

bird's call. Edward R. Ford in 1930 (*Auk*, 47: 254) comments on Stone's note and on Spanish pronunciation, indicating his belief that Sennett in first writing the name transliterated the Spanish sounds as they sounded to his English ear, with resultant error.

While working in the south-Texas border country in the vicinity of Rio Grande City, in 1938, I had frequent occasion to discuss, in Spanish, the fauna of the area with the local Mexicans, who, although often American citizens, usually possessed only the scantiest fragments of English, and had mostly come more or less recently into this country from Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and other Mexican border states. The people called the bird "Parruaca" which, in accordance with Spanish rules of pronunciation generally, and local usage in particular, is pronounced, "Pahr-r-r-wah'-kuh," the "r" being rolled rather strongly, the accented syllable "wah" cut rather short, and the final syllable "kuh," swallowed—that is, pronounced on an indrawn breath. As the "pah" part of the first syllable is also pronounced rather shortly, or not voiced distinctly, the general effect when heard is of the trilled "r" and the accented "wah," followed by a clean cut "kuh." The result as absorbed by the ear is not unlike our word "squawk," though softened by the preceding and following sounds. The spelling is in accordance with usual Spanish usages, as "Pauraque" and "Parauque" are not. These, though pronounceable in Spanish, give a distinct shock to the sensitive Hispanic eye. I believe that Ford's interpretation of Sennett's mistake is correct, so far as it goes, and that Stone's correction, while a step in the right direction, is in itself incorrect.

These birds were often observed flying at dusk in the brushy border country, and were seen to come to the local cattle "tanks,"—water containers standing five or six feet high above the earth, and ten to fifteen feet across—over which they were frequently observed to pass, leaving small ripples in the water behind their beaks, either while engaged in drinking on the wing, or catching insects just above the surface of the water.—RODGERS D. HAMILTON, *Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.*

Those tall Sinai quails.—Dr. Joshua L. Baily, Jr., writing in *Herpetologica* (3: 41–48, 1946) says that Moses' statement that the quails of the Sinai peninsula stood two cubits above the ground (*Numbers*, 11: 31) strains the credulity of most readers and has led to at least one suggestion that these birds may have been herons or dodoes. (J. M. C. Plowden, *Once in Sinai*, Methuen & Co., London, 1940, p. 192).

Mr. Anthony Curtiss of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, has this to say in rebuttal in a letter dated: "1946, Friday, Eighth night of Dhul hijja approaching All Saints' Day. Your author is surely in error in saying that Moses related that the miraculous quails stood two cubits high. The Hebrew is not very explicit; it says: ' . . . and about two cubits above the ground.' St. Jerome's old Vulgate translation is most helpful in cases of this kind for it is based on fourth century Hebrew MSS, whereas the oldest Hebrew MS that we now have is a tenth century one. St. Jerome says that the quails flew at a height of two cubits above the ground. Indeed the Hebrew context indicates that to be the true meaning."

Mr. Curtiss' explanation seems to be a good one. The writer had thought that the birds referred to might have been bustards, similar to our present giant bustards.—CHAPMAN GRANT, *San Diego, California.*

American Raven nesting in houses.—For a number of years we have been exploring a wild canyon country in the Columbia Basin in eastern Washington. One of the surprising discoveries made on our trips into this area was the not infrequent

nesting of Ravens in old deserted houses. The region is an arid sage-brush area, deeply scarred by canyons walled by colorful basalt rimrock. Rarely visited by man, the area affords refuge to numerous hawks, Prairie Falcons and Ravens. Abundant food supply is afforded in most years by the jack-rabbits, Columbia ground squirrels and field mice.

On the sage-brush land bordering the canyon a number of brave settlers homesteaded two generations ago, but now all that remains to tell the story of their struggle against drought is an occasional half-tumbled-down cabin which has taken on the dull gray color of the shifting soil on which it rests.

It is in these wrecked buildings that some of the Raven pairs have made their nests, choosing a site in the low, roofed attic where the bulky nest rests on the cross timbers. This is quite a departure from the site commonly selected by the Ravens, which is in a recess on the face of the canyon wall, sometimes partly protected by an overhanging ledge, or on the top of a basalt column. Twice we have found their nests in trees, one of these only ten feet from the ground. Our biggest surprise came on our first trip into the canyon area. We had seen the canyon walls and turrets from the distance, and leaving the country road we followed an old trail along the floor of the coulee which led down toward the canyons. We had gone but a short distance when there appeared an old shack and tumbled-down stable, long deserted. As we came closer a Raven flew from the roof of the building and was soon joined by the mate. "Maybe they have a nest there," remarked my wife. "No, they always nest in the cliffs," I replied, with superior wisdom. But, as we came to the building, we observed a window opening at the end, leading into the attic, and the wall below the opening was well whitewashed with the droppings of birds.

I braced some old planks slantwise below the opening and climbed up to investigate. When my eyes became accustomed to the dark interior there came into view a half-rotted old mattress lying on a rusty bed-spring, and on this rested the Raven's nest with five half-grown Ravens clambering over the edge!

The Ravens have nested in this deserted cabin for eight consecutive years now, but since our first visit to their attic room they have not utilized the bed-spring and mattress accommodation, but have built the nest on the floor just to one side of the entrance window.

These birds are early nesters. The eggs are laid in the fore part of March, and protection from the cold is afforded by the deeply hollowed nest, very thickly lined with sheep's wool and cow hair. The great bulk of the nest is made up of sage-brush sticks. Six or seven eggs are the usual complement. One March when we visited this nest it held a family of naked little babies, but on our next visit a week later the nest was empty. They may have afforded a meal for a pair of Northwest Horned Owls whose family we were photographing in a near-by canyon, or possibly they were meat to the pack rats occupying the downstairs apartment. However, another setting of eggs was soon laid, and this brood reached maturity.

Another pair of cabin-dwelling Ravens had added an unusual feature to their nest construction in the way of a 'front walk.' We saw the pair about this old cabin and went over to investigate. The building had been in a state of disrepair for many years, was somewhat tilted on its foundation as a result of many earth-eroding dust storms, and the chimney, which had been built on the outside of the end wall, had collapsed. The birds made their entrance to, and exit from, the attic space through a gap left by the collapse of the chimney. Only the cross-timbers separated the attic from the room below, as the ceiling boards had long since been pulled off. The big nest had been built straddled over two of the timbers, back about eight feet from the

opening in the wall used by the Ravens as their entrance, and we were indeed surprised to find that an approach to the nest had been constructed by laying sticks of sage-brush across the two parallel timbers uniformly bridging the space between, and forming a walk-like approach from the opening in the wall back to the nest. One might question whether this was accidental, but there was not the slightest appearance of careless dropping of nest material en route during the period of construction. We believe that any observer would have concluded that this walk-way was constructed with deliberate intent. Quite possibly the accidental dropping and lodging of a few sticks may have given these crafty birds a hint which they were keen enough to follow up.

In all, we have made this observation of a pair of Ravens nesting in an old cabin on five different occasions.—R. T. CONGDON, M. D., *Wenatchee, Washington*.

Green Heron captures flying dragonflies.—On July 31, 1946, while watching birds in Harrison Park, Owen Sound, Ontario, I saw a Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) capture two small, blue dragonflies while the insects were in flight. The heron was perched on a branch of a sunken log, about eighteen inches above the surface of the water, with its neck folded. Suddenly it darted out its head to capture one of a group of dragonflies which were flying about over the water. After eating the insect, the bird opened and closed its beak slowly several times, then 'froze' until another dragonfly came within reach, when the performance was repeated. A. C. Bent (1926) describes a case of the Great White Heron (*Ardea occidentalis*) capturing moths hovering about flowers, and calls the Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) "an expert flycatcher," but I have been unable to find any other case of the Green Heron catching flying insects.—FRED WARBURTON, 444 Second Ave. East, Owen Sound, Ontario.

Triangle spike rush as waterfowl food.¹—During field investigations in connection with the waterfowl studies of the Maine Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, several observations were made of ducks feeding on triangle spike rush (*Eleocharis robbinsii*). Although this plant is distributed over much of the eastern United States, there seems to be no specific record in the literature of its use as waterfowl food.

Frequent observations at the Davis-Holbrook Marshes in East Eddington and Holden, in central Maine, revealed that the majority of the ducks seen were flushed from areas in which triangle spike rush was growing. Seventy-nine separate observations totaling 621 ducks, chiefly Black Ducks (*Anas rubripes*), but including a few Wood Ducks (*Aix sponsa*) and Ring-neck Ducks (*Aythya collaris*), were recorded during August, September, and October, 1946. Thirty-eight of these observations (385 ducks) were of birds among beds of triangle spike rush. At a typical observation recorded at 6:25 A. M. on August 16, thirty-one Black Ducks and two Wood Ducks were flushed from the emergent vegetation consisting of pickerel weed (*Pontederia cordata*), duck potato (*Sagittaria latifolia*), horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*), and triangle spike rush (*Eleocharis robbinsii*). The site was littered with the freshly uprooted plants of spike rush from which the tubers (thickened portions of subterranean stems) and the more fleshy parts of the root had been stripped, leaving only the fibrous, tougher sections of the roots.

During October, 1946, four Black Duck stomachs were collected at the Davis-Holbrook area. Stomach analyses were based upon dry material. Food items found

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