

when she began chipping violently. He immediately stopped singing and flew to her and both disappeared—they are almost impossible to follow as a rule. On returning to where the nest had been, both were there, searching everywhere within thirty feet, and always keeping close together, stopping occasionally and looking at each other and chipping exactly as if asking questions about it. The female of one nest gave up looking for the male and staid around waiting for him. In half an hour or so, he returned without singing till about thirty yards away, when the song was entirely different from any that I have ever heard from this or any other kind of bird. It was on the principle of a yellow-throated vireo or a scarlet tanager; but the quality of a blue-headed vireo in addition, making a very strong and rich song. It was just about sunset and he evidently did not suspect danger, so possibly the nest might be located by listening for this song towards evening, but I never heard anything like it afterward. When he arrived they had a hurried conversation in very low but earnest "tsips," on the branch where he first appeared, she having flown to him immediately, evidently explaining everything, before he started to investigate.

A most noticeable characteristic of the birds of southern Oregon is their perfect self-possession. There is no wild, noisy exhibition of fear or despair, and they never become "rattled" or confused. When anything unusual happens, there seems to be a very brief and usually silent period of careful thought and then the decision is methodically carried out. Every crevice in

the bark and every bunch of moss is carefully searched and if the nest and eggs were placed anywhere within ten feet of its original situation, they would certainly be found, but I never thought of trying this to see what the birds would do.

The nests were from three feet and three inches to twenty-five feet from the ground, oaks seeming the favorite in southern Oregon and fir near Tacoma. The usual situation is in a small clump of leaves that is just large enough to almost completely conceal the nest, and yet so very small that a crow or jay would never think of anything being concealed in them. They probably nest higher still, but of course are more difficult to find.

Fresh eggs were found from May 14, to June 24 and there was no reason to suppose that more than one set was laid. As the eggs from Tacoma are very much larger than those from Oregon, it is possible that the birds may vary in the same way that the Parula warbler does on the Atlantic coast. Tacoma eggs average .83x.63 inches and Oregon eggs varying from .62x.48 to .72x.52 inches. The nests externally are about 3x2 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches and internally 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ x1 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter and depth. They are composed externally of grass and weed-stalks that must be several seasons old, (being bleached and very soft) moss and feathers; and lined with feathers (one had evidently been lined from a dead Steller jay), horse, cow and rabbit hair or fur, and sometimes the very fine stems of the flowers of some kind of moss. The male has never been seen to assist either at nest-building or incubation.

Nesting of the Little Flammulated Screech Owl on San Gorgonio Mountain.

BY M. FRENCH GILMAN, BANNING, CAL.

JUNE 3, 1894 stands out in my note book as a red-letter day. On that date in company with my friend, Nathan Hargrave, I was birds-nesting on Raywood Flat about 7500 feet

of the way toward the summit of San Gorgonio peak, some 11,900 feet high. Those who have hunted for birds nesting in deserted woodpeckers' holes know the labor and disappointment en-

tailed by climbing up to all the holes seen in the dead pine trees and stumps. But in most cases a blow with a rock or club against the stump is considered a sufficient test as to whether the tenement is occupied.

So when I rapped at the base of a dead pine stump with a deserted white-headed woodpecker's hole near the top, and no sign of life appeared, I was about to move on, but the hole looked too promising and I decided to investigate further. Before starting to climb up the sixteen feet to the nest I stood on the hillside above the tree and threw a big rock against the top. The whole side split off down as far as the bottom of the hole and out flew a little owl, and perched on a fir tree a few yards away. We had no shot-gun but my companion carried a 41-Colts. long barrel. I reached that and fired at the bird, missing of course. It flew across a canyon and perched high in another tree fifty or sixty yards away. I was disgusted and handed back the pistol hopelessly. But my friend had

been in the habit of breaking glass bottles thrown into the air so he took the pistol and brought down the owl at long range the first shot.

We then turned our attention to the stump and saw a suspicious mass of hair and fibre resting on what was left of the now exposed bottom of the hole. I skinned up the stump as carefully as possible for fear of shaking the nest loose. It was made of felted hair and fibre similar to the nest of a chickadee. In it were two nearly globular white eggs with incubation just begun. The bird was somewhat shot up by the 41-caliber bullet but I preserved the skin and packed it away for future reference. It lay neglected till May 1897 when I sent it to Dr. C. Hart Merriam for identification. He pronounced it the little flammulated screech owl (*Megascops flammeolus idahoensis*). I have investigated nearly every deserted woodpecker's hole seen since then and rapped on many pine stumps but have seen no more of *Megascops*.

Winter Plumage of the Black-tailed Gnatcatcher.

BY H. S. SWARTH, LOS ANGELES, CAL.

IN the few works containing any detailed account of the black-tailed gnatcatcher (*Poliioptila californica*) but little information is to be found concerning the changes of plumage gone through by the male bird, the author usually contenting himself with the statement that the young male resembles the female. It is a bird, moreover, whose life history is, I think, known to but few ornithologists, and I doubt if any extensive series of specimens has been taken through the year, showing the changes of plumage undergone by the male. I was under the impression, as is, I believe, the general idea, that during the fall and winter months the two sexes were always indistinguishable; and that the black cap, the distinguishing mark of the male, was

acquired by moult during the early spring months.

This may be true in part, but that it is invariably the rule is a mistake. I had taken many specimens between August and March showing no black on the head, with the exception of the almost invisible black streak over the eye, which is, I believe, always present in the male; and others during March and April undergoing moult over the entire crown; so I was the more surprised on taking on Dec. 13, 1901, a male bird with the black cap nearly complete, though not quite as extensive as in most spring specimens, and with the black feathers tipped with the blue-gray color of the rest of the upper parts, so that the black was not apparent unless the feathers were ruffled. It