

to ten or fifteen pairs, in company with the Black-capped Tern. They lay sometimes two, but nearly always three eggs. These are very handsome, being a beautiful deep rich olive-green. They are spotted especially near the larger end, with chocolate brown. The spots are of unequal intensity, some darker, some paler, with every intergradation.



DOWNY YOUNG OF THE ROSY GULL; ABOUT ONE-HALF NATURAL SIZE

Mr. H. E. Dresser in describing these eggs says: "They cannot be mistaken for any other Gull, except perhaps those of *Xema sabinii*. From the latter, however, they may be distinguished by being decidedly green in tone of their color, whereas those of *Xema sabinii* are not so, and by having the surface of the shell dull and glossless, whereas the eggs of the Sabine Gull are somewhat glossy.

The young Rosy Gulls, says Buturlin, are very lively and clever little creatures. As soon as they see an intruder they try to creep thru the grass to the water, and swim away to some distance, even if the waves are comparatively heavy. If you lie well hidden, after several minutes the little creatures begin to swim about, returning to the ground or the wet grass whence you disturbed them and uttering cries as they search for their mother. When caught, they peck your finger, peep and quack, but are not much frightened.

*Lancaster, Massachusetts.*

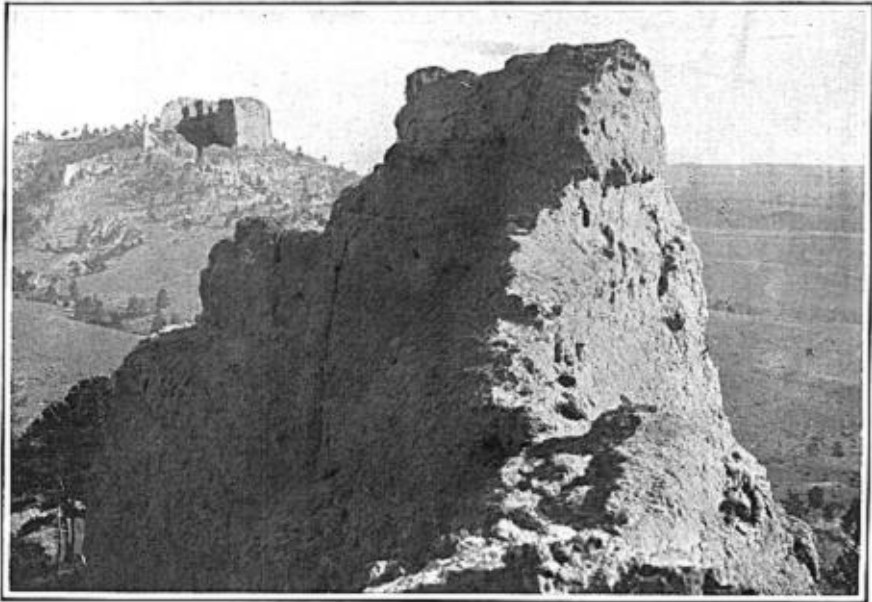
## THE PRAIRIE FALCONS OF SADDLE-BACK BUTTE

By P. B. PEABODY

FEW birds have so completely aroused my enthusiasm and won my heart. I came to know them, superficially, many years ago. Two successive summers, thru the generosity of the shy, black-eyed son of a Pittsburg millionaire, I spent two successive months of August in Manitou Park. The lad, for some strange reason, had taken a sort of fancy to me; tho I, as Chaplain of the boarding school, had barely spoken to him. And so I had the rare joy of long, ideal days in the most beautiful spot in all the world; among birds of rarest interest. Here, with "Orlando" as a quiet but most sympathetic companion, I explored the mesa and the foothills, finding there, among the many other hawks that battered on the vast prairie dog towns far down the mesa, an occasional winnowing Falcon. The supreme delight I found in examining the nest-cavities long occupied by the Prairie Falcons in the red sandstone monumental rocks is just as thrilling today as it was those August days, over twenty years ago. The genuine bird man never grows old!

An illustrated Bulletin of the wide-awake Nebraska Ornithological Union, issued a few years ago, aroused in me a sharp renewal of deep-slumbering interest in the Prairie Falcon. For a half-tone which accompanied the account gave the exact spot where Mr. Carriker (now in South America) saw two callow young and a tantalizing egg lying on a ledge twelve feet below the summit of the nesting butte. And it was graphically told how the daring youngster was only restrained from attempting that dangerous vertical climb-down, without any rope, over the wetted rocks, by the caution of two staid professors of the University!

The half-tone looked strangely familiar, tho the butte had been pictured from an aspect I had not seen. Suddenly it dawned upon me that the Saddle-back Butte was none other than one of a most venerable series which crowned the hill-tops of a certain picturesque uplift above the prairie, in Sioux County, Nebraska. These I had seen and admired as I entered the country, Wyoming-ward. I was but seventy miles away. I would see the Saddle-back again!



SADDLE-BACK BUTTE, THE NESTING SITE OF THE PRAIRIE FALCON

With ample ropeage I went, in latter-May. As I climbed the slow grade that rose to the foot of the butte I kept both eyes astrain for the sight of the kingly birds not seen before for twenty years. But only as I touched the steep incline and laboriously began the upward climb that led to the foot of Saddle-back Butte did the male come out at me.

With what incarnation of mingled grace and solicitude did he sweep down the cliffs toward me, uttering the while, a mellow, quavering cry—Wert-wert-wert-wert-wert-wert—which rang out vibrantly on the morning air. Poising, afar, he began to sweep half-timid, half-cautious curves in my direction. It seemed as if he were worrying about that sitting mate of his; yet felt a little too cautious to show it. I toiled to the south side of the butte, and made the winding ascent to the top, amusing myself by reading the "fools' names" that were carved at nearly every step. Over the narrow, sloping crest I crept with hair on end, and stood on

the fairly level top. Just below the north margin, overlooking a panorama beautiful beyond words, I could see, as I crept nearer and nearer, the stippings of bird-lime which, as seen from below, had attracted me to that profile of the butte. There, surely, lay a hidden ledge. Only its outer edge could be seen. The female *must* be there: why could I not dislodge her? Back to the south, a dozen feet from the north brink, stood a flag propped up by fragments of the soft, rough, nodular chalk-rock: did the Falcons put it there as a mark of eminent domain?

Descending I viewed the environ of the north ledge from the ground. It seemed a full thousand feet above me; and full-dangerous of approach. The male falcon was on the watch. His caution did not desert him; nor did his anxiousness. Anon he would make a sally and a survey in my direction, returning then to his favored perch. There he would crouch, eyes fixed upon me, in what seemed to me an attitude of reproach.

With a crooked stick for a probe I regained the summit. The ledge was essayed. But it proved as futile, as baffling as ever. And the female refused to dislodge. A sickening feeling of disappointment began to creep over me. Slowly I descended. A tour of the butte gave me the petty solace of a few remains of falcon-prey: mostly flight feathers of the Red-shafted Flicker. Then back to town I slowly crawled. The flicker mementoes were lost, on the way. The negatives, taken with such care, proved hopelessly blackened.

Nevertheless, back I came the following May. One had learned a *little*. It seemed clear that my falcons had wholly outwitted me; and that I had never scanned the real nesting place at all. On this second visit the old male falcon tactics were repeated. A few wide sallies were made, yet the "manner", this time, was quite as it had been before. But finally, to my surprise, the bird disappeared.

At intervals of camera work, beneath the shadowing of a friendly little bull-pine, I lay down to rest. Virtually I was hidden. The male falcon suddenly appeared. And his manner *now* was nonchalant. A quick reconnoitre on his part made it plain that there was no eyrie on the north end of the butte. Amid the quick bewilderment that struck me, the falcon suddenly swept right into the heart of the west facade, and bent his way upward with consummate grace. And there, from a pot-hole previously unperceived by me, his mate came out to meet him with quivering wings and a little cry. Fain would I try them both, *now*, to see what both would do, together. Out in the open I came; and crept along the foot of the cliff.

The male seemed now to feel at ease. He had done his duty. On some jutting ledge or nodule, above my head, he would perch for moments at a time; and what a spectacle of unconquered pride and beauty he made, as he sat there, sun-glorified; while the field-glass brought him—splendid plumage, olive-yellow legs, flashing eyes—all within arm's-length of me!

Not thus, the sitting mate. She never rested, was seldom silent. The same, soft, mellow quavering cry which I have so often heard emitted by some solicitous Rough-leg circling her snowy young in their hill-side nest on some steep North Dakota gorge, resounded now, from the mother Prairie Falcon, ceaselessly. Meanwhile, in great circles, now from the one side and now from another she swept down at me with that apparent mingling of anger and fear so fascinating in any wild mother. So close would she come, at times, that I could almost fancy the whiffing of her wings upon my face. Sometimes from the base and again from the top of the butte I watched and tested the birds. Yet nearness from above seemed in no sense to increase the female's solicitude; nor did one's withdrawing part way down the incline, appear to abate it. Then, suddenly, as if in concerted plan,

both birds winged away. In moments incredibly brief they had disappeared, nor did they return. It mattered not. My work was done. What good is a rope, intended for twelve-foot work, when the twelve feet are lengthened into fifty?

But in May, 1906, I was fore-armed. There was 500 feet of inch-and-a-quarter rope, several hundred feet of smaller, and a "tackle" warranted to hold up a dead weight of 500 pounds, and to stop, without slightest danger, at any desired point. What an ideal arrangement for photography *in situ*! A helper?—yes, of course. Masonic request, sent out at random, brought cordial reply. "Harry H. is just the man you want."

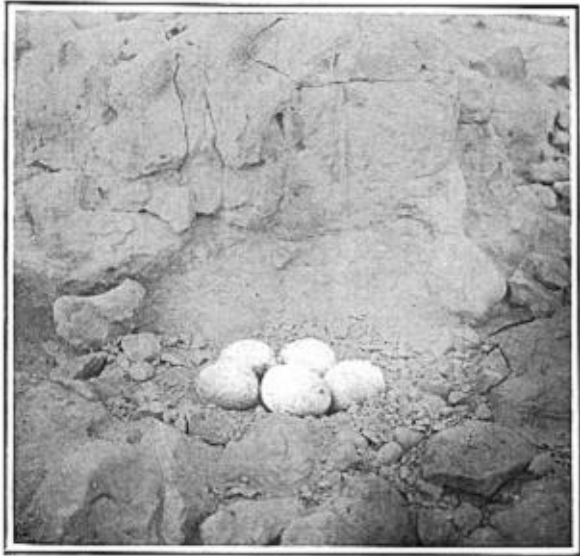
Long before I reached the base of saddle-back the male Falcon had sensed me. Instantly he swept down the heights in a long, incredibly swift sweep, rising at end of his tilt, in one slow curve. The tremulous warning cry, now so well-known, rang out again and again. This entire feint was twice or thrice repeated; and then the slender creature went his swift way to an apparently favored perching crag, on the north side of the butte.

Then did the unexpected happen. Out into the sunlight, with strong, excited cries, came the sitting female falcon, from a huge pot-hole not ten feet below the very highest crest of Saddle-back. Down she swept, far past the butte-bottom, and almost to the level of the deep gorge below. Rising again she seated herself beside her mate. Thru the field glass I watched them. Erect sat he, without apparent care. Not so, *she*: with body low-crouched and head hither-turned, she seemed the incarnation of maternal anxiety and vigilance.

Shortly she came hurtling back to the ledges near the nest. The shadow of a hawk-

ing Say Phoebe flitted across her body, and she quickly ducked her head. A Sparrow Hawk, whose eggs lay safe hidden in a west-end cranny, made a swift pass at her, but she heeded not the playful challenge. To the photographer the hours of early light are precious. Soon were camera and man both perched upon the steep crags; the camera swathed to a projecting node; the man hanging on by sheer tenacity. No fairer scene ever soothed a fevered sense. Away to the east lay a most beautiful valley. Trees grew there, in cultivated masses. Broad swards, rich of green, stood out in strong contrast with the already blanching growths of the open ranges. Scattered everywhere, were red-roofed barracks and the cottages of the garrison. It was the Fort.

The tackle was a dismal failure. It just tangled up, balked. Then we gave up the situ-photography, and went after eggs. An hour of work gave us the ropes untangled, ready for use. Then, while I was preparing a steadying rope for Harry to use in crossing the saddle-hollow, a slight sound made me look upward; and,



EGGS OF THE PRAIRIE FALCON IN SIMULATED SITE

there was Harry carelessly climbing the four-foot-wide crest of the hollow, with a coil of rope in either hand! The big climbing rope remained stubbornly kinky. While I untwisted its two-hundred feet of length, Harry sat on the brink above, kicking his heels into eternity, and watching the falcons. Suddenly a shout from him broke the previous gravity of his demeanor: "*She's gone onto her eggs*". (They were but a short eight feet below him.)

In curiosity he dropped fragment after fragment of the friable rock down upon the lower margin of the pot-hole; but the stout-hearted Falcon never faltered. Nor did she come gliding out, until I came around, in my rope-adjusting, to her side of the butte. *How* did she discern me?

Three times, as I remember, did she come out, alternately, while I was at work, and then returned, without hesitation, to her eggs. Yet Harry's forehead and hair hung each time but eight feet above her eyrie. After interminable preparations Harry was ready for the descent. Two minutes later he was standing upright on the ledge margin of the pot-hole. The cavity was four feet laterally-deep. At the back of it five eggs lay upon the disintegrated rock. It had been planned to have Harry slide down the two ropes to earth. Having duly greeted the "find" I returned to the opposite side of the butte. There was a safety-rope to be held. But, ere I reached it, there came a shout from Harry: "I'm on top!" And there he stood, agrin.

The five eggs of 1906 had been laid about April 20 to 30. The U. of N. date falls about the first of May. The nesting for 1907, quite strangely for a backward Spring, was earlier. Harry wrote me that when he examined the new eyrie, about the 25th of May, there were half-grown young, three of them in the pocket. "My rope," he added, "was five feet too short; but it did not matter." There was fair evidence that our falcons had nested again, in June of 1906. The University record and Harry's note for the current year make it apparent that five eggs are probably unusual for this pair of Falcons.

I have cited one warning note of the Falcons. It will be intelligible, I fear, to none but myself. There are two other cries that might be written down: a rattling, "Kr-r-r-r", with rising intonation; and a peevish, whining "kruk". This I find compared in my note book to a noise made occasionally by flickers, or to one call of the guinea hen.

The prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) may be considered as fairly common in the butte and the canyon regions of northwestern Nebraska. I found them rare in northeastern Wyoming; tho there was indeed, a pair that nested somewhere in the vicinity of Sundance Mountain. This pair arrived, usually, about the 10th or 12th of April. As is well-known, this Falcon is a terror to poultry. This menace is in no sense confined to the period of family-rearing. While passing thru Sidney, Nebraska, on September 6, I found, strung upon the wires of a hen-ranch fence about a dozen hawks that had fallen victims to the ranch-man's gun, either thru their own *malice prepense* or because of their fatal similarity to injurious hawks. With two or three Sparrow Hawks, a Red-tail or two, and a young male Marsh Hawk were a predominance of Prairie Falcons. The most of these were normal juveniles. One was a mature bird. But the one that caught my sight at once was what I might call a melano-erythristic juvenile. This was a bird of rare beauty; and keen indeed, was my regret that the bird was utterly rotten. Only the tail and wings could be saved. It is quite probable that these unusual color-phases, in both extremes, are quite commoner than even the savants would have us believe. As for albinism, however, the writer is inclined to believe Mr. Cameron in error (see *The Auk*, July, 1907) in believing that the Swainson Hawk normally blanches with age. I have never seen but one such (in Kansas, May, 1907); yet I have seen many melanists. Moreover, Mr. Cameron has seen hundreds of normals to my one; yet he, by his own admission (*loc. cit.*), has never seen but two blanched Swainson Hawks!

*Blue Rapids, Kansas.*