

The Cañon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*) raiding food storage of a trypoxylid wasp.—The Cañon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*) is a common resident of the Edwards Plateau of Central Texas; here it frequently searches for food in rock crevices and deserted outbuildings. In mid and late summer numbers of mud-dauber wasps (*Sceliphron cementarium*) build their nests in these and other situations. The nests are horizontally oriented mud tubes, approximately 30 mm long by 9 mm in diameter, constructed singly or in groups. Each builder provisions its nest with paralyzed spiders, to one of which the wasp attaches its egg. The nest is then sealed with mud, and the offspring develops through pupation in isolation. Before sealing, for an interval usually exceeding an hour, the accumulating larval food supply is exposed to the scrutiny of other arthropod feeders.

On 15 and 16 August 1970, from 10:00 to 12:00, I watched at a windowless abandoned cabin to determine the response of *C. mexicanus* to this potential food source. At this time three wasps were actively building and stocking nests in the cabin's interior, and several other complete and empty nests were in evidence. No blind was used; only conspicuous motion appeared to disturb either species. Two wrens visited the first day. The first moved about the cabin for about 5 minutes, examining and probing crevices, including one empty wasp cell, and left when another wren arrived. The second wren probed one empty cell and removed and carried off at least one spider from a partially sealed cell. The single wren that visited on the second day probed one partially filled cell and carried off one spider.

Examples of vertebrates raiding insect food storages are uncommon. In addition to this, these notes raise other points of interest. Is *Catherpes* also in direct competition for arachnids with *Sceliphron*? Does *Catherpes* have the ability to open a sealed nest? Consideration of this situation also demonstrates the difficulties of categorizing (competition, predation, parasitism, etc.) certain animal interactions simply and precisely.—ROBERT F. MARTIN, *Texas Memorial Museum, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas 78705*. Accepted 7 Jan. 71.

Bill deformity of a Yellow-headed Blackbird.—On 3 May 1968 one of us (Todd) collected an adult male (testes 8×6 mm) Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) at Coolie Marsh, 5 miles south of Excelsior Springs, Clay County, Missouri. It was most remarkable in having an abnormally long (length 49 mm), decurved upper mandible that was flared or spatulate at the tip (Figure 1A). The lower mandible was also abnormal, but much shorter (length 20 mm). In all other respects the bird appeared normal.

When taken the bird was alone in cattail (*Typha* sp.). It seems significant that the bird could eat with such a deformed bill. When killed it was not thin and was apparently in good health. Its crop and gizzard were filled with corn and also contained two larvae of the clover leaf weevil (*Hypera punctata*). Martin, Zim, and Nelson (American wildlife and plants, New York, Dover Publ., Inc., 1961, p. 169) show corn as comprising 10–25 per cent of the diet of *X. xanthocephalus* but do not mention weevil larvae, although about one-third of the diet of this species is animal matter, including beetles.

Apparently this is the first record of a bill abnormality for *X. xanthocephalus*, as a review of the literature revealed no similar reports (Pomeroy, *Brit. Birds*, 55: 49, 1962). The upper mandible of this bird does not seem to have been originally injured in any way. The lower mandible has a longitudinal crack on the right side and at its base a ventral opening (2×6 mm) into the pharynx. The distal

end of the lower mandible is also oddly shaped and larger than the proximal part (Figure 1A). An X-ray photograph (Figure 1B) shows that the shape of the upper bony jaw to be normal, and any possible modifications in the skull skeleton and musculature was secondary, the result of aberrant forces from the excessive growth of the horny covering or rhamphotheca. The distal portion of the lower bony jaw is missing, and the jaggedness of the edge suggests it was damaged earlier. Possibly this assumed injury initiated the abnormal growth of the rhamphotheca, at least for the lower jaw, as Pomeroy (op. cit.) states that bill deformities can be genetic but are often associated with some injury to the bill base. Apparently excessive growth of the rhamphotheca is fairly common in captive birds but is rare in the wild.

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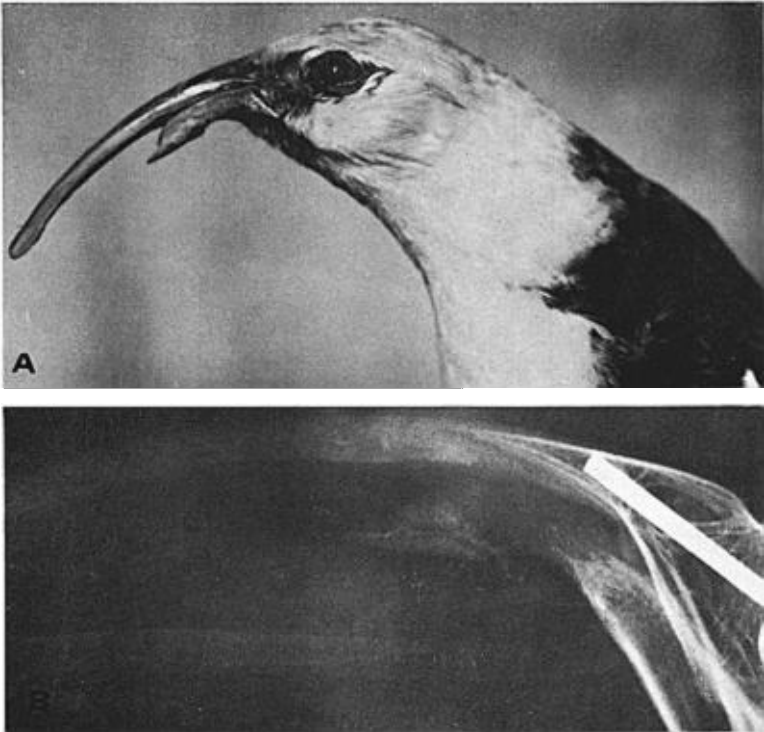


Figure 1. A, abnormal bill of adult male Yellow-headed Blackbird; B, X ray showing damaged lower bony jaw and normal bone growth for upper bony jaw.