

In the stage reached by number 4 the primaries have quite completed their growth.

Figure 2 shows a male in juvenal plumage (number 1), a male in second winter plumage (number 2), a female in juvenal plumage (with some first winter feathers appearing on the upper breast, however) (number 3) and a female in second winter plumage (number 4).

Dr. Dwight, in a paper on the molt of the North American *Tetraonidæ* (*Auk* XVII, 1900, p. 50), speaks of the young of this species as being alike in the juvenal plumage, and resembling the adult female. All the young males I secured have the crissum, flanks, and lower abdomen, dull black (a mark surprisingly conspicuous as the birds take flight), while the middle of the breast is rusty brown, a foreshadowing of the brilliant markings to appear later; while the young females (and adults also) have these same parts white or pinkish.

This species seems to be late with its breeding. The young of *Lophortyx gambeli*, *L. californicus vallicola*, and *Oreortyx pictus plumiferus*, living under very similar conditions, have, by the end of September as a rule, fully acquired their first winter plumage, while I have secured young of *Cyrtonyx m. mearnsi* the first week in November which had hardly begun the post-juvenal molt. It is possible that the heavy summer rains that occur in the regions inhabited by this species destroy many of the earlier sets of eggs, thus forcing the birds to bring out their young later, but the same reasoning would apply to other species not so conspicuously dilatory.

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## THE POPULAR NAMES OF BIRDS

By JONATHAN DWIGHT, JR., M. D.

POPULAR or vernacular names are of two sorts—those very local in their use and those approved by standard authorities for general use wherever the language is spoken. The standard for North American Birds, for over twenty years, has been the A. O. U. Check-List which has as a matter of fact recognized the most widely used local names and only supplied others when no popular name was in vogue. Of late years unfortunately its authority has been impaired by a few radicals who have been agitating certain "reforms", and under the circumstances it may be well to weigh these claims which do not seem to rest on a very solid foundation.

There is no immunity to the germs of fads, and their virulence is attested by every new fashion, every new cult, every new world-language, every new breakfast food that periodically flourishes and claims its victims; and just as some visionaries seek to improve on the natural development of dogs or horses by clipping of ears and docking of tails, so, in much the same spirit, others clip and dock words in the attempt to reform spelling or improve grammar.

Today some of our apostles of vernacular reform wish to throw away the possessive case for the popular names of birds and beasts and substitute the so-called adjectival form;—they would have us say "Audubon Warbler," "Anna Humming-bird," "Wilson Thrush," "Merriam Elk," and so on, dropping the time-honored apostrophe and the "s." Tomorrow, perhaps, it may please them to drop "needless" syllables and thereby attain such agreeable results as Bar Owl, Belt King-

fisher, Chip Sparrow, Horn Grebe, West Gull or North Phalarope. Dropping of capitals has already been tried and we are left to wonder what may be Lucy Warbler, Ross Goose or Brewster Booby, and to dread the possibility of "simplified" spelling which might give us Blak-bild Kuku, Red-id Vireo, or Blak-capt Chikady. Once we begin with "reform" and there is no telling where it may end.

English grammar and usage are, however, not to be lightly set aside, and it is well not to be beguiled by "reform" that offers no adequate advantages. Granted that we may say, for instance, either "Wilson's Thrush occurs" or "the Wilson Thrush occurs," we certainly gain nothing in brevity by using the adjectival form. And after all, the noun used as an adjective is somewhat of a grammatical upstart and his social standing is as yet none too sure. Custom has sanctioned his use chiefly for places, while the possessive has prevailed for persons. So it has been the rule among ornithologists to say "the Labrador Duck," or "the California Jay" when places are concerned, but "Cassin's Bullfinch" or "Smith's Longspur" when persons are honored. This is the way popular names have evolved, and we have merely to stick to what has been customary. Uniformity should be sought, but not at the expense of meaning. The ruling of postoffice authorities and of geographic boards (the chief offenders in "reform") is not the final criterion of language.

The distinction between person and place is an aspect of the subject worth considering, and by preserving in our lists the possessive form for birds or beasts named after persons we shall avoid much ambiguity. For instance, the apostrophe and "s" of "Virginia's Warbler" apprise everybody that the bird is not named after the State of Virginia, whereas the "Virginia Rail" is. In the same way we should know that "Olive Warbler" and "Myrtle Warbler" are not named after girls. But we must look farther than the narrow limits of our North American list to realize the importance and convenience of such a distinction. Contrast names like Stone Curlew with Stone's Caribou, Brown Creeper with Brown's Song Sparrow, Gray Kingbird with Gray's Tanager or White Ibis with White's Thrush and the ambiguity that would follow the loss of the possessive form becomes very evident. Or take such names as Wood Thrush, Field Sparrow, King Eider, Little Gull, Winter Wren, or Marsh Hawk, where the birds might well be named after Messrs. Wood, Field, King, Little, Winter or Marsh. Perhaps these examples are quite familiar to us, but how about such names as Gila Woodpecker, Costa Hummingbird, Lomita Wren, Alma Thrush, Grinda Bush-Tit, Lazuli Bunting, Flores Hummingbird, Rivoli Hummingbird, Cetti Warbler, Brewer Blackbird, Couch Kingbird, Derby Flycatcher, Sandwich Sparrow, Bell Sparrow, Wall Creeper, Bean Goose, Crissal Thrasher, Ray Wagtail, Scops Owl, Green Tody, Black Petrel, or a host of others that might be cited? Would not an occasional apostrophe and "s" be extremely convenient to distinguish at once the birds that are named after persons?

To sum the matter up, then, no reform is needed and educated people will continue to use either the possessive or the adjectival form or both as occasion requires. It is well to be a little conservative in this era of rapidity and there is certainly no overwhelming demand for reform in vernacular names. There has been some previous discussion of the subject and what Mr. Dawson (CONDOR, July-August, 1907, 112) has to say may be read to advantage, although some of his conclusions are rather forced and he has used the word "pronominal" when he means adjectival. It is no difference of opinion between the East and West, as he suggests, but merely the activity of a few individuals who are trying to re-form familiar words under the plea of uniformity. One is reminded of the fable of the

fox who lost his tail in a trap, and wonders whether the plea may not be an endeavor to make fashionable the bob-tailed names that have unfortunately, here and there, got into print.

Then there are "reformers" who would discard a well established name because it is inappropriate. No policy can be more mistaken. What difference does it make if a Purple Finch is not purple or the Louisiana Tanager is not found within the present day boundaries of Louisiana? There is hardly a name on the list that would not be subject to removal if everybody's whims were consulted. Let us at least strive for stability in vernacular names and accept those that have grown into general use. Even modern *Junco* and *Vireo*, like some generic names in botany, have gained vernacular recognition.

In the promised new edition of the Check-List we hope to see subspecific popular names as sharply differentiated as are the subspecific trinomials. *Every* race of the Song Sparrow or Brown Creeper or California Jay or Hairy Woodpecker ought to have a trinomial popular name if our list is to be uniform. It will require some ingenuity to meet the details of this problem, but now that the trinomial has come home to roost, the consequences must be met, and the awkward inconsistencies of the old Check-List overcome. It won't do to say "Western Savanna Sparrow" for one race and "Bryant's Marsh Sparrow" for another. In such cases there is room for real reform of a kind that is neither reactionary nor subversive of names that have become household words. Our Check-List must be popular if it is to retain its authoritative position as to vernacular names and the utmost conservatism is necessary if it is to keep in touch with the rank and file of the army of people who take a deep interest in North American birds.

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## NEST OF THE DUSKY POOR-WILL (*PHALAENOPTILUS NUTTALLI CALIFORNICUS*)

By JOSEPH MAILLIARD

WITH ONE PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

MY acquaintance with the Dusky Poor-Will, slight at the time and but little closer now, commenced away back in the very early seventies, when as a small lad I used to hunt for game of any sort on the back ranges of the Rancho San Geronimo, sometimes flushing one of these singular birds among the short brush on the rocky hills, or, perhaps, when in camp hearing their plaintive call at dawn or dusk.

Speaking of their call I would like to relate an incident that happened in connection with it. On our ranch is a spot marked on the old maps as "Hunters' Camp," from whence many a large shipment of venison had been made to the San Francisco markets in early days, and even now the best spot in the vicinity for a hunting camp. In the summer of 1876, if my memory serves as to date, my college chums assisted in the building of a log cabin on this spot where we could keep our blankets and cooking utensils and run up to from time to time for a little outing. While building the cabin I had noticed that on two or three evenings in succession a Dusky Poor-Will had commenced to call (to his mate?) at exactly eight o'clock. It happened that the only watch in camp stopped one day, from not having been