

saw a Dusky Poor-Will fly up just in front of him and about where one had flushed on the evening previously mentioned. The foreman called out, "Did you see that funny-looking bird?" and a second after as he took another step he exclaimed, "Hello! Here's some white eggs!" Not having had such good fortune in all these many years as to find a nest of these birds it was an interesting moment, and a great fear possessed me that the eggs might be those of some belated pair of Mourning Doves, and that the Poor-Will having been in close vicinity to them was a mere coincidence. A look at the eggs, however, was very reassuring, but to be absolutely positive it was necessary to hide and await the parent's return. This was not a very tedious wait in this case as the female soon appeared and settled most satisfactorily upon her eggs. Having a camera with me I carefully studied how to get her on a plate, but this seemed a hopeless task. She would let me approach to about twelve feet, but that was all. On account of the low rocks near her nest there was only one side from which an exposure could be made.

The weather was foggy, to say nothing of a strong wind, and as no shadows were cast the negative was bound to be flat, with rocks and ground of about the same light values. Despairing of getting anything better under the circumstances I took the best exposure I could make and then "collected" the set. Upon developing these negatives they were found to be extremely flat, as was expected, so, two or three days later—the first day, in fact, that leisure permitted—I rode up on the ridge with the blown eggs, carefully packed you may be sure, prints of the best negatives, and my camera, to try to improve on the first lot.

Replacing the eggs exactly as they were originally I tried for some time to get something more satisfactory. It was again foggy and windy—the fog condensing on the lens of the camera when focusing—and but little could be done in the way of improving over the first attempts. In reality the rock behind the eggs stands up some three feet, the eggs being at the base of it, with two good-sized stones lying in front of them; but the prints all give an impression of an almost flat surface, gently sloping backwards. In the afternoon the sun would have been in the camera's eye, if the fog cleared away, and the wind very strong, so the morning was the only chance for an exposure. Even at six feet, supposing the bird would have allowed so close an approach, it is extremely problematical if she would have been discernable in a negative, as she was just about the color of the charred leaves and small stones surrounding her.

The cut shows a few straws of dry grass a little distance away from the eggs. This is the only semblance of a nest there was. The eggs were placed upon the bare fragments of rock and these straws seemed rather to have been pushed out of the way than brought together for any purpose. The incubation of this set was about one-third along. Query: was this a second set, the first having been destroyed? Or is this the customary date of breeding of this bird in the locality?

San Geronimo, California.

NOTES ON THE CALIFORNIA BLACK RAIL

By FRANK STEPHENS

MANY years ago Mr. H. W. Henshaw told me that he had been informed that California Black Rails (*Creciscus coturniculus*) were sometimes common in the salt marshes around San Diego Bay. In our conversation Mr. Henshaw seemed to be under the impression that these Rails were but migrants at San Diego and that they were most likely to be found very late in the autumn.

In 1886 I was living near San Bernardino. In December of that year I drove to San Diego and spent several days looking for California Black Rails, without success. Some of the local hunters knew of them and one of them a few days later sent me one in the flesh. He wrote that he had killed it near Encinitas, some twenty-five miles up the coast.

My next acquaintance with the species was November 16, 1902, when a young friend brought me one which he said he had caught that day with his hands on the railroad track near the foot of 14th street in San Diego, at high tide. At this place the railroad tracks cross a tide marsh, which is now being filled.

Last spring the manual training teacher here told me that one of his pupils had found the eggs of the California Black Rail in a marsh near National City. This lad told me about where he had found the nests and said the birds were common there. At Mr. Grinnell's suggestion I tried trapping for the Rails with mouse traps set in the marsh vegetation. I kept three dozen traps out a week or so but caught no Rails. I did get several sparrows and a number of harvest mice (*Reithrodontomys*) and meadow mice (*Microtus*). When setting the traps I found an egg, undoubtedly of this species, lodged in the marsh plants where it evidently had floated at high tide. Its contents were thoroly dried, but the egg was otherwise in fine condition and apparently had not been incubated. I suspect that nests are often inundated by extra high tides. As trapping proved unsuccessful I had the lad come and show me just where he found the nests and found that I was not trapping in the best place. May 28th, we tramped thru the marsh two or three hours and flushed one California Black Rail which I shot.

This boy gave me considerable information about the habits of these Rails which I will summarize. He had done much hunting for the nests and thought he was lucky if he found a nest in half-a-day's steady search. The nest seems to be usually situated in very thick marsh vegetation (*Salicornia*, etc.) near the highest limits of the high tide. He carefully turned over all the upper part of the mass of plants foot by foot. He said the nests were always covered, but were usually from an inch to several inches above the ground. I understood him to say that he had found several empty nests, some not yet used, and some which the young birds had left. He said that he had never found any bird at the nest, which might be expected from the nests being so well hidden and the ease with which the bird could slip off and keep out of sight. He said he found eggs about the middle of March and about the 20th of April. Five and six seems to be the usual number but he knew of one set that contained eight eggs. All the eggs he knew of had been found in the last four years in a tract of less than 100 acres. He said that he had heard notes that he believed were made by this Rail and described them as a sort of clicking sound. He thinks that at low tide the Rails hide in crab holes, at times.

In June, 1908, I looked for California Black Rails about False Bay, which is a short distance northwest of San Diego Bay, but within the city limits. The 22d, I was there at low tide, and when passing along a broad tide creek I saw one crouched in the mud a few feet from the bank. It stood perfectly still, with head lowered, as if expecting to be overlooked. It was so near that I killed it with my .32 caliber auxilliary. A few days later I hunted a part of the marsh at high tide late in the afternoon. On my way to camp at dusk in a place where the marsh lay at the foot of a bluff one flushed almost under my feet and lit a dozen yards away among the debris lodged at the foot of the hill and stood there in the open, tho not to be seen distinctly because of the gathering darkness. I fired at it, without effect. The bird flew out over the water and then turned around the

point, where I failed to flush it again. I happened to have a charge of heavy shot in the other barrel and let it go. This is the only long flight I have seen and it reminded me of the flight of a water ouzel. The other two flights I have seen were short and rail-like.

Last November I was camped in the valley of the Tijuana River near the last monument of the boundary between California and Mexico. The lad before mentioned staid with me a few days and was accompanied by his pointer dog. We hunted the marshes several high tides but found but one California Black Rail. This flushed close to the boy's feet and was shot by him at very short range. He presented the skin to the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology and we now have three specimens there. The dog pointed several Clapper Rails (*Rallus levipes*) but failed to find the small species.

From my own observations and such information as I have been able to obtain from others I think that the California Black Rails are resident in the salt marshes along the coast of southern California, at least as a species; there may be a short individual migration but that remains to be proven. The nesting is probably early, March and April. Sets number four to eight, probably seldom the larger number. The nests are hidden in the *Salicornia* near the highest tide line, a few inches from the ground, and are often merely a few dead bits of *Salicornia* drawn together and tramped into place. It is practically impossible to make a positive identification unless it proves practicable to trap the parent at the nest.

The birds seem to lie very close and must be nearly stepped on before they will flush. I fancy that the species will be found fairly common in many localities when they are looked for carefully in the right places.

San Diego, California.

AMONG THE THRASHERS IN ARIZONA

By M. FRENCH GILMAN

WITH ONE PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

THE territory in which the following notes were made lies in the Pima Indian Reservation along the Gila River. Observations covered a strip of country about twelve miles long by three miles wide, lying along the south side of the Gila. My two bases of operation were Blackwater, an Indian village of 1362 feet altitude, and Sacaton, where is located the Pima Agency and the Pima Training School. Sacaton has an elevation of 1275 feet and the distance between it and Blackwater is about ten miles.

Half a mile south of the Gila, and flowing parallel with it for about twenty miles is a small stream called the Little River. Along its banks are a few cottonwoods, many willows and much water-mote (*Baccharis glutinosa*). Between the two streams, on the "Island," as it is called, are groves of cottonwoods, and a few Arizona ash trees (*Fraxinus velutina*). In places not cleared and cultivated by the Indians, is a dense growth of mesquite (*Prosopis velutina*), screw-bean (*P. odorata*), and arrow-wood (*Pluchea sericea*), besides a number of scattered plants of squaw-berry (*Lycium berlandieri*) and jujube (*Zizyphus lycioides*).

About three miles south of the Gila runs, parallel, a broken range of large hills or small mountains and on the intervening strip are many species of the cactus family: the sahuaro or Giant Cactus (*Cereus giganteus*), 20 to 35 feet high or