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The Rhinoceros Auklet at Catalina Island.

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[Read before the Southern Division of the Cooper Orn. Club.]

TAKING advantage of the recent Christmas vacation, I spent several days at Catalina Island, which lies about 25 miles off the coast of Southern California. Although it was the last week in December, when the hills are generally beginning to take on a green hue, I found the landscape very dry and apparently not very inviting to most land-birds. However, in the ravines and in the wash extending back of Avalon, small birds, such as they were, were very numerous.

In the brush two subspecies of Fox Sparrows and a race of the Spurred Towhee were abundant and made a constant racket, scratching among the dead leaves. The noise that a pair of Fox Sparrows can produce from a pile of dry twigs and leaves is really remarkable and out of all proportion to the size of the bird. I saw a whole flock of quail hurry through a thicket in the bottom of a ravine without half the clatter that a sparrow on the hill-side, fifty yards away, was raising. Everyone who goes hunting at Catalina is ever on the lookout for foxes, which are numerous on the Island, and there is scarcely any one who does not stop and listen with gun ready for use, when he hears the rhythmic rustle of dry leaves among the dark bushes ahead of him. After all, these little birds may, at least on Catalina, merit with propriety their name of "Fox" Sparrows.

Besides the sparrows, the most abundant, and by far the most noticeable

birds, were the familiar Audubon's Warblers. They were everywhere, and individuals were to be seen even on the beaches within a few feet of the surf, as usual, busily engaged in catching flies. Dusky Warblers and Vigor's Wrens were fairly numerous, but very quiet and secretive, a mood in which they are seldom found. Possibly the next rain, if it ever comes, will dispel their gloom, and restore their naturally good spirits. At any rate I hope they will be more sociable next the time I visit Catalina, for I succeeded in obtaining only ten specimens of each, where I had expected to secure a good series of twenty or thirty.

Mockingbirds were present in moderate numbers, but were likewise quiet. Indeed, I did not hear a word from them, except their ordinary harsh call-note. They, in common with the linnets, were feeding on the ripe red fruit of the cholla cactus. Possibly some of the cactus pricklers, which render this fruit so distressing to persons when they eat it in a hurry, had got stuck in their throats, so they could not sing. There is a good opportunity for any aspiring ornithologist to make a new species out of the Catalina Mockingbird. All that I saw, had bright red faces, which is quite unusual in this genus, but the cactus may have had something to do with this also! However with the cactus factor acting on the Catalina Mockingbirds for several centuries, a truly distinct species may

be evolved, with a red face and no song.

As I was duly informed that no one was allowed to kill mockingbirds on Catalina, I, of course, did not do so. However, I succeeded in measuring the middle toes of several specimens, and they agreed in being longer than in the case of our Pasadena mockingbirds.

I secured one very interesting specimen, a partial albino Dusky Warbler, *Helminthophila celata sordida*. Several of the wing feathers and many of the body feathers are of a very light yellow tint, in marked contrast with the normal dark olive green of the rest of the plumage. Hummingbirds were remarkably numerous about the blossoming eucalyptus trees in Avalon. They were the Allen's Hummingbird, *Selasphorus aleni*. It is curious that this species, occurring on the adjacent mainland only in the spring and fall migrations, should remain throughout the winter on Catalina, in the same latitude and only twenty-five or thirty miles distant. As it breeds commonly on Catalina, this hummingbird is undoubtedly the resident form, while the Anna's Hummingbird is the resident species around Pasadena.

Among the land-birds, I was surprised not to find any Song Sparrows, Horned Larks or Meadowlarks, all of which are more or less common on Santa Barbara and San Clemente Islands.

After collecting small birds for four days very successfully, and, as I was told by a tourist, robbing the landscape of half its beauty, I determined to start in robbing the water-scape. So, in the afternoon I boarded the "Fleet-wing" for a cruise out around Seal Rock to see what there might be in the line of water birds. I was very successful in shooting away some twenty-five shells, but rather disappointed in securing but one bird, a sickly loon. However, the fact that this loon was sickly, was rather of a blessing, for the bird was delightfully lean, and the skin did not require the usual amount of cutting and scraping necessary to remove the fat which is present in such great quantities on a normal loon skin. This trip, though not bringing many specimens, taught me one thing, that a noisy,

wheezy, coughing gasoline launch is the last vessel to choose to hunt birds on. They almost all departed before the boat was within long range. Another thing, distances on the water appear a great deal shorter than they really are. One member of our party persisted in shooting at shags which were fully 150 yards distant when he declared they were within fifty yards. Shags are hard to kill, anyway. Seventy-five shells were fired and two birds dropped.

On Wednesday, December 29, my friend, Mr. Ferguson, came over to Avalon, and we decided to take a trip after water birds the next day. We secured a very neat looking round-bottomed boat, with two pairs of oars and row-locks, and just big enough for two. It had not been used for some time but the boatman assured us it would not leak. Accordingly we started early the next morning, but we had scarcely got beyond Sugar Loaf, before the boat was half full of water, more or less, and from that time on, we had to bail it out with a battered tomato can every few minutes. But such little things should not disturb an enthusiastic bird collector.

Before we had gone as far as White's Landing, I thought I discerned a stranger in the distance, and sure enough a closer view proved that we were in pursuit of a rare bird, none other than the Rhinoceros Auklet, with which this paper is supposed to mainly deal. With such a prize before us, we rowed for all we were worth, and soon were in fair range of it. A shot from a rocking boat at a target on the rolling waves, is not the easiest imaginable, and ours failed, or rather, the instant we fired, our Auklet disappeared in the water. We then rowed with "might and main" to the spot where the circling ripples told us the bird had gone down. We waited breathlessly with guns cocked. One of us was supposed to watch for him on one side of the boat, and one on the other, but after each had scanned his own horizon, neither would trust the other, and we really watched sharper on the opposite side of the boat than on our own. It was an exciting moment, for we had no idea

where the bird would come up. After a full minute, we began to cool a little, and such conjectures were made, as that he was wounded and had dove to the bottom of the ocean and was clinging to the kelp. But presently, fully 300 yards away, ahead of us, peacefully rested our bird, apparently none the worse for being shot at, but with his eye on us. We, of course, pulled for him, but he was aware of our intentions by this time, and dove before we were anywhere within range. This time we rowed far ahead of where he went down thinking to meet him when he rose, but he must have been able to see the boat on the surface of the water, for he appeared far to our right. We went for him again, going to the spot where he disappeared and thinking that he might be getting winded. After waiting an unusually long time we happened to look back of us in the dark reflection of the Island, and there he was far away on the waves. He had doubled back diving right under us. We went cautiously toward him, getting rather close, but still too far for a shot before he disappeared. This time we thought it better policy to stay right where we were, hoping that he might try to double back on us again, and sure enough, in about half a minute he came up to our left, not thirty feet away, and two charges of No. 8 met him squarely, and we had bagged, or rather, carefully stowed in the collecting basket, our first Rhinoceros Auklet. We spent the rest of the day chasing Auklets, each time with about the same experience, but nearly always, if we stuck to it, finally getting our bird. We worked harder that day, than either of us had before for many months, as blistered hands testified, but I felt well paid, as the result was ten fine specimens of the Rhinoceros Auklet, besides a couple of Am. Eared Grebes and a Pacific Loon.

The manner and pose of the Rhinoceros Auklet, resting or swimming on the water are quite different from those of any other sea bird met with around Catalina. It is short and chunky with head drawn in close to the body, leaving scarcely any tract that might be called a neck. The water line comes

up to about the lower edge of the wings when closed against the body, so that the bird does not rest lightly on the water like a Gull or Phalarope. The head is held on the same line as the body directly out in front, so that the top of the head and back are on the same level. The whole bird at a little distance looks most like a block of wood floating on the water. We did not once see one flying. They all preferred to dive. One which was shot at and probably slightly wounded, attempted to take flight but failed to get clear of the water, and after dragging along the surface for several feet, instantly dove. The great ease and rapidity which is shown in diving and traveling under water is remarkable. When we showed a specimen to the boatman, he said that it was called a "fool-hen," because it would not get out of the way, but generally allowed a boat to run right over it. However I think the term "fool-hen" appropriate, for they certainly fooled us many times. We heard no note and there was never but one in sight at a time. They were mostly seen about a quarter of a mile from shore. The food consisted entirely of a small yellow crustacean, which filled their gullets. We saw none of these anywhere near the surface of the water, so they must have been caught by diving to a considerable depth. The water where the Auklets were feeding was from thirty to one hundred fathoms in depth. The Rhinoceros Auklet is probably a regular common winter visitant along our coast.



MR. A. P. REDINGTON writes from Santa Barbara: "While descending the road over the San Marcos Pass here recently, we came upon a Condor who allowed us to approach within fifty yards or so before taking wing. I opposed any attempt to secure the bird, thinking that the possibility of an egg in the future might be of more value than the skin. We can almost guarantee at least the *sight* of this species in a day's trip down the Santa Ynez range."