

## Status of the "Arizona Goldfinch" in California.

BY JOSEPH GRINNELL.

SEVERAL persons have asked me why I left the "Arizona Goldfinch" out of the *Check-list of California Birds*. I had what appeared to me good reasons for not considering *Astragalinus psaltria arizonæ* to be a bona fide subspecies at least as occurring in California, and I will here try to explain my standpoint. The following are all the California records of this bird known to me.

*Chrysomitris Mexicanus* COOPER, Am. Nat. VIII, Jan. 1874, 17 (one seen 25 miles north of San Diego).

*Chrysomitris psaltria*, var. *arizonæ* BAIRD, BREWER, & RIDGWAY, Hist. N. Am. Bds. III, 1874, appendix, 509 (Encinetos Ranch, San Diego Co., San Buenaventura).

*Spinus psaltria arizonæ* EMERSON, Zoe I, April, 1890, 44 (Haywards); FISHER, N. Am. Fauna No. 7, May 1893, 85 (Three Rivers); SLEVIN, Bull. Coop. Orn. Club I, July 1899, 73 (Santa Clara); COHEN, Condor III, Nov. 1901, 185 (Alameda); SWARTH, Condor IV, July 1902, 94 (Los Angeles).

I happen to have examined several of the above specimens as well as others not recorded; and I have seen a number of living birds at close enough range to note their general peculiarities. In the ordinary plumage of the adult male *psaltria*, the back, scapulars and ear-coverts are uniform olive-green, with the feathers of the dorsum centrally more or less blackish. In well-marked specimens of so-called *arizonæ*, the whole upper parts together with the ear-coverts and sides of the neck are pervaded with shiny black like the top of the head, sometimes quite as deep and uniform. A bird of the latter type is thus easily distinguished from its fellows of ordinary plumage in a flock at quite a distance, and there seems at first glance good grounds for considering it a distinct and nameable form. But the contrary opinion rests on a number of indisputable facts which may be enumerated as follows:

1. The differences are only evident in the case of the male. A female taken

in company with a male of *arizonæ* shows no discernible differences from female *psaltria* of the same plumage age.

2. The characters of "*arizonæ*" are limited to the peculiar blackening or melanism of the upper parts. A careful comparison of *psaltria* examples with extreme specimens of "*arizonæ*" shows not a single difference in measurements as a whole or proportionately, and there are no other color differences either in extent of white markings or tint of lower surface.

3. The melanism characteristic of "*arizonæ*" is altogether inconstant in quantity. I have seen no two exactly similar examples. Between the extreme of "*arizonæ*" and normal *psaltria* there is every intermediate condition. The melanism begins with the spreading and final coalescence of the dark centres of the dorsal feathers. Black feathers appear in the ear-coverts, which finally become uniform black to their lower limits; not that I believe that any such changes take place in the individual, but only to express the relative conditions in a series of specimens.

4. Those birds called *arizonæ* appear throughout the range of *psaltria* (in California); they are not confined to any particular faunal area. They have not been recorded anywhere where *psaltria* has not, and *psaltria* has been found in no faunal area where specimens "inclining to *arizonæ*" have not. This is an extremely important consideration; for observation has shown us that subspecies (which are incipient species) probably always originate through isolation (either by long distance or intervention of barriers) in separate zoo-geographical areas.

5. There is no definite season of occurrence of the *arizonæ* type which might go to show that it was a regular visitant from elsewhere. It occurs at all seasons and is found feeding and breeding in the same localities and at

the same time with the other goldfinches.

I have concluded from the foregoing that so-called *arizonæ* is only an extreme, and by no means uncommon, male plumage of the Arkansas Goldfinch, in which the black dorsal markings become to a varying degree extended. For this reason I included

*arizonæ* in its various combinations among the synonyms of *Astragalinus psaltria psaltria* in the Checklist. This of course must be understood to apply only to California birds. The status of the *psaltria* group elsewhere may be entirely otherwise. There are no specimens at hand, so I have no means of knowing.

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### Nesting of Swainson Hawk.

BY C. S. SHARP, ESCONDIDO, CAL.

THE Swainson hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) is one of the most interesting of our western raptors. Less well known, perhaps, because of its quiet and unassuming nature and its lack of propensity to wander but it is one of our most useful birds and well worthy of every protection from the naturalist and the farmer. Indeed there is no one of the raptorial group that is more generally beneficial, for its food supply consists wholly of those four-footed pests which every farmer and ranch man recognizes as among his worst enemies.

Of the breeding hawks of this section although the only one that is not resident, it is the most abundant, and seems to have become more so in recent years than formerly. Previous to 1897 it was quite scarce and I very seldom saw it although I frequently recognized it in descriptions by the small boys here, of a bird they called the "Mexican black hawk" or the "five dollar hawk" from the price of the eggs of that species in Lattin's catalogue. Up to that time *Buteo lineatus elegans* was quite common but *swainsoni* seems to have taken its place to a large extent, and the former is now very scarce—so much so that when in 1896 there were four pair of birds breeding in a stretch of river timber of about two miles there is now only one. All the old nests are occupied by owls or the *swainsoni*.

While *Buteo borealis calurus* is more

common in the higher foothill country *swainsoni* seems to prefer the lower levels and especially favors the fringe of sycamores and cottonwood trees along the rivers, becoming seemingly attached to a certain locality and returning to it year after year. Each pair of hawks seems to have its particular hunting ground and they never stray far from home. The appearance of a pair of these birds in the breeding season is a pretty certain indication that their nest is near. They are indefatigable hunters and from their first arrival until their departure in the fall they may be constantly seen circling high in air or sailing low over fields and hillsides ever on the watch for some luckless squirrel or mouse that has wandered too far from protecting shelter. Of these and other four-footed pests of the farmer, with an occasional lizard or insect it makes its diet and is essentially *not* a "hen hawk."

It seems to have only a passing fancy for small birds and doubtless would not take them if other food were in plenty. This fact the small birds seem to understand and do not fear to build their nests in the same tree with them. I have found nests of *Icterus bullocki*, *Colaptes cafer collaris*, *Tyrannus verticalis*, *Zenaidura macroura* and *Carpodacus mexicanus frontalis* all in the same tree with *swainsoni* and the nest of the saucy *Carpodacus* was snugly ensconced on the side of the latter. No other