

NOTES FROM THE STATE OF DURANGO, MEXICO.

BY ALFRED M. BAILEY AND H. B. CONOVER.

Plate XXIII.

DURING the spring of 1931, it was our privilege to spend a few days afield on an inspection trip, in company with our friend Mr. W. F. Ardis, as the guests of Mr. and Mrs. W. E. Brock of Durango, Mexico. We left Brownsville, Texas, by plane and traveled southwest to Torreon, in the interior, and then to the westward about one hundred and forty miles to the city of Durango.

We had not planned on collecting birds but we took a few for identification. As Durango is a highland region, isolated from both coasts, eastern and western forms occur during migration, making sight identifications impossible; so we have omitted scientific names except where verified by specimens. When we feel there is no doubt about our field identification, we use the common name given in the fourth edition of the A. O. U. 'Checklist,' but if in doubt, we do not specify the race; i. e., Mourning Dove instead of Western Mourning Dove.

On March 19 we left the city of Durango with a pack train of horses and mules and followed along the Rio Tunal, a turbulent stream which has cut a steep walled gorge through the mesa to a valley known as the Valle de los Dios, some fifteen miles to the southwest. Two rivers join at this place to form the Rio Tunal,—the Rio Chico which flows from the north and the Rio San Juan from the south. The highlands are grass-covered, providing excellent forage for stock, and the vegetation is typical of such an area. Yuccas, fifteen feet in height, grow upon the rocky slopes, and the many-branched nopals, resembling great prickly pears, are raised for their fruit. Maguey plants are also cultivated.

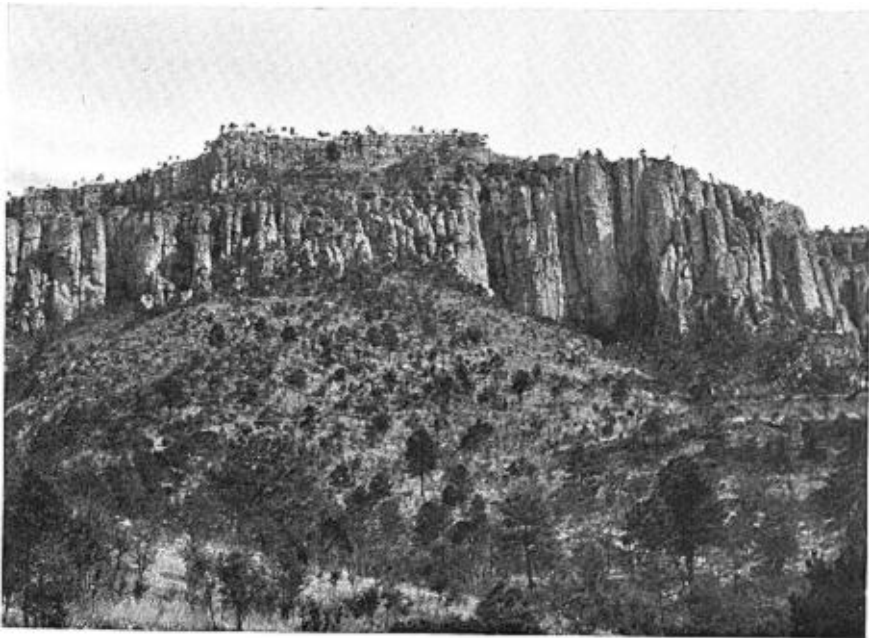
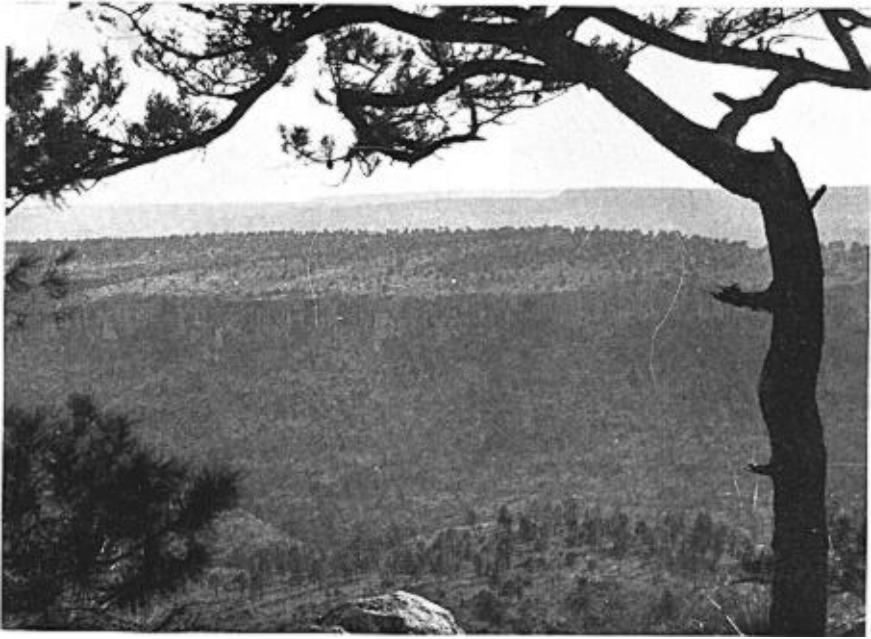
The region is sparsely populated and we saw only occasional Indians along the trail. Owing to the many revolutions, the people are extremely poor; there is little attempt to cultivate the soil and there are few domestic animals. Birds were numerous along the Rio Tunal, however. Turkey and Black Vultures were observed, and we saw them daily throughout the trip. Mourning Doves were common along the stream, and there were a few White-winged Doves near one of the habitations. Thrashers and Western Mockingbirds were observed among the nopals, and Robins and Chipping Sparrows were common along the hillsides and along the bed of the stream. Beautiful little Vermilion Flycatchers were continually flashing into the air to take flying insects, and several Black Phoebes were noted.

During the day we saw five Belted Kingfishers and their rattling cries were characteristic notes of our night's camping place; three small fellows were tentatively identified as Texan Kingfishers.

There is a precipitous escarpment along the Rio San Juan, and we found Montezuma Quail (*Cyrtonyx m. montezumae*) in small numbers at an elevation of about seven thousand feet. The first pair we flushed had been feeding upon fallen pine cones. The natives trap these birds and often have them for pets. We traversed some beautiful park land grown with pine, an ideal game country, although small deer were the only mammals we encountered. Birds of prey were not numerous. A few Sparrow Hawks were seen in the open park, and we collected one of several Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo b. borealis*) observed March 20. A male Goshawk (*Astur a. atricapillus*) was taken the following day in similar looking country as it was attacking an Oaxaca Horned Owl (*Bubo v. melanclus*).

This Owl, an adult male, was submitted to the late Outram Bangs, and he reported as follows: "This specimen is not quite typical. Ridgway gives the form from Durango as *B. v. pallescens* Stone. Your bird is much too dark for that and much too heavily marked with black on upper parts. It is in color just like skins of *melanclus* from Vera Cruz and Guatemala with which I have compared it. It is, however, larger, the wing of your male being 358 mm. In *melanclus*, which is a small form, the wing of the male is 310-320 mm. and of the female 245-255 mm. Perhaps if we had a series from Durango, we should find an intermediate form, large as *pallescens* and dark as *melanclus*."

Our camp for the night was pitched at a place marked La Casita on the map. The next morning we traveled south for about fifteen miles through the picturesque pine forests of a valley known locally as the "Bajia de los coconos"—"The Valley of the Turkeys." Numerous tracks of these fine birds were observed and apparently they were abundant in this particular bit of country. We sent one of our men out for birds and he returned with two large adults, a male and a female. However, he was anxious to aid us in our work and he very carefully picked the birds before coming back to camp! Through the region we found a few Red-shafted Flickers and many Mearn's Woodpeckers (*Balanosphyra f. aculeata*). The latter were going through their mating antics and were extremely noisy. We saw two species of Jays, a long-crested fellow which we failed to identify, and *Aphelocoma sieberi wollweberi*, an extremely common bird in these pine lands southwest of Durango. They are numerous about the camps of the charcoal burners, where, undoubtedly, they secure an easy living. The American Raven (*Corvus corax sinuatus*) was also abundant, and surprisingly tame as they are rarely molested. Robins were particularly numerous along the dry hillside and Chestnut-backed Bluebirds (*Sialia mexicana bairdi*) were seen



UPPER. VIEW IN DURANGO, MEXICO.
LOWER. HAUNT OF THE MASSENA QUAIL.

in small numbers. Here also, was found the Mexican Junco (*J. p. phaeonotus*). It was common throughout the hills above seven thousand feet.

One of the characteristic and picturesque trees of the rocky slopes is the Sad Pine, a species with needles drooping downward. They grow upon hot hillsides in whitish rock, which the natives call "caliche." Our camp that night was near a series of springs, known locally as Cienega Tableterra. In the dried grass of a little marsh we saw many Meadowlarks, but we failed to determine whether they were the Western or Mexican form. Striped Sparrows (*Plagiospiza superciliosa*) were common; in the same marsh were a half dozen or so small dark Buntings, and one was collected (Chicago Acad. of Sciences, 5150). It was submitted to Outram Bangs and, fortunately, he was the one man in the country familiar with the bird, for he had one in the museum collection taken at Bolanos, Jalisco, Mexico, forty-two years before. His specimen had been considered a hybrid by most of the ornithologists to whom it had been submitted, but Mr. Bangs always considered it a new form, and our specimen verified his belief. He described it as a new genus, *Xenospiza baileyi* in the 'Proceedings' of the New England Zoological Club (Vol. xxii, p. 85-88). In life, the birds have the appearance of dark Savannah Sparrows. A few Band-tailed Pigeons were seen near the camp.

We returned to Durango in two days, observing en route two species of Towhees. A specimen of the Spurred (*P. m. montanus*) was taken but it was not typical, although nearer *montanus* than *maculatus* of central and southern Mexico. Small flocks of the Plateau Brown Towhee (*P. f. potosinas*) were encountered on the mesa and along the ridges, but they were not numerous; while over the Canyon of the Rio San Juan, we saw several Vaux's Swifts, possibly twelve White-throated Swifts and three flocks of fifteen to twenty Thick-billed Parrots (*Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*). Their harsh voices could be heard at a great distance. Mr. Brock informed us that they were common at certain seasons when they came to feed upon the pine cones and that he had taken young from cavities in trees.

A few days later, March 29, we traveled northwest from Durango about seventy-five miles to the town of Santiago Papasquiario and in the following days worked the pine-covered mountains and the lake regions to the southwest.

There were warm springs near the town of Hervideros where we saw a Snowy Egret and many Inca Doves (*Scardafella i. inca*). The latter are numerous about the gardens of Durango.

This lake region, particularly near Patos, south of Santiago, is a great wintering ground of the wild fowl. Here, we were told, the Ducks and Geese wintered "by the millions." The majority of the birds had migrated northward at the time of our visit, but we observed many species, and collected

a few. On the reservoir of Hacienda Magdalena we saw several Mexican Grebes, a Great Blue Heron and several American Egrets. A few Mallards were found in pairs and we flushed many Mexican Ducks (*Anas diazi*). They occurred in small flocks and pairs, and several specimens taken showed signs of breeding. Gadwall, Baldpate, Pintail and Green-winged Teal were seen in numbers, but we observed only a few Cinnamon Teal. Several large bands of Shovellers, about one hundred Lesser Scaups, twenty Buffleheads, and a small band of Red-breasted Mergansers and many Coots were also resting upon the reservoir. Mr. Torres, the owner of the Hacienda, told us that the Little Brown Cranes and Long-billed Curlews were very abundant during the winter. In the same locality we saw several Wilson's Snipe, seven Long-billed Curlew, a Spotted Sandpiper and half a dozen Black-necked Stilts. Mr. Torres stated that the Stilts nested on his property. Marsh Hawks cruised over the majority of the marshes, and just south of Patos we observed a Ferruginous Rough-legged Hawk. Small birds of a few species were abundant in this lake region. We found Yellow-headed Blackbirds in large flocks near some of the villages where they were feeding upon refuse; Sonora Red-wings were found in numbers on Mr. Torres ranch; Brewer's Blackbirds (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) were common, and Great-tailed Grackles (*Cassidix m. mexicanus*) were exceedingly numerous, many old nests being seen in fruit trees. A few Cowbirds and House Finches were seen about the Hacienda; Say's Phoebes worked the cultivated fields or rested upon fences; a single White-rumped Shrike flushed from a scraggly thorn tree and Horned Larks from the road. Small groups of Violet-green, Barn and Cliff Swallows cruised the marshland in search of insects.

One hundred miles west of Durango, six days journey by mule train, is the town of Mazatlan, at the mouth of the Gulf of California. We made the trip by plane in one hour, our course lying over the rugged Sierra Madre Mountains which rise over 12,000 feet. Two days were spent in the vicinity and we observed many species unfamiliar to us. Among those we recognized were Man-o'-war-birds, Brown Pelicans, Boobies, Chachalacas (*Ortalis wagleri*), Caracaras, Turkey and Black Vultures, Crows, Coots, Lesser Scaups, Ruddy Ducks, White-faced Glossy Ibises, White-winged Doves (*Melopelia asiatica mearnsi*), White-fronted Doves (*Leptotila fulviventris angelica*) and large blue-colored Jays (*Cissolopha beecheyi*).

The Chicago Academy of Sciences,

The Field Museum of Natural History.