs:* Usually 5 (6 and 7 of record); uniform pale bluish green, sometimes very light bluish white, rarely pure white. Av. size 21.6 x 16 (.85 x .63). *Season:* May–June; two broods.

**General Range.**—Mountain districts of western North America, north to southern Yukon and northwestern British Columbia; breeding eastward to central Saskatchewan, the Black Hills, and western Texas; westward to the Cascade-Sierras; southward to the higher ranges of Arizona, New Mexico, and Chihuahua; in winter irregularly eastward upon the Great Plains, and southward to southern California, Lower California, and Sonora.

**Distribution in California.**—A common breeder in the Boreal zones of the higher mountains, including the desert ranges; south to the San Bernardino Mountains. Occurs in the Warner Mountains, on Mt. Shasta, and upon the inner, more arid portions of the northern coastal ranges. Winters irregularly at the lower levels, except in the humid sections.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Sialia arctica*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1846, p. 113; **C. H. Townsend**, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. x., 1887, p. 232 (Mt. Shasta, etc.; breeding habits); **Ray**, Auk, vol. xx., 1903, p. 193 (Lake Valley, breeding); **Willett**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 7, 1912, p. 109 (status in s. Calif.); **Tyler**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 9, 1913, p. 109 (Fresno; winter habits; dates of arrival and departure).

## The Mountain Bluebird



Taken in Idaho

Photo by H. J. Rust

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD AT NEST

again, the entire song tradition, including the "delightful warble" attributed to the bird by Townsend, appears to be quite without foundation, as in the case of *S. m. occidentalis*.

Occasionally, during migration, this species associates itself with the Western Bluebird; and the writer will not soon forget the vision of loveliness afforded by such a mixed flock of fifty birds as, on a raw March day, it swept northward in azure tranquility. Again toward the end

GENTLE and demure, as well as brave and high-spirited, is this sky-born thoroughbred of the Sierras, this bit of heaven's own blue incarnate. We shall think only of the milder qualities when we come upon a company of Mountain Bluebirds deployed over some south-sloping hillside on a sunny winter's day. Pasture weeds or fence-posts serve for lookout stations, whence the mountaineer may spy the crawling beetle, and seize daintily with flutterings of purest azure. Some pensive notes, *chee'ry* or *dear'ie*, like those of the Eastern Bluebird (*S. sialis*), but not so clear-cut, will be heard; or, if we press too closely, certain thrush-like *tsooks* of dainty alarm. Other song the birds have none, save an emphatic *whew* (never '*miu*'), uttered under stress of emotion. For here,



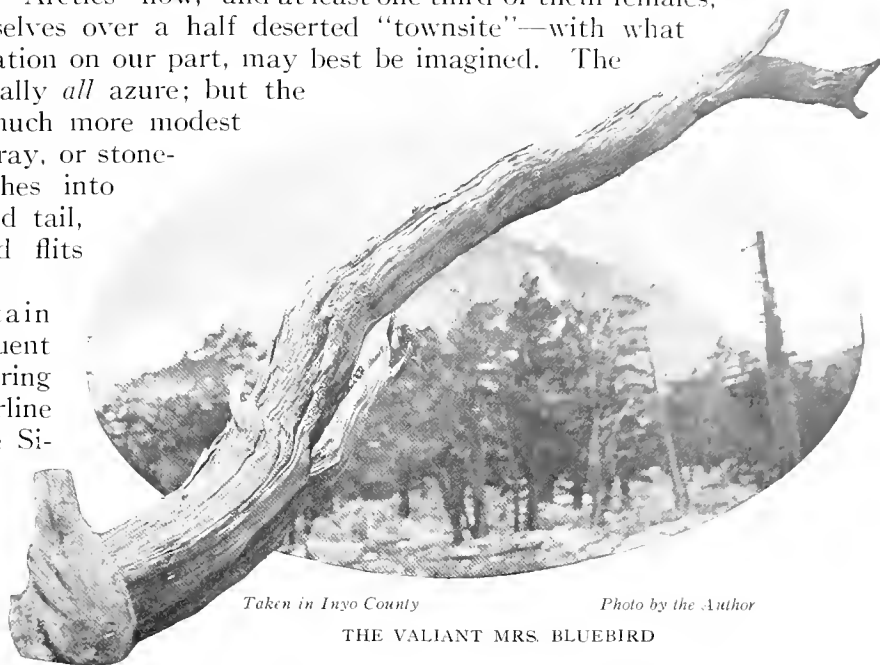
**Granite Basin**  
A Summer Home of the Mountain Bluebird  
*From a photograph by the Author*



## The Mountain Bluebird

of the same month, a great wave of migration occurred, and some two hundred birds, all "Arctics" now,<sup>1</sup> and at least one third of them females, distributed themselves over a half deserted "townsite"—with what delighted appreciation on our part, may best be imagined. The males are practically *all* azure; but the females have a much more modest garb of reddish gray, or stone-olive, which flashes into blue on wings and tail, only as the bird flits from post to post.

The Mountain Bluebird is a frequent and most endearing sight of the timberline association in the Sierras. Here, amidst retreating snowfields and bursting greenery, where every-



Taken in Inyo County

Photo by the Author

THE VALIANT MRS. BLUEBIRD

thing is fresh and clear-cut and radiant, our azure incarnation seems exactly at home. The jagged peaks are cutting the horizon into blue tatters, anyhow, and it is no matter for surprise when detached shreds of the cerulean wreckage flutter over the heather, or lose themselves by the margin of some turquoise pool. And here, where gnarled pine trees have felt the tooth of the frost and have yielded sheltering hollows, the Mountain Bluebirds make their nests. Or, perchance, some hardy woodpecker has paved the way and left a princely excavation, which the Bluebirds have only to line with soft dead grasses and call their own.

From five to seven dainty eggs, the palest possible blue, furnish occasion for pride and solicitude, and a little later for gallantries of ministrations and defense, the sweetest and the bravest which this gallant old world knows. And if I had not seen a score of male Bluebirds whose sole concern was to protect their home with its precious contents, I should not tell this tale of another not so gallant. There were seven babies, and the very least excuse for cowardice in this case, but I had marked this bird as a timorous fowl, who would not even venture up to have his picture taken. So when, one day, a great outcry arose with reference to a Clark's Crow, I hurried over. Some determined avenger

<sup>1</sup> Formerly *Sialia arctica*.

## *The Mountain Bluebird*

was after the miscreant, and he doubled and twisted hither and yon (but always yonner if possible), uttering wild cries of rage and execration, while many lesser fowls joined the hue and cry in a less determined way. While this commotion was going on, our Bluebird *père*, who happened to be seated on a stump a hundred feet from the nest, was a study. Instead of joining the pursuit he simply crouched and shuddered, as he turned an apprehensive eye aloft. He was paralyzed with fear. And lo and behold, when all the excitement was over, it was his mate, *mère* Bluebird if you



*Taken in Inyo County*

NESTING TIME!

*Photo by the Author*

YES, THIS IS SNOW, BUT ONE OF THE TREES CONTAINS A MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD'S NEST WITH EGGS NEAR TO HATCHING

please, who emerged from the fray panting and triumphant! Now what do you think of that? Certainly the ladies of California are coming to their own! It is only fair to add that while the heroine was recovering her breath the male bird went dutifully after a worm.

This same pair, observed at the Little Cottonwood Lakes (alt. 11,000), showed other curious, interesting, and highly individual psychological reactions. It all came of my trying to secure photographs. Inasmuch as I had to have the morning light at my back, and the principal or accustomed entrance was on the west side, I stopped up this



## The Townsend Solitaire

entrance with sprigs of sage, in order to oblige the birds to show themselves, in seeking entrance, from the east. The female tried it first and she was much nonplussed over the situation. She returned again and again to the perch, which commanded both sides, but she sought entrance only in the accustomed place. Again and again she fluttered in front of the sage-twigs, and then, baffled, she would alight upon the ground and wrestle mentally with the difficulty. Finally, after at least half a dozen fruitless attempts, the mental gates appeared to open to her and she flashed in in a trice. Thereafter she made straight for the proper new entrance and had no difficulty. The male had quite a different and much more exasperating experience. He readily admitted the impossibility of finding entrance on the west, but he made a bad fist of it on the other side. The entrance slit was shaped as in the accompanying diagram:



where P represents the perch, E the proper entrance, and F a false entrance, too narrow for admission. The male sought entrance repeatedly at F. He worked at it frantically, and as often as he was foiled he returned, scolding vigorously. Again and again he returned to the charge, as often to be blocked at F. Finally, after fifteen minutes of intermittent endeavor, he found E and passed in easily. But on several occasions thereafter he tried F. On a later occasion, finding that the birds passed in and out too quickly for my photographic purposes, I blocked the top of E with sage but left room for entrance. The female accommodated herself readily to this change, but the male made hard work of it. He was so afraid of touching the brush that he crowded the shoulder of wood instead. Once inside, he had even greater difficulty in emerging, inasmuch that on the second occasion I had actually to remove the obstruction to prevent undue fright. It never occurred to either bird to attempt its removal, although this would have been very easy of accomplishment. Verily, we are all "human."

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No. 154

## Townsend's Solitaire

A. O. U. No. 754. *Myadestes townsendi* (Audubon).

**Synonyms.**—TOWNSEND'S FLYCATCHING THRUSH. TOWNSEND'S FLYCATCHER.

**Description.**—*Adults:* General color smoky gray, lighter below, bleaching on throat, lower belly, axillars and under tail-coverts; a prominent white orbital ring; wings and tail dusky; wing quills crossed by extensive tawny area originating at base of innermost secondary and passing obliquely backward—this appears in the closed wing as a spot at the base of the exposed primaries but does not reach nearer the edge of the wing than the fifth or sixth primary; another obscure tawny or whitish

## The Townsend Solitaire

patch formed by subterminal edging on outer webs of seventh and eighth (sometimes ninth) primaries; greater coverts and tertials tipped with white of varying prominence; a blotch of white on each side of tail involving distal third of half of outermost rectrix, tip of second and sometimes tip of third. Bill and feet black; irides brown. *Young* birds are heavily spotted with buff above and below (showing thereby Turdine affinities),—above, each feather has a single large spot (rhomboidal in some, heart-shaped in others) of buff, centrally, and is edged with blackish, thus producing a scaled appearance; below, the ground color is a pale buff or buffy gray with blackish edgings to feathers. Length 203.2-215.9 (8.00-8.50); wing 117 (4.60); tail 103 (4.05); bill 12.4 (.49); tarsus 20 (.79).

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size; brownish gray coloration with spots of white (or pale tawny) on tail and wings. No black, as compared with a Shrike.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* Of coarse twigs and moss; lined with fine grasses, or rarely, pine needles; placed on hillside at base of tree, or under a boulder, in cranny of tree-trunk, stub, upturned tree-root, river-bank, road-cut, or rock-wall. *Eggs:* 3 or 4, rarely 5; white, pinkish, grayish, or greenish white; spotted sharply or diffusely, sparingly or heavily, with vinaceous brown and allied shades. Av. of 18 eggs from Mt. Shasta 22.1 x 16.8 (.87 x .66); index 76. *Season:* May–July, according to altitude; one brood.

**General Range.**—Western North America. Breeds in the Boreal zone from east-central Alaska, southwestern Mackenzie, and western Alberta, south through the Cascade-Sierras to the San Bernardino Mountains, and through the Rockies to New Mexico and Arizona, and in the Transition zone in the mountains of Mexico to Zacatecas. Winters irregularly southward from southern British Columbia and Montana, and straggles irregularly eastward.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident of high Transition and Canadian zones in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the Warner Mountains, and the San Bernardino Mountains. More sparingly resident in the Trinity Mountains and south to South Yolla Bolly Mountain. Found in winter at lower latitudes and levels, even upon the deserts and, in the Southwest, to sea-level.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Ptilogonys townsendii*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1847, p. 157; **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 128 (San Bernardino Mts.; desc. habits, nest and eggs); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Bull. no. 280, 1915, p. 3 (food); **Dawson**, Condor, vol. xxi., 1919, p. 12, figs. (Mt. Shasta; habits, nesting, song, etc.); **Whittle**, Condor, vol. xxiv., 1922, p. 78, fig. (song flight).

VIEWED from any standpoint, taxonomic, psychological, or sentimental, the Townsend Solitaire is a feathered Sphinx. It has been called Flycatcher, Thrush, and a combination of the two; but the name Solitaire seems best to express both our noncommittal attitude toward the subject, and the demure independence with which the bird itself proceeds to mind its own affairs. Barring the matter of structure, which the scientists have now pretty well threshed out, the bird is everything by turns. He is Flycatcher, in that he delights to sit quietly on exposed limbs and watch for passing insects. These he meets in midair and bags with an emphatic snap of the mandibles. He is a Shrike in appearance and manner, when he takes up a station on a fence-post and studies the ground intently. When his prey is sighted, at distances varying from ten to thirty feet, he dives directly to the spot, lights, snatches, and swal-

## The Townsend Solitaire

lows, in an instant, or, if the catch is unmanageable, he returns to his post to thrash and kill and swallow at leisure. During this pouncing foray, the display of white in the Solitaire's tail reminds one of the Lark Sparrow. Like the silly Cedar-bird, the Solitaire gorges itself on fruits and berries in season. Like a Thrush, when the mood is on, the Solitaire skulks in the thickets or woodsy depths, and flies at the suggestion of approach. Upon alighting it stands quietly, in expectation that the eye of the beholder will thus lose sight of its ghostly tints among the interlacing shadows.

And so one might go on comparing indefinitely, but the bird is entitled to shine in its own light. The Solitaire is *sui generis*—no doubt of that. As soon as we establish for it a certain line of conduct, the bird does something else. We banish it to the mountains for the nesting season—a pair nests in a railroad cut near sea-level. We describe to our friends the beauty of its song—they go to its sanctuaries and the bird is silent. A bird of such



Taken in Fresno County

Photo by the Author

A CAUTIOUS APPROACH

## *The Townsend Solitaire*

dainty mould should winter in the South. It does—at times. It also winters on the northern border of the United States. This poet of the solitudes, he should avoid the haunts of men. He does, usually. But another time he may be seen hopping from bush to log in a suburban swamp, or moping under the edge of a new sidewalk. Indeed, I once saw a Solitaire flutter up from under a passenger coach,

as it lay in station. He had happened to spy some bread-crumbs and there was nothing to hinder save the conductor's brisk "all aboard." Surely such a bundle of contradictions you never did see—and all belied by an expression of lamb-like artlessness and *dolce far niente* which would do credit to a rag doll.

The favored few who have known the Solitaire in his mountain haunts have not failed to testify to the beauty of his song. Indeed, I am tempted to pause here and present a little anthology of appreciation of Solitaire music, so that the reader may judge for himself, if possible, how far the poet bird and how far the witchery of romantic association may be responsible for the reputed excellence of this bird's song. Dr. J. S. Newberry, who in central Oregon encountered the bird in such numbers as



Taken in the San Bernardino Mts.

Photo by Wright M. Pierce

A TYPICAL NEST



**n/4 Townsend Solitaire**

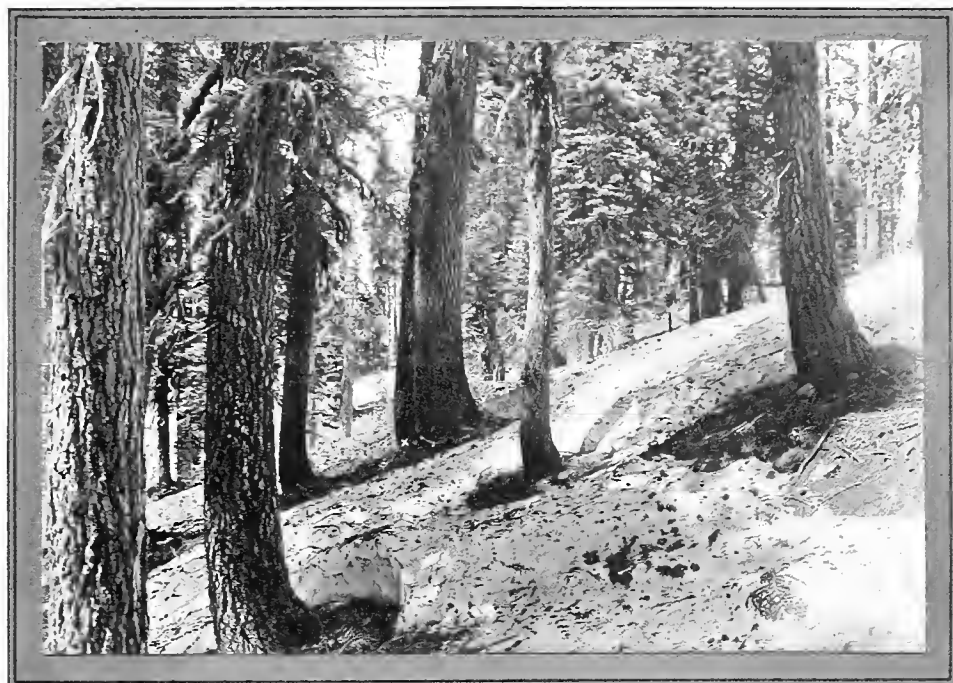
At base of Shasta Fir Tree

*From a photograph by the Author*

Taken on Mt. Shasta



*The Townsend Solitaire*



Taken on Mt. Shasta

Photo by the Author

SOLITAIRE'S NEST AMONG THE SNOWBANKS  
AN X MARKS THE EXACT LOCATION OF AN OCCUPIED NEST

have never been duplicated elsewhere, declared the Solitaire song to be full, rich, and melodious, like that of the *Mimus*:<sup>1</sup> "With the first dawn of day they began their songs, and at sunrise the valley was perfectly vocal with their songs. Never anywhere have I heard a more delightful chorus of bird music. Their song is not greatly varied, but all the notes are particularly clear and sweet, and the strain of pure gushing melody is as spontaneous and inspiring as that of the Song Sparrow."

Mr. T. M. Trippe, speaking for the Clear Creek Canyon in Colorado, says:<sup>2</sup> "Toward the middle and latter part of winter, as the snow begins to fall, the Flycatching Thrush delights to sing, choosing for its rostrum a pine tree in some elevated position, high up above the valleys; and not all the fields and groves, and hills of the Eastern States, can boast a more exquisite song; a song in which the notes of the Purple Finch, the Wood Thrush and the Winter Wren are blended into a silvery cascade of melody, that ripples and dances down the mountain sides as clear and sparkling as the mountain brook, filling the woods and valleys with ring-

<sup>1</sup> Rep. Pac. R. R. Survey, Vol. VI., 1857, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> Coues, Birds of the Northwest (1874), pp. 95-96.

## *The Townsend Solitaire*

ing music. At first it sings only on bright clear mornings; but once fairly in the mood, it sings at all hours and during the most inclement weather."

Mr. A. W. Anthony in an earlier volume of "The Condor" says:<sup>1</sup> "A few of the more favored have listened to its incomparable song, as, perched on the topmost twig of a dead fir, in the solemn silence of the high Sierras, or in deep and rugged canyons of the Rocky Mountains, this shy retiring bird pours forth its very soul in a wild ringing outburst of song that seems to descend from crags and ledges in a veritable shower of crystallized melody. With none of our song birds is the song so long

<sup>1</sup> Condor, Vol. V., Jan., 1903, p. 10.



*Taken in Mt. Shasta*

A CLOSE-UP

*Photo by the Author*

THE FEMALE, SEATED AT THE BASE OF A SHASTA FIR, IS STICKING TO HER EGGS AT A RANGE OF ONLY TWO FEET



## *The Townsend Solitaire*

sustained as with this species, lasting as it does for several minutes, sometimes without a break."

And here is an appreciation in which the bird is surely as much indebted to the poet as the poet to the bird. It is from the gifted pen of Forrest S. Hanford:<sup>2</sup> "So rare a singer is the Solitaire that during my mountain rambles, extending over a period of thirteen years, I have heard the song on only five occasions. The first time was in the forenoon of one of those bright, exquisite days of early spring at Lake Tahoe, when the warring elements had declared a



*Taken on Mt. Shasta*

*Photo by the Author*

A NOT-QUITE-SO-CLOSE-UP  
ANOTHER NEST, ALSO AT THE BASE OF A SHASTA FIR

truce and were at rest for a time. The little shadowy canyon wherein I rested enjoyed a hushed and solemn tranquility not diminished, but rather added to, by a drowsy murmuring from a bright brook splashing on its way to the lake. This, I thought, could be none other than the haunt of a Solitaire, and I wished that I might see the bird; and as in answer to my prayer came one, a small gray ghost of a bird that flitted silently in and out of the leafy corridors of its retreat, finally resting on

<sup>2</sup> Condor, Vol. XIX., Jan., 1917, pp. 13-14.

*The Townsend Solitaire*



*Taken in Fresno County*

A TOWNSEND SOLITAIRE

*Photo by the Author*

THE BIRD'S THROAT IS DISTENDED WITH FOOD GATHERED FOR HER CHICKS

792

the limb of a pine not ten feet away. And as I watched, the feathers of his breast and throat rose with a song that softly echoed the beautiful voices of the brook, the gurgling of eddies, the silvery tinkle of tiny cascades, and the deeper medley of miniature falls. Infinitely fine and sweet was this rendering of mountain music. At times the song of the bird rose above the sound of the water in rippling cadences—not shrill, but in an infinite number of runs and modulated trills, dying away again and again to low plaintive whispering notes suggestive of tender memories.”

And if the author himself ventures to add a little to this anthology, it is only on the first-hand authority of his field notebook:

*Church Mountain, (Washington),  
May 12, 1905:*



**Townsend Solitaire, Female on Nest**

At base of Shasta Fir Tree

*From a photograph by the Author*

Taken on Mt. Shasta



## *The Townsend Solitaire*

"Song \* \* a dulcet strain of varied notes. It reminds one strongly of the Sage Thrasher, but is somewhat less impetuous."

*Yosemite Valley, June 11, 1914:* "For the first time in years I hear again the strange, wild, broken thrush-like medley of the Solitaire. There are delicate flute-like trills and passages which contrast oddly with more metallic and prosaic notes. The surroundings are scattered trees of douglas fir and sugar pine with considerable intermixture of dwarf oak (*Q. morhus*), and heavy chaparral of manzanita, snowbush, and huckleberry.

"Another Solitaire held forth on the wall over which Nevada leaps. It was a romantic scene where a White-throated Swift dashed into a crevice near a Golden Eagle's nest, while a Solitaire sang a wild medley to the accompaniment of Nevada's roar!"

*Mt. Shasta, alt. 7200, July 8, 1916:* "Heard singing. The bird is evidently shifting about a little from place to place in a beautiful fir grove. His song is weird, eccentric, and unstudied, as refreshing as it is inconstant,—scarcely excellent enough to have had Newberry's encomium, yet very gratifying to the ear—and rare."

*Mt. Shasta, alt. 6900, July 10, 1916:* "A Townsend Solitaire sings from a dead limb near the summit of a tall fir tree, not less than 150 feet



*Taken on Mt. Shasta*

A GROUND NEST AT BASE OF SHASTA FIR

*Photo by the Author*

## The Townsend Solitaire



Taken in  
Fresno  
County

Photo by  
the Author

INSECT-LADEN

above the ground. The song is broken and fragmentary, and is rendered in a matter-of-fact, passionless way which harmonizes well enough with the sedate bearing of the bird. Yet the song itself is one of the weirdest and wildest in nature's repertory."

It was during two magic weeks I spent on Shasta, weeks chiefly memorable for the constant presence of the Solitaire, and enlivened by the daily repetitions of their songs, that I studied the nesting habits of six pairs of these birds, and familiarized myself not alone with the "bell-like" scolding note, but also with the hitherto almost undescribed ecstasy song flight. So plentiful were the birds, indeed, and so frequently tuneful that one could scarcely credit Merriam's earlier statement based upon a much longer acquaintance with Shasta: "I saw six during our stay. \* \* \* They were always silent and rather shy." (The future monographer of *bears* had small ear, I take it, for bird music.)

The strangest and most baffling sound of the western world is the musical *creaking* alarm note of the Townsend Solitaire. It is a ghostly, ventriloquistic, droning sound,

uttered at frequent and monotonously regular intervals, yet with such a detached and altogether impersonal air that the authorship of the sound is distrusted, even when the bird is caught *in flagrante delictu*, that is, with mandibles beating time to the music. With this note the bird celebrates his disquietude over human intrusion, or notifies his mate of trouble brewing. In far happier mood is he when, all unsuspecting of hostile presence, he soars far above the tree-tops. When at a height of some 300 feet, he pauses and lets himself fall slowly, with fluttering wings, in a great spiral, while he pours out his soul in an ecstasy of song. Now more than ever he looks like the Mockingbird, save that his action does not at all savor of the grotesque. The song torrent on this occasion is light and sprightly in

*The Townsend Solitaire*

character, reminding one more of the breathless rhapsody of the Lark Sparrow than the measured accents of a Thrush.

Nesting seems to take place at all levels, but it is, perhaps, most easily studied in the dark belt of Shasta firs which surrounds the mountain just below the snow line. The birds, indeed, appear to court the



*Taken in Fresno County*

*Photo by the Author*

YOUNG SOLITAIRES IN NEST



*Taken in Fresno County*

*Photo by the Author*

A NESTING SITE ON KINGS RIVER  
AN X AT THE UPPER RIGHT HAND MARKS THE EXACT SPOT

## *The Western Golden-crowned Kinglet*

fellowship of the snow-banks, and I have seen a bird quit her nest at the base of a Shasta fir tree and go flitting about over the snow, gleaning a snack of benumbed beetles and fallen flies.

Whether reared in such a ghostly silence as this, or cradled in a cranny which overlooks a brawling mountain stream, the baby Solitaires are as solemn as their parents and as phlegmatic. The youngsters whose portraits appear herewith were five in number—an unusually large family, by the way—who submitted to various photographic indignities, until the eldest suddenly resolved, launched out for “Kingdom Come,” and, while half a dozen sympathetic Sierrans held their breath, avoided Kings River, which roared distractingly below, fetched a compass midair, and made a safe landing in deep shrubbery. The spell was broken, and before you could say “Jack Robinson” the nest was empty, and the quintette, all likewise successful, had become Solitaires, indeed.

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No. 155

## Western Golden-crowned Kinglet

A. O. U. No. 748. *Regulus regulus olivaceus* Baird.

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Crown-patch (partially concealed) bright orange or flame-color; a border of plain yellow feathers overlying the orange on the sides; these in turn bordered by black in front and on sides; extreme forehead white, connecting with white superciliary stripe; a dark line through eye; above bright olive-green, becoming olive-gray on cervix and sides of head and neck; wing-quills and tail-feathers much edged with light greenish yellow, the former in such fashion as to throw into relief a dusky spot on middle of secondaries; greater coverts tipped with yellow or whitish; underparts sordid white, sometimes dusky-washed, or touched on sides with olivaceous. *Adult female*: Similar, but with crown-patch plain yellow instead of orange. *Immature*: Without crown-patch or bordering black, gradually acquiring these through gradation of color. Length about 101.6 (4.00); wing 55 (2.16); tail 40 (1.57); bill 7.5 (.29); tarsus 17 (.67).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; orange, or yellow, and black of crown distinctive.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: lashed to and largely concealed by drooping twigs on under side of fir bough near tip, an exquisite ball of mosses, lichens, liverwort, fine grasses, etc.; bound together with cobwebs and lined with the softest materials, vegetable down, cow-hair, and feathers,  $3\frac{1}{2}$ -7 inches in diameter, and placed from five feet up. *Eggs*: 7-9, rarely 10 (one of 11 on record), sometimes in *two layers*, dull white, cream white, or sordid cream-color, finely sprinkled, or not, with pale wood-brown or dull rufous, and sometimes, obscurely, with vinaceous gray. Av. size 13.7 x 10.2 (.54 x .40). *Season*: April-July 1; two broods.

**Range of *Regulus regulus*.**—The Palearctic Region; in North America, breeding mainly north of the United States and in the mountains of the West; south in winter to the Gulf Coast and the highlands of Mexico and Guatemala.



## The Western Golden-crowned Kinglet

**Range of *R. r. olivaceus*.**—Western North America; breeding in the Boreal zone from Kadiak Island and Kenai Peninsula, Alaska, south to the mountains of southern California, and in the humid Transition zone of the northwest coastal strip from southern Alaska to San Francisco Bay; resident or winter resident in the humid coastal strip, and winter resident or visitor from British Columbia to Guatemala.

**Distribution in California.**—Not common summer resident in the humid coastal strip south to Marin County, in the northern coastal ranges, along the central crest of the Sierra Nevadas, and in the Warner, San Bernardino and San Jacinto Mountains. Common in winter in the humid coastal strip, and more sparingly and locally in timbered sections west of the Sierras, south to the mountains of Los Angeles County.

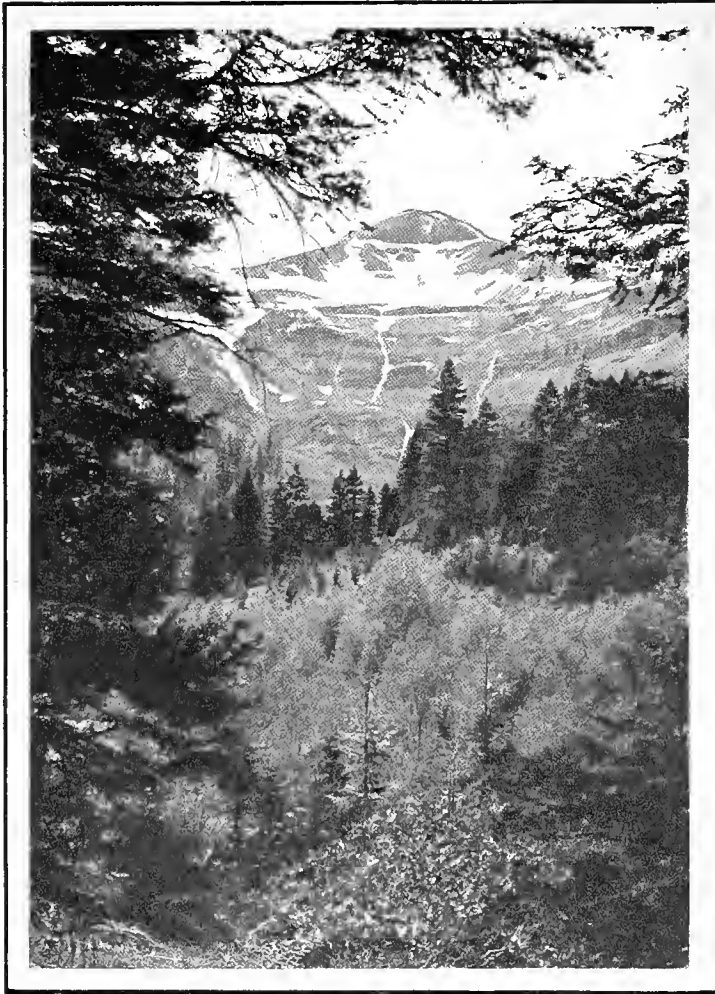
**Authorities.**—Cooper (*Regulus satrapa*), Orn. Calif., 1870, p. 32 (Sierra Nevada); Beal, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 84 (food); Sheldon, Condor, vol. x., 1908, p. 123 (Marin Co., desc. nest and eggs); Grinnell and Swarth, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. x., 1913, p. 313 (San Jacinto Mts.; summer); Ingersoll, Condor, vol. xv., 1913, p. 85 (Sierra Nevada; destruction of nests).

THREE of these little Kings, namely, Gold-crest, Fire-crest, and Ruby-crest, have portioned out the Northern World amongst themselves; and of these, Gold-crest (*Regulus regulus*) must be deemed preëminent, a sort of czarlet, for he rules in the European realms of King Fire-crest (*Regulus ignicapillus*) no less than in those of the Ruby-crested Kinglet (*C. calendula*), of America. In the fir woods of the North *R. regulus (satrapa)* is the more abundant form; but in California its range is more narrowly confined to the mountain heights; while in winter it is very much less abundant and prominent than the well nigh ubiquitous Ruby-crown. But at that, it is really surprising how very few people do know this amiable little monarch. To one who seeks the honor of his acquaintance, he proves a most delightful friend; but he has his little modesties and reserves, becoming to a potentate, so that a thousand of him would never be "common," nor pall upon the senses.

Kinglets go in troupes, family parties, which keep a little to themselves ordinarily; although Chickadees and Nuthatches, or even Creepers and Wrens, are welcome messmates in the friendly winter-time. Evergreen trees, exclusively, are frequented, and the real abundance of the birds at all seasons is coextensive with that of the Douglas spruce (*Pseudotsuga douglasi*) and the various fir trees. With tireless energy they search both bark and branches for insects' eggs and larvæ scarce visible to the human eye. They peer about incessantly, bending and darting and twisting and squirming, now hanging head downward, if need be, now fluttering prettily against the under side of a branch; but always on the go, until frequently one despairs of catching fair sight of the crown for the necessary fraction of a second. Of course it's a Golden-crown; but, then, we want to see it.

## The Western Golden-crowned Kinglet

And all the time Cutikins is carrying on an amiable conversation with his neighbor, interrupted and fragmentary, to be sure, but he has all day to it—*tss, tss-tsip-chip, tseek.*



Taken in the Warner Mts.

Photo by the Author

THE SCENE OF KINGLET'S SUMMER COURT

rather whisper sweet nothings in the mossy bower than be serenaded, never so ably. Oh, perilous house of content!

It remained for Mr. J. H. Bowles, of Tacoma, Washington, after years of untiring effort, to discover, in 1902, the first nest of this western variety. And then it came by way of revelation—a fir branch caught

Concerning the "song," one is a little puzzled how to report. One hears, no doubt, many little snatches and phrases which have in them something of the quality of the better-known carol of the Ruby-Crown, but they lack distinctness and completion. Moreover, they are never given earnestly, even in the height of the mating season, but, as it were, reminiscently, mere by-products of a contented mood. It may seem a little fanciful, but I am half tempted to believe that the Gold-crests are losing the ancient art of minstrelsy. The lines have fallen unto them in such pleasant places; food and shelter are no problems, and there is nothing of that shock and hazard of life which reacts most certainly upon the passion of song. And then it is *her* fault, anyway. Phyllis would

## The Western Golden-crowned Kinglet

against the evening sky and scrutinized mechanically afforded grounds for suspicion in a certain thickening of the twigs under the midrib. Investigation revealed a ball of moss matched to a nicety of green with the surrounding foliage, and made fast by dainty lashings to the enveloping twigs; and, better yet, a basketful of eggs. The first record for California appears to have been made by Mr. Harry H. Sheldon, of San Francisco, who in the summer of 1907 took a set of five eggs on the Lagunitas Creek, in southern Marin County.

Nests, it seems, may be found at any height from the level of the eyes to sixty feet (higher, no doubt, if one's eye-sight avails), but always on the under side of a fir limb, and usually where the foliage is naturally dense. The nest-ball is a wonderfully compacted affair of moss, both green and gray, interspersed with liverworts, dried grasses, soft weed-fibers, and cow-hair. The deep depression of the nest cup scarcely mars the sphericity of the whole, for the edges are brought well in; so much so, in fact, that a containing branch overloaded with foliage upon one side, once tipped half way over without spilling the eggs. The deep cavity is heavily lined with cow-hair and abundant feathers of grouse or lesser fowls. These feathers are placed with their soft ends protruding, and they curl over the entrance in such fashion as almost or quite to conceal the eggs. One would like to particularize at great length, for no fervors of description can overstate the beauties of this Kinglet palace.

Eggs vary in number from five to nine, seven and eight being the rule. I once took a nest with eleven—one too many at the least, for it had to rest on top of the others. They are not much larger than Hummingbirds' eggs and are quite as fragile. Mr. Bowles consumed twenty minutes in removing the contents of the big nest to the collecting box *without a break*. The eggs vary in color from pure white to sordid white and dusky brown. In the last two cases the tint may be due to a profusion of fine brown dots, or to advancement in incubation, the shell being so thin that the progressive stages of the chick's development are dimly shadowed through it.

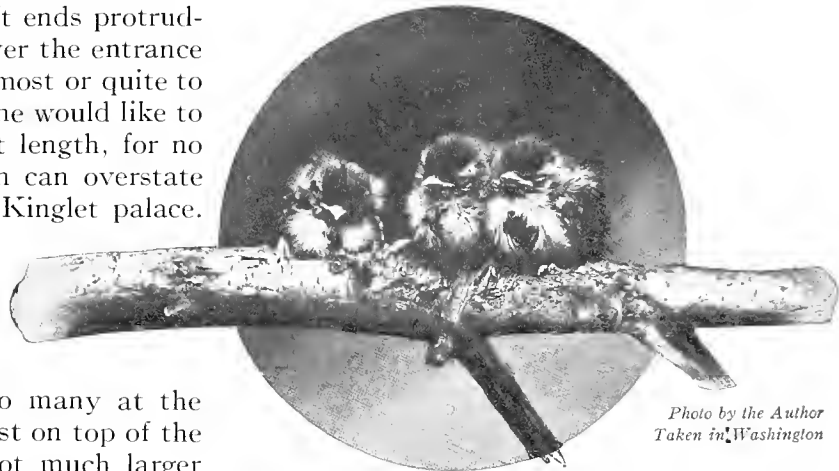


Photo by the Author  
Taken in Washington

NID-NID-NODDING

### *The Western Golden-crowned Kinglet*

The kinglet and queenlet are a devoted pair in nesting time. Whether gathering materials for the nest or hunting for food after the babies are hatched, they work in company as much as possible. They are discovered, it may be a hundred yards from the home tree, gleaning assiduously. After a time one of the birds by a muffled squeak announces a beakful, and suggests a return; the other acquiesces and they set off homeward, the male usually in the lead. It looks as though tracing would be an easy matter, but the birds stop circumspectly at every tree clump en route, and they are all too easily lost to sight long before the home tree is reached.

The female Kinglet is a close sitter and will not often leave the nest until the containing branch is sharply tapped. Then, invariably, she drops down a couple of feet and flits sharply sidewise, with manifest intent to deceive the laggard eye. Yet almost immediately she is minded to return, and will do so, if there is no further demonstration of hostilities. Re-covering the eggs is not always an easy matter, for the well is deep and the mouth narrow. One dame lighted on the brim of her nest and bowed and scraped and stamped, precisely as a carefully disciplined husband will when he brings muddy boots to the kitchen door. The operation was evidently quite unconnected with hesitation in view of my presence, but in some way was preparatory to her sinking carefully into the feather-lined pit before her. When she first covered the eggs, also, there was a great fuss made in settling, as though to free her feathers from the engaging edges of the nest. When the bird is well down upon her eggs there is nothing visible but the top of her head and the tip of her tail.

The male bird, meanwhile, is not indifferent. First he bustles up onto the nesting branch and flashes his fiery crest in plain token of anger, but later he is content to squeak disapproval from a position more removed.

While the mother bird is sitting, the male tends her faithfully, but he spends his spare moments, according to Mr. Bowles, in constructing "cock nests," or decoys, in the neighboring trees. These seem to serve no purpose beyond that of a nervous relief to the impatient father, and are seldom as carefully constructed as the veritable domus.

When the young of the first brood are hatched and ready to fly, the chief care of them falls to the father, while the female prepares for a second nesting. As to the further domestic relations one cannot speak with certainty, but it would seem probable that fall bird troops consist of the combined families of Mr. and Mrs. Quiverful.



**The Kinglets**

Males and females, about 4 1/2 life-size  
Ruby-crowns (upper and right), Western Golden-crowns (lower and left)



### **The Kinglets**

Ruby-crowns (upper and right), Western Golden-crowns (lower and left)

Males and females, about 4/7 life size



Alan Brooks -





## Ruby-crowned Kinglet

A. O. U. No. 749. *Corthylio calendula calendula* Linnaeus.

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Above olive-green, duller anteriorly, brightening to greenish yellow on edgings of quills and tail-feathers; a partly concealed crest of scarlet (scarlet to grenadine red; in younger specimens peach-red to grenadine); two narrow whitish wing-bars formed by tips of middle and greater coverts; some whitish edging on tertials; a dusky interval separating greenish yellow edges on outer webs of secondaries; a whitish eye-ring and whitish skirtings around base of bill; underparts soiled white, heavily tinged with buffy and olivaceous-buff. Fall and winter birds are more strongly tinged with olivaceous. *Adult female and immature*: Similar, but without crown-patch. Length 101.6-114.3 (4.00-4.50); wing 59.2 (2.33); tail 43.7 (1.72); bill from nostril 6.4 (.25).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; scarlet crest distinctive. Note wing-bars and whitish eye-ring of female and young. Lighter than *C. c. grinnelli*. Smaller and more olivaceous than *C. c. cineraceus*.

**Nesting.**—Does not breed in California—as in next form.

**Remarks.**—Whether or not the breeding birds of California, especially of southern California, are separable from those of the East, *C. c. calendula*, it is certain that vast numbers of an intermediate form, *infra grinnelli*, and indistinguishable from eastern specimens, coming presumably from Oregon and Washington, are present with us in winter and during migrations. It is equally certain that a grayer, "better," cineraceous bird is to be found in winter, notably in the Colorado River valley. Where this Ashy Kinglet breeds, or whether, indeed, we may not have two ashy forms, one from the southern Sierras and one from the northern interior, is not yet satisfactorily determined. I assume that *C. c. quasi-calendula* is extra limital in summer.

**Range of *Corthylio calendula*.**—North America, breeding in Boreal zones north of the United States, and in the mountains of the West south to New Mexico, Arizona, and California, and on Guadalupe Island. Winters south to highlands of Mexico and Guatemala.

**Range of *C. c. calendula*.**—As above, excluding the northwest humid coastal strip north of Washington (*grinnelli*) an undefined area of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the Great Basin region and its northern Upper Sonoran extension (*cineraceus*), and Guadalupe Island (*obscurus*).

**Distribution in California.**—Theoretically, the common winter bird of the lower levels, especially of the west-central and southwestern portions.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Regulus calendula*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1846, p. 115 (Calif.); **Anthony**, Auk, vol. xii., 1895, p. 181 (albino; San Diego); **Grinnell**, Condor, vol. vi., 1904, p. 25 (orig. desc.; type locality, Mt. Wilson, Los Angeles Co.); **Ray**, Condor, vol. xii., 1910, p. 130, fig. (desc. and photo of nest; Sierra Nevada); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Chronicle, Oct., 1921, p. 394 (manner of seeking food).

### No. 156a Ashy Kinglet

A. O. U. No. 749, part. *Corthylio calendula cineraceus* Grinnell.

**Synonym.**—WESTERN RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET.

## The Ruby-crowned Kinglets

**Description.**—Similar to *C. c. calendula*, but larger and much less olivaceous; the color tone of the foreparts ashy or grayish olive,—decided olive-green often not appearing above the middle of the back; probably also without increase of olivaceous in fall and winter.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A ball of moss, lichens, fine bark-strips, etc., bound together with cobwebs, and lashed to drooping twigs, beneath branch of conifer; lined with vegetable down, catkins, hair and feathers; and placed at moderate or considerable heights. *Eggs*: 5 to 9; dull white or pale buffy, faintly or sharply but finely speckled with reddish brown, chiefly about larger end. Av. of 25 California-taken eggs in the M. C. O. colls.: 14 x 10.5 (.55 x .415). *Season*: June; one brood (?).

**Range of *C. c. cineraceus*.**—Imperfectly defined. Probably occupies a west-central area in the United States which includes the Sierra Nevada and associated ranges, and the western portion and flanks of the intra-mountain trough, which extends well north into central British Columbia. There are few problems more fascinating or difficult than the distribution of the races of *Corthylio calendula*, and the key to a solution of this one lies in a study of the songs.

**Distribution in California.**—Common breeder in Boreal zone from the Warner and Siskiyou Mountains south along the central Sierras to about Long Meadow in Tulare County (Grinnell); also in the San Bernardino and San Jacinto Mountains. Common in winter at the lower levels, especially southerly and southeasterly.

### No. 156b Sitka Kinglet

A. O. U. No. 749a. *Corthylio calendula grinnelli* Palmer.

**Synonyms.**—ALASKAN KINGLET. SITKA RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET. GRINNELL'S KINGLET.

**Description.**—Like *C. c. calendula*, but of much darker coloration—a “saturated” form; also wing somewhat shorter, bill larger, etc. *Young birds*, especially, are much more heavily tinged with olivaceous above and with olive-buffy below. Av. measurements of males: wing 56.6 (2.23); tail 42.9 (1.69); bill 8.7 (.34); tarsus 18.1 (.72).

**Recognition Marks.**—A strikingly darker coloration than in *C. c. calendula*.

**Nesting.**—As preceding. Does not breed in California.

**Range of *C. c. grinnelli*.**—Pacific Coast district, breeding from British Columbia to head of Lynn Canal and Yukutat Bay, Alaska; south in winter to middle California.

**Occurrence in California.**—Fairly common winter resident in the Northwest humid coast strip south to Monterey; less common or casual south to Santa Barbara; also Redlands (Bishop).

**Authorities.**—Grinnell, Condor, vol. iii., 1901, p. 48 (San Mateo Co.; crit.); *ibid.*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 3, 1902, p. 72 (status in Calif.); *ibid.*, no. 11, 1915, p. 168 (status in Calif.); Bishop, Condor, vol. vii., 1905, p. 143 (Redlands).

THE SIGHT of a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, no matter where, begets in one a feeling akin to reverence. It is too beautiful, too sudden for mere flesh and blood, and we know that we are getting a winged message from the Creative Infinite.

It seems only yesterday I saw him—Easter Day in old Ohio. The significant dawn was struggling with heaped-up clouds,—the incredulities and fears of the world's night; but now and again the invincible sun found some tiny rift and poured a flood of tender gold upon a favored

## The Ruby-crowned Kinglets

spot where stood some solitary tree or expectant sylvan company. Along the river bank all was still. There were no signs of spring, save for the modest springing violet and the pious buckeye, shaking its late-prisoned fronds to the morning air, and tardily setting in order its manifold array of Easter candles. The oak trees were gray and hushed, and the swamp elms held their peace until the fortunes of the morning should be decided. Suddenly from down the river path there came a tiny burst of angel music, the peerless song of the Ruby-crown. Pure, ethereal, without hint of earthly dross or sadness came those limpid welling notes, the sweetest and the gladdest ever sung—at least by those who have not suffered. It was not, indeed, the greeting of the earth to the risen Lord, but rather the annunciation of the glorious fact by heaven's own appointed herald.



Taken in Pasadena

WESTERN RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET

Photo by Dickey

And on another yesterday, in old Santa Barbara, as I was jogging along behind the old mare (before the ruthless automobile was *de rigueur*) a Ruby-crowned Kinglet flashed down upon the road which had been recently sprinkled, and began nibbling daintily at some unguessable morsel of insect life which he had spied. Moreover, the little rajah let us pass him within three feet; and, believe me, the gleam of his resplendent jewel, authentic Burmese, from its mud setting smote a chord of wonder. The little king was not at all aware of his condescension, nor of the hazard of crown jewels, but it did affect one queerly to see such a ruby flung down by the roadside. Have a care, little Gemcrest! Some urchin sparrow will be coveting your splendor.

The Ruby-crowned Kinglet has something of the nervousness and vivacity of the typical wren. It moves restlessly from twig to twig, flirting its wings with a motion too quick for the eyes to follow, and frequently uttering a titter of alarm, *chit-tit* or *chit-it-it*. On occasions

### *The Ruby-crowned Kinglets*

of unusual excitement, as at the presence of an owl or a cat, the bird delivers what I call electric spark notes. *Chit it chit it chit it chit it chit it*, and so on *ad infinitum* in a sustained, vibrant series. If two birds become concerned over the same discovery, the Lilliputian bedlam which follows sounds like a six unit wireless transmitting station. During migrations the birds swarm through the tree tops like Warblers, but are often found singly or in small companies in thickets or open clusters of saplings.



AT TIMBER-LINE ON SHASTA

*Photo by the Author*

In such situations they exhibit more or less curiosity; and if one keeps reasonably still, he is almost sure to be inspected from a distance not to exceed four or five feet. It is here, too, that the males are found singing in spring. The bird often begins *sotto voce* with two or three high squeaks, as though trying to get the pitch down to the range of mortal ears before he gives his full voice. The core of the song is something like *tew, tew, tew, tew, titooreet', titooreet'*, the last phrases being given with a rising inflection, and with an accent of ravishing sweetness. The tones are so pure that they may readily be whistled by the human listener, and a

*The Ruby-crowned  
Kinglets*



*Taken in Washington*

RUBY'S BASKETFUL

*Photo by the Author*

musical contest provoked in which one is glad to come out second best.

After all, it is the song rather than the ruby which glorifies the Kinglet. Having heard only the preparatory spring song for years, it was a matter of great enlightenment to come upon the birds at home in the giant larches of northeastern Washington. Here these midgets sang not only incessantly but so loudly that they were easily the dominant vocal feature of the birdscape. It appears that the full-fledged breeding song is quite different from the delicate migratory carol. The preliminary notes are of much the same quality, but instead of accenting the final syllable of the *titooret* phrase, and repeating this, the phrase is given only once, with a sort of tittering, tremolo effect, and the emphasis is thrown upon a series of strong, sharp terminal notes, four or five in number, and of a uniform character—the whole somewhat as follows: *tew tew tew tew titteretteretter reet, cheep' cheep' cheep' cheep'*. These emphatic notes are also rendered in a detached form at occasional intervals,

### *The Ruby-crowned Kinglets*

usually after the entire song has been rehearsed; and they are so loud at all times as to be heard at a distance of half a mile. One individual began his song with an elaborate preliminary run of high-pitched whining notes of a fineness almost beyond human cognizance; then effected a descent by a *kititew* note to the *tew tew tew* series. In this case, also, the emphatic closing notes had a distinct double character, as *chee'py, chee'py, chee'py*.

Having retained in the foregoing paragraph the present tense, indicative of customary or established action, the author is prepared to retract, most humbly,—the assumed generalization. Generalizations are always dangerous. Disbelieve them, or treat them cavalierly, if you would learn the lore of nature. The Kinglets of the Pend d'Oreille did sing as above recited; but to my no less astonishment I have never heard the stentorous *cheep* notes in California—neither in the San Jacintos nor the Warners nor on Shasta, nor in the Mammoth country, where I know them best. On Mt. Shasta, particularly, I noted the invariable



Taken in Idaho

ANOTHER BASKETFUL

Photo by H. J. Rust

absence of the concluding notes (call them *shouts* rather). One performer, followed by the hour, said, *tew tew tew titooreét titooreét titooreét*; and the only variations observable in this example were preliminary

## *The Ruby-crowned Kinglets*

squeakings, sudden cessations, and indefinite repetitions of the main phrase—as high as seven, I believe. The birds of the Mammoth section, in southern Mono County east of the Sierras, have, among others, a localized strain which scarcely deserves the name of song at all, so prosaic and almost repulsive is it,—*sheb'le sheb'le shéble shep* or *sheb'le, sheb'le, sheb'le, pootsiweek*. These less gifted singers, however, seem to have no difficulty in securing mates, and, indeed, I am not sure that my poor opinion of their song is not subtly connected with the fact that one of their number, the most brazen, shouted at us derisively for hours, keeping well to a clump of trees which we morally *knew* contained a nest—the while an icy breeze from off the Mammoth Crests numbed first our fingers, then our feet, and lastly our courage. The same bird started to shout *sheb'le sheb'le*—at us from the same grove when we returned two years later; but we hurried past, muttering unprintable things. Whence, I conclude that Grinnell's claim of a resident race, *cineraceus*, in California, is a valid one, and that we have much to learn of the *California* Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

Like the Golden-Crowns, the Rubies weave a wonderful basket, which they swing from the end of a fir bough, or snuggle under the protecting tip. It is composed externally of whatever moss the locality offers in greatest abundance. This may contrast sharply in color with the surrounding foliage but, even so, it will be so dextrously concealed that none but the shrewdest eye may suspect its presence. Because of this and because of the wayward actions of the owners, the quest of the Ruby-crown's nest is one of the most fascinating of human pursuits. I have spent many hours at it and up to the summer of 1919 I had found—just two. In the first instance I caught the male pausing momentarily to feed his mate in a theretofore unsuspected thickening of a fir branch 30 feet up; and in the second I heard the male singing persistently in the home tree. In either case I generalized promptly (you have to in practical life), but the rules evolved were only two of a dozen that have to be learned for successful nesting.

It is not, therefore, all roses hunting Ruby-crowns' nests. The more determined you are to succeed, the more baffling seem to be the difficulties encountered. For an atom only as big as your thumb, the Ruby-crowned Kinglet is singularly sagacious. He has foresight and hindsight, and often enough, apparently, insight. He has his suspicions, at least, and when you hear the preparatory notes *tew tew tew* or *teer teer teer* continued indefinitely without sliding into the song proper, you may know that the royal midget is on guard. And if he does sing almost incessantly in the tree tops, his song circuit is a wide one, so that you

## *The Ruby-crowned Kinglets*



*Taken on Mt. Shasta looking west*

*Photo by the Author*

### WHAT THE RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET SEES

can seldom tell in which tree he is keeping a paid engagement. Well, who wants to bother the little fellows, anyhow!

A Sabbath spent on Shasta! apotheosis of rest! ultimate of soul's desire!—save Heaven. Best of all, the Ruby-crowned Kinglet sings! It is the Ruby-crown who captivates the imagination. Tireless he shouts from the tree-tops, and though charmed to the full with the rapture of the bird's shouting, one still wonders why he sings. For many moon cycles he has been a bachelor, a mere unit in the winter throng, careless of aught but himself and his gnawing belly. Spring roused him to thought of mating. The urge of hot blood led him to notice, to pursue and capture, to mate and then to celebrate in an ever-recurring note of ecstasy. But now? Now his mate sits demurely upon the nest. Love's favors are past, and there remains for him, what? Remains loyalty! Devotion! That swerveless passion of love which is above the heat of the blood and the expectation of favors. The singer—surely he knows not why—still shouts his joy from tree-top to tree-top, and all that his mate may be comforted in her long vigil. The bird rises above himself, and is, for a season, of that altruistic fellowship of which God is the founder, and we humans but unworthy members. For a season! Alas! there is the strange blighting pity of it. Summer ends, the necessity is over. Nature's subtle purposes have been accomplished, and the birds forget—are to each other henceforth as though they had never been.

Almost our singer in his ecstasy has seemed to grasp the reality of soul-life and to demand entrance into the fellowship of the immortals. And then, even while we are moved to call him 'brother,' the bird forgets—



Walter Chastler  
From a photograph copyright 1913 by W. L. Dawson

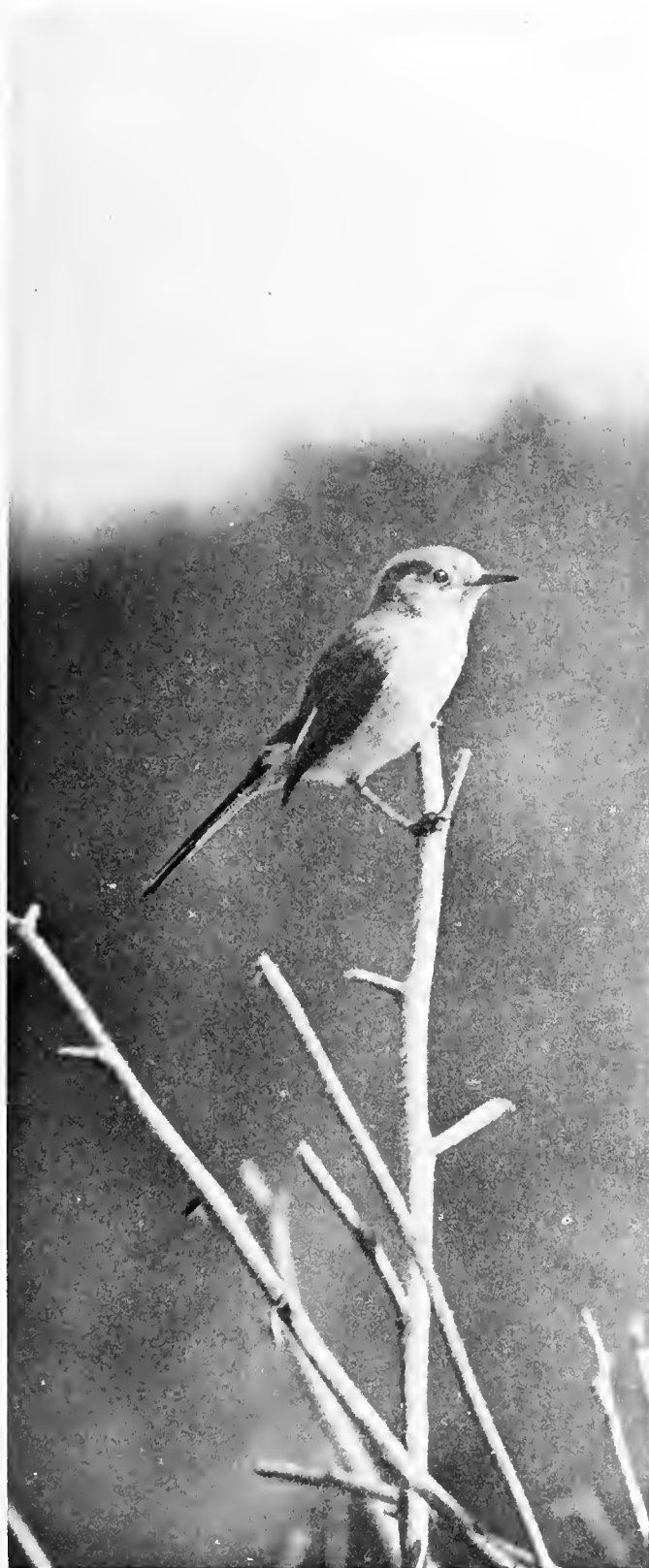
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### **Western Gnatcatcher**

*From a photograph, copyright 1913, by W. L. Dawson*

*Faint, illegible text in the lower right quadrant, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.*



*Copyright 1916 by W. B. Douson*



## The Western Gnatcatcher

becomes again a mere animated atom, a craving bundle of selfishness, the very symbol of inconstancy.

Wherefore, O Bird, I take your protestations *cum grano salis*. You are not you, *ipse cognitus*, you are only a prophecy, an expression of a Greater, who is for a time moved to express a high purpose through a bit of clay, and will presently withdraw himself again. Him I hear, and rejoice. But you? Shall I respect you in very sooth, Birdikins? Nay, not with my soul. My ear, indeed, is charmed. My eye has ceased not to mark with delight your very dainty motions. Imagination has been purified and aspiration stimulated. But—but—not with my soul. You—you have no soul. You are not yourself. You have—you are no self. For a Self were by very definition immortal. And I love only the *immortals*. Farewell! poor—dear—*bird*.

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No. 157

## Western Gnatcatcher

A. O. U. No. 751a. *Polioptila cærulea obscura* Ridgway.

**Synonym.**—WESTERN BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER.

**Description.**—*Adult male*: A U-shaped mark, involving extreme forehead and superciliaries, black; a narrow eye-ring white; pileum deep blue-gray (deep Payne's gray); cervix and sides of head, including lores, back, scapulars, and rump, light blue-gray (clear Payne's gray), with admixture of neutral gray; wings plain gray, the coverts and edgings sometimes tinged with bluish, the remiges fuscous; tail and its upper coverts black, the lateral pair of rectrices white on the outer web, except basally, and on terminal half of inner web, its shaft black throughout; the succeeding pair white on terminal half of outer web and terminal quarter of inner; the third pair tipped only with white; underparts dull white, with more or less bluish gray shading on sides of neck and sides. Bill and feet black; iris brown. *Adult female*: Like male, but without black on head; pileum like back—dull bluish gray, intermingled with brownish gray. *Immature birds* are much like adult females, but have conspicuous edging of pale gray or white on the outer web of the tertials. This feature is retained by the male for a season after the acquisition of the U-shaped frontal mark. Length about 114.3 (4.50); wing and tail 50 (1.97); bill 9-11 (.35-.43); tarsus 17.4 (.685).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; blue-gray coloration with black-and-white tail; black of head much restricted, as compared with *P. plumbea*; also white of lateral tail-feathers much more extensive, and wings more nearly uniform gray than *plumbea*; lighter, larger, and more purely white below than *P. californica*, from which it is further definitely distinguished by presence of white in tail.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A deep cup of felted vegetable fibers, lined or not with plant-down and feathers, bound with cobwebs, and ornamented or not with lichens; placed

## The Western Gnatcatcher

variously at moderate heights in shrub or tree; depth, over all, 3 inches; inside  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches; width, over all,  $2\frac{1}{4}$  to  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches inside; at brim  $1\frac{1}{4}$ - $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Eggs: 4 or 5; palest niagara green, pale "bluish" gray, or bluish white, sharply, heavily, and almost uniformly spotted with reddish brown (cameo-brown to burnt umber). Av. of 22 eggs in M. C. O. colls.: 14.2 x 10.9 (.56 x .43). Season: May-June; one or two broods.

**Range of *Poliophtila caerulea*.**—Mexico and southern United States, north in the central eastern states to southern Wisconsin and Michigan; southern Ontario.

**Range of *P. c. obscura*.**—Western United States and Mexico. Breeds from Shasta County, California, southern Nevada, southern Utah, and Colorado, south to Guanajuato and the Cape region of Lower California, and east to the Pecos River, Texas. Winters from southern California and southern Arizona south to Puebla and Cape San Lucas.

**Distribution in California.**—Resident in the Upper and Lower Sonoran zones of the San Diegoan district (including Catalina and Santa Cruz Islands) and along the valleys of the inner coast ranges north to Paicines in San Benito County; summer resident along the western skirts of the Sierras and along the inner coast ranges north of San Francisco Bay to Shasta County (Baird, Townsend); Begum, Tehama County, July 4, 1916, author; casually to Yreka (J. G. Cooper); also along the desert ranges southeast of the southern Sierras north to the White Mountains (Nelson, Fisher); and on the east slopes of the Sierras north to Independence Creek (Stephens, Fisher). Common in winter in the southeastern section of State, including deserts and Colorado River valley.

**Authorities.**—Gambel (*Culicivora caerulea*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1847, p. 156 (upper Calif.); Chamberlin, Condor, vol. iii., 1901, p. 33, figs. (life hist.; nest and eggs; habits; drawings of nests); Beal, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 84 (food); Tyler, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 9, 1913, 107 (San Joaquin Valley; habits).

PURSUIT of the Gnatcatchers is not only bad form but bad business, if your business happens to be learning all you can about the ways of birds. Let the birds pursue you, instead. How this is likely to come about two note-book entries will suggest:

Shandon, May 12, 1912: *Tsuei tsee—tsip tsee—bizzit—wee, tsee, dzee—dzeer gueick*—fluttering down like an autumn leaf came my Gnatcatcher, chattering, scolding, or singing happily at every step—for his mood changes twice with every breath. I knew he would come all the way down, for he had spied a curious looking brown hulk in the grass and must needs obtain specific news for the Poliophtilian Hourly Reflector—*dzuei dzeel—chut chut—dzeer dut dut*—"Why! It's just a man in khaki!" So he flutters, unlike the leaf, upward, with his tail pointing by turns in 3πr<sup>2</sup> directions. "Bye, bye, you animated atom of mortality! To think that Life comprehends you and me *and* the hippopotamus!"

Santa Barbara, Sept. 11, 1915: When the woodland exquisite sighted me sitting cross-legged on the edge of a dwarf willow cover, he was moved with an elfin curiosity and flitted toward me, bough by bough, until he was within three feet of my face. On such occasion one can



**The Building Inspector**  
Western Gnatcatcher at Nest  
*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*  
Taken in the Ojai





## The Western Gnatcatcher

only pray to be taken for a kindly cow and not for a human, the dread oppressor of the wild. The lithe, trim figure swayed and teetered and fluttered and posed till my heart overflowed with joy; and all the while he kept up a happy little chatter which was music if not song. The "biz" notes came only as gold beads interspersed between the parts, and when birdikins was through inspection he said *daezz*, awhile, slowly and solemnly. If I could worship anything mortal it would be in such a form.

This trim, active little figure is oftenest found in the half-open brush-patches which flank arid hillsides, in the sage proper (meaning, this time, *Salvia* and not *Artemisia*), or about the scattering oaks of Upper Sonoran foothills. His is, without question, the blithest disposition which the chaparral association has evolved; and his busy, friendly ways have endeared him to every bird-lover. Seen oftenest, perhaps, in little family troupes, a visitation of Gnatcatchers may well be deemed a happy event, not alone for the cheery animation of movement and comment which it displays, but because it is a visitation of expert husbandmen, practical entomologists, bent upon searching out and destroying every nit or aphid or tiny grub which lurks about the foliage of desert plant or garden shrub. I have seen one stow away



Allen Brooks

WESTERN GNATCATCHERS

## *The Western Gnatcatcher*

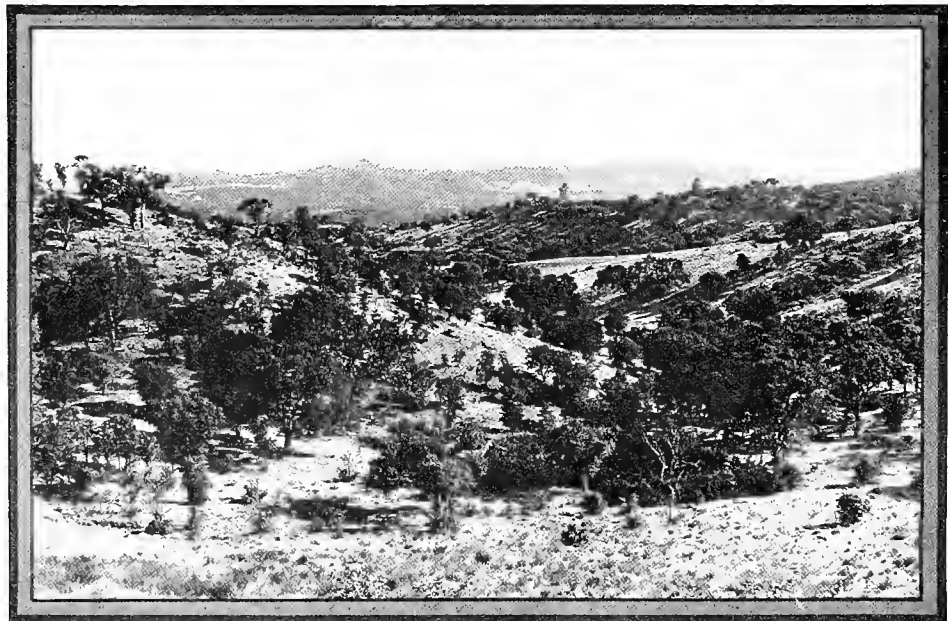
aphides at the rate of 150 per minute, never stopping until the entire colony was cleaned out; and then go right on talking and searching as if such a windfall was an every minute event. The value of the untiring services performed in our gardens and orchards by these unremunerated fairies



*Taken in San Bernardino County*

*Photo by Wright M. Pierce*

WESTERN GNATCATCHER APPROACHING NEST



*Taken in Monterey County*

GNATCATCHER COUNTRY

*Photo by the Author*

## *The Western Gnatcatcher*

and their compeers is simply beyond calculation. Recognize them we can and cherish them we can, but we can no more requite them nor discharge our obligations to them than we can pay for sunshine and rain, or reward the sea for its revivifying breath.

We are apt to think of these roamers of the sage as leading a sort of haphazard life at all but nesting time, but a little attention will show a method and timeliness in their movements. Certain brush-patches are purged daily for a season, probably for so long a time as a certain distinctive moth is depositing its eggs in that section. Again it is a tiny white grub which is attacking the pepper trees. As long as the supply lasts the Gnatcatcher will appear daily and work at capacity. What more could we ask?

It is only at nesting time, however, that we can seem to get the Gnatcatcher definitely anchored. Even at that, a half-built nest is likely to be torn down piecemeal and set up in a new location more to the builder's fancy. At such a time both birds work with unflagging

energy and prolong their labors into the heated hours each day. It is a rebuke to a sluggard to see one dash up to a tree-fork and whirl about in the nest that is to be. Cobwebs, to us invisible, are laid off at a furious rate, and the structure grows as if by magic. As the walls of the nest rise to a height often much greater than its breadth, they "toe in" at the top—presumably that the babies may not be tempted to climb out of the fairy well too soon. The greatest care is displayed in the external decoration of the nest, that it may exactly harmonize in color with its surroundings. If the site is a lichen-covered oak, the walls are draped with lichens until they appear as part and parcel with the tree. If a dead limb is chosen, grayish bark fibers are bound on with cobwebs, until the whole



*Taken in San Bernardino County*

*Photo by Pierce*

A COMPETENT INSPECTOR

## The Western Gnatcatcher



Taken in  
Monterey  
County

Photo by  
the Author

"FIRM PLANTED IN HER NEST"

nest is authentically "dead." In a burned-over section of the Sierras one pair of birds decorated dutifully with bits of charred bark.<sup>1</sup>

Some immediate protection from the sun is a necessity for most of our tree-nesting birds; hence, a bunch of leaves will almost invariably be discovered, whether near or remote, which shades the Gnatcatcher's nest at the critical hour. The western bird does not, however, like its eastern representative, seek shelter beneath some protecting limb or overshadowing trunk.

The temptation to look in upon some particular scene, of the score

whose images crowd memory's portal, is irresistible. Shall it be of the birds found near "The Pinnacles" in San Benito County? The date is May 17, 1916: We heard "business" of gnatcatchers; and though we knew there were two, our eye followed only the more active one while he traversed the tree in amiable, leisurely fashion, and then made off unconcernedly to another tree. I was about to suggest our moving on, when Bert said, "But what became of the other bird?" Sure enough, there *were* two of them. The other bird I spied, firm planted in her nest on a horizontal limb of the oak about 10 feet up. We approached from above through the tree to within a foot or two, when the bird flushed, and we saw five eggs, which we took to be rather advanced in incubation. At least that is the solace we gave ourselves. As matter of fact, when I returned with the Graflex to photograph, the inevitable happened, and I lost my heart to this brace of fairies. If one has a "scientific" duty to perform in case of this dainty tribe, he has to work quickly. The

<sup>1</sup> "Some Architectural Traits of the Western Gnatcatcher," by Corydon Chamberlain: "Condor," Vol. III, March, 1901, p. 35.

## The Plumbeous Gnatcatcher

female followed every new movement whether of arm, branch, or camera, with alert glances over the side of the nest. And for this purpose she had to rise on tiptoe, or crane her neck most ridiculously. But between times she settled resolutely to her task, insomuch that her head entirely disappeared and only the tail stuck straight up like a dear little dipper handle. This bolstering of good resolution and ostentatious settling to eggs in the presence of danger is a feature of irresistible charm to me. It is so absolutely appealing to see a midget whom you could crush between thumb and finger, and who trembles visibly before you, yet shakes herself together and dares to die rather than to shirk her immemorial charge.

I took a number of snaps of my lady Graymits at 2½ feet, but she fled when an audacious finger pressed against her beak. Then the male bird approached and scouted. And if there had been any lingering resentment on my part of my lady's eventual distrust, or any secret thought of pillage, the genial optimism of this feathered atom completely disarmed all hostility. He came again and again within two feet of my face and he said *bizz bizz* so amiably that I longed to be taken into full confidence. "What ho, good Sir Gnatcatcher, do you not need a kindly-disposed giant to fetch and carry for you?"

A giant on guard at the nest might not be amiss, either, for fully half the Gnatcatchers' nests are robbed or torn up by Jays (chiefly *Aphelocoma californica*). Wherefore the birds must needs nest twice in a season, and in individual cases, no doubt, three or four times. The raising of a Gnatcatcher family is no sinecure, even when the Jays do happen to leave them alone. Mrs. Myers, who has left us a charming account<sup>1</sup> of daily events in Gnatcatcher nurseries, tells how one pair fed its brood at the rate of 608 times a day; and another whose babies were a little older, at the rate of 840 times. Think of having to serve 840 meals in a day! And they are *meals*, too, for the birds do not stop in their questing forays until they have secured a beakful, and this may comprise a dozen or fifteen items.

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No. 158

## Plumbeous Gnatcatcher

A. O. U. No. 752. *Polioptila plumbea* (Baird).

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Similar to *P. cærulea obscura*, but entire top of head, including lore (or not) and nearly surrounding eye, glossy black; a conspicuous white

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<sup>1</sup>"Nesting Ways of the Western Gnatcatcher," by Harriet Williams Myers, *The Condor*, Vol. IX., March, 1901, pp. 48-51.

## The Plumbeous Gnatcatcher

eye-ring, usually interrupted behind, thus thrown into relief; wings rather more extensively overlaid with blue-gray; the white of outer tail-feathers much reduced,—nearly confined to outer web and tip of outermost pair, the succeeding pair narrow-edged on outer web and broadly tipped, the next pair very narrowly so edged and tipped with white. *Adult female*: Like male, but without black on head; pileum plain dull bluish gray (deep Payne's gray), contrasting with back, which is more or less overlaid with brownish. *Immatures* are much like adult females, but with more or less grayish edging on outer webs of tertials, as in *P. c. obscura*. Length (almost exactly that of *P. c. obscura*) about 114.3 (4.50); wing 46 (1.18); tail 50 (1.97); bill 9 (.35); tarsus 17.4 (.685).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; blue-gray with black-and-white coloration; black crown of male distinguishes from *P. c. obscura*; larger, lighter, and more purely white below, as compared with *P. californica*, from which it is further distinguished by notable increase of white in tail.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A deep cup of fine gray vegetable fibers, bound with cobwebs and lined with plant-down, or variously; placed in bush or weed, or low in tree, and usually settled among supporting twigs or upright branch. *Eggs*: 4 or 5; much as in preceding species, but perhaps more sparingly spotted. Av. of 20 eggs in M. C. O. coll.: 13.5 x 10.4 (.53 x .41). *Season*: April and June; two broods.

**General Range.**—The Lower Sonoran zone of the southwestern United States, narrowly defined, northern Mexico, and Lower California.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident of the Colorado Desert and the valley of the Colorado River; less common on the Mohave and associated deserts, as far north as Armagosa River, in eastern Inyo County.

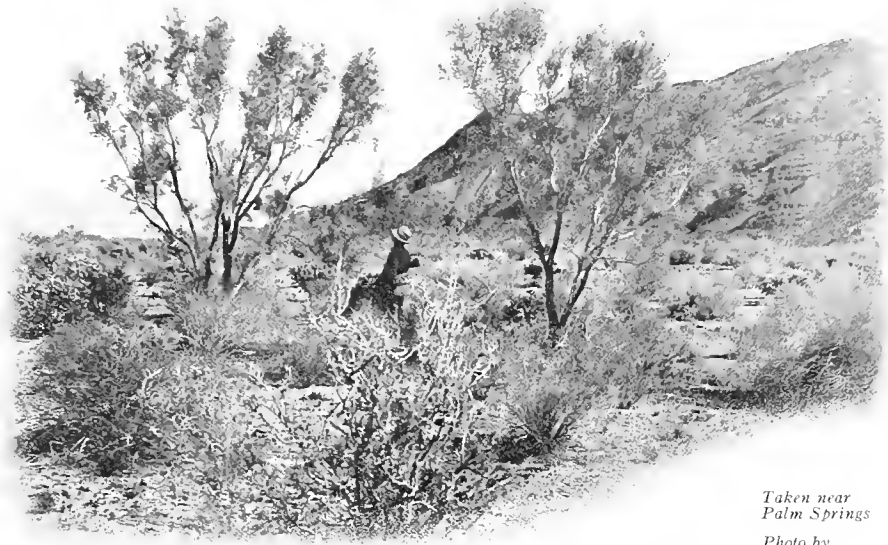
**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Culicivora atricapilla*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. ii., 1853, p. 262, part (Ft. Yuma); *ibid.*, Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. x., pt. iv., 1859, p. 39 (habits, notes); **Brewster**, Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club, vol. vi., 1881, p. 102 (crit.; syn.); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xii., 1914, p. 214 (Colorado Valley; occurrence; nest); *ibid.*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 11, 1915, p. 168 (status in Calif.).

“**POTHOLES**: Feb. 11, 1913:

*Chee cheé to yáááá; chee chee to yáááá*—It was thus that this absurd little dab of blue-gray dared to mock the birdman's dignity from the dense cover of an atriplex near the old Indian rancheria. I hurried round the bush to dislodge His Sauciness, but he retreated as rapidly, keeping the giant weed between us and jeering volubly the while. Finally, by making a feint in one direction and doubling in the other, I startled the urchin, so that he first stumbled midair and then dashed into another bush. Poor little wisp! He is a 'specimen' now, very scientific, but his saucy little spirit has fled.”

The case is really a pretty serious one, though, and a good deal of gun work will be necessary before we shall know exactly where *plumbea* belongs, and by how much it differs from *cerulea (obscura)* and *californica*. Except as regards adult males, the birds are almost indistinguishable to eye. While the notes of *plumbea* are weaker and softer than those of *cerulea*, it takes a good ear backed by no little experience to distinguish them infallibly. The ranges of *plumbea* and *californica* overlap

## The Plumbeous Gnatcatcher



Taken near  
Palm Springs  
Photo by  
the Author

MAJOR BROOKS CONSIDERS THE PROSPECT  
A TYPICAL DESERT RANGE OF THE PLUMBEOUS GNATCATCHER

only along the western border of the former; but the *plumbea* territory is extensively invaded by *cærulea* in winter, notably along the banks of the lower Colorado River. And while the breeding ranges of *plumbea* and *cærulea* are faunally distinct, there is a little overlapping or interdigitation of alternating canyons and ridges in certain desert ranges.

Stephens (MS) says, "Rather common residents of the Colorado Valley, Colorado Desert, and parts of the Mojave Desert. The seasonal distribution of the Plumbeous Gnatcatchers has not been worked out. I surmise, however, that in summer they frequent valleys and comparatively level plains, and that in winter the bulk of the species goes to the edges of the hills and the mouths of the canyons in the foothills—the short migration being as frequently north as south." Grinnell says<sup>1</sup> of their occurrence in the Colorado Valley: "The desert wash association with its catclaw, palo verde, ironwood, and smaller woody and stiff-twigged plants, was the preferred habitat of this bird, though it occurred also in the atriplex and mesquite belts along the river, even straying occasionally into the arrowweeds and willows." I found it common in the creosote belt below Palm Springs in January, 1913, and again in the atriplex wastes adjacent to the Salton Sea. In Arizona,

<sup>1</sup> Mammals and Birds of the Colorado Valley, p. 214.

### *The Plumbeous Gnatcatcher*

while it is preëminently a bird of the mesas, it follows the foothill slopes up into the oak belt, where its nests receive attention from the Arizona Jay as well as from the Dwarf Cowbird. In the Patagonia Range I found an egg of the latter in a dainty nest placed eight feet up near the top of a scrub oak, and the outraged householder, who had evidently punctured the egg, mounting guard over his blighted hopes.

The nest, according to the excellent authority of Mr. Frank C.



*Taken at "Fig-tree John's" Spring, Colorado Desert*

*Photo by Donald R. Dickey*

PLUMBEOUS GNATCATCHER, FEMALE, AT NEST

Willard, is placed at very moderate heights, usually about five feet, near the top of a bush. Both birds assist in nest building, though the female has the last word (*as usual*) as to how the furniture shall be disposed. The male is a cheerful, confiding soul, and during his shift at the brooding will allow all sorts of photographic liberties. If the eggs are to be inspected, only a finger will dislodge him. The female, on the other hand, suspects all bird-men and flees inspection, carrying her annoyance, it is said, to the point of desertion, if the eggs be fresh.

The Plumbeous Gnatcatchers have no such reputation as architects



## The Black-tailed Gnatcatcher

as have their cousins *carulea*, their nests being simple, often of grayish bark-strips and plant-fibers, undecorated,—most like those of the Eastern Redstart, Dr. Brewster says.

No. 159

### Black-tailed Gnatcatcher

A. O. U. No. 753. *Polioptila californica* Brewster.

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Somewhat similar to *P. plumbea*, but smaller and darker, especially below, with further reduction or absence of white in tail; top of head and nape, including lores and upper auriculars, glossy black; the white eye-ring reduced, or confined to lower lid, or wanting; wings dusky, the coverts and outer webs of remiges lightly (or scarcely) skirted with bluish gray; tail black, the outermost pair of rectrices very narrowly edged (on outer web only) and tipped with white, the succeeding pairs very narrowly or not at all so marked; lower breast and belly dull pale bluish gray, or dull whitish; the remaining underparts heavily tinged with dull bluish gray, or the flanks with brownish gray. *Adult female*: Like male, but without black on head; white eye-ring distinct; pileum dull plumbeous, not abruptly contrasting with back; back, scapulars, and posterior underparts heavily washed with brownish; tail brownish black. *Immature males* are like their mothers, but are clearer blue-gray anteriorly, and less extensively washed with brownish posteriorly. *Immature females* accentuate the brownish. Length about 108 (4.25); wing 46 (1.81); tail 49.6 (1.95); bill 9.1 (.36); tarsus 17.5 (.69).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; dull bluish gray and brownish coloration; sordid gray underparts; black cap of male distinguishes from the Western Gnatcatcher; reduction of white in tail and sordid underparts from both *P. carulea obscura* and *P. plumbea*.

**Nesting.**—*Nest* and *Eggs* as in preceding species. Av. size of eggs 14 x 11.2 (.55 x .44). *Season*: April–June; one or two broods.

**General Range.**—Southwestern California and Lower California.

**Distribution in California.**—“Common resident locally of the Sonoran zone in the San Diegan district, from the Mexican line northwest to the lower Santa Clara Valley in southern Ventura County (Evermann), and even to Ventura. Occurs only west of the desert divide, except at San Gorgonio Pass, through which the range of the species extends casually in winter desertwards as far as Palm Springs” (Grinnell).

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Culicivora atricapilla*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. ii., 1853, p. 262, part (San Diego); **Brewster**, Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club, vol. vi., 1881, p. 103 (orig. desc.; type locality, Riverside); **Swarth**, Condor, vol. iv., 1902, p. 86 (plumage changes); **Willett**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 7, 1912, p. 106 (s. Calif.; distr., nesting dates, etc.); **Woods**, Condor, vol. xxiii., 1921, p. 173, figs. (nesting habits; photos of adults, young, nests, habitat).

WHILE skirting a bit of cactus at the base of a mountain back of San Diego, I made the brief acquaintance of this most engaging sprite.

### *The Black-tailed Gnatcatcher*

The bird was, of course, trying to say *buz bee* after the manner of his kind; but it was with an entirely new accent. He tried to mew and buzz at the same time, but the mew had it. The sound produced was absurdly like that of a young kitten who should be plaintively demanding milk while spitting at the terrier. The Gnatcatcher did some other vocal stunts too, interspersing the pepper-box notes of the Cassin Vireo with a cat-call faintly suggestive of the roguish Chat, then mew-spitting again. As I stood motionless, the bird moved about demurely through a neighboring sage-bush, and though it eyed me intently, the incessant stream of vocables which it kept up seemed to have no particular bearing on the situation. There was an impersonality, a nonchalance, about the whole performance, which left one doubting whether, after all, these extraordinary and explicit noises might be coming from such a sedate source.

And that is, honestly, about all that the writer knows at first hand of the Black-tailed Gnatcatcher. Laurels await the conscientious biographer who will give us a full flesh-and-blood account of this elusive bird. Certainly the meager citations from early ornithological literature are principally concerned with matters of names and localities and distinguishing marks, of little interest to us and none whatever to the birds. Yet it may be well to enumerate the contributing causes of this neglect or oversight or manifest failure. To begin with, the birds themselves are rather scarce and irregularly distributed. *Californica* is hardly a bird of the ceanothus, certainly not of the oaks, but keeps rather to the chamisal, or to shorter, more scattered growths of the desert. Even where it is thoroughly at home *californica* is much less in evidence than is *obscura* further north.

Working with a difficult genus, *Polioptila*, science was slow to recognize the distinctness of the species *californica*, having buried it for years under the name *melanura*, which proved to be synonymous with *plumbea*. It was *melanura*, however (Greek for black-tail), which gave to us the very unfortunate "common" name which now handicaps the fame of *californica*. Black-tailed Gnatcatcher! Why, *all* Gnatcatchers (there are about 30 of them) have black tails. As well speak of a Black Blackbird. The name Black-crowned Gnatcatcher might serve us well enough in distinguishing from the Western (*P. carulea obscura*), which has only a narrow V-shaped mark of black about the forehead and superciliaries. But then all male Gnatcatchers have more or less black about the head, and many of them are black-capped. To be at all consistent, we shall have to fall back upon a place- or circumstance-name. "California" is not suitable, because *obscura* is much more widely distributed through the State. Southern California is too cumbersome, Riverside (the place of original description) too local. Really, I think we ought to call it



BLACK-TAILED GNATCATCHERS

## *The Wren-Tits*

Brewster's Gnatcatcher, after its gifted and very deserving describer.

Mr. Robert S. Woods, who has studied this species with some particularity near Azusa, finds<sup>1</sup> that the birds are very local in their range, and a given pair is usually confined to a space of two or three acres. They seem not to care for water at all, either for drinking or bathing, being therefore very literally dependent upon "bug juice." Nesting is the absorbing business of springtime, and no sooner is one brood successfully reared than another is attempted. The male bird takes the lead in nest construction, and performs his fair share of the duties of incubation as well. Insect food is gleaned assiduously from the surface of the desert plants, and only rarely does the bird attempt such excursions into the air as would justify the name Gnatcatcher. The black cap of the male bird is featured in spring and summer only. About the middle of February black patches appear upon the crown and quickly spread over the entire top of the head. The autumnal change takes place much more slowly, and consists of a gradual obscuring and replacing of glossy black by gray. The first signs of gray can be detected by the middle of July, but it requires approximately six weeks for all traces of the darker color, with the exception of a permanent blackish streak over the eye, to disappear.

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No. 160

## Wren-Tit

A. O. U. No. 742 and No. 742c. *Chamaea fasciata fasciata* (Gambel).

**Synonym.**—INTERMEDIATE WREN-TIT.

**Description.**—*Adult in spring and summer:* Plumage loose in texture, especially below; head and neck, above and on sides, dark grayish brown or seal-brown, varied by faintly darker centers; remaining upperparts lighter, more ochrey-brown (mummy-brown) (flight-feathers and tail a little darker and grayer), shading upon sides to light wood-brown of under plumage; the breast vaguely streaked with darker; middle of belly and chin lighter, more buffy. Bill and feet brownish horn; iris whitish. *Adult in fall and winter:* Plumage softer and color more blended. *Young birds* are duller, with plumage still looser in texture, and color of head shading into that of back. Length about 153.7 (6.50); wing 60 (2.36); tail 80 (3.15); bill 11.5 (.45); tarsus 25.4 (1.00).

**Remarks.**—While there is a pretty steady deepening of color from south to north (along the coast, but not necessarily in the interior), throughout the range of this species, it seems unwise to try to recognize four divisions, as Ridgway has done. The characters separating *C. f. fasciata* and *C. f. rufula* Ridgway are neither well marked nor geographically constant, and are, therefore, merged herewith under the name *fasciata*. It should be remembered, however, that an arbitrary subdivision could be established anywhere between *henshawi* and *fasciata* in the southern coast ranges, or between *fasciata* and *phaea* in Mendocino and Humboldt counties.

<sup>1</sup> Condor, Vol. XXIII., Nov., 1921, p. 173.



**Pallid Wren-Tit**

*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*

Taken in the Ojai



## The Wren-Tits

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; brown coloration with absence of distinctive marks; soft fluffy plumage and consequent dishevelled appearance; long tail, held at any angle; white eyes; loud musical notes, especially a staccato series in monotone accelerating. A shy and ubiquitous bird of the chaparral, more often heard than seen.

**Nesting.**—See next form.

**Range of *Chamaea fasciata*.**—Pacific Coast district from Oregon south to northern Lower California.

**Range of *C. f. fasciata*.**—Wholly contained within California. The humid coastal strip of California from Mendocino County south to Monterey, east to hills of Berkeley and Mt. Hamilton range.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Parus fasciatus*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. ii., 1845, p. 265 (orig. desc.; Calif); **Shufeldt**, Jour. of Morph., vol. iii., no. 3, p. 475 (osteology; relationships); **Lucas**, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xiii., 1890, p. 337 (osteology; relationships); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 30, 1907, p. 71 (food); **Grinnell**, Condor, vol. xv., 1913, p. 178 (call-notes and mannerisms); **Newberry**, Condor, vol. xviii., 1916, p. 65, figs. (life hist.; desc. nest and feeding of young; photos).

### No. 160a Southern Wren-Tit

A. O. U. No. 742a. ***Chamaea fasciata henshawi*** Ridgway.

**Synonym.**—PALLID WREN-TIT.

**Description.**—Like *C. f. fasciata*, but paler throughout; the division of colors between back and pileum less distinct; back, etc., dull sepia or olive-brown; the head hair-brown to deep mouse-gray; the underparts vinaceous buff.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A closely woven cup of fine grasses, frayed weed-bark, and the like, lined with horsehair; placed one to four feet up in thickets; measures  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 wide by 3 to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  deep outside;  $2\frac{1}{4}$  wide by 2 deep inside. *Eggs*: 3 to 5, usually 4; pale niagara green, unmarked. Av. of 23 eggs in the M. C. O. coll.:  $17.8 \times 13.7$  ( $.70 \times .54$ ). *Season*: March–June; two broods.

**Range of *C. f. henshawi*.**—Chiefly contained within California. Common resident of the Upper Sonoran zone, from Monterey south to northern Lower California, east to the desert divides and north along the western foothills of the Sierra Nevada to Shasta County. Also interiorly along the inner coast ranges from Siskiyou County to stations in Mendocino and Solano counties.

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Chamaea fasciata*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ii., 1853, p. 264 (Calif.); **Ridgway**, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. v., 1882, p. 13 (orig. desc.; type locality, Walker's Basin, Kern Co.); **Bowles**, Condor, vol. xiii., 1911, p. 30 (Santa Barbara; desc. nest and eggs, song, habits).

### No. 160b Northern Wren-Tit

A. O. U. No. 742b. ***Chamaea fasciata phæa*** Osgood.

**Synonyms.**—OREGON WREN-TIT. DUSKY WREN-TIT (Ridgway). COAST WREN-TIT (A. O. U.).

**Description.**—Like *C. f. fasciata*, but darker; pileum deep warm sepia; sides of head and neck grayer,—deep grayish brown faintly streaked with whitish; back, rump, etc., bister or dark sepia; the sides dark reddish brown (between Rood's brown and vandyke brown); the underparts paling centrally to fawn-color; the streaks on chest, etc., broader, more diffuse, and more rufescent. Size of *fasciata*.

## The Wren-Tits

**Range of *C. f. phæa*.**—Resident in humid coastal strip from southern boundaries of Humboldt County north to the Columbia River.

**Authorities.**—**Townsend** (*Chamaea fasciata*), Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. x., 1887, p. 229 (Humboldt Bay; song); *Osgood*, Proc. Biol. Soc. Wash., vol. xiii., 1899, p. 42 (orig. desc.); *Fisher*, Condor, iv., 1902, p. 135 (Humboldt and Del Norte counties).

ALTHOUGH so modest of garb and mien, the Wren-Tit is in a sense the most distinctive bird of California. For in its one small anatomy *Chamaea* exhibits differences which seem to entitle it to family rank. The monotypic family so constituted, the *Chamaeidae*, enjoys the further distinction of being the only family peculiar to North America. Either the bird has been here a very long time, or it has dropped from the skies "most unexpected." In any case *chamaea* is the original "Native Son" of California. Familiar spirit of the chaparral and all lowland tangles, it is also one of the commonest of the birds of California. Within its very considerable associational range, it will take first place for uniformity

of distribution, and will yield only to the Linnet in point of numbers.

Let us, then, repair to the chaparral forthwith and seek acquaintance with this member of California's first family. Ten to one, the bird heralds his presence in the all but impenetrable bush by a staccato song of flute-like notes—welling up from nowhere in particular, but audible for a quarter of a mile at least. Pursuit of the songster would only provoke retreat, and the Wren-Tit is a master scout in these trackless mazes. A better way is to creep in under cover a few feet from the trail, and to summon the bird by screeching. Presently one and then another will appear, for they almost invariably travel in pairs, moving quietly through the middle growths. As the



Taken in Pasadena

From a photograph, Copyright 1914, by D. R. Dickey

EXERCISE ON THE INCLINED BAR

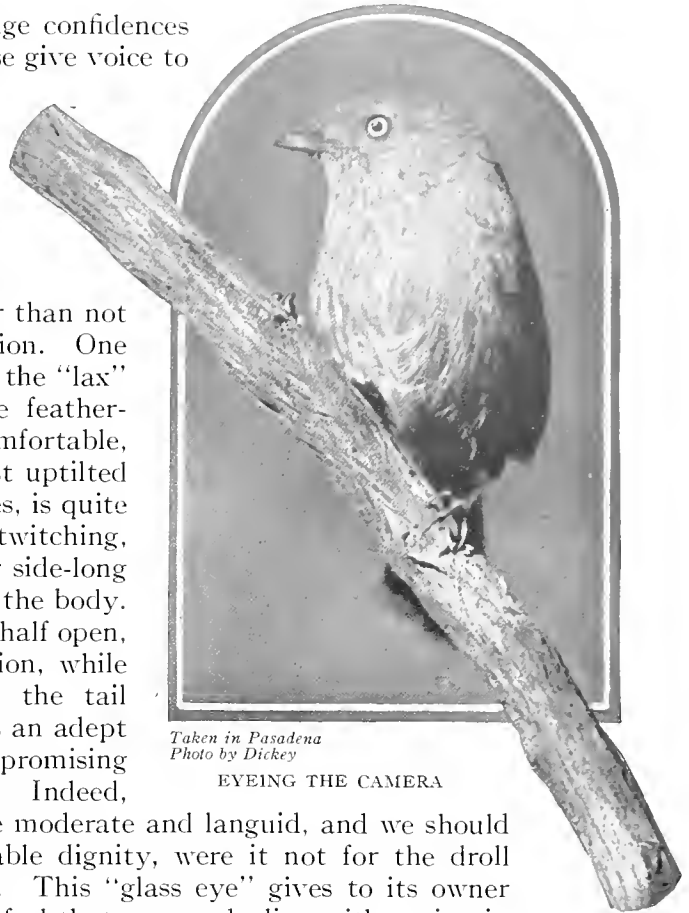


## The Wren-Tits

quest progresses the birds exchange confidences now and then in a low peep, or else give voice to suspicion in an absurd little series of low ratchety notes. But the birds in these circumstances rarely exhibit fear, and will venture up repeatedly within three or four feet. Even after they have correctly diagnosed your case, they will oftener than not potter about in friendly lazy fashion. One has ample opportunity to observe the "lax" plumage with diffuse or hair-like feather-tips, and these all fluffed out in comfortable, dowdy fashion. The tail, oftenest uptilted at an angle of forty or fifty degrees, is quite mobile, not, indeed, nervously twitching, but still compensating by bobs or side-long sweeps for every major motion of the body. Sometimes this member is carried half open, and we note its fan-like graduation, while in every short flight attempted the tail "pumps" vigorously. The bird is an adept climber, but never attempts compromising "stunts" as a Chickadee would. Indeed, all the Wren-Tit's movements are moderate and languid, and we should attribute to the bird a considerable dignity, were it not for the droll white iris which belies its claims. This "glass eye" gives to its owner a sort of impersonal cast, and we feel that we are dealing with a pixy in masquerade, rather than with a flesh-and-blood bird.

While wedded to the chaparral, the Wren-Tit is no recluse. If half civilized connections are maintained by means of hedge or neglected fence-row or weed-grown hollow, the bird will pay dutiful visits to orchard or garden, and he will announce his or her presence—for both sexes sing indistinguishably—by no less dutiful sounding of the challenge notes. As an authentic mark of Californiity, therefore, the pleasant call of the Wren-Tit, whether near or remote, comes to be one of the most cherished features of country or suburban life in our State.

Occasional visits to orchard or garden need not be resented, either, on economic grounds; for while the Wren-Tit does indulge in fruit, it is chiefly wild fruit such as elderberries, coffee berries (*Rhamnus*), twin berries (*Lonicera interrupta*), etc. Its chief interest is in insect food, and



*Taken in Pasadena  
Photo by Dickey*

EYEING THE CAMERA

*The Wren-Tits*



WREN-TIT

of that such species as do not require especial agility in capture,—spiders, caterpillars, ants, the smaller wasps taken at their nests, and, notably, the scale insects. Besides these, the bird has for a staple, available seven months in the year, the seeds of poison oak (*Rhus diversiloba*).

The bird, of course, is immune to the fancied injuries caused by this plant, and there is no denying that the Wren-Tit is an active agent in its dissemination. (The author happens, also, to be immune, but he will never forget the shriek of dismay with which a lady fled from a store in Berkeley upon learning that a modest boutonniere of autumn leaves carried by the birdman was poison oak! *Sic semper hysterics!*)

## *The Wren-Tits*

That relatively little is known of the nesting habits of the Wren-Tit is due to two causes: first, the boundless immensity of their nesting cover—the traditional needle in a hay stack presents a less discouraging outlook; and, second, the studied secrecy with which the nesting birds approach or leave or cling to their nests. Not even a sudden blow upon the nesting bush will startle the Wren-Tit into a noisy betrayal. If it quits the eggs at all, it will do so quietly by a deliberate movement, which is presently halted to await further developments. Even if quite sure of detection, or while the nest is under inspection, the bird will oftenest pause on the opposite side of the bush, either silently, or uttering a harsh, rasping note of protest. Both birds will join in the defense; and though the accusations are genteel, the white eye of the Wren-Tit knows how to be very stern. One observer, Mr. Wright M. Pierce, of Claremont, notes<sup>1</sup> how one bird on such an occasion dropped to the ground and feigned lameness, the familiar decoy ruse, accompanying its solicitous demonstration by “a hissing sound intermingled with sharp croaks.”

Nests are placed at very moderate heights, two or three feet above the ground, in any sort of cover, provided only it is dense enough; though Mr. Mailliard records<sup>2</sup> one instance of the Wren-Tit's building twelve feet up in a live oak tree. The nest is a well-built cup of wrapped grasses and bark-strips, settled firmly upon a support of horizontal branches or clustering stems. The grasses chosen are invariably browned or grayed with age, and the bark is stripped from the stalks of last year's weeds. Cobwebs help to bind the exterior, and the lining is of horse-hair, if possibly obtainable. (One wonders how American birds ever managed before the advent of the horse.)

Eggs, from three to five in number, are deposited late in March or early in April in southern latitudes, in late April or early May further north. These, when fresh, are of an exquisite turquoise green color; but the green element soon fades, and cabinet specimens are pale Nile blue. Incubation, participated in by both sexes, lasts 15 to 18 days, and the young occupy the nest sixteen or seventeen days longer. The children accompany their parents to slightly higher levels in late June or July, or else remain closely at home, according to the configuration of the country.

Though we have spoken explicitly of the appearance of the Wren-Tit, it is as a vocalist that the bird is best known. Indeed, it is safe to say that the bird is heard a thousand times to once it is seen. The “song cycle” of this species is, perhaps, less affected by or dependent on the

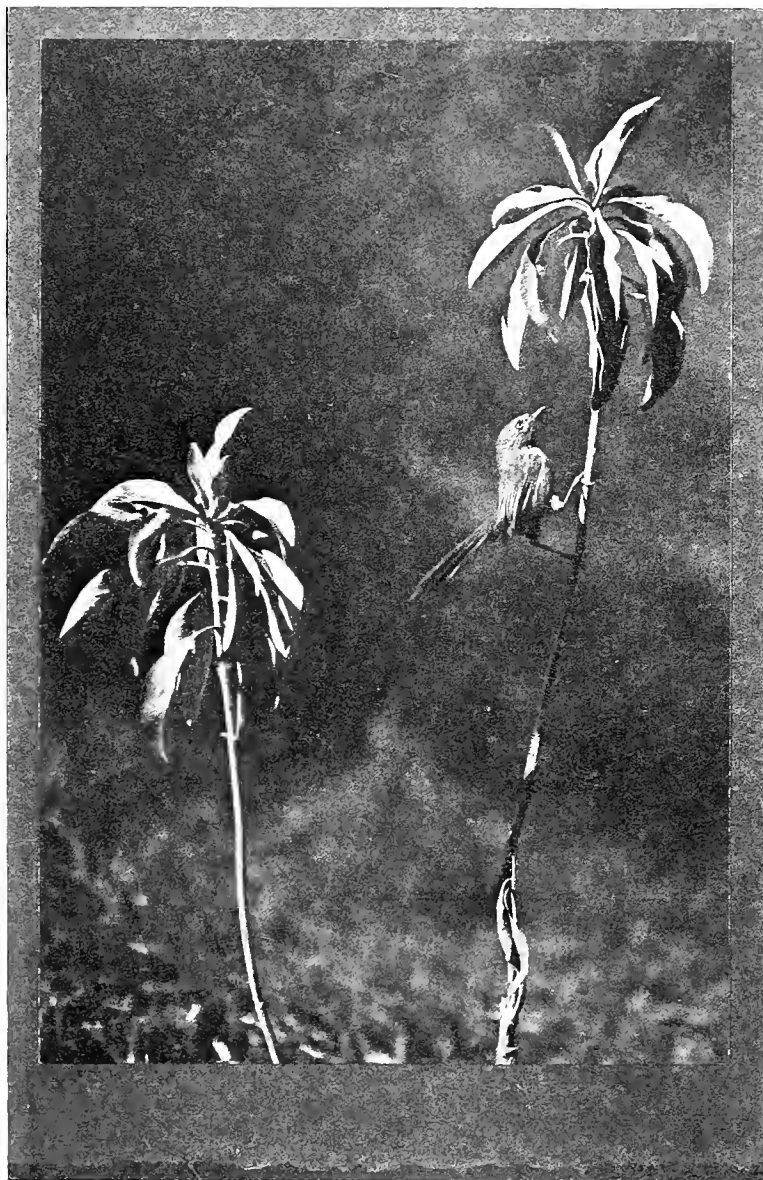
<sup>1</sup> *The Condor*, Vol. IX., Sept., 1907, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> *The Condor*, Vol. IV., p. 95.

## *The Wren-Tits*

"breeding cycle," than in the case of any comparable species. There are fluctuations of vocality, due to weather conditions, moult, current distribution, etc.; but, in general, it may be said that Wren-Tits of both sexes sing throughout the year. Vocal utterance with birds is an expression of high spirits, and as for the Wren-Tit he (or she) is feeling pretty well, I thank you, most of the time. Wherefore, we nod significantly, and say "California!"

The analysis and classification of the Wren-Tit notes is a most fascinating pursuit for the bird student. Dr. Grinnell<sup>1</sup> has given us the best account of them to date, and I am indebted to his outline, although differing from him slightly. While no two observers will hear exactly the same cadences, nor attach the same importance to minor sounds, all will agree upon the startling originality and vigor of the Wren-Tit's major call. This consists of a series of staccato notes which may be whistled admirably, and which are of so pure a quality



*Taken in Pasadena*

*Photo by Donald R. Dickey*

PALLID WREN-TIT ON SALVIA

<sup>1</sup> *The Condor*, Vol. XV., Sept. 1913, p. 179.



*Taken near Santa Barbara*

THE WREN-TIT IS NO QUITTER

*Photo by the Author*

### *The Wren-Tits*

that defining consonants would be meaningless—*hóo—hóo—hóo—hóo hóo hóo hóo hóo hóo*. The tempo is sharply accelerated after the three or four leisurely opening notes; but the concluding portion scarcely attains the speed of a trill. The effect, whether of antiphony or medley, produced by two or more singers seated on opposite sides of a brushy draw, is charming in the extreme.

A variant of this major call consists of an unmodified series of the same staccato notes without the accelerando, but the tempo of the whole is faster than the opening of the first series *hoo hoo hoo hoo*, etc., to a dozen or more.

A third series, also musical, seem intended for more domestic uses, since it is more restrained in volume and is delivered oftentimes in close proximity to fellows. After three or four preliminary notes the “main-spring” seems to break, and the whole works run down suddenly in a slurred trill, and with a slight loss of pitch, thus: *tic-tic-tic-tic trrrrr*.

Fourth, a faint single note of inquiry—oftenest passed between birds who are quietly investigating a would-be investigator.

Fifth, a faint low “chuck” of appraisal or reassurance exchanged between birds hunting together. This is also the note used by the parent bird in approaching her young.

Sixth, the ratchet and pawl, or wooden clicking notes delivered in contiguous succession of series, *dididididit, dididididit, dididididit*. This is a note of concern, a protest against an intruder, or an adverse report made by the investigating committee.

Seventh, notes of about the same quality as the last, uttered in unbroken series—evidently delivered under high stress of emotion, but the exciting cause oftenest non-human.

Eighth, a hissing *churr*, very difficult of description, which the bird utters only at close range in defense of her nest.

Besides these regular numbers there are individual variations galore, and special outcries which merit further study.

The problem of the derivation of *Chamæa* is one which challenges speculation. The taxonomic placing of the *Chamæidæ* has been the despair of American ornithologists ever since its discovery, and it owes its present position (*vide* A. O. U. Check-List), between the *Paridæ* and the *Sylviidæ*, to indolence or extremity rather than to inspiration. “Wren-Tit” may pass as a nickname, but the bird resembles neither a Wren nor a Titmouse, either in voice, appearance, or action. It is not vivacious or “nervous” like the Wren, and if it carries its tail loosely as does a Gnatcatcher, it is the only habit shared in common with the *Sylviidæ*; while as to the *Paridæ*, the Wren-Tit never indulges the upside-down

pranks which are part and parcel of Titmouse character. The testimony of the Wren-Tit's egg, moreover, is flatly against any such association. Its sheer greenness (niagara green) of color is not hinted at anywhere among the *Troglodytidae*, *Sylviidae*, or *Paridae*, and the bird must plainly have derived elsewhere.

The surmise that the Wren-Tit is of remote Asiatic origin is probably a correct one. Somewhere among the *Timeliidae*, that dump-heap of despairing taxonomists, will be found the nearest of kin to these long absent but most contented waifs. One almost dares to dream of some ancient shipwreck, a tree-top, wrested by flood, blown over from far Formosa, or a Chinese junk stranded at Monterey, but with all hands saved down to the occupants of a gilded bird-cage. A slender chance, to be sure, but in some such way even the islands of mid-ocean have been populated. The *Drepanidae*, for example, now the dominant family of land birds on the Hawaiian Islands, are believed by some to have derived from American stock akin to the *Ceribidae*. Be that as it may, California now boasts the only exclusive family of birds to be found in North America.

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No. 161

## American Pipit

A. O. U. No. 697. *Anthus spinoletta rubescens* (Tunstall).

**Synonyms.**—AMERICAN TITLARK. BROWN LARK. LOUISIANA PIPIT.

**Description.**—*Adult in spring:* Above soft and dark grayish brown with an olive shade; feathers of crown and back with darker centers; wings and tail dusky with paler edging, the pale tips of coverts forming two indistinct bars; outer pair of tail-feathers extensively white; next pair white-tipped; superciliary line, eye-ring, and underparts light grayish brown or light cinnamon buffy (sometimes chamois or honey-yellow)—the underparts streaked with dusky except on middle of throat, belly, and crissum, heavily on sides of throat and across breast, narrowly on lower breast and sides—or sometimes, in very old birds (?), nearly immaculate. *Winter plumage:* Above browner; below paler buffy; more broadly streaked on breast. Length 152.4-177.8 (6.00-7.00); wing 85.6 (3.37); tail 64.3 (2.53); bill 12 (.47); tarsus 21.7 (.85).

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; brown above; buffy or brownish with dusky spots below; best known by *tli-p-yip* notes repeated when rising from ground or flying overhead.

**Nesting.**—Not known to breed in California. *Nest:* At high altitudes, a thick-walled structure of grasses and moss set into deep excavation in sloping hillside or in cranny of cliff. *Eggs:* 4-6, usually 5, so heavily speckled and spotted with reddish or dark brown as almost entirely to obscure the whitish ground-color. Often, except upon close examination, the effect is of a uniform chocolate-colored egg. Av. size 19.6 x 14.5 (.77 x .57). *Season:* June 15-July 25; one brood.

## *The American Pipit*



*Taken in Siskiyou County*

*Photo by the Author*

### MOUNT SHASTA

WHERE THE LAST BREEDING PIPITS OF CALIFORNIA WERE SEEN

**General Range.**—Breeds in the Arctic and Hudsonian zones from northeastern Siberia and the Aleutian Islands to the west coast of Greenland and Newfoundland, and on the higher mountains of the West south to Oregon and northern New Mexico. Winters from Puget Sound and the Ohio and lower Delaware valleys south to the Gulf coast and Guatemala. Casual in Bermuda; accidental in Helgoland.

**Distribution in California.**—Common migrant and winter resident at the lower levels, practically throughout the State, more abundant coastwise. Has probably bred on Mt. Shasta within historical memory, but no longer found there.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Anthus ludovicianus*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1846, p. 114 (Calif.; winter); *Coues*, Birds of the Northwest, 1874, p. 40 (syn.; life hist.; nest and eggs); *Merriam*, N. Am. Fauna, no. 16, 1899, p. 130 (Mt. Shasta, in Alpine Arctic zone, "heard" July 17); *Swarth*, Condor, vol. ii., 1900, p. 110 (summer plumage); *Oberholser*, Auk, vol. xxxvi., 1919, p. 406 (syst.; nomencl.).

THE AMERICAN PIPIT does not sustain the habitual dignity of the boreal breed. He is no clown, indeed, like our Western Chat, nor does he quite belong to the awkward squad, with young Blackbirds; a trim form and a natty suit often save him from merited derision, but all close observers will agree that there is a screw loose in his make-up somewhere. The whole Pipit race seems to be struggling under a strange



## *The American Pipit*

inhibitory spell, cast upon some ancestor, perhaps, by one knows not what art of nodding heather bells or potency of subtly distilled Arctic moonshine. As the flock comes straggling down from Oregon they utter unceasing *yips* of mild astonishment and self-reproach at their apparent inability to decide what to do next. Their indecision is especially exasperating as one rides along a trail which is closely flanked by a primitive rail fence, as I have often done in the Northland. One starts up ahead of you and thinks he will settle on the top rail and watch you go by. As his feet near the rail he decides he won't, after all, but that he will go a few feet farther before alighting. If he actually does alight, he instantly tumbles off with a startled *yip*, as though the rail were hot and he had burnt his toes. Then he tries a post, with no better success, until you get disgusted with such silly vacillation and inane yipping, and clap spurs to your horse, resolved to escape the annoyance of having to follow such dubious fortunes.

In social flight the Pipits straggle out far apart, so as to allow plenty of room for their chronic St. Vitus's dance to jerk them hither or thither or up or down, without clashing with their fellows. Only a small percentage of those which annually traverse the State fly low enough to be readily seen; but when they do they are jolting along over the landscape and complaining at every other step. The note is best rendered *tlip-yip*, less accurately *pip-it* (whence of course the name); and a shower of these petulant sounds comes spattering down out of the sky when the birds themselves are nearly or quite invisible.

The fall migrations of this species appear to have a compound character. Birds which make their appearance early in September are likely to quarter themselves in a given locality for several weeks at a time, though whether these represent the first refugees from the high North, or mark the practical retreat of the mountaineers from Shasta and the higher peaks of Oregon, we cannot tell. Late comers pass through more rapidly, and the main host clears northern California by early November, although stragglers may be found in any lowland situation until December and, sparingly, in the Sacramento Valley, throughout the winter. They are especially partial to prairies, close-cropped pastures, the gravelly shores and bars of rivers, lakes, and ponds, and the shingle of sea-beaches. The Pipit is probably the best distributed and most characteristic bird of our southern beaches in winter. At this season the flocks are more or less dispersed and individuals pay little attention, or none, to possible comrades. In these circumstances a Pipit is the special despair of all properly constituted bird photographers. The bird appears to get up from under your feet the first time, when of course you wer'n't looking for him; but thereafter let one so much as focus a thought upon him and

## The American Pipit



AMERICAN PIPITS

passage is rather more direct. Spring flocks may be looked for in the fertile, plowed fields, where they feed attentively, often in absolute silence, moving about with "graceful, gliding walk, tilting the body, and wagging the tail at each step, much in the manner of a *Seiurus*."

Pipits are boreal breeders; and they nest at high altitudes (anywhere above timber line) from Oregon northward. Why they should have deserted our Sierras, which enthrall such glacial connoisseurs as Rosy Finch and White-crowned Sparrow, we cannot tell; but they are not suspected of nesting anywhere in California, save on Mt. Shasta, and their nests have not actually been found even there.

Because of this fact, we may be pardoned for following the Anthine fortunes a little further up the Sierra-Cascade ridge. At home, the

the bird begins to fidget forthwith, to step stealthily, to forget his proper business of fly-catching, and to mutter about a forgotten engagement. At sixty feet,—the bird being at that distance about as large on a photographic plate as the small end of a dull pin—he scuttles to the top of a stranded kelp root and declares his intention of leaving instanter if you do not abate your rudeness. He stands his ground, however, till you are about to swing at an unsatisfactory range of forty feet, when he springs into the air with an exultant bound and shouts derisively, "*pip-it thlipit*." Pip it! and also drat it!

The spring movement of return sets in early, and the northern

## *The American Pipit*

Pipit is a very different creature from the straggler of the long trail. On his native heather, surrounded by dwarfed fir trees, melting snow-fields, and splendid vistas of peak and cloud, he knows exactly what he wants, and is quite capable of flying in a straight line. The season is late, June 23, 1906, and the snows have only just released the impatient mountainside at 6000 feet elevation. Slate-colored Sparrows are caroling tenderly from the thickets of stunted fir. Sierra Hermit Thrushes, those minstrels of heaven, flit elusively from clump to clump or pause to rehearse from their depths some spiritual strain. *Leucostictes* look in upon the scene in passing, but they hasten at a prudent thought to their loftier ramparts. The real busybodies of the place are the Pipits. Females, lispng suspiciously, hurry to and fro, discussing locations, matching straws, playfully rebuking over-bold swains, and hastily gulping insects on the side. The male birds hover about their mates solicitously—never helping, of course—or else sing lustily from prominent knolls and rocks.



*Taken in Santa Barbara*

PIPIT ON KELP ROOT

*Photo by the Author*

## *The American Pipit*

The Pipit song in many of its phases is strikingly like that of the Rock Wren (*Salpinctes obsoletus*). It has the same vivacity and ringing quality, though perhaps less power, and the similarity extends to the very phrasing. An alarm note runs *pichoo pichoo pichoo*, given six or seven times, rapidly and emphatically; while another, *wee iich, wee iich, we iich*, is rendered, unless my eyes deceive me, with the same springing motion which characterizes the Wren. An ecstasy song of courting time (heard on Mount Rainier) runs *twiss twiss twiss twiss* (*ad lib.*), uttered as rapidly as the syllables may be said. It is delivered as the bird describes great slow circles in mid-air; and when the singer is exhausted by his efforts, he falls like a spent rocket to the ground.

For all this activity, however, the nests are hard to find. It was not until July 17, 1907, that the writer had his first piece of luck. A venturesome climb over the rock-wall which fronts the glacier of the Upper Horseshoe Basin (in the Stehekin country) had yielded only a last year's *Leucosticte's* nest and left me somewhat blown. As I was nearly down the cliff and breathing easier, a Pipit flew unannounced from a spur of the cliff upon which I was standing to the one beyond. Evidently she had heard the call of her mate, for the instant she lighted upon the cliff he was near her. But budge not a foot would he; whether he was suspicious or only exacting, one could not quite tell. At any rate he kept giving vent to a ringing, metallic note of apprehension. The female coaxed with fluttering wings, and moved slowly forward as she did so, finally securing the worm from her reluctant lord, when—whisk! she was back again and out of sight around the cliff on which I stood. I hastened forward to the farthest outstanding point which gave a partial view of the wall's face. No bird was in sight. Then I tossed pebbles against



*Taken in Santa Barbara*

"A GOOD FELLOW AFTER ALL"

*Photo by the Author*

the cliff-side, and from beneath the second summons fluttered the frightened Pipit. Five beautiful eggs, of a warm weathered oak, rather than mahogany shade, lay in an elegant nest of compacted grasses, wholly within the shelter of a niche in the rock. A tussock of grass clung just below, and a dwarf shrub afforded a touch of drapery above; while from the outstretched hand a flint-flake might have fallen clean of the wall, to the ice a hundred feet below. The male bird continued his outcries from the distant cliff, but the female at no time reappeared.

With the advance of summer, the Pipits lead their broods about the disrobed peaks, even to the very summits, as do the noble *Leucostictes*. Knowing this, we may readily excuse any little eccentricities which appear in our friends during the duller seasons. The Pipit is a good fellow, after all.

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No. 162

**Horned Lark**

No. 162a California Horned Lark

A. O. U. No. 474f. *Otocoris alpestris actia* Oberholser.

**Description.**—*Adult male in spring and summer:* Fore-crown and sides of crown, including upper feathers of the supra-auricular tufts (the "horns"), a patch on sides of head including nasal tufts and lores and curving downward on cheeks, and a broad patch on jugulum, glossy black; chin and throat, sides of head behind malar patch, continuous with superciliaries and extreme forehead, white, more or less tinged with primrose yellow (lemon-yellow to strontian yellow), the yellow always present on chin and upper throat, and sometimes suffusing the entire area; occiput, cervix, sides of neck, anterior portion of wing, and sides of breast, rich vinaceous brown (nearest mikado brown, but ranging from pecan-brown to fawn-color); a lighter shade of the same on upper tail-coverts; the sides and flanks sparingly marked with mingled vinaceous and dusky; remaining upperparts, including wings and central pair of tail-feathers, fuscous to dusky, washed or fringed with vinaceous, or fading on edges of feathers to grayish brown; outer edge of first primary and outermost rectrix white; remainder of tail brownish black; remaining underparts white, faintly glossed with vinaceous; axillars and lining of wings pure white. Bill bluish black above, paling on mandible basally; feet brownish black; iris dark brown. *Adult male in fall and winter:* Duller, the yellow of head fully distributed and duller (as by admixture of neutral gray); the black areas of head slightly veiled by yellowish skirtings; the vinaceous of cervix, etc., less pure, reduced as though by wear, leaving more extensive dusky; the middle coverts lightly tipped with white. *Adult female in spring and summer:* Like adult male in spring, but much duller; the vinaceous of upperparts much reduced, approximately pure only on sides of neck, sides of breast, lesser wing-coverts, and upper tail-coverts; crown like back, i. e., dusky vinaceous skirtings; patch on sides of head, only faintly indicated, dusky and fulvous; black of jugulum reduced in area and invaded by whitish or vinace-

## The Horned Larks

ous skirtings; yellow throat reduced, paler and duller. Bill and feet lighter. *Adult female in fall and winter*: Still duller, coloring more blended, the crown (at first) almost entirely overlaid with grayish brown; the jugular patch further reduced in area and skirted with fulvous; the breast washed with dull vinaceous buffy with some admixture of dusky; the throat pale dingy yellow. *Young, first plumage*: Quite different (epitomizing ancestral history); upperparts, including pileum, chiefly dusky to blackish, sharply speckled (on crown, sides of head, and on back) or edged (on scapulars and coverts and exposed flight-feathers and rectrices) with white; underparts chiefly white, but breast broadly spotted with diffused dusky. Increase of age brings a rapid increase of a buffy brown element, which becomes pervasive both as edging and centering of upperparts, and as a wash across breast. Bill dusky at tip, paling basally; feet and tarsi pale brown. Length of adult males about 152.4 (6.00); wing 99 (3.90); tail 66 (2.60); bill 11 (.43); tarsus 20.8 (.82). Females are somewhat smaller.

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; black patch on chest; black cheek and crown-patches; feather tufts or "horns" directed backward, distinctive. Less rufescent than *O. a. rubea*; darker than *ammophila* and *leucansiptila*; paler and less extensively dusky above than *strigata* and *insularis*; smaller and more rufescent than *merrilli*; much smaller and ruddier than *leucolama*.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A depression in the ground, heavily lined with grasses, weed-stems, and flower-heads, often ornamented on the skirts by a partial pavement of mud-flakes, pebbles, cow-chips, etc.; placed in open field in light grass cover or at base of weed-clump. *Eggs*: 3 or 4; grayish white, or pale buffy brown (i. e., washed by pigment), finely and often uniformly sprinkled with buffy brown or drab, occasionally wreathed or cloud-capped, with clearer white on little end. Av. of 16 eggs from Kern County 21.1 x 15 (.83 x .59). *Season*: March-June; 2 or 3 broods.

**Range of *Otocoris alpestris*.**—Europe, Asia, northern Africa, North America, and northern South America.

**Range of *O. a. actia*** (Chiefly contained within California).—Resident in open situations west of the Sierran divide, and from the region of San Francisco Bay and Stockton south to the coast and northern Lower California. Occurs in the desert passes.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Phileremos cornutus*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 2, i., 1847, p. 54 (Calif.); **Shufeldt**, Bull. U. S. Geol. and Geogr. Surv. Terr., vol. vi., 1881, p. 119, pl. iv. (osteology); **Bendire**, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. 2, 1895, p. 341, pl. (life hist.; nest and eggs, etc.); **Oberholser**, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxiv., 1902, p. 845 (orig. desc.; type locality, Jacumba, San Diego Co.); **McAtee**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 23, 1905, p. 30, fig. (food); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 34, 1910, p. 44 (food); **Tyler**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 9, 1913, p. 62 (San Joaquin Valley; habits; nesting dates).

### No. 162b Ruddy Horned Lark

A. O. U. No. 474g. ***Otocoris alpestris rubea*** Henshaw.

**Description.**—Similar to *O. a. actia*, but more strongly rufescent; vinaceous brown of cervix, etc., deeper and ruddier (but still, nearest mikado brown); the wing-coverts, especially, more extensively vinaceous; plumage of remaining upperparts more blended. The increased ruddiness even more noticeable in female, which is also more heavily shaded across breast. Length of male 159 (6.26); female 148 (5.83).

**Range of *O. a. rubea*** (Wholly contained within California).—Resident in the Sacramento Valley.

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1926-1927

1928-1929

1930-1931

1932-1933

1934-1935

1936-1937

1938-1939

1940-1941

1942-1943

1944-1945

1946-1947

1948-1949

1950-1951

1952-1953

1954-1955

1956-1957

1958-1959

1960-1961

1962-1963

1964-1965

1966-1967

1968-1969

Ruddy Horned Lark

Male and female, % life size

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**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Alauda rufa*). Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 2, ii., 1853, p. 265 (Calif.); *Henshaw*, Auk, vol. i., 1884, p. 267 (orig. desc.; type locality, "Stockton"; see Ridgway, U. S. Nat. Mus. Bull., no. 50, p. iv., 1907, p. 322, footnote); *Townsend*, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. x., 1887, p. 210 (Sacramento Valley; desc. nest and eggs); *Oberholser*, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxiv., 1902, p. 851 (monogr.).

### No. 162c Streaked Horned Lark

A. O. U. No. 474h. *Otocoris alpestris strigata* Henshaw.

**Synonym.**—PACIFIC HORNED LARK.

**Description.**—Similar to *O. a. actia*, but much darker; the dusky element of back, scapulars, etc., dominant and nearly blackish, set off streak-wise by buffy brown and vinaceous edging; the vinaceous element scarcely different in tone, but more narrowly confined; the yellow component increasing, usually more or less diffused over entire underparts, or at least over breast below jugulum. Size of *actia*.

**Range of** *O. a. strigata*.—Northwest Pacific coastal strip; breeding in Oregon and Washington west of the Cascades; in winter to eastern Washington, Oregon, and northern California.

**Distribution in California.**—Winter visitant in northern California, but chiefly in the Sacramento Valley south to Stockton and San Francisco (?) [The subsequent delimitation of *O. a. sierræ* Oberholser, known to occur in winter in the Sacramento Valley, throws doubt upon the earlier identifications of *strigata* in the southern portion of its alleged range].

**Authorities.**—**Belding** (*Eremophila alpestris*), Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. i., 1878, p. 423 (Marysville, Feb.; see Ridgway, U. S. Nat. Mus. Bull., no. 50, pt. iv., 1907, p. 316); *Townsend*, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. x., 1887, p. 210 (Red Bluff, Dec.); *Oberholser*, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxiv., 1902, p. 837 (monogr.; Red Bluff, San Francisco).

### No. 162d Island Horned Lark

A. O. U. No. 474n. *Otocoris alpestris insularis* C. H. Townsend.

**Description.**—Very similar to *O. a. strigata*, but "slightly darker"—at least the vinaceous element may conceivably be darker, although the dusky (blackish) element is a shade lighter; yellow of throat (nearly wax-yellow) stronger, if anything, and remaining underparts said to be less usually diffused with yellow. Size of *actia*.

**Remark.**—Except for the striking discontinuity of range, no one would ever have dreamed of claiming subspecific distinctness as between *strigata* and *insularis*. They are actually if not logically inseparable. Neither will the theory of parallelism of development account for this origin of forms so similar in regions as diverse as Santa Cruz Island (where *insularis* is at its best) and Puget Sound. There must be a historical connection between them, and that a recent one.

**Range of** *O. a. insularis* (Wholly confined within California).—Common resident on all of the Santa Barbara islands. Casual upon adjoining portions of the mainland in winter.

**Authorities.**—**Cooper** (*Phileremos cornutus*), Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci., vol. iv., 1870, p. 78 (Santa Barbara Id.); *Henshaw*, Rep. Wheeler's Survey, 1876, App. JJ, p. 248 (Santa Cruz Id.); *Townsend*, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xiii., 1890, p. 140 (orig. desc.; type locality, San Clemente Id.); *Grinnell*, Pasadena Acad. Sci., Pub. no. 1, 1897,

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pp. 5, 10, 16 (desc. nest and eggs); *Oberholser*, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxiv., 1902, p. 839 (monogr.); *Howell*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 12, 1917, p. 67 (syn., occurrence, habits, etc.).

### No. 162e Columbian Horned Lark

A. O. U. No. 474j. *Otocoris alpestris merrilli* Dwight.

**Synonyms.**—DUSKY HORNED LARK (name misleading). MERRILL'S HORNED LARK.

**Description.**—Similar to *O. a. actia*, but slightly larger and decidedly paler; the vinaceous element more restricted in area, lighter and grayer in tone (about vinaceous-fawn); the brownish dusky of back tending to fall more into streaks, the edgings pale brownish buffy rather than vinaceous; the yellow element slightly paler and more frequently confined to throat. Length of male 162 (6.38); of female 154 (6.06).

**Range of *O. a. merrilli*.**—The Columbian plateau and adjoining districts of the north interior. Breeds from southern British Columbia and northeastern Idaho south to northeastern California. Winters irregularly south.

**Distribution in California.**—Breeds in Modoc County and possibly further west. Winters south through northern California, at least to Stockton.

**Authorities.**—*Dwight*, Auk, vol. vii., 1890, p. 153 (orig. desc.; type locality, Ft. Klamath, Ore.; Calif. in migr.); *Merrill*, Auk, vol. v., 1888, p. 259 (Ft. Klamath, Ore.; habits, desc. nest, etc.); *Oberholser*, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxiv., 1902, p. 833 (monogr.; Calif. localities).

### No. 162f Sierra Horned Lark

A. O. U. No. 474j, part. *Otocoris alpestris sierræ* Oberholser.

**Description.**—"Similar to *Otocoris alpestris actia* but upper parts darker; nape more cinnamonaceous; back more blackish and more contrasted with neck; and posterior lower parts usually decidedly tinged with yellow" (Oberholser).

**Range of *O. a. sierræ*** (Wholly contained within California).—"Breeds in the region of the Sierra Nevada in California south to Placer County and north to Lassen County. Winters also in the Sacramento Valley" (Oberholser).

**Authority.**—*Oberholser*, Condor, vol. xxii., 1920, p. 34 (orig. desc.; type locality, Pine Creek, Lassen Co.).

### No. 162g Desert Horned Lark

A. O. U. No. 474d. *Otocoris alpestris leucolæma* (Coues).

**Synonyms.**—PLAINS HORNED LARK. GREAT BASIN HORNED LARK.

**Description.**—Similar to *O. a. actia*, but somewhat larger and much paler, less rufescent; the cervix, bend of wing, etc. (of male), pinkish cinnamon; the (basally white) head-patches less strongly tinged with yellow. Length of adult male 162.6 (6.40); wing 105.8 (4.165); tail 71.5 (2.815); bill 11.5 (.45); tarsus 21.8 (.86). Adult female: length about 152.4 (6.00); wing 98.6 (3.88); tail 64 (2.52); bill 10.5 (.41); tarsus 21.1 (.83).

**Range of *O. a. leucolæma*.**—"Great Plains and Great Basin. Breeds chiefly in Transition zone from southern Alberta and southern Saskatchewan to southern Nevada, northern New Mexico, and western Kansas; winters south to southern California, Texas and Sonora."

## The Horned Larks

**Distribution in California.**—Winter visitant to east-central and southern California, chiefly desertwise; casual west of the Sierras at Stockton.

**Authorities.**—**Oberholser**, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxiv., 1902, p. 820 (monogr.; Calif. localities); *Dickey and Van Rossem*, Condor, vol. xxiv., 1922, p. 94 (s. Calif. localities in winter).



Taken in San Luis Obispo County

Photo by the Author

NEST AND EGGS OF CALIFORNIA HORNED LARK

### No. 162h Mohave Horned Lark

A. O. U. No. 474d, part. **Otocoris alpestris ammophila** Oberholser.

**Description.**—Similar to *O. a. actia*, but paler; the color of upperparts more blended, with decrease of the dusky element; the vinaceous element lighter and grayer (vinaceous-fawn, about as in *merrilli*), but less uniform by reason of darker centers of feathers. About the size of *actia*, or a little larger. A rather "light" form!

**Range of *O. a. ammophila*** (Wholly contained within California).—"In summer, the Mohave Desert, north to Owens Valley, California; in winter, south to the Mexican boundary line" (Oberholser).

**Authorities.**—**Fisher** (*Otocoris alpestris arenicola*), N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, 1893, p. 66, part (Coso Valley, Mohave Desert, Darwin, etc.); **Oberholser**, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxiv., 1902, p. 849 (monogr.; orig. desc., type locality, Coso Valley, s. e. Calif.).

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### No. 162i Yuma Horned Lark

A. O. U. No. 474k, part. *Otocoris alpestris leucansiptila* Oberholser.

**Synonym.**—BLEACHED HORNED LARK.

**Description.**—Very similar to *O. a. ammophila*, but still paler, the vinaceous element lighter by reason of increased hoariness of edgings; the dark element no longer dusky, but grayish brown, and still further reduced by lighter edgings and pinkish diffusion; yellow of throat unmodified, but forehead and superciliary averaging whiter than in *actia*. Slightly larger than *O. a. actia*.

**Range of *O. a. leucansiptila*.**—“Extreme southwestern Arizona, extreme southeastern corner of California, and northeastern Lower California along the international boundary line, north to southern Nevada” (Oberholser).

**Distribution in California.**—Resident locally on Colorado Desert west to Mecca and in Imperial Valley.

**Authorities.**—Oberholser, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xxiv., 1902, p. 864 (monogr.; orig. desc.; type locality, Yuma, Ariz.; spec. from Coyote Well, San Diego, Calif.); Grinnell, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 11, 1915, p. 95 (distr. in Calif.).

In the foregoing paragraphs we have taken account of certain obtrusive questions of variation and distribution which pertain to this very plastic species; but the case of the Horned Lark is such a complicated one, that we cannot hope to follow all its intricacies. The characters which interest us, those of behavior and general economy, are common to all the “forms.” On the other hand, general statements regarding seasonal movements, dates of breeding, and the like, are as much out of place within the limits of a single form, as for the species itself. The fact is that the Horned Lark is so plastic and so perfectly adjusted to its environment that its actions everywhere reflect local conditions. For example, *O. a. rubea* does not appear to nest in the cooler, semi-transitional coast belt of Santa Barbara before May; while in eastern San Luis Obispo County the same subspecies nests in early April; and in the neighborhood of Pasadena it lays eggs as early as February. In like manner, dwellers in the cooler coastal belt stay at home in summer; while those living in the heated interior flee to the higher ranges. These differences in custom may theoretically reflect themselves in exterior characters; but the search for such marks has already pressed the limits of sanity.

EREMOPHILA, desert-loving, is a name once used for the Horned Lark, but now denied us by the jugglery of nomenclature. No fitter title could have been chosen, for the modest bird has an unconquerable affection for the open places; and (save for his modesty) no fitter bird could be found to symbolize the joy of the Californian in his sun-kissed, clean-aired State. The Horned Lark, never too common, is, nevertheless, to be found almost everywhere, if timber, or chaparral, or outrageous “crops” have not fenced him out. He even ventures at times over the Sierran snows.

But modesty becomes a bird whose home is on the ground; and he hugs its tiny shelters when disturbed, as though quite assured that its brownness matched the tint of his back. If attentively pursued, he patters away half trustfully; or if he takes to wing, he does so with a deprecating cry of apology, as if the fault were his instead of yours. If



**California Horned Lark, Female on Nest**

*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*

Taken near San Diego





## *The Horned Larks*

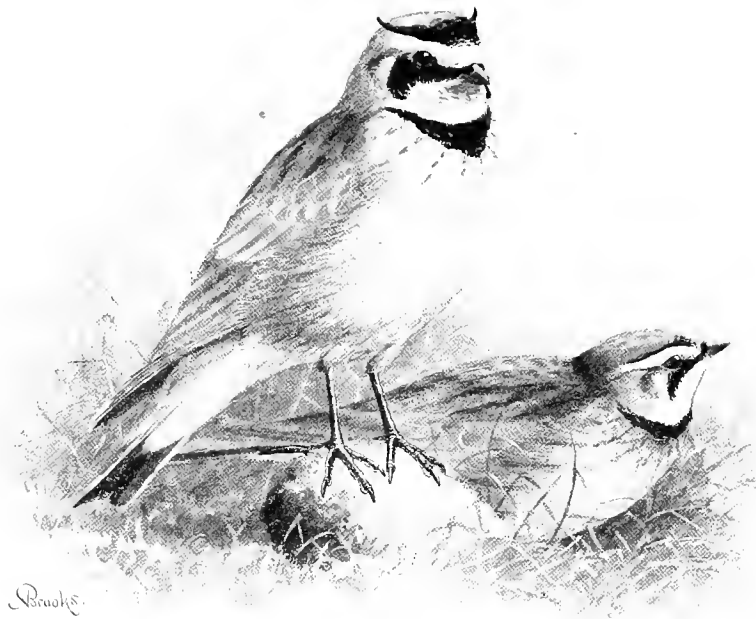
his business keeps him in the same field, he will reappear presently, picking from the ground with affected nonchalance, at a rod's remove; or else, pausing to face you frankly with those interesting feather-tufts of inquiry, supported by black moustachios and jetty gorget on a ground of pale primrose.

A dusty road possesses irresistible attractions for our hero; and a traveler's progress, whether a-foot or a-wheel, in any interior country, may be measured by the number of Horned Larks displaced per mile. Displacement is no easy matter, either. The lark knows that that dusty road was made especially for him, and if you are rude enough to dispossess him, he will alight a rod or so ahead and survey you with mild reproach. If the intruder is in an automobile, the moment of survey is necessarily brief, but the bird will try again. A spirited passage of flitting and lighting ensues, in which the bird becomes fairly crazed in his determination to maintain a footing on that roadway; and, as a result, he misses death repeatedly by margins which the man at the wheel does not like to contemplate.

The unseeing class the Horned Larks among "brown birds" and miss the vaulting spirit beneath the modest mien. Yet our gentle Lark is of noble blood and ancient lineage. The Skylark, of peerless fame, is his own cousin; and while he cannot hope to vie with the foreign bird in song, the same poet soul is in him. A devoted Englishman, for some years resident on the edge of a certain Pacific prairie, having realized a competence, imported at no small expense a consignment of some forty English Skylarks. When I told him that there was a native lark already resident on that same prairie, he was dumbfounded. Cherishing only the fond memories of boyhood, he had altogether overlooked the offerings of his adopted home. Of course the Skylarks all died, as objects of such misplaced charity usually do; but the Streaked Horned Larks still flourish on that prairie near Tacoma. Whether in the pasture, therefore, or on the gravelly hillside, or in the desert, the coming of spring proclaims our gentle poet laureate; and in many places the chief vocal interest of nesting time centers in the song-flight of the male Horned Lark.

The song itself is, perhaps, nothing remarkable, a little ditty, or succession of sprightly syllables which have no considerable resonance or modulation, although they quite defy vocalization; yet such are the circumstances attending its delivery that it is set down by everyone as "pleasing," while for the initiated it possesses a charm which is quite unique. *Twidge-widge, widgity, widgy-widge*, conveys no idea of the tone-quality, indeed, but may serve to indicate the proportion and tempo of the common song; while *Twidge, widgity, eelooy, eelooy, idgity, eelooy, eew*, may serve the same purpose for the rare ecstasy song. The

## *The Horned Larks*



MERRILL HORNED LARKS

bird sometimes sings from a fence-post, a sage-bush, or even from a hummock on the ground, but usually the impulse of song takes him up into the free air. Here at almost any hour of the day he may be seen poising at various heights, like a miniature hawk, and sending down tender words of greeting and cheer to the little wife who broods below.

It is, however, at the sacred hour of sunset that the soul of the heavenly singer takes wing for its ethereal abode. The sun is just sinking; the faithful spouse has settled herself to her gentle task for the night; and the bird-man has lain down in the shadow of the fence to gaze at the sky. The bird gives himself to the buoyant influences of the trembling air and mounts aloft by easy gradations. As he rises, he swings round in a wide, loose circle, singing softly the while. At the end of every little height he pauses and hovers, and sends down the full-voiced song. Up and up he goes, the song becoming tenderer, sweeter, more refined, and subtly suggestive of all a bird may seek in the lofty blue. As he fades from the unaided sight I train my glasses on him and still witness the heavenward spirals. I lower the glasses. Ah! I have lost

## *The Horned Larks*

him now! Still there float down to us, the enraptured wife and me, those most ethereal strains, sublimated past all taint of earth, beatific, elysian. Ah! surely, we have lost him! He has gone to join the angels. "Chiquitica, on the nest, we have lost him." "Never fear," she answers; "Hark!" Stronger grows the dainty music once again. Stronger! Stronger! Dropping out of the boundless darkening blue, still by easy flights, a song for every step of Jacob's ladder, our messenger is coming down. But the ladder does not rest on earth. When about two hundred feet high, the singer suddenly folds his wings and drops like a plummet to the ground. Within the last dozen feet he checks himself and lights gracefully near his nest. The bird-man steals softly away to comfort his own dear ones, grateful for the message of love and trust brought by a bird.

Horned Larks are among the first to feel the prickings of a February sun. Communal life has been well enough in its way, but the interests of springtime are special. The transition is effected not without much riot of amorous pursuit, and some attendant heart-ache, no doubt; but by the end of February or April, according to local conditions, domestic



*Taken on San Clemente Island*

*Photo by D. R. Dickey*

NEST AND EGGS OF ISLAND HORNED LARK

## *The Horned Larks*

order emerges from the chaos of rival claims, and little homes begin to dot the plain. "Dot" is a good word, although you cannot find a nest as easily as you might a . , novice that you are, in a box of printer's pi. The nest is not so much concealed as subordinated, swathed in obscurity. At best it does no more than fill the hollow of some cavity, natural or artificial,—a wheel-rut, a footprint of some horse or cow, a cavity left by an upturned stone, or, as in one instance, the bottom of an unused golf hole.

The number of eggs in a set varies from two to four, three being most commonly found. In color the ground is grayish white, while dots of greenish gray or reddish gray are now gathered in a heavy wreath about the larger end, and now regularly distributed over the entire surface—sometimes so heavily as to obscure the ground. The eggs are often very perceptibly glossed and there is frequently a haunting greenish or yellowish tinge which diffuses itself over the whole—an atmosphere, as the artist would say.

Horned Larks owe their preservation chiefly to the wariness of the female, for she flushes at long distances. Either she will slip off quietly and sneak at thirty yards, or else flush straight at a hundred. When the nest is discovered, she is quite as likely to ignore the intruder, and seldom ventures near enough to betray ownership. On the other hand, given patience and a pair of strong binoculars, "tracking" is not a difficult accomplishment. Of course the nest is at the mercy of the wandering footstep, and if the sufferings of an oölogist (intent on a larger set) are any index, the bird must endure agonies of apprehension in the presence of a grazing herd of cattle, while a flock of sheep spells almost certain disaster.

Golf-links are treasure trove for Horned Larks, and nothing short of annihilation will persuade them of the ever recurring dangers. Mr. J. H. Bowles records three instances in which larks were killed by flying golf balls; and another gentleman, himself a devotee of the game, tells me that he once saw a bird struck dead in midair.

*Octoris* is, however, a prolific breeder. Two and sometimes three broods are raised each season. Nests are also found in June and July at altitudes which forbid the supposition that birds could have bred earlier in the same locality. It is inferred, therefore, that a partial migration occurs after the first nesting. Certainly when the second brood is able to move, family parties and neighborhood groups forsake the warm lowlands and ascend, sometimes to the very summits of the more exposed peaks. Thus, Grinnell found twenty Horned Larks (*O. a. actia*) on the top of San Gorgonio Peak (alt. 11,485) on the 16th of July, 1906.

At the conclusion of the breeding season large companies assemble, sometimes to the number of hundreds. The northern members of the



**n/4 California Horned Lark**

*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*

Taken near San Diego



## *The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher*

clan are driven southward, or downward, as the case may be, while the non-migrating forms foregather in dozens, or scores, where food is abundant. They are also somewhat given to wandering about in straggling flocks, and the mild cries which they scatter freely have a subdued and plaintive tone, borrowed, no doubt, from the chastened character of the season. A sitting flock will sometimes allow a very close approach, but when they do so, they "freeze" so perfectly that the eye can scarcely find them. The only thing to do under such circumstances is to freeze also, until the birds begin to limber up and steal cautiously away, taking advantage, for concealment, of every tuft of grass or depression of the ground, and giving occasional admonitory *yips* to their fellows.



Taken in Kern County

DESERT RANGE OF THE MOHAVE HORNED LARK

Photo by the Author

No. 163

## Scissor-tailed Flycatcher

A. O. U. No. 443. *Muscivora forficata* (Gmelin).

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Foreparts light gray, clearest, almost white on chin and throat; a subaxillary patch on side of breast and a concealed patch on crown scarlet or grenadine red; the axillars, wing-linings, sides, and posterior underparts ochraceous salmon or salmon-buff. This red element appears on back and scapulars, where intimately mingled with gray, and is continued in a diluted form (pale ochraceous salmon) over the greatly prolonged exterior rectrices (two pairs) for about two-thirds of their length; the wing-coverts dusky, edged with pinkish, buffy, or white; the primary coverts, wing-quills, upper tail-coverts, and remaining portion of tail black. Bill dark horn; feet brownish black. *Adult female*: Like male, but tail only two-thirds as long and crown-patch obsolete or wanting; the red element in the plumage much reduced in intensity, flame-scarlet on the subaxillary patches, capucine buff to light buff posteriorly. Length of adult male (skins): 320 to 365 (12.60-14.37); wing 125 (4.92); tail 200-255 (7.87-10.04); bill 18 (.71); tarsus 18.2 (.717).

## *The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher*

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size (disregarding the prolonged tail-feathers); the lengthened tail with light gray-orange-and-black coloration unmistakable.

**Nesting.**—Does not breed in California. *Nest:* Normally of twigs, rootlets, or weed-stems, copiously lined with wool, cotton, or other soft materials; occasionally bulk of nest consists of "Spanish moss" or any soft substance available; placed 5 to 40 feet high in trees or shrubs, usually on horizontal limb in more or less exposed situation. *Eggs:* 4 to 6, usually 5; ovate or rounded ovate; clear white or pale creamy, rarely palest pink, strikingly but sparingly spotted or blotched with maroon (burnt lake to claret brown) and a little lavender (deep grayish lavender to deep dull lavender). Av. of 107 (U. S. N. M.): 22.5 x 17 (.89 x .67). *Season:* May, June (April 19–July 6); one or two broods.

**General Range.**—Breeds in Texas and Oklahoma and narrowly in adjoining states to the north and east of this area; winters from southern Mexico to Panama; accidental locally from Florida to New Brunswick, Keewatin, and Colorado, and in California.

**Range in California.**—One specimen taken in northern Los Angeles County.

**Authorities.**—Swarth, Condor, vol. xvii., 1915, p. 203.

THE SOLE claim offered by this bird for a place upon the California list was made by a single example, an adult male secured by Dr. I. D. Nokes, of Los Angeles, on June 26, 1915, in the northern part of Los Angeles County, on the Elizabeth Lake road. When first seen, the bird was flitting from post to post along a roadside fence, and there was nothing in its appearance to suggest the unusual; but upon dissection it was found to have a partly healed injury upon the head, as though it might have collided with a telegraph line or other obstacle. This Scissor-tail was evidently not an escaped cage-bird, for the maintenance of such a species would be all but impossible. On the whole, probably Mr. Daggett's suggestion is as good as any. He surmised that the bird might have been accidentally trapped somewhere in Texas in an empty cattle car waiting re-shipment to California. It is quite conceivable that this involuntary hobo might have subsisted upon the flies which swarm about such a reeking stable, even en route, and might have effected its escape at, say, Mohave.

Upon its native heath in Texas the graceful Scissor-tail is one of the most familiar, as it is the most courageous, of birds. Since he is quite exotic, we rejoice in the necessity of quoting these able paragraphs from Mrs. Bailey:

"One of his favorite performances is to fly up and, with rattling wings, execute an aerial seesaw, a line of sharp-angled VVVVVV's, helping himself at the short turns by rapidly opening and shutting his long white scissors. As he goes up and down he utters all the while a penetrating scream, *ka-quee -ka-quee ka-quee -ka-quee -ka-quee*, the emphasis being given each time at the top of the ascending line.



"Frequently when he is passing along with the even flight of a sober-minded crow and you are quietly admiring the salmon lining of his wings, he shoots rattling into the air, and as you stare after him, drops back as suddenly as he rose. He does this apparently because the spirit moves him, as a boy slings a stone at the sky, but fervor is added by the appearance of a rival or an enemy, for he is much like a *Tyrannus* in his masterful way of controlling his landscape. He will attack caracaras and white-necked ravens, lighting on their backs and giving them vicious blows while screaming in their ears." (Handbook of Birds of the Western United States.)

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No. 164

## Kingbird

A. O. U. No. 444. *Tyrannus tyrannus* (Linnæus).

**Synonyms.**—EASTERN KINGBIRD. BEE MARTIN. TYRANT FLYCATCHER.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Above slaty black, changing to pure black on head, and fuscous on wings; crown with a concealed orange-red (orange-chrome to cadmium orange) central patch, or "crest," the orange feathers black-tipped and overlying others broadly white at base; wings with whitish and brownish ash edgings; tail black, all the feathers broadly white-tipped, and the outermost pair often white-edged; below white, washed with grayish on breast. Bill and feet black. *Immature* birds lack the crown-patch, and are more or less tinged with fulvous or buffy on the parts which are light-colored in the adult. Length 203-228.6 (8.00-9.00); wing 116.8 (4.60); tail 84.1 (3.31); bill from nostril 13.2 (.52).

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size; blackish ash above; *white* below; black tail conspicuously tipped with white; noisy and quarrelsome.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: At moderate heights in trees, usually over water; of weed-stalks, plant-fibers, and trash, with a felted mat of plant-down or wool, and an inner lining of fine grasses, feathers, rootlets, etc. *Eggs*: 3 or 4, sometimes 5; white or pale creamy white, distinctly but sparingly spotted with chocolate of several shades and vinaceous gray. Av. size 24.1 x 18.2 (.95 x .72). *Season*: 1st week in June; one brood.

**General Range.**—North America from the British Provinces south; in winter through eastern Mexico, Central and South America. Less common west of the Rocky Mountains. Not recorded from northern Mexico and Arizona.

**Occurrence in California.**—Rare or casual, in summer in the extreme north-eastern portions of the State. Has occurred on Owens Lake (June 29, 1891, by A. K. Fisher). Accidental at Santa Monica (Aug. 31, 1895, by W. B. Judson).

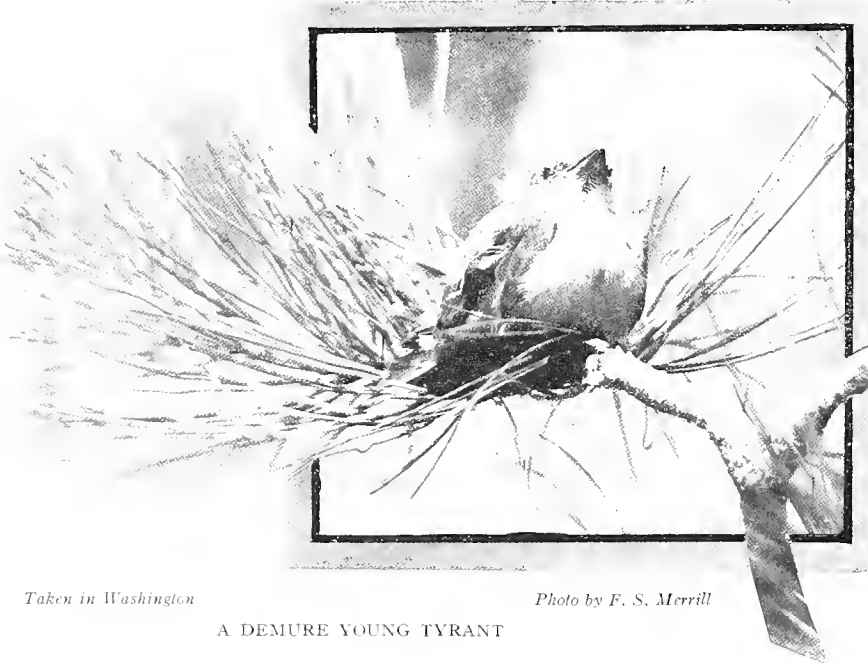
**Authorities.**—**Fisher**, N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, 1893, p. 59 (Olancha, near Owens Lake, June 29, 1891, one seen); **Grinnell**, Pasadena Acad. Sci. Pub., no. 2, 1898, p. 29 (Santa Monica, Aug. 31, 1895, one spec.); **Bendire**, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 236, pl. 1, figs. 14, 15 (habits); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 44, 1912, p. 11, pl. 1 (food).

## The Kingbird

SCATTERED records from the northeastern corner of the State establish a suspicion that the Eastern Kingbird is among the rare breeders. If so, it is probably on the increase; and this hope may justify a few paragraphs not "made in California."

"No one has come forward with a theory to account for the testiness

of this bird's temper, nor for the domineering qualities which distinguish him above all others; but I hazard that it is because his glowing crown is partially concealed by bourgeois black. Those whose regal marks are more patent are wont to receive homage as matter of course, but the scion of an unacknowledged house, a feathered Don Carlos, must needs



*Taken in Washington*

*Photo by F. S. Merrill*

A DEMURE YOUNG TYRANT

spend a fretful life in defense of his claims. Toward those who knuckle down tamely the little tyrant is often very gracious, and it may be conceded that he does perform a real service in holding the common enemies at bay. Who has not seen him as he quits his perch on some commanding tree and hurries forward, choking with vengeful utterance, to meet and chastise some murderous hawk, who before any other foe is brave? Down comes the avenger! The Hawk shies with a guttural cry of rage and terror, while a little puff of feathers scatters on the air to tell of the tyrant's success. Again and again the quick punishment falls, until the tiny scourge desists, and returns, shaking with shrill laughter, to give his mate an account of his adventure.

"The food of the Kingbird consists entirely of insects, caught on the wing for the most part, by sallies from some favorite perch. His eyesight must be very good, as he not infrequently spies his prey at distances

## The Western Kingbird

of from twenty to fifty yards. Honey bees form an occasional but inconsiderable article of diet. Grasshoppers are not overlooked, and they sometimes capture, not without a scuffle, those big brown locusts (*Melanoplus sp.*) which make flippant exposure of their persons on a summer day. Both in the taking of food and in the discharge of police duties the Kingbird exhibits great strength and swiftness, as well as grace in flight. Once, when passing in a canoe through a quiet, weed-bound channel, I was quite deceived for a time by the sight of distant white-breasted birds dashing down to take insects near the surface of the water, and even, occasionally dipping under it. They had all the ease and grace of Tree Swallows, but proved to be Kingbirds practicing in a new role.

"This fondness for water is often exhibited in the birds' choice of a nesting site. Where accustomed to civilization, orchard or shade trees are preferred, but on many occasions nests are found on low-swinging horizontal branches overhanging the water; and, as often, in tiny willow clumps or isolated trees entirely surrounded by it. The nest of the Kingbird sometimes presents that studied disarray which is considered the height of art. Now and then a nest has such a disheveled appearance as to quite discourage investigation, unless the owners' presence betrays the secret of occupancy. Ordinarily the nest is placed in an upright or horizontal fork of a tree at a height of from three to forty feet. Twigs, weed-stalks, and trash of any kind enter into the basal construction. The characteristic feature of the nest, however, is the mould, or matrix, composed of vegetable plaster, ground wood, and the like, or else of compacted wool and cow-hair, which is forced into the interstices of the outer structure and rounded inside, giving shape to the whole. This cup, in turn, is lined with fine grasses, cow-hair, or variously. Occasionally, nests are found composed almost entirely of wool. In others string is the principal ingredient.

"Although the Kingbird never sings, it has a characteristic and not unmusical cry, *tizic, tizic* (spell it *phthisic*, if you favor the old school) or *tsee tsee tsee tsee*, in numerous combinations of syllables, which are capable of expressing various degrees of excitement and emotion." (The Birds of Washington.)

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No. 165

### Western Kingbird

A. O. U. No. 447. *Tyrannus verticalis* Say.

**Synonyms.**—ARKANSAS KINGBIRD. ARKANSAS FLYCATCHER.

## The Western Kingbird

**Description.**—*Adults*: In color pattern very similar to *T. vociferans*, but ashy of foreparts, back, etc., lighter; above light neutral gray; below pale neutral gray; chin and throat paler or whitish, but shading gradually into yellow of remaining underparts; wings plain fuscous or with a few edgings of paler on middle coverts and tertials; the outer web of outer pair of tail-feathers pure white, the tip of the wing formed by the 4th primary; the 1st longer than the 5th; the five outer primaries attenuate-emarginate, the first acicular. *Females* and *young* with reduction or absence of crown-patch and non-attenuation of primaries as in *T. vociferans*. Measurements substantially as in *vociferans*, but bill averaging a little less.

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size; light ashy gray of foreparts and back; extensive yellow of belly; edge of tail abruptly white; whitish of throat *not* contrasting with prevailing gray.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: Of twigs, grasses, string, wool, and other soft substances; placed at moderate heights in bushes or trees, or, as frequently, on beams and ledges of barns or other outbuildings. *Eggs*: 4 or 5; much like those of *T. tyrannus*; white, pale creamy white, or, very rarely, pale pinkish buff, spotted and blotched with chocolate and its various "self"-tones (sometimes brightening to liver-brown or even hessian brown, or yellowing and graying to snuff-brown, sayal brown, or even fawn-color) and vinaceous gray. Av. size 23.6 x 17.4 (.93 x .69). *Season*: April–June; one or two broods.

**General Range.**—Western United States, rare or transient in Pacific coastal strip, north regularly to southern British Columbia, southern Alberta, and Saskatchewan, east to western Minnesota, western Iowa, and western Texas, south to Chihuahua, breeding throughout its range; south in winter through Western Mexico to Chihuahua.

**Distribution in California.**—Common summer resident in Lower and Upper Sonoran zones nearly throughout the State; most abundant in semi-arid valleys of interior; less common on the deserts as a breeder; rare or wanting in the northwest humid coastal section; occasional breeder in Lower Transitional zone.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel**, Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1847, p. 157 (Los Angeles); **Tyler**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 9, 1913, p. 59 (San Joaquin Valley; habits, nesting dates, etc.); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xii., 1914, p. 146 (lower Colorado Valley, manner of occurrence); **Kennedy**, Condor, vol. xvii., 1915, p. 65, figs. (nesting sites); **Howell**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 12, 1917, p. 64 (Santa Barbara Ids.).

BELOVED of all but nervous invalids and "grouches" is this genial, garrulous, irresponsible tyrant of the West. Himself a lover of the open country, he has become the presiding genius of all properly conducted ranches. Guest he is not, host rather; and before you have had time to shut off the motor and clap on the brakes, this bird bustles forth from the eucalyptus row and hovers over you with noisy effusiveness. The boisterous greeting is one-third concern for his babies in the shade tree hard-by, one-third good fellowship, and the remainder sheer restlessness. The Western Kingbird is preëminently a social creature. And by social in this case we mean, of course, inclined to human society. For, although the bird may start up with vociferating cries every time a member of the besieged household sets foot out of doors, one is reminded

## *The Western Kingbird*

by these attentions rather of a frolicsome puppy than of a zealous guardian of the peace. Those who have been most honored by their presence year after year claim that the birds become fond of certain members of the family, and allow a familiarity in nest inspection which would be shriekingly resented in the case of strangers.

One can readily guess a utilitarian consideration in favor of ranch life, viz., the greater variety and abundance of insects afforded. Of these the Kingbirds enjoy a practical monopoly by reason of their confidence in man. They are fond of flies, moths, butterflies, crickets, winged ants, and all that sort of thing. Moreover, they eat bees. But,—[Hold on, Mr. Rancher! Don't grab that shot-gun and begin murdering Kingbirds] *they eat only drones*. A prominent bee-keeper, Mr. A. Barnett, in San Diego County, was curious on this point and dissected over a hundred specimens of Western Kingbirds and Phœbes, using a microscope in the examination of stomach contents. The birds had been shot about the apiaries, where they had been seen darting upon and catching bees. Although many of the birds were gorged, no working bees were found, only drones. This is an important distinction to bear in mind, for the reduction of drones is unqualifiedly beneficial. And when one stops to think of it, it is absurd to suppose that a bird could swallow bees, stings and all, with impunity.

But the real secret of Kingbird's attachment for mankind is not discovered until we see his nest. It is our *strings* which have won his heart. Whatever else the nest may or may not contain, it is sure to have



*Taken in Kern County*

THE KINGBIRD'S REALM

*Photo by the Author*

## *The Western Kingbird*



*Taken in Washington*

WESTERN KINGBIRD AT NEST

*Photo by the Author*

string,—string in strands, string in coils, string in bunches, hanks, and tangles, drug store string of a dissipated crimson hue, white string that came around the sugar, greasy string that you had tied around your finger to remind you to feed the chickens, string of every length and size and use and hue.

Those Western Kingbirds which have not yet adopted men manage to subsist somewhat after the fashion of their eastern cousins, and build a nest of twigs, grass, weed-stalks, bark strips, and cottonwood down, placing it against the trunk, or saddling it upon a horizontal fork of willow, poplar, cottonwood, or oak, usually near water. Even that most inhospitable of trees, the eucalyptus, is made to do service sometimes; and if the birds only knew it, they are safest there.

But, more commonly, nests are placed about crannies and projections of farm buildings, fences, unused hayricks, windmills, or even upon the house itself. The crossbars of telegraph and telephone poles and power-line trestles are favorite places, because of the command they give of the insect world. In the Fresno region Mr. Tyler has told

## The Western Kingbird

us<sup>1</sup> how the smaller telephone lines of that section are "supported on poles without crossbars, the majority of these poles being about four inches in diameter and extending to a height of about sixteen feet, excepting where the lines cross entrances to farmhouses or intersecting roads, in which case the wires are raised several feet to permit the passage of derricks and other tall machinery. This additional height is attained by nailing two two-inch pieces to the original pole on opposite sides, thus leaving a *four-inch platform*, protected on two sides, on which a nest just fits snugly. A drive through the country, during the summer months, now reveals a pair of Kingbirds tenanted in nearly every such pole." Perhaps the oncoming of wireless telephony will deprive our friends of their myriad citadels. If such threatens to be the case, it will pay us to provide artificial supports, for the usefulness of these birds in controlling the balances of the insect world and in preventing unseasonable outbreaks of pests, such as crickets and grasshoppers, is simply incalculable.

Eggs, to the number of four or five, are deposited from the 1st of May to the middle of June. Beauties they are, too, creamy white, with bold and handsome spots of chestnut in two shades, and lilac-gray.

<sup>1</sup> Pac. Coast Avifauna, No. 9, by John G. Tyler, 1913, p. 60.



Taken in Washington

Photo by the Author

"IT IS SURE TO HAVE STRING"  
NEST AND EGGS OF WESTERN KINGBIRD

## The Western Kingbird

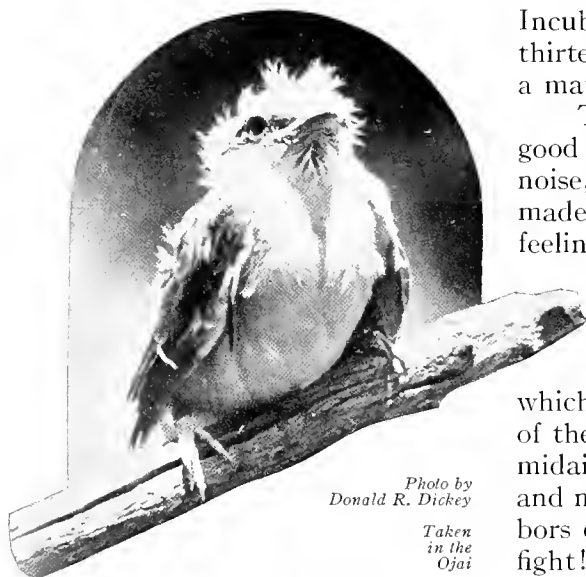


Photo by  
Donald R. Dickey

Taken  
in the  
Ojai

THE CROWN PRINCE

Incubation is accomplished in twelve or thirteen days, and the youngsters fly in a matter of two weeks.

These Kingbirds are model parents, good neighbors, and, if one can stand their noise, good "citizens." Exception must be made of the courting season, when the feelings of the gentlest are likely to be ruffled. Kingbirds are hotspurs here, and they dearly love a scrimmage. When a row starts, neighbors hasten to the fray, and from the hubbub which ensues one might think the tragedy of the Kilkenny Cats was being enacted in midair. But there are no bones broken, and not many feathers shed, and the neighbors come home chuckling. It was a good fight!

When these little differences of amorous opinion are settled, the Kingbirds get on splendidly, even with their own kind. Where cover is rare two or more pairs will nest in the same tree without strife; and the excellent relations which exist between *T. verticalis* and *T. vociferans* are notorious. It is only in the presence of enemies, real enemies, that Western's fighting blood is aroused. Hawks and crows and snoopng Jays are set upon and punished relentlessly. My son William saw a Kingbird chase a Red-bellied Hawk and actually settle upon his back for the space of ten seconds. What the poor buzzard was suffering all that time from the tyrant's beak and claws we can only guess. And once I saw a Western Kingbird set upon a pair of Yellow-billed Magpies and punish them unmercifully, and that in spite of the fact that the Pies did some very creditable team-work. They were no cowards and when they were beaten they fairly ached with anger.

Smaller birds flock to the ægis of this valiant defender; and in regions where they nest in trees, as on the oak-clad hills of San Benito County, it is rare to find an instance where Linnets or Goldfinches or Nuthatches have not availed themselves of the able protection afforded. In the northern section Bullock Orioles are grateful debtors to the Kingbird's prowess; and Bendire narrates an instance where a pair of Swainson Hawks—most harmless of birds—lived on pleasant terms with the Western Kingbirds in the same tree.

As a husband and father the Western Kingbird leaves little to desire.





## *The Cassin Kingbird*

The characteristic short note is a sort of *plick*, uttered with a good deal of energy and so much of variation that we hesitate to syllabize it—call it the *chup* note. This is varied by *berwick*, a perfectly characteristic and definite utterance. Then for a call, or challenge note, the bird has a long vibrant roll or rattle; and this roll, rendered staccato with every degree of length and intensity, is used on every occasion of meeting, whether of friendly welcome to a mate, or of execration at sight of a rival. Its utterance shows the owner to be an emotional and highly excitable bird. Call him an alarmist, Sir Clackchops, and general busybody, if you will. He is nevertheless a very good fellow, beloved, as I say, of all but invalids and cynics.

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No. 166

### Cassin Kingbird

A. O. U. No. 448. *Tyrannus vociferans* Swainson.

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Head and neck above and on sides dark ashy gray (neutral gray); a partially concealed crown-patch orange-red, or scarlet; space about eye and auriculars darker, nearly black; sides of neck shading into lighter ashy gray (light neutral gray) of breast; chin and upper throat, including malar area, definitely white; ashy of breast shading broadly "on lower breast" into pure yellow (empire yellow) of remaining underparts; back, scapulars, and rump ashy gray (light neutral gray) washed with olive-green (yellowish oil green), shading to black of upper tail-coverts and tail; tip of tail and outer webs of lateral rectrices much paler, but never white; wings fuscous with much paler edging; first five primaries sharply and decreasingly but not extensively emarginate on the inner web; the tip of the wing formed by the third primary, closely supported by the second and fourth. Bill and feet blackish. *Adult female*: Like male, but crown-patch reduced and primaries scarcely or not conspicuously emarginate. *Young birds* are paler, have no crown-patch, and are without suggestion of emargination on wings. Length (skin) 208 (8.19); wing 132.7 (5.22); tail 93.1 (3.66); bill 9.7 (.38); tarsus 9.2 (.36).

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size; ashy gray and yellow coloration; throat white, contrasting with gray; and edge of tail not definitely white, as contrasted with *T. verticalis*.

**Nesting.**—*Nest* and *Eggs* individually indistinguishable from those of *T. verticalis*. The eggs are perhaps slightly warmer, more pinkish in tone. Av. of 80 specimens in the collections of the Museum of Comparative Oology: 22.8 x 17.5 (.90 x .69). Extremes 20.6-25.4 x 16.5-19.8 (.81-1.00 by .65-.78). *Season*: April-June; one or two broods.

**General Range.**—Western North America. Breeds in Sonoran zones north to central California and southern Wyoming, east to eastern Colorado and western Texas, south to Michoacan. Winters from southern California and northern Mexico to Guatemala. Casual in northern California and in Oregon.



Cassin's Kingbird  
About life size  
From a water-color painting by Allen Brooks

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**Cassin's Kingbird**

About  $\frac{3}{4}$  life size

*From a water-color painting by Allan Brooks*





## The Cassin Kingbird

**Distribution in California.**—Summer resident of very local distribution in southern California, and west of the Sierran divide north to about Latitude 37 (Dos Palos, Merced Co., June 5, 1916, breeding). Winters sparingly in southern California and casually west to Santa Barbara; formerly to Santa Cruz (Auct. J. G. Cooper).

**Authorities.**—**Baird**, Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. ix., 1858, p. 174 (Sacramento Valley; Ft. Tejon; Colorado R.); *Bendire*, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 249, pl. 1, figs. 18, 19 (eggs); *Swarth*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 4, 1904, p. 20 (s. Ariz.; habits); *Beal*, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 44, 1912, p. 22 (food); *Dawson*, Condor, vol. xviii., 1916, p. 27 (range in Calif.).

SOME FOLKS are twins. Such being the case, birds, we suppose, have no right to expect exemption from the common lot. The penalty of being a twin consists, of course, in being forever confused, misidentified, and misunderstood. The similarity between *Tyrannus vociferans* and *T. verticalis* is exceedingly close,—so close, in fact, that it is doubtful if a hundred people in California, apart from self-conscious and fully alert bird students, ever stopped to consider that they might be different. Yet the two species are perfectly distinct in plumage and in voice, and somewhat so in habit and disposition. These likenesses and differences, in two related species which are closely associated throughout much of the year, form one of the most fascinating problems of intimate bird study which California offers.

The voice is the key to the difference: Cassin's Kingbird says, *Che bew'*, in a heavy, grumpy tone, whose last flick nevertheless cuts like a whip-lash—*chebeeu'*. This is generically similar, but specifically very different from the evenly accented, and more nearly placid *ber'wick* of the Western Kingbird. The note of greeting or of general alarm in Cassin is a breathless *kuh day' kuh day' kuhday'*; or, as I heard a female render it, *kiddoo' kiddoo' kiddoo' kiddoo' kidduck'*. For the rest Cassin is a rather more sober and a much more silent bird than is the volatile *verticalis*. Dr. Cooper<sup>1</sup> testifies that birds of this species are "less lively and quarrelsome in habit";



Taken in San Luis Obispo  
County

Photo by the Author

A PATRON OF WESTERN  
UNION

<sup>1</sup> Land Birds (of California), Vol. I., p. 314.

## *The Cassin Kingbird*

and Bendire<sup>1</sup> adds, "Cassin's Kingbird is neither as noisy nor as quarrelsome as the preceding species, and appears to be more of a mountain-loving bird and to nest at higher altitudes."

As to this last, we can only say that the rule does not appear to hold good in California. Cassin's Kingbird, at the nesting season, barely exceeds the upper limit of the Lower Sonoran faunal zone; and it is not even mentioned in the exhaustive reports on the San Jacinto and San Bernardino mountain regions. It is apparently of very irregular distribution over the two California deserts, and in the lowlands of the

San Diego-Santa Barbara region. I have found what I believe to be its local center of abundance in the sparsely timbered valley of the Estrella, in northern San Luis Obispo County, and in the connecting tributaries. Here its close and all but invariable association with *T. verticalis* is worthy of special notice.

In this region of scattering oak trees and of stream beds lined with cottonwoods, both birds are exceedingly common. As surely as a pair of oak trees boast some degree of isolation from their fellows, one will be occupied by a pair of Cassin Kingbirds and the other by a pair of Westerns. Or if the trees are only members of a series, next door neighbors will be



*Taken in San Luis Obispo County*

*Photo by the Author*

CASSIN KINGBIRD IN LIVE OAK

<sup>1</sup> Life Histories, Vol. II., p. 250



## The Arizona Crested Flycatcher

occupied by these paired doubles; and the group may be separated by an interval of a hundred yards or so from the next quartet. The arrangement is evidently studied, and it must be mutually agreeable, for the two species are upon the best of terms, and I have never seen evidence of jealousy or ill-will on the part of either, though I have camped right under their nests.

*Verticalis* is evidently the follower, the "copycat," for the Cassins invariably begin nesting first. Most nests are under way by the third week of April (there is one record by Fred Truesdale of a set of five taken at Shandon on the 28th day of March, 1914); while sets of *verticalis* are seldom complete before the 15th of May. Apart from this, there is no constant difference either in the size, composition, or placing of the nest; shape, color, or size of eggs; or in the attitude of the birds toward friends or enemies. Cassin will chase a Raven as far as neighbor Western, and Mrs. Western will applaud the act as heartily (and as unresentedly) as will Mrs. Cassin. That the two strains remain inviolably distinct under such circumstances is either a tribute to the virtue of the birds, or a monument to our own lack of perspicacity in discerning differences or incompatibilities greater than we now suppose to exist.

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No. 167

### Arizona Crested Flycatcher

A. O. U. No. 453. *Myiarchus magister magister* Ridgway.

**Description.**—*Adults* (sexes alike): Pileum dresden brown, the feathers darker centrally, the remaining upperparts chiefly olivaceous gray (nearly Saccardo's olive), on back graying, on hind neck and sides of neck, the upper tail-coverts and exposed edges of rectrices pale brownish; tertials and rectrices in superior aspect brownish dusky, the exposed edges of primaries and inner webs of rectrices cinnamon; the wing-coverts broadly tipped and the tertials broadly edged on outer webs with brownish white; chin, throat, sides of neck, and breast, broadly ashy gray; remaining underparts, including axillars and wing-linings, pale yellow (barium yellow). Bill and feet black. Av. length of adult males (skins): 217 (8.55); wing 109 (4.30); tail 100 (3.94); bill 24 (.945); tarsus 24.7 (.97). Females somewhat smaller.

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size; requires careful discrimination from the Ash-throated Flycatcher, *M. c. cinerascens*. It is much larger, and the yellow of abdomen, etc., is both darker in tone and much more extensive.

**Nesting.**—Not known to breed in California, but probably does so. *Nest*: Placed in old woodpecker hole in sahuaro (giant) cactus or, more rarely, in mesquite tree; a heavy cushion of hair or fur, guarded, almost invariably, by a cast-off snake-skin. *Eggs*: 3 to 5; much like those of *M. cinerascens*, but slightly darker and more heavily marked; almost indistinguishable, save for size, from those of *Myiarchus crinitus*. Av. size 25.4 x 18 (1.00 x .70). *Season*: June.

## *The Ash-throated Flycatcher*

**General Range.**—Southern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico, south throughout western Mexico to Oaxaca, Tepic, and Chiapas, migrating in northern portion of range.

**Occurrence in California.**—One record of two specimens, males, collected by Mrs. May Canfield at Bard, Imperial County, May 17, 1921. Range probably coextensive with the narrowly delimited groves of sahuaro cactus growing upon the west bank of the Colorado River.

**Authorities.**—**Dickey**, Condor, vol. xxiv., 1922, p. 134 (Bard, Imperial Co.), May 17, 1921, 2 spec.); **Swarth**, Condor, vol. vii., 1905, p. 28 (s. Ariz.; nest and eggs, habits); **Osgood**, Auk, vol. xxiv., 1907, p. 219 (nomencl.).

*POORRRRITT grilp ürrr it!* To a birdman in Arizona that is as good as "hands up" from a road agent. We came to attention instantly; but when the bird saw our obedience, self-consciousness overwhelmed him and he fled incontinently. Indeed, modesty is the distinctive vice of this alleged *magister*—at least in May—and he will edge away through the creosote with a most irritating facility. No doubt June and the responsibilities of parenthood give him a temporary courage, for he will not allow his meeker kinsman, *cinerascens*, in the same sahuaro; and he has, beside his own chicks, all the interests of Elf Owls, Gilded Flickers, and vagrant Cactus Wrens to protect. That he is either superstitious or a coward at heart we know from the circumstance of his adding a cast-off snake-skin to the furnishings of his nest. One look at that terrifying emblem and the prowling "inemy," whoever he may be, is supposed to fall over backward in a faint. If said enemy refuses to do so, it is, perhaps, a sign that the burglar alarm is shorted, or worn out, so that it will not crackle ominously. In an eastern orchard where snake-skins were, presumably, scarce, I once found a nest of the Crested Flycatcher, *Myiarchus crinitus*, whose eggs were protected by crumples of stiff tissue paper, the folds of which did not fail to crepitate most valiantly when pressed.

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No. 168

## Ash-throated Flycatcher

A. O. U. No. 454. *Myiarchus cinerascens cinerascens* (Lawrence).

**Description.**—*Adults*: Above dull grayish brown changing to clear brown on crown; wings dusky brown, the middle and greater coverts tipped broadly, and the secondaries edged with pale buffy brown or dull whitish, the primaries edged, except towards tips, with cinnamon-rufous; tail darker than back, with paler grayish brown edgings, that of outermost rectrix sometimes nearly white; tail feathers, except central pair, chiefly cinnamon-rufous on inner webs; sides of head and neck gray

## The Ash-throated Flycatcher



ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER

(slightly tinged with brown) fading into much paler gray on chin, throat, and chest, changing to pale yellowish on breast and remaining underparts; yellow of underparts, strengthening posteriorly, and axillars and under wing-coverts clear (primrose) yellow, exposed inner edges of flight-feathers pale cinnamon. Bill blackish; feet and legs black; iris brown. Length of adult male about 200 (7.87); wing 100 (3.94); tail 92 (3.63); bill 19 (.75); tarsus 23 (.91).

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size; brownish gray above; ashy throat shading into pale yellow of remaining underparts; cinnamon-rufous of tail conspicuous in flight.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A natural cavity or deserted flicker hole, copiously lined with rabbit-fur, wool, hair, or other soft materials. *Eggs:* 3 to 6, usually 4; buffy or creamy as to ground, but heavily marked, chiefly in curious lengthwise pattern, with streaks of chocolate of several degrees of intensity. Av. of 50 eggs in the M. C. O. coll.: 21.4 x 16.2 (.844 x .637). *Season:* May 15–June 15; one brood.

**Range of *Myiarchus cinerascens.***—Western United States, Lower California, and Mexico; breeding from the Tropic of Cancer north, diminishingly, to Washington and northern Utah, east to central Colorado; wintering south to Guatemala.

**Range of *M. c. cinerascens.***—That of the species, minus the southern half of Lower California (*M. c. pertinax*).

## *The Ash-throated Flycatcher*

**Distribution in California.**—Common summer resident in Lower and Upper Sonoran life zones, save in the humid coastal strip and the northern tier of counties. Invades Transitional areas as the summer advances. Casual in winter in the Imperial Valley. Rare or casual on the Islands during migrations.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Myiobius crinitus*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1847, p. 157 (Monterey; Santa Barbara); *Bendire*, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 266, pl. 2, fig. 3 (eggs); *Nelson*, Proc. Biol. Soc. Wash., vol. xvii., 1904, p. 33 (monogr.); *Van Rossem*, Condor, vol. xiii., 1911, p. 132 (Imperial Valley; winter); *Beal*, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 44, 1912, p. 28 (food).

THE ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER is two birds—or, rather, two birds and a voice. The voice might belong to a third bird, or it might be altogether discarnate, for all one learns of its authorship and connections—at first. One of the birds migrates, openly, shamelessly, and abundantly—none more common. The other of him, or her (the cleavage does not occur along the line of sex difference), having arrived in the neighborhood of the spot called home, is henceforth a furtive creature, moving secretly through the treetops, or keeping to the under-shade of the grove, and bearing upon his (or her) conscience a tremendous load, viz., the guilty knowledge of that precise spot called a nest. Not wild horses shall draw the secret forth, nor may the sweet influences of heaven operate to rid the guilty mind of its load.

The voice belongs altogether to the latter bird—or to none. It is chiefly a voice of suspicion,—harsh, elusive, accusing. Its notes are rich in “r’s.” In fact *r* is about the only predictable quality of the double tone as it shall issue: *Queerp—too-weerp—lookateer*; though once I heard a bird, carefully marked beyond possibility of error,—a bird which said *tu'bick* or *too'vick*, in perfect Meadowlark fashion. Sometimes the *r* is a mere chirp or guttural croak, an intermittent escape of r-steam from a seething chestful of superheated rrr’s. If one does catch sight of the bird, standing almost motionless in the shadow, he may witness the transformation wrought by the effort of speech. The foreparts of the bird are jerked irresistibly forward. The sound spills out incontinently—*kuteerp*—and the tankard rights itself again by a compensatory bob of wings and tail. The bird seems to be actuated by an unseen wire; and if the observer catches the rhythm, he may play at pulling the wire himself.

The bird of migration is only shameless because there are so many of him that he cannot hide. Or at least he cannot both hide and rustle breakfast. First birds arrive, southerly, during the last week in April. The breeding contingent immediately takes to cover in the sycamores and live oaks of the canyon bottoms and mesas, thenceforth to play ventriloquist or Raffles. But their fellows, intent on a more northerly

### *The Ash-throated Flycatcher*

destination, pass in leisurely fashion for at least a month thereafter. Silently they flit from station to station over the boundless chaparral or else plunge into its depths. Any wayside weed, any fence rail, may harbor one, and the aspic cholla of the desert is as good a place as any for the tolerant Ash-throat.

Being privileged to spend the last days of May and the first of



*Taken in Riverside County*

*Photo by the Author*

CHAPARRAL—TYPICAL RANGE OF THE ASH-THROAT

early June on the Farallon Islands in the season of 1911, I witnessed a remarkable arrival of migrants, "bird waves," which had slightly overshot their mark. Some of the Warblers were, frankly, lost; but the Flycatchers, of which there were five species, changed in character from day to day, so that one felt sure that it was only a normal movement abnormally exposed, which he was witnessing. Two Ash-throated Flycatchers were seen on the first day of June, and a number of Olive-sided Flycatchers on the day following. Ash-throated Flycatchers were still passing through the desert near Palm Springs on the 28th of May, 1913.

## The Ash-throated Flycatcher

In May or early June, according to altitude, these Crested Flycatchers select some cavity in a tree and line it copiously with soft material, chiefly the hair of animals,—rabbit-fur, cow-hair, deer-hair, and the like. The female does *all* the work, transporting her materials by great beakfuls, while the male dances close attendance and keeps a sharp lookout for enemies. A rubbing-post for cattle yields good returns in hair, while a native tannery, where deer-hair has been accumulating, is treasure trove for the birds. The amount of furnishing depends,



Taken in Riverside County

Photo by the Author

"I C'N ALMOST REACH 'EM, DAD"  
NESTING SITE OF ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER

of course, upon the size of the "house." If a hollow limb is eight inches across inside, it must needs be filled up at whatever cost; while one authority records a nest behind a sprung bark-scale, which was only two and a half inches in diameter. Knot holes in oak-trees, sycamores, or cottonwoods, at any height up to forty feet, are favorite places. In the more desert portions of the bird's range, holes in mesquite, juniper or iron-wood must do shift; or else, as in the valley of the Colorado,

the deserted woodpecker holes in the columns of the giant cactus.

Of the Ash-throated Flycatcher as a neighbor, Captain Bendire says,<sup>1</sup> "It seems to be rather quarrelsome and intolerant in its disposition toward other birds, and will not allow any to nest in close proximity; in fact I am inclined to believe that it not infrequently dispossesses some of the smaller Woodpeckers, like *Dryobates scalaris bairdi*, of their nesting sites, as I have found its nests on two occasions in newly excavated holes, the fresh chips lying at the base of the tree, showing plainly that they had only recently been removed."

During the period of incubation, which lasts fifteen days, the female has no need to be tended by the male, and he makes himself very scarce

<sup>1</sup> Life Histories of N. A. Birds, Vol. II., p. 267.

in the neighborhood, although he is probably aware of all that takes place. As for the eggs, they are so snugly bedded in rabbit-fur that the mother may absent herself for hours at a time with impunity, and she is thus perfectly able to do her own fly-catching. At the moment of hatching, however, the male parent becomes all attention, and he takes his full share of responsibility in feeding and tending the young.

The eggs of these Flycatchers, as of the entire Crested Flycatcher group (genus *Myiarchus*, with the closely related *Myiodynastes*), are among the quaintest and most engaging oölogical treasures. As a group they form the most notable, and we may say stubborn, exceptions to the general rule that eggs laid in holes are white, or tend to become so. The eggs of the Ash-throated Flycatcher are of a pinkish buff or cream-color as to ground, heavily marked—spotted or short-streaked in crisscross and longitudinal pattern—with dull red (hæmatite red). The markings are rather finer and less abundant than those of eastern Crested Flycatchers (*Myiarchus crinitus*), and their longitudinal prolongation is never so pronounced; but they belong to the same order of beauty. No clew is at hand to account for the exceptionally rich coloration of these eggs, born to blush unseen in fur-lined caves; and in spite of the universal hole-haunting habits of the birds, the tendency would seem to be toward increased richness and variety in the pigmentation of the egg, rather than away from it.

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No. 169

## Phoebe

A. O. U. No. 456. **Sayornis phoebe** (Latham).

**Synonyms.**—EASTERN PHOEBE. PEWEE (name should be restricted to *Myiochanes virens*). BRIDGE PEWEE. PEWIT FLYCATCHER. PHOEBE-BIRD.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Pileum brownish black, shading on cervix into olive-brown of remaining upperparts; quills and tail brownish dusky; some margining of grayish brown or olive-buffy on greater coverts and secondaries; underparts sordid whitish or dingy greenish yellow, shaded on sides of breast and irregularly across breast with olivaceous; chin with some admixture of dusky, and sides of throat shading. Bill and feet brownish black. Length about 152.4 (6.00); wing 85 (3.35); tail 70 (2.755); bill 14.5 (.57); tarsus 18.5 (.728).

**Recognition Marks.**—Small sparrow size; general outline and behavior much like that of our Black Phoebe, from which it is readily distinguishable by its dingy olive-brown upper plumage and softly shading underparts—without pure white.

**Nesting.**—Does not breed in California. *Nest*: A thick-walled cup or bracket of moss and mud, lined with plant-down, fine grasses and horsehair; placed upon beam

## *The Black Phoebe*

or projecting corner of bridge, barn, or outbuilding, or upon ledge of shale-bank, etc. *Eggs*: 4 to 6; white (unmarked), or, rarely, sparsely dotted with reddish brown. Av. size 19 x 14.5 (.75 x .57).

**General Range.**—Eastern North America; breeding from central Texas and the northern hilly portions of the Gulf States north to Quebec, southern Keewatin, and southwestern Mackenzie; wintering from about the 37th parallel of latitude south to southern Mexico; accidental in California and Cuba.

**Occurrence in California.**—Accidental. Two records: San Fernando, Feb. 14, 1901; and Moss Landing, Monterey County, March 7, 1913.

**Authorities.**—**Swarth**, Condor, vol. iii., 1901, p. 66 (San Fernando Valley, Feb. 14, 1901, one spec.); **Brooks**, Condor, vol. xv., 1913, p. 182 (Moss Beach, near Pacific Grove, Monterey Co., March 7, 1913, one spec.).

WE WERE pretty well fixed for Phoebes as it was—though of course we are glad to welcome all of them. With *Sayornis sayus* and *S. nigricans* already on the ground, *Sayornis phoebe*, represented in California by two "accidentals," completes the muster roll of Mr. Say's birds.

Small wonder that this intrepid flycatcher should wish to prospect our pleasant land. They treat him shamefully in the East. Having lured him North in early March, or even February, by treacherous promises of springtime and harvest of flies, when they hear his first trustful notes, they begin to blow at him with icy breath. They kill his vassal flies at a blast; they mercilessly pelt him with sleet, or bury his promised kingdom under a blanket of snow. He, poor soul, takes shelter under a bridge or a sheltering bank, and says *tsip-tsip*, disconsolately, while he tries to warm his toes. Such of their number as survive this Spartan discipline become the most familiar and confiding of farm-yard pensioners; but their plaintive "Phoebe" notes seem always to preserve the recollection of unmerited hardships.

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No. 170

## Black Phoebe

A. O. U. No. 458. *Sayornis nigricans* (Swainson).

**Description.**—*Adult*: General color slaty black, paling slightly on scapulars and rump, the greater coverts and secondaries edged with pale buffy brown or whitish; belly and crissum abruptly white (the line of separation between black and white  $\Lambda$ -shaped); the outer web of outer pair of tail-feathers narrowly white; the lining of wings chiefly white. Bill and feet black; iris brown. *Young birds* are more sooty and have rusty or brownish edgings on wing-coverts, lower back, and rump, and a rusty stain along posterior margin of black below. Length about 165.1 (6.50); wing 91.5 (3.60); tail 80 (3.15); bill 15.5 (.61); tarsus 18.4 (.72). Females average smaller.





**Stoking**

Black Phoebe and Young

*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*

*Taken in the Ojai*



## The Black Phoebe

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; black-and-white coloration; black of breast more extensive than in Junco, and junction of black and white A-shaped, instead of square; haunts buildings, bridges, cliffs, etc., and courts prominence; plaintive *tsip* note.

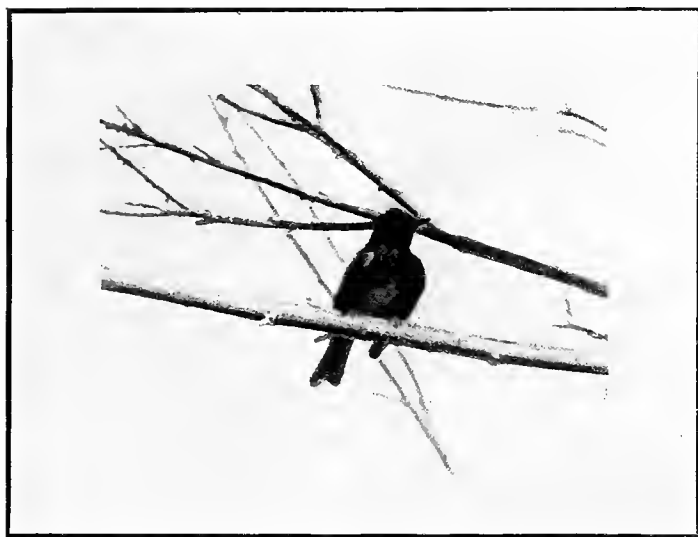
**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A stout cup or bracket of mud, lined with grasses, horsehair, or other soft substance; cemented to wall or resting on ledge of other projection of bridge, culvert or outbuilding, or else variously disposed at low heights along cliffs and rock-walls overlooking streams. *Eggs*: 4 or 5; white, or occasionally speckled very sparingly with reddish brown. Av. size 18.8 x 14.5 (.74 x .57); index 77. *Season*: March-June; two broods.

**General Range.**—Resident in Mexico (except the Gulf Coast) and in the South-western States, from central Texas westward and north on the Pacific slope to south-western Oregon.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident of Lower and Upper Sonoran zones west of the Sierras, and (sparingly) on the Channel Islands; less common northerly, especially along the humid coastal strip. Occurs in summer along the eastern base of the Sierras, at least as far north as Bishop Creek; and in winter is found sparingly on the deserts and in the Colorado River valley.

**Authorities.**—**Vigors** (*Muscicapa semiatra*), Zool. Voy. "Blossom," 1839, p. 17; *Bendire*, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 280, pl., fig. 30 (egg); *Nelson*, Auk, vol. xvii., 1900, p. 125 (syst.; nomencl.); *Beal*, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 44, 1912, p. 38, pl. v. (food); *Tyler*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 9, 1913, p. 61 (San Joaquin Valley); *Howell*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 12, 1917, p. 65 (s. Calif. islands).

THE TRIM APPEARANCE of this little flycatcher no less than its modest, friendly mien has endeared the Black Phoebe to the most general



Taken near Santa Barbara

A WINTER PORTRAIT

Photo by the Author

notice. Black and white are recognized as the colors of gentility, and our Phoebe is punctilious in the matter of clothes. He *always* wears his dress suit, whether his task be that of a mason building a mud house, or of a gallant presenting a butterfly bouquet to his lady love. Nature's gifts are

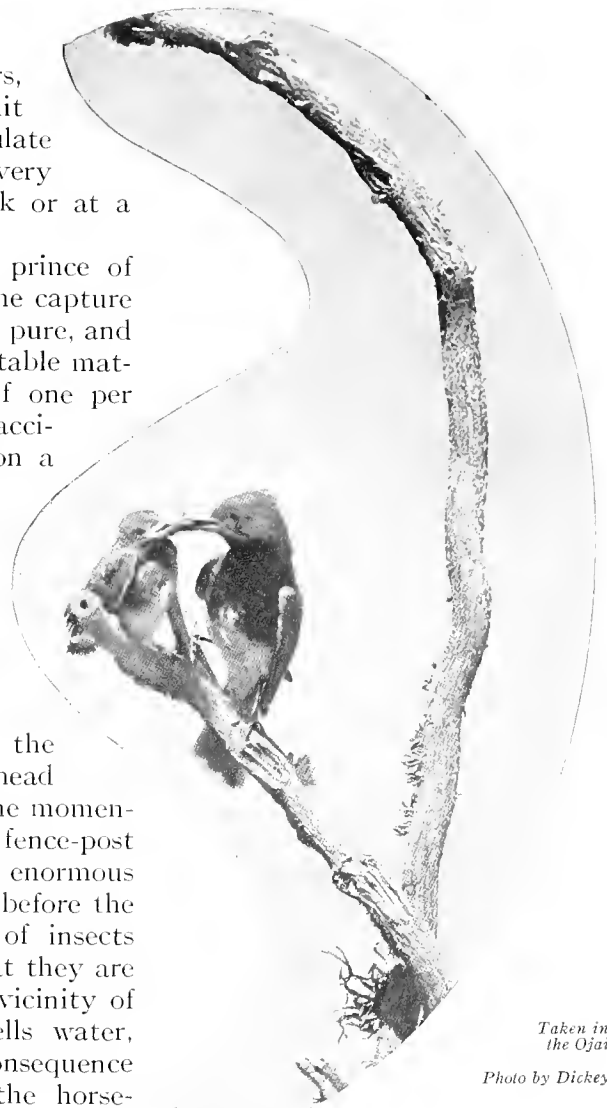
## The Black Phoebe

supplemented by tidy manners, too, and though the black suit must last a season, the immaculate shirt-front is fresh laundered every day beside the running brook or at a wayside watering trough.

The Black Phoebe is a prince of flycatchers. His record for the capture of "animal food" is 99-41/100 pure, and the trifling admixture of vegetable matter represented by 59/100 of one per cent is judged to be chiefly accidental. An insect roosting on a blackberry is likely to be snapped up perch and all; but the only fruit which Phoebe is suspected of taking on purpose is the dainty elderberry. As a flycatcher, then, *nigricans* displays a tireless energy and no little adroitness. When seated, the bird is always turning his head about in quest of game, and the momentary sallies from weed-top or fence-post or bridge-rail represent an enormous consumption of flying things before the day is done. Of the kind of insects taken, it is enough to say that they are chiefly such as frequent the vicinity of water. Anything that spells water, spells insects, and as a consequence Phoebe is found haunting the horse-trough and the tank-house, no less than the stream-side and the fringes of lakes. The farmyard with its lowing

cattle and scented by-products offers ideal attraction for flies, and so, for flycatchers. Besides, if the flies are troublesome about the kitchen door, Phoebe will help clear them away if you will let him.

The natural breeding haunts of the Black Phoebe are cliffs or low ramparts overlooking streams. Here in some niche which offers at



Taken in  
the Ojai

Photo by Dickey

### A PRIVATE ENGAGEMENT

THE LOWERMOST YOUNGSTER SHOWN IN THE SUCCEEDING CUT IS GETTING HIS PORTION

## The Black Phoebe

least overhead shelter, the birds cement a bracket of mud against the perpendicular wall. They are very clever little masons, and the percentage of failure in adhesion in the use of the Phoebe recipe is decidedly less, I should say, than in the case of the Barn Swallow, whose handiwork Phoebe's so closely resembles. Contrary to the statement of some authors noted for their imaginative powers, the Black Phoebe does not, in my experience at least, use elaborate upholsteries. The nest is somewhat austere lined with twisted grasses and a few included horse hairs. Eggs to the number of four or five are deposited, pure white in color, save that one or more are likely to be lightly sprinkled or sharply spotted with chestnut. Tyler thinks it is invariably the last egg or eggs laid which are so marked, and wishes that we might find larger sets so as to test the birds' latent powers.<sup>1</sup>

Bridges and culverts meet the exact conditions of the Black Phoebe's requirements even more accurately than stream banks. *Nigricans*, therefore, has well merited the name "bridge pewee" which has so long been applied to its cousin *Sayornis phoebe*. Given running water and freedom from molestation, there is no bridge too humble to boast its attendant pair



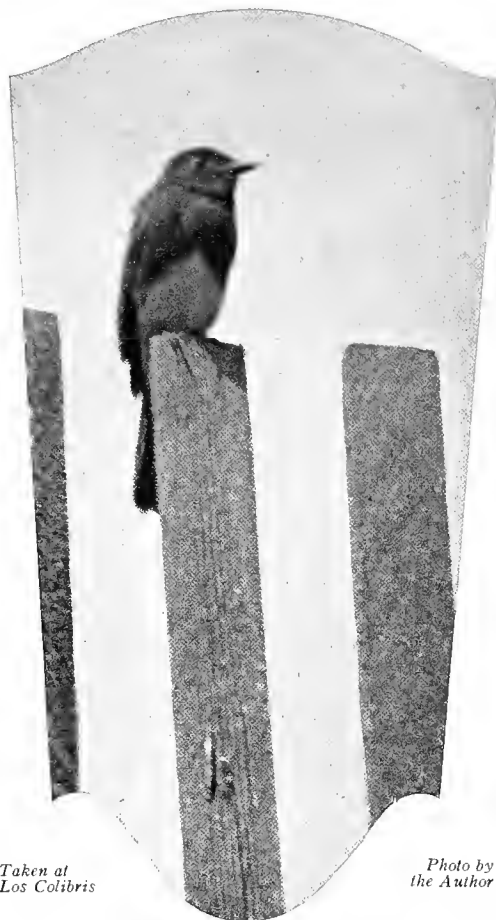
Taken in the Ojai

Photo by D. R. Dickey

A FAMILY GROUP. BLACK PHOEBES

<sup>1</sup>"Some Birds of the Fresno District," Pac. Coast Avifauna No. 9, p. 61, 1913.

## The Black Phoebe



Taken at  
Los Colibris

Photo by  
the Author

OUR LOCAL FLY-TRAPPER

of black fairies. Automobiles pass unheeded nowadays, but at the clatter of horses' hoofs the mistress is likely to sally out from under her shelter and to remark, *tsip, tsip*, in a very emphatic, if lisping, manner, accompanied by a lively "jetting" of the tail. This single note is still so complex and distinctive in quality that it may be recognized anywhere. Both at nesting time and elsewhen, if in a happy mood, the bird will utter a vivacious *chedee' chedew'*, or *chedé chedé chedew'*, the first syllable in rising, the last in falling inflection; and this proper song does duty at scolding-time if the *tsips* are not sufficient.

It is noteworthy that the Black Phoebe does not accept support from below for its nest, as do both *phoebe* and *sayus*, holding it to be more workmanly to glue its handiwork firmly against the side of a timber. This proficiency gives the bird command of the entire underpinning of a bridge, and frequently assures a fortunate degree of inaccessibility. One cannot help wondering, though, how the youngsters

are to manage with their first flight with a swift running stream below them and nothing about to offer a foothold.

The plight of the young aspirant is evidently still more serious in the case of those who are reared in the mouth of an old well. For some occult reason an abandoned well is irresistible to the Black Phoebe; and the birds will nest ten or fifteen feet below the brink. A vertical rise of fifteen feet is surely a pretty stiff stunt to propose to a fledgling. As an alternative he has—the bottom. Scarcely less foolhardy seemed the attempt of a pair on Santa Cruz Island, whose nest overlooked the sea beach at a point which was impassable at high tide. The place was several times drenched with spray during our brief acquaintance with it, but I dare say the brood weathered through somehow. It is of

such attempts that variations—and heroes—are bred.

Without doubt, there is a considerable re-sorting of population as winter approaches. Phoebes which have summered in the foothills fall back upon the lowlands. Northern colonists deploy over the Colorado Desert or drop into the comfortable depths of the Colorado River Valley, where they have never been known to breed. Outlying bridge-tenders are driven into the shelter of farmhouses, or else take refuge in villages; and thus, oftentimes, a welcome relationship, broken off by the cares of summer, is resumed as between man and bird. "Swat the fly" is the motto of the careful housewife. What more suitable, therefore, than to have a cheerful and serviceable colored person to attend to the same duty, outside!

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No. 171

## Say's Phoebe

A. O. U. No. 457. *Sayornis sayus* (Bonaparte).

**Synonyms.**—SAY'S PEWEE. WESTERN PHOEBE.

**Description.**—*Adults:* General color drab (grayish brown to dark hair-brown, darker on pileum and auriculars, shading through upper tail-coverts to brownish black of tail; wings fuscous, the coverts and exposed webs of tertials edged with lighter grayish brown; underparts cinnamon-buff, clear on belly and crissum, shaded and blended with drab on sides of breast, paler, cinnamon-drab, on throat; axillars and lining of wings light buff or cream-buff. Bill and feet black; iris brown. *Young birds* are more extensively fulvous, and are marked by two cinnamomeous bands on wings (formed by tips of middle and greater coverts). Length of adult male about 177.8 (7.00); wing 105 (4.14); tail 82 (3.23); bill 15.7 (.62); tarsus 20 (.79). Female averages smaller.

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; drab coloring; cinnamon-colored belly; melancholy notes; frequents barns and outbuildings, or cliffs.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* Composed of dried grasses, moss, plant-fibers, woolly materials of all sorts, and hair; placed on ledges, under eaves of outbuildings, under bridges, or on cliffs. *Eggs:* 3 to 6, usually 5; dull white, very rarely dotted with reddish brown. Av. of 50 eggs in the M. C. O. colls.: 19.6 x 15 (.77 x .59); index 76. Range 17.8-21.3 by 14.2-16 (.70-.84 by .56-.63). *Season:* Varying with locality—March-June; two broods.

**General Range.**—"Western North America. Breeds from central Alaska, northwestern Mackenzie, northeastern Alberta, southeastern Saskatchewan, and central North Dakota south to Lower California, Arizona, southern New Mexico, western Iowa, and western Kansas; winters from central California, southern Arizona, southern New Mexico, and central Texas to southern Lower California, Vera Cruz, and Puebla; accidental in Wisconsin, Missouri, and Massachusetts" (A. O. U. Com.). Rare or wanting in summer in most of the Pacific coastal region.

*The Say Phoebe*



SAY'S PHOEBE

**Distribution in California.**—A common breeding bird of the Lower Sonoran and of the arid portions of the Upper Sonoran life zones; occurs broadly as a breeder throughout the southeastern desert and semi-desert regions, north to Mono Lake; in the southern portion of the San Joaquin valley, and on the inner coastal ranges of Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Monterey, and San Benito counties, north (at least) to Paicines; also, more sharply localized, in the mountains of the San Diegan district; the northern portion of the Sacramento valley and the northeast plateau region. Winters east and west of the Sierras from Mono Lake and the Sacramento Valley



## The Say Phoebe

southward, abundantly in the San Diegan district, more sparingly on the islands. Never reported from the humid coastal strip.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Tyrannula Saya*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1847, p. 156 (Calif.); *Fisher*, N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, 1893, p. 61 (Owens Valley, Death Valley, etc.; occurrence, habits); *Bendire*, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 276, pl. 1, fig. (eggs); *Beal*, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 44, 1912, p. 36 (food); *Grinnell*, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xiii., 1914, p. 149 (Colorado Valley).



Taken in Kern County

GENERAL VIEW OF NESTING HAUNT

Photo by the Author

A GENTLE MELANCHOLY possesses the soul of all Pewees, and *Sayornis sayus* is the most desponding of the lot. It is impossible to guess what ancestral hardship could have stamped itself so indelibly upon any creature with wings. Perhaps the bird is haunted by the memory of that northern Eden once obliterated by the ice-sheet. Perhaps alkaline waters are bad for little livers. I do not know. Your guess is as good as mine. *Chooory kuteéw*. This "choory" note, heard on a gray day in December, puts one in the same mental attitude as that induced by the modest mewling of a cat. I want to stop and stroke its head, and say in sympathetic falsetto, "Poor little kittens!"

In keeping with its ascetic nature the Pewee haunts open, solitary places, drear pastures tenanted by mullein stalks, bleak hillsides swept by wintry gales, dull dove cliffs with their solemn, silent flutings. Or,

## The Say Phoebe



Taken in Kern County

Photo by the Author

WATCHING THE PHOTOGRAPHER  
AS HE TAKES THE PRECEDING VIEW

or else hovers aloft in an attitude of critical inspection. Say's Phoebe, in common with a few other flycatchers, has the power of ejecting indigestible elytra and leg-sheathings in the form of pellets.

In their winter haunts in the southern lowlands, these birds are quite solitary. The males appear to depart in spring some days in advance of the females, for no better reason, perhaps, than that the reproductive instinct first excites the masculine imagination. Courtship is an animated affair in spite of the melancholy proclivities of the bird; and the male achieves a sort of song by repeating *ku-tew's* rapidly, on fluttering wing. Besides this, in moments of excitement, both birds

since misery loves company, she ventures upon some half-deserted town-site, and voices in unexpected cadences the universal yearning for green things and cessation of wind. Or, better still, she attaches herself for the season to some farmhouse, culls wintry flies, and roosts disconsolate in the shelter of a cornice—*choooory—choooory—kuteéw*.

Say's Pewee, for all its depressed spirits, is an active bird. Taking station on a fence-post or weed-stalk, it waits for passing insects, and sallies out after them with good form and despatch. If local trade is dull, the bird makes fluttering excursions over the field, snapping right and left at humble quarry, and returning to jet the tail and render mournful thanks. Insects constitute the bird's exclusive diet, save in winter, when, under the spell of adverse weather, dried berries and seeds are sometimes taken. Flies, butterflies, moths, wasps, and the smaller wild bees (not the honey bee), are the staples of diet; but beetles, and especially ground beetles, are largely sought. This flycatcher, therefore, more than any other, lights upon the ground to seize its prey,

## The Say Phoebe

cry *Look at 'ere, look at 'ere, look at 'ere* with great distinctness.

Eggs are first laid by the 10th of April, and usually at least two broods, sometimes three, are raised in a season. At the Point of Rocks, in northwestern Kern County, I found a nest containing young about ready to fly, on the 4th of April, the egg complement having been deposited in this instance by the 10th of March. In the natural state these Pewees nest about cliffs, at moderate heights, and in shallow caves. In



*Taken in Santa Barbara County  
Photo by the Author*

ON LOOKOUT

selecting a site, they show a decided preference for a cliff which enjoys the protection of nesting Prairie Falcons. In one instance a pair of these birds nested within ten feet of a pair of Barn Owls. The association might have been accidental, or the Owls' kitchen-midden of gopher-skulls, hard by, might have offered inducement to flies, and, so, to Flycatchers. A stout bracket of twigs, weed-fibers, lichens, and other soft substances, is constructed, and a luxurious lining of wool and hair is supplied; but the whole must be artificially shielded by some projecting tooth or facet of stone, or covered frankly by the shelter of an overarching roof.

Latterly, bridges, culverts, and out-buildings are being more and more utilized by Say's Pewees as nesting sites. Especially attractive to this shelter-loving bird are deserted shacks. Never shall I forget a monumental structure, full eight inches in height, which was placed on a shelf in an old windowless shack on the "Garden of Eden" townsite. This forlorn memorial of human folly on the edge of the Colorado Desert seemed an especially fitting place for this married muse of melancholy. Three whacking big eggs gave promise of future Says, a promise which we did not thwart.

The author in taking his first set of Say Pewee eggs selected a nest which could be reached only by canoe, one

## *The Western Flycatcher*

placed on the south wall of a northern lake. The floor of an old Cliff Swallow's nest, placed in a shady niche at a height of some twelve feet, formed the support of Pewee's accumulations. The cliff was perfectly straight, but by dint of half an hour's work piling lava blocks and securing footholds, with the aid of a double-bladed paddle he succeeded in reaching the nest. Requiring the use of both hands in descent, he placed the four fresh eggs in his hat, and the hat in his teeth, reaching the ground safely and depositing the hat carefully. Tired out by the exertion he flung himself down on the narrow strip of shore and rested. Then noting the rising wind, he sprang up, seized coat and hat and—Oh! did something drop?!! Yes, gentle reader, the eggs were in it,—but only one was smashed. Only one! As perfect the arch without its keystone as a "set" of eggs with the guilty consciousness of one missing!

The experience of a companion, Mr. D. E. Brown, on the same lava wall was even more agitating. Noting some fresh-looking straws projecting from a vapor hole about twelve feet up, he surmised Say's. He climbed up the practically perpendicular wall with such difficulty that he was minded to explore the cranny above with his upstretched hand. His good angel, however, counseled examination by eye and the bird-nester drew himself up so that he could command a full view of the nest—and of a rattlesnake coiled at nine inches. The reptile had just dined upon the contents of the nest and was prepared to vindicate his course of action. Fearing to move a muscle visibly lest the snake strike upon the instant, Brown coolly reached his unseen hand for his revolver, brought it up and dropped upon the moment of the explosion. The rattler was in the act of striking, for he leaped clear of the hole as Brown fell, and that although he had five bullet holes in his writhing carcass.

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No. 172

## Western Flycatcher

A. O. U. No. 464. *Empidonax difficilis difficilis* Baird.

**Synonym.**—WESTERN YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER.

**Description.**—*Adults:* Above and on sides of breast olive or brownish olive (nearest olive citrine); a lighter shade of same color continued across breast; remaining underparts light yellow (between baryta yellow or barium yellow and primrose); sordid on throat and sides, clearest on belly; bend of wing pale yellow; a faint yellowish eye-ring; axillaries and lining of wings paler yellow; middle coverts and tips of greater coverts, continuous with edging of exposed secondaries, yellowish gray, forming two more or less conspicuous wing-bars. Bill brownish black above, yellow below; feet

## The Western Flycatcher

and legs brownish dusky; iris brown. *Young birds* are browner above and paler below; wing-bars cinnamon-buffy (and not certainly distinguishable in color from young of *E. trailli brewsteri*). Length 127-139.7 (5.00-5.50); wing 67 (2.64); tail 57 (2.24); bill 12 (.47); width at nostril 5.4 (.21); tarsus 17 (.67).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; characterized by pervading yellowness. Adults always more yellow than *E. trailli brewsteri*, from which it is not otherwise certainly distinguishable (save by note). Note: a soft *pis-wit*; a woodland recluse. Really the easiest, because the most common of this difficult group.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: Chiefly of moss, lined with fine bark-strips, rootlets, or fine grasses; placed in any convenient cranny, but chiefly in well-sheltered niches of banks or upturned tree-roots, or broken stubs near streams. *Eggs*: 3 or 4, rarely 5; pale creamy white, or buffy, spotted and marked, chiefly in loose wreath, or rarely blotched with light reddish brown (pecan-brown to mikado brown, or onion-skin pink to orange-cinnamon). Av. size 16.8 x 12.95 (.66 x .51). *Season*: April-June; one or two broods.

**Range of *Empidonax difficilis*.**—Western North America south to southern Mexico.

**Range of *E. d. difficilis*.**—Breeds from southeastern Alaska (Glacier Bay), southeastern British Columbia, Montana, and the Black Hills in Dakota, south to western Texas and southern California; winters in Mexico.

**Distribution in California.**—Early migrant nearly throughout the State. Common summer resident in Upper Sonoran and Transition zones, chiefly west of the Sierran divide. Only records of occurrence in summer east of the Sierran divide



WESTERN FLYCATCHER

## The Western Flycatcher

appear to be the following: Warner Mountains (Grinnell) [Not found there by author in 1912]; Mammoth Camp, Mono County, June 7, 1919 (author). Most common in humid coastal strip from San Francisco Bay south; and in foothill sections of San Diego district. Found on floors of higher Sierran valleys in midsummer, and probably indulges in some altitudinal "migration" (Vidette Meadows, alt. 9700, July 5, 1913; Kenawyers, July 8, 1913, *breeding*; Dougherty Meadows, alt. 9700, July 15, 1913). Casual (?) in San Diego district in winter.

**Migrations.**—Spring arrivals: Santa Barbara, March 16, 1911; Mar. 16, 1912; Mar. 21, 1913; Mar. 20, 1915; Mar. 15, 1916.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Tyrannula pusilla*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1847, p. 156 (Los Angeles); *Bendire*, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 298, pl. ii., figs. 24, 25 (eggs); *Oberholser*, Auk, vol. xiv., 1897, p. 300 (*Empidonax insulicola*, new sp.; type locality, Santa Rosa Island); *Grinnell*, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 77 (San Bernardino Mts.; habits, association, nest); *Beal*, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 44, 1912, p. 55 (food).

PLEASE OBSERVE the scientific name, *difficilis*, that is, "difficult." There is a delicate irony about the use of this term as a distinctive appellation for *one* of the "gnat kings"; for, surely, the plural, *Empidonaces difficiles*, would comprehend them all. As a matter of fact, *difficilis* is the least difficult of the group, not alone because it is the most widely distributed and familiar in the West, but because its under-plumage is definitely tinged with yellow, and its notes preserve a fairly distinctive character.

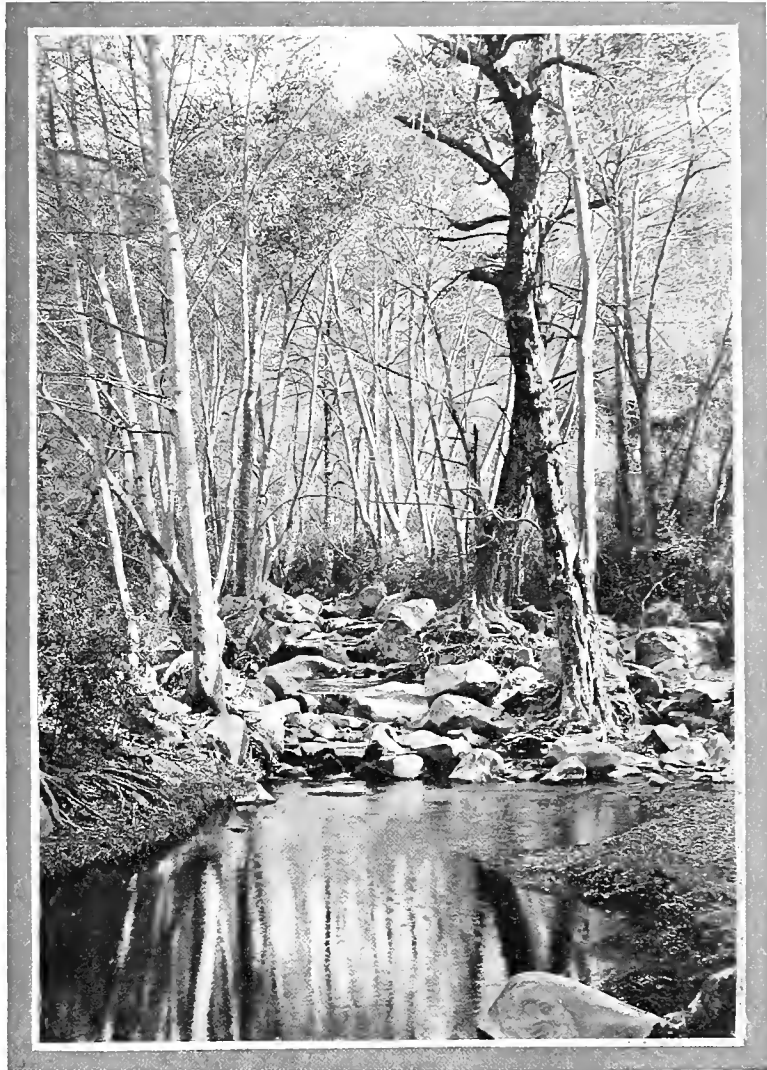
The Western Flycatcher is the first of the *Empidonaces* to arrive in the spring, the local breeders appearing in the San Diegan district as early as the 16th of March; and on the northern borders of the State some two weeks later, when the yellow-green racemes of the Large-leaved Maple (*Acer macrophyllum*) are first flung out to the breeze. The little fay publishes his arrival at once, but so closely does he keep to the shady depths of the trees, and so perfectly does he blend in with the tender hues of new foliage, that we hear him twenty times to once we see him.

The notes are little explosive sibilants fenced in by initial and final "p" or "t" sounds. If one prints them, they are not at all to be vocalized, but only whispered or hissed, *pssseet*, *psswit*, or *piswit*. Other variations are *sé a-wit*, slowly and listlessly; *psur-wit*, pensively; *aweé ut*, petulantly; and *cleotip*, briskly; *kushchtip*, a fairy sneeze in Russian. One becomes familiar with these tiny cachinations, and announces the Western Flycatcher, unseen, with some degree of confidence. There is, besides, a sharp metallic *chup* of anxiety heard at nesting time, which is sparrow-like in vigor and quite out of keeping with anything else Empidonacine.

## *The Western Flycatcher*

The Western Flycatcher inhabits the deeper woods of lower and moderate levels, chiefly west of the Sierras, though it has its acknowledged centers of abundance in the San Diegan district, and in the humid coast province up to and including the San Francisco Bay region. It is rather partial, also, to watercourses, and especially such as flow through shady retreats or past mossy grottoes. Abundant water and shade lure it to the heart of the Sierras, but only along the valleys of the major streams at altitudes of 5000 or 6000 feet. On the other hand, it is interesting to note an increasing fondness on the bird's part for civilized shade. Given shade, the little fellow will invade the most pretentious estates, or push his way into the confines of cities. The crannies of porches offer him welcome shelter, and he is nowise intolerant of humans, if only they will leave him to his own devices.

*Difficilis* is typically the gleaner of the middle forest. Though moving about in the shade, he selects a perch devoid of foliage, where he can have a local fair-way. Quiet, for the most part, when settled, he nevertheless shifts position every twenty seconds or so—goes the rounds in search of the lesser hymenoptera and the



*Taken on the Sespe*

*Photo by Dickey*

A HUMBLE HAUNT OF THE WESTERN FLYCATCHER

## The Western Flycatcher

flies, which together make up two-thirds of his living. Of course these are secured by tiny sallies through the air, and each successful foray is likely to be marked by a self-satisfied shake of the wings when the bird has regained his perch. Birdikins never seems to tire of this sportive gastronomic quest, and we suppose that the flavor of *Hippodamia convergens* (that's a beetle) must be quite equal to pompano or sand-dabs;

while the satisfaction of landing *Diabrotica soror* is like bringing a tuna to gaff. Wasps, too, are no mean antagonists, but so relentless is the warfare *difficilis* wages against them, that his older children are fattened up on an almost exclusive diet of wasp meat.

The Western Flycatcher is a most catholic nester. It builds almost always a substantial cup of twigs, grasses, and hemp, lined with grass, hair or feathers. The outside is usually plentifully bedecked with moss, or else the whole structure is chiefly composed of this substance—not, however, unless the color-tone of the immediate surroundings will permit of it. In position it varies without limit. We find nests sunk like a Solitaire's in a mossy bank, or set in a niche of a rocky cliff, on logs, stumps, or beams, in a clump of ferns, or securely lodged in a fir tree at a height of forty feet. One I found in a swamp was saddled on the stem of a slanting vine maple without a vestige of cover other than that afforded by



Taken in Santa Barbara  
Photo by the Author

I'M WATCHING YOU, SIR!  
FEMALE WESTERN FLYCATCHER, RECENTLY FLUSHED



## The Western Flycatcher

the general gloom. At Kenawyer's, deep in the Sierras, I found an exquisite nest with scarcely a trace of "skirts" showing, tucked between two ridges of bark on the bole of a great shaggy pine tree. Near Tacoma (Washington), a pair of these birds filled up and occupied a cavity from which a set of Gairdner Woodpecker's eggs had already been taken. Near Santa Barbara a pair occupied a hand-sized niche in a solid stone wall from which an Auburn Canyon Wren had just led her brood. Indeed, Woodpeckers, Phoebes, House Wrens, Winter Wrens, and Canyon Wrens, are all mentors of this docile bird, *difficilis*. Another "Western" found a set of bridge-timbers so much to her liking that she built three nests, just alike, on adjoining beams. She laid two eggs each in two of them, but raw weather intervened and we could not learn whether she meant to sit on two nests at once.

Two broods are the rule in the southern part of the bird's range; one elsewhere. Near Santa Barbara I have found fresh eggs on the 30th of April, and others heavily incubated on the 3rd of May. June sees a second crop here; but "May or June" is the nearest we can predict of those who nest but once. Eggs to the number of three or four, rarely five, occupy the dainty cup provided. These are of a dull creamy white color, spotted and blotched rather lightly, with cinnamon brown and pinkish buff, easily distinguishable from all others, save those of the Brewster Flycatchers.

The male does not dance a close attendance upon his mate while she is sitting, but I believe he is always within call. Indeed, I am sure that he oftenest keeps his mate advised of the approach of danger by that penetrating *chup* of which we have already spoken. Possibly the male shares the duties of incubation, as Mrs. Myers supposes.<sup>1</sup> At any



Taken in  
Fresno County

Photo by  
the Author

A HUMBLE BIRD MAY HAVE GRAND NEIGHBORS  
HAUNT OF THE WESTERN FLYCATCHER: SOUTH FORK, KINGS RIVER

<sup>1</sup> Harriet Williams Myers in "The Condor," Vol. XIII., May, 1911, p. 89.

## *The Brewster Flycatcher*

rate, he is the soul of devotion from the moment the chicks are hatched, and he has need to be, for they are voracious eaters. Professor Beal<sup>1</sup> saw a nestful of young Flycatchers fed twenty-four times in a single hour—336 times in a day. Expert service that, and no time for tips!

No doubt the perspiring parents (but birds don't *really* perspire) consider themselves sufficiently rewarded. They have a better opinion of their youngsters than I have, for of all bumptious youth, young West-erns are to me among the most exasperating. Instead of being tender, they are implacable. They have to very perfection that infantile frown which mars the looks of so many baby birds, giving them an appearance of preternatural gravity and cynical aloofness instead of beaming inno-cence. Would you soothe them with a finger—they first bristle, then cower. These are bad tokens, for as at a preconcerted signal they burst from cover like a bevy of partridges, and hasten to their several fates. Ah me! how many a pathway and how many a summer stroll has been saddened by these wayside explosions—premature and pitiful, and beyond repair!

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No. 173

### Brewster's Flycatcher

A. O. U. No. 466. *Empidonax trailli brewsteri* Oberholser.

**Synonyms.**—LITTLE FLYCATCHER. LITTLE WESTERN FLYCATCHER.

**Description.**—*Adults:* Above brownish olive (Saccardo's olive to light brown-ish olive), clearest on back and rump; head and neck darker by reason of mesial dusky; wings dusky, the coverts and exposed inner secondaries broadly tipped with olive or pale olive-gray; tail dusky with some olivaceous skirting; underparts basally whitish or sordid whitish, the sides of neck heavily and the breast more lightly shaded with olive-gray; belly and crissum, or at least the flanks, more or less tinged with pale yellow (extreme examples are nearly as bright as *E. difficilis*, but others show the barest trace of yellow); wing-linings pale yellow; lores light gray to whitish; an inconspicuous eye-ring olive-gray. Bill brownish dusky above, lilaceous (in life) or whitish below; iris hazel; feet brownish black. *Young birds* are browner above, and have cinnamon-buffy wing-bands. Length about 139.7 (5.50); wing 70 (2.76); tail 57 (2.25); bill 12.5 (.49); width at nostril 6 (.24); tarsus 16.5 (.65).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; *brownish* olive coloration; not so yellow below as preceding species; brush-haunting habits; note a smart *sweet' choo*.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A rather bulky but neatly turned cup of plant-fibers, bark-strips, grass, etc., carefully lined with fine grasses; placed 3 to 10 feet up in crotch of bush or sapling of lowland thicket or swamp. *Eggs:* 3 or 4; pale creamy white, sharply but sparingly spotted, chiefly about larger end, with chocolate or dark reddish brown. Av. size 17 x 12.95 (.67 x .51). *Season:* June; one brood.

**Range of *Empidonax trailli*.**—North America, south in winter to Central America and Colombia.

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<sup>1</sup> Food of Our More Important Flycatchers, Biol. Surv. Bull. No. 44, p. 58, 1912.



The Empidonax Flycatchers  
about 25 life size

The Empidonax Flycatchers



### The Empidonax Flycatchers

About 3/8 life size





*E. wrighti*

*E. hammondi*

*E. griseus*

*E. difficilis*

*E. traillii*

Alan Brooks-



## The Brewster Flycatcher

**Range of *E. t. brewsteri*.**—Western North America. Breeds from southern British Columbia south to southern California and northern Mexico, and east, centrally, to Ohio. Winters in Central America and south to Columbia.

**Distribution in California.**—Breeds locally in the brushy riparian association of foothill streams and broader valleys, from the lower levels up well into Transition zone. Found sparingly in the deeper valleys of the high Sierras and on both slopes. Abundant during spring migrations, at the lower levels; common in late summer at the higher levels, both as a vertical and an autumnal return migrant.

**Authorities.**—**Baird** (*Empidonax pusillus*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. ix., 1858, p. 194 (Ft. Tejon); **Bendire**, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 305, pl. 11, figs. 28, 29 (eggs); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 44, 1912, p. 60 (food); **Ingersoll**, Condor, vol. xv., 1913, p. 83 (destruction of nests); **Hanna**, Condor, vol. xx., 1918, p. 211 (parasitized by cowbird); **Oberholser**, Ohio Jour. Sci., Jan., 1918, p. 53 (nomencl.; the name *brewsteri* applied to the western subspecies).

DISCRIMINATION is the constant effort of those who would study the *Empidonaces*, the Little Flycatchers. Comparing colors, Brewster's gives an impression of brownness, where the Western is yellowish green, Hammond's blackish, and Wright's grayish dusky. These distinctions are not glaring, but they obtain roughly afield in a group where every floating mote of difference is welcomed. Brewster's Flycatcher, moreover, is a lover of the half-open situations, bushy rather than timbered, of clearings, low thickets, and river-banks. Above all, it is wedded to the lesser willows, *Salix flavescens*, *S. lasiolepis*, *S. sessilifolia*, and the rest. Unlike its congeners, it will follow a stream out into the desert, if only a few willows or cottonwoods will keep it company; and the willow stubs which border the Colorado River are as sure to hold these chaps as are the wastes tributary to the Santa Ana, San Gabriel, and the Santa Clara rivers. In like manner, Brewster's Flycatchers will stoutly follow the lithe charmers to the heart of the Sierras, though not often to altitudes above 6000 or 7000 feet. In June, 1915, I found them nesting in the Yosemite Valley near Camp Ahwahne, in company with White-crowned Sparrows and Lincoln Sparrows; and in July, 1913, a pair nested in the Simpson Meadows, altitude 6000, on the Middle Fork of the Kings River, along with such "Boreal" species as Thick-billed Sparrow, Sierra Junco, and Townsend Solitaire. But here it had a willow hummock in a grassy bog exactly to its taste. The highest elevation at which I have ever found this species breeding is at Mammoth Camp, in southern Mono County, at an elevation of 8000 feet.

Brewster's Flycatcher is a tardy migrant, for it arrives in Los Angeles County not earlier than the 1st of May, and does not reach certain northern stations before June. When it does come, however, it wastes no time moping about, but takes prompt possession of everything in sight in the name of Hunger and the God of all little Tyrants. This

## *The Hammond Flycatcher*

particular tyrant is restless, energetic, and pugnacious to a fault. It posts in conspicuous places, the topmost twig of a ceanothus, a willow, or an alder, making frequent outcries if the mood is on, and darting nimbly after passing insects. During the nesting season it pounces on passing birds of whatever size, and drives them out of bounds. It is not always so hardy in the presence of man, and if pressed too closely will whisk out of sight for good and all.

The notes of the Little Flycatcher, as it used to be called, are various and not always distinctive. The best-known one, and that which most accurately sums up the energy of its nature, is *switchoo*, *sweéchew*, or, unblushing, *zweébéw*, *zweébéw*, *zzweet*. Other notes, delivered sometimes singly and sometimes in groups, are *pi-soó*; *swit' oo*, *sweet*, *swit' oo*; *swee*, *kutip'*, *kutip'*; *hwit*, or *hooit*, softly.

Nesting begins late in May, and fresh eggs may be expected from June 1st to about the 4th of July. Nests are placed characteristically in upright forks of willows, elderberry bushes, roses, etc. They are usually compact and artistic structures of dried grasses, hemp (the inner bark of dead willows), and plant-down; lined with fine grasses, horse-hair, feathers, and other soft substances. Not infrequently the nests are placed over water; and low elevations, say two or three feet from the ground, appear to prevail.

Incubation lasts only twelve days, and the babies require as much more time to get a-wing. Thereafter the family begins to ascend the valleys; and by August they are invading the nurseries of their mountaineer cousins, *Empidonax wrighti*. The summer vacation is an ancient and honored institution in California; and the birds held summer Chautauquas on the slopes of Mt. Whitney before our ancestors scalped Indians or smoked their seductive weed.

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No. 174

## Hammond's Flycatcher

A. O. U. No. 468. *Empidonax hammondi* (Nantus).

**Synonym.**—DIRTY LITTLE FLYCATCHER.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Above olive, brightest (buffy olive or dull citrine) on rump, shading to olive-gray on foreparts,—color continued on sides, throat (where paler), and breast well down, only slightly paler than back; remaining underparts yellow-tinged in various degrees, usually more or less sordid; pattern and color of wing much as in preceding species; outermost rectrix pale on outer web. Bill comparatively small and narrow, *blackish* above, lighter but very variable below. *Young birds* present a minimum of yellow below, and their wing-markings are buffy instead of whit-



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ish. Length about 127 (5.00); wing 71 (2.80); tail 58 (2.29); bill 10.5 (.41); breadth of bill at nostril 4.6 (.18); tarsus 16 (.63). Females average a little smaller.

**Remark.**—Ridgway recognizes two plumage "phases" of this species, a white-bellied and a yellow-bellied; but a series of 66 examples, culled from everywhere, fails to support this theory. There is not, in fact, one-quarter as much variation in this regard as in the preceding species, *E. trailli brewsteri*, whose differences Ridgway rightly neglects.

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; the smallest of the five California *Empidonaces*, and possibly the most difficult (where all are vexing); olive-gray of plumage gives impression of blackish at distance; the most sordid below of the Protean quintette; nests high in coniferous trees; eggs white.

**Nesting.**—Not certainly known to breed in California. *Nest:* A neat cup of fir-twigs, grasses, and moss, lined with fine grasses, vegetable down, and hair; placed on horizontal limb of fir tree at considerable heights. *Eggs:* 4; pale creamy white, unmarked. Av. size 16.5 x 12.7 (.65 x .51). *Season:* June; one brood.

**General Range.**—Western North America. Breeds from southeastern Alaska, southern Yukon, and central Alberta, south at least to Oregon and Colorado. Winters in Middle America.

**Distribution in California.**—After *E. griseus*, the most elusive and difficult of the *Empidonaces*. Fairly common spring migrant at the lower levels; less common during fall migrations, and then chiefly in the mountains. The species certainly does not breed in southern California (A. O. U.), and there seems to be no indisputable evidence of its breeding anywhere within the limits of the State.

**Authorities.**—**Xantus** (*Tyrannula hammondii*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. x., 1858, p. 117 (orig. desc.; type locality, Ft. Tejon); **Brewster**, Auk, vol. vi., 1889, p. 88 (relationship to *griseus* and *obscurus*); **Bendire**, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 315, pl. 11, fig. 32 (egg); **Willett**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 7, 1912, p. 64 (occurrence in s. Calif.); **Howell**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 12, 1917, p. 66 (Santa Barbara Ids.).

THE GREATEST confusion still exists in literature regarding the habits and distribution of the members of the genus *Empidonax*. As a student of some twenty-five years' standing, and not unversed in experience of any of these little "gnat-kings," the author may, perhaps, confess with as good a grace as any, that there are no *infallible* tests by which the western species may be distinguished by the eye alone, out of hand. This is not saying that given the appropriate local setting, one may not guess right in nearly every instance, even where breeding ranges overlap. The notes, too, are fairly distinctive, and would probably prove absolutely so if we knew them well enough. But however proficient one may become in "sensing" the identity of a resident bird, sight records of migratory *Empidonaces* are (save in the case of *difficilis*) practically valueless. And there are nine full species of these charming enigmas in the United States, with eight more in Mexico. How we should love to be shut up with all seventeen at once!

*Hammondi* is the western analogue of *minimus*, the well-known Least Flycatcher of the East. It has not, however, achieved any such

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distinctness in the public mind as the "Chebec," nor is it likely to do so. While it is common during migrations both east and west of the Sierras, and more broadly in southern California, its appearance at these seasons lacks character, and its notes are seldom heard. And in spite of numerous "records," Dr. Grinnell's conclusion<sup>1</sup> carries conviction: "Of the many records of the breeding of this species along the Sierras,



*Taken in the Tehipite*

*Photo by the Author*

THERE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE HAMMOND FLYCATCHERS IN THESE MOUNTAINS, BUT THEIR PRESENCE, LIKE THE MOUNTAINS THEMSELVES, IS SHROUDED IN MYSTERY

not one has been authenticated, though a few remain untested." The truth is that the species is much more northern in its breeding range than it was supposed to be, and somewhat sporadic in its appearances at that.

In its summer home, in Oregon and Washington, Hammond Flycatchers may be locally very common. I have seen twenty in the course of a morning's walk in early June. Fir groves, the edges of clearings, bush-clad hillsides with fallen trees scattered about, the timbered banks of streams, these are favorite places of residence. Its smart, slightly querulous notes, *sewick'* or *cleo tip'*, are uttered frequently from any

<sup>1</sup> Distributional List of the Birds of Cal., Pac. Coast Avifauna, No. II, 1915, p. 92.

## The Wright Flycatcher

half-prominent station, and they may occasionally be heard in the depths of the forest—in marked contrast to the lazier, drawling tones of the Western (*E. difficilis*). I have one down also for an emphatic *sweé chew*, but the chances are ten to one that a Brewster Flycatcher slipped in on me unawares.

In the summer of 1906 Mr. Bowles and I found these flycatchers nesting on a fashionable hillside section of Spokane. In two instances the birds were building out in the open, after the fashion of the Western Wood Pewee (*Myiochanes richardsoni*): one on the bare limb of a horse-chestnut tree some ten feet from the ground; the other upon an exposed elbow of a picturesque horizontal limb of a pine tree at a height of some sixty feet. A few miles further north we located a nearly completed nest of this species on the 20th of May, and returned on the 1st of June to complete accounts. The nest was placed seven feet from the trunk of a tall fir tree, and at a height of forty feet. The bird was sitting, and when frightened dived headlong into the nearest thicket, where she skulked silently during our entire stay. The nest proved to be a delicate creation of the finest vegetable materials, weathered leaves, fibers, grasses, etc., carefully inwrought, and a considerable quantity of the orange-colored bracts of young fir trees. The lining was of hair, fine grass, bracts, and a single feather. In position the nest might well have been that of a Wood Pewee; but, although it was deeply cupped, it was much broader, and so, relatively flatter. The four fresh eggs which it contained were of a delicate cream-color, changing to pure white upon blowing.

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No. 175

## Wright's Flycatcher

A. O. U. No. 469. *Empidonax wrighti* Baird.

**Synonym.**—LITTLE GRAY FLYCATCHER.

**Description.**—Similar to *E. hammondi*, but averaging slightly larger; grayer and with less of olivaceous above; lighter and less extensively gray-washed below; the web of outer rectrix paler gray; the first outermost primary *shorter* than the 6th; the bill larger and decidedly broader. *Adult* (gray phase): Above dull bluish gray or grayish dusky, faintly olivaceous on back and sides; throat and breast pale gray to whitish, with admixture of ill-concealed dusky; remaining parts, posteriorly, faintly tinged with pale primrose; a whitish eye-ring; wing-markings, of the same pattern as in other species, or more extensive on secondaries and outer webs of tertials, definitely white; outer web of outermost rectrix pale grayish white. *Adult* (yellow-bellied phase): As in gray phase, but underparts strongly tinged with yellow, and upperparts faintly tinged with olive-green; wing-markings less purely white. Bill blackish above, more or less pale below, and dusky-tipped, or sometimes entirely dusky—quite variable in this respect. *Young birds* are whitish below and the wing-bands are buffy,

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Taken in Inyo County

MY LADY

Photo by the Author

as in other species. Length about 132 (5.20); wing 68 (2.69); tail 61 (2.40); bill 12 (.47); width at nostril 5.3 (.21); tarsus 17 (.71).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; prevailing gray coloration; whitish eye-ring; excessively retiring habits; smaller and darker than *E. griseus*; larger and lighter than *E. hammondi*.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* Of "hemp," weathered weed-bark, fine grasses, and vegetable down, lined indifferently with finer grasses, or a few feathers; placed in upright crotch in bushes, or settled upon branch of evergreen sapling. *Eggs:* 4; pale creamy white, unmarked. Av. of 34 specimens in the M. C. O. coll.: 17 x 13.2 (.67 x .52); index 77; largest, 18.5 x 14.2 (.73 x .56); smallest (runt) 15.5 x 11.4 (.61 x .45). *Season:* June; one brood.

**General Range.**—Breeds in the mountains of western North America from about the northern border of Mexico north to southern British Columbia, southern Alberta, and southwestern Saskatchewan, and east to the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains; west to but not including the humid coastal strip, narrowly defined. Winters in Mexico.

**Distribution in California.**—Abundant during migrations at the lower levels, save in the humid coastal strip. A common breeder in the mountains throughout the

## The Wright Flycatcher

State, save in the more humid coastal sections, and from the upper limits of Transition to the limit of trees.

**Authorities.**—**Cooper** (*Empidonax obscurus*), Orn. Calif., 1870, p. 329 (Colorado R.); *Bendire*, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 318, pl. 11, fig. 33 (eggs); *Grinnell*, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 78 (San Bernardino Mts.; habits, desc. nest and eggs, etc.); *Grinnell and Swarth*, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. x., 1913, p. 256 (San Jacinto Mts.; breeding; crit.); *Ray*, Condor, vol. xx., 1918, p. 78, fig. (Lake Tahoe, breeding.).

IT WOULD be impossible to convey to the novice a sense of the mingled awe and reluctance with which the author approaches a declaration as to the appearance, voice, whereabouts, and general characteristics of this will-o-the-wisp of the mountains. Wright's Flycatcher, early dubbed the obscure (*Empidonax obscurus*), is likely to remain such in spite of our manliest endeavors. Its various obscurities have been apostrophized, anathematized, confused, misapprehended, misrepresented, and lied about, until one shudders upon entering the smoke-laden arena. And all because My Lady is so gentle,—gentle and most modest of the gentle, as soberly clad as a mouse and as timid, having a soft voice and a single liquid note, "pit" or "swit," with which she asks most devoutly to be let alone. It is somewhat otherwise with Sir Donax Wrighti, M. P., but of that anon. As for my lady, I have known her so well that to refuse testimony to her many excellencies would be a sort of treason, and—might reflect upon the Platonic qualities of our relationship.

It befell on a July day, the 5th it was, near Skiddoheim Camp,



Taken in Santa Barbara County

Photo by the Author

A MIGRANT EMPIDONAX



*Taken in Inyo County*

*Photo by the Author*

EARLY NESTING

THE LEAVES ON THE OSIERS HAVE JUST BEGUN TO APPEAR;  
YET IT IS JULY, AT ALTITUDE 11,300

Cottonwood Lakes, Inyo County, High Sierras, altitude 11,300. It was a land of contrasts, burning bright by day and freezing cold by night. The vivid green of new grass mocked the retreating snow-banks, and the dull green of clustering pines stood out against a background of glaciers and precipices. The very bush in which the nest sat had so recently escaped the confinement of the wintry drifts that its leaves were only half grown, and its tenant stood out to view at a hundred feet; yet here sat Mrs. Wrighti on four creamy white eggs, and she braved hostile notice as she had braved the mountain storms. She fled, indeed, when I wiggled her tail with my forefinger, but that was only the first time. We were better friends after that. The next day she allowed us to cut our way through the patch of brush to where the nest stood; she allowed me to set up the tripod camera at two feet; and she sat for half second exposures without even winking. At the end of an hour, though, she fled again, and when she returned she sat for some moments on the edge of the nest in a pensive daze as though undecided whether to sit or to flit. Then she sat, and never again did she debate the question of her duty.

Within a week we could do almost anything with her, stroke her wing feathers, playfully tweak bill or tail, thrust a sunburned nose at her, or cover her with a hand,—all unresisting. Truth to tell, she never really enjoyed these stunts, although she condescended to accept flies by

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way of reparation. She was not eager, but it was evidently too good a thing to miss, so when I brought a fly within a half inch or so of her beak, she would seize it with a quick dab. She was too bashful to eat in our presence, however. She always held the fly in the tip of her beak until we had retired from view, then (presumably) she swallowed it. Once, while she was still holding a dead fly in her beak, I offered her a livelier one. Like a flash she dropped the dead fly and seized the living. It was the unerring professional instinct.

Once when a smart shower sprang up, accompanied by sleet, I hastened down to the nest and held a hat over her (at a distance of a foot or so) till the danger passed. This time I am positive she looked her gratitude.

On the 13th day after discovery the eggs began to hatch. As I poked her aside momentarily, toward noon, we saw two naked babies and two eggs. Clothed with the new dignity of motherhood, "Birdetta," as we called her, adopted a more distant mien. She refused to take flies from my hand, and as often as I touched her she would rap me soundly with her little beak. We were rather rude neighbors, I fear, but our solicitude was genuine, and we noted with regret that only two eggs hatched, the first two having undoubtedly been frosted



*Taken in Inyo County*

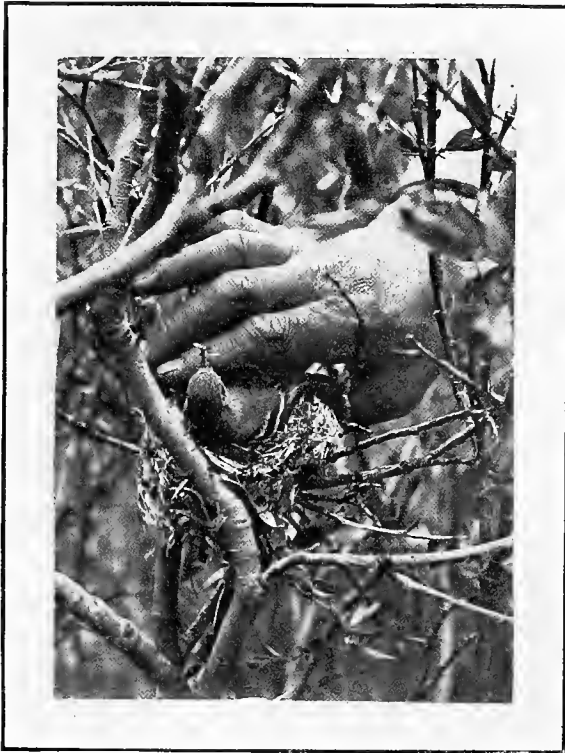
*Photo by the Author*

"SHE BRAVED HOSTILE NOTICE"

## The Wright Flycatcher

before incubation had set in. Perhaps it was better, though, for the weather was raw, and she had all the work to do alone, apparently.

That was the astonishing thing. This timid creature, battling with the elements, had no comfort of her mate. Evidently he was dead, for never once in our constant visits did we see any other Flycatcher than the patient female within a hundred yards of this nest. Other Flycatchers of some sort there were, however, in a distant grove. One little fellow, as merry as a partridge, kept to the tops of distant dead trees, perching and flying after the manner of the Least Flycatcher (*E. minimus*), and singing persistently: *Pusst pesek' pewit'—pssit pewick' pussett'—etc.*



Taken in Inyo County

Photo by the Author

WE COULD DO ALMOST ANYTHING WITH HER

On the 10th of July, 1912, while in camp in a grove of White-bark Pines (*Pinus albicaulis*) in a magnificent cirque near Eagle Peak, in the Warner Mountain, I saw a Wright Flycatcher settle in a neighboring tree, to which the good wife had tied the camp clothes-line. The thing was incredible. We had been in camp there for ten days. One could have sat at the "dining room" table and snapped a prune pit into that particular cluster of pine needles. Yet there sat Mother Wright on four fresh eggs in a nest which she had built under our unsuspecting noses. We had no suspicion even of amorous traffic in our near neighborhood, let alone of house-building.

This nest was closely watched on the ensuing day, and we were sure that no other bird than the female *wrighti* came near the nest. To all appearances she was another widow. The nest was then collected, the female interposing only a flood of soft *swits* uttered with unusual emphasis and, once, a sort of tittering cry, like that of the Western Wood Pewee, though weaker. On the day following there was a great stir of activity on the part of the Wright Flycatchers. In view of the late





**Wright Flycatcher**

The Osier Nest

*From a photograph by the Author*

Taken in Inyo County



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hour, July 12th, nesting must be speedily resumed. The *discarded mate had been recalled from exile*, and he was joyously shouting the mating call, *whêw hit'* or *hit' whêw hit'*, interspersing his emphatic declaration with a variety of lesser notes, and the ever present, infallibly characteristic *swit*. The secret was out. Thenceforth it was to be plain sailing.

The male *wrighti* on his native mountain-side is a bristling, active, and self-important creature, albeit excessively wary. He has an extensive repertory of notes, entirely unlike any uttered by the female, and of so varied a character as to have given rise to great confusion. The two syllabled *pewick'* or *pusek'* note, especially, is very like that of *hammondi*, although it is undoubtedly milder and less sharply accented. This note is susceptible of great variation, especially when uttered in groups of three: *Pusek'—pitic'—squiz'ik*; *sit'ick—chit'ick—sue whit'*; *pssit pewick pussett'*. It is, however, the high-pitched and resonant *whêw hit'* call which startles the woods and marks the movements of the male at the mating season. This note is essentially a mating, or seeking, call; and it is uttered successively from prominent tree-tops over a wide range of territory, in much the same fashion as the challenge song of the Ruby-crowned Kinglet, which is to be heard in the same woods. Judged by this staunch character, Grinnell is undoubtedly right in withdrawing his earlier contention that the breeding birds of the southern mountain ranges are Gray Flycatchers (*E. griseus*),<sup>1</sup> for the *whêw hit'* notes of birds heard in the San Jacintos have precisely the same lilt as those heard in the Warners, and are utterly unlike the efforts of any other known species.

In migrations, these birds may be found almost anywhere. In the great wave which struck the east-and-west-stretching Ventura-Gaviota coast, in late April, 1912, Wright Flycatchers were a prominent factor. Keeping always a certain fly-catching distance from their fellows, they were, nevertheless, so thickly planted that some had to accept very humble perches,—mustard patches, fence-rails, willow thickets, or even boulders and driftwood. For the most part, they are silent on migration, and it is only when one can be cajoled into remarking *swit* that the student may feel sure of his ground. One of these travelers, "snapped" in the mustard, was an *Empidonax*, no doubt of that; but whether *trailli*, *wrighti*, or *hammondi*, no man will ever know.

<sup>1</sup>"A Distributional List of the Birds of California," Pac. Coast Avifauna, No. 11, 1915, p. 93.

## Gray Flycatcher

A. O. U. No. 469.1. **Empidonax griseus** Brewster.

**Description.**—*Adult*: Similar to *E. wrighti*, but wing averaging decidedly longer, tail shorter, bill longer and relatively narrower, and coloration much grayer above (Ridgway). Also decidedly larger; the first primary (outermost) equal to or longer than the 6th (as in *E. hammondi*); the tail less or not at all emarginate; the outer web of the lateral pair of rectrices definitely white. The terminal third of mandible brownish dusky; the basal portion lilaceous white (not variable as in *E. wrighti*). Measurements—av. of seven males from the Colorado River: Length (skins) 139.6 (5.50); wing 71 (2.80); tail 59 (2.32); bill 12.3 (.49); width at nostril 5.1 (.20); tarsus 18.3 (.72).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; obscure grayish coloration; larger and grayer than *E. wrighti*, but not certainly distinguishable out of hand.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A deep cup composed externally of grasses, weed-stems, and weathered bark-strips; felted internally with finer materials, including feathers; placed two or three feet high in greasewood or sage. *Eggs*: 3 or 4; ovate or short-ovate; pale creamy white. Av. of 14 specimens from Mono County, in the M. C. O. coll.: 17 x 13.2 (.67 x .52). *Season*: June; one brood.

**General Range.**—"Southwestern United States and Mexico. Breeds from mountains of southern California [discredited], Arizona [no evidence], and southern New Mexico [no evidence], to southern end of the Mexican tableland [?]; winters from southern California and southern Arizona south in Lower California and Mexico to Puebla and Tepic. Casual in Colorado" (A. O. U. Check-List, 3rd Ed., with brackets by author).

**Conjectural Range.**—Summer resident, of very local distribution, in the Upper Sonoran life zone of the Great Basin region, probably north into Washington. South in winter to southern Mexico.

**Distribution in California.**—Of sharply localized occurrence as a breeder in the high-lying sage sections east of the Sierras (Mono Craters, June 2-7, 1919; June 12-14, 1922). Fairly common in winter in the southeastern deserts and in the valley of the Colorado.

**Authorities.**—Baird, Brewer and Ridgway (*Empidonax obscurus*), Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. iii., 1874, p. 520 (San Buenaventura, winter); Grinnell, Pasadena Acad. Sci., Pub. no. 2, 1898, p. 31, part (Los Angeles Co.; lowlands in fall and winter); *ibid.*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 11, 1915, p. 93 (status in Calif.); Nelson, Auk, vol. xxi., 1904, p. 80 (crit.; nomencl.); Walker, Condor, vol. vi., 1914, p. 94 (Crook Co., Ore.; desc. nest and eggs); Dickey and Van Rossem, Condor, vol. xxiv., 1922, p. 137 (White Mts.; probably breeding).

**Remarks.**—The case of *Empidonax griseus* is, without exception, the most baffling in the current annals of western ornithology. First recognized by Dr. Brewster, in 1889, from specimens taken in Lower California (La Paz), it was for years hopelessly confused with *E. wrighti*, which it so closely resembles. Grinnell erroneously recorded it as resident in Los Angeles County, and, later, as the breeding bird of the San Bernardino; but careful study of the breeding birds of the San Jacinto Mountains in 1908 convinced him of his error, and laid under suspicion all previous records of the occur-



**Gray Flycatcher on Nest in Greasewood**

*From a photograph by the Author*

Taken in Mono County



## The Gray Flycatcher

rence of this bird in California, save those concerned with the valleys of the San Diegan district, the desert lowlands, and the valley of the Colorado River. Careful study of the last-named region in the winter and spring of 1910 showed the Gray Flycatcher as a characteristic winter resident, and raised the question whether we have here an example of reverse migration—Mexican birds coming north to winter—or whether there is still, in the ever hospitable north, some breeding area large enough to cradle, all unrecognized by man, this bird of mystery.

By every analogy *E. griseus* should have characteristic notes which would give us the clue to field recognition and enable us to unravel the tangled web of relationship which involves *hammondi*, *wrighti*, and *griseus*; but no one has yet reported on the vocal distinctions, if they exist.

So ran the legend as penned in 1916 and intended for this work. To this I am able to append the following bulletins:



Taken in Mono County

NESTING HAUNT OF GRAY FLYCATCHER

Photo by the Author

THE GROPINGS and conjecturings of Science-in-the-making afford amusing reading after the clew is found. We are not out of the woods yet, but the timber is thinning. The Gray Flycatcher is beginning to take on the semblance of reality.

On the 2nd of June, 1919, while we were pausing in a heavy stretch of mingled greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*) and sage (*Artemisia tridentata*), at a point due west of the Mono Craters, a member of our M. C. O. party found a "Wright" Flycatcher's nest, with three eggs, in a sage-bush. A few minutes later another collector found an incomplete

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set, two eggs, in a nest two feet up in a greasewood. The altitude was approximately 7000 feet, high Upper Sonoran, and about two miles from the nearest timber.

Returning on the 7th of June we gave the neighborhood careful study, and roughly defined the limits of a small colony, at least seven pairs, of the supposed Wright Flycatchers. We were able to locate six nests in a space approximately half a mile square. It was not *easy* work, and we may have missed some. The females sat very closely, so closely, indeed, that we could almost touch them on the nests. Only one was caught foraging quite alone, and she was traced without great difficulty to her nest. Another bird, evidently a male, was less promising. He had started up somewhat brusquely from the sage, and was off so quickly that I could not tell within twenty feet where he came from. Again and again the bird lighted on the very lowest bushes and plucked something from the leaves, an insect, apparently. The bird also posted for aggravating intervals, as much as ten minutes sometimes. But I was encouraged by the fact that he was working back nearer to the supposed place of origin. A sparrow lighted in the bush at about the level I suspected the bird of flying from, and the flycatcher took up the challenge promptly, pounced upon the intruder and drove him out; having done which, he posted near by quite contentedly. After this he wandered aimlessly over nearby bushes and returned to his central post. I concluded that he was a male on guard near the nest. Acting on this assumption I arose to investigate. The bird departed instantly and ostentatiously. But when I took up my stand where he had been last, I had no difficulty in spotting the nest with the female on, about twelve feet away in a sage-bush. I have been thus explicit because I have never known of an instance in which the male *wrighti* mounted guard in close proximity to a nest, or, indeed, betrayed any knowledge of its existence.

These notes were dutifully filed under the heading "*Empidonax wrighti*"; but for the rest of the season of 1919, I saw *wrighti* only at timberline or thereabouts, and the recollection of that freak colony, blistering by preference in the open sage, haunted me. Then an overlooked item in "The Condor" (xvi., p. 94) came to attention:

**"Nesting of the Gray Flycatcher in Oregon.**—June 7, 1913. I collected a nest and three eggs of the Gray Flycatcher (*Empidonax griseus*) on the juniper flat, at the north of Pauline Mountains, Crook County, Oregon. The parent bird was taken with the nest, and identified by Mr. H. C. Oberholser and Mr. Joseph Grinnell. The eggs are creamy white, and were but slightly incubated. Data reads as follows: Nest composed of small dead weed stems, plant-down, hair, shreds of sage-brush bark and some grasses, quilted together, and lined with wool and fine feathers. Situated in the crotch of a sage-bush, on a sage and juniper flat. Nest about two feet above the ground. Female bird incubating.—Alexander Walker, Mulino, Oregon."



## The Gray Flycatcher

Of course! How simple! But other good men have fallen into the same trap, all unawares, as witness this from the pen of Vernon Bailey in the steenth edition of the justly famous "Handbook":

"In the Great Basin country *wrightii* is as much at home in the sagebrush as most other species of *Empidonax* are in shady woods or around grassy meadows. His trim little form is often noticed on top of a sagebrush by the roadside, sometimes far from water, but more often within reach of pond or stream. A favorite place for a nest is in the fork of a sage."

*Griseus* is evidently the bird of the open sage, and *wrightii* is the bird of the timbered mountains.

Now (before going to press) as a last appendix to this chapter of science-in-the-making, I add that in June, 1922, the M. C. O. party spent two unexpected days with this same "colony" near Mono Craters. By some fluke of fortune we had no gun—perhaps we should have been no



Taken in Mono County

Photo by the Author

### A CLOSE-UP OF MRS. GRISEUS

THE ARTIST HAS TRIED TO IMPROVE THIS NEST BY THE ADDITION OF A SORT OF PATENT WHISKERS, AFTER THE CURIOUS FASHION OF HIS KIND

## The Gray Flycatcher



Taken in Mono County

Photo by the Author

### NEST IN GREASEWOOD

wiser if we had had, because the doctors are still debating in their closets whether such a species as *Empidonax griseus* actually exists. In this exigency perhaps field testimony is more reliable. I can testify, then, that we found these birds everywhere in the *sarcobatus* belt. We took twelve sets of eggs with nests, besides observing several nests a-building. In our close, almost exclusive, association with these birds, we did not once hear the *whew hit* notes, which are distinctive of the male Wright Flycatcher, although this was the first sound we did hear upon returning to our base camp in the fir belt some 20 miles away. Again and again we observed the close association of male and female in the vicinity of their nest, a custom which is absolutely taboo in orthodox *wrighti* society. The notes and social customs of this desert-haunting group of *Empidonaces*, together with their nests of much more massive construction, serve to distinguish them from the established *E. wrighti* type, much more certainly than do any alleged differences in somatic characters.

And now come two young scientists of most reputable standing who assert that they have found *wrighti*, *hammondi*, and *griseus* breeding together at the higher levels (say 10,000 or 11,000 feet) of the White Mountains, and that the *young* of *wrighti* and *griseus* are clearly distinguishable. Here is work for the gods! I resign!



**n/3 Olive-sided Flycatcher on Pine Bough**

*Not in situ*

*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*

*Taken in San Diego County*



## Olive-sided Flycatcher

A. O. U. No. 459. *Nuttallornis borealis* (Swainson).

**Description.**—*Adult*: Upperparts brownish slate with a just perceptible tinge of olivaceous on back; top of head a deeper shade, and without olivaceous; wings and tail dusky blackish, the former with some brownish gray edging only on tertials; flank-tufts of fluffy, yellowish or white feathers, sometimes spreading across rump and in marked contrast to it, but usually concealed by wings; throat, belly, and crissum, and sometimes middle line of breast, white or yellowish white (naphthaline yellow on belly); heavily shaded on sides and sometimes across breast with brownish gray or olive-brown—the feathers with darker shaft-streaks. Bill black above, pale yellow below; feet black. *Immature*: Similar to adult, but coloration a little brighter; wing-coverts fulvous or buffy. Length about 177.8 (7.00); wing 105.7 (4.16); tail 70 (2.756); bill 17 (.67); tarsus 15 (.59).

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; heavily shaded sides; bill yellow below; *tew-tew* note; keeps largely to summits of conifers.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A rather shallow cup of twigs, bark-strips, and, rarely, grasses—or moss (northerly); lined with coarse rootlets (or, exceptionally, with moss and fine grass), settled upon horizontal spreading branch of conifer or other tree, often at great heights. *Eggs*: 3, very rarely 4; creamy white, cartridge buff, or pale pinkish buff; handsomely and rather sparingly spotted, chiefly in wreath about larger end, with chocolate, walnut-brown, pecan-brown (exceptionally sayal brown), and vinaceous gray. Av. of 22 eggs in the M. C. O. coll.: 22 x 16 (.866 x .63); index 72; range 20-24.1 by 14.5-17 (.79-.95 by .57 x .67). *Season*: June 1-15; one brood.

**General Range.**—North and South America; breeds in Transition and Canadian zones from central Alaska and southern Mackenzie east to central Quebec and Cape Breton Island, south in the coniferous forests of the West to southern California, Arizona, and Texas; and in the East south in the mountains to North Carolina; passes through Mexico and Central America in migrations; and winters in northwestern South America to Peru.

**Distribution in California.**—Common summer resident in Transition and Canadian zones, practically throughout the State, save in the eastern desert ranges, south to Cuyamaca Mountains and Santa Barbara. Near Carpinteria breeds almost to sea-level in pure Upper Sonoran, non-coniferous associations. In humid coastal strip breeds down to sea-level from Monterey County north. Of wide occurrence during migrations.

**Migrations.**—*Spring arrivals*: Santa Barbara, May 6, 1911; May 7, 1912; Apr. 29, 1913; Apr. 29, 1914; Apr. 29, 1919; May 3, 1920.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Tyrannus borealis*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. iii., 1847, p. 157 (Monterey); **Bendire**, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 282, pl. 2, figs. 15, 16 (eggs); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 76 (San Bernardino Mts.; habits, desc. nest and eggs); **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 44, 1912, p. 41 (food); **Dixon**, Condor, vol. xxii., 1920, p. 200, figs. (desc. nest, eggs, taken at Berkeley); **Bangs and Penard**, Proc. Biol. Soc. Wash., vol. xxxiv., 1921, p. 90 (*Nuttallornis borealis majorinus*, new subsp.; type locality, Pine Flats, Los Angeles Co.).

*The Olive-sided Flycatcher*



OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER

FLYCATCHERS belong to the sub-order *Clamatores*, that is to say, Shouters. Some few of our American Flycatchers lisp and sigh rather than cry aloud, but of those which shout the Olive-sided Flycatcher is easily dean. And it is as an elocutionist only that most of us know this bird, even though our opportunities may have stretched along for

## *The Olive-sided Flycatcher*

decades. On a morning in early May, as surely as the season comes around, one hears a strong insistent voice shouting, "*See here!*" There is not much to see, save a dun-colored bird seated at an impossible height on the summit of a tall fir tree. Its posture is that easy half-slouch which, with the Flycatchers, betokens instant readiness for action. While we are ogling, the bird launches from his post, seizes an insect some thirty feet distant, and is back again before we have recovered from surprise. "*See here!*" the bird repeats, but its accent is unchanged and there is really nothing more to see.

An intimate acquaintance with the Olive-sided Flycatcher is not easily attained; but its characteristic cry carries to a distance of half a mile or more, and is, fortunately, quite unforgettable. Both in accent and energy it seems to set the pace for several of the lesser Tyrants. Of course, like many another of the voices of Nature, its interpretation depends a good deal upon the mood of the listener. Heard on a dull day at sea-level it may sound dismal enough, but heard in the sharp air of the mountains it becomes an exultant note. At closest range one notices a premonitory note, a liquid *quit*, as is often the case with the strong-voiced species. *Quit, we're here*, the birds of the San Jacinto



*Taken in the San Jacinto Mts.*

*Photo by the Author*

A ROMANTIC OUTLOOK  
THE X MARKS POSITION OF AN OCCUPIED NEST

### *The Olive-sided Flycatcher*

Mountains seemed to say; and if they warned us once, they did a thousand times. "Well, what of it?" we were minded to retort. But miners, toiling in the depths of the Sierras, come to regard the brisk evening greeting of this flycatcher as one of the compensations of solitude. "*Hip! Three cheers!*" says the bird as he sees his friends emerging from the tunnel's mouth; and the miners shout, "Hooray!"



*Taken in the San Jacinto Mts. Photo by the Author*  
"A RUSTIC SAUCER OF INTERWOVEN TWIGS"

*Borealis* is a bird of the treetops, and nearer you cannot come, save in nesting time, when caution is thrown to the winds, and studies in morbid psychology are all too easy. The birds place a rustic saucer of interwoven twigs and mosses, lined with rootlets, upon the upper side of a horizontal branch, whether of yellow pine, tamarack pine, or fir tree; and as often as otherwise at moderate heights. The small bird usually maintains a prudent aloofness in the early days; but as incubation advances, his solicitude breaks bounds. Then both birds betray uneasiness at the approach of strangers and begin to flit about, with restless, tittering cries, *tew-tew, tew-tew, or tew-tew-tew*, sounds which strangely excite the blood of the oölogist. Once the nesting tree is made out



and the ascent begun, the birds are beside themselves with rage, and dash at the intruder with angry shouts which really stimulate endeavor where they are intended to discourage it.

How fatal is the beauty of an egg-shell! There be those of us who have drunk so oft of this subtle potion that the hand goes out instinctively to grasp the proffered cup. Besides, the product of an Olive-side's skill is of a very special kind,—a rich cream-colored oval, warmed by a hint of living flesh, shadowed by lavenders and splotched with saucy chestnut. It is irresistible! But, boys, don't do it! We are old toppers ourselves; public sentiment is against us, and our days are numbered. It is right that it should be so. Besides that, and speaking in all seriousness now, while it is desirable and necessary that a few representative collections of natural history should be built up *for the public use*, it does not follow that the public good is secured by the accumulation of endless private hoards of birds' eggs—whose logical end, in ninety-nine cases out

of a hundred, is the scrap-heap. You are probably one of the ninety-nine. Think twice before you "start a collection," and then—don't!



Taken in the San Jacinto Mts.

Photo by the Author

A DIFFIDENT OLIVE-SIDE

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No. 178

## Western Wood Pewee

A. O. U. No. 462. *Myiochanes richardsoni richardsoni* (Swainson).

**Synonyms.**—SHORT-LEGGED PEWEE. RICHARDSON'S PEWEE.

**Description.**—*Adults:* Above deep grayish brown or grayish olive-brown, the pileum with dusky mesial streaks, the quills and tail dusky; a lighter shade of grayish brown continued around sides and across breast, lightening on chin and throat, where

## The Western Wood Pewee

also washed with yellow; on remaining underparts becoming yellowish white or pale greenish yellow; middle and greater coverts tipped with grayish, the greater more broadly; outer webs of tertials edged with grayish white, the anterior feathers, so marked, forming with the tips of greater coverts a noticeable bar. Bill blackish above, dusky (never light) below. *Young birds* have the middle and greater coverts tipped with buffy (forming *two* not inconspicuous bars); and some buffy edging on rump and upper tail-coverts. This species bears a curiously close resemblance to *M. virens* of the East, inasmuch that it is not always possible to separate specimens in the cabinet; yet the two are perfectly distinct in note and habit, and are not suspected of intergradation. Length of adult males 139.7-165.1 (5.50-6.50); wing 87 (3.43); tail 66 (2.60); bill 13 (.51); tarsus 13.4 (.53). Females a little smaller.

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler to sparrow size; dark coloration (appearing blackish)—much darker and a little larger than any of the *Empidonaces*. *Meezeer* note of animated melancholy, distinctive.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A handsome cup of grasses and plant-fibers, lined with fine grasses, or, more rarely, feathers, and saddled upon horizontal branch, usually a dead one, without attempt at concealment. The exterior is, however, invariably finished in gray, usually by copious use of cobwebs, by which, also, the entire structure is bound to branch. *Eggs:* 3 or 4; pale creamy white to ivory-yellow, spotted, rather finely, or with occasional blotches, in open wreath about larger end, with chocolate (rarely chestnut, russet, or even tawny olive) and vinaceous gray. Av. of 69 eggs in the M. C. O. coll.: 17.5 x 13.4 (.69 x .526); index 76; range 14.5-20.3 by 12.45-14.5 (.57-.80 by .49-.57). *Season:* May 10-July 10, according to altitude; one brood.

**General Range.**—"Western North America and South America. Breeds from central Alaska (casual at Point Barrow), southern Mackenzie, southern Saskatchewan, and southern Manitoba, south to northern Lower California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas; migrates through Mexico and Central America; winters in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia" (A. O. U. Com.).

**Distribution in California.**—Common summer resident from the lowermost limits of Upper Sonoran to limit of trees in Boreal zone; of wide occurrence during migrations.

**Migrations.**—*Spring arrivals:* Santa Barbara, Apr. 29, 1911; Apr. 8, 1913; Apr. 22, 1919; Santa Cruz Island, Apr. 18, 1915. *Fall departures:* Santa Barbara, Sept. 11, 1911; Sept. 11, 1915.

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Tyrannula virens*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. ii., 1853, p. 262 (Calif.); *Coues*, Birds of the Northwest, 1874, p. 247 (syn., desc. habits, comparison with *virens*); *Bendire*, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 291, pl. 11, figs. 20-22 (eggs); *Ray*, Auk, vol. xx., 1903, p. 184 (Sierra Nevada; habits, desc. nest, eggs); *Beal*, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 44, 1912, p. 49 (food); *Mailiard*, J. W., Condor, vol. xxiii., 1921, p. 76 (Lake Tahoe; nesting habits).

THE PREY of gentle melancholy and the heir to gloom is this Pewee of the West. The day, indeed, is garish. The leaves of the fragrant cottonwoods glance and shimmer under an ardent sun; while the wavelets of the lake, tired of their morning romp, are sighing sleepily in the root-laced chambers of the overhanging shore. The vision of the distant hills is blurred by heat pulsations; the song of birds has ceased and the very caddis-flies are taking refuge from the glare. The sun is

## The Western Wood Pewee

dominant, and all Nature yields drowsy allegiance to his sway. All but Pewee. He avoids the sun, indeed, but from a sheltered perch he lifts a voice of protest, "Dear Me!"

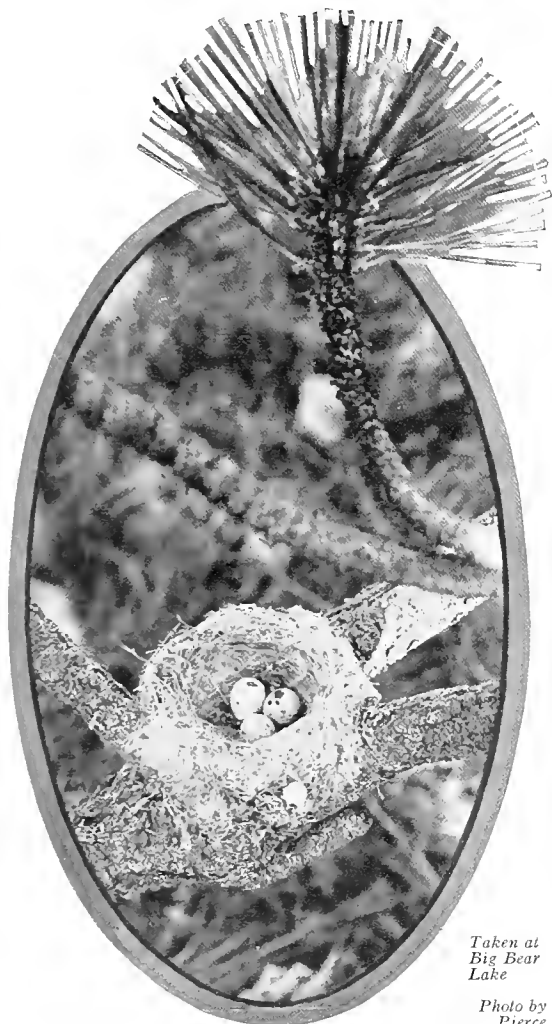
It seems uncalled-for. The bird does not appear to be unhappy. Fly-catching is good, and the Pewee cocks his head quite cheerfully



WESTERN WOOD PEWEE

as he returns to his perch after a successful foray. But, true to some hidden impulse, as you gaze upon him, he swells with approaching effort, his mandibles part, and he utters that doleful, appointed sound, *dear me*. His utterance has all the precision and finality of an assigned part in an orchestra. It is as if we were watching a single player in a symphony of Nature whose other strains were too subtle for our ears. The player seems inattentive to the music, he eyes the ceiling languidly,

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NEST AND EGGS OF WESTERN WOOD PEWEE

Taken at  
Big Bear  
Lake

Photo by  
Pierce

## *The Western Wood Pewee*

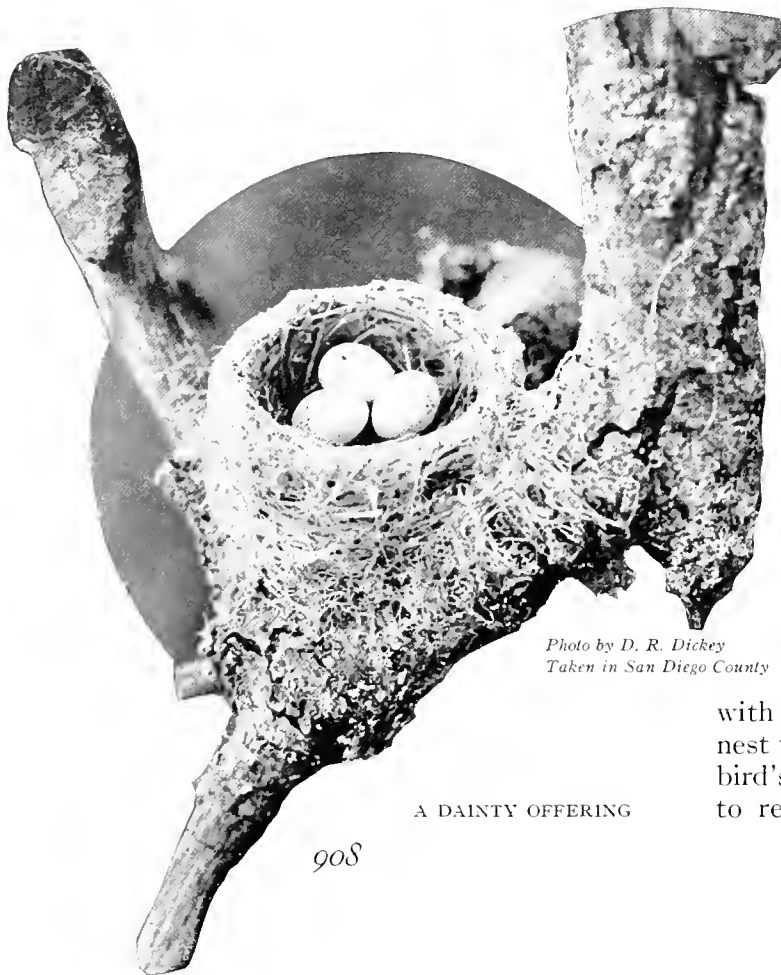
he notes a flashing diamond in the second box, he picks a flawed string absently, but at a moment he seizes the bow, gives the cello a vicious double scrape, *dear me*, and his task is done for that time.

But if our musician is faithful to the score of daylight, he makes himself responsible for its comings and its goings. Over how many millions of acres of western woodland is not the dear, doleful preceptor the first to break the brooding silence of the night! Or ever the owl and the night-hawk have gone to bed, his voice booms out in the darkness and serves notice of impending day. And he it is who tolls the knell of day departing. Only the Mockingbird, lovesick and comfortless, disputes him,—he and the Nuttall Sparrow, rousing tipsily at goodness knows what hour to shout defiant babblings.

The Western Wood Pewee is one of the later migrants, and a great loiterer at that. For although our local population reaches the southern part of the State by the 18th of April, and a nest with eggs has been taken at Pasadena on the 1st of May, such birds as intend to breed in Alaska

may be passing as late as June 1st. It is found as a summer resident wherever there is timber, even from sea-level to the limit of trees on the Sierran slope; yet it shows a marked preference for the more open situations, and a measurable though not slavish dependence upon water.

The Pewee takes the public quite into her confidence in nest-building. Not only does she build in the open, without a vestige of leafy cover, but when she is fully freighted with nesting material she flies straight to the nest and proceeds to arrange it with perfect nonchalance. If a nest with eggs is discovered in the bird's absence, she is quite likely to return and settle to her eggs



*Photo by D. R. Dickey  
Taken in San Diego County*

A DAINTY OFFERING

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## The Western Wood Pewee

without a troubled thought.

The nest is a moderately deep, well-made cup of hemp, fine bark-strips, grasses, and similar soft substances; and it is usually saddled upon a horizontal limb of pine, fir, maple, alder, oak, aspen, sycamore, etc.; but occasionally the nest is set in an upright crotch of a willow or some dead sapling. Nests having such support are naturally deeper than saddled nests, but the characteristic feature of both sorts is the choice of a site quite removed from the protection of leaves. The grayish tone of the bark in the host tree is always accurately matched in the choice of nesting materials, and, if the result can be secured in no other way, the exterior of the nest is elaborately draped with cobwebs.

All eggs appear beautiful to the seasoned oölogist, but few surpass in dainty elegance the three creamy ovals of the Pewee, with their spotting of quaint old browns and subdued lavenders. They are genuine antiques, and the connoisseur must pause to enjoy them even though he honors the prior rights of Mr. and Mrs. *M. Richardsoni*. It is not certain that we shall be left to undisturbed enjoyment either. If the Pewee's nest is placed in the open, it is only that she may watch it the better, and woe betide the stranger, bird or



Taken in Modoc County

Photo by the Author

A PORTRAIT

*The Western Wood Pewee*



*Taken in Inyo County*

*Photo by the Author*

THE BIRD-NESTER  
WOOD PEWEES OFTEN CHOOSE EXPOSED SITUATIONS

for humans, if certain trophies do adorn our cabinets, it is only because we have taken a wicked advantage of this sad-voiced but valiant-hearted wood sprite.

beast, who covets her handiwork. The nest under survey in the illustration accompanying was discovered to us by a female Audubon Warbler, who was out after house-furnishings. When she spied this treasure she chortled with delight, and proceeded to help herself to some of the choicest hangings. Quick as a flash the Pewee was upon her; and from the scrimmage which followed the warbler emerged a bootless and chastened bird. Chipmunks fare no better; and as



From a water-color painting by Walter John Brooks  
Male and female, seen at the site  
Vermillion Flycatcher

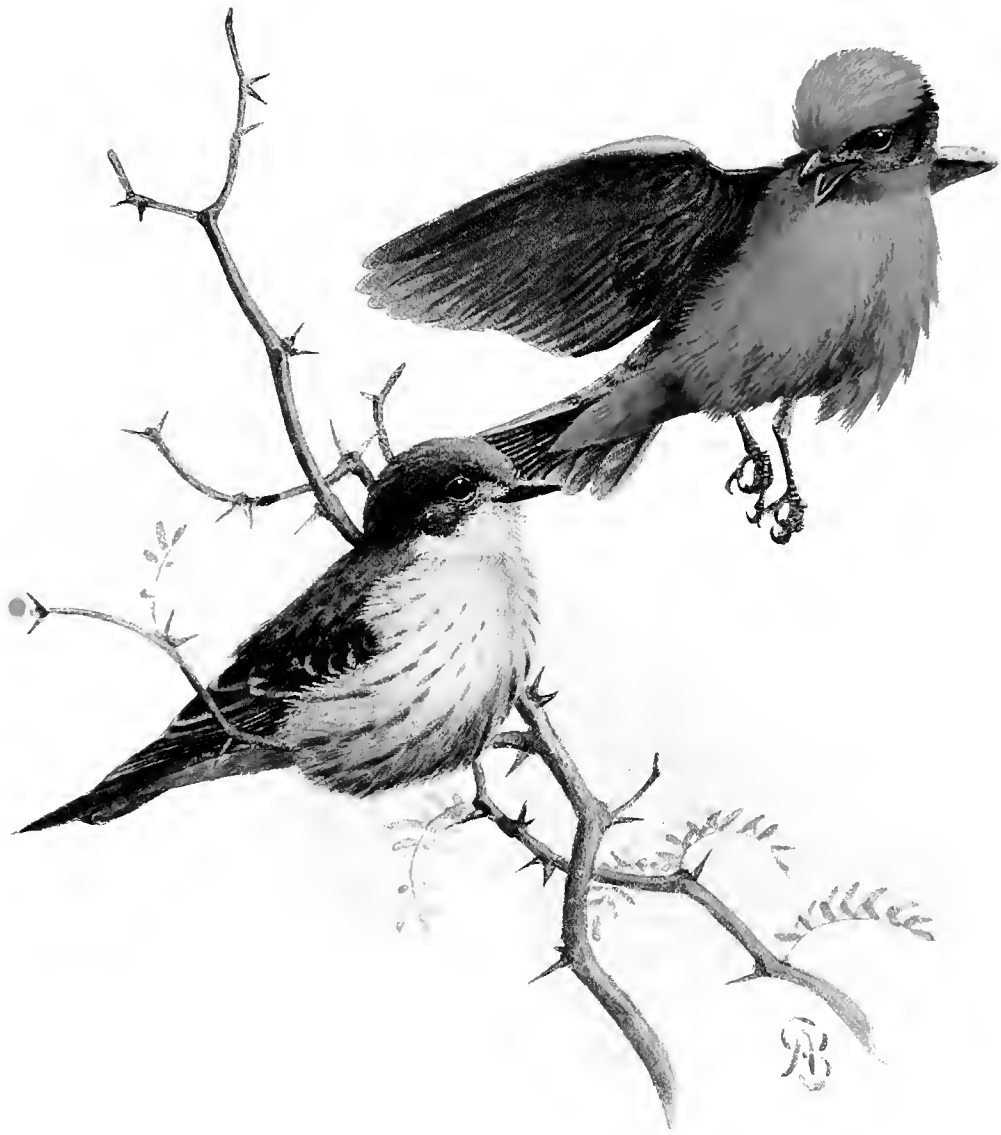


**Vermilion Flycatcher**

Male and female, about  $\frac{3}{4}$  life size

*From a water-color painting by Major Allan Brooks*







## Vermilion Flycatcher

A. O. U. No. 471. *Pyrocephalus rubinus mexicanus* Selater.

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Top of head and broad occipital crest intense scarlet-red or scarlet; entire underparts bright scarlet, grenadine red, or flame-scarlet; sides of head narrowly and sides of neck broadly and upperparts nearly uniform brownish dusky; tail deeper dusky; a little faintly rufescent light edging on wing-coverts, tertials, and outer edge of outer pair of rectrices. Bill and feet black. *Adult female*: Red confined to wing-linings and posterior underparts, where much lighter than in male (peach-red and strawberry-pink, grenadine pink, etc.); anterior underparts white, breast broadly, streaked with brownish; upperparts warm grayish brown to fuscous, lightening on forehead, blackening on tail; pileum with mesial dusky streaks; a vague supraloral and superciliary line of whitish; upper plumage and streaks on breast more or less edged with faint rufescent. *Yearling males* are like the adult females, but the red of posterior underparts is lighter, more orange or salmon-pink. *Young birds* of both sexes are much like female, but without red and with much lighter edging of upper plumage. Length 127-152.4 (5.00-6.00); wing 78 (3.07); tail 56 (2.20); bill 12.5 (.49); tarsus 15.7 (.62).

**Recognition Marks.**—Warbler size; brilliant red of male unique for size; pale red belly of female, distinctive.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A neat cup settled into crotch of large horizontal limb of mesquite, willow, hackberry, or other tree; at moderate heights—10 to 40 or even 60 feet; composed externally of straight twigs laid log-cabin fashion, bound together by copious cobwebs; internally of fine grasses, weed-bark, and other vegetable substance, lined with fine grasses, horsehair, or feathers. A typical nest is two inches across the hollow, and one and a quarter inches deep. *Eggs*: 3; dull white, pale creamy white, or pale cartridge buff, boldly and handsomely spotted and blotched, chiefly in broad belt about larger end, with brownish black, sepia, and tawny olive (according to dilution) and light violet-gray (violet-gray to pale violet-gray, according to depth of limy overlay). Av. of 101 eggs in the M. C. O. coll.: 17.2 x 13.1 (.675 x .515); index 76; range 15.75-18.5 x 12.45-14 (.62-.73 by .49-.55). *Season*: c. May 1–June 10; one brood; (Colorado River, opposite Cibola, April 2, 1910, by Grinnell, probably very exceptional).

**General Range.**—Resident in Lower Sonoran zone from southeastern California, southern Nevada, southwestern Utah, western and southern Arizona, southern New Mexico, and southern Texas, south to Lower California and central America.

**Distribution in California.**—Resident in valley of the Colorado River north to Needles, more sparingly in Imperial Valley, northwest at least to Torres (Grinnell), and on the Colorado-Mohave deserts west at least to the Cushenberry Ranch (Hoffmann). In winter visits lowlands of the San Diego district, irregularly and in small numbers, north at least to Santa Barbara (March 15, 1907, by Bradford Torrey).

**Authorities.**—**Baird** (*Pyrocephalus rubineus*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. ix., 1858, p. 201 (Ft. Yuma); **Bendire**, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 322, pl. 11, figs. 34, 35 (eggs); **Willett**, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 7, 1912, p. 65 (status in s. Calif.); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xii., 1914, p. 153 (Colorado Valley, habits, nesting, etc.); **Hoffmann**, Condor, vol. xxiii., 1921, p. 166 (east base San Bernardino Mts., June).

## *The Vermilion Flycatcher*



*Taken in Arizona*

*Photo by the Author*

"CHOOSES AN EXPOSED SITUATION"

AS BEAUTIFUL as heart's desire is this brilliant child of the tropics. By the flawless scarlet of his ample crest and entire underparts we may appraise the meagerness of color with which nature has endowed most of our northern species. Only the Western Tanager at his best has anything half so wonderful in head dress—he and the Arizona Cardinal, which, unlike the Vermilion Flycatcher, does not attain our eastern borders. The occurrence of the Vermilion upon the Pacific slope of southern California is doubly impressive, because it is only in fall or winter that the bird displays itself. Normally confined in summer to the mesquite area of the Colorado Desert, the Imperial

Valley, and the borders of the Colorado River, the birds retire irregularly, but not fully, in winter. Some may go south, others south and east, but a few at least venture into San Diego and Los Angeles counties; and they have been seen on two or three occasions as far west as Santa Barbara.

The bird is apt to be a little shy anywhere within our borders, as though conscious that its brilliance is attracting too much attention; but in the mesquite forests of, say, the Santa Cruz River in Arizona, where the bird abounds, its movements are as unrestrained as those of Black Phoebes or Gnatcatchers. Although dependent more or less upon the presence of water, the bird may be seen along hedge-rows or about

## *The Vermilion Flycatcher*

the shade-trees which hide some outlying ranch. It is demure, rather than excessively active, and waits patiently in exposed situations,—a fence-post, the tip of an upturned tree-root, or a barren branch, at any height, for the appearance of passing bug or fly, in order that it may sally forth and capture it midair, with a graceful snap and flutter.

The female, likewise, in nesting chooses an exposed situation,—almost invariably a crotch of a horizontal limb of mesquite or willow, in order that it may have a commanding view of the passing show of insects. Incubation is as much a shielding of eggs from the too ardent sun as it is an encouragement of the life process; so the bird averages things up by absenting herself from the nest every few minutes. She secures her own food in large measure, but if her lord has a gracious offering to make, she meets him midair, or at some appointed rendezvous, rather than to suffer his shining, tell-tale presence about the home tree. In the cooler hours, which enforce a stricter attention to duty, the modest bride is entertained in becoming fashion. No spectacle could be more bewitching than that of the ecstasy song flight of the Vermilion Flycatcher. In him the very pride and joy of



*Taken in Arizona*

*Photo by the Author*

VERMILION FLYCATCHER, FEMALE, NEAR NEST  
THE BIRD IS THE ONE SHOWN IN PRECEDING ILLUSTRATION

## *The Vermilion Flycatcher*

life burst cover; and the little tyrant, breasting the sun, now flutters with exaggerated wing-motion, thinking only of display and not at all of progress, and now pours forth his soul in that stirring song, *tully tully tully zziingh*. This last is a marvelous, vibrant sound, sufficient in itself to entitle the performer to a decoration. There is not the smallest doubt, either, that the performance is for the lady's benefit; for after several passages of such aerial address, the gallant turns homeward, or ladyward, to claim applause.

In watching the antics of a certain Vermilion dandy, I saw him resort twice to a tiny fork on a horizontal branch, remote from any possible proximity of a mate, and indulge in a very peculiar set of motions, bowing and turning, and lying supine with outstretched wings and dangling feet. Careful reflection showed the act to be an outcropping, through suggestion, of what we call a secondary sex character, viz., a demonstration of the nest-building instinct, excited by the presence of an especially attractive site.

The nest of a Vermilion Flycatcher is a fairy creation—rather a shallow cup outlined boldly with twigs, bodied with frayed grasses and weathered weed-barks. It is lined exquisitely with feathers, and the whole structure is cemented, as well as bound to its moorings, with a copious supply of cobwebs. Egg-laying is very likely to commence before the nest is



*Taken in Arizona*

*Photo by the Author*

NEST AND EGGS OF VERMILION FLYCATCHER



**n/3 Vermilion Flycatcher in situ**

*A choicely-marked set*

*From a photograph by the Author*

*Taken in Arizona*





## The Calliope Hummer

finished; but if so, the work is carried to completion, and the bird cannot resist the appeal of proffered upholsteries at any time thereafter. The eggs, invariably three in number, are among the handsomest known to science,—whitish as to ground, but broadly belted with bold spots of blackish or sepia. These spots often converge, and in exceptional instances we have a nearly solid belt of color, sharply contrasting with the immaculate areas attendant. The chicks are black for a few days after hatching, with some outcropping of white down, and for these babies the anxious parents will entreat in winning accents, *please* or *tease*—something after the manner of our Black Phoebe.



Taken in Arizona

Photo by the Author

A DISTANT VIEW  
MALE VERMILION FLYCATCHER IN MESQUITE

No. 180

## Calliope Hummer

A. O. U. No. 436. *Stellula calliope* (Gould).

**Synonyms.**—CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD. STAR HUMMER.

**Description.**—*Adult male:* Upperparts golden-green, or shining metallic bronzy green; tail chiefly dusky, rufous at base, paler on tips, slightly double-rounded, its feathers broadening distally and nearly round at tips, the outermost pair touched with white; flight-feathers violet-dusky; sides of throat and underparts white, the sides more or less overlaid with golden-green and dusky; a pale rufous wash across breast and belly and sides, often faintly suffused with rufous; gorget shining rose-purple (Rood's violet, aster purple, or amaranth purple), the color confined to tips of feathers, which are white at base, shot with much outcropping white on chin and throat, and progressively lengthened with suppression of visible white on lower throat, the lateral

## The Calliope Hummer

feathers much produced to or beyond bend of wing—the whole distensible and radiating in excitement. Bill straight, black above, yellowish below. *Adult female*: Without gorget; throat speckled with dusky or bronzy green; coloration of upperparts, save tail, as in male; central tail-feathers green, tipped with dusky; remaining rectrices greenish gray, mingled with rufous basally, crossed with black distally, broadly but decreasingly (toward center) tipped with white; underparts basally white, but more or less suffused with rufous, especially on sides. *Young birds* resemble adult female, but are still more heavily washed with rufous below and (male only) with more extensive speckling on throat. Length of adult male about 70 (2.76); wing 38.7 (1.52); tail 20 (.79); bill 14.3 (.56). Adult female about 75 (2.95); wing 42.8 (1.68); tail 21.5 (.85); bill 15.6 (.61).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size—the smallest of the birds of California, and after the Helena Hummer (*Calypte helenæ*), av. mm 58, and the Vervain Hummer (*Mellisuga minima*), which averages mm 61 in length, one of the least of birds. Gorget of male with *radiating* feathers of rose-purple, distinctive; but female and young difficult to distinguish afield from those of *Selasphorus rufus*—less rufous, especially on rump and tail, where little or none visible in *S. calliope*.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: Composed chiefly of white plant-down (seed-pappus), covered externally with fine mosses, gray bark-shreds, or vegetable miscellany, held in place with cobwebs, saddled on horizontal or descending branch (preferably a dead one) of bush or evergreen tree, at any height—1 to 60 feet of record. *Eggs*: 2; elliptical oval; pure white. Av. of 16 eggs in M. C. O. coll.: from Mono Co., 11.7 x 7.72 (.46 x .304); index 66. Av. of 8 eggs taken by Grinnell in San Bernardino Mountains 12.2 x 8.6 (.48 x .34); index 71. *Season*: June; one brood.

**General Range.**—"Breeds in mountains of Canadian zone from southern British Columbia and southern Alberta, to southern California and northern New Mexico; winters in Mexico south to Guerrero; casual in Wyoming and Colorado" (A. O. U. Com.).

**Distribution in California.**—Resident in summer in the higher mountain ranges from the upper limits of Upper Sonoran zone to timberline, and from the San Jacinto Mountains north to Shasta and the Warners; west to Mt. Pinos, and to Wildcat Peak in Siskiyou County (Grinnell). Most abundant along the east slopes of the central Sierras. Of more general occurrence during migrations.

**Authorities.**—**Xantus** (*Calothorax calliope*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., 1859, p. 190 (Ft. Tejon); **Feilner**, Ann. Rep. Smithson. Inst. for 1864 (1865), p. 429 (discovery of nest and eggs; at Yreka); **Lucas**, Auk, vol. x., 1893, p. 311 (food); **Bendire**, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 219 (habits; nest and eggs); **Widmann**, Auk, vol. xxi., 1904, p. 69 (Yosemite Valley; nuptial flight); **Mailliard**, J. W., Condor, vol. xxiii., 1921, p. 75, fig. (Lake Tahoe; desc. nesting sites).

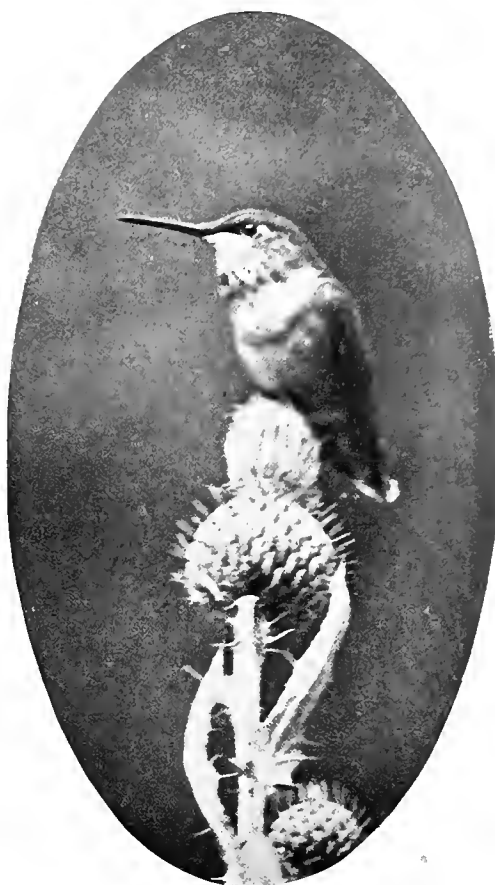
ORNITHOLOGISTS have been hard put to it to provide names for these most exquisite of birds, the Hummers. In default of an authoritative dictionary of the Colibrian dialect by a native Hummingbird, we have been obliged to call poetic imagination to the aid of our own poor stammering tongues. The realm of callilithology, chromatics, esthetics, astronomy, history, classical mythology, and a score beside, have been laid under tribute to secure such fanciful and high sounding titles as

## The Calliope Hummer

Fiery Topaz, Ruby-and-Topaz, Allied Emerald, Sapphire-breasted Emerald, Green-crowned Brilliant, Equadorian Rainbow, Equadorian Sunbeam, Parzudaki's Sun-Angel, Gould's Heavenly Sylph, Fanny's Wood-Star, Compte de Paris's Star-frontlet, Mrs. Stewart's Star-throat, Isaacson's Puff-leg, Baroness de Lefresnaye's Plumeleeter, Blossom-crown, Little Violet-ear, Pallid Hermit, Bearded Mountaineer, Green Mango, Darker-Green Carib, Sparkling tail, Tyrian-tail, White-booted Rocket-tail, Black-billed Streamer-tail, Curve-winged Saber-wing, Julia's Train-bearer, the Sappho Comet, the Circe, Rivoli, and Lucifer Hummers, the Frilled, Spangled, Festive, and Adorable Coquettes, the Charming, Beautiful, and Lovely Hummingbirds, and, last but not least, the truly Marvelous Hummingbird (*Loddigesia mirabilis*). What wonder, then, that with so many children to provide for, Gould, the great monographer of the *Trochilidæ*, should have named this nearly silent, but always beautiful species, after the muse of eloquence, Calliope.

Star-Hummer would, however, have been the more fitting name, for the genus *Stellula* is unique in this highly gifted family, in that the gorget of the male is distensible into separate rays of purple, like a halved star.

This, the tiniest of our sextette of California Hummers, is also the highest-ranging, at least in the nesting season. It is essentially a mountain-loving species, and is, so far as we have been able to prove, the only breeding Hummer of the higher Sierran slopes. There is a 3000 foot record, by Stephens, of a nest in the San Bernardino; but 4000 is the usual minimum, and 8000 a better average. In the Canadian zone, therefore, the bird knows no restrictions, save that it does not favor the densely timbered sections. In the Sierras it nests nearly up to timber line, 10,000 to 11,500 feet, and follows the advancing season to the limit



Taken in Washington Photo by F. S. Merrill

CALLIOPE HUMMER, FEMALE

### *The Calliope Hummer*

of flowers. Without doubt the mind remembers longest those birds which visit the mountain heather beds, gorgeous with flowers, and varied beyond description. A bit of heather on a northern peak, where we camped at an elevation of 8,000 feet, yielded thirty-two species of plants in conspicuous bloom within a stone's throw of the breakfast table. The Hummers appear to be attracted to the flower-beds by color and position rather than by scent; and as surely as we neglected to rise with the sun, a troop of puzzled honey-hunters hovered by turns over our parti-colored blankets. Once a Hummer minutely inspected a red bandana handkerchief which graced the bird-man's neck; and once, I regret to say it, fluttered for some moments before his nose (sunburned!).

The gorgeous flower-beds of the "cattle country," especially those found on the innermost ranges of San Luis Obispo and San Benito counties, often detain these Hummers, during migrations. On the 21st of April, near La Panza, I observed a male as he fed in the clumps of Owl Clover (*Orthocarpus purpurascens*) or rested on low limbs. Or perhaps one should not speak of his resting, for as he sat he flirted his wings and screwed from side to side in conscious vanity. He *is* a tearing beauty, you know.

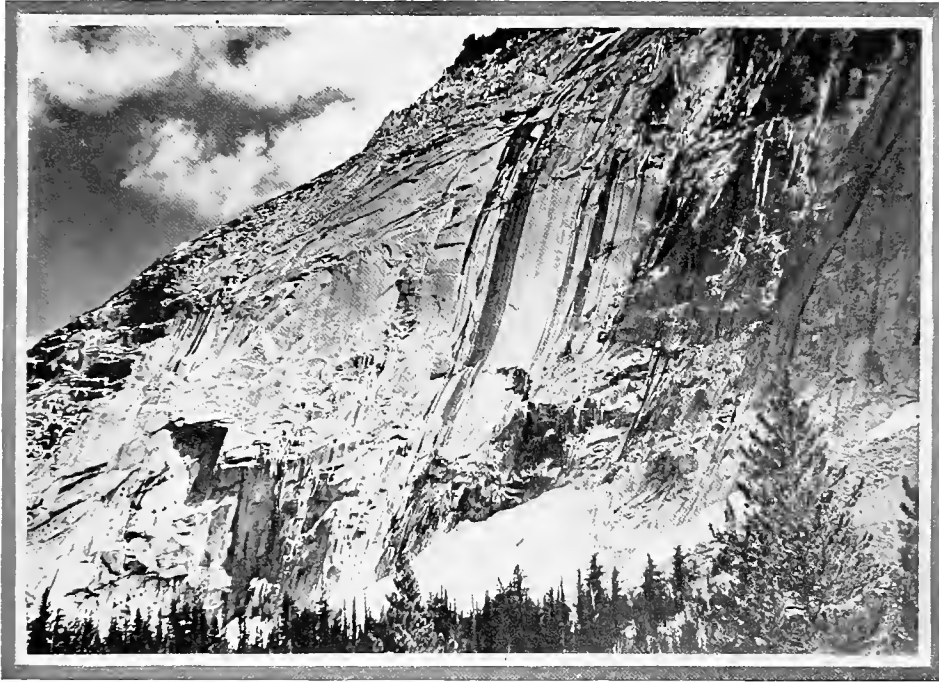
But goodness gracious! What an awful temper His Niblets, the Maharajah of Bullypore, really has! Once, in Modoc County, when a Pygmy Nuthatch had, much to my satisfaction, alighted upon the tip of a half-dead juniper, and served notice that he was about to show me his domicile, one of these dashing Star Hummers set upon him so viciously that the astonished bird fell off his perch and hugged the tree trunk instead. Even here the Nuthatch was not safe, for the Hummer darted and buzzed like a giant bumble bee, adding, I believe, a vocal tone to the noise of its wings, until the terrified Nuthatch dropped ten feet further and then fled outright. Very valiant, to be sure, the Maharajah looked as he resumed his station on the topmost twig of the juniper, and let the wind toy with his streaming cravat. Then he caught sight of the bird-man and dived down to utter some offensive threats, grinding them out horribly, as between clenched teeth. I should have heeded, too, if the gallant had been, say, a hundred times bigger.

In common with most of our Hummers, the Calliope conducts an ardent courtship by means of headlong dashes from the sky. It is a sight well worth seeing when one of these elfin gallants, flashing like a jewel and bristling with self-consciousness, mounts slowly upward on vibrating wings to a height of a hundred feet, then darts back with the speed of lightning to make an affectionate pass at the placid lady on a twig below. Or, occasionally, the tactics are reversed, and the amoret settles slowly through the air as though smitten by Cupid's dart, and

## *The Calliope Hummer*

invokes the lady's pity on his hapless plight. Pitiful it should be, but the rascal recovers suddenly, bounds aloft and makes again the courting swoop. As he does so, he brings out at the climax a tiny, rasping note—in fact the word “rasp” with a rolled r, thus, *rrraspp*, just about expresses it.

An exquisite honeymoon ensues for the happy pair; but when nature's purposes have been served, the stern madam banishes her ardent



*Taken in Fresno County*

*Photo by the Author*

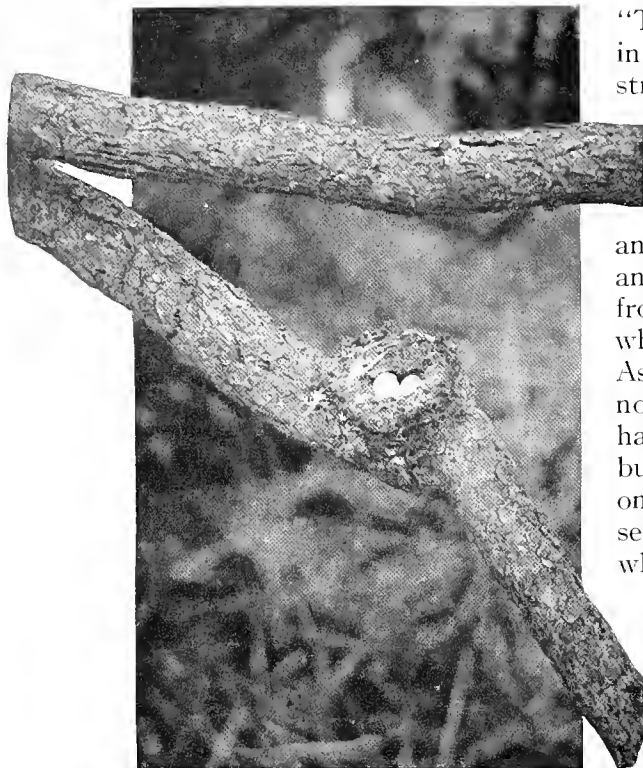
SLIM PICKINGS!

YET THE CALLIOPE HUMMER IS AT HOME IN JUST SUCH A ROMANTIC SETTING AS THIS, PROVIDED AT THE BASE OF EAST VIDETTE PEAK

spouse, and leaves him henceforth to vent his irascible humors on luckless woodpeckers and wandering chipmunks. The female Calliope is an inconspicuous object, colorwise, but she has a will of her own, and a way which even the collector learns to recognize. As Grinnell says:<sup>1</sup> “There are certain peculiarities of poise and flight impossible to describe intelligibly, which characterize it; and the attenuated and squeaky notes, so faint and difficult to locate, have a quality all their own.” Of their occurrence in the San Bernardino Mountains Dr. Grinnell says further:

<sup>1</sup> “The Biota of the San Bernardino Mountains,” U. of C. Pub. in Zool., 1908, p. 73.

## The Calliope Hummer



Taken in San Bernardino Mts. Photo by W. M. Pierce

NEST OF CALLIOPE HUMMER  
SHOWING TYPICAL PROTECTION AFFORDED BY  
OVERSHADOWING BRANCH

"The female Calliopes are wont to stay in the ravines and canons where the streams are lined with columbines; while the dashing males each have a valiantly defended patch of gooseberries or manzanitas, high on the mountain side. The males are pugnacious, and each has his own flower preserve and regular perch (on some bush-tip) from which he drives all intruders, whether of his own species or another. As far as my observations went I saw not the least evidence that the male has anything whatever to do with nest-building or caring for the young. And on only one or two occasions did I ever see a male invade the cañon-bottom where the females were nesting, and then he was routed out by an irate mother."

The wing-buzz of a female Calliope leaving her nest has also a distinctive character, and a sweet one to the discriminating ear of the oölogist. It was in this way that I found my first one years ago, in company with Mr. Jack Bowles, in a Washington glade. The nest was

saddled on a slender descending branch of a red birch tree, at a point seven feet out from the trunk, and at least twelve feet from the ground. The bird returned to her nest repeatedly as we stood about speculating, and we felt sure she had eggs. The only way to reach the prize was from below, and for this Jack generously offered to hold up a stout pole which I cut hard by. I mounted this hastily, and after mussing the patient man's features with my struggling boots, brought one brogan to rest on his shoulder, while the other sought lodgment upon a knot which projected at least a quarter of an inch from the pole. Then from this infirm but pious support, and being mightily upborne by aspiration, I clutched at the prize overhead with both hands. Determined to secure a portion of the birch limb with the nest, I tucked in a piece of cotton about the eggs, exercising therein such composure as I could command in view of trembling knees and a stream of considerate, soft cuss-words which had begun to





**Calliope Hummer**

Male, female, and nest, about life size







J. H. Brooks.



## *The Calliope Hummer*

ooze up from the underpinning. Then I bent the limb sharply and slashed it with a knife !! \*\*\* ? !! .—As my arms were collapsing after the exquisite strain, a heretofore unnoticed filament of the birch, drooping from a branch above, suddenly began to tear loose from its lashings in the side of the nest, upset the same quicker than a wink, and dashed out one of the eggs.

It is not given to a callous public to appreciate the agony of remorse which ensued. I neither cursed nor wept, but the stars fell about me in great clusters as I sat silent upon the ground and nursed my erring head between my knees. Mr. Bowles' language, however, was beautifully expressive and soothing. The nest—oh, yes, we kept it, and *one* egg—is a shallow, thick-walled cup, felted out of gray bark-fibers, cob-webs, and the cotton of the wild clematis. The exterior is heavily decorated with dead leaves, bark-fragments, and bits of decayed wood. It measures mm 20.5 across, and 14 in depth inside, 42 in width by 26 in depth outside.

In the Mammoth region of the eastern Sierras we found this species in great abundance. They nested in the aspen groves and in the birches which line the lower courses of the mountain streams, and, to a lesser extent also, in the Murray pines. The nests are duller often, to appearance, than any other of our native hummers, still they are invariably assimilated to the color of bark, whether of living or dead limbs. Almost invariably the nest is saddled upon some small descending limblet which enjoys the protection of a horizontal parent stem. This arrangement, while it affords scant protection from storms, guarantees to the sitting bird a certain immunity from falling branches. Nests in the aspen trees, although frankly exposed, are most difficult to find. The aspens of this section are subject to a fungoid growth, or tubercular swelling, which raises black knobs of every conceivable size, but chiefly those about the size of a Hummer's nest. As a consequence, Calliope's domicile is only one of a thousand possibilities.

Accustomed as we are to the confiding actions of Costa and Anna Hummers, we have still a surprise waiting for us in the absolute fearlessness of the Calliope. Danger simply does not exist to the mind of *Stellula* intent upon her motherly duties. One valiant lady, in particular, we shall always remember. Mr. Carriger had traced her to a nest 30 feet up and well out on a descending branchlet, sheltered by a dead limb of a Murray pine. The little lady was on, and she stuck to her post with incredible pertinacity. First Carriger poked her with a long stick. The Hummer simply tilted her head up in the air and dared him to poke any harder. Then I went up and took hold of the bird's beak with intent to lift her off by main force. This was too great an indignity

## *The Broad-tailed Hummer*

to be borne, and the Hummer buzzed off,—but was back in a moment. Then, since I could not see the contents of the nest from the place where I was obliged to be in order to reach her by hand, I too went higher, and started to poke her off. Believe me, nothing but main strength of a stick forcibly pressed against her breast induced her to give up and disclose her single white egg,—which was no sooner seen than birdie was back again, defying me to touch her.

This was Friday, June 10th, and a second egg was laid on Sunday. On Monday, after we had, regretfully, performed the duties of our office, William proffered the nest to its mistress and gained instant acceptance. On three occasions she allowed him to carry her, nest and all, for a distance of three or four feet, and so up to his face. Once he clapped his hand over her and could, of course, have held her prisoner. All this, mind you, on an empty nest. But the bird was nothing daunted by persecution, and would have played the game to any length, had human patience lasted.

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No. 181

## Broad-tailed Hummer

A. O. U. No. 432. *Selasphorus platycercus* (Swainson).

**Description.**—*Adult male:* Gorget, slightly produced on sides, iridescent purple (between aster purple and amaranth purple); upperparts shining green, with brassy reflections; tail chiefly black, with violet reflections; the central pair of rectrices darker green, at least the next succeeding pair and sometimes the adjoining pairs on either side edged on the outer web with cinnamon; the three outer pairs of rectrices edged with cinnamon on the inner web and tipped with white; throat below gorget abruptly white, shading into greenish dusky of breast and sides; the sides largely tipped with shining green; the under tail-coverts white with greenish tips. *Adult female:* Similar to male, but without purplish gorget, and lacking the shining green of breast and sides; chin and upper throat white or washed variously with orange-rufous; the lower throat and sides of neck flecked with greenish; the sides of breast and sides washed with pale cinnamon; the underparts otherwise more extensively white, or else tinged with cinnameous; tail-feathers extensively rufous at base and the three outer pairs broadly tipped with white. Length of adult males about 101.6 (4.00); wing 50 (1.97); tail 30.5 (1.20); bill 17.6 (.69). Females average slightly larger.

**Recognition Marks.**—Midget size; most like *Archilochus colubris* of the East in general appearance. Purple gorget not rayed (as in *Stellula calliope*), distinctive for range. The female comes into most frequent comparison with that of *A. alexandri*, from which it may be distinguished by the presence of the rufous element upon the sides.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A cup of felted plant-downs, often white, not otherwise lined, but covered externally with lichens, dead leaves, or bark-shreds, held in place by cobwebs; placed 3 to 20 feet high on twigs, horizontal branches, or variously, in

## The Broad-tailed Hummer

bushes or trees, usually near water. *Eggs*: 2; white; blunt elliptical; av. of 15 specimens (U. S. N. M.) 12.7 x 8.3 (.50 x .33). *Season*: May, June, July; two broods.

**General Range.**—Western North America. Breeds from Wyoming, southern Idaho, and (probably) eastern Oregon, south to Valley of Mexico, and from western Nevada and the desert ranges of eastern California to western Nebraska and western Texas; winters in Mexico and Guatemala.

**Range in California.**—Summer resident in the timbered desert ranges of eastern California—at least the White Mountains and the Inyo range, probably the Panamints, Argus, Amargosa, etc.

**Authorities.**—**Swarth**, *Condor*, vol. xviii., 1916, p. 130 (Inyo Mts.); *Grinnell*, *Pac. Coast Avifauna*, no. 11, 1915, p. 184 (Hypothetical List, Calif. birds); *ibid.*, *Condor*, vol. xx., 1918, p. 87 (White Mts., breeding); *Dickey*, *Condor*, vol. xxiv., 1922, p. 135 (White Mts.); *Bendire*, *Life Hist. N. Am. Birds*, vol. ii., 1895, p. 210 (habits, nests, eggs, etc.).

AN OLD ADAGE runs, the wish is father to the thought. If ever there was a bird wished onto the California check-list, it is the Broad-tailed Hummer. The amiable conspiracy began way back in 1868, when Dr. Cooper recorded<sup>1</sup> a female from Lake Tahoe. This Dr. Grinnell later proved to be a young male of *S. rufus*;<sup>2</sup> and in like manner the astute scholar proceeded to demolish all ensuing "records." The field was clear, then, for Mr. Harry Swarth, who in 1916 published what is undoubtedly the first authentic account of the bird's occurrence within this State, viz., upon the western slopes of the Inyo Mountains, near Independence, May 24, 1912. Even then the discoverer modestly disclaimed credit for a State record, because he didn't have a gun handy, and left it for his junior colleague, Mr. H. S. White, to clinch the record, on the 13th of August, 1917, by taking a nest with young, and the adult female, upon the eastern slope of the White Mountains in Inyo County. A paragraph from Mr. Swarth's account<sup>1</sup> is well worth quoting: "Several times during our stay I was satisfied that I heard the shrill buzz of wings of the male Broad-tailed Hummingbird; but not until our last day at this point (Mazourka Canyon, Inyo Mts.) was I able to get sight of the bird. This noise is as loud and quite as characteristic as in the Rufous and Allen Hummingbirds, though of a different tone; as far as I know it is absolutely distinctive among North American hummingbirds. Acquaintance with the species in the mountains of Arizona had familiarized me with his flight sound, and also with the fact that the birds are frequently most difficult to see in spite of their noisy mode of progression. I was not greatly surprised at my failure to catch sight of the hummingbirds, which I was satisfied were in Mazourka Canyon, but kept on the

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci.*, IV., 1868, p. 7. *vide* Grinnell, *Pac. Coast Avifauna*, No. 11, p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> *A Distributional List of the Birds of Calif.*, by Joseph Grinnell, 1915, pp. 184-185. *Condor*, Vol. XVIII., May 1916, p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> *Condor*, XVIII., May, 1916, p. 130.

## *The Allen Hummer*

alert, and finally had a fleeting glimpse of one. On May 24, as we were breaking camp, a male bird with shrill buzz of wings darted in front of me, and passed in the sunlight but a few feet away. Though gone again before I could make a move for a gun, the sight was sufficient to clinch the identification, to my own satisfaction at least, for the green back and top of head, and gleaming red throat, together with the manner of flight, formed an unmistakable combination of characters."

The Broad-tailed Hummer is essentially a mountain-loving species, breeding as the season advances to the very tops of the ranges. The nests themselves are placed at the lower levels (reckoning the ground as base level) and indifferently in bushes, maples, oaks, or evergreen trees. But because much of its range is arid, the vicinity of streams is closely adhered to. The nests are richly ornamented with lichens, if such are to be had; but if not, a covering of bark-shreds, dead leaves, or particles of wood will suffice. The female is a close sitter and will suffer the presence of the hand, being comparable in this respect with the *Calypte* Hummers rather than her own congeners.

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No. 182

## Allen's Hummer

A. O. U. No. 434. *Selasphorus alleni* Henshaw.

**Synonym.**—GREEN-BACKED RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD.

**Description.**—*Adult male:* Similar to adult male of *S. rufus*, but upperparts (except rump and tail) shining bronzy green (duller on crown), the color of back sometimes broken up by outcropping of underlying rufous; underparts, including belly, cinnamon-rufous, changing to white on chest only; tail-feathers without notching or emargination, the two outer pairs smaller and very narrow, the outermost acicular. *Adult female:* Very similar to adult female of *S. rufus*, but with tail as in male *alleni*. Length of adult male 82.6 (3.25); wing 38.6 (1.52); tail 29.7 (1.17); bill 16 (.63). Female a little larger.

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; fiery gorget with *green* back of male unmistakable; female indistinguishable out of hand from that of *S. rufus*; outermost tail-feathers less than .10 in. wide (mm 2.5).

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* Exteriorly of fine green moss (invariably present), occasionally supplemented by dead leaves, flower-heads, etc., or even lichens, bound on with cobwebs, interiorly of white plant-down, or, rarely, of sycamore down; placed chiefly in vines or in sheltered situations against banks, more rarely in trees. *Eggs:* 2; white, as in all hummingbirds. Av. of 24 eggs from Santa Barbara (M. C. O. coll.): 11.9 x 7.9 (.47 x .31). Av. of 16 eggs from Humboldt Co.: 12.2 x 7.9 (.48 x .31). *Season:* February–April; April–June; two broods.

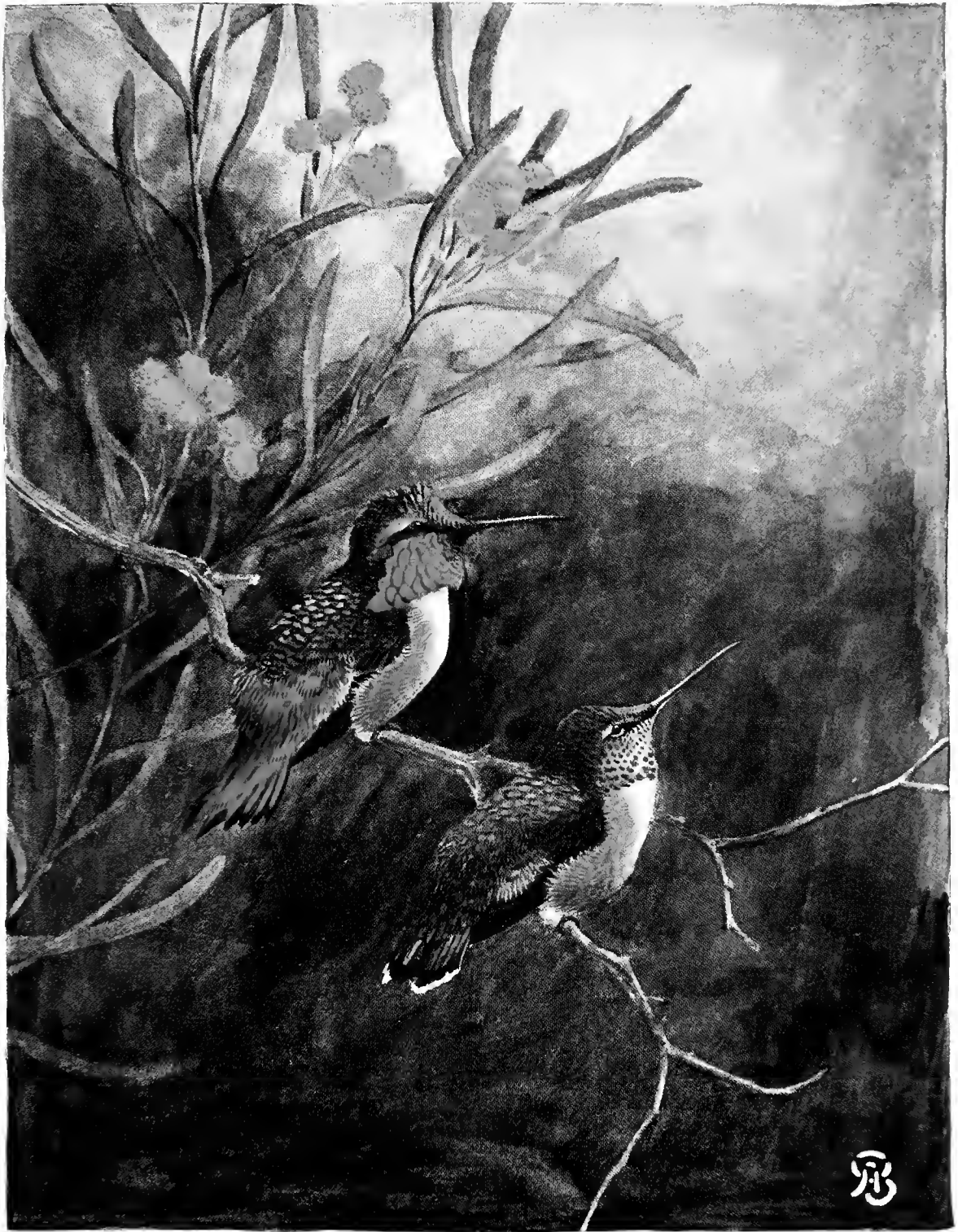
**General Range.**—Breeds in the Pacific Coast district, narrowly, from northern Lower California to southern Oregon; winters in northern Lower California and Sonora;

Allen's Hummer

Plate and female, 1897. The size  
from a color-plate painting by Allen.







RB



## The Allen Hummer

during summer dispersal found in mountains of southern California, Arizona, and Chihuahua.

**Distribution in California.**—Common summer resident in the humid coastal strip south to Santa Barbara and Santa Paula; early migrant, arriving in late January in the San Diegan district; during summer dispersal found in the mountains—Mt. Pinos and southeastward; present throughout the year and possibly resident on the Santa Barbara Islands.

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Selasphorus rufus*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 2, vol. ii., 1853, p. 269 (San Francisco, summer); *Ilenshaw*, Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club, vol. ii., 1877, p. 53 (orig. desc.; type locality, Nicasio, Marin Co.); *Bendire*, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 216; *Howell*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 12, 1917, p. 63 (s. Calif. Ids.); *Bassett*, Condor, vol. xxiii., 1921, p. 37, fig. (nuptial flight).

IT IS AMUSING, in the light of later experience, to read the early accounts of the nesting of the "Rufous" Hummer in California. Thus Dr. Cooper,<sup>1</sup> under the caption of *Selasphorus rufus*, solemnly records the finding of a nest on Catalina Island, and mentions that some also build about San Francisco. It remained for Mr. Charles A. Allen, of Nicasio, to discover, in the late Seventies, that the common hummer of the coastal region of California is something different—a perfectly distinct species from *S. rufus*, although closely related to it. We now know *Selasphorus alleni* to be the commonest and in many localities the exclusive species in western California, yielding first place to *Calypte anna* in the southern portion of the coastal ranges. For all that it is so common, it is not by any means the best known, for of our seven species, Allen's is consistently the most retiring and secretive, as well as the wildest when found.

It is on this account that we must look to the oölogist for such scraps of information as we possess about this most interesting species. It is, perhaps, as much as one's reputation is worth in these parlous times of pity to undertake to defend the practice of bird-nesting. But as a hardened offender I shall confess that I have found the keenest delight in the pursuit of Hummingbirds' nests. The quarry, albeit abundant, is so elusive, so tiny, and wrought in so fine a harmony with its surroundings, that the collector is put upon his highest mettle. The quest enlists all the faculties of mind, and requires the most alert attention. A flash, a wing-buzz, a suspected bit of moss—these are the things that must be heeded, if success is to come. The trophies themselves are among the most dainty specimens of architecture the world affords, even if one be so well fortified as to resist the appeal of the two tiny, pinkish, elongated pearls which they contain. Moreover, the quest, ardently pursued, leads most certainly, through its exercise of fine dis-

<sup>1</sup> Ornithology of California, Vol. I., Land Birds (1870), p. 356.

*The Allen Hummer*



*Taken near Santa Barbara*

HUMMERS IN CENTURY PLANT

*Photo by the Author*

criminations, to an accuracy and intimacy of knowledge of bird life, which can come in no other way. Theoretically, the earnest student should be moved to search, irrespective of the trophy; but practically, he never does. Hence, it comes about that the ultra-sentimentalist gets to know as little of the practical psychology and inner workings of bird life as does the skin-man, whose motto is, "Shoot first and inquire afterward." Without asserting the full recompense of his own bold claim, the writer may say that a certain cabinet in the Museum of Comparative Oölogy holds more of fairy treasure, of fragrant memory,

## *The Allen Hummer*

and of crystallized experience than may be put into a hundred books, or paintings either.

Enter with me one of those narrow canyons in the Santa Ynez Mountains. We will call it an early May day, although that is between seasons for Allens, and a little early for Costas. A tiny mountain stream babbles over boulders, or gathers darkling in pools under the shade of sycamores, bays, live oaks, and alders. The sides of the canyon, now steep, or briefly precipitous, now sloping and climbable, are occupied by live oaks and ceanothus, with a score of flowering shrubs and a host of bright-hued mints, with sages. Under all, there is the tangle and pluck of wild blackberry vines, and these festoon the lesser cliffs, or face you with impenetrable jungles in the open glades. Here Hummers of four species breed. The Black-chins, lately come, are pitching their yellow tents (upside down) in the sycamores and live oaks, without much regard to the water. The Anna Hummers nest anywhere, at any height, save on the ground, or in the vines, but they care less for shade and retirement than do the other species, and their ranks will lessen as we ascend the canyon. Costa Hummers in such circumstances hug close to the water, weaving their little baskets on a descending branch of a willow or a bay tree whose tips nearly drag the water. As for the Allen Hummer the blackberry tangles are her home, and all such other situations as assure a measure of protection from above. Thus, drooping vines falling over boulders offer ideal sites; for *alleni* is also fond of a swing. The most remarkable nest of our experience, a *five-story* one, was saddled upon the hook of a broken root, which was, in turn, caught upon a sprangle of roots above, unearthed by the under-cutting of the stream. This root could be lifted clear and replaced without injury; and its mistress added, in one season, stories No. 4 and No. 5, to our knowledge.

Hummingbirds are passionately fond of their old nesting sites, and will, apparently, use old nests by preference, whenever these have escaped the attention of larger birds intent upon gathering nesting materials. Sometimes, in default of their own nests which have been destroyed, they will help themselves to others. One such nest, a three-story affair, found by J. Hooper Bowles, was started in 1910, by a Black-chinned Hummer. Mr. Bowles found the nest in June of 1911 with a second story occupied by an Anna Hummer, with two fresh eggs, which were not disturbed. Thereafter a Black-chin, presumably the original owner, returned to add a third story and to raise a brood. Allen Hummers are less frequently partners in these composite arrangements, and I have no certain instance where an Allen was the aggressor. On the other hand, the Allen Hummer is more successful than any other in

### *The Allen Hummer*

eluding the public eye, and many-storied nests are, therefore, the rule rather than the exception.

The inner fabric of a nest is compounded of vegetable downs, often of the purest white, but the characteristic decoration is a certain vivid green moss. The Anna Hummer occasionally uses this same moss, though I have only one instance of such exclusive use. Allen, on the other hand, occasionally, though very rarely, decorates with lichens. Careful discrimination is, therefore, necessary, especially since the extremes of size in the eggs of the two species overlap considerably.

The behavior of the female is quite the most interesting part of hummingbird nesting. Usually the only appraisal one has of the presence of a nest is a little momentary electric buzz summoning you—*somewhere*. Oh! that is the point where the search begins in earnest, for the wing-buzz of the departing bird is a sound ventriloquial in its indefiniteness. Or if the bird returns to squeak her disapproval, that may only add fuel to the fire of your anxiety, without being at all illuminating. Once a female Allen, startled from a nest of unknown location, squeaked lustily from the top of a live oak, until she was sure she had our attention, then she set out on a *Himmelfahrt*, a heavenly flight, winging rapidly upward at an angle of 70 degrees until the eye strained to watch her. Nearer and nearer she drifted to the sun until she suddenly lost herself to view in that orb, and we nearly lost our eyesight. It was, I submit, a clever ruse, quite as effectual as the staple trick of the fleeing highwayman who, to baffle his pursuers, wades the bed of a running stream.

Nests with fresh eggs are, curiously enough, more easily found by observation of the bird than those in which incubation is advanced. At first, the bird, with the nest-making instinct still strong upon her, cannot resist the temptation of a floating bit of down, and she sallies forth noisily to capture it, and add it to her nest-lining. Similarly, she uncovers the eggs at frequent intervals to snap at insects or to sip a beaker of honey, before she has learned to forswear these pleasures for her more exacting duties. And no Hummer of refined tastes can be expected to resist the attractions of a cunning bit of moss or a brocaded lichen, but it must be lugged home and added to the collection.

At close quarters some birds are stampeded, and will not even return to the neighborhood while danger is nigh. Others will twitter and squeak, or dash into the intruder's face, or hover before him with waving wings which betoken unquestionable anger. But never yet have I found any so bold as to submit to the hand at the nest, as an Anna or a Costa will often do.

Eggs are deposited on alternate days; and incubation, counting from the deposition of the second egg, lasts twelve. The youngsters

## The Allen Hummer

when hatched resemble tiny black bugs. Their bills are mere beginnings, not over one-sixteenth of an inch in length, and serve to point the relationship of this group with the tiny-beaked Swifts and Gnatcatchers, who are also *Macrochires*.

The Hummer diet is not exclusively honey, as was once supposed, but the nectar of flowers is still a large element. For the rest, honey-eating insects, fellow tapsters, found in the corolla of flowers, are largely preyed upon. Along about the first of May all Santa Barbara Hummers, especially the Allens and the Black-chins, are likely to have yellow crowns. They are gathering sweets from a coarse mint, the crimson sage (*Salvia spathacea*), and the



Taken near Santa Barbara

A CLOSER VIEW

Photo by the Author

THE HUMMERS ARE NOT GUARANTEED TO BE ALLEN'S, HOWEVER

yellow pollen of the two protruding stamens adheres to the bird's crown as it pushes its way in. Inasmuch as the style of this plant projects further than the stamens and overarches them, it would seem that this arrangement ought to facilitate self- rather than cross-fertilization.

Although not resident in winter upon the mainland of California, the Allen Hummers return very early to take up the duties of incubation. Dr. Cooper mentions seeing a bird, undoubtedly of this species, on the 5th of February, 1862; and Bradford Torrey saw one at the same place on the 26th of January, 1908. Mr. Bowles established the earliest nesting record in a set taken at Santa Barbara on the 13th of February, 1912. He took another on the 19th of that same month. Nesting,

## *The Rufous Hummer*

however, is very irregular, lasting right through March and April, with second sets in May or early June.

At the close of the nesting season the Allen Hummers ascend as they move slowly southward, first the males (who are dismissed for keeps when the second set is laid) and later the females with young. They are, thus, very common in the southern ranges, Mount Pinos, San Jacinto, and the rest, any time after the first of July.

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No. 183

## Rufous Hummer

A. O. U. No. 433. *Selasphorus rufus* (Gmelin).

**Synonyms.**—RED-BACKED HUMMINGBIRD. NOOTKA HUMMER.

**Description.**—*Adult male:* In general above and below bright rufous or cinnamon-red, changing to dull bronzy green over dusky on crown, sometimes touched with bronzy green on middle of back, fading to white on belly and on chest, where sharply contrasting with gorget; bend of wing bronzy green; wing-quills purplish dusky; rectrices rufous, tipped with purplish dusky, the dusky areas elongated mesially, the central pair of feathers broadened and broadly acuminate; the succeeding pair with a deep notch on the inner web, and a slighter emargination on the outer web; gorget somewhat produced laterally, of close-set, rounded metallic scales, shining scarlet, coppery-red, fiery red, or (varying with individuals) rich ruby-red, changing to deep golden green when viewed crosswise. Bill slender and straight. *Adult female:* Above shining golden green or bronzy green, laid over rufous on rump and tail-coverts, elsewhere over greenish dusky; pattern of tail as in male but less decided; central tail-feathers green, tipped with black; lateral feathers chiefly rufous, changing through green to black subterminally, and tipped with white; underparts whitish, shaded with rufous on sides; gorget wanting or represented by a small central patch of separated scarlet flecks. *Young males:* Like adult female but more extensively rufous above, and throat more flecked with reddish metallic scales. *Young females:* Like adult female, but rump green and throat flecked with greenish scales. Length of adult male (skins): 84 (3.31); wing 40.3 (1.59); tail 30 (1.18); bill 16.5 (.65). Female: 85 (3.35); wing 44.5 (1.75); tail 26.5 (1.04); bill 18 (.71).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; abundant rufous of male distinctive; female requires careful discrimination from that of *S. alleni*, and it may be known certainly by notching of next central tail-feather, and by outer tail-feather more than .10 wide; known from that of *Stellula calliope* by tail-feathers broader but *not* expanding subterminally, by narrower primaries, and by larger and less dispersed speckling of throat.

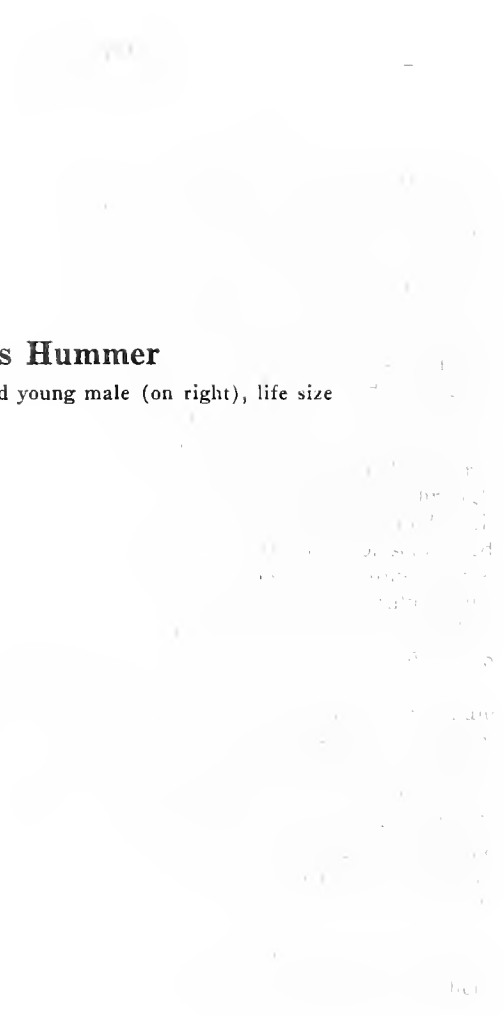
**Nesting.**—Not known to breed in California. *Nest:* Of plant-down and fine mosses bound together with cobwebs and ornamented with lichens; placed on horizontal or declining stem of bush or tree. *Eggs:* 2; pure white, elliptical oval. Av. size "12.7 x 8.3 (.50 x .33)."

**General Range.**—Breeds on the Pacific slope of North America from about Latitude 44 (in Oregon) to Latitude 61 (in Alaska), and east northerly to northern



**Various Numbers**

Male female (on left), and young male (on right) life size

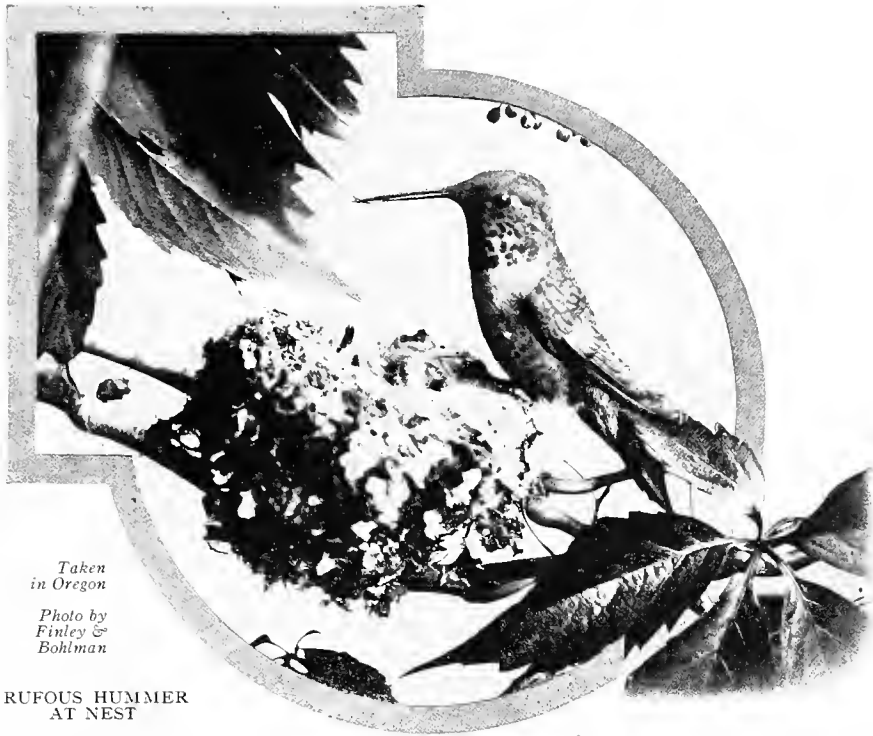


**Rufous Hummer**

Male, female, (on left), and young male (on right), life size







Taken  
in Oregon

Photo by  
Finley &  
Bohlman

RUFIOUS HUMMER  
AT NEST

Idaho and western Alberta; occurs broadly during migrations at all levels, east to Wyoming, Colorado, and western Texas; and during the summer dispersal occupies the mountains of California, Arizona, and New Mexico, and even southwestern Colorado. Winters in southern Mexico.

**Distribution in California.**—Common spring migrant, chiefly west of the deserts and the Sierras. Late migrants bound for the high north (?) linger into May (Watsonville, May 20, 1914), or even June (San Jacinto Mts., June 2, 1913). The return migrations set in in late June and are more narrowly confined to the higher mountain ranges.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Calliphlox rufa*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 2, i., 1847, p. 32 (Calif.); **Lucas**, Auk, vol. x., 1893, p. 311 (food); **Grinnell**, Condor, vol. iii., 1901, p. 127 (status in Calif.); **Thayer and Bangs**, Auk, vol. xxiv., 1907, p. 312 (hybrid with *Atthis calliope*); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 71 (San Bernardino Mts., late in summer).

*RUFUS!* What mighty Norsemen have borne that name! None more worthily than the iron-blooded midget of tropic mould who, among six hundred kinsmen, holds the record of "farthest North." Often have I pitied him as on a March day in the Puget Sound country, with the rain pelting and the mercury at 40°, I have come upon him sheltering in the

## *The Rufous Hummer*

depths of a somber fir tree. Or more pitiful still is the sight of shivering babies in mid-April, the air oozing moisture and the mother gone to search for food. But *rufus* would laugh at our solicitude; and as for hardship, he would say, Lead me to it! Hence it is, he ranges along the Cascade crests and ventures among the glaciers of the mighty Saint Elias Mountain. At Mount Wrangell he is  $61^{\circ}$  north of the Equator, and his only peer in hardihood is the Chilean Fire-crown (*Eustephanus galeritus*), who attains  $55^{\circ}$  south in Terra del Fuego.

Perhaps it is the abounding conceit of the bird which carries it into such perilous places; but if so, the little spit-fire makes good all along the way. I thought I had seen Hummers before, some tens of thousands of them, but a vision seen on the flowery hills of Shandon (San Luis Obispo County), April 8, 1912, still stands apart in experience. The bird had been moving from flower to flower in the open sage, and came momentarily to rest on a sprig of greasewood. As I saw him quartering from the sun, the center of his gorget glanced molten gold, and his shoulders shot a living flame. As he turned about, his throat-piece darkened suddenly, but whenever it did shine, it was nothing less than cadmium or Saturn red. His back, also, was the very quintessence of rufous, almost flame, and I thought there could be nothing handsomer—until another, his equal, flashed up and displaced him on the same twig.

As the retina of the eye retains for some moments the impression of an object over-bright, so memory, or consciousness, has retained so vivid an impression of this bird of passage, that we have until lately supposed it to be a common breeding bird of California. There was special reason for this forty years ago, before the common summer resident, *Selasphorus alleni*, had been distinguished, or, as it were, dissected out of our blurred impression of *rufus-alleni*. But the dawning knowledge of the presence of *alleni* did not work a speedy cure. Preconceptions blinded the most expert. Thus, C. Hart Merriam could say:<sup>1</sup> "The commonest Hummingbirds of Shasta, breeding apparently, from the lower edge of Shasta firs to timberline, though it is possible that those seen at high altitudes had moved up to feed from the painted cups in the heather meadows after the breeding season was over. At Wagon Camp where they were abundant in July and early August, they seemed to feed chiefly from the scarlet painted cup (*Castilleja miniata*)."<sup>2</sup> Notice that the breeding is inferential and that the actual dates are July and August. The true condition is set forth by Dr. Grinnell:<sup>1</sup> "Common migrant the whole length of the State west of the deserts; in spring through the valley and foothill regions of the Pacific slope,

<sup>1</sup> N. A. Fauna No. 16, Washington, 1899, p. 117.

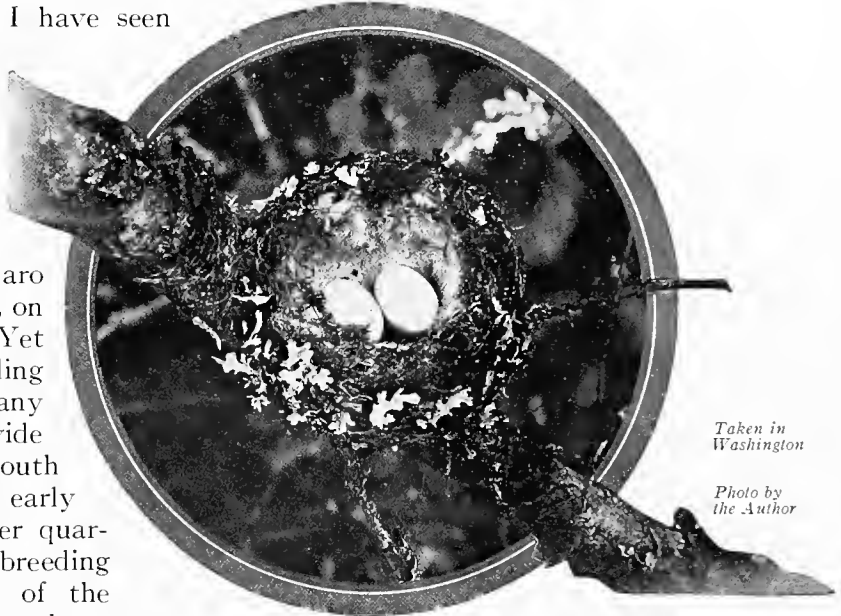
<sup>2</sup> Avifauna No. 11, "A Distributional List of the Birds of California."

## The Rufous Hummer

in summer and fall chiefly along the mountain ranges. In spring the species arrives early (March and even February), and some individuals are still about till early May. The return migration begins the last week of June (old males, followed in two or three weeks by females and young-of-the-year)." He also adds: "It is quite possible that *rufus* breeds in the Boreal zone along the central Sierra Nevada." Of course all things are "possible" in a State where the Great Grey Owl (*Scotiaptex nebulosa nebulosa*) could be found breeding, and for the first time within the limits of the United States, after having escaped notice for seventy-five years. But the fact remains, *there are no records*.

The circumstances would deceive the very elect. I have seen the Rufous Hummer at Santa Barbara on the 28th of February (Mr. Swarth has a record at Los Angeles of February 20); and again, the same season, 1914, on the Pajaro River near Watsonville, on the 20th of May. Yet these were not breeding records. Like so many other species having a wide vertical or north and south distribution in summer, early arrivals from the winter quarters hasten on to begin breeding in the southern part of the summer range; while others, knowing that their summer

quarters are untenable sooner, linger in the south and pass ultimately over the heads of their resident fellows, to occupy the extreme northern portions of the range. We may not, however, assume the converse, as in the case of certain *Limicolæ*. At least we should rather suppose that the early July migrants which appear on Shasta and the Sierras, as well as the San Bernardino-Jacinto ranges, are birds which, having bred in the lowlands of Oregon and Washington, are combining a vertical migration with a leisurely southern movement. Food conditions on Mt. St. Elias are more favorable in August than they are, say, in the vicinity of Seattle or Victoria.



Taken in  
Washington

Photo by  
the Author

NEST OF RUFIOUS HUMMER ON FIR BRANCH

## The Rufous Hummer

Rufous Hummers are very fond of the blossoms of the eucalyptus tree, and this towering exotic is not only responsible for the presence of a hundred hummers at once, but in a measure also for the withdrawal of the birds from their humbler and more wonted ranges of observation. It



Taken in Washington

Photo by the Author

### TREASURE TROVE FOR THE HUMMERS

COBWEBS ARE LARGELY UTILIZED IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A HUMMINGBIRD'S NEST

is a pretty sight to see hummers as thick as bees, but it is a bit provoking, as well, to think that there may be as many as six species aloft which are no better than one to you. In the north they are more fortunate who can see these hummers swarming about a lowly bush of flowering currant. At such a time there may be a dozen birds about at once. The bush seems fairly aquiver with their vibrating wings. The birds are exceedingly quarrelsome, and the intrusion of a newcomer

may be the signal for a general pursuit and much clashing of tongues.

The rattling noise made by the Rufous Hummer is apparently a vocal sound accompanying flight, rather than a by-product of the wing-beat. One morning in Tacoma, we saw a young dandy in a fine fury. His exhibition of temper was undoubtedly on our account, although there seemed to be no precisely defined objective. The bird first *towered* slowly with bill held straight up, as though in infinite disdain. When at a height of 75 feet he darted to one side and then swept down in a passion, giving vent, at the lowest point of the curve, to an explosive rattle of unquestionable ferocity. Then he would face about sputtering and murmuring to note the effect made upon us. Finding us unmoved, rooted to the spot, indeed, with admiration, the little bully repeated the process again and again, pausing only to vary his tactics by a slow and menacing advance with distended gorget flaming in the morning sun. We were cowed, to be sure, and we crept away with the consoling thought that nobody would tell on us if we fled. Or—now, do you suppose there could have been a mischievous coquette applauding softly from behind that screen of dogwood blossoms?



## Anna's Hummer

A. O. U. No. 431. *Calypte anna* (Lesson).

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Entire head, save hind crown and sides behind eye, iridescent rose-purple, changing to velvety black and with coppery and greenish reflections, the latero-posterior feathers of throat elongated; wings and tail, except central pair of rectrices, which are like back, purplish dusky; remaining upperparts golden green, with bronzy or peacock-blue reflections; underparts olive-dusky, more or less overlaid, especially on sides, with metallic golden green, and skirted lightly with buffy gray; lightening on throat below gorget and on thighs; tail deeply forked, the central feathers broad and rounded, the others doubly truncated, the outermost pair much narrower. Bill and feet black. *Adult female*: Without metallic feathers on head, save for scattering, rounded, purple spots on throat; nape, back, and central pair of rectrices as in male; pileum greenish or purplish dusky; underparts much lighter, sordid whitish or dull buffy on throat and belly; tail double-rounded, the feathers all broad and rounded acuminate, greenish gray basally and black subterminally, the three outer pairs broadly white-tipped in decreasing ratio. *Young males* approximate to male parent in heavy coloring of underparts, but are more extensively white- or buffy-skirted; the metallic colors appear in patches both on throat and crown; the tail is first like that of the adult female, and the change to adult male characters in this respect does not seem to be exactly correlated with the other changes (as the assumption of metallic scales). *Young females* are like adults, save for some pale margining above and for lack of metallic scales on throat. Length of males about 101.6 (4.00); wing 50 (1.97); tail 31.3 (1.23); bill 18.2 (.72). Females average a little less.

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; the largest of the California Hummers; rose-purple gorget and *crown* of male distinctive; female may be known out of hand only by large size and absence of rufous; underparts darker and throat more heavily spotted than that of the Black-chinned Hummer.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: Of varied construction and position; a dainty cup of mosses and fine plant-shreds bound with cobwebs and usually decorated or covered with lichens; lined with plant-downs, chiefly white or yellow, or feathers (sometimes copiously); placed at any height in bush or tree, or occasionally in sheltered places about buildings. *Eggs*: 2; elliptical ovate, occasionally much elongated. Av. of 30 eggs from Santa Barbara in the M. C. O. coll.: 12.7 x 8.1 (.50 x .32); index 64. Av. of 24 in U. S. N. M.: 13.2 x 8.6 (.52 x .34). *Season*: January–June, but also recorded, or by inference, for every month in the year; one or two broods.

**General Range.**—Resident in California west of the Sierran divide and in the coastal district of northern Lower California; wandering casually during (or after) the summer dispersal to mountains of Nevada, Arizona, and Sonora, and to the islands off the western coast of Lower California.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident in Upper Sonoran areas west of the Sierran divide (thus encircling the Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley); north coastwise to and including the San Francisco Bay region; sparingly resident on the Santa Barbara Islands. The post-breeding altitudinal migration involves neighboring mountains, even to Boreal zones, while not wholly depleting the breeding range. Winters sparingly in the northwest humid coastal district and on the Colorado Desert.

## *The Anna Hummer*

**Authorities.**—Lesson (*Ornismya anna*), *Hist. Nat. Ois-Mouch*, 1829, pp. xxxi., xlvi., 205, pl. 74 (orig. desc.; Calif.); Bendire, *Life Hist. N. Am. Birds*, vol. ii., 1895, p. 206; W. P. Taylor, *Auk*, vol. xxvi., 1909, p. 291 (hybrid with *Selasphorus alleni*); McAtee, *Auk*, vol. xxx., 1913, p. 155 (feeding habits); Hunt, *Condor*, vol. xxii., 1920, p. 109, fig. (nuptial flight).



*Taken in the Ojai*

*Photo by Donald R. Dickey*

ANNA HUMMER AND NEST, ON DEAD BRANCH OF EUCALYPTUS TREE

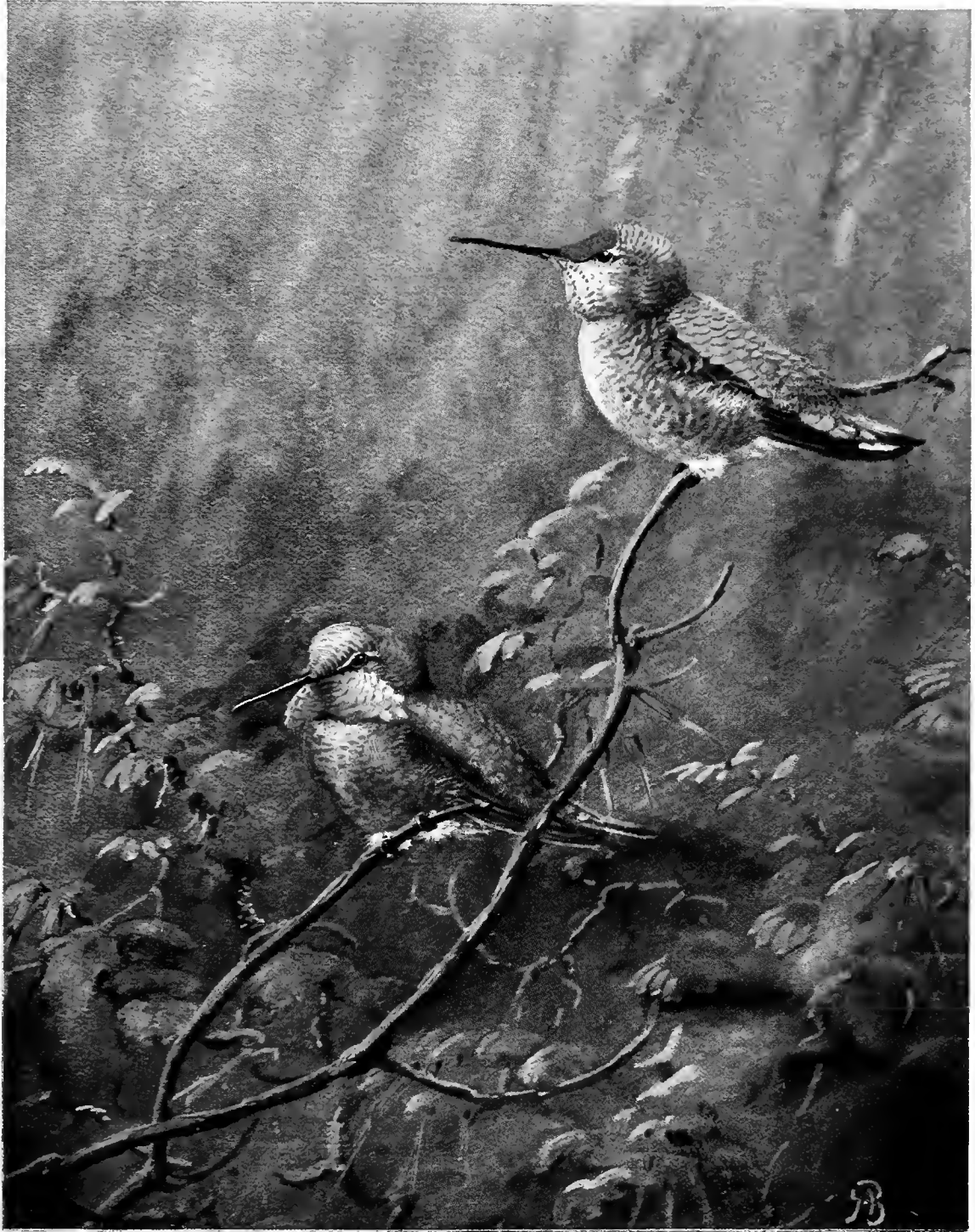
SHREWDEST of immortalities, a name! One Anna, sometime Duchess of Rivoli, is held aloft to immortal remembrance in California more surely than as if her statue in imperishable bronze were adorning a space in Golden Gate Park. Lesson, the Frenchman, monographer of

Anna's Hammer  
Male and female, about life size  
From a series of drawings by Allen S. Wood

**Anna's Hummer**

Male and female, about life size

*From a water-color painting by Allan Brooks*





## The Anna Hummer

Hummingbirds, spying a new jewel in a recent importation from Mexico, presented it, *Calypte anna*, with a graceful flourish, to his lady friend; and we, forsooth, were pledged to pay vocal tribute to this unknown lady forever. Was she pretty? Was she witty? Was she worthy and wise? We hope so, for her namesake is all of these; and Anna is *his* name for better or for worse.

The Anna Hummer, Hyperion of the Golden West, is the California Hummer *par excellence*. And while we may not endure to match his beauties against the flaming splendors of certain tropical species, we are well content that such a treasure should be in our portion. Look first upon a singing male as he seats himself on a December day upon the topmost wire of a garden trellis. We must look before we listen. Not only the gorget, but the forehead, crown, and sides of neck as well, are seen to be clad in a resplendent panoply of glancing crimson. At a turn of the head the entire foreparts assume one cast of rose-purple; at another, the gorget will go to velvet of some dark nameless tint in relief, while the side of the head will glance with fires of green and copper. And at another tilt of the head the fires will be wholly quenched in a uniform velvety blackness.

As he sings, the minstrel's body sways from side to side, and his earnestness is punctuated by a rhythmical beat of the bill. The notes are of two sorts, irregularly interspersed, and each impassioned series is followed by an interval of silence. *Zzt, zzt, zzt, merk, merk, zzt, zzt, zzt, merk, merk*, feeble enough as a representation of such elfin language, may serve to give the tempo and some indication of the contrasting qualities. At another time the *merk* notes may be wanting altogether, and we shall have a series, sustained and rapid, which nevertheless, for its irregular intervals, as well as its snapping, hissing qualities, suggests the passage of electric sparks.

Although we may flatter ourselves that the gallant is laying siege to our affections, it is ten to one he knows where a lady of his own kind is listening. As sure as she stirs there is instant pursuit, and in the flashing meteoric shower which follows, the male finds time to pour out a flood of murderous slashing or snipping notes. These come in groups of four and remind one absurdly of barber's shears, *huh' uh uh uh, huh' uh uh uh*.

At Los Colibris we have an upstairs sleeping porch and a telephone wire passing outside not six feet from the head of the bed. Here an Anna Hummer has sung to us every season for several years past (and often too early in the morning), until we can fancy an individual distinction in his tones. He often indulges the snipping notes out of mere exuberance of spirits. We call him the barber or the scissor-grinder,

*The Anna Hummer*



Taken in the Ojai

ANOTHER VIEW OF FOREGOING

Photo by Dickey

and Mrs. Dawson respectfully proposes Thumb-sized Scissor-grinder as a more descriptive epithet than Anna—the inane.

The established article of Hummer courtship is, as everybody knows, the tower and dive, and this performance serves as well to intimidate enemies as to win favor with the ladies, though why it should accomplish such diverse ends I cannot for the life of me discern. Perhaps there is a subtle difference in quality which escapes our dull perceptions. Anyhow, the male Anna in courting time is very irascible, and is as likely to try conclusions with a man as with a mouse. Upon sighting a fancied enemy, the little spitfire mounts to a considerable height in midair, and then darts down with great velocity, producing at the climax of its parabola a sudden explosive squeak or

squawk—actually a little trying to the nerves of the most hardened offender. This focal squawk (whether vocal or exophonic we do not know) is very brief and is much lower in pitch than the courting squeak of the Costa Hummer. It sounds, in fact, like the whistling cry of the ground squirrel (*Citellus*) or of a cony (*Ochotona*).

The courting flight, with the lady seated on an exposed twig, or



## The Anna Hummer

modestly hiding in the depths of a bough, is performed with more circumstance. The *squayuck* squeak, or screech, or squawk, is uttered, indeed, at the climax of one downward flight; but the curve of flight on this portion is slight and the speed terrific. It is the grandstand play for an audience of one. After each dash the speed king manages a quick recovery and returns to hover for some moments over his enamorata, as if for applause. The chances are the lady isn't handing out any bouquets today. Nothing daunted, the impetuous suitor ascends, almost vertically, with fiercely vibrant wings, swings over to a proper distance and repeats his dash. Birds do not perspire, but our hero evidently earns his bread by labors more strenuous than sweat of the brow. The coy minx in the grandstand, she knows how to appear quite indifferent, to be sure, but if she does not look out she will overplay the part. Bowles narrates an instance<sup>1</sup> where a swinking swain, outraged at last by the coldness of his lady love, paused before her, and gliding slowly up seized her rudely by the beak and dragged her highness headlong from the perch.

It is thus undoubtedly that hearts are won, for I have witnessed the nuptials—tented all in a bower of oak-leaves. The nuptial kiss occurs as well in midair as upon an oaken bed, but always close to cover and always to a fierce accompaniment of squeaks in which both sexes participate. Indeed, so ingenuous are these happy children of nature that it is best not to be too inquisitive when one hears a fairy bedlam in the garden.

The amours of the Anna Hummer have not always been conducted within the bounds of the species. As a result of these divagations, several hybrid forms have been recorded. The most famous is that between *Calypte anna* and *Selasphorus alleni*, once described as *Selasphorus floresii* Gould, of which four examples, all probably Californian, now exist in collections. Another, described from Santa Barbara, *Archilochus violajugulum* (Jeffries) probably represents a union of *C. anna* and *Archilochus alexandri*. Hybrids of *Archilochus alexandri* + *Calypte costae* and *Selasphorus rufus* + *Stellula calliope* have also been noted, but none of these unions appear to be fertile in the third generation, and they remain curious examples of misplaced affection, rather than phylogenetic factors with which the scientist has to reckon.

During the honeymoon Anna—Mrs. Anna now if you please—has contrived to slip away from her insistent lord and has spread a foundation of cobwebs over the bare shaft of some limb where she intends to rear her nest. The pappus of seeds, especially of the willow, and a dozen other sorts of vegetable down, are felted together and bound with cob-

<sup>1</sup> "The Condor," Vol. XII., July, 1910, p. 126.

## The Anna Hummer

webs, which the mistress deftly spreads with her needle beak, the while she moulds a hollow with her breast. In this way a noble structure can be balanced accurately and lashed securely to the slenderest twig, though Anna is rather more given to broad foundations than is the Black-chin, say.

As like as not the first egg arrives while the nest is only half com-



Taken near Santa Barbara

ANNA HUMMER ON NEST

Photo by the Author

pleted. No matter—the half-done hollow will suffice for now, and the structure will be passably done by tomorrow, when the next arrival is due—or by the day after at most. As for the decorations, they can be added any time, a bit of moss here and a bit of lichen there, or a feather snatched when the mistress is returning from some foray after insects or morning dews. Your ready-furnished flats are vulgar, anyhow, and it is much more satisfactory to a taste

like Anna's to be able to select the adornments of her home with deliberation and discriminating care.

As to the male bird, he has no part in these festivities. Not only is he forbidden to assist in the building of the home, but he is banished forever from its sacred precincts. So complete is the rupture between these elfin mates, that we do not even know whether the male bird leads henceforth a disconsolate existence, wedded to fond memories, or whether he presently lays siege to other hearts. These are frail children of the sun, and we must not seek to apply our own laborious standards of conduct to them.

*Dum vivimus vivamus* is the Hummer's motto—and what else could you expect of a creature whose blood is always at fever heat (variously estimated at from 111° to 114° Fahrenheit), and who must forever quench a raging thirst with honey?

Careful and extended experiment has shown that a hummingbird may subsist entirely upon sweetened water. It is certain, therefore,

## *The Anna Hummer*

that however much the average diet may be varied by insect food, the nectar of plants is still the staple element with most species. Professor and Mrs. Charles Frederick Holder, of Pasadena, once kept an Anna Hummer within doors for nearly a year on a diet of sugar-and-water varied only by offerings of flowers. Miss Althea R. Sherman, of National, Iowa, in a series of open-air experiments with the Ruby-throated Hummer, found that the creatures will consume an average of from 70 to 90 grains of pure sugar daily, an amount equal to a cube of bar sugar or a level teaspoonful of common 'granulated' sugar. This amount, moreover, is more than twice the average weight of the bird. If we humans were determined upon such high living, we should have to consume 300 pounds of sugar apiece per diem! Alas, for daddy's purse, and alas for our poor livers!

Anna's Hummer is fond of the sap of our common willows (*Salix laevigata* and *S. lasiolepis*). It will also follow the Red-breasted Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus ruber*) into the orchards and glean eagerly from its deserted borings. A catalogue of Anna's favorite flowers would be nearly equivalent to a botany of southern California. But if one had to choose *the* favorite it would probably be *Ribes speciosum*, our handsome red flowering gooseberry, for it is upon the abundance of this flower that Anna relies for her early nesting. In watching a female feeding in one of these bushes we were interested to note that because of the density of the foliage the bird felt obliged to alight, and did so whenever favorable opportunity offered. At times it would discontinue the wing motion altogether and would rifle the neighboring flowers from its perch. At others the wing stroke was only retarded to such a degree as to become noiseless, but was still too rapid for the eye to follow. The bird threaded the mazes of the shrub fearlessly and there was frequent sound of contact between wing and foliage, but it is certain that the bird took care to avoid the fierce-looking thorns which beset the plant, and which would seem to a novice sufficient to have discouraged entrance altogether. Once the bird clung to the under side of a twig, Chickadee-fashion, and if Brooks had drawn her so in his plate, every ornithaster would have scouted.

But Anna is a bit of a flycatcher too. She will buzz off a twig to make connection with some object to us invisible, or she will quit her nest to rescue some victim of the spider's toils, and, perchance, to gobble the ogress herself. In these and other ways a heavy grist of little beetles, flies, spiders, tree-hoppers, and tiny wasps goes to the account of that winged furnace of high caloric. Insects are fed to the babies at a very tender age, according to one authority within 24 hours of their hatching.

## The Anna Hummer



A SWEET BUD

Photo by Donald R. Dickey

THIS IS A BLACK-CHINNED HUMMER—NOT AN ANNA

in this respect: "After she [the mother Hummer] had spread her tail like a flicker to brace herself, she craned her neck and drew her dagger-like bill straight up above the nest. She plunged it down the youngster's throat to the hilt, and started a series of gestures that seemed to puncture him to the toes. Then she stabbed the other twin till it made me shudder. She was only giving them a dinner after the usual hummingbird method of regurgitation, but it looked to me like the murder of the infants."

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> The Condor, Vol. VII., May-June, 1905, p. 60.

Incubation with the Anna Hummer lasts seventeen days, a good deal longer than is customary with our other Hummers. Bowles has noticed<sup>1</sup> that the albumen of Anna's egg is thick and gummy in comparison with that of other species, and we surmise that this is the concomitant condition of some special cold-resisting property, as in the case of ducks' eggs. The infants, when they do come, look to our Brobdignagian eyes more like baby bumblebees than baby birds. They are shamelessly naked, too, and it is small wonder that their young mother, after having braced herself with copious drafts of mead, returns to assassinate her changeling brood. At least, so it would appear—but perhaps we are mistaken, for Finley says<sup>2</sup> of another species nowise different

## *The Anna Hummer*

By all accounts the youngsters are very hardy, for their birth-month, February, knows how to be blustery and raw sometimes, even south of Tehachipe. Since the mother has sole care of the brood, they are left uncovered for long spaces, whatever the weather. Miss Mollie Bryan, of Orange, tells of a home which enjoyed the shelter of her woodshed:<sup>1</sup> "One of the little ones thrived wonderfully, stretching the nest to accommodate its increasing size. By another three weeks (i. e., since hatching) the nest was almost in tatters, and the robust child decided to leave. As it spread its wings to fly away the weakling brother fell to the ground. Kind hands rescued it, the torn nest was carefully drawn together and I placed it within, for we supposed, of course, the mother would come to feed it, but she did not. All day it lay without food. That night a rain came and the next day it seemed chilled and almost lifeless. Flowers were placed near it that it might find food within if it would. Another cold night passed, and we thought sure the life of the little one would be ended, but when the warm sun came it raised itself, stretched first one wing, then the other, and with a last look at its human friends darted away to be lost in bird-land."

Hummingbirds, one sees, even though they be so frail, possess an amazing vitality or recuperative power. But it is not too rare an experience to find one stranded, or numbed with the cold; and, to cite the extreme instance, the big freeze of January 2nd, 1913, undoubtedly cut down the resident hummer population of southern California (all Annas) one-half. It is quite worth while upon finding such a waif to try various methods of first-aid. The first expedient is, of course, heat—that of the closed hand may suffice. Or, it may be that the little engine only lacks "gas." Sweetened water, of a pretty strong solution, offered in a pipette, or medicine dropper (pressed upon attention, or flooding the bill until the tongue gets the flavor), will sometimes resuscitate a fallen hummer like a magic potion. It is, in fact, a sort of hummingbird brandy without any reaction or bad taste in the mouth.

Apropos of these waifs, a missionary friend tells me that in southern Chile a certain species of hummer, probably a *Eustephanus*, habitually weathers extended storms and bad nights in a comatose condition, clinging by the feet, to a twig, but hanging head downward, much like a chrysalis, in the densest cover it can find. Some perish in this fashion, but most of them revive with the returning sun, or upon the approach of milder weather.

The Anna Hummer holds the record for early nesting in California. Much depends, of course, upon weather and flower conditions; but in a favorable season there is a general stir of activity among the resident

<sup>1</sup> The Condor, Vol. IV., March, 1902, p. 35.

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hummers in late December, and a prospect of nests by the first week in January, although not above one-tenth of the total population is involved so early. The earliest authentic record appears to be that of A. J. McCormick<sup>1</sup> who took two considerably incubated eggs near Los Angeles on the 21st day of December, 1895. Mr. W. Lee Chambers took a fresh set at Santa Monica on the 4th of January, 1903, and eleven other nests during the same month. The pace quickened sharply in February, when he found forty nests. Mr. J. H. Bowles gives January 5th, 1910, as his first record for a complete set at Santa Barbara; but on the 3rd of that month he saw a well-grown young bird which, although not in the nest, was receiving attention from its mother, and which must, therefore, have been an egg no later than the 26th of November. February and March are undoubtedly the months of general activity, but nesting goes right on without much regard to rhythm or order till July; and there is one record, that of H. Robertson, of Pasadena, for August 17, 1900.

Anna enjoys the widest range in the choice of nesting sites. All the forest trees are utilized, but chiefly those within easy reach of streams. Sycamores are favorites, and the mountain laurels are not forgotten. The structure may be lashed to a twig no larger than a baling wire, or anchored more amply on a horizontal limb several inches in diameter. Anna has a fondness for sheltered places, though not so marked as that of *Selasphorus alleni*. Dangling rope ends under porches, electric light fixtures, hanging baskets, harness hooks, coils of wire in outbuildings, all these recall to the bird the choicest offerings of nature's out-of-doors, and she will adventure them with only half a chance. The Potter Hotel of bygone fame had along its east aspect a verandah some thirty feet wide where guests promenaded freely, or listened to band concerts. Large windows from the lobby looked out upon the verandah, and opposite each, just outside, swung a graceful basket of drooping vines. Upon an underhanging tendril of one of these baskets an Anna Hummer wove a basket of her own and in it laid two valiant eggs. Here, twenty-five feet from sunshine, she held high court, now flashing off to seize a midge, now swapping compliments with important dowagers, or picking wistfully at their proffered jewels. Gilded youths paused before her in astonishment, while authentic financiers plucked fat cigars from their faces and said, "Well, what do you know about that!" I saw her on the 15th of April, but whether she succeeded in raising her children in that expensive atmosphere, or whether she was later evicted by the mighty Milo, I could not ascertain.

It is not alone because the Anna Hummer is resident that it has endeared itself to the Californian. It is rather because of the amazing

<sup>1</sup> Grinnell, Pub. 2, Pasadena Acad. Sci., 1898, p. 28.

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confidence which the bird displays. An Anna possessed by the mothering instinct will submit to many indignities before she will desert her post. The first nest I ever saw was pointed out to me by Mr. Bowles. After photographing it to satisfaction, I dared my companion to try to touch the bird in the nest. To my astonishment he succeeded in doing so, raising a finger slowly from below and displacing a dainty wing without visible annoyance on the bird's part. Next I took a turn and accomplished the same thing. I raised the drooping wing and crossed it over her back. Birdikins patiently replaced it. I did it again, and she glanced down at the offending hand with mild protest. "If you please, sir, I prefer to have my wing down, so-fashion." Could anything have been sweeter and more appealing! Of course that set was "spoiled" for any collection.

My next venture was no better. An empty nest had been found on a slender horizontal branch of a sycamore tree. Returning the next day when there should have been only one egg, I found the little mother seated. By all analogies she should have buzzed away in wild alarm. Allen or Black-chin or Rufous, yes; but not Anna. Arrived abreast I shook the branch, but Anna only looked troubled. I swayed it to and fro, and she thought it great fun. I said, "Shoo" and she opened her eyes in mild surprise. Aw, what's the use! We are no Annapophagi!

Nests of the Anna Hummer vary in construction perhaps more widely than those of any other local species. Some are massive and as heavily adorned with lichens as those of the eastern Ruby-throat. Perhaps it is necessary to say adorned *externally*, for a Ruby-throat's nest in the M. C. O. collection is also lined on the inside of the cup with lichens. Plant-down is, of course, the staple ingredient for wall construction, and this often appears unadorned in the lining; but Anna has also a penchant for feathers. These may be as few as one or two set rakishly on the rim, or they may constitute a perfect pillow. Sometimes the wall curves inward slightly toward the top, but the walls are usually round-edged and heavy. As for size, they are just large enough to accommodate the bird's body, and that is about as indefinite as the bird is. One nest in the M. C. O. collection is .75 inches across inside and contains eggs .60 inches long. Whoppers, to put it mildly! Mr. Bowles took a set on February 17, 1912, in which both eggs were double-yolked.

At the close of the breeding season some of the Anna Hummers follow the flowers to the higher levels, but the movement is irregular and apparently insusceptible of exact definition. Obviously, there is not "room at the top" for all; so the lower levels are never quite deserted. Also, this upward movement appears to take a northward trend, so that Anna Hummers appear in late summer in the Siskiyou Mountains and on Shasta,

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though they are not known to breed within a hundred miles. Northern "winter" records (really late fall) also exceed the breeding records by a degree or so. There is evidently some uncertainty attendant upon the autumnal retreat, and there are a number of desert or Lower Sonoran records for winter, but none for the breeding season.

No. 185

## Costa's Hummer

A. O. U. No. 430. *Calypte costæ* (Bourcier).

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Head all around, with latero-posterior extension of throat feathers, metallic violet-purple, changing to velvety black or with light blue reflections; flight-feathers and lateral rectrices purplish dusky; remaining upperparts shining bronzy green (golden green or peacock-blue with changing angle of vision); dusky shading of underparts nearly confined to wing-linings; sides of breast and centers of lower tail-coverts (where overlaid with bronzy green) shading through buffy of chest to clear white in definition of gorget; femoral tufts and edges of lower tail-coverts white; tail double-rounded, the outermost feather very narrow. Bill straight, black; feet black.

*Adult female*: Without metallic feathers on head, save for flecking very variable in extent on upper portion of throat; green of back as in male, but forehead and crown drab or grayish brown, a fainter tint of drab blending on sides of head and neck; underparts nearly uniform dull buffy or sordid whitish; tail rounded (scarcely double-rounded) with colors and proportions as in *C. anna*. *Young male*: Much like adult female, but upperparts nearly uniform bronzy green, heavily margined with buffy; throat more heavily shaded and gorget of adult outlined, the metallic feathers first appearing on the lower portion of the throat. *Young female*: Like adult female, but drab of head more extensive, and throat unfecked. Length (sexes about equal): 85.1 (3.35); wing 44.4 (1.75); tail 22.6 (.89); bill 17.2 (.68).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; violet-purple gorget and crown of male distinctive; the female, although a little smaller, is nowise distinguishable in the field from that of *A. alexandri*. Indeed, the only certain distinction in hand is generic—*C. costæ* lacks the curious tooth at the subterminal angle of the inner web of the inner primaries, which is the subtle birthmark of the genus *Archilochus*. A ready but by no means infallible field distinction is, however, afforded by the difference in nest structure (*q. v.*).

**Remark.**—The nearly distinction-defying similitude of the females of *Calypte costæ* and *Archilochus alexandri* ought to guard taxonomers against the folly of generic separation of these two groups. The males, to be sure, are strikingly, though quite superficially, divergent in two respects; viz., the invasion of the crown by metallic feathers (in the *Calypte* group) and the reduced inner primaries of the *Archilochus* group. But all distinctions in the case of the females reduce to a pitiful atom of a projection on the webbing of certain primaries (in *Archilochus*),—a fairy wisp of evidence which would scarcely serve to distinguish twins to their own mother.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: Of highly variable construction; typically a dainty cup of vegetable downs, decorated externally with yellow-sered or gray leaves and plant-



**Costa's Hammer**

Male and female, about life size  
From a water-color painting by Allan Brooks

*[Faint, illegible text at the top of the page, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side.]*

**Costa's Hummer**

Male and female, about life size

*From a water-color painting by Allan Brooks*







## The Costa Hummer

shreds, according to setting, and bound with cobwebs; less typically, compacted entirely of gray, weathered materials—sage-flower bracts and withered leaves—and lined coarsely with dark feathers; placed on dead weed or bush of desert or chaparral, or else at moderate height on descending branch of tree overlooking water. *Eggs* average 12.2 x 7.9 (.48 x .31) (Bendire). *Season*: May–June; one brood.

**General Range.**—Breeding in southern California, southern Utah, Arizona, southern New Mexico, and Lower California with its adjacent islands; wintering in Lower California and northwestern Mexico.

**Distribution in California.**—Breeds chiefly in Lower Sonoran zone of southern California, north on the east side of the Sierras to the head of Owens Valley (Silver Creek, May 26, 1919), and in the interior portion of the southwestern coast ranges to southern Monterey County (San Ardo). Has occurred casually at Haywards (J. G. Cooper) and Oakland (McGregor) and, in winter, on the Colorado Desert (Grinnell). Breeds sparingly on the Santa Barbara Islands.

**Authorities.**—**Xantus** (*Atthis costae*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., 1859, p. 190 (Ft. Tejon); *Gault*, Auk, vol. ii., 1885, p. 309 (Arrowhead Springs, San Bernardino Co.); *Lucas*, Auk, vol. x., 1893, p. 311 (food); *Grinnell*, Condor, vol. xiv., 1912, p. 154 (Palm Springs, Feb.); *Palmer*, Condor, vol. xx., 1918, p. 114 (early hist.); *Tyler*, Condor, vol. xxiii., 1920, p. 190 (San Joaquin Valley, breeding).

NATURE has never staged a more thrilling form of entertainment than that provided by the male Costa Hummer for the delectation of his lady love. It is not alone that the intoxicated suitor hurls himself from the heights of heaven in vehement protestation of his love—all our hummers do that—but this one has evolved as an accompaniment a sound which I believe to be the very shrillest in the bird world, and one which is fairly terrifying in its intensity. This sound is generically like that produced by the Anna Hummer, but it is much more prolonged and more dramatic, more, in fact, like the shriek of a glancing bullet, or a bit of shrapnel.

The lady, who has cultivated a taste for this sort of music, sits demurely upon a bit of sage not over two feet from the ground. The performer mounts dizzily to a height of 100 or 150 feet, then hurtles down at a speed several times that of mere gravity, intending thereby to make the parabolic climax the swiftest possible, and to vault back into the sky with the same impulse. The shriek begins when the hummer is about a quarter way down, gains in intensity until the climax of the curve is reached, and diminishes to the vanishing point as the momentum is spent. Talk of honeyed accents of love! This must sound like the very devil to the enamorata, coming, as it does, within six inches of her head. But she evidently enjoys it, for the performance is repeated again and again. Indeed, about twenty rounds appears to be the authorized number. And as a grand finale, the ethereal acrobat goes reeling off into space like a drunken comet, describing a zigzag course until

## *The Costa Hummer*



*Taken in Ventura County*

*Photo by D. R. Dickey*

### RIVALS WE VOTE FOR THE HUMMER

completely lost to sight. This, to me, is the most astonishing part of the whole performance, this heavenly swagger with which our Lothario leaves the stage. Perhaps he has received some sign of the lady's disfavor, or perhaps, as is more likely, he must quench his fires in a cooler atmosphere.

One would suppose that such gallant attentions should gain a life-long affection. So careful an observer as Frank Stephens narrates<sup>1</sup> one instance where a male Costa was allowed to assist in building a nest. The resplendent fellow gathered in a spider's web and then betook himself to a distant structure on a sycamore limb, which the observer had not seen before. Perhaps the very ease with which the observer discovered the secret is nature's reason for dispensing with the services of the male. Anyhow he is a nuisance.

The lady whose portrait is next shown was discovered on two fresh eggs in a weed patch near the San Jacinto River. Returning in the afternoon with photographic gear, we found the lady not at home. But while we wondered, a lively scrimmage broke out near at hand. A pair of hummers were at it hammer and tongs, though whether in a friendly

<sup>1</sup> Bendire, *Life Histories*, Vol. I, p. 203.



**La Marquise de Costa**  
Costa Hummer in Yerba Santa  
*From a photograph by the Author*  
Taken near Hemet





## The Costa Hummer

bout or bloody fight we could not at first tell. We did, however, hear sundry squeaks of the quality but not the duration of the male's courtship screech, and these led us to suppose that the sound is really vocal and not one made, as others have surmised, by the rush of air against set wings. After a moment one bird emerged from the blur and buzzed off for the hills, rather wobbly as to manner, but very definite as to purpose,—which was, manifestly, to get as far away from that irate female as the Lord would let him. We had witnessed one of those painful passages which mark the inevitable rupture in the domestic relations of all hummingbirds. Immediately thereafter the more deadly of the species took her place upon the eggs, and she swayed so gracefully in the wind, and she sat so nicely for her portrait, and vindicated so completely her right of ownership, that we left her, as her erstwhile lord had done, in undisputed possession.

But the manner of this portraiture deserves a word, lest our readers should suppose our honors too hardly won. On this occasion it was no time at all until my assistant was holding the weed-stalk so as to keep the bird in the sun; and only a little while later he could stroke her breast. Once or twice she broke away when William started to oust her with a finger, but our last passage was a *tete a tete*, in which I



Taken in Riverside County

LADY COSTA

Photo by the Author

### *The Costa Hummer*

pressed my red nose against the dainty beak, quite unrebuked. The Costa Hummer is not so well known as its congener, *Calypte anna*. This for three reasons, easily defined. In the first place, the



Taken in Riverside County

COSTA HUMMER IN YERBA SANTA

Photo by the Author

birds are not residents, as the Annas are. Though it has been detected in winter at favored stations on the Colorado Desert, the bulk of the species retires to Mexico and Lower California to winter, and does not return till late March or April. The range also is much less extensive than that of Anna, or indeed of any other of our California species; and any occurrence north of the Tehachipe or Santa Barbara County is counted noteworthy. Finally, Costa's Hummer is a bird of the deserts and the friendly chaparral. More definitive still is the bird's attachment to the white sage (*Salvia apiana* Jepson or *Ramona polystachya* (Benth.) Greene), for not only does the hummer share the aromatic nectar of this plant with the bees, but it uses the leafy bracts to adorn its modest nest, or to subdue it to a harmonizing grayness.

Desert washes, therefore, and sunny sage-clad hillsides have first

## The Costa Hummer

choice as summer homes of the Costa Hummer. But in the southern portion of its general range its local occupation is pretty complete. Dixon at Escondido finds it nesting in the orange or lemon groves or olive trees, and in the dead cockle burrs of a river bottom, as well as upon the cliffside bushes. Along the San Jacinto River, at an elevation of 2100 feet, we found the birds very abundant in a coarse gray weed (*Eriodictyon*) which lined the river's flood plain, as well as in the more open chaparral of the hillsides. Dead yucca-stems were also favorite nesting stations; and the materials used harmonized perfectly with the weathered silvery gray of the plant stalks. At Santa Barbara the Costa Hummers join their fel-



Taken in Riverside County

Photo by the Author

COSTA HUMMER IN DEAD YUCCA

lows of three other species in seeking sites close to running water. Before the big flood (that of 1914) tore out the finer covering of the stream-bed, we could find half a dozen nests in a morning's stroll any day in early June. These would be in oaks, alders, sycamores, or bays, and sometimes within two feet of the water. Again, I have taken eggs high up in the heart of the Santa Ynez range, above the nesting of the Western Tanager and California Purple Finch, in near-Transition territory. These northern breeding birds seem to live especially secluded lives, and though we know exactly where to find their nests, the birds themselves scarcely figure in local horizons.

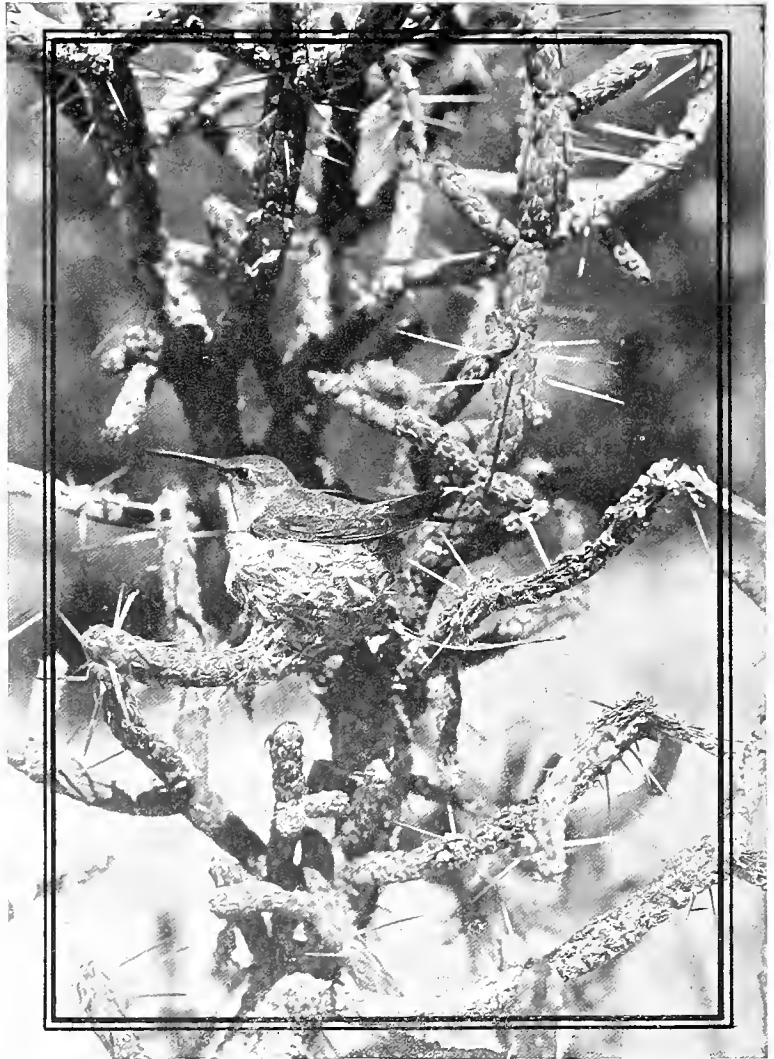
## The Costa Hummer

Of the occurrence of this bird in the desert ranges, Dr. A. K. Fisher says:<sup>1</sup> "Costa's Hummingbird is the common species of the desert

valleys and mountains of southern California and Nevada \* \* \* the only species met with by Dr. Nelson in the Panamint and Grapevine Mountains, where he found it a common breeder during May and June. \*

\* \* In the Argus Range the species was very abundant and several of its nests were found. Various kinds of plants were used as nesting sites, though the branching cactus (*Opuntia echinocarpa*) was most commonly chosen. Usually the structure was placed on the top of a lower branch, a foot or so from the ground, and under an overhanging mass of thick spiny branches, which formed a protection for the parent bird from the sun and

weather, as well as its enemies. At Coso one of these hummers was seen on a bright moonlight evening hovering over a bunch of flowers



Taken in the Mohave Desert

Photo by Wright M. Pierce

COSTA HUMMER AND NEST IN *Opuntia ramosissima*

<sup>1</sup> Ornithology of the Death Valley Expedition, N. A. Fauna, No. 7, 1893, p. 57.

## *The Costa Hummer*

and was heard again later in the same night. \* \* Just at daylight on the morning of June 25th, before the shadow had risen out of Wild Rose Canon, a Costa hummingbird came and hovered within a foot of our camp fire, probably mistaking it from a distance for a bunch of buff flowers. It was observed on several occasions that any *brightly colored* object placed in a conspicuous position attracted the bird."

Bendire's description of the nest is perfect:<sup>1</sup> "The nests of Costa's Hummingbird do not compare favorably in architectural beauty with those of the preceding species [the Black-chinned Hummer]; the materials used are not so thoroughly felted or quilted together, and the inner cup has, ordinarily, a rather slovenly appearance. It is externally composed of plant down or fine shreds of plant fiber; the outer walls are thatched more or less profusely, in different specimens before me, with bits of gray lichens, fine shreds of bark and small dry leaves, and these are securely fastened in place by spider webs and silk obtained from cocoons. The inside is lined with plant down, and occasionally with finely shredded plant fibers and small fluffy feathers. In some examples feathers are very prominent among the inner lining. An average specimen measures  $1\frac{3}{8}$  inches in outer diameter by 1 inch in depth. The inner cup is about seven-eighths of an inch in diameter by one-half inch in depth."

The eggs, always two in number, are dull white in color, elongate elliptical in shape, and a little smaller than those of *C. anna*. Deposition occurs on succeeding days, and incubation, according to one authority,<sup>2</sup> lasts for 14 to 16 days; according to another,<sup>3</sup> nine or ten days. This discrepancy is doubtless due in part to the irregularity with which different birds *begin* incubation. Some brood from the laying of the first egg. Others loaf around a day or so after the deposition of the second. Under favorable circumstances the young birds fly in from ten to fourteen days.

The smallest bird's egg on record is probably the one taken in a Costa's nest by Nelson Carpenter at Escondido, June 11, 1905. This tiny atom, technically known as a "runt," is about one-fourth the normal bulk and measures .29 x .21 (mm 7.37 x 5.33). No regrets for the present tense, please, for the little pearl contained no yolk and so never could have hummed.

<sup>1</sup> Life Histories, Vol. I., p. 205.

<sup>2</sup> R. H. Lawrence, quoted by Bendire, Life Histories, Vol. I., p. 203.

<sup>3</sup> J. B. Dixon: Condor, Vol. XIV., March, 1912, p. 76.

## Black-chinned Hummer

A. O. U. No. 429. *Archilochus alexandri* (Boucier and Mulsant).

**Synonyms.**—SPONGE HUMMER. ALEXANDER HUMMER.

**Description.**—*Adult male:* Upperparts, including central pair of tail-feathers, black, overlaid with shining bronzy green and blue-green; wing-quills and remaining rectrices purplish dusky; wing-quills sharply and diagonally truncated; tail double-rounded, the central pair of feathers broad and mildly acuminate, about .12 (4 mm) shorter than remaining feathers, which are narrow and sharply acuminate; gorget chiefly opaque velvety black, the posterior portion showing rich violet reflections; underparts chiefly dusky, on sides heavily overlaid with bronzy green with narrow white skirtings, elsewhere more relieved by white edging; white sometimes attaining clearness on middle of belly and (usually) sharply defining lower edge of gorget. Bill slender, straight, black; feet black. *Adult female:* Upperparts similar to those of male; but underparts chiefly sordid white; some faint tawny or dusky shading on sides; throat nearly immaculate, or finely and sparingly speckled with dusky; tail quite different; central pair of feathers much as in male, the remaining pairs much broader, greenish at base, purplish black subterminally, broadly and decreasingly tipped with white, the outermost feather not noticeably emarginate on the inner web (as is the case with *A. colubris*); primaries somewhat more rounded. *Young male:* Like adult female, but feathers of upperparts edged with pale buffy; and underparts more strongly suffused with pale brownish; throat more speckled. *Young female:* Like young male, but throat immaculate, or speckling reduced. Length of adult male about 88.9 (3.50); wing 42.7 (1.68); tail 25.4 (1.00); bill 19.1 (.75). Female, length up to 101.6 (4.00); wing 47.5 (1.87).

**Recognition Marks.**—Pygmy size; black gorget of male distinctive; best field characters of female consist in lighter coloration of underparts, the reduced (or wanting) speckling of throat, and the more blended shading of sides of head and neck (or breast, when shaded).

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* Typically, a deep, thin-walled cup with incurved edges, and composed exclusively of the pubescent down of young sycamore leaves, bound together with cobwebs. In default of this yellow material the bird will use white plant-downs, or compacted shreds variously decorated and lined. Placed on slender descending twigs or horizontal branches of bush or tree, usually at moderate heights and often over water. *Eggs:* 2; white, elliptical oval, often blunt-ended. Av. of 53 (U. S. N. M.) 12.7 x 8.3 (.50 x .33). *Season:* May, June (at height about May 10th); one or, rarely, two broods.

**General Range.**—Western North America, breeding in Sonoran and Transition zones from northern Lower California and northern Mexico north to British Columbia and northern Alberta, and from the Pacific Coast (save for the northwestern coastal strip) east to western Montana, western Colorado, and west-central Texas; wintering in western Mexico south to Guerrero.

**Distribution in California.**—Common summer resident in Upper and Lower Sonoran zones practically throughout the State. Most abundant in San Diegan district. Not found in humid coastal section north of San Francisco Bay, nor upon the Santa Barbara Islands. Winters sparingly on the Colorado Desert (Grinnell).



**Black-chinned Tanager**

Male and female, about life size  
From a scientific painting by Major Allan Hood.

720 10 100 100 100 100

PLATE 1



**Black-chinned Hummer**

Male and female, about life size

*From a water-color painting by Major Allan Brooks*







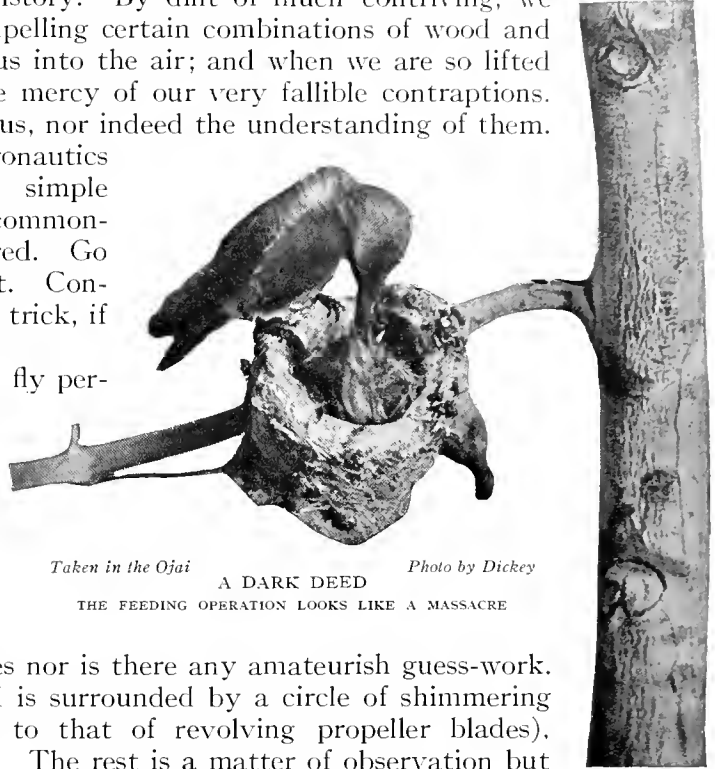
## The Black-chinned Hummer

**Authorities.**—Heermann (*Trochilus alexandri*), Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., ser. 2, ii., 1853, p. 269 (Sacramento); Gault, Auk, vol. ii., 1885, p. 310 (San Bernardino Mts., breeding); Grinnell, Condor, vol. vi., 1904, p. 42 (Palm Springs, Dec.); Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xii., 1914, p. 143, fig. (Colorado Valley; habits, nests); Thayer and Bangs, Auk, vol. xxiv., 1907, p. 312 (hybrid).

THE MECHANICS of flight is engaging the attention of man as never before in the world's history. By dint of much contriving, we have succeeded at last in compelling certain combinations of wood and canvas and aluminum to lift us into the air; and when we are so lifted we find ourselves quite at the mercy of our very fallible contraptions. The way of wings is not with us, nor indeed the understanding of them. Though the mathematics of aëronautics now fills volumes, the big, simple things, which are Nature's commonplaces, remain still unmastered. Go to the Hummer, thou aëronaut. Consider her ways and learn the trick, if you can.

A baby hummingbird can fly perfectly from the cradle. He may, indeed, be seen vibrating his wings without leaving the nest, much as an aviator sets his propeller to spinning just to try his motor; but when the moment of flight comes, and the bird does cast off, there are no motor troubles nor is there any amateurish guess-work. The wings buzz until the bird is surrounded by a circle of shimmering light (irresistibly comparable to that of revolving propeller blades), and the bird rises—that is all. The rest is a matter of observation but not of imitation on our part.

A hummingbird flies in any direction it pleases. It is like a queen played at chess in three dimensions. She has all the privileges. Forward, backward, straight upward or sidewise, it is all one to those facile wings. The action of the wings is greatly assisted, no doubt, by the mobile tail; and it may be that the backward dash, by which the bird retreats from unexpected danger, is limited in range to the spasmodic thrust of that important organ. Anyhow, the tail jerks forward in a down-sweep, like the telson of a lobster, and the bird goes backward three or four feet, or, oftener, backward and upward. Those wings, also, are capable of the nicest calculation, in spite of their apparently



Taken in the Ojai

A DARK DEED

Photo by Dickey

THE FEEDING OPERATION LOOKS LIKE A MASSACRE

## The Black-chinned Hummer



Taken in the Ojai

BLACK-CHINNED HUMMER AND YOUNG

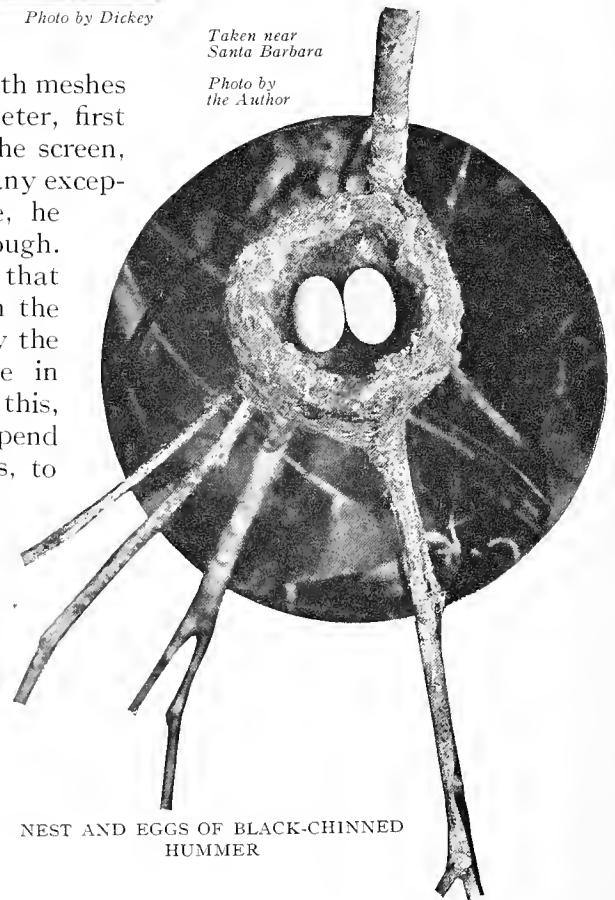
Photo by Dickey

automatic action. Be sure that such species as are wont to invade cactus plants, whether to nest or to rifle sweets, are not just taking chances with the thorns. If the foliage threatens to interfere with wing-action, that is instantly suppressed, and the bird crawls about like a bee, or uses its wings as a pair of crutches. Once, a hummer, finding itself entrapped in a porch by

a wall of "chicken-wire" netting with meshes only an inch and a half in diameter, first passed slowly before the face of the screen, searching whether there might be any exception in his favor. Finding none, he made up his mind and darted through. So swiftly was the passage effected that the eye could detect no change in the position of the bird's wings. Only the ear noted an infinitesimal pause in their rhythm. Yet to accomplish this, the bird had been obliged to suspend the propeller motion of its wings, to furl them, to halve their normal spread, and to resume again upon the other side of the screen. No insect could have done this, and no other bird would have attempted it without "losing its head."

Vibrated, as they are, with a rapidity which no lens can

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Taken near Santa Barbara

Photo by the Author

NEST AND EGGS OF BLACK-CHINNED HUMMER



**Morning Glories**

Costa Hummer and Nest in Thistle

*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*

Taken in the Ojai



## The Black-chinned Hummer

arrest (at near range), it becomes of interest to note the wings of this tiny aircraft, and the pectoral muscles,—the engines which drive them. Compared with other birds' wings, those of the hummingbird are seen to be very much shortened basally—shorter leverage and added power. The breastbone, or sternum, serving for the attachment of the muscles which actuate the wings, is extraordinarily developed. It extends backward beyond the attachment of the legs, beyond the sacrum even, save as that is prolonged by processes which support the no less fully developed tail. The breastbone, moreover, is of an extraordinary



Taken in the Ojai

JE TOUCHE!

Photo by Dickey

depth, so that the skeletal hummer is like the body of a racing yacht, all keel. With such an equipment, a hummingbird can reel off a course a thousand times the length of its own body in a single second, and perform evolutions whose rapidity has no other near competitor in the realm of living nature. Or, let us say, to cap this climax, that the tip of a hummingbird's wing travels further through absolute space than any other wing in the world.

The Black-chinned Hummer indulges the tower-and-dive tactics in courtship, as do other hummers, but its performance is, perhaps, less spectacular. The loop of downward flight is less acute, and its altitudes are not so dizzy. The climax is marked by a low, musical, murmuring sound of considerable beauty, and there are spirited chipperings, besides, of so dainty a quality as to baffle the most careful student of distinctions. The Black-chin has, however, one fashion all his own, which makes him a prince among these fairy lovers. At what might be termed the sofa-and-low-gas stage of courtship, the male disports himself before his lady-love in a passionate effort which I call the rocking song. *She* is seated in the center of some bower, perhaps the tempered shade of a live oak tree. The lover sways violently before her through the arc of a small circle, like some feverish pendulum-bob; and as he sways he gives vent to his emotions in a dropping sound of passionate intensity.

### *The Black-chinned Hummer*

*Woozz, woozz, woozz, woozz*, he says,—or possibly *wings*—with a frenzied half-circle for each beat. The sound is one of the commonest of the merry Maytime, albeit the lovers take some pains not to be caught spooning.

The Black-chin becomes known as the "Sponge Hummer" through its almost exclusive use of the tawny yellowish down of young sycamore leaves for nest material. This elastic substance is felted together and tempered with spiders' webs, and bound over all to the slenderest support of sycamore twig, willow, or



*Taken in the Ojai*

POLLYANNA

*Photo by Dickey*

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*Taken in the Ojai*

*Photo by Dickey*

SONNY

what not. The resulting nest, both for simplicity of material and perfection of design, is quite the most exquisite in North American hummerdom. The upper margin of the Black-chin's nest toes in, so as to form a cup some two-thirds or three-fourths enclosed; and this tidy receptacle will stand a good deal of bandying by the wind without





**Buddie o' the Hollyhocks**  
A Young Black-chinned Hummer  
*From a photograph by Donald R. Dickey*  
Taken in the Ojai



## *The Black-chinned Hummer*

spilling its contents. So elastic is the structure that it will regain its shape after being lightly squeezed, and this quality comes in good part later, when the babies begin to "swell visibly." In those last days the edges of the nest are first stretched to twice their former girth by the crowding chicks, and then trampled down so that the whole is a mere platform, a sort of vegetable pin-cushion, into which the bantlings fasten their needle-like claws.

Two eggs are, of course, the rule, as with all hummers; but in Black-chin's special case three eggs have been several times recorded. These are white with a pinkish tinge in fresh eggs, changing to the dull white of blown specimens, or to sordid gray or discolored dusky in the case of those which are near the time of hatching.

All hummers are more or less dependent upon the presence of water at nesting time, but the Black-chin most of all. Hence, it comes about that one has only to search along the bottom of some foothill canyon in early May to find Black-chins' nests galore. Many of the birds will actually build out over the water, and at heights ranging from three to fifteen

feet above it. Although jealous of each other's presence, they are willing to crowd in desirable territory; and it is not uncommon along certain favored streams to find a hummer's nest every fifty feet.

Most hummers' nests are seized by other birds and lugged off for nest-linings the moment they are vacated; but if they escape such notice, they are pretty sure to be utilized by the same pair of hummers the



*Taken in the Ojai*

*Photo by Dickey*

BUDDIES

## *The White-throated Swift*

following season. The Black-chin has strong local attachments and is very persistent. T. C. Wueste, of San Diego, tells<sup>1</sup> of one bird which, having been robbed consecutively three times in one season, built a fourth nest upon the selfsame twig and laid therein a fourth set of eggs, which she was allowed to possess in peace. Another bird,<sup>2</sup> having probably lost her nest when it was just ready for occupancy, dropped her eggs into the nest of a House Finch—defended her usurpation, too, in all probability, for nothing can stand before an irate hummer.

The comings and goings of the Black-chinned Hummer depend, more than in the case of any other California species, upon the season and the state of the flower crop. A wet winter, with abundance of food assured, is followed by a large influx of Black-chins; and in exceptional circumstances they fairly swarm. Tree tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*), an introduced plant which is on the increase with us, is sure to abound with Black-chins; and, to mention only one of a dozen other favorites, so is the red larkspur (*Delphinium cardinale*). Those which have not followed the flowers up into the mountains with the advancing season will swarm about a century plant in August. A lady near Santa Barbara tells me that she has seen as many as sixty at once about a single plant. Of their occurrence in Los Angeles County, Joseph Grinnell says:<sup>3</sup> "This species arrives in Pasadena from the middle of April to the first week in May, and the majority disappear by the last of July. Extreme records at Pasadena are April 3 (1895), and September 3 (1895). By the first of July, when the vegetation of the foothills becomes dry and flowers cease to bloom, the hummingbirds are found in countless thousands at higher elevations (6000 to 8500 feet), where summer is just dawning."

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No. 187

## White-throated Swift

A. O. U. No. 425. *Aëronautes saxatalis* (Woodhouse).

**Synonyms.**—ROCK SWIFT. MOUNTAIN SWIFT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN SWIFT. WHITE-THROATED ROCK SWIFT.

**Description.**—*Adults:* Chin, throat, breast, middle line of belly, and a conspicuous patch on flanks, white—also outer edge of first primary and tips of secondaries;

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<sup>1</sup> Condor, Vol. IV., March, 1902, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Stephens in Life Histories of N. A. Birds: Bendire, Vol. I., p. 199.

<sup>3</sup> Pub. 2, Pasadena Acad. Sci., 1898, p. 27.



**A Downy Cradle**

Young Black-chin in Sycamore Nest

*From a photograph by the Author*

Taken near Santa Barbara



## The White-throated Swift

remaining plumage brownish black, paling on forehead, shading on sides of head; a whorl of stiffened feathers in front of eye black. Bill black; feet and claws (drying) pale brownish. Length about 152.4 (6.00); wing 145 (5.71); tail 57 (2.24); bill 6.2 (.24); tarsus 10.3 (.405).

**Recognition Marks.**—"Sparrow size," but larger to appearance; exceedingly rapid flight with flashing white underparts and flank-patches, distinctive.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A shallow, often formless saucer of feathers glued together with saliva and placed at bottom of inaccessible cranny or crevice on cliff. *Eggs:* 4 or 5 elongate ovate; pure white. Av. of 12 specimens in M. C. O. coll.: 21.46 x 12.95 (.845 x .51); index 60. *Season:* April–June, varying with locality; one brood.

**General Range.**—Western North America. Breeds from south-central British Columbia and Alberta south to Lower California and Guatemala, and from the Pacific slope east to southwestern South Dakota and western Nebraska; winters from southern California southward.

**Distribution in California.**—Resident in cliffs of Upper and Lower Sonoran life-zones in southern California, foraging to highest altitudes; also breeding locally in Sonoran and Transition zones throughout the State, except in the humid coastal district, from Santa Cruz northward. Resident on the Santa Barbara Islands.

**Authorities.**—**Heermann** (*Panyptila melanoleuca*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. x., 1859, p. 10 (San Fernando Pass and Palm Springs); *Bendire*, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 185; *Bailey*, Condor, vol. ix., 1907, p. 169, figs. (Capistrano; nesting in old Mission); *Hanna*, Condor, vol. xix., 1917, p. 3., figs. (Colton; desc. habits, nests, eggs, hibernation).

SWIFTER than swift is the White-throated Swift. Indeed, swift, swifter, swiftest will best express the relations of our western *Cypseli*, where the positive degree is represented by the Vaux Swift, the comparative by the Black Clóud Swift, and the superlative by the White-throat. No one who is troubled with acrophobia, the fear of high places, should attempt to spy upon the nesting haunts of these Swifts, from above; for when to the ordinary terrors of a sheer cliff, say a thousand feet in height, is added the hurtling passage of resentful Swifts flashing about like hurled scimitars, the situation will try the strongest nerve. Viewed from below, in the open air, the evolutions of these birds may be regarded with some degree of equanimity; but when a Swift dips toward the ground, or measures its speed across the face of some frowning precipice, one sees what a really frightful velocity is attained. There is no exact way of measuring this, but an estimate of five miles per minute would be well within the mark, and six not unreasonable. The bird, that is, would require only an hour to flit from San Francisco to Santa Barbara; or, it might breakfast on Okanagan Lake in British Columbia, lunch in San Diego, and dine, a trifle late, with Goethals, in Panama.

In these days of rapid transit it is impossible not to allow the imagination to dwell for a moment on the implications of this bird's powers. Even at an average pace of four miles a minute, if the bird stays a-wing

### *The White-throated Swift*

one-third of the time (it probably does nearer half), it would do off some 2000 miles per diem. Eight years of life would give the bird some 5,000,000 miles of travel—ten round trips to the moon; two hundred times around the world—a trip every ten days if need be. Given the right psychological impulse, Swifts could undoubtedly accomplish such a journey, and they are probably the only birds that could. A night and an early breakfast at Hawaii, and another at Wake Island would bridge the Pacific; and as for enemies, no one who has ever seen a White-throated Swift box a Prairie Falcon about, will have any fears on that score.

Our hero is no such bold rover, however. Although northern breeding birds have to fall back a thousand miles or so in winter, there is every reason to suppose that our southern birds are resident, or nearly so. They roost, therefore, the year around in the same crevices which harbor their nests, and one who knows their habits can summon them out of the rocks, if not out of the sky, to figure in a day's "horizon." The birds, nevertheless, exhibit great confidence in their rocky fastnesses, and it is by no means certain that they will all come forth when called for, especially if you are inconsiderate enough to knock at the sacred hour of siesta.

Behavior differs, of course, with the time of the year. Wintering birds from the north appear to rove about the country in considerable companies. For the most part their hunting is carried on in the upper air, where their lighter colors soon render them indistinguishable. Lakes or ponds of water will, however, lure them earthward at frequent intervals, since it is to such localities that they must look for an unfailing supply of insects when the upper currents are chill and barren. Laguna Blanca, near Santa Barbara, offers almost irresistible attractions on such occasions. When the birds come they come so suddenly, and they hawk for their prey with such fierce-winged zeal, with such intricacy of evolution, and are so soon gone again, that it would seem as if Mistress Blanca were some magician, who, having summoned from the sky a hundred scimitars, proceeds to juggle furiously with them. Then, tiring of the sport, she tosses the flashing blades back into heaven, and awaits our applause.

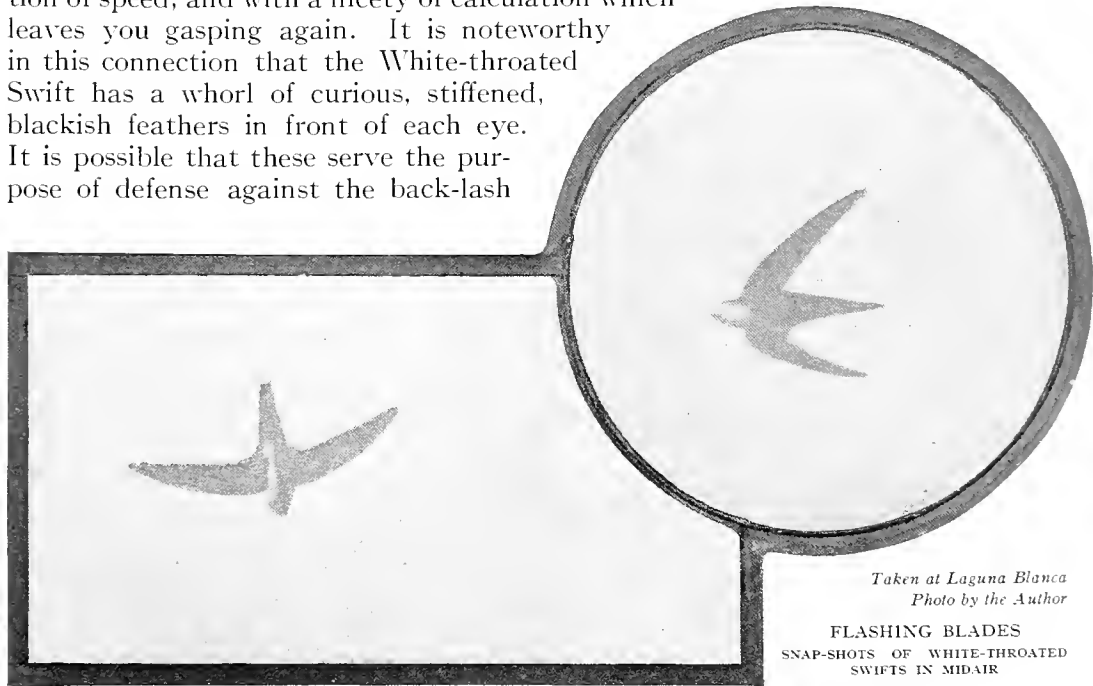
At other seasons the White-throated Swift appears to be much less sociable. Intent, it may be, on family affairs, it disregards the presence of its fellows, and meets only at the appointed rendezvous of the cliff side. At any real remove, therefore, one may expect to see a solitary bird plying his trade with characteristic energy. He is not devoid of curiosity, either, and several times I have cringed before the unexpected



## *The White-throated Swift*

sound of a Swift's wing cutting the air at close quarters. Two or three times he will dash past you, as though trying your nerves, and although he may not come closer than ten feet, the whistle of his wings is unpleasantly suggestive of an effort to "get the range." What a magnificent fellow he is, to be sure! A bent spring of steel,—the very embodiment of power!

But see him at the nesting cliff, and taste life's uttermost in speed. He is not a falling body, but a bolt launched from the blue. The descending stroke of his parabola is a thing to marvel at; but the vertical return, accomplished, it may be, within two feet of the cliff's face, really baffles the eye, and causes one to wonder how flesh and blood can stand such a strain. And while you are wondering, he repeats the device and cuts figures of eight with jutting rocks for foci, until you clutch dizzily at the ground for support. At such times you hear the characteristic notes which constitute a sort of war-cry rather than a song, consisting of a liquid, descending scale of musical, chuckling, or rubbing, tones. The noise produced is much as if two pebbles were being fiercely rubbed together in a rapidly filling jar of water. Anon the bird disappears as though the earth had swallowed him up, for the Swift has dashed into a crevice no larger than the thick of your hand without a sensible diminution of speed, and with a nicety of calculation which leaves you gasping again. It is noteworthy in this connection that the White-throated Swift has a whorl of curious, stiffened, blackish feathers in front of each eye. It is possible that these serve the purpose of defense against the back-lash



*Taken at Laguna Blanca  
Photo by the Author*

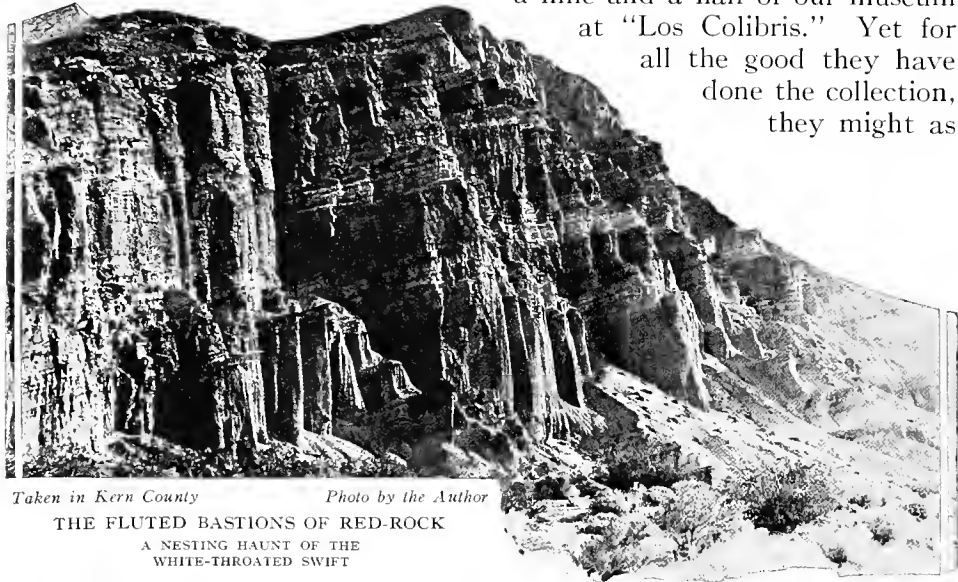
FLASHING BLADES  
SNAP-SHOTS OF WHITE-THROATED  
SWIFTS IN MIDAIR

## *The White-throated Swift*

of struggling insects, but I should rather suppose that they are in the nature of a wind-shield, ready-made goggles for this heavenly chauffeur.

In the selection of nesting sites these birds exhibit an almost preternatural cunning. Not only do they choose sheer walls or undercut niches, but those which, because of the fissures so afforded, are crumbling and dangerous to a degree. A small colony of these birds nests within

a mile and a half of our museum at "Los Colibris." Yet for all the good they have done the collection, they might as



*Taken in Kern County*

*Photo by the Author*

THE FLUTED BASTIONS OF RED-ROCK  
A NESTING HAUNT OF THE  
WHITE-THROATED SWIFT

well be nesting in Tibet. As an index of the variety and difficulty which Swift-nesting affords, a detailed account of the quest of the season of 1913 may be worth while.

On the 3rd of May, son William (aet. 13) and the writer, loaded down with fathoms of rope, reconnoiter the sandstone cliff which juts out of the dense chaparral a mile or so up Mission Creek near Santa Barbara. The wall is more than a hundred feet high, and a great niche, overhung to a depth of twelve or fifteen feet, occupies the upper reaches. The lip of the cliff above this niche is deeply cleft, and here we see Swifts appearing and disappearing from time to time. The frontal aspect of this cliff is quite forbidding, and its flanks are guarded by chaparral, whose disciplinary values we have no mind to test. Fortunately, the face of the cliff is crossed by a narrow ledge. The devious course of this half hypothetical ladder is marked now and then by moss and ferns, a tiny live oak sapling, or a gnarled bunch of ceanothus. Every few yards a tiny sandstone cave offers repose, and the view of the wooded

## *The White-throated Swift*

canyon itself tempts the climber to pause at every solid foothold. The Swifts resent our intrusion in fashions we dare not consider, midway. So also do the Cliff Swallows, humble tenantry of all upended acres; and so, to our pleased surprise, do a half dozen of those gentle squires, the Violet-green Swallows.

Arriving at the crest, after a tortuous detour to get directly above our quarry, William shucked off his shoes and stockings, took a life-line about his waist, and a hand-line snubbed about an oak, and went over. He soon reported a Swift in the crevice and succeeded in dislodging her by dropping pebbles down. She took her revenge by cutting didoes about the cliff, and especially some fierce upper cuts which made a hardened offender like myself wince. The lad returned bravely to the charge, but found the crevice too deep, too narrow, too tortuous, and quite impossible of approach. Dynamite might have done it, but we were after eggs, not dreadnoughts.

Another crevice with an external aspect, nearly horizontal, was reached half an hour later. This was our best "prospect," for we had seen a bird enter it repeatedly; but William's arm could not negotiate the first passage, let alone the sharp turn upward which it presently took. Nesting in Tibet!

On the 15th of May we saw Swifts careening across a rock cliff in the Santa Susana country. Although they were not definitely traced to any one crevice, they made such frequent passes at a certain portion of the cliff, some twenty feet up, that one felt sure of a prospect. By dint of good fortune and the comforting recollection of our life insurance policies, we succeeded in clambering up to it with no greater penalties than come from the proximity of a colony of wild bees. But sure as fate, the suspected crevice was only large enough to admit the arm; and at a point about three feet in began to taper and turn. After vain groping with the arm, I rammed a pike up into the darkness and a Swift followed it out, double quick. Of course we renewed our efforts, but the quest was futile. Score three for the Swifts.

On the 22nd of May in the San Jacinto Mountains, William reported three locations made in a great dobe wall facing north. In each case birds had been seen entering narrow crevices behind sprung "scales" of indurated earth, such as mark the stage of erosion just previous to collapse. The wall was 180 feet in height, and our longest rope only 120, barely sufficient to reach the lowest prospect. But between this station and the next, twelve feet above it, there was a slight slope, and it was upon this margin that we pinned our faith. Briefly, we spent a day and a half under a broiling sun, with ax and pike digging a pathway along this ledge before we could connect up with the dangling rope, which we had

## The White-throated Swift



Taken in Orange County  
Photo by the Author

RUINS OF MISSION SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO  
WHITE-THROATED SWIFTS NEST HERE

lashed to a manzanita stub at the crest of the wall. Further work disclosed in the respective crevices two nests—about *ready* for eggs. The birds had given us careful attention every half hour or so, and we were by no means prepared for this disconcerting outcome. Score four, and tally, for the birds. *Auf wiedersehen* for local prospect number three!

May 30, 1913. As the shadows of Decoration Day began to lengthen, we determined to do what we could toward the morrow's work, and set our ropes at least for the upper White-throated Swift's nest. The ropes set, one for life-line and one for hand-line, I went down to reconnoiter as matter of course,—and from that went to work in good earnest. William tended the ropes

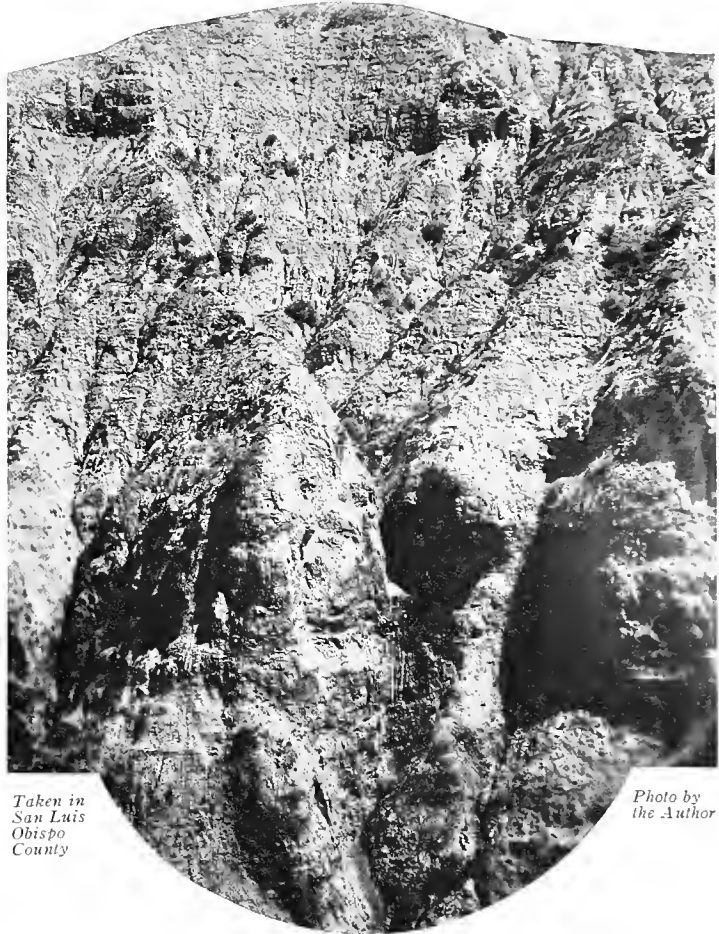
above in efficient fashion as I needed more line, or less, and I worked my way down with pike and ax till I had a fair platform carved out on the upper side of the great slab of sprung rock under which the Swift's nest was supposed to be. It was not long before I penetrated the crevice on the upper side and began to send devastating detritus down it; and not much longer till I found that I was in an exceedingly dangerous position, and that the upper two-thirds of the hanging wall must come down before I could work in safety. Indeed, when I thrust my pike midway, tentatively, there was an ominous rustle which sent me up my

## *The White-throated Swift*

lines like a cat. There was nothing for it but to hew off the whole mass, and a single pry of the pike sent off half a ton of earth, about ten feet of the scale. Next I sent off another scale below the first one, bearing no relation to it except that I had to have it out of the way in order to get at the lower third of the main works. This time a full ton of the earthy rock fell away, and it was no pleasant sensation to hear it thundering down while I clung to the lines.

Well; so much was done, and too well done, and no help for it. When I dug into the crevice again I found the nest all right, and it had eggs, or rather *had* had. They lay, whether four or five of them I could not tell, crushed to a jelly and sodden with the earth which pressed down upon the nest at every point. I took the sad remains out, placed them in my hat, and heaved aloft, a downcast and dispirited bird-man. It was nothing that I had seen another Swift enter a crevice lower down and further along the cliff. I had had enough of Swift nesting for one season!

May 31, 1913. Six o'clock! Sun's up! Hooray! Let's go after Swifts' nests! Agreed! That is, agreed while William slept. A Road-runner who was making me an early morning call ratified the arrangement by jerking his tail three times assuringly, then scuttled into cover. William agreed, too, when he woke up; but it was ten o'clock by the time we got to it. It



*Taken in  
San Luis  
Obispo  
County*

*Photo by  
the Author*

A DOBE NESTING CLIFF  
"KELLY" TRUESDALE IN CENTER OF PICTURE

### *The White-throated Swift*

was easy. The lad had rigged up a step-ladder for examining some Cliff Swallow's nests on a previous trip, by nailing cleats on a sycamore sapling; and this we found exactly suited our purpose. The new prospect was only some 15 feet above the main talus slope, and above this, in turn, was a 5-foot solid slope in which we carved steps. In one of these steps we planted the one-legged ladder and William mounted to begin the attack. Fortunately we knew exactly where the Swifts had entered the uppermost opening of a vague crevice in a sprung but still quite substantial sandstone shoulder. Will had to remove a cubic foot or so of superimposed loose stuff and had only begun to hack at the face of the entrance itself when he glimpsed feathers. The bird dashed in at this juncture, ascended, and came back to a protected niche just over the visible entrance. Will poked in cotton, carefully, and his handkerchief after, and then worked away at the low-vaulted ceiling. He reported each step of progress breathlessly to a very expectant dad below, and was soon able to announce eggs—then the bird, hiding further back in the crevice.

I claimed a peep and uncovered the eggs, four of them, but gave the boy the well-earned privilege of actually bringing them down. He found that although the nest rested on the floor of the cavity, it was more or less cemented also, especially on one side, and required to be cut away carefully.

The male bird, meanwhile, was taking vigorous exercise by hurling himself at me from various angles in space, but he always brought the focus of his attention, much to my relief, some three feet away from my face. The female remained in the crevice till the last, and we left her in charge while the eggs were brought down in safety. "White-throated Swift n/4"—a proud trophy, the result of the seventh attempt this season.

These eggs, which seem to be typical enough, are of an elongate ovate shape, and of crystalline whiteness. In appearance they resemble those of the eastern Chimney Swift, although they are slightly longer. The nest is a shallow saucer four inches long and three and a half wide, composed of grasses and weed-stems, used sparingly, together with cotton from the black cottonwood, and copious feathers. These substances are gummed together basally, presumably by saliva. The surface is soft and fluffy; while a couple of quill feathers, picked up in some barnyard, are stuck in rakishly on one side. This domicile, otherwise charming, was alive with "varmints," chief among which we noted bedbugs, presumably *Cimex hirundinis*, such as infest the homes of the Cliff Swallows hard-by. The eggs were all lightly specked with blood which had exuded from the parental abdomen as a result of the bites of these creatures.

## *The White-throated Swift*

Egg deposition in the case of the White-throated Swift is not daily, as is customary with small birds, but only every second or third day, as determined by Mr. Wilson C. Hanna, of Colton.

The White-throated Swift enjoys a great range in the nesting season, breeding from virtual sea-level up to nearly timberline. Their occupation of the gorges in the western Sierras is not less characteristic than that of the dove cliffs of the coast ranges. In the latter instance they are humanly attainable, but those which elect to nest in the glacier-scored walls of Tehipite or the Yosemite are secure from mortal wish.

The evolutions of these master aëronauts are an engaging feature of life at Glacier Point. The birds delight, I believe, in "throwing scares" into tourists, and if one does happen to be squeamish about gazing into a 3000 foot abyss, it doesn't help matters any to have a saucy bird demonstrate the strength of his nerves by dashing within a foot of one's ears at a rate of five miles per minute, that is, 440 feet per second. A strong upcurrent of air at this place takes up bits of paper from discarded lunch boxes and whirls them in the air at dizzying heights above the valley. Noting that the Swifts paused occasionally to inspect these bits of paper, I conceived the idea of feeding them smaller

bits of tissue. There was instant attention on the part of the Swifts, and I soon had them seizing the paper before it had floated a dozen feet away. Many of the pieces were borne off in triumph out of sight, but I was not able to trace any of the birds to their nests by means of it. Indeed, I am not sure that the bits were not all eventually dis-



*Taken in San Bernardino County*

*Photo by Pierce*

NEST AND EGGS OF WHITE-THROATED SWIFT  
NOT IN SITU

## *The White-throated Swift*

carded, either because the pioneers reported them unsuitable for nest-lining, or because there was no need of lining nests further. While the fun was on, there was considerable rivalry among the birds as to which should get the dainty first, and in one instance a "hand to hand" tussle ensued, during which the birds tumbled over and over and lost a hundred feet of altitude.

That most friendly of encounters, the nuptial embrace, appears to take place, also, in the air. In this the birds come together from opposite directions, engage with the axes of their bodies held at a decided angle laterally, and begin to tumble slowly downward, turning over and over the while for several seconds, or until earth impends, whereupon they separate without further ado.

Romantic as are the mountainous associations of our hardy Rock Swift, it is in order to note certain exceptions. Thus, Mrs. Bailey<sup>1</sup> reports the nesting of White-throated Swifts in the ruined arches of the Mission San Juan Capistrano, near San Diego. No less than five pairs of these birds enlivened this pale sanctuary in a single season, sharing its hospitality, as they did, with the Cliff Swallows, Barn Owls, Wrens, Phoebes, and other drabs. Many triumphs has the Church had over the savage breast; I wonder if she knows the full significance of this one.

Still more striking is the exception noted by Mr. H. Arden Edwards<sup>2</sup>—that a pair of these Swifts attempted to nest in a weathered fissure of a giant fir stub in the Big Tujunga Range. Perhaps, after all, we attribute too much of cunning to our hero in the selection of a nesting site. In sober prose, availability is doubtless the chief test.

The heights of heaven are being stormed by man. The virgin precincts of the upper air are desecrated now by monsters of aluminum and steel, while the soft zephyrs reek with the stench of gasoline. Fast and faster grows the pace. Near and nearer the skill of flying men approximates to that of the birds. It is with a feeling akin to sadness that the lover of Nature sees her last sanctuary ravished by the ruthless enterprise of his own kind. But there are those whose laurels will never be snatched away by the hand—or wing—of man; and chief among these towers the White-throated Swift. Her perpetual challenge is flung to the teeth of the air-men. She will outfly the fairest of them all through all the centuries; and as often as some hapless Lucifer of the vaunting crew starts upon his last journey earthward, she will weave about his tumbling body a mocking shroud of flight.

<sup>1</sup> Condor, Vol. IX., Nov., 1907, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Condor, Vol. XVI., Sept., 1914, p. 207.



## Northern Black Swift

A. O. U. No. 422. *Nephoecetes niger borealis* (Kennerly).

**Synonyms.**—CLOUD SWIFT. NORTHERN BLACK CLOUD SWIFT.

**Description.**—*Adult male:* Plumage sooty black, changing to dull glossy blue-black on exposed quills and on tail, paling to sooty brown on head and breast; forehead, especially on sides, lightly tipped with pale grayish brown; a velvety patch of black feathers in front of eye; feathers defining edge of wing faintly edged with grayish brown; tail notched for eight or nine millimeters. Bill and claws black; feet and legs paler. *Adult female:* Like male, but feathers of belly and crissum more or less edged with white; marginal row of feathers on wing-lining narrowly edged with white or pale grayish; tail scarcely emarginate. Length about 165.1 (6.50); wing 165 (6.496); tail 61 (2.40); bill 6.8 (.27); tarsus 12.9 (.51). Female has tail a trifle shorter.

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size, but appearing larger; long wings and rapid flight with solid black color and size distinctive.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* None, or, rarely, a simple coil of grasses. *Egg:* Single; pure white; placed on floor of shelf or cranny of sea-cliff or mountain precipice. Av. of 9 eggs: 28.8 x 19 (1.13 x .75); index 66. *Season:* June 20–July 10; one brood.

**Range of *Nephoecetes niger.***—Western North America, the West Indies, and northern South America.

**Range of *N. n. borealis.***—Western North America. Breeds in the mountains and on the sea-cliffs from southern Alaska south to central Mexico, and from the extreme Pacific Coast east to Colorado. Winters south to Guatemala and Honduras.

**Distribution in California.**—Of general distribution throughout the State, but rarely observed. Known as a summer resident and breeder only from the Monterey and Santa Cruz coasts. Undoubtedly breeds elsewhere in the higher mountains (Lone Pine, June 16, 1911; San Jacinto Mountains, June 7, 1913; Kearsarge Pass, July 4, 1913; Yosemite, near Nevada Falls, June 16, 1914; Bishop, May 29, 1919; Mammoth Lakes, June 20, 1921).

**Authorities.**—Baird, Brewer and Ridgway (*Nephoecetes niger*), Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. iii., 1874, p. 521 (San Francisco); Lucas, Auk, vol. x., 1893, p. 365 (osteology); Bendire, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 175; Vrooman, Auk, vol. xviii., 1901, p. 394; *ibid.*, Condor, vol. vii., 1905, p. 176 (Santa Cruz; desc. nest and eggs); Dawson, Condor, vol. xvii., 1915, p. 8, figs. (Santa Cruz, breeding habits).

IT MAY be confessed that the palmy days of bird-nesting *as a sport* are over. Those who still have at heart the interest of oölogy as a science are not loth to make this admission. Sport in the older sense of the term has ever meant destruction, while science stands or should stand for conservation. A kindlier spirit toward the things of nature is manifesting itself on every hand—a determination to foster and to protect, instead of to destroy. The life of a bird is undoubtedly more important to humanity than its caloric content, and the psychology of a living bird is more fascinating than either its plumage or its egg.

The substance of this article has already appeared in "The Condor," to which grateful acknowledgment is made.

## *The Northern Black Swift*



BLACK CLOUD SWIFTS

That the turn of the tide came when the task of Science, in this country at least, was nearly ended, is no doubt more than a coincidence. The game has flagged because there are so few new fields to conquer. The quest of the unknown in American birds' eggs is nearly over; for with the exception of certain forms casual or rare along our southern border, and one of the Rosy Finches, there are no more full-fledged species of American birds, believed to breed within the limits of the United States, whose nests and eggs have not been discovered.

What this means for science and for romance the layman may never fully understand. But it means at least that the quest has been very keen of late, and that a bona fide discovery of some long-sought species has marked the discoverer a prince among oölogists. When, therefore, an unknown collector, A. G. Vrooman, of Santa Cruz, announced in 1901, through the columns of "The Auk," that he had found the egg of the Black Cloud Swift (*Nephæctes niger borealis*), the oölogical world came to instant attention. But when we read further that the bird laid only *one* egg, and that on the bare, damp earth of a sea-cliff, interest turned to amazement, and incredulity to open scorn. Anything

## *The Northern Black Swift*

but the Black Swift! For everybody knows by now that the Black Swift is a bird of the high mountains. This fellow in Santa Cruz has stumbled on some petrel's egg, deposited, perhaps, in haste, on an exposed shelf instead of its habitual burrow.

The Black Swift had for decades teased the oölogical imagination. The bird itself was none of the commonest; but when we did see it, we saw it in roving companies numbering scores or even hundreds. Every movement of these great, black, silent "sky-scrapers" bespoke mystery, no less than ease and power. A lucky day had found them gyrating about the solemn bastions of some basaltic range in eastern Oregon or Washington. Another had seen them madly crossing and recrossing the face of a giant bulwark of the high Sierras, or else hurtling like scimitars through the defiles of a frozen mountain pass. Again, it pleased their whim to descend upon the plains, a thousand strong, and there they hawked at insects, like swallows, albeit with a dash skill unknown to the swallows. At a time, again, they would deploy over the surface of one of the larger lakes, Chelan, Tahoe, or Washington;

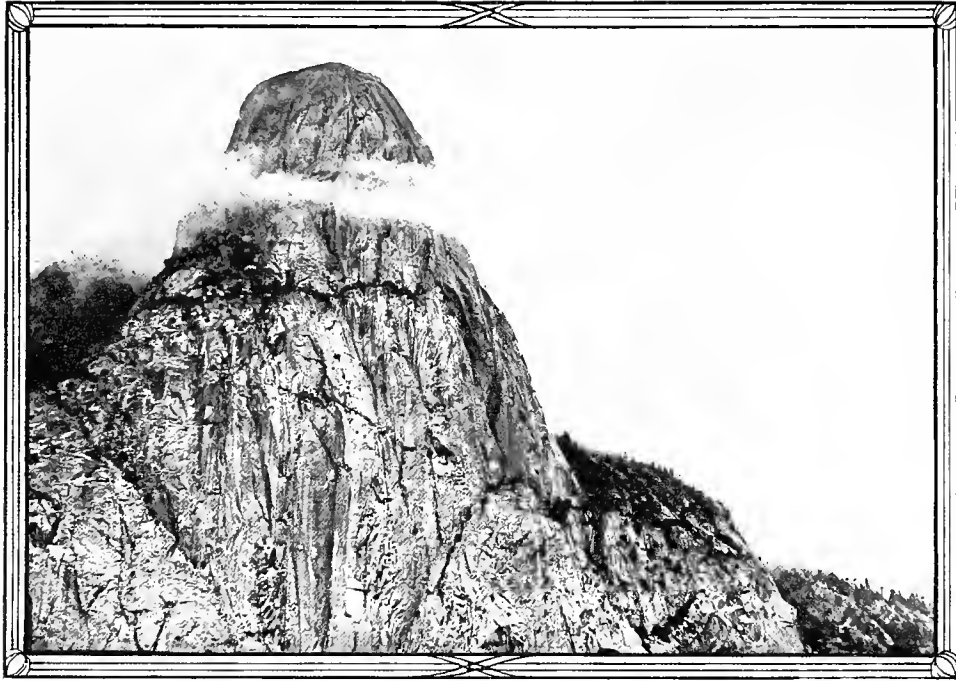


*Taken in Santa Cruz County*

*Photo by the Author*

A BIT OF THE SANTA CRUZ COAST  
THE ONLY ESTABLISHED NESTING HAUNT OF THE BLACK SWIFT

*The Northern Black Swift*



*Taken in Fresno County*

*Photo by the Author*

"A GIANT BULWARK OF THE HIGH SIERRAS"  
TEHIPITE DOME, UNDOUBTEDLY A LANDMARK FOR THE CLOUD SWIFTS

and the boatman caught the gleam of a beady eye, or else cringed in involuntary terror, as the bird swept over him with the impersonal disregard of a thunderbolt. Sultry days, we used to fancy, drove them low, but even as we gazed and speculated, seeking what manner of meat they fed on, they were gone again, vanished in a trice behind the clouds. There seemed to be no law about their comings and goings, even in the summer season, when all proper fowls are found in the vicinity of their nests. These birds could not nest on lakes or plains. Indeed, I still believe that Black Swifts hunt in flocks at all seasons, and that they enjoy a daily range of hundreds of miles in quest of food.

Our meager knowledge of the nesting of the Black Cloud Swift has been painfully acquired. In the year 1888 an ardent amateur, whose name it would be a pity to perpetuate in this connection, but a member of a once flourishing organization known as the "Young Naturalists," found a bulky nest containing five white eggs in a warehouse on the Seattle water-front, and reported it with due pomp and circumstantiality

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as the nest of the long-sought Black Swift. Appearing, as it did, in the venerated columns of "The Auk," this account met with ready acceptance, and was copied far and wide,—so widely, in fact, that the tradition still persists in heavy monographs and foreign tomes.

Of course, those whose natures are tinged with a wholesome skepticism soon made out that the nest in question belonged, not to the dashing tyrant of the skies, but to the more prosaic Purple Martin (*Progne subis*), a bird at that time little known in the West. Major Bendire correctly diagnosed the case upon a visit to Seattle in May, 1894, and published his opinion in the authoritative "Life Histories," which appeared in 1895 under government auspices. This veteran nest-finder, the ranking officer of the whole oölogical corps, had come the nearest of any one to finding the nest of our elusive black heroes. The gist of his account is worth quoting: "The only locality where I have obtained this species was on the upper Columbia River, opposite Lake Chelan, Washington, in July 1879. Here quite a colony nested in a high perpendicular cliff on the south side of and about a mile back from the river, and numbers of them flew to and from the valley below where they were feeding. The day was a cloudy one and the slow-drizzling rain was falling the entire time I was there; this caused the birds to fly low, and they were easily identified. They evidently had young, and the twitterings of the latter could readily be heard as soon as a bird entered one of the numerous crevices in the cliff above. This was utterly inaccessible, being fully 300 feet high and almost perpendicular; and without suitable ropes to lower one from above, it was both useless and impractical to make an attempt to reach the nests. These were evidently placed well back in the fissures, as nothing bearing a resemblance to one was visible from either above or below."

The writer had word of the nesting of these birds in the summer of 1906 upon a majestic rock-wall overlooking the Sahale Glacier in the Upper Horse-shoe Basin in the Chelan country, but a visit paid to this scene the following season failed to discover either nests or birds, although local miners were ready to confirm the report of their presence in numbers the previous season. Dr. Edward Hasell, a reputable bird-student of Victoria, B. C., reported their nesting about a certain cliff overlooking Cowichan Lake on Vancouver Island. The cliff referred to is about 1600 feet high (1500 feet is the Doctor's limit, so the birds were not disturbed). Ridgway saw them in 1868 about a cliff on the Carson River in Nevada. And so it has gone for decades,—glimpses, rumors, tantalizing prospects, near successes, but never a view of the coveted eggs.

Other North American Swifts, of which there are three species, lay from four to six moderate-sized white eggs. The Chimney Swift

*The Northern Black Swift*



*Taken in Santa Cruz County*

*Photo by the Author*

THE BLACK SWIFT NESTERS  
A. G. VROOMAN, THE DISCOVERER, TO RIGHT

of the East, miscalled "Swallow," lays its treasures on a shallow bracket of twigs glued together by saliva, and placed against the wall inside a disused chimney. The Vaux Swift of the West makes a similar bracket of twigs, but retains for the most part the primitive custom of nesting inside some fire-hollowed tree or decayed stub. The White-throated Swift, which nests in crevices of cliffs, prepares an elaborate cushion of feathers and other soft substances, which it cements with saliva. It was fair, then, to suppose that the Black Swift, since it nested in cliffs, followed somewhat the same fashion as does its mountain-dwelling associate. But we did not know.

Comes now Vrooman of Santa Cruz, naturalist, aged forty, and sixteen years steeped in the lore of local collecting haunts. On June 16th, 1901, he is making his annual rounds of those beetling limestone cliffs, which with their indentations front the sea for thirty miles to west and north of the famed resort on Monterey Bay. The country is a rather desolate one, for the unceasing winds have driven even the reluctant redwoods to take shelter in such cañons as occasionally intersect the

## *The Northern Black Swift*

narrow, sharp-edged table-land. No one but the lookout of a life-saving crew, or a bird-nester, would care to follow this perilous cliff-edge, with only the wind and the snarling surf for company. Shags' eggs are the special quest of the naturalist on this occasion, hence he is equipped with rope-ladder, maul, and pin, as well as with landing-net and tin collecting box. He has just taken two or three sets of Cormorants' eggs from the face of a cliff a hundred feet in height, when, as he leans over to land another one, a Black Swift flushes from under his net-pole not four feet away, dives down toward the ocean, and whisks out of sight around the cliff. It all happens in a trice. He thinks he cannot be mistaken, for



*Taken in Santa Cruz County*

EGG OF BLACK SWIFT, IN SITU

*Photo by the Author*

he has often seen the birds in midair. He has even seen them flash across the face of a cliff in frantic pursuit of some insect too small or too quickly gone for human ken. This must be a Black Swift. The bird is gone, but there, as mute evidence of occupation, lying on an earthen cornice wet with seepage, and partially screened by growing grasses, is an enormous white egg. Fearful of exciting the bird's jealousy and so causing desertion, Mr. Vrooman leaves the egg untouched and hastens up the ladder. The bird does not return. Nor yet is it to be seen when the birdman returns a week later, hoping to retrieve a full set. He finds only one cold egg instead. He also found incubation somewhat advanced and concluded, therefore, that this single egg might be all that the bird was wont to lay. But the case was manifestly not well proven, and it

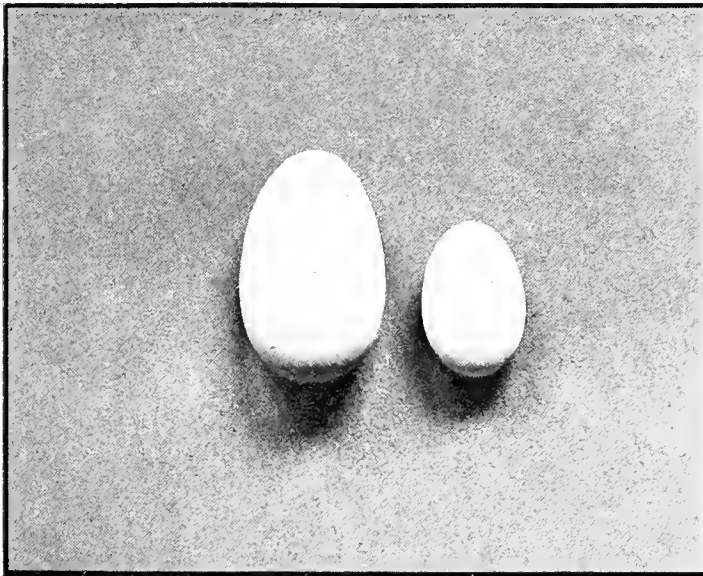
## *The Northern Black Swift*

is not strange that birdmen in general failed to share the discoverer's enthusiasm over the find.

From this time forth Vrooman resolved to find another egg and "show 'em." Each year at the appointed season, therefore, he beat up and down that bristling, wind-swept coast. The birds were close sitters and well hidden, he knew that, so he examined the rock walls, peered into booming caverns, or searched laboriously across the faces of storm-scarred stretches. At the end of a dangling rope ladder he fought with the spray for a glimpse of coveted recesses. Depths that he could not follow with the eye were sounded with a "devil's rattle-box" of his special contriving. All in vain. Mile after mile of likely-looking cover was laboriously scrutinized, but nothing came of it, not so much as the flash of a vanishing wing. It seemed to the lonesome seeker that he must have been dreaming that strange day on the Cormorant cliff. Perhaps the scoffers were right, after all, and he had only stumbled on the egg of an erring Petrel overtaken on shore. But the Swifts were in the country, that he knew. Not many, to be sure, two or three or half a dozen at a time, at most. Often he saw them at nightfall playing mad games of tag, with only the horizon for bounds. Now a sable lover made soft proposal to a dusky mate, the while they scudded across the

heavens like twin meteors. She for answer appointed a tryst in the shadow of Tēhipite's dome, or over a glacier on Shasta's flanks. They might as well have gone to the dark side of the moon for aught the watcher learned. The bird had, apparently, no local attachments.

But on a day, the 9th of July, 1905, it was, the long search was rewarded. The wonder-bird was run to earth again. On a dank cliff and a natural bracket of mud, which fairly mimicked the first nesting



*Photo by the Author*

### A COMPARISON

EGG OF BLACK SWIFT TO LEFT; OF WHITE-THROATED SWIFT TO RIGHT—YET THE BIRDS ARE ABOUT THE SAME SIZE



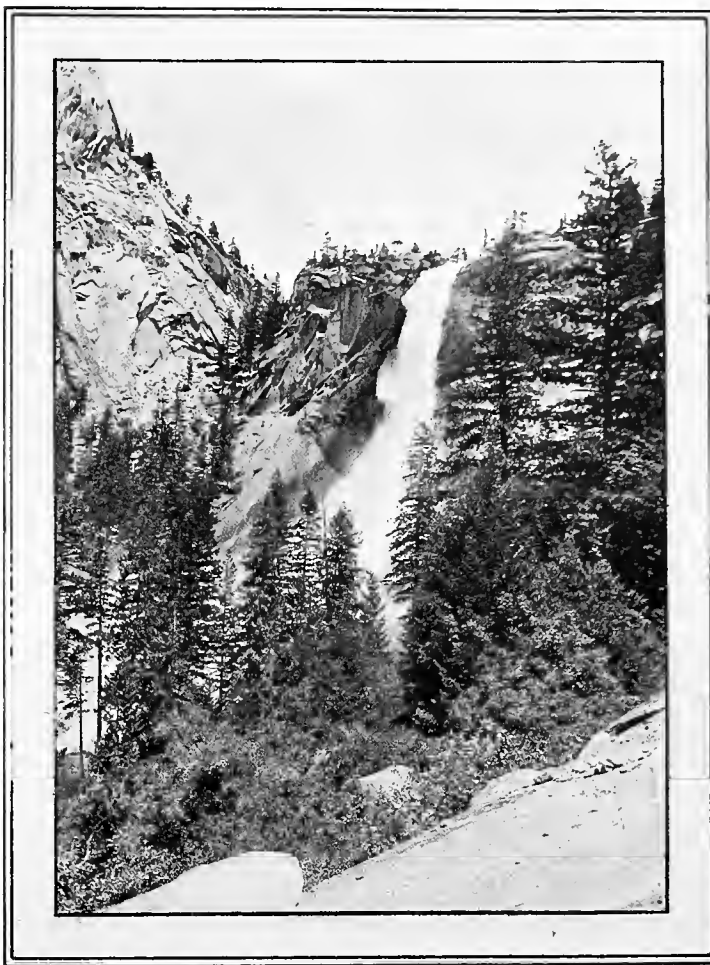
## The Northern Black Swift

site. Mr. Vrooman found a dull white egg, which the Black Swift consented to own by repeated visits. Then to quiet the last doubt which Science otherwise would never have ceased to voice, the collector secured the parent birds and added their skins to the shipment, "Exhibit B," which went to the foremost connoisseur in the land, Col. John E. Thayer, of Boston.

While it might have been called an accident which first betrayed the secret of the Black Swift, it was the sort of accident which befalls only the knowing, and the alert Vrooman was not slow to profit by the lesson of the second find. Putting the two situations together and noting the coinciding features, the naturalist determined on a revised campaign. Disconnected facts began to

come into relationship, and partially forgotten details took on significance. Slowly but surely the investigator came to an understanding of Swift psychology which enables him to locate an egg or two of these shifting, wary creatures almost every season. Hence, to the credit of the first discovery, so richly deserved, has been added the record of unchallenged honors for twenty-two years. It would, of course, be presumptuous to say that no one else could find a Black Swift's egg; but the eloquent fact remains that no one has.

In the season of 1914 it was the privilege of the writer to accompany



*Taken in the Yosemite*

NEVADA FALLS

*Photo by the Author*

A CONJECTURAL NESTING SITE OF THE BLACK SWIFT

### *The Northern Black Swift*

Mr. Vrooman when the annual take was made. After a long motor drive up the coast in the teeth of a fresh gale, we turned in at a point where the cliffs were only 65 or 70 feet high. Here the surf, crashing against the abrupt sea-wall, kept the vegetation moist; and here, at a point some thirty feet over the crest of the cliff, the location was made. The Swift, when apprised of our presence by the rattling of Vrooman's "devil box," darted downward toward the water, and passing with strong wing-stroke close to the surface of the water, stood straight to sea until lost from sight. A Black Swift I knew it to be at first glance, but this was amazing behavior for a land bird. A Kaeding Petrel or a Cassin Auklet, haled from its burrow and tossed into the air, would have acted just so; but why should this gleaner of heavenly gnats, this inspector of glacier-carpeted fastnesses and habitant of clouds, seek the sympathy or the seclusion of the open sea? *Quien sabe?* Although we knew about where the bird had got up, we did not know the precise spot quitted. The minute search, therefore, required several resettings of the stout steel stake which supported the swinging ladder, and it was nearly an hour before Vrooman appeared aloft bearing that studied, matter-of-fact expression which is the precursor of important news. He had found the egg on a mud cornice some 30 feet down, half hidden in the growing grasses. He had barely returned, however, when a shout from another member of our party, posted on a commanding cliff-edge hard by, apprised us of the return of the bird. She had swept in once, fainted and retreated, but she threatened to return again. Hastily drawing up the ladder, we flung ourselves face down upon a neighboring point, and had the satisfaction of seeing her sweep grandly upward to her nesting ledge. The grass concealed her from inquisitive gaze, even of binoculars, but there she undoubtedly was, brooding on her solitary, titled egg.

It was too good to be true. This mistress of the clouds, this storied, quested, eccentric sky-wanderer, sitting there with wings meekly folded, behind a tussock of grass! We felt like the farmer at the circus, who, having gazed long at the giraffe, declared, "By gum, there ain't no such creature."

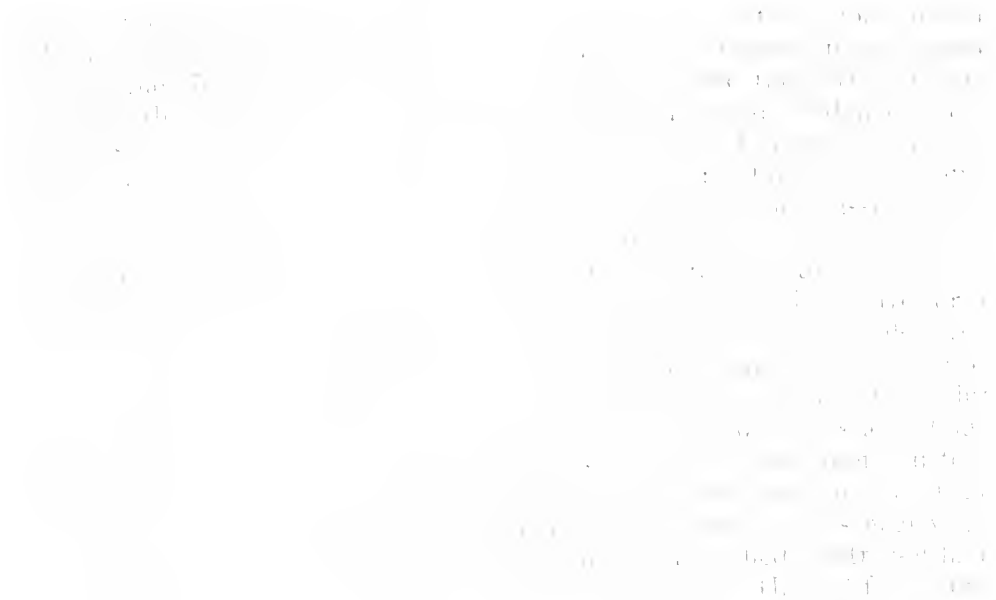
When she flushed again, after another reminder from Vrooman's rattle-box, we had the camera set for her. But she was quite too nimble for us, even with a shutter set at 1/1000 of a second. And so she passed to sea again, flying straight beyond the range of 8-power glasses, and leaving us in undisputed possession of the pearly trophy.

This, the rarest of American birds' eggs, is remarkable not alone for its singular number, but for its large size, greater than that of any other American Swift. Thus, in comparison with the egg of the White-throated Swift, figured herewith, it is seen to be about three times larger,



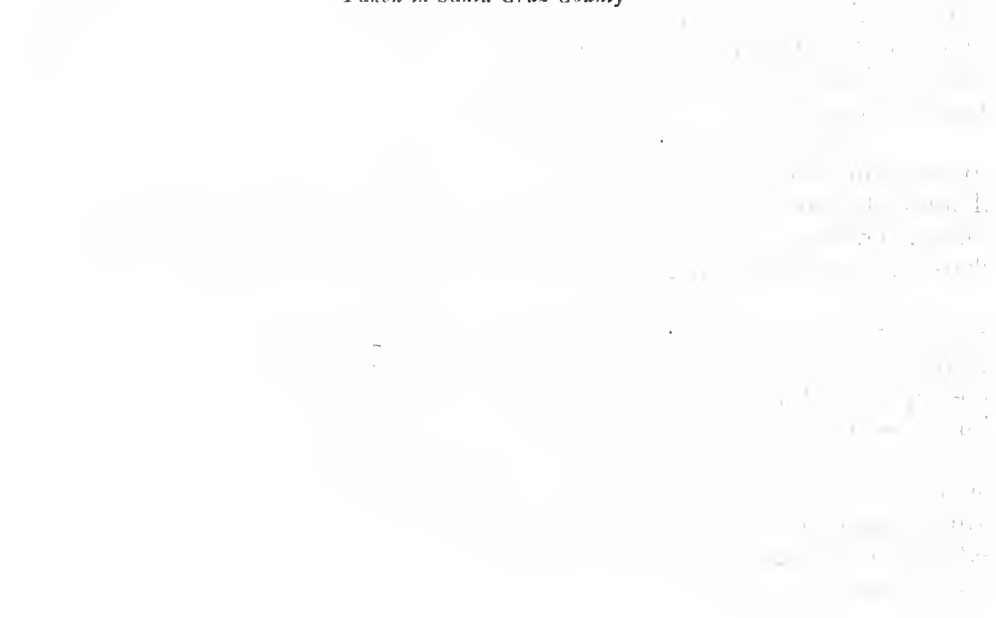
**Nesting Site of Black Cloud Swift**

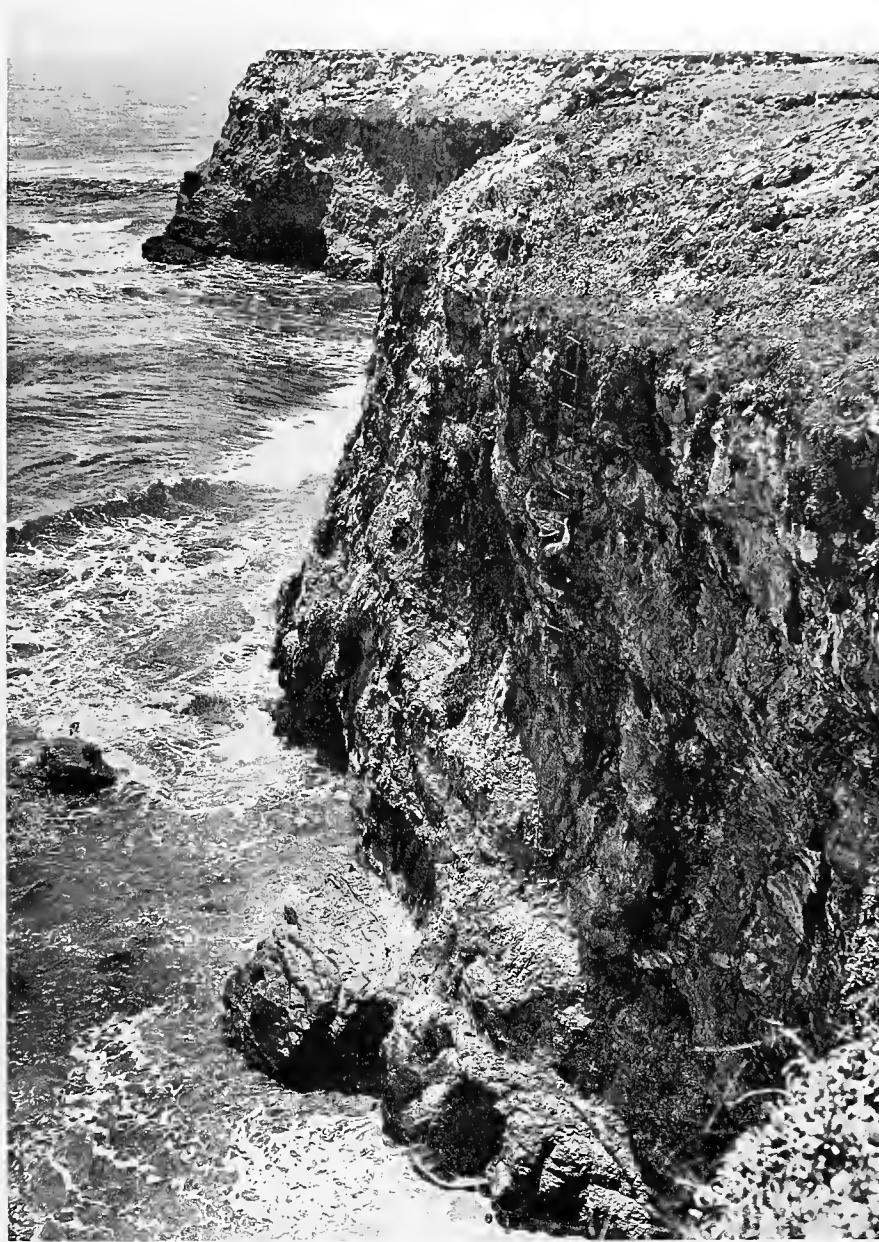
From a photograph by W. Ross Dawson  
Taken in Santa Clara County



**Nesting Site of Black Cloud Swift**

*From a photograph by W. Leon Dawson  
Taken in Santa Cruz County*







### *The Northern Black Swift*

while the birds themselves differ in length by less than two per cent. What the determining cause of this extraordinary difference in size may be, we cannot yet see; but it is fair to conclude that the infant *niger* must be much further developed at birth than are his baby cousins. As the exclusive recipient, also, of parental favors, it is safe to predict that his growth is rapid, and his hazardous sojourn in his surge-crooned cradle a brief one. These are children of the upper air, and their scorn of the ground may have become embodied thus in an effective device for being quickly quit of it.

Since writing the above I am informed by Mr. DeWitt Miller, then in the service of the American Museum, that he has found nests of a related species, the Brown Swift (*Cypseloides brunneitorques brunneitorques*), in the mountains of Peru; and that this bird lays only one large egg. The South American Brown Swift, however, makes a shapely nest of moss, which it attaches to the side of a cliff. The Black Swift seems to be unique in its deposition of its egg upon the bare, moist earth. There are, however, distinct indications that this careless habit is a recent devolution. Vrooman has found several eggs whose support was a well-coiled cushion of grasses, and one of these at least whose formal proportions deserve the title of nest.

The sea-faring instinct displayed by these birds is hard to understand, but that it is a deep-seated one the following account will show. In the summer of 1920, when Mr. Vrooman was out after his annual toll, he came upon a youngster in the pin-feather stage, unseasonably early, albeit with well developed flight-feathers. Juvenal specimens are rare and very desirable, so the collector, who was dodging the waves on the beach below, essayed to dislodge the chick with a pole, intending to snatch him and run before a wave caught him. The nestling tumbled, but when within two feet of the ground recovered itself, rose to a height of six feet, and set out bravely to sea. In helpless astonishment the veteran collector watched this waif as it fluttered and wobbled or circled, but ever seaward, until it passed from sight. Never a thought, apparently, for the parent cliff or of *terra firma*, but only for that ancient beckoning siren whose bosom could have meant nothing but a grave. It was too uncanny!

For myself I have followed this will-o-the-wisp for thirty years—not on Vrooman's preserves, of course, that would be ungentlemanly—but never a sight have I had of the alabaster oval beyond the glimpse afforded me by Vrooman's skill that day in June. But someone, somewhere, will make a strike. The birds undoubtedly do nest in the mountains; and they must occur elsewhere along the sea coast. As a sporting proposition I place my accumulated "dope" at the service of the public—

## *The Vaux Swift*

and may the best man win. Stories attributed to Mr. Herron, of San Bernardino, tell of Black Swifts seen passing behind a certain waterfall on Mill Creek east of Redlands; and of a cave near the Warner Ranch where they are supposed to breed. I have myself seen these swifts "under suspicious circumstances" haunting Nevada Falls in the Yosemite. This well known cataract is only 700 feet in height, but I renounce title to all the Black Swifts' eggs which may have accumulated behind it. Swifts have been seen, in season, in the Kearsarge Pass, above Independence; and a single bird in Mammoth Pass. Besides this—now this is an honest-to-goodness tip—I have seen Black Swifts in numbers playing about the cliffs of the Point-of-the-Arches group, on the west coast of Washington. They undoubtedly breed there.

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No. 189

### Vaux's Swift

A. O. U. No. 424. *Chaetura vauxi* (Townsend).

**Description.**—*Adults:* Above sooty brown, lightening (nearly hair-brown) on rump and upper tail-coverts; below light sooty gray, lightening (nearly white) on chin and throat; lores velvety black; shafts of tail-feathers denuded at tips a third of an inch. Length about 114.3 (4.50); wing 112 (4.41); tail 36.5 (1.44); bill 5.2 (.20); tarsus 10.9 (.43).

**Recognition Marks.**—Strictly "pygmy size," but comparison misleading—to appearance swallow size; rapid, erratic flight, and bow-and-arrow-shaped position in flight, distinctive. Although this species is only half the size of the preceding, careful discrimination is necessary while the birds are a-wing.

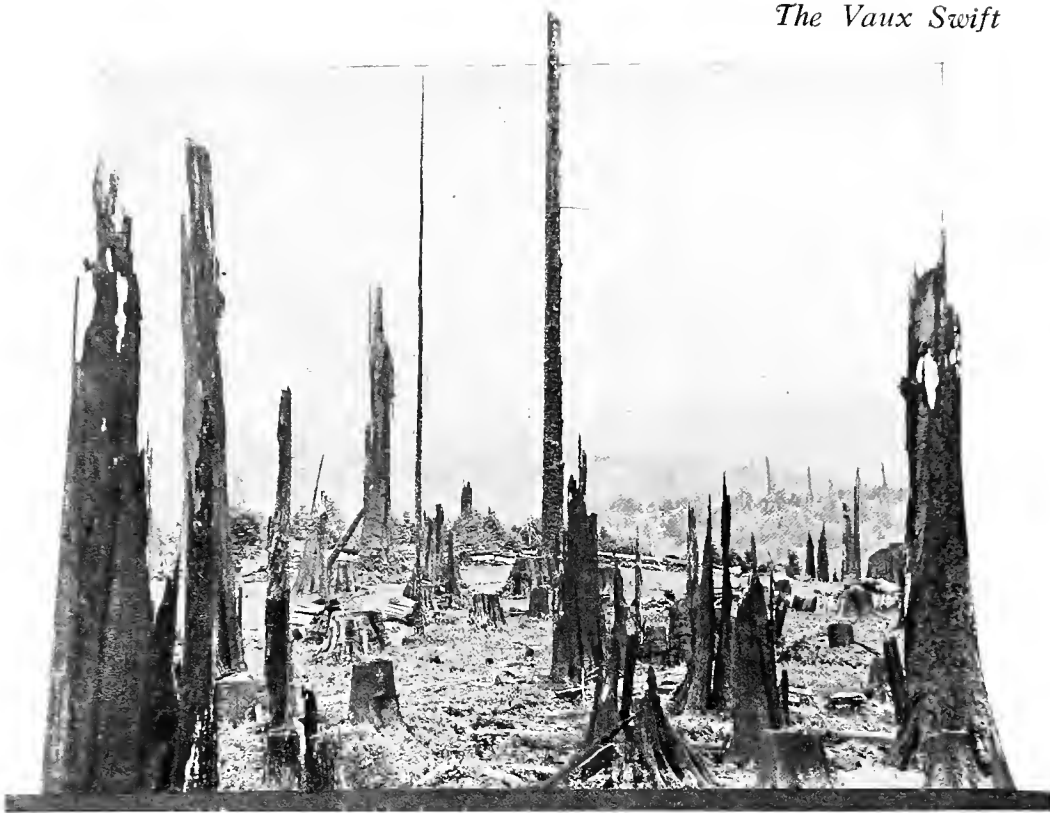
**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A small bracket of fine dead twigs or fir needles, held together by hardened saliva, and placed against inside wall of hollow redwood tree, near bottom, or else in hollow under a stump. *Eggs:* 4 to 6; elliptical ovate; white. Av. of 26 specimens from Humboldt County in M. C. O. coll.: 18.3 x 11.8 (.72 x .465); index 64.6. *Season:* June; one brood.

**General Range.**—Breeding in the Pacific Coast district from Santa Cruz, California, to southern Alaska; casually (?) eastward through the Cascade Mountains and into the Sierras; east in migrations to Montana, western Nevada, and Arizona; south in winter to Lower California, Mexico, and Central America.

**Distribution in California.**—Common migrant practically throughout the State. Resident in summer in the Redwood forests of the humid coastal belt, from Santa Cruz northward. May breed sparingly in the Sierras (Kenawyers, South Fork of Kings River, July 9, 1913).

**Migrations.**—*Spring:* Apr. 16–May 23. San Diego, Apr. 16, 1885; Cazadero Redwoods, Apr. 21, 1911; Shandon, Apr. 19, 1912; Los Olivos to Santa Barbara, Apr. 26, 1912, "the dominant bird"; Potholes, Apr. 29, 1910; Fresno, May 20, 1903; Olancho, May 23, 1891; Vallevista, Apr. 29, 1908. *Fall:* Aug. 4–Oct. 14 (both Los Angeles, 1899, by H. S. Swarth); Santa Barbara, Sept. 4, 1911; Oct. 5, 1912; Sept. 11–18, 1915.





Taken in Humboldt County

A STUMPSCAPE

Photo by the Author

THESE RUINS OF A REDWOOD FOREST OFFER ATTRACTIVE NESTING SITES TO VAUX SWIFTS

**Authorities.**—Woodhouse (*Acanthylis pelagica*), Rep. Sitgreaves Expl. Zuni and Col. R., 1853, p. 63, part (Calif.); Bendire, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 183, pl. 1, fig. 26 (egg); J. Mailliard, Bull. Cooper Orn. Club, i., 1899, p. 44 (Santa Cruz Id., migr.); Taylor, Condor, vol. vii., 1905, p. 177, fig. (Humboldt Co.; desc. nest and eggs); Willett, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 7, 1912, p. 59 (s. Calif.; migr. dates).

SO MUCH has been said above in praise of the larger Swifts of the West, that little remains for this humbler sky-scooter, the smallest of the American group. Truth to tell, we are not able to give a very clear account of three quarters of a century's "scientific" acquaintance, having earlier established a lazy habit of describing it in terms of its eastern cousin, the Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*), which it does very closely resemble. This quotation at least from "The Birds of Ohio" will exactly apply: "The way of any bird in the air commands interest, but the way of the Swift provokes both admiration and astonishment. With volitional powers which are unequalled by any other land bird, this

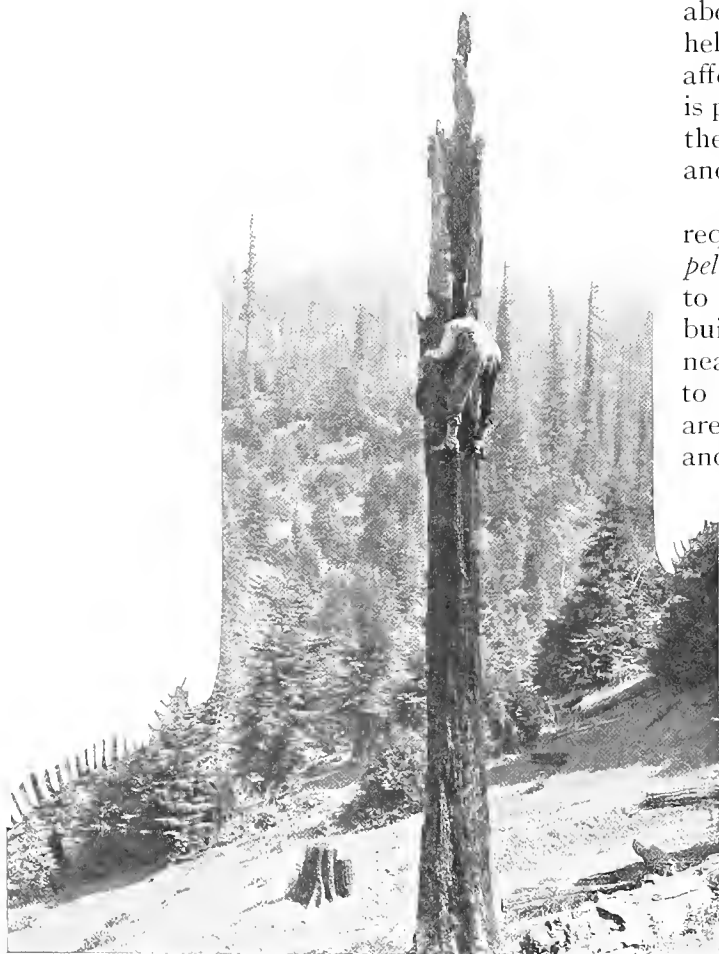
## The Vaux Swift

avian missile goes hurtling across the sky without injury, or else minces along slowly with pretended difficulty. Now it waddles to and fro in strange zigzags, picking up a gnat at every angle, and again it 'lights out' with sudden access of energy and alternate wing strokes, intent on hawking in heaven's upper story. At favorite seasons the birds cross

and recross each other's paths in lawless mazes and fill the air with their strident creakings, while here and there couples and even trios sail about in great stiff curves with wings held aloft. It is the only opportunity afforded for personal attentions, and it is probable that the sexes have no further acquaintance except as they pass and repass in ministering to the young."

In nesting only, the Vaux Swift requires some distinction from modern *pelagica*, in that it clings pretty rigidly to the common ancestral habit of building in hollow trees. It is thus nearly confined in the breeding season to the vicinity of heavily forested areas, so that its study is difficult, and its appearances deceptively rare.

In preparing for the nest, short twigs are seized and snapped off by the bird's beak, in mid-flight, and these, after being rolled about in the copious saliva, are made fast to the inner wall of the hollow tree, a neat and homogeneous bracket being thus formed. The bracket is so narrow, however, that the eggs, even up to the number of half a dozen, are likely to be ranged in a single row, and these the sitting bird broods lengthwise. The first California nest, reported from the vicinity of Santa Cruz in 1874, was placed in the hollow of a dead



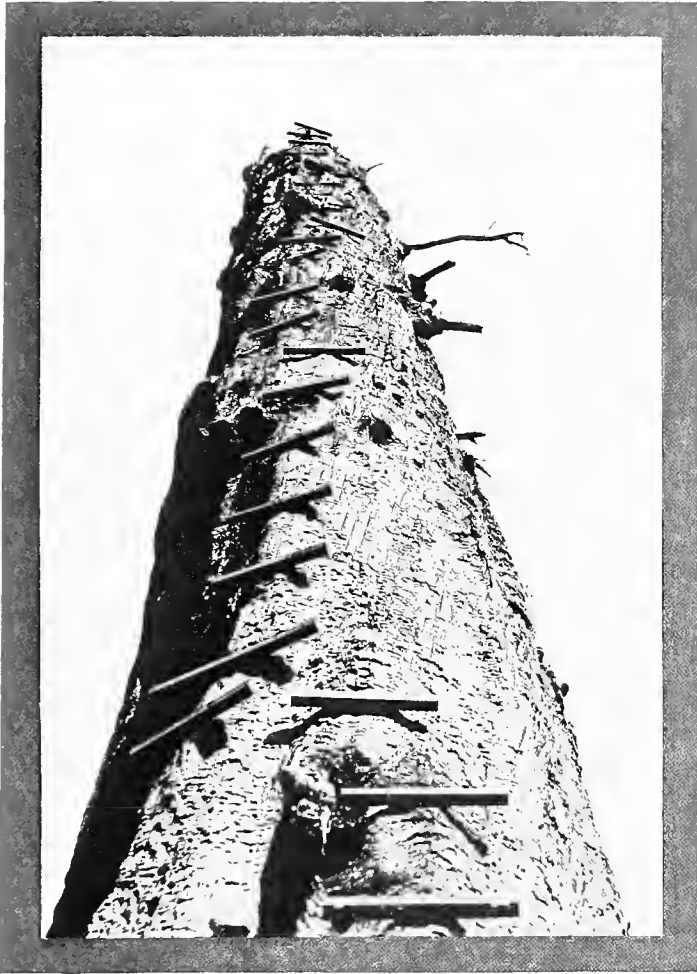
Taken in Humboldt County

Snapped by A. G. Vrooman

### THE VIEWER AND THE VIEWED

YES, IT'S MESILF; AND I COULD *not* SEE THE NEST, BECAUSE IT PROVED TO BE WITHIN TWENTY INCHES OF THE GROUND

## *The Vaux Swift*



*Taken in Humboldt County*

*Photo by the Author*

### THE LADDER OF ILLUSION

IT LED THE AUTHOR UP AN 80-FOOT STUB AND HALF AS FAR DOWN INSIDE, BUT IT YIELDED ONLY AN "EMPTY"

sycamore. In Humboldt County, where these birds are probably more nearly common than anywhere else in the State, Redwood stubs are used. A nest found by Mr. Franklin J. Smith, in the summer of 1905, was composed entirely of pine needles instead of twigs. In this case, also, the bird had descended to such a depth, in a thirty foot stub, that the nest was only two feet above the ground.

Almost invariably the birds nest within twenty inches or such a matter of the bottom of the cavity, no matter how elevated the orifice. And, since the forces of disintegration are at their feeblest when furthest removed from air, the soft punk wood at the bottom of these shafts avails to preserve the not infrequently dropped eggs.

The Vaux Swift also nests, according to Mr.

C. Irvin Clay, of Eureka, in the stumps of logged-off redwood lands. The birds enter by weather fissures, and since the stumps are almost always undermined by fire, it sometimes happens that the nest is found beneath the level of the ground. Another investigator, Mr. John M. Davis, finds that if the birds are robbed early in the season they will repeat in the same tree, or in one closely neighboring. Mr. Davis has a few pets, "old hens," who remember him

*The Vaux Swift*



*Taken in Humboldt County* Photo by the Author  
NEST AND EGGS OF VAUX SWIFT, IN SITU

pleasantly year by year, and the situation looks "dead easy" to an outsider. But after we had tried for two weeks to break into the game and had ruined two prospects of our own we were glad to avail ourselves of his skilled services. A well screened redwood stub meekly reposing within the corporate limits of Eureka, and supporting an ancient and rickety cleat ladder of Mr. Davis's construction, yielded us the photographs and the

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eggs shown on this page.

Sitting birds, when discovered, drop below the nest and hide, clinging easily to the smoothest shaft by means of their tiny, needle-clawed feet, supported by the spiny tail. The young birds, likewise, quickly forsake the frail shelf which first cradled them; but it is several weeks before they get a wider



*Taken in Humboldt County* Photo by the Author

AN INSIDE VIEW  
LOOKING DOWN THE BARREL OF A HOLLOW REDWOOD STUB

view of the world than that which is afforded by their dismal nursery.

A careful observer in southern California will never fail to note the passage of the Vaux Swifts in migrations; but they are very variable both as to abundance and time of appearance. Their movements are controlled, no doubt, by weather conditions and the attendant variation of insect life. I have seen thousands of them in a day here at Santa Barbara under conditions which suggested a major representation of the species. They are never, I believe, counted locally abundant on their breeding grounds, and it would be safe to say that their total number does not approximate one-tenth that of eastern *pelagica*. Vaux Swifts mingle freely with others of the Cypseline kind, and with Swallows as well. They could never be mistaken for White-throats, nor seriously confused with the Tree Swallows, but when they are moving at considerable heights, one casts about in vain for some standard of comparison which may serve to distinguish them from Black Swifts (*Nephæctes niger borealis*).

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No. 190

## Hairy Woodpecker

### No. 190a Modoc Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 393d, part. *Dryobates villosus orius* Oberholser.

**Synonym.**—SIERRA WOODPECKER (Ridgway).

**Description.**—*Adult male:* Above, in general, black, glossy (at least) on head and nape, paling, brownish dusky, on quills; nuchal feathers slightly lengthened, the anterior ones scarlet-red, forming a short nuchal band; nasal tufts dingy white; a narrow white superciliary and a broad white rictal stripe, curving upward and sometimes nearly meeting fellow on hind nape (rarely connecting with white of back); a black area included on side of head continuous with nape; a black malar stripe broadening behind; a lengthened white patch down middle of back, connecting with sides of rump, or not; one to several rounded spots of white on middle wing-coverts, or not; primaries (except usually the first) and the outer secondaries marked with angular white spots on outer webs and with large rounded spots on the inner webs, the spots tending to fall into bars on the closed wing; the two outer pairs of tail-feathers white on exposed portion, and the succeeding pair chiefly white on outer web and tip; under parts sordid white or dingy brownish gray. Bill and feet plumbeous; iris reddish brown. *Adult female:* Like male, but without red on head. *Immature:* Like adult, but crown, instead of nape, red (scarlet, grenadine red, grenadine, or even yellowish); the forehead and often the crown finely spotted with white. Length about 228.6 (9.00); wing 129 (5.08); tail 80 (3.15); bill 32 (1.26); tarsus 23 (.91). Bill of female 27 (1.06).

**Remarks.**—*Dryobates villosus* is a highly variable species, of which some twenty forms are now recognized. The chief variable is that of size, which increases from the diminutive *auduboni* of Florida to a form, *leucomelas*, or *septentrionalis* (Nuttall), of interior Alaska, which bulks fully twice as large. Another variable developed in

## The Hairy Woodpeckers

the West is that of soiled or darkened underparts. The form *orius* occupies a mediating position between *monticola* of the northern Rockies, which is larger and has white underparts, and, on the one hand, *hyloscopus*, a smaller bird, of south coastal and interior California, and on the other, *harrisi*, a "saturated," or brown-bellied form, from our northwest coast. Intergradation is, therefore, from an assumed center in Modoc County with *hyloscopus* through the northern Sierras and with *harrisi* through the Shasta region and westward. As matter of fact, the real center of distribution of this form is much further north, in Oregon, and it could never have been separated from *hyloscopus* on the basis of California specimens alone.

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size; black-and-white pattern of head (10 alternating areas of black and white viewed anteriorly at latitude of eye) *with size*, distinctive; back *not* barred, as distinguished from *D. scalaris cactophilus* and *D. nuttalli*; larger; a little larger than *D. v. hyloscopus*; much lighter below than *D. v. harrisi*.

**Nesting.**—Much as in succeeding form.

**Range of *D. villosus*.**—Wooded portions of North America south to Panama.

**Range of *D. v. orius*.**—The Sierra-Cascade Mountain system from south central Washington to central California, and east over the lesser ranges to Nevada.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident in northeastern portion of State. Typically in Modoc County, shading into *hyloscopus* somewhere in the Tahoe sector, and into *harrisi* in the Trinity Mountains.

**Authorities.**—**Sclater** (*Picus harrisi*), Proc. Zool. Soc. London, 1858, p. 3 (near Shasta); **Ray**, Auk, vol. xxii., 1905, p. 365 (Tahoe region; desc. nest and eggs); **Oberholser**, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xl., 1911, p. 597 (orig. desc.; Quincy).

### No. 190b Cabanis's Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 393d. **Dryobates villosus hyloscopus** Cabanis & Heine.

**Description.**—Similar to *D. v. orius*, but somewhat smaller. Length 203.2-222.25 (8.00-8.75); wing 122 (4.81); tail 75 (2.95); bill 31 (1.22); tarsus 21 (.83). Female bill 27 (1.06).

**Remarks.**—This long-recognized form exhibits the tendency toward reduction of size in southern birds; but this tendency is less pronounced on the Pacific Coast than in the East. *Hyloscopus* intergrades with *harrisi* through an indeterminate area north of San Francisco Bay; and with *orius* through a still less determinable area in the central northern Sierras.

**Recognition Marks.**—As in preceding.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: An excavation in tree, either live or dead, and usually at moderate heights; lined sparingly with chips. *Eggs*: 3 to 6, usually 4; pure white. Av. size (subspecies not clearly distinguished) 24.9 x 18.5 (.98 x .73). *Season*: April-May (El Monte, Los Angeles Co., Mar. 25, 1900, by Antonin Jay); one brood.

**Range of *D. v. hyloscopus*** (Chiefly within California).—The timbered districts of northern Lower California and southern California north Sierrawise to Mono Lake and the White Mountains, coastwise to Mendocino County.

**Authorities.**—**Vigors** (*Picus villosus*), Zool. Voy. "Blossom," 1839, p. 23 (Monterey); **Cabanis and Heine**, Mus. Hein., iv., heft 2, 1863, p. 69 (orig. desc.; San Jose); **Bendire**, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 53; **Beal**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 34, 1910, p. 15, part (food); **Oberholser**, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xl., 1911, p. 597 (monogr.).

## The Hairy Woodpeckers

### No. 190c White-breasted Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 393d, part. *Dryobates villosus leucothorectis* Oberholser.

**Synonyms.**—SOUTHWESTERN HAIRY WOODPECKER. ARIZONA HAIRY WOODPECKER.

**Description.**—*Adults*: Similar to *D. v. orius*, but slightly smaller; the underparts pure white. A very dubious race. Males average: wing 126.8 (4.99); tail 79.4 (3.126); bill 30.8 (1.21); tarsus 21.5 (.846). Females smaller.

**Range of *D. v. leucothorectis*.**—Canadian and Transition areas of the desert ranges of the Southwestern States.

**Range in California.**—At least the White and Panamint Mountains.

**Authority.**—Grinnell, Condor, vol. xx., 1918, p. 86.

### No. 190d Harris's Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 393c. *Dryobates villosus harrisi* (Audubon).

**Description.**—Similar to *D. v. orius*, but underparts (including lateral rectrices) much darker, buffy brown, or pale snuff-brown; white of back and head usually tinged with buffy brownish, the white never pure save on superciliaries, and back-patch, and (always) spots of wings. Length and proportions not appreciably different.

**Nesting.**—As in *D. v. hyloscopus*.

**Range of *D. v. harrisi*.**—Humid Pacific coastal region from southeastern Alaska to Humboldt Bay; south in winter to Monterey.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident of the humid northwest coastal counties; east in winter through the Siskiyou Mountains, and irregularly south to Monterey.

**Authorities.**—Newberry (*Picus harrisi*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. x., pt. iv, 1859, p. 89 (n. Calif.); Shufeldt, Auk, vol. v., 1888, p. 212, figs. (pterylosis); Anderson and Grinnell, Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., 1903, p. 7 (Siskiyou Mts.; crit.); Jenkins, Auk, vol. xxiii., 1906, p. 168, map (variation, distr., etc.); Oberholser, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xl., 1911, p. 597 (monogr.).

THE HAIRY Woodpeckers in their three localized forms may be said roughly to occupy all the mountain forests and timbered streams in California; but the occupation is not a close one at the lower levels; and the bird is decidedly more abundant in the northern and more elevated portions of its range. Again, the depths of the forest do not often claim him, for his favorite resorts are old burns and the edges of clearings, logged-off areas, open, rangy woods, and interrupted groves. In summer the bird ranges up to timberline, a little above the normal breeding level; and in winter it visits the live oaks and the sycamores, or even takes a turn through the chaparral. Although a resident, therefore, in the accommodated sense, the year around, we are quite likely to overlook his presence until cold weather appears to quicken his pulses, and to send him careering noisily over the treetops. He has spent the night, it may be, in the heart of a fir stub at the end of his winter tunnel, and

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Taken in Oregon

Photo by Bohlman & Finley

HARRIS WOODPECKER

now he covers a half-wooded pasture with great bounds of flight, shouting, *plick, plick*, from time to time; and he gives a loud rolling call—a dozen of these notes in swift succession—as he pulls up in the top of a dead tree to begin the day's work.

He is an active fellow, hitching up or dropping down the tree-trunk with brusque ease, and publishing his progress now and then in cheerful tones. But he knows how to be patient too. In the search for hidden worms and burrowing larvæ, it seems not improbable that the Woodpecker depends largely upon the sense of hearing—that he practices auscultation, in fact. A meditative tap, tap, is followed by a pause, during which the bird evidently marks the effect of his strokes, noting the rustle of apprehension or attempted escape on the part of the hidden morsel. It is not unusual for the bird to spend half an hour tunneling for a single taste, and even then the wary game may withdraw along some tunnel of its own, even beyond the reach of the bird's extensible tongue.

Nearly half of the Cabanis Woodpecker's food consists of the larvæ of wood-boring beetles (the *Cerambycidæ* and *Buprestidæ*); and of the remainder the caterpillars of various injurious moths form a large per cent. Wild raspberries and blackberries are eaten in summer, and certain hardy fruits, such as cornel berries, acorns, and the pits of the islay, or evergreen cherry (*Prunus ilicifolia*), eke out the winter sustenance. But the Hairy Woodpecker has never been accused of depredations in the orchard, while his services as a supervising forester are beyond recompense.

The bird has other uses for timber besides that of larder. He loves a dry tree, as well, for its noise-making possibilities. And I suppose if we were astute enough in observation, we could decipher his signalling system, or musical scale. Speaking of this habit, as exhibited in the San



## *The Hairy Woodpeckers*

Bernardino Mountains, Dr. Grinnell says:<sup>1</sup> "The resonant rattling drum of the Cabanis Woodpecker identified this species from any other of this region. Near Dry Lake, 9000 feet altitude, dead tamarack pines were selected for this purpose, and on June 23rd, 1905, I listened for many minutes to a remarkable demonstration of this bird. Different branches



*Taken in the Warner Mts.*

*Photo by the Author*

THE UPPER LIMITS OF CABANIS'S NESTING RANGE

were tattooed in rapid succession, so that a xylophone-like variety of tones was produced, very impressive and far-carrying through the otherwise quiet forest."

The nest of this bird must also be excavated in a tree, either a dead fir or pine, or, more rarely, a living alder. It may be at any convenient height in the tree, from four to eighty feet; but it will be about ten inches deep and it will have no lining save a few fine chips, among which the crystal white eggs, four or five in number, lie partially imbedded. Incubation is begun anywhere from the last week in March to the last in May, according to altitude; and but one brood is raised in a season. These woodpeckers are exceptionally valiant in defense of their young, the male,

<sup>1</sup>"The Biota of the San Bernardino Mountains," by Joseph Grinnell, Berkeley. The University Press, Dec 31, 1908.

## *The Downy Woodpeckers*

in particular, becoming almost demented from indignation at the appearance of an enemy near the home nest.

It is a fair question whether the Harris Woodpecker of the extreme Northwest did not get his dingy breast through long association with his grimy grub-cupboards. The dead trees which he frequents, where not actually blackened by fire, are often stained with decaying fungic growths and clinging spores, so that the snowy shirt-front of the eastern Hairy Woodpecker would be small satisfaction to him here. Or if this grimy condition of tree-trunk be not the *terminus a quo* the smoky front of the Woodpecker started, it is certainly the *terminus ad quem* its color is accurately tending. And, of course, it is easy to see how these conditions are due exactly to the humidity which prevails on the Pacific Coast, and to a lesser degree through the Trinity and Siskiyou ranges. The dry dirt of the Rocky Mountain pines is by comparison clean dirt, and so *Dryobates villosus* is able to take some decent pride in his linen as he proceeds eastward.

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No. 191

## Downy Woodpecker

### No. 191a Rocky Mountain Downy Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 394b. *Dryobates pubescens leucurus* Hartlaub.

**Synonym.**—BATCHELDER'S WOODPECKER.

**Description.**—Similar to *D. villosus orius*, of which it is a close miniature. The differences are chiefly in the spotting of the wings and the pattern of the lateral tail-feathers: to-wit, spotting of coverts more extensive, involving tips of greater as well as middle coverts; spotting of quills more extensive, involving all the flight-feathers and appearing prominently as paired spots on exposed portions of inner tertials; the two outer pairs of rectrices marked with black in two or three broken or entire subterminal bars; the black of malar stripe reduced and diffused, especially anteriorly. Sex changes as in *D. villosus*. Length about 165.1 (6.50); wing 100 (3.94); tail 63 (2.48); bill 17 (.67); tarsus 16.3 (.64).

**Remarks.**—The geographical variations of *D. pubescens* follow roughly the outlines of its larger prototype, *D. villosus*, but the differences are not so far developed, insomuch that only seven forms are recognized within the same area. The analogy in the variation of the two species is especially close within the limits of California. *D. p. leucurus*, like *D. v. orius*, is the larger, whiter-bellied form, which establishes connections with the northern Rockies. But because it holds the ground covered by three recognizable forms of the *villosus* group, *monticola*, *leucothorectis*, and *orius*, it comes to us with pure white underparts, in stronger contrast to the prevalent form, *turati*.

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; black and white color-pattern of head; back

## The Downy Woodpeckers

white centrally, contrasting with solid black of shoulders, *not barred*, as distinguished from the equal-sized Nuttall and Cactus Woodpeckers; a miniature of *D. villosus* subsp.

**Nesting.**—Much as in next form.

**Range of *Dryobates pubescens*.**—Temperate North America.

**Range of *D. p. leucurus*.**—Western United States and central British Columbia from the eastern members and outliers of the Sierrro-Cascade system east to eastern Montana and western Nebraska, south to Arizona and New Mexico; breeding throughout its range and wandering somewhat more widely in winter.

**Distribution in California.**—Summer resident in the Transition zone of the Warner Mountains, and in the pinyon belt of the Panamint and Grapevine Mountains, Inyo County. Casual at lower levels in winter, chiefly east of the desert divide.

**Authorities.**—**Fisher**, Condor, vol. iv., 1902, p. 69 (crit., diagnosis, nomencl.); **Grinnell**, Condor, vol. xxv., 1923, p. 30 (status in Calif.; nomencl.).

### No. 191b Willow Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 394e. ***Dryobates pubescens turati*** (Malherbe).

**Description.**—Similar to *D. p. leucurus*, but somewhat smaller, and shade of underparts much darker, buffy brown or grayish drab. Length 146-158.75 (5.75-6.25); wing 92.5 (3.64); tail 55 (2.165); bill 16 (.63); tarsus 16.1 (.63).

**Remarks.**—While the lines of confluence between *leucurus* and *turati* are still imperfectly made out, Ridgway's suggestion that *turati* occupies Upper Austral and Transition zones, save in the extreme Northwest and Southeast is probably the correct one. Hence, although *turati* is the analogue of *hyloscopus* of the *villosus* group, it is much more nearly related to *gairdneri* than *hyloscopus* is to *harrisi*. It may be assumed, therefore, that *turati* is intrusive from the Northwest, rather than locally derived, and this assumption is supported by occasional specimens from the southern Transition, which are nearly or quite as dark as those labelled *gairdneri* from Humboldt County.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A hole excavated by the birds in tree, usually deciduous, as willow, cottonwood, alder, and the like; at moderate heights. *Eggs*: 4 or 5, 7 of record; white. Av. size 19.1 x 15.2 (.75 x .60). *Season*: April-May; one brood.

**Range of *D. p. turati*** (Wholly contained within California).—Resident in Upper Sonoran and Transition zones of California, except in extreme northwestern and northeastern sections and in the desert mountains. Largely confined to deciduous timber along the banks of streams.

**Authorities.**—**Nuttall** (*Picus meridionalis*), Man. Orn. U. S. and Can., 2d ed., vol. i., 1840, p. 690 (Calif.); **Malherbe**, Monographie des Picidees, i., 1861, p. 125 planche 28 (orig. desc.; Monterey); **Bendire**, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 58, part; **Fisher**, Condor, vol. iv., 1902, p. 68 (diag., crit., meas.); **McAtee**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 37, 1912, p. 17, part (food).

### No. 191c Gairdner's Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 394a. ***Dryobates pubescens gairdneri*** (Audubon).

**Description.**—Like *D. p. turati*, but underparts averaging darker, and white of head and back often tinged with brownish; also a little larger. Length 152.4-165.1 (6.00-6.50); wing 95 (3.74); tail 58 (2.28); bill 16.4 (.645); tarsus 16.6 (.65). Female a little smaller.

## The Downy Woodpeckers

**Remarks.**—This form is the exact analogue of the "saturated" form, *D. villosus harrisi*, having its center of abundance in the humid coastal belt of Oregon and Washington. No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between it and *turati*, however, whether north or south of San Francisco Bay. Indeed, *gairdneri-turati* may be regarded as a gradually paling strain, intrusive from the Northwest. The recognition of *gairdneri* in California illustrates a sequence rather than establishes a fact.

**Range of *D. p. gairdneri*.**—Resident in humid Transition zone from southern British Columbia to Mendocino County, California.

**Authorities.**—(?) **Heermann** (*Picus meridionalis*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. x., pt. iv., no. 2, 1859, p. 57 (mts. of n. Calif.); **Fisher**, Condor, vol. iv., 1902, p. 68 (diag., meas., Calif. localities of capture); **Anderson and Grinnell**, Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., 1903, p. 7 (Siskiyou Mts.; crit.).

THE DOWNY Woodpecker is an almost perfect miniature of the Hairy type, even in flight and voice. The parallelism between the two species is, moreover, so close that it follows them in their geographical changes, for both are wide-spread. The Willow Woodpecker, *D. p. turati*, is, therefore, roughly the analogue of the Cabanis, *D. v. hyloscopus*; the Batchelder, *D. p. leucurus*, of the Modoc, *D. v. orius*; and especially the Gairdner, *D. p. gairdneri*, that of the Harris Woodpecker, *D. v. harrisi*; for to the same causes must be attributed the soiling of bosoms once immaculate. In making further comparison, however, we find that the Willow Woodpecker (under which name we may most conveniently speak of California Downies) is much more restricted in its range than its larger congeners. It is nearly confined to the Upper Sonoran zone, save in the northern part of the State, where it invades Transition; and in winter it may make little excursions into the desert to hobnob with the Cactus Woodpecker, *D. scalaris*. In its normal range it is chiefly confined to deciduous timber, and shows a great preference for wooded bottoms and the borders of streams. Willow trees are everywhere its most natural association, yet sycamores, alders, and occasionally oaks and fir trees afford nesting sites. Foraging expeditions are regularly undertaken into neighboring groves of live oak or pine, as the case may be, and visits are paid, wherever the cover allows, to apple orchards.

It is as an orchardist that the Willow Woodpecker deserves the most careful consideration. Bird-lovers are, perhaps, prone to superlatives in commending their friends, but it is safe to say that a more useful bird *for his ounces* than the Downy Woodpecker does not exist. He eats not only ants and the larvæ of wood-boring beetles, but scale insects, plant lice, and the pupæ of the detestable codling moth. The evidence is clear that these incomparable tree experts, together with their friends, the nuthatches, the chickadees, and the creepers, would insure the health of our orchards if they were numerous enough. It becomes of the highest



GAIRDNER WOODPECKER

importance, then, to study their welfare in turn. In the northern and more elevated valleys of the State, it may be worth while to offer them

### *The Downy Woodpeckers*

nuts or to hang out a bit of suet in winter. In the South no such precautions are necessary. A fundamental consideration, however, is the provision of suitable nesting sites. Experiment has shown that the Downy's forage range during the breeding season is not extensive. The clamoring young are fed by the product of nearby trees (fed, it may be, a thousand insects a day). Their services, therefore, must be secured in the orchard; and to this end the orchardist must consent to leave certain dead branches—a foot or so at the base of the larger ones will do—for a nesting site. Dead wood, of course, invites insects; but the most serious and frequent mistake which our California orchardists make is to trim out all the dead wood from the fruit trees. A pair of Willow Woodpeckers, or of Slender-billed Nuthatches, will clean out all the dangerous pests from a dead tree, and sixteen live ones to boot.

It is worth while, too, from almost any standpoint, to cultivate the friendship of a pair of these birds. Their abounding good cheer, as expressed in vigorous *pink* notes and in a merry rolling cry, as well as their untiring industry, may well be an inspiration to any farmer boy. As for the bird-man, he never feels quite at home in the river grove until this capable elf has come around to say "howdy," or to shrewdly size up the invader. Of course the pretense that that particular tree right over your head needs inspection at that particular moment, *tap-tap, tap-tap*, is as hollow as the accidental meeting of lovers on the way home from school,—and for something the same reason, if we deserve our luck.

It is at times difficult to distinguish, in the case of the *pink* notes and the longer rattling call, between the voices of this bird and the Cabanis; but the notes of the smaller bird are usually much less in volume and strength, and have a rather more nasal quality. All woodpeckers have, also, a sort of signal system, or Morse code, consisting of sundry tattoos on resonant wood. These calls are used principally, or exclusively, during the mating season, and consist, in the case of the Willow, of six or seven taps in regular and moderate succession. The birds have favorite places for the production of these sounds; and it is probable that birds are able to distinguish their calling mates by the timbre of the smitten wood, as well as by some subtle variation of tempo which escapes unfamiliar ears.

Willow Woodpeckers, in the wild, place their nests at considerable heights in deciduous trees, and those, if possible, among thick growths on moist ground. Both sexes assist in excavation, as in incubation. Partially decayed wood is selected, and an opening made about an inch and a quarter in diameter. After driving straight in for an inch or two, the passage turns down and widens two or three diameters. At a depth of a foot or so the crystal white eggs are deposited on a neat bed of fine chips.

## The Cactus Woodpecker

Incubation lasts twelve days, and the young are hatched some time in May.

Mr. Bowles asserts that when a tree containing eggs is rapped, the sitting bird will try, sometimes successfully, to deceive the inquirer by coming to the entrance and dropping out a mouthful of chippings, thus conveying the impression that she is still building. It's a shame to give it away.

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No. 192

### Cactus Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 396. *Dryobates scalaris cactophilus* Oberholser.

**Synonym.**—Formerly called BAIRD'S WOODPECKER.

**Description.**—*Adult male:* Extreme forehead and nasal tufts snuff-brown, shading into sooty brown of forehead, thence through black of crown, narrowly tipped with scarlet-red and broadly subtipped with white, to nearly pure scarlet-red of sides of occiput and nape, the fore-crown thus speckled with red and white in varying proportions; cervix (narrowly), upper tail-coverts, and tail from above, black; back and wings sooty brown or brownish dusky, heavily and equally barred or spotted with white, the spotting of wings involving flight-feathers arranged in rows, equivalent to bars when in repose; sides of head and neck, including superciliaries and remaining underparts, pale buffy brown fading to white on sides and crissum; included area on sides of head black, invaded by malar streaks of buffy brown or whitish; the sides of breast sharply and heavily spotted with brownish black; the sides, flanks, and crissum indistinctly barred with dusky; the under (outer) feathers of the folded tail equal-barred black-and-white. Bill and feet dusky horn-color; iris brown. *Adult female:* Like male, but without red on crown or nape, glossy black instead, shading to sooty brown on forehead; forehead sometimes sparingly speckled with white. *Young male:* Like adult male, but nape and sides of occiput black, the red carried forward and prevailing on crown; plumage softer and pattern slightly blended. *Young female:* Like young male, but red of crown somewhat reduced. Length of adult male: 158.75-184.2 (6.25-7.25); wing 104 (4.09); tail 60.8 (2.39); bill 22.7 (.89); tarsus 18.1 (.71). Females average slightly less.

**Remarks.**—*Dryobates scalaris* is a vigorous and considerably differentiated stock prevalent in Mexico (including Lower California) and Central America. Fifteen subspecies are recognized by Ridgway, of which two reach the United States, *cactophilus* widely, and *symplectus* more narrowly, through central Texas to southeastern Colorado. *D. s. cactophilus* may be regarded as a younger brother of *D. nuttalli*, more recently arrived from Mexico, and already crowding upon and interpenetrating the range of the older bird. Hybrids between the two forms are suspected.

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; black-and-white barred upperparts distinctive from all save *D. nuttalli*, from which it requires careful discrimination: *cac-*

## The Cactus Woodpecker

*tophilus* is browner above, more strikingly, heavily, and numerously barred, with less of black on sides of head, and red (of adult male) pervading crown as well as nape.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A hole at moderate height in giant cactus, Joshua-tree, willow, or other tree. *Eggs*: Usually 4; pure white, glossy. Av. size 20.7 x 15.9 (.82 x .63). *Season*: March 25–May, rarely June; one brood.

**Range of *Dryobates scalaris*.**—The southwestern United States south over the highlands of Mexico to Yucatan and British Honduras.

**Range of *D. s. cactophilus*.**—Resident in the Sonoran zone of the southwestern states, from western Texas to southern Nevada and southeastern California.

**Distribution in California.**—The southeastern deserts, broadly; hence, occasionally invading the domain of *nuttalli* through Walker and San Geronio Passes.

**Authorities.**—**Baird** (*Picus scalaris*), in Rep. Stansbury's Surv. Great Salt Lake, 1852, p. 333 (Calif.); **Bendire**, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 65, pt.; **Oberholser**, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., vol. xl., 1911, p. 140 (monogr.); **Grinnell and Swarth**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. x., 1913, p. 241 (San Jacinto region; desc. nests and habits; distr.; crit.); **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xii., 1914, p. 132 (Colo. Valley; habits, desc. nest and eggs, etc.).

WE HAVE become so accustomed to associating Woodpeckers with big timber, that it strikes us as uncanny to flush a Cactus Woodpecker from a creosote bush at the edge of the desert, and to have it go *plicking* contentedly from one bit of dwarf vegetation to another. It is an inexorable law of nature that every available space shall be occupied; so here is Sir Cactophilus, the apostle of content, making the best of a very humble lot, and envying the mighty Logcock not a whit. Of course it must not be understood that the Cactus Woodpecker tries to live in the central wastes of the desert; for however much it may forage over the creosote and cholla patches, on occasion, it requires something of more ample girth for a nesting site. Hence, its breeding range is confined to the more fruitful upper edges of the Lower Sonoran zone, and to the moister bottoms. In the former situation the dried stalks of the agave and the lesser yucca (*whipplei*), or of the Joshua tree (*Yucca arborescens*), and the Mohave Yucca offer asylum. In the valley of the Colorado, fearing no rivalry from *D. pubescens turati*, the Cactus Woodpecker is able to monopolize the willows which grow so rankly along the lagoons. In the two or three limited areas where the giant cactus crosses the river to the California side, the Cactus, too, gladly establishes its home within the fluted columns, as it does habitually in Arizona. The ripened fruit of this giant cactus the bird counts a special delicacy. Outside of these favored spots, the stubborn mesquite tree must be conquered, and it is rather a pathetic sight to see a nesting cavity which has been drilled with infinite pains out of this iron-like wood. Last of all, comes the telegraph pole to offer its more easily-won shelter to this child of the desert. *Cactophilus*, in his fresh enthusiasm, is ready to be rechristened *telegraphpoleophilus*,





Carina (upper pair) and Nattali Woodbeckers  
Male and female of same species. N. 111. 111.

*Carina (upper pair)*

The Cactus Woodpecker



**Cactus (upper pair) and Nuttall Woodpeckers**

Male and female of each, about 1/2 life size





Alan Brooks



## The Nuttall Woodpecker



Taken in Los Angeles County

Photo by the Author

JOSHUA TREES (*Yucca arborescens*) ON THE MOHAVE DESERT  
CACTUS WOODPECKERS AND MANY OTHER SPECIES OF BIRDS NEST IN THESE YUCCA "FORESTS"

for the attenuated forest planted by Western Union, and stretching gauntly across the Colorado Desert, gives our woodpecker access to leagues of territory otherwise unattainable. However, too much enthusiasm on the part of these little miners may impair the usefulness of a small telegraph pole. Indeed, it is to be feared that *D. scalaris* and his brood are *personæ non gratae* to those magnates who depend upon W. U. dividends. Shucks! Let the birds have their fun. What's a telegraph pole between friends!

One does come to have a very friendly feeling for these plucky little chaps, whose business is so conducted in the open. The very lizards are endeared to the true "desert rat." How much more this saucy Ladder-back, with his *plink plink*, and his long rolling chirrup!

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No. 193

### Nuttall's Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 397. *Dryobates nuttalli* (Gambel).

**Description.**—Similar to preceding species. *Adult male in fresh plumage:* Nasal tufts white or pale brownish buffy; forehead and crown glossy black, speckled

## *The Nuttall Woodpecker*

sparingly (but with increase both in size and abundance toward hind-crown) with white; nape, broadly, scarlet-red; superciliary, expanding on side of neck, and a sharp rictal stripe under eye, white; a broad postocular area and a malar stripe, connecting behind and continuous with broad band across cervix, upper tail-coverts, and tail above, glossy black; back and wings black, shading posteriorly to dusky, barred or spotty-barred with white; underparts white, tinged on breast and belly with pale yellowish buff, or brownish buff; sides of breast and sides coarse-spotted, flanks and crissum coarse-barred with black; graduated series of exposed under lateral rectrices white, crossed by three or four broken or irregular black bars. Bill and feet dark horn. With the advance of the season and usually in spring and summer the white tips of the coronal feathers wear off, leaving a solid black crown. *Adult female*: Like male, but without red on head, a few scattering coronal or nuchal white specks wear off in spring. *Young male*: Like adult male, but red shifted forward to crown, where mingled with white specks. *Young female*: Like young male but red restricted to crown; the white speckling similarly restricted to middle of forehead and crown. Length of adult male about 177.8 (7.00); wing 102.7 (4.04); tail 63.8 (2.51); bill 20.8 (.82); tarsus 18.4 (.72). Females perceptibly smaller.

**Remarks.**—*D. nuttalli* bears closest relationship to *D. scalaris*, of which it is undoubtedly an early derivative. Presumably a zonal or associational connection suitable to the advance of *nuttalli*'s ancestors once existed between California and Mexico. This zonal bridge was later destroyed, and *nuttalli* evolved in southern California in the direction of increase of black and in the clearing of the underparts. It is noteworthy also that the shifting of red from crown to nape of the male approaching maturity, follows the example of *D. villosus* and *D. pubescens*, this tendency, although manifest, having been retarded in the case of *D. scalaris*. *D. scalaris cactophilus*, now acclimated to arid conditions, has latterly overtaken its long-lost brother, and there is a bit of a fight on along *nuttalli*'s southeastern borders.

**Recognition Marks.**—Sparrow size; black-and-white-barred upperparts distinctive within range, except with regard to *D. scalaris cactophilus* (see ante).

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A hole excavated at any height in tree, live or dead, lined copiously with chips. *Eggs*: 4 or 5; white, glossy. Av. size 21.3 x 16.2 (.84 x .64). *Season*: April 10–May 20; one brood.

**Range of *Dryobates nuttalli*** (Chiefly confined within California).—Resident in the Upper Sonoran life zone west of the Sierras from southwestern Oregon to northwestern Lower California. Casual on the edges of the deserts. Not found in the northwest humid district nor upon the islands.

**Authorities.**—**Gambel** (*Picus nuttallii*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. i., 1843, p. 259 (orig. desc.; Los Angeles); **Gault**, Bull. Ridgway, Orn. Club, no. 2, 1887, p. 78 (range, habits, etc.); **Bendire**, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 65; **J. Mailliard**, Condor, vol. ii., 1900, p. 13 (plumage changes); **Mailliard and Grinnell**, Condor, vol. vii., 1905, p. 75 (apparent hybrid).

ALTHOUGH one who is forming the acquaintance of the Nuttall Woodpecker soon learns where to look for him, his range is hard to characterize in terms of associations. Upper Sonoran, foothill, oak, live oak, chaparral, deciduous trees bordering narrow stream beds—all these apply to *nuttalli* well enough, but they are not exhaustive, save for the

## The Nuttall Woodpecker

first, which is all inclusive. Within Upper Sonoran limits it is, perhaps, easier to tell where he will not be found; thus, not (or only occasionally) in pine timber; not in stands of pure willow (which are given over to *D. pubescens turati*); not in orchards, nor about cultures of any sort; not, most decidedly, "nesting in giant cactus." (One may be very sure that Xantus's classical instance, oft quoted, concerned itself with *D. scalaris*, instead of *D. nuttalli*.) Least of all, is it "seldom found along streams," as one precocious authority<sup>1</sup> avers. A narrow canyon whose floor harbors sycamores and alders and bay trees, nourished by a purling stream, and whose sides are lined with live oaks which run up into ceanothus chaparral, is precisely the best place to look for *D. nuttalli*.

*D. nuttalli* is an irritable, not to say noisy, beastie; and it is ten to one you hear him tittering apprehensively from the depths of the chaparral before you see him emerge to fly over the tops of the cover. The Nuttall Woodpecker, as a good friend in the Cooper Club declares,



Taken in San Diego County

Photo by Donald R. Dickey

### YOUNG NUTTALL WOODPECKERS

<sup>1</sup> "Birds of California," by Irene Grosvenor Wheelock, p. 365. This widely circulated product of a Chicago pen exhibits throughout its cheery pages the valor of ignorance.

*The Nuttall  
Woodpecker*



*Taken in San Bernardino County*

*Photo by Pierce*

A COMPLETE EXHIBIT  
EGGS AND FEMALE PARENT, NUTTALL WOODPECKER

always has a grouch on, and you are sure to be challenged as you pass, by a repetition of his double notes of distrust, *ticket, ticket—ticket it*. Besides these, he makes frequent use of a rattling, staccato cry which reverberates through the woods in defiance of all the decencies. This noisy publication is probably intended for home consumption, a keep-in-touch note, powerful enough to penetrate the mazes of the forest, whereby a distant partner is advised of progressive movement. This call is almost invariably sounded, therefore, before a bird quits a given locality.

Exact rules may be drafted for Nuttall's nesting from a single instance. Thus, its nest is always excavated in "a decayed part of the tree"—except when it elects to drill into the live heart-wood of an oak or a sycamore, as I have seen it do in Los Canoes Canyon. "It

nests at moderate heights"—from 2½ to 60 feet!—"in a willow tree"—also alder, elder, cottonwood, sycamore, live oak, maul oak, white oak, etc.

The male Nuttall not only takes a lively interest in all matters connected with the nesting, but it is believed that he monopolizes the task of excavation. Certainly he takes his turn at incubating, and he is invariably,



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in my experience, the more valiant of the two in defense of young. The female, however, is probably the closer sitter, as there are several instances in which she has submitted to the hand rather than forsake her trust. Fresh eggs, typically four, are deposited on a generous cushion of sawdust about the 20th of April. Incubation lasts two weeks; and when the chicks are astir the father is fairly beside himself with joy and apprehension. In fact, if you ever require a symbol of dotting solicitude, picture a male Nuttall Woodpecker thrusting his head into a dark hole to make sure that nothing has spilled out of it since his last inspection—which occurred exactly three seconds ago. Nothing could happen, you know; but then again, it might. *Voyons!*

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No. 194

### White-headed Woodpecker

#### No. 194 Northern White-headed Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 399. *Xenopicus albolarvatus albolarvatus* (Cassin).

**Description.**—*Adult male:* General plumage black and white; head and neck white, nasal tufts sometimes tinged with brownish buffy, the crown sometimes ashy or buffy or even dingy plumbeous through abrasion of white tips, interrupted by narrow postocular stripe of black, and bounded behind by nuchal band, spectrum red; flight-feathers dull black; a large white patch on primaries and outer secondaries, involving both webs but extending much further on outer webs of primaries, often echoed by disconnected distal spots; remaining plumage glossy black. Bill and feet black; iris brownish red. *Adult female:* Like male, but without red on nape. *Young male:* Like adult male, but black duller; the red shifted forward to crown, broader, lighter (to flame-scarlet or grenadine), often interrupted or streaky. *Young female:* Like young male without red, or only faintly streaked with red on hind crown. Length of adult 203.2-241.3 (8.00-9.50); wing 127 (5.00); tail 81 (3.19); bill (male) length 28.1 (1.11), depth at base 7.6 (.30); bill (female) length 25.3 (.996), depth 7.1 (.28); tarsus 21.5 (.847).

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee to robin size; white head contrasting with solid black, distinctive.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A hole in conifer, live or dead, at moderate height. *Eggs:* 3 to 7, usually 4; pure white. Av. size 24.1 x 18 (.95 x .71). *Season:* June.

**Range of *Xenopicus albolarvatus*.**—Resident in Transition zone in the Sierra-Cascade Mountains with their outliers from southern British Columbia to southern California, east to western Idaho and western Nevada.

**Range of *X. a. albolarvatus*.**—That of the species minus the mountains of southern California.

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**Distribution in California.**—Resident along both slopes of the Sierra Nevada. Also the Warners, the Siskiyou, and south to Snow Mountain, Colusa County (Grinnell), and on Mt. Pinos, west through the San Rafael.

**Authorities.**—**Cassin** (*Leuconerpes albolarvatus*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., vol. v., 1850, p. 106 (orig. desc.; type locality, Oregon Canyon, Eldorado Co.); **Brewer**, Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club, vol. v., 1880, p. 56 (Placer Co.; desc. nest, eggs); **Lucas**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Div. Orn. and Mamm., Bull. no. 7, 1895, p. 37, pl. ii., fig. 8 (structure of tongue); **Bendire**, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 70, part; **Barlow**, Condor, vol. iii., 1901, p. 162 (Sierra Nevada, nests, habits).

### No. 194a Southern White-headed Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 399, part. **Xenopicus albolarvatus gravirostris** Grinnell.

**Synonym.**—GRINNELL'S WOODPECKER.

**Description.**—Similar to *X. a. albolarvatus*, but bill averaging larger. Bill (male) length 29.7 (1.17), depth 8.3 (.33); (female) length 27.4 (1.08), depth 7.9 (.31).

**Remarks.**—This form is based on a single light character, that of a bill averaging 5% larger in the male and 6% in the female. Nevertheless, the subspecies as here defined enjoys a certain degree of isolation, and the character is interesting as marking a reversal of the usual order, which calls for increase of size, especially bill, with increase of latitude.

**Range of *X. a. gravirostris*** (Wholly contained within California).—Resident in the mountains of southern California, the San Gabriels, the San Bernardinos, the San Jacintos, the Santa Rosas, and the Cuyamacas.

**Authorities.**—**Morcom** (*Xenopicus albolarvatus*), Bull. Ridgway Orn. Club, no. 2, 1887, p. 41 (Bear Valley, San Bernardino Mts.); **Grinnell**, Condor, vol. iv., 1902, p. 89 (orig. desc.; type locality, Sierra San Gabriel); *ibid.*, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 62 (San Bernardino Mts.; habits, nest, etc.).

LEFT TO OURSELVES, we should be tempted to declare that this bird eschews protective coloration altogether; but Mrs. Bailey argues that black and white are not very conspicuous colors under our interior sun, and claims that the bird gains inattention by its very unbirdlikeness. And Dr. Merrill, who made a most satisfactory study of this species near Fort Klamath, in Oregon, regards the bird in winter as the very simulacrum of a broken branch, strongly shadowed, and crowned with snow.

This woodpecker is essentially a pine-loving species and is, therefore, nearly confined to the slopes of the Sierras and the Transition zones of the southern ranges. Only in winter does it appear at lower levels, and then rarely beyond the pale of the yellow pine. So close is this devotion of bird to tree that the woodpecker's feathers are almost always smeared with pine pitch; and I have found eggs dotted with pitch and soiled to blackness by contact with the sitting bird.

Pitch, however, is no chosen part of the White-headed Woodpecker's menu. The bird does not eat pine sap, as does *Sphyrapicus*; nor has it been found to depend upon any sort of seed or fruit. Wood-ants are

## The White-headed Woodpeckers

everywhere its favorite summer food; and concerning its winter provender Dr. Merrill speaks authoritatively:<sup>1</sup> "So far as I have observed, and during the winter I watched it carefully, its principal supply of food is obtained in the bark, most of the pines having a very rough bark, scaly and deeply fissured. The bird uses its bill as a crowbar, rather than as a hammer or chisel, prying off the successive scales and layers of bark in a very characteristic way. This explains the fact of its being such a quiet worker, and, as would be expected, it is most often seen near the base of the tree, where the bark is thickest and roughest. It must destroy immense numbers of *Scolytidæ*, whose larvæ tunnel the bark so extensively, and of other insects that crawl beneath the scales of bark for shelter during winter. I have several times imitated the work of this bird by prying off the successive layers of bark, and have been astonished at the great number of insects, and especially of spiders, so exposed. As a result of this, and of its habit of so searching for food, the White-headed Woodpeckers killed here were loaded with fat to a degree I have never seen equalled in any land bird, and scarcely surpassed by some Sandpipers in autumn."

The White-headed Woodpecker is a rather quiet bird both in manner and voice. I had been acquainted with the bird for years, and had even taken its eggs, without having once heard it utter a sound; but in the San Jacinto Mountains, in June, 1913, I heard a double or treble call-note, *chick-up* or *chick-it-up*, which reminded me somewhat of the Cabanis's cry. Mr. Stephens also reports (MS) a "drumming, or mating call, which was rendered in May on the broken limb of an oak. The blows were very rapid and the bird's head made a blur of motion for a second or so at a time, after which the drummer would pause and glance about to note the possible effect of his performance."

Although rather wary, this woodpecker knows how to save its face when taken by surprise. It neither endeavors to escape by dodging around a tree and fleeing behind cover, as do the Sapsuckers, nor to make off with an air of ostentatious offense, such as the Cabanis Woodpecker indulges on like occasions. No; the White-head is always decorous, self-contained, and above suspicion—save when his nest is discovered. Then, indeed, his nerves may go to pieces.

In the San Jacinto Mountains, where these White-heads outnumber all other Woodpeckers combined, our attention was drawn, on the 6th day of June, by a male who tittered anxiously as we stumbled along the rough trail. We camped on the prospect immediately, but it took a full hour to trace the "damage" to a hole fifty feet up in a yellow pine stub, which was three feet through at the base. It was the female who took,

<sup>1</sup> The Auk, Vol. V., 1888, p. 253.

### *The Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker*

at last, the fatal plunge into the nesting hole, and she was no sooner ensconced than the male appeared at the entrance and chuckled coaxingly. His mate reappeared upon the instant and resigned her place without parley. The male entered, remained a moment, came out again, squirmed consciously, tried to clear his throat, achieved some raucous remark about the state of the weather, then bravely dived into the hole again—and *stayed*. He flew when we were half way up the tree—those pine stubs often boast a bristling array of dead branches which are as easy to climb as a flight of stairs—and he shouted lustily as he went. His mate, however, had evidently gone far afield, and when she did return she took the situation very complacently.

We found a clean-cut round hole, one and a half inches in diameter, which gave admission to a cavity ten inches deep, and which had for its outer wall only the thick bark of the tree. Taking precaution for a possible future for the woodpecker family, we enlarged the entrance carefully and discovered two young birds, perhaps three days old, and a sterile egg. The youngsters were singularly long-gearred and scrawny-looking individuals. Their eyes were still tight shut, but they were clamorous to a fault, and vigorous enough,—insomuch that they stood on tiptoe in the nest, by dint of steadying themselves against the walls.

It was the male parent again who first ventured back to inspect the nest with its patched-up entrance, while his mate remained timorously in the distance. Not till after a thousand feints and wrestlings with his fears did the bird finally thrust his head in at the entrance; and when he did so, he nearly turned a somersault backward in astonishment—at what, I do not know, unless it was to find the sterile egg gone. We really didn't need this bauble, for though it was polished like a pocket-piece, a single egg isn't much better than a chip for a souvenir. Besides that, its "interior redemption" presented something of a problem. Ancient eggs are some smelly. He could have had it for all of us. Not for fifteen minutes thereafter did that outrageous fowl return, yet there were those same little young ones clamoring all that time for their papa—not to mention their useless mother—and we were a hundred yards away. Talk about nerves! We left in disgust.

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No. 195

## Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 400. *Picoides arcticus* (Swainson).

**Synonym.**—BLACK-BACKED THREE-TOED WOODPECKER.

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## The Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Upperparts glossy blue-black, duller on flight-feathers; primaries and outer secondaries with paired spots of white on edges of outer and inner webs; a squarish crown-patch of yellow (mustard-yellow, or light cadmium to orange); a transverse white cheek-stripe meeting fellow on forehead and cut off by black malar-stripe from white of throat and remaining underparts; sides and lining of wings heavily barred with black; three outer pairs of rectrices graduated, white on exposed (under) portions. Bill plumbeous slaty, the mandible lighter; feet and legs grayish dusky; iris reddish brown. *Adult female*: Like male, but without yellow crown-patch. *Young male*: Like adult male, but black of upperparts duller, white of underparts less pure, tinged more or less with dingy gray; barring of sides more blended; the yellow of crown-patch reduced, streaky. *Young female*: Like young male, but yellow of crown still further reduced, sometimes barely perceptible. Length of adult 209.6-254 (8.25-10.00); wing 129.5 (5.10); tail 77.9 (3.07); bill 33 (1.30); tarsus 23 (.905). Female slightly smaller.

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee to robin size; yellow crown-patch of male and young; upperparts nearly solid black, as compared with *Dryobates* group; throat white, as compared with *Sphyrapicus* group.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: According to Bendire, a hole in stump or stub, from 2½ to 8 feet above ground. *Eggs*: 4; glossy white. Av. size 24.4 x 18.3 (.96 x .72). *Season*: May 20–June 10; one brood.

**General Range.**—Northern North America, resident in the Canadian zone, from southern Alaska, southern Mackenzie, and southern Ungava, south to heavily wooded portions of the northern New England States, Michigan, etc., and in the West to the Black Hills, Wyoming, and the central Sierra Nevada of California; casually south in winter.

**Distribution in California.**—A rare and very local resident in the Boreal zone of the Sierra Nevada Mountains from Mt. Shasta south to the Tahoe region, and Big Trees, Calaveras County (Belding), and in the Warner Mountains.

**Authorities.**—Cooper, Orn. Calif., 1870, p. 384 (Sierra Nevada); Bendire, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 74; Bangs, Auk, vol. xvii., 1900, p. 131 (syst.; nomencl.); McAtee, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 37, 1912, p. 25 (food).

BEYOND a perfunctory mention in bird-lists from the Tahoe region and isolated records from distant mountains, very little seems to be recorded in ornithological literature of the Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker as a resident of California. I have never seen the bird myself, though I have searched diligently for him in the Warner Mountains, on Shasta, and in various localities of the central southern Sierras. Those who speak familiarly (and vaguely), therefore, of this stranded Eskimo have my green-eyed regards.

*Picoides arcticus* is one of a boreal quintette, contemporaries of the Ice Age, whose survival in the mountains of sunny California gives to this State one of its most piquant charms. No other state, we are told, presented such a motley of human survivals as did California at the advent of the white man. And surely no other state of the American Union can present a gamut of bird life which runs from the tropical splendors of

### *The Red-naped Sapsucker*

Vermilion Flycatcher, Scott's Oriole, and Beautiful Bunting, to the frigid austerities of Gray Jay, Pine Grosbeak, Leucosticte, White-crowned Sparrow, and Arctic Woodpecker. And this reckoning takes no account of the astounding discovery of the Great Gray Owl as a breeding bird of the Yosemite sector! Verily, California is a microcosmos, an epitome of geography and history in three dimensions.

In default of more explicit information (which, ambitious reader, it is up to you to supply—there are still untrodden corners in the bird world), I copy *in toto* the ancient and meager account left by Dr. Cooper in the "Ornithology of California": "I found the bird quite numerous about Lake Tahoe, and the summits of the Sierra Nevada above six thousand feet altitude, in September, and it extends thence northward, chiefly on the east side of these and the Cascade Mountains, as I never saw it near the Lower Columbia. At the lake [i. e. Tahoe] they were quite fearless, coming close to the hotel, and industriously tapping the trees in the early morning and evening. In the North I found them very wild, probably because the Indians pursue them for their scalps, which they consider very valuable. I noticed their burrows in low pine-trees near the lake, where they had doubtless raised their young. According to Nuttall, they lay four or five white eggs. I have found them silent birds, though probably in the spring they have more variety of calls. The only note I heard was a shrill, harsh, rattling cry, sufficiently distinct from that of any other woodpecker."

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No. 196

## Red-naped Sapsucker

A. O. U. No. 402a. *Sphyrapicus varius nuchalis* Baird.

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Pileum, throat, and nuchal band spectrum-red (or scarlet-red to carmine); crown and throat-patches defined by black, narrowly on sides, broadly behind, the black border of throat below forming a conspicuous crescentic breast-plate; a white streak over and behind eye, more or less continuous with black-and-white mottling of upper back; a transverse stripe from nostril around throat and chest, and continuous with white of underparts; remaining upperparts black, variously spotted, banded, and blotched with white; middle coverts and upper tail-coverts nearly pure white, the first-named forming with the exposed edges of the greater coverts a broad white wing-band; inner webs of central pair of tail-feathers sharply black-and-white-barred; underparts, centrally, pure white or flushed with sulphur-yellow; sides, flanks, and under tail-coverts heavily barred or marked, chiefly in hastate pattern, with black. Bill and feet slaty; iris brown. *Fall and winter specimens* occasionally show a tendency to deepening of sulphur-yellow on underparts, and a tinge of the same in the spotting of upperparts. *Adult female*: Like male, but chin white, and red of throat reduced by invasion or intermixture of white; also a barely perceptible tendency

## The Red-naped Sapsucker

toward reduction of red in nuchal band (this red completely wanting in typical *varius*). *Young* (sexes alike?): General pattern of adults on upperparts, but spotting pale sulphur-yellow; no red on nape, black instead; the crown blackish, more or less overlaid or suffused (or not) with dull red; underparts chiefly dingy sulphury brown, barred with blackish, most conspicuously on breast, colors blending on sides of throat, chin, and upper throat, dingy whitish, or progressively suffused with dingy red; middle of belly immaculate sulphur-yellow. Length 184.2-215.9 (7.25-8.50); wing 128 (5.04); tail 75 (2.95); bill 23 (.91); tarsus 20 (.79).

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size; highly variegated black, white, and red (and sometimes tinged with yellow below); red throat-patch defined by black (or white on chin in female) distinctive.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A gourd-shaped excavation in decaying wood of live aspen tree, 5-30 feet up; entrance 1½ inches wide; hole 8-10 inches deep; no lining. *Eggs*: 3 to 6; white, moderately glossed, ovate to elliptical ovate. Av. size 22.9 x 17 (.90 x .67). *Season*: June 1-15; one brood.

**Range of *Sphyrapicus varius*.**—Northern North America, breeding from near limit of trees south irregularly in mountainous and heavily timbered districts to North Carolina, Missouri, New Mexico, and California. South in winter to Central America.

**Range of *S. v. nuchalis*.**—Western North America. Breeding in Transition and Boreal zones from central British Columbia south to northeastern California, New Mexico and western Texas; wintering from southern California and southwestern Arizona to west central Mexico.

**Distribution in California.**—Common summer resident in the Warner Mountains. Common in winter in the valley of the Colorado River; also sparingly in the San Diegan district west at least to Santa Barbara, and casually elsewhere west of the Sierras.

**Authorities.**—**Baird** (*Sphyrapicus varius*), Rep. Pac. R. R. Surv., vol. ix., 1858, p. 103 (Ft. Yuma); *Shufeldt*, Auk, vol. v., 1888, p. 212, figs. (pterylosis); *Bendire*, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 88; *Grinnell*, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. xii., 1914, p. 132 (Colo. Valley, winter); *ibid.*, Pac. Coast Avifauna, no. 11, 1915, p. 80 (Warner Mts., breeding).

THIS western variety of the well-known Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*S. varius*) differs only slightly in appearance and habits from the eastern bird, and not at all in disposition. Of *varius* I have already said:<sup>1</sup>

“Before the maple sap has ceased running, our woods are invaded from the south by a small army of hungry Sapsuckers. The birds are rather unsuspecting, quiet, and sluggish in their movements. Their common note is a drawling and petulant *kee-a*, like that of a distant Hawk; but they use it rather to vent their feelings than to call their fellows, for although there may be twenty in a given grove, they are only chance associates and have no dealings one with another. Starting near the bottom of a tree, one goes hitching his way up the trunk, turns a lazy back-somersault to re-inspect some neglected crevice, or leaps out into the air to capture a passing insect. The bulk of this bird’s food, however, at least

<sup>1</sup> Birds of Ohio, p. 350.

### *The Red-naped Sapsucker*

during the migration, is secured at the expense of the tree itself. The rough exterior bark layer, or cortex of, say, a maple, is stripped off, and then the bird drills a transverse series of oval or roughly rectangular holes through which the sap is soon flowing. The inner bark, or cambium, is eaten as removed and the sap is eagerly drunk. It is said also that in some cases the bird relies upon this sugar-bush to attract insects which it likes, and thus makes its little wells do triple service."

In lieu of maple sap the western bird makes heavy requisition on the fresh-flowing pitch of pine and fir trees. As for cambium, that of the aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) has marked preference, and the summer range of the bird, so far as it goes, is practically controlled by the occurrence of the tree. Inasmuch as this tree is short-lived and of slight economic importance, the depredations of the bark-eaters are not seriously felt.

The aspen, also, is the chosen nesting home of the Red-nape. On the bank of a northern river, the Pend d'Oreille, on the 28th of May, we found a nest some twenty-five feet up in an aspen tree sixteen inches in diameter. The tree was dead at the heart, but there was an outer shell of live wood two inches in thickness. The bird had penetrated this outer shell with a tunnel as round as an auger-hole, and an inch and a half in diameter, and had excavated in the soft heart-wood a chamber ten inches deep vertically, five and a half horizontally, and three from front to back. Here five eggs, as fresh as paint, reposed on the rotten chips. Like all, or most, woodpecker eggs these were beautifully transparent, with the position of the contained yolk clearly indicated. One egg was broken with a small round hole, as though a careless claw had been stuck into it.

The parent birds, especially the male, who was caught on the eggs, as though inspecting the latest achievement, were very attentive, flying back and forth in neighboring trees, and giving utterance to the *kee ah* and other notes.

In the Warner Mountains, where alone these birds summer within our borders, I heard a petulant *clew clew*, a double note, wherein the second member was an echo of the first. This reminded me of the *chow chow* of that amiable old pouter, the Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Centurus carolinus*) of the East, but would scarcely be conclusive as evidence of Centurine affinities.

In this same region I found the Red-napes nesting at forbidding heights in the fir stubs, but always near to some grove of "quaking asps." The young birds, which by the 8th of July were "hollering" loud enough to be heard from the ground, were evidently being fed on insects and



## The Red-breasted Sapsuckers

grubs. Few of us vegetarians succeed in enforcing our fad upon the rising generation—not, at least, till after they have risen.

The Red-naped Sapsuckers, for the most part, retire in winter to Mexico and Lower California, but there is a scattering fire of them over western and southern California, and they are of regular occurrence at that season in the Colorado River Valley, at least as far up as Needles. Dr. Grinnell found them subsisting chiefly upon the bark and sap of willow trees, but in one instance they had attacked a mesquite.

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No. 197

### Red-breasted Sapsucker

#### No. 197a Northern Red-breasted Sapsucker<sup>1</sup>

A. O. U. No. 403a. *Sphyrapicus ruber notkensis* (Suckow).

**Description.**—Similar to *S. r. ruber*, but slightly larger and coloration darker and brighter, the red of the foreparts, especially, richer, the white (or pale yellow) spotting of upperparts much less extensive, approaching that of *S. varius nuchalis*. Length 184.2-215.9 (7.25-8.50); wing 130 (5.12); tail 80 (3.15); bill 25.4 (1.00); tarsus 21 (.83).

**Remarks.**—*Sphyrapicus ruber* is, of course, derived from *Sphyrapicus varius* stock (or a common ancestor), and represents the obliteration of the highly developed head and breast pattern of *varius* by prevailing red. Although the ranges of the evolved forms now overlap considerably, we are inclined to regard intermediate examples, which are not wanting in our own borders and are more common to the north and east, as persistent or reminiscent examples of earlier intergradation (throughout an area now no longer definable), rather than "hybrids" in the interspecific sense. In such examples referable to *ruber*, the malar white stripe may be carried through to connect with the lower breast, and the included black "breast-plate" of *varius* may be clearly definable under the red.

The exaltation of *ruber* to the rank of a species is a deliberate defiance of the rule which would enjoin the assignment of subspecific rank to all forms known to intergrade. For in the case of *varius-ruber* the degree of difference between them has passed all normal or comparable bounds. We do violence to our traditions either way (it is the bird's fault for being so gaudy), yet the *ruber* fact is too glaring, too exceptional, to be embraced in the subspecific concept (however logically derived), and we choose to err on the side of common sense. *Summa jus summa injuria*.

**Range of *S. r. notkensis*.**—Humid Transition and Canadian forests of the Pacific Coast district from southern Oregon north to Skagway, Alaska, and east to the eastern slopes of the Cascade Mountains. "In winter south through northwestern California."

**Distribution in California.**—"Common winter visitant to the northern humid coast belt, east through the Siskiyou Mountains and south through the San Francisco

<sup>1</sup> The latest shift of the nomenclatural kaleidoscope makes it necessary, for once, to list a *subspecies* ahead of "typicus". The "Sierra Red-breasted Sapsucker" was known as *S. ruber daggetti* at the time our accounts were written.

## *The Red-breasted Sapsuckers*

Bay region and Santa Cruz district, at least to Monterey" (Grinnell). Intergradation with *ruber* characterizes many California-taken specimens.

**Authorities.**—**Audubon** (*Picus ruber*), Orn. Biog., v., 1839, p. 179 (upper Calif.); *Grinnell*, Condor, vol. iii., 1901, p. 12 (orig. desc.; type locality, Pasadena); *ibid.*, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 63, pls. 14, 15 (San Bernardino Mts.; habits, nest, distr.); *McAtee*, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 37, 1912, p. 31 (food); *Pierce*, Condor, vol. xviii., 1916, p. 179 (San Bernardino Mts.; desc. nest).

IT IS all very well for the economic ornithologist to tell us that Sapsuckers are somewhat injurious to orchard trees, but the sight of one of these splendid creatures, dropping with a low cry to the base of a tree and hitching coquettishly up its length, is enough to disarm all resentment. From what spilled chalice of old Burgundy has the bird been sipping? Or from what baptism of blood has he lately escaped that he should be dyed red for half his length? Recrudescient mythology, ill at ease in these commercial times, nevertheless casts furtive glances at him, and longs to account in its inimitable way for the telltale color.

For myself, if young fruit trees will lure such beauty from the woods, I will turn orchardist. Nor will I begrudge the early sap from my choicest pippins. I am fond of cider myself, but there are worthier. Drink, pretty creature, drink!

Well, of course, there are biographical details; but what of it? Have you not yourself been so smitten with beauty that you forgot to inquire pedigree? Tut, now; you do not even remember a single sentence she said that day. But you remember *her*. Enough!

Once when the bird-man was camping on a Cascade trail, this crimson vision appeared at the edge of a clearing, and proceeded to inspect our plant approvingly; and while the bird-man's heart was in his mouth, it lit on the tent-post and gave it two or three inquiring raps. What need of details!

### No. 197 Sierra Red-breasted Sapsucker

A. O. U. No. 403a. **Sphyrapicus ruber ruber** (Gmelin).

**Synonyms.**—RED-BREASTED WOODPECKER. SIERRA SAPSUCKER. DAGGETT'S SAPSUCKER.

**Description.**—*Adult male*: Somewhat as in *S. varius nuchalis*, but distinctive markings of head and neck and chest nearly obliterated by all-prevailing carmine, which reaches well down on breast; marks alluded to persistent only in anterior portion of transverse (white) cheek-stripe and in black of lores; breast (posterior to carmine) and remaining underparts, except lining of wings, strongly suffused with yellow (pinard yellow); white spotting of upperparts greatly reduced, the residual marks on scapulars tinged with yellow; white wing-bar fully persistent, but sometimes yellow-tinged—thus an evolved form of *S. v. nuchalis*, with which males are said to exhibit every degree of gradation. *Adult female*: Like male, but plumage just perceptibly duller,

Red-breasted Scaup  
Nestly life size

*It is a...*

### **Red-breasted Sapsucker**

Nearly life size

*[Faint, illegible text, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page]*

*[Faint, illegible text, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page]*



Alan Boers.



## The Red-breasted Sapsuckers

with a tendency toward white flecking on throat. *Young birds* are somewhat like adults above, but dingy blackish on head and breast and sides, with the anterior portion of head and the breast suffused with dull red; also traces of fine barring on breast. Length a little less than in preceding; wing 123 (4.85); tail 75 (2.95); bill 24 (.945); tarsus 20.5 (.81).

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size; rich carmine of head, shoulders, and fore-breast distinctive; yellow underparts, lighter and duller than *notkensis*.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: An unlined cavity in live or dead fir, or living deciduous tree, preferably aspen, at any height. *Eggs*: 5 to 7; white. Av. size 23.4 x 17.6 (.92 x .69). *Season*: May–June; one brood.

**Range of *Sphyrapicus ruber*.**—The Pacific Coast region broadly; breeding from Alaska to southern California and east to the eastern slopes of the Sierra-Cascades; wintering south to Cape San Lucas.

**Range of *S. r. ruber*.**—The Californias; breeding in the Transition zone of the Trinity Mountains and the inner northern coast ranges, Mt. Shasta, the Warner Mountains, sparingly, and south along both slopes of the Sierras to the San Bernardino and San Jacinto Mountains; wintering extensively in the San Diegan district and throughout Lower California; less commonly in the valleys and foothills west of the Sierras.

**Authorities.**—**Vigors** (*Picus ruber*), Zool. Voy. "Blossom," 1839, p. 23 (Monterey); **Anderson and Grinnell**, Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., 1903, p. 8 (Siskiyou Mts.; crit.); **Swarth**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. x., 1912, p. 34 (habits, hist., nomencl., crit.).

IN THE PRECEDING sketch we followed the promptings of our heart and made apology for this naughty little beauty who has been playing hob with our trees. But we foresee that in this account we shall have to review the evidence and invite such lenient judgment as becomes a jury of Californian millionaires (present and prospective). The Red-breasted Sapsucker does puncture trees and drink sap both in summer and in winter. In summer it attacks in this fashion not only pine, fir, aspen, alder, cottonwood and willow trees, but such orchard trees, as apple, pear, prune and the like, as may lie within Transition areas. In winter at lower levels it gives attention to evergreen trees, white birch, mountain ash, peach, plum, apricot, English walnut, elder, and pepper trees. That sounds portentous, and it would be if the birds were as indiscriminate and wasteful in their methods as are jack rabbits and pocket gophers, for example. But the Sapsuckers are curiously restrained by habit. Instead of gleaning at random, as we might expect, the Sapsucker makes careful selection, like a prudent forester, of a single tree, and confines his attentions henceforth, even though it be through succeeding seasons, to that one tree. Starting well toward the top of an evergreen, or well up on the major branches of an orchard tree, the bird works successively downward in perpendicular rows, whose borings are sometimes confluent. In this way the bird secures an ever-fresh flow of sap, from below. If carried on too extensively, or persisted in for successive





### *The Red-breasted Sapsuckers*

"These birds are not at all shy during the breeding season, allowing you to approach them closely; but they have an extraordinarily keen sense of hearing. I frequently tried to sneak up to a tree close to my house which I knew had been selected by a pair of these birds, to watch them at work, but I was invariably detected by the bird, no matter how carefully I tried to creep up, before I was able to get within 30 yards, even when she was at work on the inside of the cavity and could not possibly see me. The bird would cease working at once, her head would pop out of the hole for an instant, and the surroundings be surveyed carefully. If I kept out of sight and perfectly still, she would probably begin working again a few minutes afterwards, but if I moved ever so little, even without making the least noise, in my own estimation, she would notice it and stop working again at once. If the tree were approached too closely, she would fly off, uttering at the same time a note resembling the word 'jay,' or 'chae,' several times repeated, which would invariably bring the male around also, who had in the meantime kept himself busy in some other tree, either drumming or hunting for food. While the female was at work on the inside of the excavation, the male would fly to the entrance, from time to time, and look in, probably asking his mate how her work was coming on, how soon they might begin housekeeping, etc.; and at other times he would hang, for five or ten minutes even, just below the entrance to the burrow, in a dreamy sort of study, perfectly motionless and seemingly dazed, evidently thinking of the family responsibilities that were soon to come."

"Family responsibilities" (or at least oölogical opportunities) transpire about the last week in May or the first in June. Aspen trees are again leading candidates for favor; and by far the easiest way to make nest locations is to look about at the foot of the trees for fresh chips. From these we learn that the birds require a fresh domicile each season. After the nest is roughed out, the interior surface is carefully smoothed off, and the chippings, no more pretentious than sawdust, are allowed to fall into the bottom of the cavity to provide a soft cushion for the eggs. Incubation lasts from twelve to fourteen days, and the male bird does his full share of the work. A tell-tale spot, moreover—a rounded, polished area, about the size of a dollar, appearing on the trunk of the host tree some four inches below the nesting hole—shows where a bird's tail-feathers are wont to rest, and supports the idea that the male Sapsucker loiters about on the doorstep a good deal, chinning with his spouse.

This Sapsucker's eggs, five, six, or even seven in number, are remarkable among woodpeckers' eggs not alone for their transparency—the outlines of the yolks are plainly visible from the outside in fresh eggs—but for the varying texture of their shells,—an effect as of water-marked

## *The Williamson Sapsucker*

linen paper, in heavy, branching lines, and coarse, frost-work pattern.

Baby Sapsuckers are very clamorous in their dark nurseries—setting at naught the familiar adage that little children should be seen and not heard. Even after they have escaped from prison, they clamber about the nesting tree for some days before attempting flight. Woodpeckers of all sorts are very devoted parents; and the youngsters require careful initiation into the mysteries of bug-catching, sap-sucking, and bark-chewing. One can see readily enough how the birdies would take to sap, but the relish for “cambium,” the green stuff of bark, must be an acquired taste, like that for olives.

Sapsuckers are more extensively migratory than any other woodpeckers, save *Colaptes*, but *ruber*'s migrations are chiefly altitudinal. Retirement from the untenable heights is quite irregular, and dependent upon weather conditions. The winter distribution, also, appears somewhat irregular and haphazard. The bird is very quiet and rather stolid in winter, as becomes a bird of high feather. It is, however, quite as likely to be seen in a city park or on a shaded avenue as in a foothill forest; and if its presence occasionally offends the exceptional horticulturist, the bird, at least, suffers from no sense of guilt.

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No. 198

## Williamson's Sapsucker

A. O. U. No. 404. *Sphyrapicus thyroideus* (Cassin).

**Synonyms.**—WILLIAMSON'S WOODPECKER. RED-THROATED WOODPECKER (male). BROWN-HEADED WOODPECKER (female). BLACK-BREASTED WOODPECKER.

**Description.**—*Adult male*: In general, glossy black changing to dull black or dusky on wings; throat, narrowly, scarlet-red; belly bright yellow (lemon or strontian); sides, flanks, lining of wings, and under tail-coverts more or less mingled with white (black-and-white barred, or marked with black on white ground); a broad oblique patch on wing-coverts and upper tail-coverts, white; a few small, more or less paired, white spots on wing-quills; a white post-ocular stripe, connecting or not with a faintly indicated cervical collar; and a white transverse stripe from extreme forehead passing below eye to side of neck. Bill black or slaty; feet greenish gray with black nails; iris dark brown. *Adult female*: Very different. In general, closely barred black-and-white, or black-and-brownish; only breast pure black, in variable extent; whole head nearly uniform hair-brown, but showing traces of irrupting black; post-ocular stripe of male faintly indicated, and occasionally with touch of red on throat; some intermediate rectrices black, but exposed surfaces of central and outer tail-feathers black-and-white barred; white spots of wing-quills larger, paired, and changing to bars on inner quills; belly yellow and upper tail-coverts white, as in male. *Young*

## The Williamson Sapsucker

*male*: Like adult male, but black not glossy; belly paler; throat white. *Young female*: Like adult female, but barring carried across head, neck, throat, and breast. Length of adult 203.2-228.6 (8.00-9.00); wing 136 (5.36); tail 84 (3.31); bill 25.4 (1.00); tarsus 21.5 (.83).

**Recognition Marks.**—Towhee size; fine barring of female, with brown head, distinctive; extensive black of male with white head-stripes, white rump (upper tail-coverts), and white wing-bars; pattern of underparts (in male) clearly a modification of that of *S. v. nuchalis*, but red of throat much reduced and black much extended.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A hole excavated by the birds, at any height in half-dead coniferous tree, or rarely, in California, aspen. *Eggs*: 3 to 7, usually 4; pure white. Av. size 24.2 x 17.2 (.95 x .68). *Season*: May-June; one brood.

**General Range.**—Transition and Boreal mountain forests of western North America; breeding from central British Columbia and Montana south to southern California, central Arizona, and central New Mexico; wintering from the southern tier of western states south to Jalisco.

**Distribution in California.**—Summer resident of high Transition and Boreal zones of the Warner Mountains, the Sierras, the San Bernardinos, and less commonly the San Jacintos. In winter descending to somewhat lower levels and wandering westward sparingly to interior coastal ranges.

**Authorities.**—**Cassin** (*Picus thyroideus*), Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila., v., 1851, p. 349 (orig. desc.; Calif.); **Henshaw**, Am. Nat., vol. viii., 1874, p. 242; **Bendire**, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 97; **Grinnell**, Univ. Calif. Pub. Zool., vol. v., 1908, p. 64 (San Bernardino Mts.); **McAtee**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 37, 1912, p. 32 (food); **Swarth**, Condor, vol. xix., 1917, p. 62 (syst.; nomencl.; crit.).

IN THE LIGHT of after knowledge, it is always amusing to recall the gropings of the pioneers in the search for truth. The case of the Williamson Sapsucker, however, was exceptionally puzzling. Here nature had deliberately set a trap for the unwary, and it is small wonder that the pioneers meekly fell into it. Whereas the two sexes of most woodpeckers are very much alike, Lord and Lady *Thyroideus* are almost absolutely unlike, only a tinge of yellow, common to most sapsuckers, serving to hint at any relationship. Cassin describes the female first in 1851, from a California specimen, as *Picus thyroideus*; and she was known for some years as the Brown-headed or Round-headed Woodpecker. Wherefore, Baird, in the "Ornithology of California" (1870) gravely tells us: "No red on top of head, but the chin and throat tinged with this color in adult males"; and "Female with rather duller colors." Dr. Newberry, in 1857, described the handsome black-and-white-and-yellow male as *Picus williamsonii*, and Baird's comment is, "Female with the chin white instead of red(?)." In 1872, Dr. Henshaw, studying the birds near Garland, Colorado, discovered a black male "*williamsonii*" and a brown female *thyroideus* waiting upon the same brood of newly hatched young, and so set us straight upon this strange alliance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Explorations and Surveys west of the 100th Meridian. Rep. on Orn. Spec. Coll. in years 1871, 1872 and 1873 (1874), p. 92.

### *The Williamson Sapsucker*

Williamson Sapsuckers occur chiefly in pine timber at the middle and upper levels of our higher ranges. They are especially common in the east central Sierras; and although they occupy the same general territory, they shun the quaking asp and other deciduous trees, which are the special province of the Red-breasted Sapsuckers. Except for a rolling call, a rhythmical drumming on wood, which is like a call to arms in the quiet forests, the Williamson Sapsuckers are rather silent birds. Food, which consists chiefly of ants with a little sauce of flying insects and a flavor of sap, is easily obtained. Hence, the birds do not wander far, nor make their selves very conspicuous.

While bird-nesting in the service of the M. C. O. in the summer of 1919, I sighted a female of this species, the rather reluctant subject of one of the accompanying illustrations, in a small pine-clad valley near Lake Mary, one of the "Mammoth" group in southern Mono County. We followed her course for some minutes as she sucked sap, first from one pine sapling, then from another; finally she caught a fly midair with a swift fillip, then beat a straight course across the valley and was lost



*Taken in Mono County*

A TYPICAL NESTING SITE  
PINE WITH DEAD TOP NEAR CENTER

*Photo by the Author*

### *The Williamson Sapsucker*

behind a grove of pines. We followed and found a pine, broken-topped but still alive, and riddled with holes. The bird fled guiltily from a spot about fifteen feet up, and as we drew near we heard a depressing uproar of infantile squawking. The male, however, a resplendent fellow, who presently appeared bearing a beakful of big black ants, fed without apology or circumspection, as we stood at the base of the tree. This boldness of a brightly plumaged male is so at variance with established usage, that I venture to quote a page, tedious enough in itself, just as torn from



*Taken in Mono County*

LORD AND LADY THYROIDÆUS  
THE LADY IS AT THE LEFT

*Photo by the Author*

my field note-book: "Williamson Sapsucker, Mammoth Lakes, Calif., June 19, 1919. Visited nesting site found on the 16th. Male fed young at 5:25 p. m. Both male and female came at 5:30. Male fed, but female loitered about with her beak full, afraid to enter nesting hole. Male returned at 5:40 and fed. Female finally screwed up her courage to feed

### *The Western Pileated Woodpecker*

her youngsters at 5:53, after 23 minutes of scolding. Flew away and returned after 3 minutes, entered hole after 7 minutes of scolding and hopped about. Female returned again in 5 minutes, was scared away by noise of shutter, but returned after about a minute, and soon entered hole. Male came at 6:13, was slightly alarmed by noise of shutter when at hole, but fed a minute later. At the same minute female came, but had not entered when male made another visit within a minute and entered at once. Male came again at 6:20, fed at once, and flew away. Female flew away and back, and away again without feeding. Male returned and fed again at 6:24. Female came back at 6:26, but did not feed again while we stayed."

One soon comes to recognize the rigid requirements of the Williamson Sapsucker in the matter of nesting sites. Given a pine which is beginning to die at the top, usually in a fairly sheltered situation, and a pair of birds will adopt it for a permanent home. They will occupy it from year to year, or perhaps the year around, nesting twice in a season; and a long occupation is evinced by a trunk riddled with holes at all levels. One such "family tree," closely examined, had 38 holes, apparently complete and fit for habitation or incubation. At the time of our visit, on June 19th, the male was industriously drilling a new excavation at a height of 45 feet, and from much amorous talk in which *he* affirmed that the state of his affection was *clear, clear*, and *she* declared that it was *queer, queer*, we knew that a bridal chamber was intended.

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No. 199

## Western Pileated Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 405a. *Phlœotomus pileatus picinus* Bangs.

**Synonyms.**—LOGCOCK. COCK-OF-THE-WOODS. BLACK WOODCOCK.

**Description.**—*Adult male*: General plumage sooty black, lusterless save on wings and back; whole top of head and crest of lengthened occipital feathers bright red (spectrum red to nopal red); a red malar-stripe changing to black behind, and separating white spaces; chin and upper throat white, the latter usually streaked or more or less suffused with gray; also a white stripe extending from nostrils and below eye to nape, and produced downward and backward to shoulder; a narrow white stripe over and behind eye; lining and edge of wing, and a large spot (nearly concealed) at base of primaries, white; black feathers of sides sparingly white-edged (the white disappearing by abrasion in spring). Bill dark plumbeous above, lighter below, save at tip; feet black. In some specimens the whites are everywhere tinged with sulphur-yellow, the color being especially noticeable in the axillaries and lining of wings. *Adult female*: Similar, but red of head restricted to hind crown and occiput, the deserted areas black. Length of adult male 406.4-457.2 (16.00-18.00); wing 237 (9.33); tail 157 (6.18); head from tip of bill to end of crest 114.3-139.7 (4.50-5.50); bill 54.4 (2.14); tarsus 34.4 (1.35). Female smaller.

## *The Western Pileated Woodpecker*

**Recognition Marks.**—Crow size, largest of western woodpeckers; black, white, and red on head; body mainly black.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* A cavity with entrance hole 3 to 3½ inches in diameter, high in dead tree. *Eggs:* 3-5, 6 of record; white. Av. size 32.5 x 24.1 (1.28 x .95). *Season:* c. May 1st; one brood.

**Range of *Phlaeotomus pileatus.***—Wooded portions of North America.

**Range of *P. p. picinus.***—“Northwest coast district, from British Columbia to northern California, east to Idaho and northwestern Montana, and south to southern Sierra Nevada” (Ridgway).

**Distribution in California.**—Locally resident in heavily timbered sections in the Transition zone of the inner ranges of northwestern California south at least to Cazadero, and in the Sierras from Shasta to the Kings River region.

**Authorities.**—**Bridges** (*Dryocopus pileatus*), Proc. Zool. Soc. London, 1858, p. 2 (Trinity Co. and Sierra Nevada); *Fisher*, N. Am. Fauna, no. 7, 1893, p. 49 (localities in s. Sierra Nevada); *Bendire*, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 102, pl. i., fig. 5 (egg); *Carriger and Wells*, Condor, vol. xxi., 1919, p. 153, fig. (Placer Co.; desc., habits, nests, eggs).

ONE'S first acquaintance with this huge black fowl marks a red-letter day in woodcraft, and it is permitted the serious student to examine the bird anatomically just once in a lifetime. The scarlet crest attracts first attention, not only because of its brilliancy, but because its presence counterbalances the bill, and imparts to the head its hammer-like aspect. This crest was much sought after by the Indians of our coast, and figured prominently as a personal decoration in their medicine dances, as did the bird itself in their medicine lore. A measurement of twenty-eight inches from wing-tip to wing-tip marks the size of this “Black Woodcock,” while the stiffened tail-feathers with their down-turned vanes show what adequate support is given the clinging claws when the bird delivers one of its powerful strokes. The bill is the marvel. Made, apparently, of horn, like other birds' bills, it has some of the attributes of tempered steel. The bird uses it recklessly as both ax and crowbar, for it hews its way through the bark of our largest dead fir trees, in its efforts to get at the grubs, which have their greatest field of activity between the bark and the wood. It pries off great chips and flakes by a sidewise wrench of its head. A carpenter is known by his chips, but no carpenter would put his chisels to such hard service as the bird does his. As a result there is no mistaking the bark pile which surrounds the base of certain old stubs in the forest for the work of any other agency.

Possibly the most interesting of all is the Log-cock's tongue, which it is able to protrude suddenly to a distance of four or five inches beyond the tip of its beak. This provision enables the bird to economize labor in the tracking of buried sweets, and the arrangement is made possible by the great development of the hyoid bones with their muscular attach-

*The Western Pileated Woodpecker*



*Taken in the Yosemite*

*Photo by the Author*

ON THE BANKS OF THE MERCED

SEVERAL PAIRS OF PILEATED WOODPECKERS NEST BETWEEN THE OBSERVER AND HALF DOME

ments. These extend backward from the base of the tongue over and around the skull, nearly to the upper base of the bird's bill again.

The great forest fires which have ravaged portions of our State have proved a godsend to the woodpeckers, although they are in no way responsible for them. The Pileated Woodpecker does his share in staying the ravages of the wood-working insects, but he is even more interested in the spoliation of fallen logs, and so hastens rather than retards decay. A pair of these Woodpeckers will gradually tear a rotten log quite to pieces in pursuit of the grubs and wood-boring ants which it harbors. They are shy or confiding just in proportion to the amount of persecution which they have been called upon to endure. I have waited half a day trying to get a specimen, and again I have sat under a shower of chips or ogled a busy pair in the open at forty feet.

The Log-cock has a variety of notes, and one who learns them will find the bird much more common than he may have supposed. The most noteworthy of these is a high-pitched stentorian call, which is not exactly laughter, although something like it in form, *hü ha ha*



## *The California Woodpecker*

*ha ha ha ha ha hii.* "At a distance this call sounds metallic; but when at close range it is sent echoing through the forest, it is full and clear, and it is the most untamably wild sound among bird notes."

The Pileated Woodpecker chisels out its nesting hole at any height in dead timber, whether of fir, pine, or incense cedar. It nests regularly in this State, but the taking of its eggs is something of a feat; so, in default of much-coveted "luck," we fall back on Bendire: "From three to five eggs are usually laid to a set, but I have seen it stated that the Pileated Woodpecker often laid six, and that a nest found near Farmville, Virginia, contained eight. An egg is deposited daily, and incubation begins occasionally before the set is completed, and lasts about eighteen days, both sexes assisting in the duty, as well as in caring for the young. Like all Woodpeckers, the Pileated are very devoted parents, and the young follow them for some weeks after leaving the nest, until fully capable of caring for themselves. Only one brood is raised in a season. The eggs of the Pileated Woodpecker are pure china-white in color, mostly ovate in shape; the shell is exceedingly fine-grained and very glossy, as if enameled."

The gravest crime of which a child of nature can possibly be guilty is to grow larger than the common run of its kind. Capital punishment is the invariable penalty we mete out in such cases; and for this reason, principally, this wild-hearted chieftain of the woods has been nearly exterminated in the more settled parts of America. In the old South the very name "Woodcock," which although absurdly inaccurate still sounds rapid, has hastened the doom of an inoffensive bird. Under this foolish misnomer the carcasses of Pileated Woodpeckers were, until lately, offered in open market in the City of Washington. But it is difficult to conceive how even darkies could ever have relished them as food. Captain Bendire tried one once when he was short of rations, up in Oregon, and he has left eloquent testimony to the bird's non-edibility. Fricassee of Woodpecker! Ugh!

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No. 200

## California Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 407a. *Balanosphyra formicivorus bairdi* Ridgway.

**Description.**—*Adult male:* Nasal tufts continuous with chin and upper throat black; forehead, connecting narrowly with sides of throat and lower throat, white, the lower throat, centrally, tinged with light greenish yellow; crown and nape spectrum red; rump and upper tail-coverts white; sides of head, breast, and remaining upperparts, including tail, shining black with bluish or greenish reflections; wings changing to dull

## The California Woodpecker

black and brownish black on tips of quills; edge of wing white,—a large white patch, nearly concealed, involving base of primaries and inner edges of secondaries; remaining underparts white; the lower breast below the black patch, the sides, flanks, lining of wings, and crissum, sharply and heavily streaked or striped with black. Bill and feet black; iris highly variable,—white, yellow, brownish, or even bluish or pinkish. *Adult female*: Like male, but red restricted to hind crown and nape, in so far replaced by shining black. *Young birds* are duller, but exhibit the characteristic pattern of adult. Birds in any plumage are likely to exhibit touches of red on the black of upper breast or the yellow of lower throat. Length (sexes about equal sized): 215.9-254 (8.50-10.00), averaging about 228.6 (9.00); wing 143.3 (5.65); tail 80 (3.15); bill 29 (1.14); tarsus 22 (.866).

**Recognition Marks.**—Robin size; black, white, red, and yellow of head; black breast continuous with back. The only bird this could possibly be confused with is the male Williamson Sapsucker, which has a yellow belly with red on throat, but not on crown or nape.

**Nesting.**—*Nest*: A hole in live or dead portion of white oak or live-oak, sycamore, or other tree. *Eggs*: 4 or 5 (17 of record!); white, scarcely glossy. Av. size 25.4 x 19 (1.00 x .75). *Season*: April–June 10; one brood.

**Range of *Balanosphyra formicivorus*.**—Pacific Coast and southwestern border of the United States from western Oregon and western Texas to Colombia.

**Range of *B. f. bairdi*.**—Resident in Upper Sonoran and lower Transition zones of the Pacific slope from northwestern Oregon to northern Lower California.

**Distribution in California.**—Common resident in timbered sections west of the Sierras, locally abundant in oak timber, and in lightly wooded valleys. Recorded casually (?) from Carroll Creek on the eastern flanks of the Sierras (Grinnell). Not found on the islands.

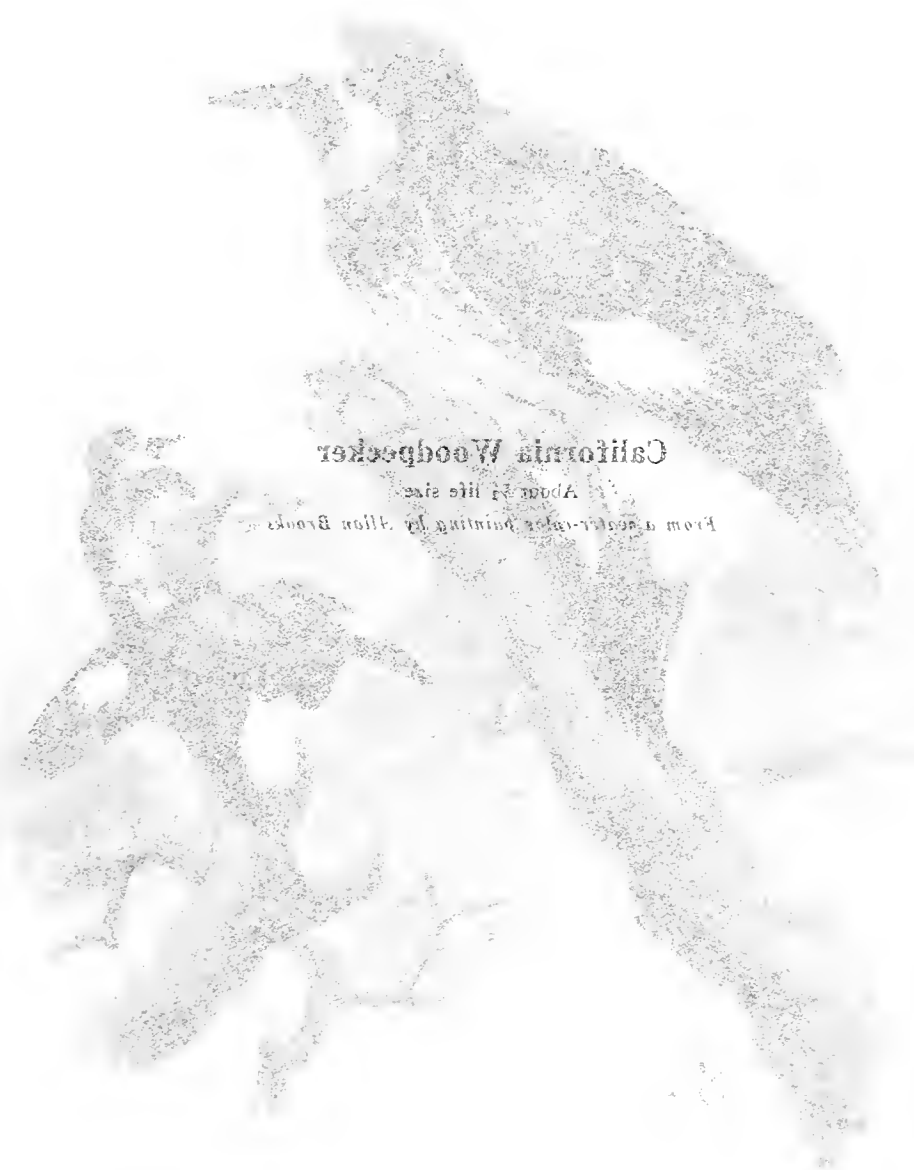
**Authorities.**—**Vigors** (*Picus formicivorus*), Zool. Voy. "Blossom," 1839, p. 23 (Monterey); **Ridgway**, Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus., no. 21, 1881, pp. 34, 35 (orig. desc.; type locality, Petaluma, Sonoma Co.); **Bendire**, Life Hist. N. Am. Birds, vol. ii., 1895, p. 112, part; **McAtee**, U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull., no. 37, 1912, p. 43 (food); **Ritter**, Condor, vol. xxiii., 1921, p. 3, figs. (acorn storing); *ibid.*, vol. xxiv., pp. 109-122, (important summary); **Henshaw**, Condor, vol. xxiii., 1921, p. 109, figs. (acorn storing); **Gignoux**, Condor, vol. xxiii., 1921, p. 118, fig. (almond storing).

*JACOB, Jacob, Jacob*, shouts a jeering, raucous voice on the campus of one of our two greatest universities. The conscious freshman, newly arrived in the West, turns him around to get a view of his tormentor. There is no one near, apparently; but from the oak tree overhead comes again that mocking cry—*Jacob, Jacob*. Ah! it is no sophomore, bent on hazing, but a California Woodpecker greeting one of his own kind. The other bird has just brought another acorn to ornament the fretwork in the giant live-oak which rears itself in front of President Jordan's residence, and there is much animated discussion as to its placing. *Kerack Kerack*, "Where shall I put it?" asks the acorn-bearer. *Chaar chaar tchurruup*, replies the sexton, who has just completed a neat round excavation in the heavy bark of a large oak bough. In goes the acorn, pointed end down, and *whack, whack* goes the sexton's spade, till the

California Woodpecker

Adult in life size

From a water-color painting by Ellen Brooks



**California Woodpecker**

About  $\frac{1}{2}$  life size

*From a water-color painting by Allan Brooks*





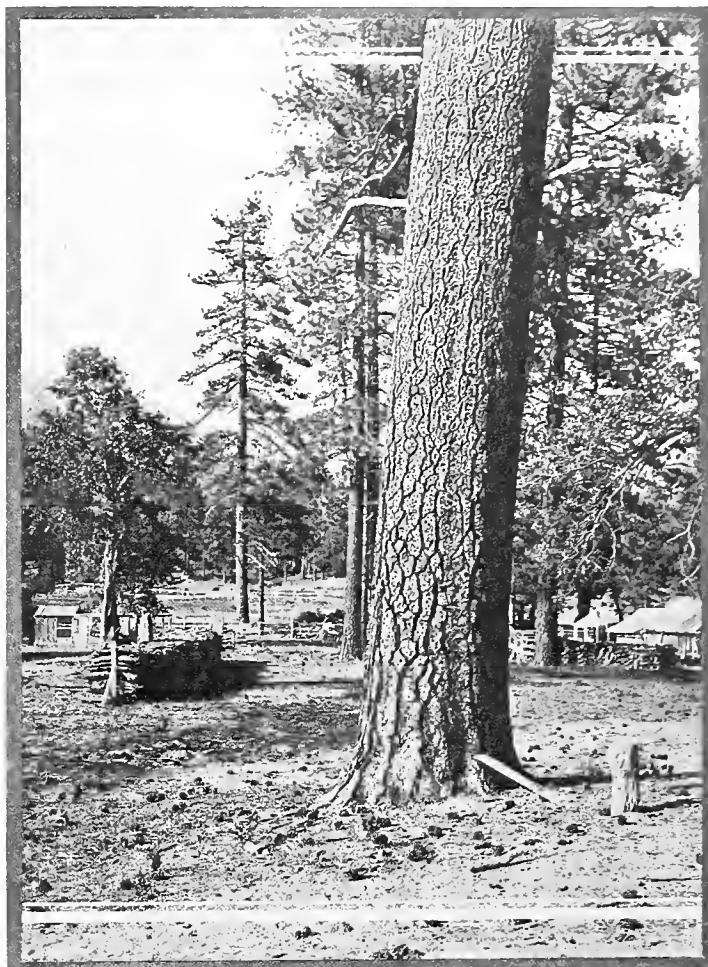
## The California Woodpecker

acorn is driven in so firmly that nothing short of a pick-ax or decay will loosen it.

The freshman may be late to class, but he is witnessing one of the strangest as well as most characteristic spectacles in California's varied pageant. The bird itself is worth more than a passing glance. True native son is *Balanosphyra*, handsome, saucy, debonaire, as faultless in dress as a Spanish fandanguero, as independent in speech as a Kearney Street sand-lotter, as lofty and preoccupied in manner as a Junior "frat," and as industrious, withal, as a heathen Chinese. The Woodpecker is our native aristocrat. He is unruffled by the operations of the human plebs in whatever disguise. Digger Indians, Don Joses, or Doctors of Philosophy are all the

same to him. Wigwams, haciendas, or university halls, what matter such frivolities, if only one may go calmly on with the main business of life, which is indubitably the hoarding of acorns.

The California Woodpecker is preëminently a sociable bird,—sociable and clannish. Other woodpeckers tend to become solitary, the larvæ-hunting species especially so, because of the comparative scarcity of their prey. But the California Woodpecker is chiefly dependent upon mast, and this, if not unfailling, is at least abundant when it is to be had at all. Now abundance of food begets gregariousness, of which the



Taken in the San Jacinto Mts.

Photo by the Author

A SCULPTURED SHAFT

### *The California Woodpecker*

mast-eating pigeon, the extinct Passenger Pigeon of the East, was the extreme example. Abundance with variability has produced gregarious but sporadic, or roving, species, as in the case of our own Band-tailed Pigeon (*Columba fasciata*) and the Crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra* and *leucoptera*). The California Woodpecker is not only gregarious but social, having, by coöperation in hoarding, solved the question of a variable food supply.

But before we go into that, let us note how well the birds get along among themselves. Bickering and minor differences of opinion there may be, for *Balanosphyra* is an active, noisy bird; but it is astonishing how well they do agree together upon the whole, insomuch that half a dozen Woodpeckers may be found working silently upon the same tree. In defense of the common preserves, also, they show a great unanimity of action, combining to drive off marauding Jays and Magpies. This coöperative larder-keeping has in time reacted upon this Woodpecker's character, making the species self-contained and self-sufficient to an unusual degree. They are neither wary nor friendly, and, except where persecuted, will go on about their business in total disregard of human comings and goings. Thus, an acorn-ridden oak spans the entrance driveway of a fashionable hotel near Santa Barbara. Automobiles and carriages come and go at all hours, yet at any moment in the year from one to a dozen Woodpeckers may be seen on that tree.

The patchy coloring of the head gives this bird an uncanny look, an effect which is heightened by the white or variably light coloration of the iris. A "china" or "glass" eye does not ordinarily promote one's confidence in a horse, and most of us prefer that our human friends should have the windows of their souls appropriately colored and not too transparent. But however we may quarrel as to matters of taste, we shall agree that the California Woodpecker's eye is bright enough for bug-catching. Our Woodpecker is abstemious as to meat, but active and far-sighted in the pursuit of it. Much time is spent on lookout on the bare tips of elevated stubs or on telephone poles. Frequent sallies are made in midair, chiefly insectivorous, but partly, one suspects, from sheer exuberance of spirits. A most characteristic flight-movement is an exaggerated fluttering wherein progress is at a minimum and exercise at a maximum. In this way, also, they ascend at acute angles, sometimes almost vertically. With this movement alternates much sailing with outspread wings, and certain tragic pauses wherein the wings are quite folded. It is in such a movement of the folded-wing position, apparently, that the Woodpecker may make critical inspection of anything before him, for at other times his downward vision is obscured by the motion of his own wings.

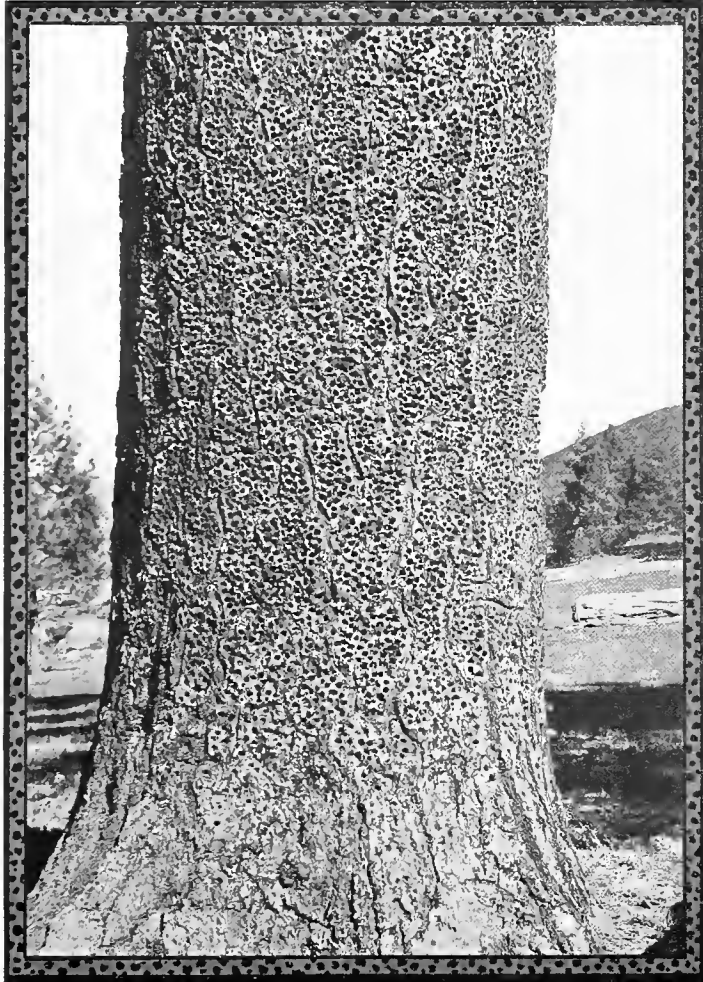


## The California Woodpecker

The name *formicivorus*, ant-eating, is a thorough misnomer for this bird. In common with all other woodpeckers it does eat ants, but these form only eight per cent of its food, as against fifty per cent for the Flicker (*Colaptes cafer*), and eighty-five per cent for the Williamson Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*). This species does not secure much, if any, of its food by drilling, and it does not go after the Cerambycid larvæ at all. In addition to bugs, flies, and miscellaneous hymenoptera, taken a-wing, it appropriates a caterpillar or a beetle or an olive scale

now and then, or lies in wait to pick up ants as they emerge from their xylophagous tunnellings. A regrettable taste for fruit is occasionally cultivated, but this has not reached economic proportions, save in the case of almonds. Almond orchards thrive best at a very considerable distance from oak groves—otherwise, the “lead us not into temptation” petition were a vain thing (or shall we pray, “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,” and then seduce the birds?)

Now, having conscientiously despatched all other matters, we pause to remark, what is perfectly well known to every Californian, that the California Woodpecker is the original artist in inlaid bindings. From time immemorial this bird has riddled the bark of certain forest trees and stuffed the



Taken in the San Jacinto Mts.

Photo by W. M. Pierce

A THOROUGH JOB

## *The California Woodpecker*

holes with acorns. Speculation is still rife as to the cause or occasion or necessity or purpose of this strange practice, but the fact is indisputable and the evidence of it widely diffused. *Balanosphyra formicivorus bairdi* has taken it for his life work to enshrine all the acorns, one by one, in appropriate wooden niches, so long as life shall last. This is his bounden duty, his meat and drink, his religion, and his destiny.

What he accomplishes the photographs show well enough,—the close, methodical studding of bark or wood of any kind with acorns, chiefly those of live-oaks, over immense areas. The cultures, once started, are wrought upon continuously year by year, as material avails or the colony flourishes. Live-oaks themselves are the commonest hosts, together with the white, or post, oak, and the black oak of the southern counties. After these come sycamore and yellow pine or, more rarely, eucalyptus. Telegraph and telephone poles, gables, cornices, and, in fact, any wooden structure where they are permitted to work, if near the source of acorn supply, may come in for ornamentation. On a small square-sawed telephone pole near Marysville I found sixty acorns (and pecans purloined from a neighboring orchard) imbedded in a space five inches wide and two feet long. At that rate the pole carried some 1500 of these tiny storehouses.

In Tecolote Canyon, west of Santa Barbara, there is a giant sycamore which I count one of the handsomest examples of Carpintero's workmanship,—an unbroken shaft, at least forty feet high and three feet across the inlaid face, covered with a "solid" mass of acorns totalling, say, some 20,000. Strawberry Valley in the San Jacinto Mountains appears to be a paradise for the California Woodpecker. Here majestic oaks (*Quercus californica*) alternate with still more majestic pines (*Pinus ponderosa*), the former for sustenance and the latter for storage, and the doughty "California" is probably the most abundant bird in the valley. The boles of the most enormous pines are methodically riddled with their acorn-carrying niches, and in some of the trees the work is carried through from base to crown. In one such tree I estimated that there were imbedded no less than 50,000 acorns.

Why does the bird do it? Ostensibly, of course, for food. Acorns form more than fifty per cent of this Woodpecker's diet and by this provident arrangement the bird is able to regale itself on mast throughout the year. These treasure-houses are not "worm cultures" as was formerly supposed. Many of the acorns do become infected, but these represent, apparently, a dead loss to the bird. Care is taken, in selection, to provide sound acorns, and one authority asserts, with what justice I do not know, that the birds are shrewd enough to select sweet ones out of the host of bitter acorns. Acorns so preserved keep sweet and usable much

## *The California Woodpecker*

longer than they would upon the ground, and are probably good for more than one season. But the fact remains that the provision made is out of all proportion to any possible use. Chipmunks, California Jays, and other Woodpeckers, especially the Lewis, levy upon this horde as often as they dare; but the Californias are very zealous in defense, and do not hesitate to employ platoon tactics when threatened. The feud is especially sharp between the Californias and the Lewises, and one observer<sup>1</sup> tells how a wounded Lewis Woodpecker, escaping from the gunner, sought refuge in a California tree. The Californias set upon him promptly, and one of their number paid forfeit with his life, for, when the huntsman arrived he found the Lewis Woodpecker dead with two of his talons sunk into the California's eyes and two in his pierced skull.

But, again, why does the bird hoard treasure on this lavish, irrational scale? For exercise? Perhaps. To be doing something—for the same reason that a high school girl chews gum or a callow youth sucks cigarettes, a matron does embroidery, or a middle-aged gentleman of increasing girth trots after a twinkling white ball—to kill time. Possibly, also, from force of habit. Following the blind urge of a provident instinct, the bird over-shoots the mark. Having no accurate criterion of judgment, or inhibitive power, it just goes on forever, *working*.

It is not impossible, of course, that some ancestral experience of drought and famine has fastened this lesson of providence deep in the Balanosphyrine race; but it is much more probable that the species is hipped, and that it applies no more reason to its life than does an old miser who goes on hoarding gold. Be this as it may, the explanation what you will, the obsession of the California Woodpecker is undoubtedly one of the most pathetic things in nature.

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<sup>1</sup> Howard W. Wright, "Condor," Vol. X., p. 93.

## Lewis's Woodpecker

A. O. U. No. 408. *Asyndesmus lewisi* Riley.

**Synonym.**—BLACK WOODPECKER.

**Description.**—*Adults:* Above shining black with a greenish bronzy luster; "face" including extreme forehead, space about eye, cheeks, and chin, rich crimson (carmine or oxblood red); a collar around neck continuous with breast hoary ash; this ashy mingled intimately with carmine, or spectrum red, on remaining underparts, save flanks, thighs, and crissum, which are black; feathers of nape and underparts black and compact at base, but finely dissected on colored portion of tips, each barb lengthened and bristly in character. Bill and feet black; iris brown. *Young birds* lack the crimson mask and hoary collar; the underparts are gray mingled with dusky below, with skirtings of red in increasing abundance according to age. Length of adult 254-279.4 (10.00-11.00); wing 171.5 (6.75); tail 95 (3.74); bill 30.5 (1.20); tarsus 25.4 (1.00).

**Recognition Marks.**—Robin size; shining black above, hoary collar and breast; red mingled with hoary ash on underparts distinctive.

**Nesting.**—*Nest:* In hole excavated in live or dead tree, usually at considerable height. *Eggs:* 5-9; white, slightly glossed. Av. size 26.2 x 20.3 (1.03 x .80). *Season:* May 15-June 15; one brood.

**General Range.**—Transition zone of western United States from southern British Columbia and southern Alberta south to California and western Texas, and from the Black Hills of South Dakota, and western Kansas, west to the inner coast ranges of California and the western slopes of the Cascades, or rarely to Vancouver Island.

**Distribution in California.**—Summer resident, of rather sporadic appearance locally, in high Upper Sonoran and Transition areas of the northern counties from the Warners to the Siskiyou and Trinities, south along both slopes of the Sierras, and irregularly along the inner coast ranges; casually south in summer (probably breeding) to San Bernardino Valley, Ventura County (Sespe), and Santa Barbara. Of usual though irregular occurrence in winter in timbered sections anywhere west of the Sierras and in the San Diegan district.

**Authorities.**—**Audubon** (*Picus torquatus*), Orn. Biog., vol. v., 1839, p. 176 (Calif.); **Marsden**, Condor, vol. ix., 1907, p. 27 (feeding habits); **Bolander**, Condor, vol. xvi., 1914, p. 183 (Alameda Co., nesting).

NOT the least strange of the many new creatures discovered by a famous expedition of a hundred years ago was this curious black woodpecker, which Wilson named *torquatus* (collared), but which soon became known by the name of the intrepid leader, Captain Meriwether Lewis. In habit and appearance the bird combines crow, jay, woodpecker, flicker, and flycatcher. It is perhaps as flycatcher that we know him best, as we see him sail out from the summit of a cottonwood or towering pine-tree and make connection with some object to us invisible. If the



**Lewis's Woodpecker**

(The black spots of the black have been exaggerated in painting.)

Length: 110 mm.

From a water-color painting by Major Allan Brooks.

PLATE 100

### Lewis's Woodpecker

(The bronzy sheen of the black has been exaggerated in printing)

About  $\frac{1}{2}$  life size

*From a water-color painting by Major Allan Brooks*







## *The Lewis Woodpecker*

insects are flying freely, the bird may conclude to remain aloft for a few minutes, fluttering about in great, watchful circles, ready for momentary dashes and adroit seizures. A dozen of his fellows may be similarly engaged in the same vicinity, for Lewis is ever a sociable bird, and when he returns to his perch he will raise a curious raucous twitter, a rasping, grating, obstructed sound, which is his best effort at either conversation or song.

In passing from tree to tree the Woodpecker presents a crow-like appearance, for it moves with a labored, direct flight, which is quite different from the bounding gait so characteristic of many of its real kin-folk. In alighting, also, the bird is as likely to bring up on top of a limb, in respectable bird-fashion, as to try clinging to the tree-

trunk. The pursuit of wood-boring beetles is evidently a lost art to this indolent dweller in the sun, and even bark-inspection is sadly neglected. Amateurish, also, are its attempts at rapping out a tattoo on a dead pine branch. A passing comrade will mock the effort, and in the playful scuffle which follows the drummer's task is quite forgotten. "Tag" is a favorite game, and as for "Holding Bunker Hill," a bevy of youngsters will line up along a favorite limb and snigger and scramble and shove and tumble off by turns, to get a new "holt," for half an hour at a time.



LEWIS WOODPECKER

### *The Lewis Woodpecker*

Lewis Woodpeckers are rather wary, and if one starts out to secure a specimen, he is surprised to note how the birds manage to edge off while still out of range, and to fly away across the tree-tops rather than trust themselves to the lower levels. A wounded bird will put up a spirited defense with beak and claw; and with the latter it is especially dexterous, sending its needles home with a vice-like grip which, at best, leaves



*Taken in Siskiyou County*

*Photo by the Author*

THE CEMETERY WHICH LEWIS HAUNTS

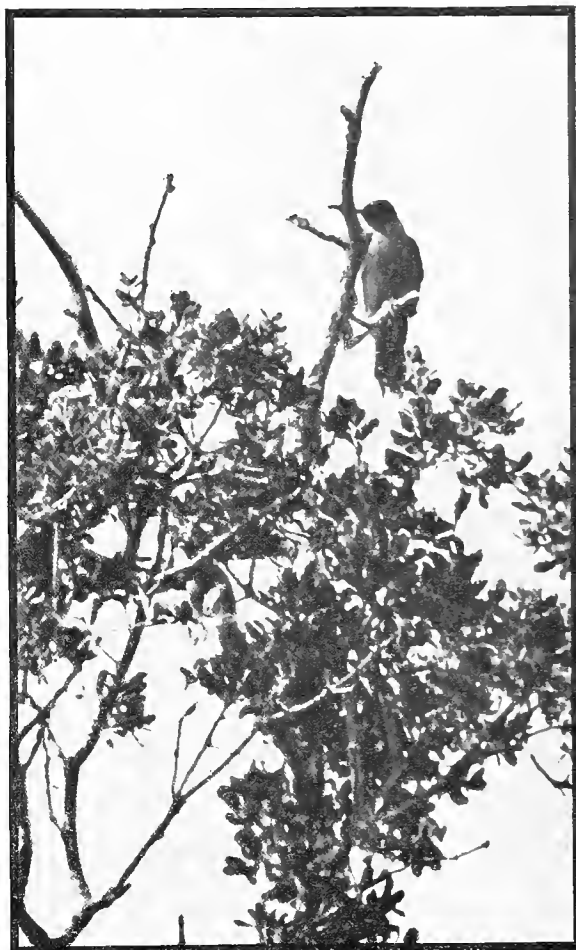
unpleasant souvenirs. But it is well worth one's while to examine a specimen, because of the exceptional character of the bird's plumage. The hoary ash of the collar contrasts strikingly with the glossy green of the upperparts; while the rich crimson, mingled with ashy, below, serves to emphasize the extraordinary hair-like character of the feathers themselves. If it had been a Sapsucker, now, or a Hairy, we could readily

## The Lewis Woodpecker

understand how the abdominal plumage might have been teased to rags through constant friction with rough bark; but this lazy Jack-of-all-trades, who is more flycatcher than true woodpecker, how did he get his under-plumage so fearfully mussed?

For all the Black Woodpecker keeps largely to the tops of trees, it is not averse to ground-meats, and where unmolested will descend to feed with Cousin Flicker upon crickets, geotic beetles, or fallen acorns. Grasshoppers are a favorite food, and during the season of their greatest abundance the bird requires little else. Service berries are sampled in season, wild strawberries are not often neglected, and the bird has been known to filch a cherry now and then. Indeed, there has been some just complaint, in fruit-growing sections of northern and Sierran foothills, of depredations committed by these versatile birds upon peach and apple orchards. They do not appear to molest citrus fruits, but pomegranates, quinces, and, occasionally, persimmons have suffered in the South. Save for such orchards as lie within the immediate breeding range of *lewisi*, the danger is slight; but in the worst cases a little "discipline" is undoubtedly justifiable.

The cherished diet of the Lewis Woodpecker is, however, the acorn. No one begrudges to *Asyndesmus* this abundant and humanly useless food, except that Rockefeller of acornedom, the California Woodpecker. If *Balanosphyra* had his way, every drop of the oaken product would be stored up in Standard tanks (or grills, or cultures, or whatever you choose to call them), and kept there under lock and key till worm's-day. *A. lewisi* and his crowd are "Independent," however. They claim the right to help themselves to



Taken in San Luis Obispo County

Photo by the Author

ON LOOKOUT

### *The Lewis Woodpecker*

acorns off the ground, and they have been known to swagger about on the wing in a most insolent manner, each with his beak thrust into an acorn. It is even whispered—the story comes from Colorado—that the “Independent” crowd has experimented with storage tanks on its own account, and that it has patented an improvement, namely, that of stripping off the husks before storing acorns away in crannies and abandoned hollows in trees. Of course this is gall and wormwood to the Californians, who, in turn, suspect the Lewises—rightly, no doubt—of filching from their stores.

The acorn crop is, possibly, the controlling element in Lewis's choice of winter quarters. The bird, at best, is of somewhat irregular or sporadic occurrence, even in its summer range. In winter, when it forsakes the northern latitudes and falls back from the Transition altitudes of our own mountains, it may appear in regions which have scarcely known its presence before; or it may be unaccountably absent from other quarters, where its appearance was reckoned as commonplace. The autumnal movements of this species are sometimes quite striking in point of numbers, but the return movement is more desultory and seldom provokes comment.

Nesting occurs typically in rather open country, in a scattering stand of Upper Sonoran pines, in charred stubs overlooking an old fir slashing, or in the cottonwood belt which lines some of our northern streams. The nesting hole, which, according to some authorities, may serve for several seasons, is tunnelled at any height in dead timber or, more rarely, in a living pine. A set in the M. C. O. collection was taken on the 12th of June, 1912, from a hole sixty-five feet up in a giant pine stub overlooking Goose Lake. Being without climbers (which are little used in California) and the tree being of huge girth, I shall not soon forget the intimate discussion with each dead branch in the perilous stairway which led up to the treasures. The bird was generous, six fresh eggs, and I am sure she did not begrudge the pearly trophies, since she made no remonstrance. As Captain Bendire well says:<sup>1</sup> “On its breeding ground Lewis's Woodpecker appears to be a stupid and rather sluggish bird; it does not show nearly as much parental affection as most of the other members of this family, and it is much less demonstrative. It is not at all shy at such times, and will often cling to some convenient limb on the same tree while its eggs are being taken, without making the least complaint. A second and smaller set is generally laid a couple of weeks later if the first one is taken, and not infrequently in the same nest if the entrance hole has been left intact.”

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<sup>1</sup> Life Histories, Vol. I., p. 120.

















