WINTER NOTES FROM NEW MEXICO.

BY CHARLES F. BATCHELDER.

(*Concluded from p. 128.*)

SCATTERED along the river for a mile or so below the hotels are a number of small cliffs or precipitous outcrops of sandstone thirty or forty feet high. Their faces, which come down close to the water, are broken by many clefts and narrow gullies, and large blocks split off from their sides lie here and there piled one upon another. These were a favorite resort of the Cañon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*). They were not a very abundant bird, but single birds were apt to be met with in such places as these, which seemed to suit their tastes so well. What they want is rocks piled in confusion, the more abruptly perpendicular the better, among whose clefts and interstices they can skip and dodge about to their heart's content. They evidently prefer a place that is close to a stream, but in one or two instances I met with one in some dry little ravine back among the hills where he seemed contented among some loose rocks or even about fallen trees and up-turned stumps. They are quick in their motions, restless and shy. Their flight, for they occasionally fly considerable distances, is swift and low. At this season of the year I had not the pleasure of hearing their beautiful song, so enthusiastically described by more fortunate observers. However, though the breeding song was not to be heard, they were far from silent. The commonest note is a peculiar, loud, harsh, penetrating cry, not unlike the ordinary cry of the Nighthawk, and can be heard at a long distance. Besides this note I one day heard one repeatedly utter a sharp *pĕ́body*, the first syllable being rather prolonged and having the principal accent. The quality of the notes was about the same as that of the ordinary call-note. In illustration of one peculiar habit I quote the following from my notebook under date of December 23: "This forenoon I heard a Cañon Wren under my window, and looking out I saw him hopping about on the gravel. He presently flew to the hotel's extensive wood-pile and moved about on it for some time, uttering his loud harsh cry almost incessantly. I watched him sitting on the edge of

a pile of corded firewood, and almost every time he uttered his note he would at the same instant jerk his body, not to mention his conspicuous tail, around to one side or the other, alternately to the left and right, revolving about a quarter of a circle each time. Finally he flew to a little bridge over a gully back of the house."

The only other Wren that occurred was the Rock Wren (*Salpinctes obsoletus*), of which I obtained two one cold morning (December 22) when the ground was covered with a light snow that had fallen the day before. They were at points some distance apart, each on the side of a steep, rocky hill, thus bearing out their name much better than they do in some parts of their habitat. To trespass somewhat beyond my bounds, at Riverside, California, where I found them abundant in January and February, 1883, they frequented open plains and bare hillsides destitute of rocks, and nearly so of vegetation. Their favorite resorts there were places where the clayey soil, baked hard by the sun, had been cut out by the occasional heavy rainfalls into little gullies, perhaps ten feet deep and often less than that in width, whose perpendicular sides reproduced in miniature the form of the great cañons of some of our western rivers. In the sides of these gullies there were a great many holes, some made by the water, others by the ground squirrels or other rodents, and about these holes and around the projecting corners of the crooked, narrow gullies the birds were continually dodging back and forth, giving you a glimpse of them here, and then disappearing and turning up unexpectedly some distance off.

The same morning that I met with the Rock Wrens I shot the only Arctic Bluebird (*Sialia arctica*) that I saw during my stay. It was perched on the edge of a rudely made brush dam that held back the waters of the stream, forming a pond from which started one of the irrigating ditches, its exquisite coloring contrasting brilliantly with the new-fallen snow that covered the ground. Very likely the bird had been driven down from the mountains by the snowstorm.

There are several spots along the river that will remain fixed in my memory not merely on account of their natural beauty, but because they formed the background to scenes in which that most interesting bird, the Water Ouzel (*Cinclus mexicanus*)

played the prominent part. The Ouzels seem to show excellent taste in the choice of their surroundings. In following up the stream if you come to a place where it splashes down over the rocks in a low fall into a clear, broad pool from whose depths a few rocks here and there barely lift their heads above the surface, keep your eyes open, you may chance to see a Dipper; it is such a spot as this they fancy, and about the foot of the fall or on one of the wet rocks that rise out of the pool is where to look for him. The charm of the bird is doubtless heightened by its frequenting such picturesque places, but I fear that it is attracted to them chiefly by the abundant food that can be gleaned about the rocks at the foot of the falls, luckless insects carried down by the force of the current, or any other tidbits the stream may furnish. They are very tame, unsuspicious birds, and hardly seem to be aware when one is watching them. One morning following down the stream past a point where it is bordered by some low sandstone cliffs, I heard a loud note somewhat like the cry of a Kingfisher. Looking around I saw an Ouzel, and restraining my first impulse to shoot it, I seated myself on a rock some twenty yards away and watched its actions. There was a slight fall in the stream and below it a deep pool, across which a small log had lodged. On this log sat the Dipper. On each side the rapids above the pool were covered by several inches of loose spongy ice that had formed during the night and had not yet yielded to the sun's rays, and only the middle of the stream was free from it. On the pool there was some floating ice, the remains of a skim formed in the night, and even the log the bird was on was partly coated with it. The Ouzel stood with its legs a little bent, its body being nearly horizontal, facing across the log, and apparently watching the water for anything eatable that might come within reach. Meanwhile it repeatedly lowered and raised its body, apparently merely by bending its legs, keeping the position of the body the same all the time, *i. e.*, not tipping it forward or back. The dipping was done rapidly with an interval between each dip. I timed it by my watch, and found the motion was repeated about forty times a minute. Presently it turned around, jumped into the water, and swam quickly to the foot of the rapids, sitting on the water much like a Grebe. It poked about the rapids, walking on the stones, and when necessary swimming

from one to another, stopping now and then to duck its head in for some bit of food, and occasionally standing still on a stone. Once, at least, it stood for a few moments on a stone, the top of which was covered by the water. Whenever it stood still it kept up the dipping, but I did not detect the motion except when the bird was stationary. After poking about the rapids for a while it came out on the snowy ice and walked about on it. Then coming to the edge of the ice it dropped off into the water, and presently reappeared having swum down stream under the ice. Apparently there was room for it to do so without diving. All the while it paid not the slightest attention to me. Perhaps it was as well that it never knew the fate that was in store for it: it now occupies a place in my collection.

They were as a rule quite silent birds. Besides the Kingfisher-like cry the only note I heard from them was one day when passing the same spot, I heard a cry that sounded like a magnified song of a grasshopper or katydid. Turning, I found it came from one of two Ouzels that were chasing each other, flying swiftly along the stream at about a foot from the surface. Their flight reminds me of that of the Black Guillemot.

The Ouzels were much more numerous than writers on the subject had led me to expect. Along some ten miles of the Gallinas River there must have been as many as twenty individuals during my stay. Very likely there were more of them than in summer, for though they are not a strictly migratory species, many of the mountain streams where they make their homes must freeze in winter, and so compel them to seek a temporary habitation among the streams in the foot-hills, that are either too large or too far south to freeze up entirely.

Down the river below the mouth of the cañon, where the gravelly banks of the stream are thickly covered with a growth of low willows and other bushes, Song Sparrows (*Melospiza fasciata montana*) were to be found. With the exception of two or three on the stretches of level ground bordering the river above the springs, I found none elsewhere. As compared with the Eastern Song Sparrow I noticed no difference in habits. Their chirp, the only note I heard them utter, was indistinguishable from that of *M. fasciata*.

Here, too, I occasionally came across a little flock of Tree Sparrows (*Spizella monticola ochracea*), though they did not con-

fine themselves to such places. One day I found one fraternizing with a flock of Juncos in a bare weedy field, and another was found in a clump of scrub oaks high up on the hills. In their habits they seemed to differ in no way from their Eastern relatives.

In the willows along the river bank the Cañon Towhees (*Pipilo fuscus mesoleucus*) were sometimes to be seen, though they frequented other places as well. Among their resorts were the small cliffs scattered along the river, where they poked about among the masses of fallen rocks at their bases, and in the clefts and gullies by which they were intersected. They were apt to be found, too, about the Mexican villages, where they might be seen perched on the high adobe wall surrounding a courtyard, or exploring the ruins of some deserted house that offered a safe retreat in case of alarm. Perhaps, however, the places where they were most numerous were some small irrigated fields on the outskirts of one of these little villages. Where these fields bordered the river or an irrigating ditch, they were fringed with bushes, chiefly willows, that were a favorite haunt of the Towhees. Here one would sometimes be seen running along and then stopping, somewhat like a Robin on an earthworm hunt. Their run really consists, however, of a series of rapid hops. There is much that is Thrush-like about their air and motions, and if seen from behind one might almost be mistaken for a Robin, its form and attitudes are so similar, though it does not stand as upright as a Robin very often does. As a rule they kept on the ground, but now and then they would get up in a bush or even in a low tree, but as soon as a Towhee saw he was attracting attention he immediately shifted his position or retired silently with a swift low flight to some safer place.

Though they commonly go in small flocks I am inclined to think that some at least remain paired throughout the year. They are not infrequently found in couples; in one such case dissection proved them to be male and female; in another when I had shot one bird the survivor showed evident signs of distress.

Their ordinary note is a *chuck* a good deal like a magnified copy of the Song Sparrow's *chuck*.

Among these bushes along the river were flocks of Juncos, too, though, indeed, it would be hard to say where they were not. Here in the bushes, in the bare weedy fields, among the pines on

the hills, as well as among their favorite clumps of scrub oak in the level openings in the cañon, they were sure to be found, wherever a plentiful supply of seeds could be picked up, for they were very industrious in appeasing appetites that seemed never quite satisfied.

On the edge of an irrigating ditch one day (December 18) I came upon a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, the only one I met with. It was feeding near the ground, among the willow bushes that bordered the ditch.

Another straggler, shot down the river, was brought to me December 23. It was the Great Northern Shrike. With the exception of a specimen obtained by Dr. Coues at Fort Whipple, Arizona, in February, 1865, this is, I believe, the most southern instance of its occurrence in the West that has been yet recorded.

My friends who shot this Shrike brought me at the same time some Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelæus phœniceus*) that they had shot from a flock down the river. Eight days before several others were brought to me, shot from a large flock near the same place. Ten birds out of eleven shot on these two occasions were apparently females, which suggests the probability that the flocks wintering in this neighborhood are made up chiefly of that sex.

A bird that I saw but once (December 20), was the Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*). His habits were perhaps somewhat modified by the extreme dryness of the country, for though he was not far off from the river, yet while I saw him he stayed high up on a steep hillside where he generally chose a pine for a perch, though once or twice he alighted on a dead tree.

The only water bird that occurred was the Green-winged Teal (*Querquedula carolinensis*). They were quite plenty, and adapted themselves easily to circumstances in this scantily-watered country. Their favorite resort was an irrigating ditch that followed the course of the river some distance below where it emerges from the cañon. This ditch was not more than six feet wide, but the water was clear, and it had a swift current. The banks were thickly lined with slender low willows that overhung the water, offering an excellent shelter that the Teal seemed to highly appreciate. They were also sometimes to be found along the river, on some of its stiller stretches that were thickly fringed with bushes. Here they led a life of comparative safety, for any one approaching through the dense growth of willows could usually be heard before he caught a glimpse of them, and rising at

the first suspicious sound, a low flight kept them screened by the friendly bushes until well out of gunshot. On the ditch they were usually scattered along singly or in twos, but on the river half a dozen or more might sometimes be found together. I probably saw not more than ten or a dozen different individuals on any one occasion along the mile or two of the river where I observed them.

Among the more open spots along this part of the river, small flocks of Pine Finches sometimes paused in their wandering, though they spent most of their time, when not moving about, in places where large stretches of tall dead weeds furnished abundance of seeds wherewith to stuff themselves. One day, leaving the river and walking out on the bare desolate plains, apparently so devoid of life, I came upon a flock that must have numbered two hundred, so busily feeding among some weeds that they did not stir until I was close to them. Then they rose and flew back and forth, circling around several times before they flew away. As the flock turned in the air the whir of their many wings was plainly audible.

The plains, though they seem so deserted, are not without life. They have one characteristic inhabitant, the Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris chrysolæma*), that may be met with scattered here and there in small numbers in whatever direction you go. Their colors harmonize well with the dull tints of the surrounding ground, and as one crouches low at your approach you are very likely to overlook him. They remind one of the fact that nature, the great economist, allows no available space to be wasted and adapts all to their surroundings. The Larks certainly seem well contented with their home, bleak and barren though it may be, and are, perhaps, especially fortunate in occupying a place their title to which no other bird is inclined to dispute.

COUNTER-'NOTES ON SOME SPECIES OF BIRDS ATTRIBUTED TO POINT BARROW, ALASKA.'

BY E. W. NELSON.

IN 'The Auk' for April, 1885 (p. 200-201), Mr. John Murdoch makes some rather hasty criticisms upon certain statements made