

Hirundo erythrogastra. Barn Swallow. Seen at Ft. Lewis and found nesting at Cortez.

Piranga ludoviciana. Western Tanager. Not common; breeding.

Stelgidopteryx serripennis. Rough-winged Swallow. Seen a few times.
(*To be concluded in November*)

THE RUFIOUS-CROWNED SPARROW IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

By NELSON K. CARPENTER

IT was another one of those dark foggy mornings that were so plentiful last spring in southern California. I was standing on the east slope of a steep gulch watching a pair of Costa Hummers feeding their two fully grown young. I stepped to one side to get a better view but in doing so startled something in the grass about five feet away. Catching a glimpse of a small brown object as it shot into the thick brush ahead I completely forgot my hummingbirds.

Whether it was bird or mammal I could not tell. My first guess named it a wood-rat but a moment's reflection changed my mind. It must be a bird. Perhaps a Spurred Towhee. I parted the weeds and almost the first thing I saw was a nest containing three fresh "white" eggs. Not a Spurred Towhee but probably a Rufous-crowned Sparrow. I waited for a few minutes but did not get another glimpse of the bird.

My next visit to the gulch was made on June 2, just four days after I had first found the nest. I wound my way thru the thick brush as quietly as possible, but when I came to the nest the sparrow was gone, and all looked just as I had left them. My hopes vanished. Yes, a valuable find but probably an incomplete sett and uncertain identity. I took several exposures with a kodak and went to the other side of the ravine to await the uncertain. It was fully half an hour before I saw anything encouraging. The sun was getting hot and I was pretty well disgusted, when of a sudden two sparrows came flying over the hill and lit in a sumac bush about forty feet from the nest. They did not make a sound but quietly plumed their feathers. Finally one of them slipped to the ground and disappeared. About two minutes later it reappeared in the top of a bush about ten feet nearer the nest, but quickly slid down the stem into the grass and was again lost to view. This was repeated at least half a dozen times, the bird having completed almost a semi-circle around the nest, but at the same time drawing nearer. Finally its last survey of the country was taken from a small bush about three feet from the nest. This time she did not climb to the top but only about half way up. She stayed but a moment and was again lost from view. A few seconds and I saw her standing on the edge of the nest looking at its treasures. She slipped on and completely hid from sight. All this time her mate did sentinel duty from the top of the sumac, which was just out of reach of my light charges of dust shot.

I thought it was my next move, but while figuring the surest way by which I might collect her, Mrs. Sparrow appeared on the edge of her nest and quietly slipped away to her nearest outlook. I shot quickly but she was quicker, for all I could find upon crossing the gulch was broken twigs. Her mate was gone also and I was just where I had been an hour before, only with the birds badly scared and perhaps one injured.

All I could do was to recross the gulch and wait. Another half-hour of blazing heat and my sparrows came over the hill and alighted in the same bush as they had done on their former visit. I waited to make sure that these were my birds and while doing so saw their first performance entirely repeated. This time, however, I had better success for I secured the female just after she left the nest, proving the species to be the Rufous-crowned Sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps*). Dissection showed the set to be complete.

The eggs, upon blowing, proved to be slightly incubated and also had a very distinct bluish color, spoken of by the late Chester Barlow (CONDOR, Vol. IV, page 109). In fact they were nearly as blue as Arkansas Goldfinch eggs but have since faded considerably even tho kept in the dark. They measure as follows: .74x.61, .74x.62, .71x.62 inches.

The nest was placed at the foot of a bank which was about a foot high. A small bush which had grown on top of the ledge had died and fallen over making



NEST AND EGGS OF RUFOUS-CROWNED SPARROW

a miniature brush pile. Into this the birds had broken their way using the fine twigs of the bush as a foundation for the nest. This mat of twigs was nearly two inches wide on the front side of the nest and entirely lacking where the nest touched the bank. The nest itself was made of very fine dry yellow grass with considerable black horse hair in the lining. The inside dimensions of the nest are one and a half inches deep by two and three-quarter inches across. The mat of twigs around the exposed edges was so interwoven with the surrounding bush that it was hard to tell exactly where the nest began.

Last year a friend collected a set of four eggs of this species near San Diego, on May 13, in which incubation was complete in three, the fourth being added. The nest was on the ground and made entirely of grass. The eggs were slightly larger than the set just described and a very much paler blue.

Escondido, California.