

lining, about one inch thick, is a firm, compact, warm matting of fine shredded cedar bark fibre, practically no weeds, grass, feathers or other matter entering into its composition. This construction, with the depth of the nest, makes it especially well adapted to protect its contents from freezing and severely inclement weather.

Measurements: Outside diameter, average about 11 inches, depth  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Inside of cup, diameter 4 inches, depth  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

Eggs: Ground color light lichen green. Light mottlings or shadings of pale drab-gray and minute spottings of Saccardo's olive distributed over the entire surface, with a slight confluence at the larger end where a faintly defined banded effect is noticeable. (Colors from Ridgway's *Color Standards and Nomenclature.*) Measurements (in inches): 1.25x0.92.

The nest taken this year is practically the same as the one taken last year, except somewhat larger in outside measurements and of fresher material. (See fig. 53.) The three eggs of this year's take differ but little in color or markings. Their measurements (in inches) are as follows: 1.27x0.91; 1.26x0.87; 1.31x0.90. It would appear from the foregoing that three eggs were a normal, if not maximum, clutch for this species.

*Denver, Colorado, June 13, 1917.*

## RED LETTER DAYS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

By FLORENCE MERRIAM BAILEY

**B**EFORE visiting Venice, in the field season of 1907, we had some delightful encounters with water birds, in passing, for between Capistrano and the San Jacinto Mountains our work took us to the two alkaline lakes, San Jacinto and Elsinore, both evidently popular with water fowl.

When we drove out from Hemet to San Jacinto Lake on August 14, in the cultivated valley we saw a harvester, drawn by a band of horses, entering fields of straw-colored waving grain, and leaving behind stubble fields and rows of fat grain bags. But in the immediate neighborhood of the alkaline lake the soil was too permeated with salt for grain fields—one plant of the country actually shone with salt crystals—and the only signs of human habitation were a ruin and an abandoned house and barn. On the roof of the barn a Red-shafted Flicker rested, and inside a Barn Owl napped, while two Ravens perched on rafters enjoying the cool shade in the heat of the day.

Here the level floor of the San Jacinto plain presented a characteristic desert picture, the soft blue bulk of the San Jacinto Mountains having a foreground of pale desert colors brightened by acres of pink abronias, wide stretches of yellow tar weed, and fields of sunflowers with faces turned toward the sun, fields that went well with the fresh, uplifted song of the Meadowlark. The strong smell of the tar weed suggested the pleasing tang of the desert creosote, and along the base of the foothills near the lake grew desert willows, mesquite, and other desert plants, and masses of pale green cactus topped with pink fruit. Roadrunners and Cactus Wrens and their nests were passed here, and two Cactus Wrens dashed across the road ahead of us, one of them lighting on a fence post with its grating *chut, chut, chut.*

About a pond near the lake a variety of water birds were gathered. Two Phalaropes were swimming around in the pond, a Willet flew up with a sudden flash of white, a Marbled Godwit on the shore stood on one leg with its bill resting in its wing feathers, an Anthony Green Heron rose from the low juncus border showing its long bill and crest, a company of White-faced Glossy Ibises were walking around in the marsh grass, and circling low over the water was a small band of Greater Yellowlegs, while standing out by itself was a bird on which we focused our glasses eagerly, a large white-bodied Avocet, its long bill recurved at the tip, a most distinguished looking bird which I longed to stop and study.

As the water of the San Jacinto River is now used for irrigation, the lake is only a rain water lake, but at our visit it was about a mile long, a typical tule lake, with great stretches of cool-looking dark green tules ten feet high, showing a line of brown heads at the top. At our approach a large flock of Ibises flew from the green walls and from the dotted surface of the lake the nearer Coots and Gadwells went spattering and splashing off into the sheltering green alleys to begin their talk again when all was quiet. Near the edge of the lake a young Night Heron stood up to its body in water as if half asleep. Three Rails were seen in the tules walking jauntily about with short tails up. Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds were also flying about among their nests.

Some of the Ibises were out in the marsh grass possibly catching the small frogs that were hopping around, and one that was standing alone in the short tules looking preoccupied, let us come quite near. Another flew with his *quank* so close we could see the maroon between his wings. In walking about, as their long legs bent under them they would busily give a dab here and there, bill and legs making a silhouette of three long lines in motion.

A month later we repassed the lake, on our way searing up Black-tailed Gnatcatchers and Baird Wrens from the desert brush and willows, and seeing a Bell Sparrow, a family of Rock Wrens that flew back to their stony hillside, and a Say Phoebe that measured off the fence posts ahead of us. The pond on which there had been so many waders at our previous visit was now a dry, pale green hollow. The main lake was dotted over with birds but we had no time to stop for we were then in search of the kangaroo rats whose tracks and trails were everywhere in the valley. As we passed the lake, however, we saw, on the bent tops of some lodged tules, a large flock of Ibises that rose and circled around to another part of the lake.

Ibises and a much greater number of water birds had been found previously at Lake Elsinore, an alkaline lake lying between the Santa Ana Mountains and the Gavilan Hills and surrounded by orange, lemon, and olive orchards. While the lake is now shrinking because its feeders are used for irrigation, old beach lines along the foothills tell of its former magnitude. In curves along the shore piles of foam attested the alkaline character of the water and a wide margin of the beach was covered with a layer of algae, green at the edge of the water, red on the wet shore, and crusted white over the dry sand. Multitudes of the flies characteristic of alkaline lakes, from whose larvae the Indians make *koochabee* were found along the shore and the larvae were probably distributed over the algae, as in walking over the crisp crust we flushed Meadowlarks, Blackbirds, and flocks of Horned Larks, the Larks flying off with their plaintive cry.

Although we had been told that there wasn't a bird on the shore at this time of year—July 26—as we looked over at a lagoon near the lake, lined up along its borders we discovered a row of forms that proved to be Ducks, which when we got near rose with a roar, flying out in a black mass and circling about till they finally came down in the lake. Altogether there were perhaps two dozen Mallards, fifty Gadwell, and two hundred Cinnamon Teal.

Other larger black forms, about thirty of them, through the field glass proved to be White-faced Glossy Ibises. As this was before we had been to San Jacinto Lake and these were the first Ibises I had ever seen, I could hardly believe my good fortune. Standing around taking their comfort, or walking about humped over like Curlew, probing with their long decurved bills, at the distance they looked black enough to justify their common local name—Black Curlew. As we approached they rose, with a loud *quank, quank*, and circled around in a close flock looking as decorative as figures on a Japanese screen, each bird a segment of a circle with its long extended drooping neck and legs. As they swung around and the sun struck them, their long necks glowed dark maroon and their backs shone dark green. It was a picture for an artist. After circling low around us they dropped down in the place from which they had arisen, after which they stalked about unconcernedly, probing the ground. They must also have been feeding along the lake shore for in places the whitish crust of dried algae was as riddled as a long used target.

As I stood open-eyed watching the Ibises, another large striking bird appeared on the film of this rare moving picture—a Black-necked Stilt—its black wings raised over its black and white body, as it lit and stood stilted up on its long pink legs. It came out on the edge of the lagoon and ran up and down with a nervous, nasal *en, en*, making itself so conspicuous that we quickly arrived at a conclusion. As we advanced it was joined by five other anxious parents. And three pairs of Black-necked Stilts can make as much excitement as two hundred and fifty Ducks! The whole disturbance, as far as revealed, was due to the fact that three half-grown young were running around trying to hide on a narrow grassy spit of land between the lake and the lagoon. One Stilt, in its calmest moments, is enough to occupy all one's attention, running along the shore with airily hinging legs, or wading out in the water on its long pink stilts. But when six anxious parents fly around you with long necks and legs extended, distractedly crying *en, en*, or bursting out into a loud harsh barking *kown, kown*, and after working themselves up draw on their imaginations for methods of decoy, were it not all done in such tragic earnest, they would indeed be laughably droll figures. Bending one knee and throwing up a long pink leg as if to get a better purchase, one would flap the opposite long black wing like the sail of a windmill till it almost touched the ground. Then, stiff-legged, the acrobatic Stilt would tilt forward against the wind till it seemed as if its small stilted up body would surely tip over on its bill; and then again it would begin violently flapping its wings at its sides. Or one of the droll birds would merely run along the beach eloquently shaking its wings.

While absorbedly watching the Stilts my attention was attracted to some big dim forms in the background that, with the glass, proved to be a row of Great Blue Herons on the edge of a lagoon, sitting in picturesque attitudes with necks variously folded up. More wary than any of the other birds, perhaps because of their enormous size, one by one they flew silently away, their gray forms fading into their background. After a time I rediscovered them, a row

of nine big motionless figures on a streak of white, doubtless the beach of a distant lagoon—solemn lookers-on at the play.

But these distinguished characters were not the only ones seen along the shore. A solitary Coot stood near the edge of the water preening itself, a family (?) of seven Killdeer were standing together on the beach, Ravens croaked in passing over from the lake to a pasture where grasshoppers were abundant, an Ash-throated Flycatcher sat on an elderberry tree, a Black Phoebe perched on a fence near the water, Black-headed Grosbeaks and Mockingbirds kept in evidence, a Burrowing Owl flew from its burrow near the shore—a handful of pellets were gathered in passing—and two little Cassin Kingbirds snuggled tight to a branch while their parents flew over calling, and apparently fed them on the wing; and then too, Goldfinch voices were in the air, and Eave Swallows were flying back and forth overhead. What a scene of life! As we were luxuriating in it, we heard a tourist on a hilltop above us exclaim disdainfully, "We've been down to the lake. *There's nothing at the lake!*"

All that afternoon we were on the shore, Mr. Bailey trapping for gophers in an attempt to solve a distribution problem raised farther up the range, so the Ducks that were out on the lagoon may have gotten used to our figures unaccompanied by shooting or accident to themselves. In any event, the next morning on going to the traps we found them on the lagoon, and by walking slowly and quietly toward them got within a few rods before any of them rose; and even when the mass had risen and circled around, many of them came back, plumped down into the water, and swam quietly about the lagoon, working out to its weedy edges. Feeding with the Mallards and Gadwell, Cinnamon Teal, which looked small by comparison, were especially tame, to my amazement coming up within a few yards of us, looking up at us curiously as we talked to them. Possibly the most unsophisticated were young of the year who had never passed through the horrors of an open season. Recalling the feeding of wild Ducks on the ponds in Golden Gate Park, I wished fervently that we might spend the day among our new friends trying to tame them. Not far from shore three or four Dabchicks, told from the Ducks by their smaller size, grace, and delicacy, were swimming about, now above, now below water.

While the mammalogist was engaged in setting a gopher trap near the shore of the lake, he was startled by a Cinnamon Teal bursting from her nest in the grass only about a yard from him. Hurrying to the spot I found the nest almost entirely hidden by soft yellow grass about a foot high. Bits of broken egg shell on the ground outside made me wonder if some of the ducklings had already left in charge of the other parent, as sometimes happens in other bird families. In the nest, which was just a hollow in the ground encircled by dusky down from the mother's breast, there were now only six eggs—the clutch is given as eight to twelve—together with the pathetic body of a downy yellow nestling. The old Duck had stood her ground bravely, but at the last moment had burst away without stopping to cover the eggs, and one was already pipped, while the midday sun was so hot it threatened to cook the others before she could summon courage to return. Then her last hopes would come to naught. Drawing the down carefully over the eggs we hurried away, taking the yellow nestling that had lain dead under its mother's breast after all these weeks of waiting, after all the anxious nights when hungry coyotes passed along the shore, after all the many long hours of patient brooding and care.

Later in the morning as we came up the beach we crept quietly over to

make sure that the mother had returned. Again I had to have the nest pointed out to me. The yellow grass had been combed up and drawn in at the top with cunning art to conceal its enclosed treasures. There the old Duck was, however. Walking up softly and speaking in low tones we were able to get so near that we could see her eye, the fine brown pencilling of her head and breast, and the blue speculum of her wing.

Early the next morning we again made our way eagerly to the nest. Could our tracks have betrayed her to a prowling enemy? Had the sun been too hot for her eggs? What should we find? There she sat on her grassy nest, and—under the edge of one wing to our delight we discovered a protruding patch of yellow down. Misinterpreting our excited comments, after a courageous stand she burst away from almost under our hands, coming down in the grass a few yards away, waddling along dragging her wings in appealing decoy. Turning our backs we hurried guiltily down the beach. When we ventured to look back she was swimming around on the lake, picking about with apparent indifference; but even as we watched over our shoulders, back she swam, straight for the shore. How fast she went! When nearly there she stopped and took one last look at us, then quickly climbed up the bank and across the beach to the nest.

At sunset we were again at the lake and went to see what had happened to the little family in whose fortunes we had become so much interested. Mother and duckling were both gone! Had the old Duck despaired of the rest of her eggs and hurried off to get safe cover for her one small nestling? Where had she taken it? We scanned the water eagerly. She was nowhere to be seen. But she must know the secrets of lake and shore, and could choose well the safe harbors for tender little ones.

As we stood thinking of the tragedies of the deserted home, the sunset light deepened to orange. In the sky overhead a flock of Texas Nighthawks were beating, and as we watched they flew off toward the hills. Just before we turned to go a Night Heron came flying up the shore and lit beside the water, standing silent and motionless, ready for its night's work. The interests of the day had given place to those of the night. Would that we could stay and see all the nocturnal birds and mammals come out under the stars and take up the task of caring for their families! For in the world of the wild sunset does not end the joys and labors of the day. When the stars shine out, another day begins.

*Washington, D. C., May 28, 1916.*

## BOTTA'S VISIT TO CALIFORNIA

By T. S. PALMER

**D**R. PAOLO EMILIO BOTTA (1802-1870), an Italian traveller and archaeologist, spent more than a year in California in 1827 and 1828. This visit was made in the course of a voyage around the world, nine years before the visit of Thomas Nuttall, three or four years before David Douglas reached California, and at about the same time that Dr. Alexander Collie, surgeon on H. M. S. 'Blossom' was on the coast. Prior to 1827 apparently only a few of the most characteristic species of birds such as the thrasher, the valley quail and the condor had been described from California. The thrasher or 'Promerops de