

1.05 × .90 inches, and is in my collection with the parent bird. It will be observed that in size it is very close to the egg of *M. whitneyi*.—GEO. B. SENNETT, *New York City*.

[A New Generic Name for the Elf Owl.]—*Micropallas*, Strigidarum genus novum = *Micrathene*. Coues, 1866, nec *Micrathena*, Sundevall, Arachn.—ELLIOTT COUES, *Washington, D. C.*

Sphyrapicus ruber Breeding in Coniferous Trees.—In the July number of 'The Auk' (Vol. V, No. 3, p. 234) I stated that I doubted very much that this species ever bred in coniferous trees of any kind. In a letter recently received from Mr. A. H. Anthony, a well-known western ornithologist, he informs me that *S. ruber* was a rather common species in Washington County, Oregon, during 1884 and 1885, and that he found a pair nesting in a big fir stub, fully fifty feet from the ground. He writes me that as he was unable to take the eggs he did not molest the birds, but that there could be no doubt of their identity, as he watched them from the first day's excavating till they began to incubate.—C. E. BENDIRE, *Washington, D. C.*

Occurrence of Traill's Flycatcher near Washington, D. C.—Three specimens of *Empidonax pusillus traillii* taken this spring, are probably the first ever obtained from this locality. Although this Flycatcher is mentioned in every list of the birds of the District of Columbia and vicinity as occurring here, there is no evidence that the authors had ever seen the bird or taken a specimen. One was taken by the writer on May 13, 1888, at Potomac Run, Alexandria County, Virginia, another by Mr. Ridgway at Laurel, Maryland, on May 18, and the third by myself on the 19th, in Virginia, opposite Georgetown, D. C. Several others were subsequently seen and identified.—WILLIAM PALMER, *Washington, D. C.*

Early Appearance of Empidonax minimus at Portland, Maine.—The spring of the year 1888 was a bad season for early arrivals at Portland, most of the earlier birds being very much delayed. Yet some did come early, and I think the most remarkable example was the Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*). Previously its earliest recorded arrival was May 5 (N. C. Brown, Proc. Port. Soc. Nat. Hist., 1882, p. 12), but on the morning of May 2, 1888, a chilly day with the thermometer only 36° Fahrenheit, and snow falling steadily, I saw one in a large orchard inside the city limits.—JOHN C. BROWN, *Portland, Maine*.

Second Occurrence of the Prairie Horned Lark in Eastern Massachusetts.—In recording* not long since the capture of three specimens of *Otocoris alpestris praticola* at Revere Beach, Massachusetts, I ventured

*Auk, Vol V, No. 1, Jan., 1888, pp. 111, 112.

to suggest that this form might prove to be a regular if rare migrant through the eastern portions of our State. Some added probability is given this surmise by the fact that I have just taken two more perfectly typical examples of *praticola* at Great Island near Hyannis, Mass., Dec. 15, 1888. Both are males, one an old, the other a young bird. They were in flocks of *O. alpestris* which very possibly contained still other specimens of *praticola*, but I had neither time nor inclination to settle this point definitely by shooting a large number of birds, the only possible way, for the two forms could not be distinguished when living. As it was I killed twenty-three *alpestris* to get the two *praticola*, but none of the former were wasted.—WILLIAM BREWSTER, *Cambridge, Mass.*

Molothrus ater in Massachusetts in December.—On Dec. 8, 1888, I shot two female Cowbirds in Belmont, Mass. For records of this bird in Massachusetts in January, see 'The Auk,' Vol. V, 1888, p. 207.—WALTER FAXON, *Museum of Comparative Zoölogy, Cambridge, Mass.*

The Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) as a Fly-destroyer.—On the 20th of October my little son shot a male Cowbird, winging it slightly; the bird was exceedingly active and fought most vigorously when taken in the hand, pecking savagely, but the moment it was placed on the floor, or on a table, it quieted down, and would step promptly and fearlessly up to an extended hand, and if a fly were presented, pick it off and stand patiently to wait for more. It caught flies with unerring snaps of its beak, as they flew around its head, buzzed against the window panes, or rested on the floor or table top; it drank freely of water, and delighted in picking up fine grains of earth and sand between its meals of flies. My children began to feed it promiscuously, but it refused everything except flies. They took it from room to room, when it was turned loose, and at once began its incessant war upon flies, soon catching every one that was not roosting on the ceiling. Finally after six or seven days of this captivity the supply of live flies gave out, and the bird was taken into the summer kitchen where these insects were in the greatest abundance and where large numbers were dead, having been whipped by the servants and the children; the Cowbird ate very heartily of these dead flies, and the next morning was found dead in its cage, in which it had been regularly shut up and covered every night.

It became fearless, and was easily taken up in the hand, after it had been in the children's hands about a day; it would stand facing them on a table top, and take flies from their hands as rapidly as they could be passed over.—HENRY W. ELLIOTT, *Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.*

Notes upon the Sudden Appearance in Numbers of the Evening Grosbeak at Fort Wingate, New Mexico.—For four years and more (1884-1888) I have made constant and careful observations during all seasons upon the birds that are to be found in the country about Fort Wingate, New