

## BIRDS OF THE BIG BASIN

By MILTON S. RAY

WITH THREE PHOTOGRAPHS BY OLUF J. HEINEMANN

I HAVE told in a previous number of THE CONDOR how Heinemann and I tramped from the coast thru the Ben Lomond Mountains to the Big Basin, which was reached on the 13th of June, 1908. The present article tells of our stay of four days in the Basin, and the return journey to the coast.

Our stay, while rather short, still gave us time to visit the principal points of interest and to gain a fair idea of the bird life. Arriving as we did at a later date than in 1907, and in a year of less rainfall, we found that the extreme dampness of the previous year did not now prevail. Bird life in general was most abundant about the settlement known as the Governor's Camp, due no doubt to the fact that the habitations attract many species which, receiving protection as they do here, have no occasion to leave.



COAST JAY FORAGING AROUND CAMP IN BIG BASIN

Thruout the entire Basin the Coast Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri carbonacea*) is an ever present species and is even more noticeable on account of its noisy ways and deep blue plumage. These jays are the most arrant bird thieves I know of and were the cause of many a joke on "green" campers. One party arriving from Los Gatos in a motor car brought a cherry limb thickly hung with fruit; but leaving it on the hotel porch for a few moments they found, on returning, they had nothing to show their expectant friends but the green leaves. Bolder birds than these Big Basin Jays I

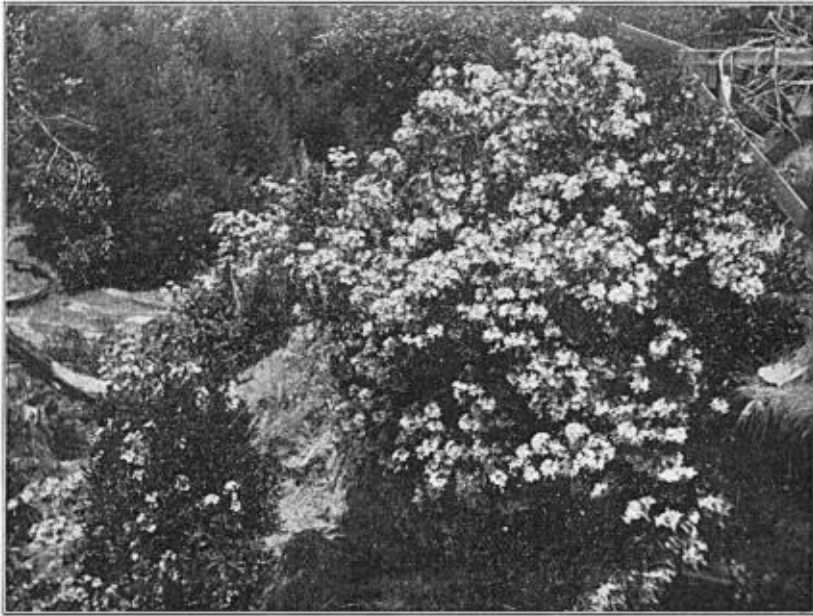
have never seen anywhere, not even excepting the Mainas of Honolulu or the Magpies of Shanghai. When eating our meals on the camp-tables, which were about eight feet long, a jay, or often several, would alight on the far end, and with that wise-acre look and scolding note come sideling up the table. Picking up the nearest eatable handy the bird would fly to a nearby perch to enjoy it; or perhaps, having been noticed by other jays, would be compelled to fly to safety thru the woods with a host of screaming fellows in pursuit. In no way afraid of the camera we were enabled to take pictures as close as we desired; but our camp being in the thick shade instantaneous photographs, for the jay is ever active, were not a great success. The jay rises early, for every morning before the camps were astir the jays, hungry and saucy, paraded thru the grounds peering into every nook and cranny and, alas, farewell to anything eatable lying within their reach. The jay, tho bold, is ever alert, and possesses a remarkable quickness of vision, as many an angered camper, with well-directed tho unavailing missile, is aware.

This bird has one of the most varied vocabularies I know of. Here are some of the most common calls: a quick succession of chep chep, chep, chep, usually

followed by cayad, cayad, cayad, or a high pitched keep, keep keep, or kee-lo, kee-lo, sometimes varied to kid, kid, kid. Nor is this all; for this very versatile bird at times breaks into a melodious sort of whistle which, while not of rare beauty, still is easily the equal of some of the birds termed songsters.

The noisy California Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus bairdi*), with their loud, merry cry, yay-cob, yay-cob, yay-cob, were most of the time among the tops of the tallest trees, and here a tall tree means two hundred feet or so. Even from this great height, however, their loud call resounding thru the woods was all too plainly heard by those who preferred to linger in the misty shades of dream-land in the early morning hours.

Here, too, in these great redwood timber lands is the home country of the Point Pinos Junco (*Junco hyemalis pinosus*). Attractive but rather shy, these little birds were nearly always about the edge of camp, hunting for stray morsels



AZALEAS IN BIG BASIN

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in a quiet, unobtrusive way. The snow-bird can make no claim as a songster, yet with its dainty ways and pleasing plumage it is by no means the least interesting of the birds in the great forest.

Down along those waterways, the Waddell, Berry Creek and others, that course thru the endless woods, are the haunts of less known forms of bird life. Know you how these silvery streams go laughing thru the forest beautiful? Where great trees line the banks with varied bark effects in grays and browns, and verdant moss-grown rocks and in gayer green the alders, ferns and shrubbery, and azaleas, too, veritable trees! thick with thousands of rich scented, snowy blossoms? This is a fairy land and the home of those feathered fairies, peerless in song, the Winter Wren, Water Ouzel and Hermit Thrush. Nor should comparisons be drawn between their songs; for each in its way is a gem of bird-music. That of the Winter Wren cheery, high-keyed and sweet, lends a charm to every woodland ramble; the

Water Ouzel's sung in unison with the waterfalls is a blending rare of liquid notes. The ever far-away song of the Magician Thrush, secluded and solitary, rich in tone and clear as a crystal bell, gives an added depth and distance and an air of fascinating mystery to these great forest canyons, remembered long after, when much else is forgotten.

Our ramble carried us thru the Basin to all four points of the compass, on the north to Sempervirens Camp, east to Pine Mountain, south along the Waddell



**BERRY CREEK FALLS, BIG BASIN: HOME OF WATER OUZELS,  
WINTER WRENS AND HERMIT THRUSHES**  
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favorite haunt of Water Ouzels.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the bird life in this region is the great difference between the birds within the Basin and those in the more or less de-timbered country on its eastern edge. A comparison of species in both sections better illustrates this difference. These lists are arranged in order of abundance, the commonest species being number one.

and west to the head of Berry Creek. Nor did we always follow the placarded trails but traveled numberless miles thru the unbroken wilderness, which was often laborious and at times somewhat dangerous. From the top of Pine Mountain, which we ascended on June 15th, we were afforded a view of the entire region. Below the peak, running north and south, lay the great forest lands, the low ranges and valleys extending far north into San Mateo county, while on both sides of the Basin, east and west rose higher but rocky and barren mountain ranges.

The trip to Berry Creek and its many waterfalls was taken on June 16th. Altho somewhat difficult, owing to the thick underbrush and precipitous character of the country, we secured successful views of both the upper falls, Red Bank and Mossbrae, as well as the better known Berry Creek Falls, which is shown herewith. Here, amid the continuous roar of the foaming falls and the shifting clouds of spray, was ever the

## SPECIES FOUND WITHIN THE BIG BASIN

1. Coast Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri carbonacea*)
2. Point Pinos Junco (*Junco hyemalis pinosus*)
3. California Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus bairdi*)
4. California Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus californicus*)
5. Western Winter Wren (*Nannus hiemalis pacificus*)
6. Santa Cruz Chickadee (*Parus rufescens barlowi*)
7. Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Nuttallornis borealis*)
8. California Quail (*Lophortyx californicus californicus*)
9. Western Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis difficilis*)
10. Brewer Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)
11. Monterey Hermit Thrush (*Hylocichla guttata slevini*)
12. American Water Ouzel (*Cinclus mexicanus unicolor*)
13. Western Wood Pewee (*Myiochanes richardsoni richardsoni*)
14. Intermediate Wrentit (*Chamaea fasciata intermedia*)
15. Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura septentrionalis*)
16. Western Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo borealis calurus*)
17. Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*)
18. California Creeper (*Certhia familiaris occidentalis*)
19. Russet-backed Thrush (*Hylocichla ustulata ustulata*)
20. Black-headed Grosbeak (*Zamelodia melanocephala capitalis*)

## SPECIES FOUND AT THE BASIN'S EDGE

1. California Jay (*Aphelocoma californica californica*)
2. Green-backed Goldfinch (*Astragalinus psaltria hesperophilus*)
3. California Towhee (*Pipilo crissalis crissalis*)
4. Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Nuttallornis borealis*)
5. California Thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum redivivum*)
6. California Quail (*Lophortyx californicus californicus*)
7. Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana occidentalis*)
8. Intermediate Wrentit (*Chamaea fasciata intermedia*)
9. San Francisco Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus falcifer*)
10. Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura carolinensis*)
11. Western Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo borealis calurus*)
12. Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans nigricans*)
13. Russet-backed Thrush (*Hylocichla ustulata ustulata*)
14. Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*)
15. Dotted Canyon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus punctulatus*)

While to the bird-lover the Basin, with its delightful surroundings and varied tho not always abundant bird life, is an ideal place for study, yet, to the oologist the region may prove a disappointment, as nests are alike hard to find and to reach. We found but three nests, two of which were located on the way back from Mossbrae Falls and both were of the Western Flycatcher. The first, an empty nest, was placed among the bark folds of a great redwood, fifteen feet up, along Berry Creek. The second was built where the ground sloped slightly above a footpath and was partially hid by weeds and roots and held three eggs apparently fresh. The two were similarly constructed of moss, stems and spider webs, and lined with redwood bark.

It was on the day we left, the 17th of June, that we found our third nest, an Intermediate Wrentit's. We had emerged from the forest proper and were near its

edge when I noticed a nest laced to an upright alder fork, in a thicket, twelve feet up. It was made of plant fibers and down, and a few weed stems, and contained four very small young. The parents, while they strongly resented my intrusion, did not appear in the least afraid, but boldly returned to the nest while I was still at the foot of the tree.

From the Basin, past Blume's old mill, up the long but gradual grade we toiled. Noon found us on the summit and some hours later the familiar cabins at Boyea Creek Dam appeared below us among the timber. The afternoon and night were passed here, and next morning a hurried march was made to Folger, from where the train was taken to Santa Cruz and Capitola.

Here at Capitola, beneath the great alders, sycamores and willows that shade our camp, I am penning these lines. It is very pleasant here at the mouth of Soquel Creek and on the shore of Monterey Bay, yet, after all, there is no place in all this fair county like that great woodland, the Big Basin Forest.

*Capitola, California.*

#### NOTES ON THE HABITS OF *PHAINOPEPLA NITENS*

By HARRIET WILLIAMS MYERS

ON the 22nd of last April (1908) I heard the Phainopeplas in our neighborhood for the first time of the season. The next day I saw a pair of them about, and on the 26th, at 3:40 P. M., I came upon a pair of them nest-building in the same pepper tree where the year before there had been a nest; not in the same place, however, this nest being in an upright crotch, while last year's was in a horizontal one. The nest was not far along—probably only begun that day.

This nest-building in April I consider unusual for these birds—at least in my vicinity (Garvanza). Ordinarily they first make their appearance not earlier than April 22, oftentimes a few days later. Always, also, before this year the males have been observed two or three days in advance of the females, and neither sex has been abundantly represented before the early part of May. The earliest record of nest building that I have before this one is May 12.

Ordinarily there has seemed to be rivalry between the males in the selection of mates, not a little mild dueling being a part of the program. These birds being paired when they first made their appearance has led me to wonder if they came north mated.

As I have previously written for *THE CONDOR* my previous observations regarding the nest building habit of this species, I shall not dwell upon it in this short record, since it differed not materially from other nests watched.

These birds seemed neither of them to be very shy, nor to mind my watching them. In this they differed from others I have watched, usually one bird, sometimes the male and sometimes the female, minding my presence.

Both birds worked at the nest building, the male, as usual, doing the major part of it. May 3rd, just a week after I had discovered the nest, was a cold day with strong wind and some rain. Up to this time the birds had been seen daily at the nest and it seemed about finished. It was 5 P. M. before I got out to see how things were progressing. As I came in sight of the tree I saw the female fly out