

SOME BIRDS OF THE FRESNO DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

By JOHN G. TYLER

In *Pacific Coast Avifauna No. 9*, one hundred and sixty-one species and subspecies of birds were listed as occurring within the region under consideration. Recent field work has enabled me to identify a number of others and I have also had the pleasure of examining a small collection of skins belonging to Mr. H. C. Ohl, from which I obtained several interesting records.

Occasional mention was made in *Avifauna No. 9* of the New Hope District, a schoolhouse of that name furnishing the only means of locating a rather sparsely settled portion of Fresno County. A railroad has since been constructed and the embryonic city of Helm, with its postoffice of the same name, has arisen to dispossess the school of the honor of being the only nameable object in a vast area of interesting country. The seventh line on page 15 in my former paper should read "Herminghaus" instead of "Chowchilla" Ranch, the latter being an inexcusable error on my part.

The thirty-three birds listed herewith brings the total for the Fresno District up to one hundred and ninety-four.

162. EARED GREBE. *Colymbus nigricollis californicus* (Heermann).
163. RING-BILLED GULL. *Larus delawarensis* Ord.
164. CASPIAN TERN. *Sterna caspia* Pallas.
165. COMMON TERN. *Sterna hirundo* Linnaeus.
166. AMERICAN MERGANSER. *Mergus americanus* Cassin.
167. GADWALL. *Chaulelasmus streperus* (Linnaeus).
168. CANVAS-BACK. *Marila valisineria* (Wilson).
169. GREATER SCAUP DUCK. *Marila marila* (Linnaeus).
170. LESSER SCAUP DUCK. *Marila affinis* (Eyton).
171. BUFFLE-HEAD. *Charitonetta albeola* (Linnaeus).
172. ROSS SNOW GOOSE. *Chen rossi* (Cassin).
173. CACKLING GOOSE. *Branta canadensis minima* Ridgway.
174. AMERICAN EGRET. *Herodias egretta* (Gmelin).
175. SNOWY EGRET. *Egretta candidissima candidissima* (Gmelin).
176. SORA. *Porzana carolina* (Linnaeus).
177. WILSON PHALAROPE. *Steganopus tricolor* Vieillot.
178. LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER. *Macrorhamphus griseus scolopaceus* (Say).
179. WESTERN SANDPIPER. *Ereunetes mauri* Cabanis.
180. SPOTTED SANDPIPER. *Actitis macularia* (Linnaeus).
181. SEMIPALMATED PLOVER. *Aegialitis semipalmata* (Bonaparte).
182. SNOWY PLOVER. *Aegialitis nivosa* Cassin.
183. RED-BELLIED HAWK. *Buteo lineatus elegans* Cassin.
184. RICHARDSON PIGEON HAWK. *Falco columbarius richardsoni* Ridgway.
185. OSPREY. *Pandion haliaetus carolinensis* (Gmelin).
186. DUSKY POOR-WILL. *Phalaenoptilus nuttalli californicus* Ridgway.
187. TRAILL FLYCATCHER. *Empidonax traillii traillii* (Audubon).
188. ARIZONA HOODED ORIOLE. *Icterus cucullatus nelsoni* Ridgway.
189. CALIFORNIA PURPLE FINCH. *Carpodacus purpureus californicus* Baird.
190. MODOC SONG SPARROW. *Melospiza melodia fisherella* Oberholser.
191. GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE. *Oreospiza chlorura* (Audubon).
192. WESTERN WARBLING VIREO. *Vireosylva gilva swainsoni* (Baird).
193. SAGE THRASHER. *Oreoscoptes montanus* (Townsend).
194. DOTTED CANYON WREN. *Catherpes mexicanus punctulatus* Ridgway.

GENERAL ACCOUNTS OF THE BIRDS

Colymbus nigricollis californicus (Heermann). Eared Grebe. May 23, 1915, Mr. J. E. Law and I saw one pair of Eared Grebes and a single individual on a large, shallow pond near Riverdale. The pair seemed much interested in the largest of several clumps of tules and we watched them for some time through Mr. Law's high power glasses. June 19 I returned to the pond and finally located a nest in an opening among the tules. It was floating in water three and one-half feet in depth, and a portion of one of the carelessly covered eggs was visible from the opposite side of the opening about fifteen feet away. The nest was a slovenly arranged mass of dead tule stems and in no way resembled the well-made, compact nests of Pied-billed Grebes. There were four eggs, all somewhat incubated and very much stained. Only one bird was present and it remained near-by while I was inspecting the nest.

Larus delawarensis Ord. Ring-billed Gull. This gull has been reported several times from different parts of the valley, usually as single birds occurring during migrations. Mr. W. Moore of Selma has a mounted specimen taken several years ago on a small pond near that place. I was unable to learn the date of capture.

Sterna caspia Pallas. Caspian Tern. These large handsome terns occur quite commonly as spring and fall migrants through the district. They seem to enter the county near the Summit Lake region, follow down the Fresno Slough to its confluence with the San Joaquin River and then northward along that stream. I have never observed them elsewhere, except as an occasional bird may wander for a short distance out over the adjacent overflowed territory. Small companies are usually the rule in the spring, but after the nesting season single birds are as often seen. April 3, 1914, one individual was observed at the dam near Mendota and on the 18th of the same month another was noted flying back and forth over the west end of Summit Lake. May 6, 1914, a flock of nine was seen flying down the river near the drawbridge at Firebaugh. August 14, 1914, fully a dozen of these red-billed terns were observed flying over the slough at White's Bridge. They were not associated in a flock, but each individual seemed to fish over a well defined, semicircular course about one-half mile in length. They kept some distance apart and occasionally gave voice to a grating noise. All were in post-breeding plumage, with the black caps streaked with white. One specimen was taken, an adult female. I passed the same place on August 24 and September 1 and noted *Sterna caspia* on each occasion; but a few days later none were seen. So late as October 2, 1915, Mr. F. Seymour Hersey found Caspian Terns still in evidence and collected specimens on the Madera County side of the river near Mendota. Both adults and immatures were present.

Sterna hirundo Linnaeus. Common Tern. Mr. F. Seymour Hersey collected a specimen of this species on October 2, 1915, near Mendota, but on the Madera County side of the river. The bird was an immature female and, so far as I am aware, this is the only recorded instance of the occurrence of this tern anywhere in the interior of the State. Another bird taken at the same place proved to be the common *Sterna forsteri*.

Mergus americanus Cassin. American Merganser. My collection contains a beautiful male of this species, taken near Firebaugh January 20, 1915.

Chaulelasmus streperus (Linnaeus). Gadwall. The Gray Duck occurs sparingly as a winter visitant but seems to be decreasing from year to year. Possibly it formerly bred in suitable places, but if it does so at the present time it is in limited numbers. There was a mounted specimen in the office of A. D. Ferguson of Fresno. This bird was shot near Helm during the winter of 1912.

Marila valisineria (Wilson). Canvas-back. The winter of 1913-14 brought large numbers of Canvas-backs into the San Joaquin Valley. They arrived early in November and were common until February, and possibly later. On November 29, 1913, a party of hunters reported fully two hundred and fifty "cans" on the Artesian Lake near Helm, and brought me an adult male which is now in my collection together with another male from near Firebaugh, taken January 20, 1914. Personally I never saw but one female, and several hunters told me that very few females were ever encountered.

Marila marila (Linnaeus). Greater Scaup Duck. Mr. Ohl's collection contains a male of this species from the Herminghaus Ranch near Mendota. The label bears the date of April 2, 1912. According to *Pacific Coast Avifauna No. 11* there is only one other known instance of the occurrence of this duck anywhere in the interior of the State.

Marila affinis (Eyton). Lesser Scaup Duck. The Lesser Scaup occurs rather uncommonly as a winter visitant, usually being encountered as single birds either alone or in flocks of other species. Mr. S. L. N. Ellis reports shooting one on October 15, 1913, on the Herminghaus Ranch at Mendota.

Charitonetta albeola (Linnaeus). Buffle-head. I have seen a few mounted winter specimens of this handsome little duck, but it does not occur commonly anywhere in the Fresno District. The favorite resorts are the large open ponds, similar to those chosen by the Ruddy Duck, rather than the narrow sloughs and the tule ponds.

Chen rossii (Cassin). Ross Snow Goose. This little snow goose, known to hunters as "squealer", is a rather common winter visitant to the open country along the west side of the county. It occurs regularly in the region about Firebaugh, but is exceedingly wary and difficult to approach. Several large flocks were observed near Oxalis, January 26, 1916. Their habits seem to differ considerably from those of the Lesser Snow Goose.

Branta canadensis minima Ridgway. Cackling Goose. A specimen of this goose in my collection was taken near White's Bridge, January 11, 1915. This species, in common with several other geese, is a regular winter visitant to the open country in the western part of the district. In the markets these little geese are often referred to as "young honkers", but the market hunters call them "Brant" or "Black Brant".

Herodias egretta (Gmelin). American Egret. A noticeable increase in the egret population of this part of the San Joaquin Valley during the past few years would seem to indicate that this handsome species will be able to hold its own against everything save the encroachments of agriculture. There is probably a small breeding colony somewhere in the Laton or Summit Lake region in addition to the one recorded by H. C. Bryant in Stanislaus County. December 8, 1914, Mr. S. L. N. Ellis noted thirteen egrets near Riverdale. On the 18th of the same month I saw six near the same place, and a young man informed me that twelve had been seen flying over the barn on his father's ranch earlier in the day. Hundreds of Night Herons and a great many *Ardea herodias hyperonca* were attracted to the same locality. Throughout the summer, egrets may be confidently looked for on the extensive fields of the Herminghaus Ranch near Mendota. April 3, 1914, I saw three, and exactly a month later one was approached in an auto to within seventy-five yards before it took wing. May 26, 1915, Dr. A. K. Fisher and the writer counted seven egrets standing in the over-flowed areas of the field. The birds are always exceedingly wary and a man on foot can seldom hope to get nearer than three or four hundred yards; yet when flying from their roosting places to their feeding grounds egrets fly very low and frequently pass directly over houses or roads.

Egretta candidissima candidissima (Gmelin). Snowy Egret. Reports from several reliable observers agree that the Snowy Heron was a common species throughout suitable areas in Fresno County before the inroads of agriculture had transformed so much of the swamp lands into grain and alfalfa fields. They still occur, but in very limited numbers, as summer visitants to the region near the confluence of the Fresno Slough and the San Joaquin River and in the Firebaugh district. Unlike the larger species this egret has shown no noticeable increase of late and seems to be gradually disappearing. During the years of their abundance, this species often assembled, after the breeding season, in flocks of thirty or more individuals.

Porzana carolina (Linnaeus). Sora. I have a number of fall, winter, and spring records of this rail but have never detected it in mid-summer, although it possibly breeds not uncommonly. The numerous telephone and power wires annually prove destructive to a great number of rails, coots, gallinules and other night-flying migrants. Mr. H. C. Ohl has a specimen of the Sora picked up from beneath the wires near White's Bridge on September 12, 1912, and I found another victim near McMullen on April 17, 1914. December 3, 1912, I noted a Sora in the slough near Centerville, and December 25, 1914, two were seen feeding, late in the afternoon, at a tule pond eight miles southwest of Fresno.

Steganopus tricolor Vieillot. Wilson Phalarope. While driving along the road about fifteen miles east of Firebaugh, in Madera County, May 24, 1915, Mr. J. E. Law and I discovered a pair of Wilson Phalaropes near a series of shallow alkaline overflow ponds. One of these birds was a male in breeding condition and plumage. Other evidence, too, seemed to warrant the conclusion that this pair might have been nesting nearby.

Macrorhamphus griseus scolopaceus (Say). Long-billed Dowitcher. This interesting wader occurs as a spring and fall migrant, but from my observations it is not very abundant at any time. October 18, 1912, two were noted at a small pond near Easton, and August 6, 1914, a single bird was seen near Fresno. This latter individual seemed to have already molted the brilliant cinnamon breeding plumage notwithstanding the early fall date. A specimen which Mr. Ohl examined on May 3, 1913, was in very rich plumage and the stomach contained three angle-worms and two cut-worms.

Ereunetes mauri Cabanis. Western Sandpiper. This sandpiper is an abundant spring and fall migrant, and winters sparingly, being greatly outnumbered at this season, however, by the somewhat similar *Pisobia minutilla*. During the spring many flocks of the latter contain scattering individuals of this species. Migrant Western Sandpipers were still present in large numbers at many of the ponds as late as May 6, 1914, and by July 5, 1915, a small returning flock had appeared in the White's Bridge region. On August 12, 1914, this species was rather common along the Madera road east of Firebaugh, and October 15, 1915, they fairly swarmed about several large ponds near Riverdale. Around some of the stagnant alkaline ponds south of Caruthers I have noted a very heavy mortality among the flocks of spring migrants.

Actitis macularia (Linnaeus). Spotted Sandpiper. April 4, 1914, Mr. S. L. N. Ellis called my attention to a small wader that had been noted daily during the preceding three weeks or more, on the boom-logs at the Mendota dam. The bird proved to be a Spotted Sandpiper in the unspotted winter plumage. It fed along the logs, balancing and teetering in characteristic fashion, and seemed not the least disconcerted by the very near presence of numerous fishermen.

Aegialitis semipalmata (Bonaparte). Semipalmated Plover. I have an adult male of this species, collected April 21, 1914, at a small pond near Riverdale. It was feeding in the mud several feet from the water's edge. Near-by were several avocets, stilts and killdeer. October 15, 1915, the dried-up remains of another Semipalmated Plover were discovered on the shore of a large pond not over a mile from where the one mentioned above was taken.

Aegialitis nivosa Cassin. Snowy Plover. A rare visitant to the larger open bodies of water. Mr. J. E. Law and I discovered a pair near the shallow overflow along the Madera road, east of Firebaugh, May 24, 1915. All indications pointed to the probability that this pair was preparing to nest.

Buteo lineatus elegans Cassin. Red-bellied Hawk. This handsome hawk has never been detected anywhere in this region in the numbers that one might reasonably expect. It occurs sparingly in the Kings River bottoms near Sanger, where I saw a beautiful example on January 9, 1913. I have no breeding records.

Falco columbarius richardsoni Ridgway. Richardson Pigeon Hawk. I recorded *Falco columbarius columbarius* in *Pacific Coast Avifauna No. 9*, page 46, the records being based on several birds seen but not collected. October 2, 1915, Mr. F. Seymour Hersey collected a specimen of *richardsoni* on the Madera County side of the river, near Mendota. It was a female in good plumage and I was very grateful to Mr. Hersey for supplying a new species for my list, even though by so doing he put me to the necessity of collecting further specimens to determine whether or not *Falco columbarius columbarius* occurs at all. This record and that of *Sterna hirundo* are made through the kindness of Mr. A. C. Bent.

Pandion haliaetus carolinensis (Gmelin). Osprey. The Fish Hawk was quite frequently noted, in former years, along the Kings and San Joaquin rivers according to several reliable observers, but has now become very rare. I saw one on the San Joaquin River near Herndon March 31, 1914, and was so fortunate as to see him plunge into the river from a considerable height.

Phalaenoptilus nuttalli californicus Ridgway. Dusky Poor-will. Mr. H. C. Ohl has a specimen of this bird taken March 27, 1912, at Mendota, and I have one from Piedra, collected March 5, 1915.

Empidonax traillii traillii (Audubon). Traill Flycatcher. A spring and summer visitant, being encountered occasionally in the willows along certain sloughs. I have never found a nest, but on May 23, 1915, Mr. J. E. Law heard one of these flycatchers singing in the willows surrounding a small deep-water pond, north of Riverdale. The date would seem to indicate the possibility that this bird was preparing to nest, and the surroundings were most favorable.

Icterus cucullatus nelsoni Ridgway. Arizona Hooded Oriole. Miss Winifred Wear was the first to record this species from the Fresno District (see CONDOR, XVII, p. 234). On June 27, 1915, I personally saw a pair of Arizona Hooded Orioles in some fig trees along the White's Bridge road, about seven miles west of Fresno. I watched them for ten minutes or more, being within fifteen feet of them. This is the only known instance of a female being seen here. At least one, and probably several, males of this species were present during the summer of 1911. On June 4 of that year a male was seen on a vine in the yard of a residence in town and the song was frequently heard, usually in tall eucalyptus trees in various parts of the city. It was last heard about July 1. I feel quite positive that no *nelsoni* were present during the three intervening summers.

Carpodacus purpureus californicus Baird. California Purple Finch. In the *Auk*, vol. XXIII, page 415, Mr. Milton S. Ray recorded this bird from Firebaugh. In response to my inquiry Mr. Ray wrote me that but a single bird was noted, a male that was singing from the top of one of the clumps of trees along the river near town.

Melospiza melodia fisherella Oberholser. Modoc Song Sparrow. I collected a specimen of this form near Oxalis, in the northwestern corner of the county, on January 25, 1916. The bird was discovered in a patch of tules in a small slough, and specimens of *M. m. heermanni* were taken at the same time and place.

Oreospiza chlorura (Audubon). Green-tailed Towhee. Mr. H. C. Ohl has a specimen of this species which he found dead among some straw and refuse from a barn at Mendota, September 10, 1912. The sex was not determined, as decomposition was beginning at the time the bird was discovered.

Vireosylva gilva swainsoni (Baird). Western Warbling Vireo. May 23, 1915, while exploring some of the small ponds north of Riverdale, Mr. J. E. Law saw a single vireo of this species. The bird sang repeatedly at close range. I was investigating another small willow-bordered pond a short distance away and also saw one of these birds.

Oreoscoptes montanus (Townsend). Sage Thrasher. February 27, 1912, Mr. H. C. Ohl noticed an unfamiliar bird perched on a fence near Mendota. It proved to be a female Sage Thrasher and the only one I have ever heard of in the Fresno district.

Catherpes mexicanus punctulatus Ridgway. Dotted Canyon Wren. During the fall months an occasional example of this wren appears in the valley. At such times they usually frequent open sheds and other farm buildings. September 15, 1914, one was seen near Fresno. It was apparently devoid of fear and seemed much at home in a large, open packing shed where it crawled over the cornices and along the rafters in a most satisfied manner, frequently giving its harsh but subdued scolding note. On one occasion a series of Wren-tit-like notes was heard. The bird was still present on November 6, following.

Fresno, California, February 22, 1916.

SOME BIRD NOTES FROM HUMBOLDT BAY

By JOSEPH MAILLIARD

IT WAS the writer's good fortune recently to pass a few days—May 28 to June 4 (1916), inclusive—in the city of Eureka, Humboldt County, California, and to be warmly received and most unselfishly assisted by Mr. C. I. Clay, a Cooper Club member from whom most of us have heard from time to time. In his company the hours not occupied in putting up specimens were spent in scouring the country for certain forms it was especially desirous of finding upon their native heath, sequoia, salicornia, or whatever they elect to inhabit. Without treading upon the preserves of the local ornithologists, who probably have a surprise or two up their sleeves, there are a few matters that might be touched upon which may be of value to some of the work being carried on in the state, or at the very least, of interest to some of the ornithologists following out special lines.