

was located. At least eight or ten birds were seen, apparently well established, the males in full song, reminding one of a June day in the clover fields of the East. At least one specimen was taken, and now bears this data: "*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*, male, Lake Malheur, Oregon. Collected and mounted by W. T. Shaw." This specimen is now in the Oregon Agricultural College collection.—WILLIAM T. SHAW, Pullman, Washington, January 10, 1923.

Band-tailed Pigeons Increasing in California.—Until May, 1922, I had for some years seen only occasional Wild or Band-tailed pigeons (*Columba fasciata*). About May 30, 1922, however, during a trip along the coast north of the Russian River and in the vicinity of Fort Ross, I saw one morning seven flocks; the smallest flock numbered ten, the largest flock, from thirty to thirty-five pigeons.

Toward the end of November, 1922, in Pasadena, near the residence of Mrs. Howard Huntington, I saw two large flocks on several successive days. There were possibly 125 pigeons all told, and they were resting in some large eucalyptus and sycamore trees in a canyon below the house.

January 5, 1923, in Bollinger Canyon, Contra Costa County, back of San Ramon, I saw two flocks, one of about twenty, the other of about seventy-five pigeons. They seemed to be feeding on toyon (red) berries.

January 13, 1923, near Jolon, Monterey County, I saw probably three hundred pigeons, scattered over a territory about a mile square. January 15, 1923, at the same place, I saw one flock of 200 to 250 birds. They were feeding on acorns and were probably a gathering of the scattered birds seen on the 13th.

January 20, 1923, near Ojai, Ventura County, I saw several flocks. One flock, feeding in a grain field, numbered from three to five hundred—nearer five hundred.

January 25, 1923, I was again in Pasadena, and the canyon near Mrs. Huntington's house was full of pigeons flying around and alighting in the high trees near by. When they flew they made a loud, quite noticeable, flapping noise. I do not think that there was one less than 500. Mrs. Huntington told me that the pigeons had been there since I first saw them, in November, 1922, and in larger numbers. They were evidently using this canyon for a resting place, and going out to some other place to feed. They were so numerous that they were exciting much local attention.—ALLEN L. CHICKERING, San Francisco, California, February 1, 1923.

The English Blackbird in California.—For a number of years there has reposed in the collection of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology a dark plumaged thrush which was thought by some people to be merely a melanistic example of the Western Robin. In fact, the writer had so accepted the bird, and had used it on two or three occasions in demonstrating color abnormalities to classes in vertebrate zoology, contrasting it with an almost complete albino Robin of undoubted identity. But a recent critical study, made at the suggestion of Mr. H. S. Swarth, showed that the bird was not a Western Robin at all. On the presumption that the bird in question was an individual which had strayed out of its normal path of migration, the descriptions and illustrations of dark-colored thrushes in Central America and eastern Asia contained in Seebohm's Monograph of the Turdidae were examined, but without revealing any species with which the specimen in hand might be linked. The bird was then submitted to Dr. Charles W. Richmond for comparison with the National Museum material and he identified it as a female English Blackbird, *Planesticus merula* (Linnaeus).

The specimen in question was collected by F. O. Johnson at Oakland, California, on December 6, 1891. It came with the rest of the Johnson collection to the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology and is now number 10688 of the bird collection. In an article published soon after its capture (Zoe, III, 1892, pp. 115-116), Johnson described the bird, identifying it as a melanistic Robin (*Merula migratoria propinqua*). He also gave the circumstances of capture and these are worth quoting in the present connection.

" . . . While pursuing a Townsend's sparrow which had flown to the top of a tall growth of jasmine, I noticed on the opposite side of the bush a strange bird moping in the shade. It observed me just as I saw it, and hopped sluggishly to another branch

putting a bough between us. . . . My first impression was that it might be a catbird which had strayed from his rightful home. I crept up . . . and easily approached within twenty feet. It made no note and did not pay the least attention to my maneuvers. When I killed it, I was still more puzzled, for it was totally different from anything I had ever seen. It appeared much like some European thrush." Johnson describes its plumage in detail, then gives a number of points, notably the slighter notching of the bill, in which the specimen differed from the Western Robin. These differences he seemingly thought might have been produced along with the supposed disturbance in the color-producing mechanism, though even after having decided to call the bird a melanistic Robin there seems to have been some doubt in his mind as to the correctness of the identification. The behavior of the bird so far as described above quite agrees with that given for the English Blackbird in its home range.

Had Johnson measured his specimen he would have found that it was quite different from the Western Robin. The measurements are as follows: Total length (dry skin) 240 millimeters; wing 113; tail 99; tarsus 30.3; bill from feathers on forehead 20; from skull 21.8. The wing measurement in particular is well below the minimum for the Western Robin.

What is the probable source of this bird? It seems very unlikely that it was a wild stray, an "accidental" from Europe; so far as I can ascertain, the species has not hitherto been reported anywhere on the American continent. Save for a slight abrasion of the tail feathers, which might be a consequence of its brush-seeking propensities, the specimen does not show anything which would suggest that it was a recently-escaped cage bird.

It so happens that a short time prior to the capture of this bird there was some activity in the importation of European song birds on the Pacific coast. A. W. Anthony (Zoe, II, 1891, pp. 6-11) has referred to a society which was formed at Portland, Oregon, in 1888, for the importation of European song birds. In May, 1889, about five hundred individuals, representing a number of common European species were received and released near Portland. Included in these were sixteen pairs of "black thrushes (*Turdus merula*)."

The latter were reported in the spring of 1890 as among the species which survived, though the evidence for correct identification in this report was not wholly satisfactory according to Anthony. In Europe the Blackbird is migratory. It may be that some of the birds released at Portland migrated south into California and that Johnson secured one of these. The chance of this seems small, though it is not an impossible occurrence. Or, the activities of the Portland society may have inspired some one in the neighborhood of Oakland to import and release European birds. There is no record of this so far as I can find.

In brief, then, a specimen of the English Blackbird, originally reported as a melanistic example of the Western Robin, has been taken in California. This leads me to ask, in closing, has any collector ever taken a melanistic example of the Western Robin?—TRACY I. STOREY, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, California, December 21, 1922.*

Mimicry in Bird Songs.—The article on the Mimetic Aspect of the Mocker's Song by Mr. Donald R. Dickey (Condor, xxiv, pp. 153-157) is of unusual interest. Mr. Dickey evidently assumes that birds in general acquire the ability to sing by inheritance rather than by imitation of parents. Would it not be equally as good a supposition to think that the young mocker he mentions had learned to "imitate" the Sparrow Hawk, Killdeer, and Cactus Wren from hearing its male parent sing these notes? At least, if Mr. Dickey is right, the instance is of more than mere ornithological interest, for it involves the inheritance of acquired characters, the possibility of which some modern evolutionists have denied.

The question brings to mind the imitations by the Starling in the eastern United States. This bird, so recently brought to America, has learned to imitate the notes of many American birds. If such a thing is possible, there would hardly be time for this species to acquire these notes by inheritance. Yet imitations of some species, such as the Wood Pewee, Chickadee, Grackle, Cowbird, and Bluebird are so common, at least in southern Connecticut, that they almost seem to be part of the Starling's own notes.