

ARIZONA BIRD NOTES.

BY HERBERT BROWN.

MY EXPERIENCE with the Elf Owl (*Micropallus whitneyi*) is that during the spring and summer months they home almost wholly in holes made by woodpeckers in the sahuara, or giant cactus. Although so common to the hills and plains of Arizona this cactus does not grow in the immediate vicinity of Yuma. It is, however, plentiful about twenty miles above on the Colorado, in the great washes that slash the mesas at right angles with the river, and along the river bottom bordering the foothills. By comparison with those growing in central and southeastern Arizona these cactus are small, seldom averaging more than thirty feet in height. Nearly all contain woodpecker holes, many of which appear at some time to have been used. They must have been made over a long series of years, or at a time when bird life was more plentiful than now, as not one in fifty have occupants of any kind. During my last two visits to that section I worked the cactus over a large scope of country and was surprised at the poverty of bird life.

May 18, 1902, by the aid of a 21-foot ladder, I climbed my first cactus on the Colorado. It was a prolific tree. In one hole I found an Elf Owl sitting on three partially incubated eggs. In another hole I found her mate, and in still another five young woodpeckers (*Centurus uropygialis*). As this cactus had been so fruitful I very naturally expected to find many others equally so, but did not. I returned everything to their nests. For seven hours four men worked the big ladder on every promising cactus within a radius of several miles, but we found only three additional owls, one of which played 'possum' and escaped; the other two I brought home with me. Both were females, as with one I took three partially incubated eggs, and a fresh egg was found in the box on my return home.

This trip was made wholly for the purpose of satisfying myself as to the presence of the Elf Owl on the Colorado. We were twenty-one hours in making it, as the sun was intensely hot and the road both heavy and rough. Although the object sought had been accomplished I was not very well satisfied with results. A week

later we tried it a second time, under more favorable conditions, as we were but a little more than fifteen hours making it. It differed scarcely from the first in the way of Elf Owls, as but four were taken during the day, and with them two sets of eggs, one of three and one of four. Both sets were partially incubated, but less so than those on the preceding week. With one exception the birds were taken from cactus growing in or close to the edge of the valley.

I expected to have met with some form of Screech Owl, but found no sign of them whatever. I found two partially built nests of the Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*), and five nests of young Gila Woodpeckers (*Centurus uropygialis*), and one of Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*). These, with the owls, represent nearly 100 miles of travel and the work of four men for two days, with the thermometer well up to 150 degrees in the sun. I merely mention these things to illustrate the hard work a bird man bumps against on the Lower Colorado. The young woodpeckers were of all sizes and conditions of feather. In one nest, containing three very young birds, I found a fresh egg. The hawk's nest contained two young birds. They left the nest as we approached it, but struck the ground less than fifty feet away. They were a beautiful pair, and encouraged by their screaming parents were full of fight, but by a little maneuvering I managed to get them to the scant shade of a paloverde tree where I left them. The nest was a bulky affair, made of sticks and padded with dead bark. It was built against the body of a cactus and was supported by a pair of curving arms. The partially consumed bodies of a wood rat and a large lizard were on the nest.

I found many bats in the cactus, sometimes a dozen or more in a single hole. They were all of the pale form of *Vespertilio fuscus*, ugly little rascals to put one's hand among. In one cactus I uncovered a whole colony. Every hole chopped into, and there were at least ten of them, swarmed with bats. Finally but one remained to be examined; as it was rather awkwardly situated I was inclined to leave it, and in doing so stated to my companions that owls were too cleanly to associate with such dirty neighbors. I did, however, cut it open and, to my surprise, I found an owl. If it was a case of convenient larder the nest contained no evidence

of it. I might here add that I have never seen unused food in the nest of an Elf Owl, but with Screech Owls such things have been of common occurrence.

I have been more or less familiar with the Elf Owl for the past eighteen years and am, or should be, fairly well acquainted with them. In one day I took over thirty adults, and turned everyone of them loose. In the matter of plumage I never found but one out of the ordinary. It had a black eye disk and black eye. When handled, they are, apparently, as inoffensive as a canary, and will feign death when first taken in the hand, but that it is fully conscious of its surroundings is evidenced by its quick dart for liberty the moment the grip of the hand is relaxed. I once thought that this semblance of death was due to paralytic fear, but after losing a number of birds I came to believe it a wise provision for its preservation. Have often tried the experiment and the little fellows never failed to take advantage of it. Occasionally two, male and female, are taken from the same hole. On the Santa Cruz I saw an owl taken from its nest which contained three of its own and two eggs of the Gila Woodpecker. As it was in possession, it had, undoubtedly, driven away the original occupant. All the eggs were fresh.

For years I was of the belief that adult birds could not be kept alive in confinement. With an abundance of fresh meat before them they would, if permitted, deliberately starve to death. An examination of their stomachs disclosed their food to be largely insects. A small black ant and numerous beetles are, apparently, their principal food. With this knowledge I had no trouble in keeping them alive indefinitely. The six taken up the river enjoyed the best of health during the weeks I kept them here. Two were sent to Los Angeles and died shortly after reaching their destination; the other four were sent to New York and died in transit. Their daily food consisted of crickets, grasshoppers, lizards, small birds and mice. Years ago, before I knew how to properly feed adults, I raised five. When first taken they had been hatched only a few days, but they did well and eventually grew into handsome birds. If I remember rightly I sent them to the Zoölogical Gardens at Philadelphia, but do not know how they fared afterwards.

Outside of the river bottom there is really but little bird life on the Colorado. The rainfall, sometimes, does not exceed a half inch a year. The valley is densely brushed and heavily wooded along the sloughs and banks, but the dead hills give no sign of vegetable life. From twenty to fifty miles above Yuma is a great basin hedged in by detached volcanic mountains. At one time they were covered with pine timber, but are now baked and bare. The wood has become silicified, is hard as adamant and heavy as iron. I have been told by vaqueros familiar with that country, that an occasional tree can still be seen standing, but it has not been my good fortune to see one although I have been five times through the section where they are supposed to be. In the washes, some of which are a mile wide, giant cactus, paloverde, and ironwood make up almost the sum total of vegetation. In May the ironwood (*Olneya tesota* Gray) was covered by dense masses of purple bloom and presented a delightful contrast to the black and brown of the overshadowing hills.

Next year I hope to define the western boundary of the Elf Owl on the California side of the Colorado River.

Red-winged, Yellow-headed and Brewer's Blackbirds, and the Dwarf Cowbird, are the most common of all winter residents in the neighborhood of Yuma, Arizona. Redwings scatter up and down the Colorado and Gila River bottoms and can be found nesting throughout the summer. The Yellowheads and Brewer's go north in the spring and are not again seen till the fall migration has set in. Cowbirds are gregarious the year through. During the summer months, when all respectable birds are paired and nesting, these little black and brown midgets can be seen fifty in a flock, and the work of the pestiferous female is apparent in the nests of nearly all small birds found hereabouts. In the winter they skirmish for food in the town by the hundreds. They are audacious little scamps and are ever ready to take chances with the boldest of blackbirds, and some of the latter will almost suffer themselves to be driven over before they will get out of the way.

That Cowbirds are a recognized nuisance is evidenced by the determination of their afflicted neighbors to rid themselves of honors thrust upon them. Last summer my attention was called

to the three-story nest of a Sonora Yellow Warbler and its efforts not to raise a brood of bastards. The first or lower nest contained one cowbird egg and one warbler egg, the second two cowbird eggs and several broken shells of the warbler, the third contained one egg of each bird and had been abandoned. Between the first and second lot of eggs the nest had been thickly padded; between the second and third lots the padding was not so thick, but was sufficient to thoroughly cover the objectionable eggs. I have seen numerous nests of small birds, most of which contained one or more eggs of the Cowbird. Double nests are quite common, the Cowbird eggs being entirely padded over. One of these double nests was that of a Sonora Yellow Warbler. It was a beautiful thing. The lower nest contained three fresh eggs of the mother bird and one Cowbird egg, the upper one three legitimate eggs. Occasionally, but not often, I have found Cowbird eggs in the nests of larger birds than themselves, notably in those of Abert's Pipilo, but the predisposition is in favor of the nests of vireos, warblers and small flycatchers. This is carried on to such an extent on the lower Gila that it is almost impossible to find a nest of any of the foregoing birds that does not contain one or more of the eggs or young of the Cowbird. To my knowledge more than one hundred eggs of this parasite were taken from nests and destroyed during the past season.

Blackbirds announce their arrival here not later than October first, sometimes a week or two earlier, and from thence on they drift along towards the latter part of the month. Young birds have come in as late as October 20. Their short tails and persistent demands on the other birds for food precluded any mistake as to their age. The Redwings and Brewer's make themselves at home wherever they can get food, but the Yellowheads go lower down the valley and have a fondness for working over refuse in stock corrals, straw stacks and wheat fields. The spring migration commences by the middle of April and by the end of the month nearly all are gone. These dates will hold about good for the average year, but 1892 was different from anything I had heretofore seen. The birds did not get away for a month later. Small bunches of Redwings nest in the willows and arrow weeds on the Gila and make odd visits to their old feeding grounds dur-

ing the early summer, but eventually they disappear and are not again seen till they become due in the fall. During the winter months Redwings, Brewer's and Cowbirds make common cause in the streets and yards of this town. Once in a while an odd Yellowhead can be seen among them, but, as a rule, they flock alone.

Abert's Pipilo is the most common of all pipilos to be found on the Colorado and lower Gila. They are gregarious during the early winter months and, I believe, they go no further south as they are to be found here the year through. I have repeatedly seen large numbers of them together, scratching in the earth and sunning themselves like a lot of quail. May 3, 1900, I found a nest containing five eggs. That is my earliest record for the year, and the only nest I ever saw with five eggs. On July 14, of that year I saw young birds still in the nests. During 1901 I made no record, but for 1902 I made the most complete one ever made in this section of the country. June 12 I found the first nest of this pipilo, it contained three fresh eggs, and on August 3 the last one. It also contained three eggs. As you will observe, there is a difference of a month and nine days between the nesting seasons of 1900 and 1902, and the difference of fully a month in the closing. The young birds seen July 14 were eight or ten days old, and the eggs taken August 3 were fresh. I have no reason to offer for this great difference. There can be no mistake in the matter for the reason that on each of the years named I had a responsible man in the brush with a note book and his sole business was to watch the birds. I am almost certain that two broods of young are raised a year. The nest of this pipilo is somewhat bulky, is loosely made and loosely placed in any convenient fork of tree or bush. The favorite nesting material, hereabouts, is the inside bark of willow and cottonwood. It is torn off in strips, about one quarter of an inch wide, of varying lengths. An average sized nest is six inches in diameter, outside measurement, and four inches deep, three inches in diameter and two and a half inches deep, inside measurement. It is lined with fibrous roots, shredded bark, hair, grass or other convenient material. During their summer molt the birds are ragged and disreputable in appearance.

The American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) has a

playground between here and the Gulf. During the early spring months of 1901 they passed up the river by thousands, but during the spring of 1902 they were much less in evidence. February 28, 1901, they went into camp a few miles above here. To that time I did not think it was possible to see so many pelicans together. They occupied a wide sweep of sand, left by an overflow of the Colorado and, at a distance, resembled great banks of snow. They remained, hereabouts, coming and going, to May first, when they suddenly disappeared and were not again seen till September 17. Those seen during the late spring went directly up the river.

The Little Green Herons (*Butorides virescens*) generally reach here by the middle of April, and by the end of the month they are common both up and down the river. By the middle of June the nesting season is apparently at its best. The nest is a rude platform of twigs, or small sticks, through which the eggs can be seen from below. When possible they are built above the water and generally in the fork of a small tree. I saw one nesting within the town limits of Tucson, but it was the only one of the kind I ever saw in that neighborhood.

On the night of December 15, 1899, there was a heavy fall of rain accompanied by continuous gusts of wind. On the morning following the surface of the river was dotted with numerous bunches of ducks and Pied-billed Grebes. Men and boys shot at everything afloat from both sides of the river, while such as could did their butchering from boats. Both ducks and grebes were confused, and although kept much on the wing, could not be driven away. The Southern Pacific railroad bridge crosses the river directly opposite the town, and, queerly enough, below this bridge the birds would not go. A ferry cable, stretched across the river about 300 yards above the bridge, was a dead line to many ducks, but the grebes were sharper eyed and never collided with it. I was told that six ducks were killed at one time by striking against it. Out of a flock of about a dozen I saw four killed in that manner, two as they flew up the stream and two more as they circled and went down. The feathers would be knocked off in great bunches and they would fall to the water like pieces of lead. But it was of the grebes I wished to write and not of

ducks. They were shot at without mercy, decency or common sense, and although it was tails up at the flash of a gun they were eventually tired down and killed off. The only redeeming feature to the slaughter, if there could be one, was that the Mexicans and Indians used them for food. I estimated one bunch to be 30 feet in diameter, and there were numerous small bunches scattered up the river for at least a quarter of a mile. Since that time I have not seen a half dozen on the river. They can, however, be met with at any time during the year at a laguna of brackish water about fourteen miles above here, where they probably nest. I hope to be able to determine that this spring. The Western Grebes, in limited numbers, are also permanent residents of the laguna. A few occasionally straggle lower down, but not often.

NOTES CONCERNING CERTAIN BIRDS OF LONG ISLAND, N. Y.

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THE following data for the most part relate to recent occurrences of species more or less rare or uncommon on Long Island. One species or hybrid (*Helminthophila lawrencei*) is here for the first time recorded from Long Island. The note concerning another species (*Larus minutus*) has to do with the occurrence of this bird in North America, as well as on Long Island, for the second time.

Fratercula arctica. A specimen of the Puffin was sent me from Montauk by Mr. Arthur Miller, with a request that it might be identified and its name furnished. The sender stated that but for its poor state of plumage, he should have kept the bird for mounting, as it was to him an ornithological curiosity. It was found on the beach, March 30, 1902. The state of plumage which rendered it an imperfect specimen for mounting rather added to its interest as a 'skin,' since it was due to moult. Its