

NOTES ON BIRDS COLLECTED IN THE VIRGIN RIVER
VALLEY OF UTAH

WITH TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

By VASCO M. TANNER

IN THE SOUTHWESTERN part of Utah, along the Virgin River, may be found some of the most interesting birds of that state. For this region is locally known as Utah's Dixie because of the hot climate and the cultivated semi-tropical fruits, such as figs, pomegranates, raisin grapes and cotton. The elevation of the region is from 2700 feet to 3100 feet and is one of the extreme interior arms of the transcontinental belt, the Lower Austral (in the west, Sonoran) zone.

Some of the characteristic Sonoran plants and animals that are found about Saint George are: creosote bush (*Covillea glutinosa*), mesquites (*Prosopis glandulosa* and *P. pubescens*), prickly-pear (*Opuntia acanthocarpa*), rose flower (*Krameria glandu-*



Fig. 58. THE VIRGIN RIVER, UTAH, FROM JARVIS FIELD, SOUTH OF ST. GEORGE; MAY, 1922.

Photo by Kerr.

losa), yucca (*Yucca angustissima*), shadscale (*Atriplex lentiformis*), desert willow (*Chilopsis linearis*), and Utah sumach (*Rhus utahensis*); Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus mexicanus*), Gambel Quail (*Lophortyx gambeli*), Road-runner (*Geococcyx californianus*), Western Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos leucopterus*), and Phainopepla (*Phainopepla nitens*); Banded Gecko (*Coleonyx variegatus*), Gila Monster (*Heloderma suspectum*), Sonoran Tantilla (*Tantilla nigriceps*), Bicolor Ground Snake (*Sonora semiannulata*), and Agassiz Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizi*); tiger beetles (*Cicindela lemniscata*, *C. praetextata*, *C. micans*, and *C. tenuisignata*), tenebrionids (*Trichiasida acerba* and *Cryptoglossa verrucosa*). (See figs. 58, 59.)

Within this arid Sonoran region, where most of the species are derived from the south, the following birds were collected. Mr. Angus M. Woodbury and Mr.

Clarence Cottam have recently collected in this region and the writer wishes to thank them for the privilege of going over their collections of skins and incorporating facts from those sources.

Anas platyrhynchos. Mallard. A common duck on the river south of St. George in the fall of the year. I have taken it in October and November.

Nettion carolinense. Green-winged Teal. Several different years in November I have taken this duck in the swamps south of the little town of Washington.

Querquedula cyanoptera. Cinnamon Teal. One of the common ducks in October and November along the Virgin River.

Marila americana. Redhead. One male of this species was collected in November, by Mr. Woodbury, at the junction of the Santa Clara Creek and the Virgin River.

Marila valisineria. Canvas-back. I have taken this species in October and November in the Washington fields, and on the Virgin River and the Santa Clara Creek.

Ardea herodias treganzai. Pallid Great Blue Heron. A migrant in the fall and spring of the year. I have taken it in May.

Nycticorax nycticorax naevius. Black-crowned Night Heron. Has been seen wading in the muddy water of the Virgin River in the spring time. Two females were collected in the Washington fields in September, 1926, by Mr. Cottam.



Fig. 59. THE VIRGIN RIVER, UTAH, LOOKING NORTHEAST FROM JARVIS FIELD, SOUTH OF ST. GEORGE.

Photo by Kerr.

Fulica americana. Coot. I have collected the coot in April on the city reservoir.

Recurvirostra americana. Avocet. Three migrating Avocets were taken in May, 1917, in the swamps below St. George.

Gallinago delicata. Wilson Snipe. I have found this wader only in the fall of the year along the river, in the swamps, and at times in the ditches in St. George.

Pisobia minutilla. Least Sandpiper. Common in this region during the migrating seasons. Two specimens were taken in September, 1926, by Mr. Cottam.

Oxyechus vociferus. Killdeer. Common in this region most of the year. I took this species on January 1, 1926, in the fields south of St. George.

Lophortyx gambeli. Gambel Quail. A resident of this region. A very useful bird, as the bulk of its food consists of insects and weed seeds. However, many of the farmers complain that it is a pest to the berries and grapes. It nests in March.

Dendragapus obscurus. Dusky Grouse. In the Pine Valley Mountains in September and October.

Centrocerus urophasianus. Sage Hen. In the sage-brush foothills of the Pine Valley Mountains.

Zenaidura macroura marginella. Western Mourning Dove. Common through most of the year.

Accipiter cooperi. Cooper Hawk. One specimen collected on December 24, 1925, at Santa Clara, by Mr. Woodbury.

Buteo borealis calurus. Western Red-tailed Hawk. Frequently killed by farmers in the fall and spring.

Aquila chrysaetos. Golden Eagle. Two large males have been captured near St. George, in January. One with a wing extent of 79 inches was caught in a hunter's trap.

Falco sparverius phalaena. Desert Sparrow Hawk. A resident of the region.

Tyto alba pratincola. Barn Owl. I have collected this bird in March. It is not common, however, in this region.

Bubo virginianus pallescens. Western Horned Owl. In different parts of the region throughout the year.

Speotyto cucularia hypugaea. Burrowing Owl. Taken in April at Washington, and seen at Leeds. Not common.

Geococcyx californianus. Road-runner. Resident. One of the most interesting birds of this region and of the state.

Ceryle alcyon. Belted Kingfisher. Throughout the region in the fall months.

Dryobates scalaris cactophilus. Cactus Woodpecker. Two males and one female of this desert species were taken in September, 1926, in St. George, by Mr. Cottam.

Asyndesmus lewisi. Lewis Woodpecker. This species has been taken while migrating in the spring months, March, April and May.

Colaptes cafer collaris. Red-shafted Flicker. A resident of the region. It breeds in the Pine Valley Mountains; specimens in Mr. Woodbury's collection.

Phalaenoptilus nuttalli. Poor-will. I have taken specimens of this species in May. I have found it breeding in the Pine Valley Mountains.

Archilochus alexandri. Black-chinned Hummingbird. In April I have collected migrants.

Tyrannus verticalis. Arkansas Kingbird. A common summer visitant, nesting throughout the region.

Sayornis saya. Say Phoebe. Found about St. George from March until November. I have found it breeding in the Upper and Lower Sonoran zones. It builds its nest in trees, buildings, wells, and bird-houses.

Nuttallornis borealis. Olive-sided Flycatcher. A summer visitant. I have taken it at St. George in May.

Empidonax trailli. Traill Flycatcher. I have taken this species in May. Mr. Cottam collected this species in September, 1926.

Empidonax wrighti. Wright Flycatcher. Specimens of *Empidonax* taken in September I have decided to place under this name because of the white of the throat and wings and the size and shape of the bill. Collected by Mr. Cottam.

Pyrocephalus rubinus mexicanus. Vermilion Flycatcher. Resident in the region some years. I have taken it in December and January.

Otocoris alpestris leucolaema. Desert Horned Lark. A common resident of the region up to the Pine Valley Mountains.

Pica pica hudsonia. Magpie. Occasionally seen about St. George in the winter. I have collected it north of Santa Clara.

Aphelocoma woodhousei. Woodhouse Jay. In this region throughout the winter months. I have obtained it in November.

Corvus brachyrhynchos hesperis. Western Crow. A resident. Does some damage to corn crops.

Cyanocephalus cyanocephalus. Pinyon Jay. Taken in the Upper Sonoran zone of the Santa Clara Creek and the Pine Valley Mountains.

Molothrus ater obscurus. Dwarf Cowbird. Summer visitant.

Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus. Yellow-headed Blackbird. A summer visitant, nesting along the river.

Agelaius phoeniceus (subsp.?). Red-winged Blackbird. Red-winged Blackbirds have been taken by Mr. Cottam, Mr. Woodbury and the writer, and I had thought they were *sonoriensis*; but a study of the most recent literature (van Rossem, Condor, xxviii, 1926, pp. 215-230) leads me to question this. We may have *nevadensis*; in fact, specimens taken this summer at Provo and Bear Lake, Utah, seem to support this belief.

Sturnella neglecta. Western Meadowlark. A common resident.

Icterus bullocki. Bullock Oriole. A common summer visitant, breeding from April until the middle of June.

Euphagus cyanocephalus. Brewer Blackbird. An early spring and fall visitant.

Carpodacus mexicanus frontalis. House Finch. This species is locally known as the "peach bird". It is common from April until November.

Astragalinus psaltria hesperophilus. Green-backed Goldfinch. A spring and fall migrant. I have collected it in March, and Mr. Woodbury has taken it on December 29.

Passer domesticus. English Sparrow. A pest.

Poocetes gramineus confinis. Western Vesper Sparrow. Common about St. George in early spring and late fall. Cottam collection, September.

Zonotrichia leucophrys gambeli. Gambel Sparrow. A common winter visitant.

Spizella passerina arizonae. Western Chipping Sparrow. A migrant and winter visitant.

Junco hyemalis connectens. Shufeldt Junco. This junco and *mearnsi* spend the winter about St. George.

Junco hyemalis mearnsi. Pink-sided Junco. A winter visitant.

Melospiza melodia fallax. Desert Song Sparrow. A resident, but most noticeable in the spring and fall. Other species of sparrows have been taken in the Virgin River country, but they need more study.

Pipilo maculatus montanus. Spurred Towhee. Common in winter. In the Woodbury collection.

Pipilo aberti. Abert Towhee. A resident of the Virgin from St. George south. In the Cottam collection.

Oreospiza chlorura. Green-tailed Towhee. I have taken this towhee in the sagebrush valleys about Pine Valley Mountains during the summer months.

Piranga ludoviciana. Western Tanager. A summer visitant. In the Cottam collection, specimens taken in September.

Petrochelidon lunifrons. Cliff Swallow. Common in spring and summer. I have taken it during the breeding season in cliffs along the river.

Hirundo erythrogaster. Barn Swallow. Two specimens of this species taken in the Washington fields in May.

Phainopepla nitens. Phainopepla. A common summer visitant, breeding in May and part of June.

Lanius ludovicianus excubitorides. White-rumped Shrike. A resident. Collected by Woodbury in December and by Cottam in September.

Vireosylva gilva swainsoni. Western Warbling Vireo. Specimens secured in May during the spring migration.

Dendroica aestiva sonorana. Sonora Yellow Warbler. A summer visitant.

Dendroica auduboni auduboni. Audubon Warbler. A spring and fall migrant. Common in all parts of Utah during migration.

Oporornis tolmiei. Macgillivray Warbler. A migrant. Specimens taken in September, 1926, by Mr. Cottam.

Geothlypis trichas occidentalis. Western Yellow-throat. Specimens were taken in the ash and black willow trees at the junction of the Santa Clara Creek and Virgin River in September, by Mr. Cottam.

Icteria virens longicauda. Long-tailed Chat. A summer visitant. Cottam collection, September.

Cinclus mexicanus unicolor. Water Ouzel. A resident of the Virgin River about Zion National Park.

Oroscoptes montanus. Sage Thrasher. A migrant in this region, but breeds in the northern part of the state. One specimen taken at St. George in September by Mr. Cottam.

Mimus polyglottos leucopterus. Western Mockingbird. A common summer visitant in the Virgin Valley about St. George. It arrives in April and departs in November.

Salpinctes obsoletus. Rock Wren. A resident.

Catherpes mexicanus conspersus. Canyon Wren. I have taken specimens of this species in August near Hurricane.

Troglodytes aedon parkmani. Western House Wren. A common summer visitant, nesting in buildings in May.

Telmatodytes palustris plesius. Western Marsh Wren. Taken in the Washington fields in December, by Mr. Woodbury.

Regulus calendula. Ruby-crowned Kinglet. I have taken specimens of this species in March. Only a migrant in this region.

Planesticus migratorius propinquus. Western Robin. A resident.

Sialia mexicana bairdi. Chestnut-backed Bluebird. Specimens have been taken at St. George, Leeds, and LaVerkin, Utah, in the spring months.

Sialia currucoides. Mountain Bluebird. Winter visitant. Taken by Mr. Woodbury in December.

Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, October 29, 1926.

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

A Strange Meeting with a Flicker.—On the night of December 27, 1925, I had an experience with a Red-shafted Flicker (*Colaptes cafer collaris*) which seemed to me sufficiently unusual to be worthy of record. I was at Frank Stephens' ranch in La Puerta Valley, San Diego County, California, and about an hour after sunset, when it was completely dark and a light, drizzling rain was falling, I started to the pump-house for some water. I carried a flash-light in one hand and a pail in the other, being hatless and coatless at the time. After proceeding for a hundred yards or so I stopped to shift the pail and flash-light. While doing so, I was suddenly struck a sharp blow on the right arm, just above the elbow.

Completely startled, I dropped my pail and light, and instinctively grabbed my arm. To my amazement I found something rather soft, warm and downy, clinging there for all it was worth. Upon returning to the cabin with my prize, it was found to be a male Red-shafted Flicker. It was released soon after being identified, and lost no time in departing. Whether the bird mistook me for a tree, or my light attracted it, remains a mystery to me; at any rate, the fact that it was flying after dark and while it was raining is surely interesting.—JACK C. VON BLOEKER, *San Diego Society of Natural History, San Diego, California, April 29, 1927.*

Correct Portraiture of Some Birds.—In the London (England) *Field* for March 10, 1927, there is an article by Mr. Frohawk on the Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*). Among other remarks the writer points out that this species invariably alights on the ground, never perching in trees; and that, notwithstanding, both in pictures and in museums, the bird is frequently shown doing this.

Looking through what ornithological literature I possess, I find two books that are extensively used by bird-student beginners. In these two, also in a colored picture out of a series, the Short-eared Owl is represented perching on a tree or stump. Is this owl never known to perch on a fence post? I have seen an individual seated on a hay stack.

Recently I purchased *British Birds*, by Archibald Thorburn, with the author's own beautiful illustrations. In this work the Short-eared Owl is portrayed squatting on the ground. In describing the Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) the same author says: "Like most, if not all Petrels, the Fulmar appears to be unable or unwilling to stand on its feet, and rests when on the ground in a crouching attitude." I presume that does not imply that the petrels, shearwaters, and fulmars cannot and do not walk about in the ordinary manner. But in the above-mentioned beginners' manuals the greater number of pictures represent the birds of this group at rest in an upright posture, or even on one leg.—L. B. POTTER, *Eastend, Saskatchewan, May 30, 1927.*

The Rufous-necked Sandpiper on St. Paul, Pribilof Islands.—In the bird collection of the California Academy of Sciences there is a specimen (no. 23552, male) of *Pisobia ruficollis* (Pallas) collected by G. Dallas Hanna at Northeast Point, St. Paul Island, Alaska, August 27, 1920. This bird was recorded as the Least Sandpiper by Mailliard and Hanna (*Condor*, XXIII, 1921, p. 95), but recent examination of the skin aroused suspicion that it might not belong to that species. It was sent to the United States National Museum for determination, where examination by Dr. C. W. Richmond, Mr. J. H. Riley, and Dr. H. C. Oberholser settled its specific identity as above indicated.