

When Bangs and Peck described *insolitus* they remarked on the fact that the brown portions of the plumage (wings, back, rump) were much darker than in South American *maculatus*,—Seal brown instead of Mummy brown. The Chiapas bird is extremely nigrescent; the back and rump feathers are black, edged with Natal brown, the remiges are clipped, but the primaries, insofar as they can be judged, are deep clove brown, the scapulars and upper wing coverts are black, tipped and basally edged with Natal brown, and with white marginal markings; the feathers of the upperback, interscapulars, and hind neck are black with white spots. It is conceivable that with wear and fading, all these black areas might turn to dark Seal brown, as in the somewhat worn type of *insolitus*, but it is also not improbable that the Chiapas bird may represent a new form comprising the dark extreme of the species. What is needed is additional material from both southern Mexico and British Honduras. For the present it seems that the two specimens should be considered as of the same race. The known range of *insolitus* is thereby extended from Yacos Lagoon, British Honduras, northwestward to Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas, Mexico.

In response to my suggestion that he keep detailed notes on the bird while it was still alive, as nothing is known of its habits, Señor del Toro has supplied me with the following observations.

In captivity the bird ate dried insects and cooked rice with apparent relish, it also seemed to like fresh insects, dragonflies, and larvae and pupae of wasps, and also chopped meat. The bird would pick up the food in its bill and then take it to its water pan where it would eat it.

Almost all day the rail remained hidden among some plants, especially fairly high up in the branches of a shrub in the large cage in which it was kept; from this perch it descended now and then, chiefly in the early morning and late afternoon, to eat and to bathe in the shallow water pan. After splashing about in the shallow water, it usually preened its plumage, sunned itself for a while, and then climbed up to its favorite perch among the branches. In climbing to the perch it always ran upward on the branches or the wire mesh, helping itself along with its wings, but in descending it merely flew down.

The bird became tame very soon after its capture, almost taking food from the hand. The only notes it was heard to utter were high pitched cries.—HERBERT FRIEDMANN, *United States National Museum, Washington, D. C.*

The Pacific flyway of the golden plover.—Almost all recent discussions of bird migration include a comment of astonishment at the feat of the Pacific golden plover (*Pluvialis dominica fulva*), in passing each year from the Aleutians to Hawaii over 2400 miles of open ocean. The astonishment is not so much at the great length of the trip, as at the featurelessness of the terrain, "without even an island or a rock to serve as a landmark" (MacDonald, *Birds of Brewery Creek*. (Oxford Univ. Press), p. 13, 1947); or again, "The Golden Plover performs *with no landmarks* over the broad expanses of the Pacific Ocean" (Yeagley, *Journ. Appl. Physics*, 18: 1035-1063, 1947), or still again, "Since *there are no 'sign posts' of any kind* (italics mine) over the ocean wastes, the flights (of the albatross) must involve true navigation until the island home comes into view" (Yeagley, *loc. cit.*).

The purpose of the present note is to point out that the Pacific is not one vast, featureless expanse, merely because solid land is scarce. Some of the most spectacular "sign posts" of the planet lie over the oceans.

Thus, off the coast of California is a "landmark" which must, to a dweller on Mars or the moon, appear to be one of the most brilliant features of our planet. In July,

starting at the coast at San Francisco and extending 800 miles out to sea in the direction of Hawaii, is a brilliant white band paralleling the coast. It is a belt of clouds, like a white quilt, with scarcely a hole through it. The base of the clouds is sometimes not a thousand feet above the sea; its upper surface is only a matter of a few hundred feet higher; but this stratum of air is a solid blanket of cloud. Above it is brilliant sunshine; below it is cold. The clouds apparently lie over the California Current.

The position of this current varies somewhat with the seasons. The extent of the cloud canopy (according to a report from Pan-American Airlines) varies considerably with the seasons. But during part of the year, at least, an aviator or bird could fly a course parallel with the coast and nearly a thousand miles out to sea, by following the seaward margin of the solid cloud. Beyond the 800-mile point, or thereabouts, the cloud topography is different. It consists of scattered low cumulus clouds. The base of these cumulus clouds seems often to be at about a thousand feet; their tops may be a thousand or sometimes two thousand feet higher. They occupy only a minor fraction of the total area.

The West Wind Drift or Current circles eastward past the Aleutians, and then under the name of the California Current flows southward down the coast to the edge of the tropics, where it turns westward directly toward the Hawaiian Islands, to become the North Equatorial Current in the latitude of Mexico. If the cloud canopy follows it, a bird has only to follow the cloud to find itself within sight of these islands. Among the small cumulus clouds in this area are a few towering giant ones where the trade winds striking the Pali [cliffs], and steep slopes of the islands, go shooting upward. No better beacon would be asked, in the morning sun, for a bird approaching from the east. The volcanoes of the southeastern islands are almost 14,000 feet high, and if the air were clear enough they would be visible to a bird flying at an equal height nearly 300 miles away.

It is not the purpose of this note to suggest that the plover does fly at a great height, or that it does follow the cloud or other, perhaps more subtle, differences in cloud topography or ocean features; this may, or may not, be the case. My purpose is to utter a word of warning against the assumption that the ocean is featureless, merely because it is so shown on a map.—F. W. PRESTON, *Butler, Pennsylvania*.

Aquatic snails eaten by woodcock.—An American woodcock (*Philohela minor*) was accidentally killed in a muskrat trap set along the edge of Breakneck Creek, Rootstown Township, northeastern Ohio, on November 29, 1947. It is uncommon for this species to be in the locality at that date, since most of the woodcock leave this region in October. On request, the viscera were given to the writer by the trapper, William Winnefeld, and his uncle Bernhard Raithel. The woodcock is reported to feed almost entirely on earthworms and grubs. Three species of aquatic snails made up the bulk of the contents of the digestive tract of this specimen. The crop was filled with eight *Physa gyrina* and two *Gyraulus parvus*. In the gizzard were one *P. gyrina*, ten *G. parvus* and one *Paludetrina nickliniana*. Fragments of a weevil were also present. The bird was probably killed while engaged in hunting snails along the shallow waters of the creek.—RALPH W. DEXTER, *Kent State University, Kent, Ohio*.

***Hoploxypterus cayanus* in Colombia.**—On February 14, 1948, while Mrs. Grinnell and I were travelling in a small motor boat on the upper Meta River, in the Llano country, a few miles below Puerto Lopez, in the Department of Meta, east of the Andes, we saw two unfamiliar, medium-sized plovers, feeding along the edge of a