

ON BICYCLE AND AFOOT IN THE SANTA CATALINA MOUNTAINS

By F. C. WILLARD

ABOUT nine o'clock on the morning of May 19, 1904, two bicyclists might have been seen leaving Tucson, Arizona, in the direction of the Santa Catalina Mountains. They were O. W. Howard and myself, our handlebars piled high and our shoulders well draped with the necessary paraphernalia for a trip into the region of giant cottonwoods, firs, and cactus to be found on the San Pedro slope of the aforesaid mountains.

A few nests of Palmer and Bendire thrashers tempted and delayed us somewhat, so it was noon before we reached Agua Caliente, eighteen miles from Tucson. Here we had to leave our wheels and shoulder our packs. A rancher named Vail served us luncheon, during which we listened to directions as to trails and short cuts which would bring us to Foran's camp, on the other side of the mountains and twenty-one miles distant. About one o'clock we set out, the hot sun beating down on our backs as we climbed the steep zigzag which leads to the top of the pass some three hundred feet above us. A few Cactus Wrens, Mourning Doves and Verdins were seen on the way to the summit. Here we passed the Indian postoffice, a relic of the Apaches. It was a pile of small stones, the accumulation of ages, sufficient to fill several good-sized wagon beds, each stone placed there by some Indian in passing to convey a message to some future passer-by. What messages they must have been! We were almost prepared to see a painted face peering at us from behind a boulder as Major Bendire once did not many miles from here. Scrub oak, various cactuses, and bear grass constituted the verdure up to the summit of the pass at this point. For some miles now the grade was very gradual, and scattering groups of large black oaks and Spanish bayonets were in evidence. A few Canyon Towhees and Arizona Jays were the only birds seen.

Passing the summit we began a steeper descent. Sycamore and ash trees began to appear along the bed of the canyon. Cooper Hawks were seen, Turkey Buzzards soared overhead, and in addition to the small birds previously seen, Vermilion Flycatchers appeared quite numerous in the sycamores, where we saw several nests. Howard had been through here a couple of weeks before, when he had collected some eggs of the Zone-tailed Hawk and had seen some Gray Vireos and Broad-billed Hummers. We kept eyes and ears open for the latter two species but without success. Intent on this we passed the dim trail where it branched off to cross over into another canyon, and were not aware of it until some miles beyond and it began to grow dark. Water was scarce, so we hiked back till we came to the first we could find, and hurriedly began to gather wood and select a soft spot for a bed. A long dead sapling made a foundation for an all night fire. Brush and logs were piled on top, after we had dragged this tree into place across a niche in the canyon wall, where it fenced us in. Lighting a fire at one end, we heated a can of beans (such a small one) and made as much of a meal as we could of this and two crackers apiece. Then, with our feet toward the fire we lay on the sand, my sleeveless coat for a cover, a flour sack with a few handfuls of leaves in it for a pillow. Poorwills began to call, a fox barked, and the fire burned bright and warm, making us feel as comfortable and drowsy as could be wished. The *yip-yip-yee-e-e-e* of a coyote sounded, and almost before the long drawn howl ended we were asleep. B-r-r-r, we awoke shivering. Our fire had

burned the length of the sapling and was about out. The sand was as hard as adamant. Too cold to lie still, we slipped on our shoes and hunted up some more wood. By the light of the fire we saw that the time was 2 A. M., so we tried to sleep again, and between dozes gathered more wood. At 4:30 we gave it up and began our second day with our other can of beans and crackers two.

An hour's walk farther down the canyon brought us to its junction with the one wherein lay the camp which was our destination. Up this canyon we went, paying little attention to the birds as we went. We found two nests of the Costa Hummingbird in low-hanging branches of sycamores, saw a pair of Western Gnatcatchers building in an old half-dead oak, and heard the song of several Gray Vireos in the hackberry trees which made a scattered fringe to the canyon bottom. About 10:30 we sighted the camp, and were soon talking to one of the owners. At the first word about dinner we eagerly offered our services as assistants. Frijoles, baking powder bread, dried apple sauce, and potatoes, backed by a huge pot of coffee,—how good they looked on the table. We could hardly restrain ourselves until the big chief, Foran, arrived, covered with muck from his prospect hole. A short rest after dinner and we climbed the hill with Foran to look at his prospect. Then we started prospecting on our own hook along the canyon bed. "Look here", said Howard, and I turned around and saw, not three feet from me, a beautiful Gray Vireo (*Vireo vicinior*) on her nest, hung from the lower branch of a mesquite. She sat very close for a few moments and then slipped off, revealing three white eggs. No other finds rewarded our search that day, but birds were present and the prospect promised great things to come. At the supper table we found Morris Chrisman, prospector, trapper and entomologist. His tents were near by, and his generous supply of blankets, spread under the moonlit sky, was a welcome change from our hard, cold couch of the previous night.

It was sunrise before we awoke. We were through breakfast by 6:30 and, with some biscuits in our pockets started down the canyon looking for Zone-tailed Hawks and Gray Vireos. Several nests of White-winged Doves were seen but not disturbed. Two more sets of Costa Hummer were found in similar situations to those of the day before. We heard some Arizona Cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis superbus*), and I located a nest at the extreme top of a hackberry covered with a grapevine. With some difficulty I secured it and the set of three fresh eggs it contained, the female scolding me well and staying close by. While I was thus engaged Howard wandered off and soon called that he had found another Gray Vireo, in a hackberry this time. He had secured it by the time I was down, and we packed the two sets with feelings of elation. Lucy Warblers (*Vermivora luciae*) were heard singing on all sides, and our next find was a nest of this species with four fresh eggs, in a natural cavity in a small stump. Farther down the canyon we passed an immense cottonwood from which Howard had collected a set of Zone-tailed Hawk (*Buteo abbreviatus*), after a daring feat of rope climbing. Below this a group of eight tall cottonwoods stood on guard at the opening of a narrow place in the canyon. Old nests of sticks in their lower crotches were almost beyond the reach of our best thrown stones. I hesitate to guess at the height of these giants but know that they were well over a hundred feet tall. I shall visit them again some day and take their measure and their pictures.

Below here some screaming Zone-tails kept us busy throwing stones at various nests, but the immense size of the cottonwoods wherein they were

placed made an uncertain climb unwise, and we could not pick out any nest that looked sure. Lunch time had long passed without our notice, it was now four o'clock, and we were six miles from camp. We ate our biscuits and started back. Another Arizona Cardinal was heard calling and its nest in a grapevine-covered hackberry yielded three more treasures. By six we were back in camp, and after supper we hit upon a plan by which Chrisman was to go to Reddington, some twelve miles down the canyon, on the San Pedro river, for hay and grain for his two horses, and chuck for the three of us, enough for five days. We planned to go across the foothills into another canyon, and then on to the summit of the range, three days to go, one on top, and then one to return by a shorter, steeper trail.

While Chrisman was gone the next day we hunted as before, though with rather poor success, as we found but one nest each of Gray Vireo and Arizona Cardinal. We met Chrisman about four miles down the canyon as he came back with his load, and returned with him to get our traps ready for an early start the next day. Our program was for Howard and myself to hunt as we went along, leaving the horses and camp to Chrisman. It was some twelve miles to our first camp. The extremely dry season made it necessary to pack both hay and grain for the horses, making with our bed roll and grub quite a load for each of the two, big animals which were Chrisman's pride.

The day was barren of oological results. We made our camp near an old adobe cabin where there was a good stream of water, and were on the road again before six the next morning. A short distance above camp stood a lone cottonwood with a large stick nest near its top. As we approached a Zone-tail left the nest and flew screaming away. I strapped on the climbers, and was not long in reaching the nest, some sixty feet from the ground. It contained two plain white eggs, incubation far advanced. The canyon we were now in was quite barren. Scrub oaks and other brush, with a few chollas and spanish bayonet interspersed, offered few nesting sites. One cholla was found to contain a nest with three eggs of the Palmer Thrasher. Eight miles above our previous night's camp we struck into the trail and followed it over a low ridge into another canyon. Here we found our guide preparing lunch. While he finished his preparations I made a quick search of the oak brush near by and found another nest of Arizona Cardinal. Our next camp was ten long miles up this canyon, over a steep rough trail. We were able to hunt but little and located only a nest of Phainopepla with incomplete clutch.

It was after seven o'clock when we approached our destination. A tall slender cottonwood stood close to a high cliff and held at its top a typical Buteo's nest, from which flew Madam Zone-tail in response to a well aimed stone. It was too late for a climb then so we put it off for the morrow. After a supper of jerky stew and frying pan bread, both delicious as prepared by our chef, we lay under the branches of a giant sycamore and listened to the whimpering of some Pigmy Owls in a nearby oak. Various other night noises reminded us of our bed on the sand a few nights before, but our comfortable blankets gratefully reassured us that we were not to repeat that experience.

We were up early again the next morning and investigated the oak where he had heard the Pigmy Owls, but found nothing. Various other trees with holes in them were examined with no better results, so we turned our attention to breakfast and after finishing it, helped Chrisman pack up and start, as we

were to reach the summit that day and the trail was a long, hard one. We then went down to the Zone-tail's nest, which Howard climbed. The female left the nest as he ascended, and alighted on a nearby hillside where she kept up an intermittent screaming, ably seconded by her mate who had come at the first alarm. The nest was seventy-eight feet from the ground, was composed of sticks with a few green leaves for lining, and contained two incubated eggs. This was a strictly characteristic nest.

We hurried on after Chrisman, and spent several toilsome hours climbing the trail. At one point it was so steep that he had to go up ahead with a rope and steady the horses to keep them from falling over backward as they climbed. After passing this place we were soon at the edge of the pines. Painted Redstarts greeted us, but were not yet nesting though it was late for them. This was due no doubt to the dry season, for they usually begin nesting in April. Some Long-crested Jays, Western Flycatchers, and several other common species were met with. In a small weed growing on a perpendicular wall of rock we found a nest of Broad-billed Hummingbird (*Cyananthus latirostris*) with two dried-up eggs. This was the only nest of this species found on the trip.

As we got up among the pine trees the needles made walking very difficult. They covered the trail with a coating as slippery as ice. On one zigzag portion three white-tailed deer jumped up, and, with amazing ease, tore away across the mountain side and out of sight. A little later a series of excited yelps attracted our attention, and four more deer went by, with the little yellow camp dog following. About four o'clock we topped the ridge and were rejoiced to hear that "Bear Wallow cabin" was a scant mile farther up. A beautiful pine and fir forest covered the whole mountain top with giant trunks, many of which were over four feet in diameter and a hundred feet tall. As we passed Bear Wallow spring a flock of about thirty Western Evening Grosbeaks flew up from their evening drink and scattered among the nearby trees. A hundred yards farther and we were at the cabin. The guide had already arrived and the horses were grazing nearby, hobbled and belled. A fire was soon going, and while supper was cooking we prepared the bunks. A goodly supply of blankets was already in the cabin, and we were glad to have the extra number as the air was very cold at this altitude of over 8000 feet.

We were up at daylight the next morning and out among the trees by sunrise. The Western Evening Grosbeaks were again at the spring when I went for a pail of water. A thin film of ice was on the shallow pool. Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Audubon Hermit Thrushes were singing in several directions. Starting out after breakfast, we soon had our attention arrested by a pair of Evening Grosbeaks fighting some Long-crested Jays. We located and collected their nest as I have recorded in a former article (see CONDOR XII, 1910, p. 60). Several completed nests of Audubon Hermit Thrush (*Hylocichla guttata auduboni*) were found, some a few feet from the ground in small fir trees, and one in a hollow of a rotten pine stump. None of them held eggs, and all were deserted subsequently as Howard discovered on returning early in June. Chestnut-backed Bluebirds and Arizona Juncoes were fairly common, as were the Pigmy Nuthatches, of which we found several nests with young. Our greatest surprise was a family of Clarke Nutcrackers (*Nucifraga columbiana*), two mature birds and three fully fledged young almost as large as their parents. The young birds

were foraging industriously for themselves, but were given occasional bits of food by their elders. They were very tame, and allowed me to come within a few yards before flying. Warblers were quite scarce. We saw a few Black-fronted and Olive warblers but no Red-faced.

During our hunting we continually heard Kinglets (*Regulus calendula*) in the tops of high trees. We found one partly built nest, and a little later Howard saw a bird fly into a bunch of long moss, about sixty feet up in a slender dead fir tree. He came beaming, to report, and right after dinner we went up to the tree, which he struck with his hatchet. A little mite of a bird darted out of the moss and away. Howard climbed up and found the nest, completely hidden among the cluster of dead twigs overgrown with moss. With considerable difficulty he got the eggs out from among the twigs and into his mouth, and I counted eight as he made the transfer. Then he fastened a small rope to the branch and, cutting it off, lowered it to me. The nest was a beautiful object in its setting of grey moss and twigs. The eight eggs were fresh; the date, May 25. The next morning I saw a Kinglet gathering moss or grass from the ground and carrying it into the extreme top of a tall fir. We did not climb to this nest, however.

About three o'clock that afternoon we set out on our return trip. Our shoes were nearly gone and my shirt was little more than a neck band. Driving the horses ahead of us we hurried down, but even though we hurried it was after nine o'clock before we got into camp, too tired to do more than go to bed. The next morning we were up at 4:30, and, after some repairs to our shoes, and a hasty breakfast, started down the canyon to collect a set of eggs from the nest of a Gray Vireo we had previously discovered. We also took sets of Costa Hummingbird and Lucy Warbler. A set of Western Gnatcatcher previously discovered was still incomplete. We got back to camp early, and packed our nests in boxes, for Foran to bring out in his wagon, as he was going to Tucson the next day. We were glad to be relieved of such a load, as they made quite a large bulk altogether.

This day had nearly finished our shoes, so next morning, the 28th, the prospect of a twenty-one mile hike over a rocky trail made us realize the necessity of some further repairs. An old bootleg, a piece of canvas from an old tent, some nails and cord furnished the means, and lasted nearly half the trip back. The balance of the trail was negotiated very carefully. I found another nest of Arizona Cardinal before we started, and about a mile from camp a Zone-tailed Hawk left her nest in a small cottonwood, containing a beautiful set of two fresh eggs. This was evidently the second laying of a pair whose nest Howard had found on the first trip. A set of Cooper Hawk eggs was taken from a nest in a vine-covered oak. About three o'clock we reached our wheels, and then loafed along toward Tucson with the idea of arriving after dark. Strenuous is the word that best describes the ten days we had just passed. A hot bath and a good dinner made us both feel fit for our trip among the giant mesquites and cactus the next day, but that is another story.

Tombstone, Arizona, March 14, 1916.