

Cactus Wren, the entrance is quite long enough to hide the doorway and cloak the comings and goings of the little Verdin. The largest nest examined was 10 inches long by 6 high, and another large one measured 9 by 7 inches and was 5 inches high.

In 9 of the 15 nests in which the position of the entrance was noted, 3 were on the north side; 4, on the northwest, west, or north-by-west; 1, southwest, and 1, southwest. The discrepancy between these directions and those faced by the Cactus Wrens' nests may possibly be explained by the fact that the Wrens' nests were largely hidden in protecting balls of mistletoe while those of the Verdins were unprotected and might be more easily affected by the severe winds from the Gulf of California on the southwest.

The nests were mainly the inconspicuous greenish gray of the zizyphus, but one seen on the Range Reserve about two miles from camp was, to quote from my notes, "a dishevelled looking mass, largely straw-color, of dead mesquite leaves, leaf stems, and thorny twigs, well supported with mesquite twigs." Two disused nests brought to camp and examined carefully showed a three-fold structure made with great skill. The outside shell of the handsome ball was made of thorny zizyphus, or zizyphus and catsclaw twiglets; while the inner nest was made of mesquite or catsclaw leaves, leaf stems, and sometimes catkin stems, remarkably felted throughout with spider web; the nest chamber in turn being lined thickly with feathers, in one case mainly quail but some chicken, making in all a large handful.

Of 10 nests showing signs of occupation, 9 were found to contain roosting birds, the birds being flushed at intervals from 4:28 P. M. until after sunset, on various dates, from December 9, 1920, to March 13, 1921. Two birds seen going to their nests went earlier than the Cactus Wrens, half an hour or more before sunset, which considering the fact that their nests are largely under trees rather than on top of them can be done with less danger from prowling Sharp-shinned Hawks and other too observant neighbors.

It should be said that what little work was done on the Verdins' nests was quite incidental to that done on the Cactus Wrens' nests, and that many of the interesting questions which suggest themselves now must be left for others to answer.

Washington, D. C., October 28, 1922.

MIGRATIONS OF THE GOLDEN AND BLACK-BELLIED PLOVERS IN ALBERTA

By WILLIAM ROWAN

CURRENT literature on the subject of the migrations of the Golden Plover (*Charadrius dominicus dominicus*) must surely be modified when the ornithology of this province has received a little more of the attention that it deserves. During three years observations on the same spot on one of the larger lakes in the vicinity of Edmonton, I have been struck with the regular southward migration of this species in the fall. The birds generally asso-

ciate with the Black-bellied Plover (*Squatarola squatarola*), but they are always in the minority. The southward movement appears to be at its height about the middle of September when between thirty and forty birds have been seen in an afternoon. All of these, however, seem to be juvenals, although this point requires verification.

The moults of the two species are similar, but apparently those of the Black-bellied are somewhat later, both in the fall and in the spring. Up to the middle of September, birds of this species in breeding plumage are common, but they are always very wild and difficult of approach. They are of course adults. During the first week no winter plumaged birds have yet been noted. From the second week they come into evidence and get more and more abundant thence onwards. An exceptional bird and the latest in breeding dress I have taken on this spot was collected in the third week of the month, with the first feathers of the winter plumage just appearing. I do not believe that this individual was a late moulter but rather a late migrant. As a rule the specimens in this garb disappear in a very short time, so short that the possibility of their having moulted is eliminated. They have in fact proceeded south.

My belief is that adults here in winter plumage are very rare. Of a long series taken during three years every one seems to be immature. The same remark applies to the Golden Plover. But an adult of this latter species in breeding dress I have not yet secured in September. Unfortunately I have not had the opportunity of collecting here in August, but I have been informed by one or two reliable observers on other lakes that they have seen adult Golden Plovers going south early in that month. Presumably, then, they show the same trait as their relatives, the adults migrating before the juvenals. But the Golden Plovers migrate earlier than the Greys for which reason no adults have been seen here in September. My latest Golden Plover record is for the 23rd of September, just when the Black-bellied, which stay on to the end of October, were present in their largest numbers.

With regard to their spring movements, apparently both species go north about the same time; but again the Greys are not as advanced in their moult as the Golden Plovers. The latter are generally in their full dress, while the former are still changing, a large percentage of them at all events. The height of the migration seems to be early in the latter half of May.

My latest record for northward bound Golden Plover is May 29, when two birds only were seen. The Black-bellied Plover I have never seen so late in this province, although I have a later record for an isolated specimen on Lake Winnipeg.

This year has been an exceptional Golden Plover year. At the place referred to above, somewhere over a thousand birds were seen on the 20th of May alone, in moving flocks varying in number from thirty individuals to several hundreds. This was evidently not unique; for about the same time I got a report from quite another part of the province that this species was unusually abundant, while from yet another quarter I got a very good description of the bird in a letter with the request that I name it for the enquirer, a careful bird observer. Her comment was that she had *never seen the species before*, but that it was, at the time of writing, present on the ploughed fields in enormous numbers. To convince myself, I made a careful sketch of a typi-

cal specimen and returned it to the source of enquiry, later to hear that it was the bird in question without doubt. It seems difficult to account for the unprecedented numbers, unless it is the effect of the general prohibition of spring shooting on the continent during the last few years.

University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, October 24, 1922.

THOUGHTS ON ENGLISH NAMES FOR BIRDS IN THE A. O. U. CHECK-LIST

By W. L. McATEE

PAPERS presented at the 1921 meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union and others that have appeared in print at intervals have contained suggestions and criticisms relative to the English names of birds appearing in the Check-List. It seems to the writer that these arguments have lacked cogency and force to a great extent because the object to be accomplished has never been clearly defined. Bluntly, what is the object of incorporating a set of English bird names in the Check-List? That question must be clearly answered before an intelligent selection of names can be made.

Some writers evidently lean toward the view that the non-technical names of the Check-List should reflect popular usage. Again, in this connection, a serious question immediately arises—What is popular usage? Check-List territory is a large one, and however much we may dislike the idea, it is strongly sectionalized. One need only recall popular designations of a few of these sections as The South, Way Down East, and the Corn Belt, to realize that even among the English speaking part of our population, grouping is evident and that it undoubtedly strongly influences usage in bird-names. In addition we have the Mexican Border, we have localities chiefly populated by Indians, communities strongly Bohemian, Swedish, German, or Russian; we have Louisiana, home of the Creoles, and French Canada; in all, sectionalization so pronounced as to make the question, What is popular usage?, an unanswerable one. Usage in bird names is not only local, but often changeable, even whimsical. It cannot be accurately reflected in a list of bird names—one name to the species—such as we incorporate in the Check-List. Rather, a catalogue or dictionary of names would be required.

Only a comprehensive knowledge of local bird names also, will serve for another purpose, namely legal use, for which some might think an authoritative standard list sufficient. No, when in court, the terms used in local legislation must be used, and to hardly a less degree the colloquial nomenclature of the people concerned. Local bird names have been made official by being incorporated into laws. Consider the following, for instance, from a Louisiana bird-protection act: grosbec, poule d'eau, chorook and papabotte; and these from a Florida law: joeree, pond bird, red warbler, and plume bird. In trials, therefore, to which the ornithologist may be called, he must be familiar with bird names that never have received recognition by the Check-List. To secure conviction