

## FIELD EXPERIENCES ON THE COAST OF CHILE

Editor THE CONDOR:

On my return from Juan Fernandez Island I received your letter, but regret to say that the package of Condors which you so kindly forwarded could not be located at the Valparaiso postoffice. They would certainly have been appreciated, as United States publications come high down here. Mrs. Beck was nearly speechless when charged fifty cents for a fifteen cent American magazine in Lima, Peru.

Retrieving hummingbirds on Juan Fernandez was like retrieving mountain goats in cliffy canyons of the Rocky Mountains, if the published yarns of such feats be true. One had to lay down his gun and climb down by tree roots, at times holding by one hand so as to secure a hold with the other on the rocky ledge below and search amid ferns and grass for his bird. One beauty, I remember in particular, was shot in the edge of the trail at the top of the mountain where some sixty years ago an English man-of-war's crew erected a tablet in memory of Alexander Selkirk, the well known Robinson Crusoe who spent four years and four months in complete solitude on the island, if the tablet be believed. The bird dropped only thirty feet, but it was necessary to go below and climb up over roots on the face of the cliff, holding on to grass stems or loose rocks that in some places gave way at a touch.

Pigeon collecting there also was different from California styles. One would take a boat and row along the shore, and the pigeons flew by from rocky perches as Baird Cormorants might do in home waters. The Sparrow Hawks, though, acted the same as our home birds; and I even flushed a pair of California Quail one day to my great surprise. The quail had been introduced a few years before and were increasing, so the natives said. The first day on the island, when at the edge of the forest I dropped my hand into the pocket of the sleeveless shooting coat for shells, the odor in the air took me back to the hills of Monterey. How like the sage-brush smell it was; and it *was* the sage-brush smell, carried all the way from Toro Canyon, Monterey County! The coat had not been used since the first day of the quail season the year before, and it had never been emptied of the debris accumulated when following the elusive birds on brush-covered hillsides. And speaking further of California quail, they were common in the Valparaiso markets both dead and

alive, costing about ten cents apiece. I took a snap at a cagefull on the street and heard several calling just back of the town in the canyons.

Changing the subject, you know that skeleton of the giant cuttle-fish (is it?) in the Golden Gate Park Museum? Do not some members of the squid family get about as large? I still remember (can it be thirty years back?) that old geography picture: the two sailors working with all their might chopping at the huge tentacles of a giant cuttle-fish that had grasped their boat while their sailing ship was beating up a mile or more away. Will you please tell me what part of the waters of the globe those monsters inhabit? If I can find out, I intend to give that locality a wide berth in this collecting business. I had thought the squids were night feeders, from the statements of my Monterey Bay fishermen friends; but collecting one day about six miles off Valparaiso, alone as usual, I noticed a bunch of kelp a short distance from me being agitated more than seemed natural by the light wind and sea, so rowed up and it was not kelp, but a school of squid feeding. They were only about four or five feet long; but to see those five or six long feelers rise out a foot or two above the water, reach forward and back toward the mouth about four times a minute—ugh! They were but fifteen or twenty feet away at times and could be seen perfectly; and then looking off, why there were acres of them! Schools of four or five and schools of hundreds. Birds were feeding among them, terns, shearwaters and gulls, on small shrimps, I found on dissection. But suppose they had been those giant relatives figured so graphically in the geography of my youth. Only a shrimp would I have been to one of those big fellows. I saw dozens of the bodies of these five-footers on the beach at Corral when coming south, and deliver me from any close acquaintance with relatives as large sized as that skeleton in the museum, please!

I made my first acquaintance with the Steamer Ducks here. With most of them it was a distant acquaintance. There are two or three particular birds near town here that if ever I get rich will see me again. In that case, I'm coming down here with a motor boat capable of twenty miles an hour, and a bag of salt, and if I don't sprinkle their tails it will be because they make for the kelp instead of the open water. Though they cannot fly, my best efforts with the oars take me about two feet to their three.

It is likely I'll have to go a hundred miles farther south to make the closer acquaintance of a series.

The one species of goose I've taken here is much different from any of our California visitors. They stand about on surf-beaten rocky points like the gulls, the male pure white and the female dark. But the Cinnamon Teal swing over bunches of tules as do the flocks in fall at Los Banos, before they leave for the south and the shooting season begins. The call of the curlew, and the sweep of the sanderling flocks, carries one back to the Alameda marshes; but the hoarse penguin call, and circling albatross in view from my window, bring me back again with suddenness to the Southern Hemisphere.

Sincerely,

R. H. BECK.

Ancud, Chiloe Island, Chile, April 26, 1914.

#### PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

THE BIRDS OF NORTH AND MIDDLE AMERICA: [etc., 8 lines] | By | ROBERT RIDGWAY, | Curator, Division of Birds. |——| Part VI. | Family Picidae—The Woodpeckers. | Family Capitonidae—The Barbets. | Family Ramphastidae—The Toucans. | Family Bucconidae—The Puff Birds. | Family Galbulidae—The Jacamars. | Family Alcedinidae—The Kingfishers. | Family Todidae—The Todies. | Family Momotidae—The Motmots. | Family Caprimulgidae—The Goatsuckers. | Family Nyctibiidae—The Potoos. | Family Tytonidae—The Barn Owls. | Family Bunionidae—The Eared Owls. |——| Washington: | Government Printing Office. | 1914. | —U. S. Nation. Mus., Bull. No. 50, Part VI, pp. xx+882, 36 plates; "issued April 8, 1914."

It is certainly gratifying to the many admirers of Mr. Ridgway to note the regular appearance of the successive portions of his great work, the first of which was published nearly fourteen years ago. The latest volume, Part VI, of content as indicated in the above transcript from the main title page, shows the same high standard of treatment as in the best of the previous volumes.\*

In the six volumes which have appeared to date (as stated in the Preface, page vi, of Part VI), "are treated, in detail (that is, with full synonymies and descriptions), besides the Families above mentioned and the

higher groups to which they, respectively, belong, 520 genera, 2111 species and subspecies, besides 155 extralimital genera and 478 extralimital species and subspecies whose diagnostic characters are given in the 'keys', and their principal synonymy (full synonymy in case of the genera) given in footnotes."

There are a number of interesting renditions of systematic status among the higher groups,—interpretations which would bear much discussion, mainly, in the mind of the reviewer, corroborative of Mr. Ridgway's views. Our remarks in the present connection are best confined to nomenclatural and systematic points likely to be of most interest to students of western ornithology.

The yellow-shafted flicker which occurs rarely in California pure-blooded, more often as a strain in so-called "hybrids", is referred to under the name Boreal Flicker (*Colaptes auratus borealis* Ridgway), the assumption being that our birds are winter visitants from the far north (pages 20-22). Mr. Ridgway believes that "some California specimens are doubtless hybrids of *C. auratus borealis* and *C. cafer saturator*, whose respective ranges adjoin in northern British Columbia and southern Alaska." While the "Hybrid Flicker" has been the subject of several special essays, a new and exhaustive study of the case in the light of modern findings in chemico-physiology would, in the mind of the reviewer, very probably result in a different systematic treatment of western, purely yellow-shafted, examples, as well as of "hybrids".

As already announced (Ridgway, Proc. Biol. Soc. Wash., xxiv, 1911, page 34), a new genus is founded for that section of the old genus *Melanerpes* containing the California Woodpecker. The latter becomes *Balanosphyra formicivora bairdi*. This is possibly justified in the effort to secure uniformity in rank among related bird groups. But the continued general tendency towards generic refinement does not seem to the reviewer to be in line with the development of a clear and useful system of classification.

Bangs' name, *picinus*, is adopted for the "Western Pileated Woodpecker". The bird of the Pacific Coast from northern California to Vancouver Island thus becomes *Phloeotomus pileatus picinus*.

The southern race of the White-headed Woodpecker, *Xenopicus albolarvatus gravirostris* Grinnell, not admitted to the A. O. U. Check-List, is given full recognition by Ridgway (page 267).

The status of the western sapsuckers re-

\* For reviews of previous volumes, see: for Part I, CONDOR, IV, 1902, pp. 22-23; for Part II, CONDOR, V, 1903, pp. 22-23; for Part III, CONDOR, VII, 1905, p. 147; for Part IV, CONDOR, X, 1908, p. 53; for Part V, CONDOR, XIV, 1912, p. 110.