

## FROM FIELD AND STUDY

**Vocal Performances of the Rock Sparrow in Oklahoma.**—The Rock Sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps eremoea*) has been found in rocky situations in five different localities in central and western Oklahoma: the Arbuckle Mountains in Murray County; the Wichita Mountains in Comanche County; near Headrick in Jackson County; gypsum hills in Blaine County; and on the mesas in Cimarron County within nine miles of Colorado and five of New Mexico. Although the books call these birds shy, I have found the males tame, singing in fairly close proximity to the observer. They do not often take wing, but instead disappear among the rocks.

On June 4 and 5, 1929, I studied birds near the Lower Narrows of West Cache Creek on the hillside across from Eagle Mountain in the Wichitas, watching a young Red-tailed Hawk in its nest on the face of the cliff, seeing Rock Wrens, and hearing the songs of a Black-capped Vireo and a Cañon Wren. A Rock Sparrow, about a hundred feet from my seat, had three singing posts, a live cedar, a dead cedar, and a favorite rock. I searched in vain for his nest and decided it must be in a tussock of grass on the cliff below me. I did not see his mate at all.

At 9:50 a. m. he appeared on a boulder, gave a queer, nasal *pur-pur-pur*, then flew to a dead cedar overhanging the cañon and began to sing, hardly opening his bill at all. After about a dozen songs he flew. At 10:15 he was back again, singing steadily eight times a minute. A male Painted Bunting that had a nest 25 feet to the eastward alighted in the cedar and the sparrow promptly chased him off, leaving the place himself after a few more songs. At 10:35 he started again, but stopped to peer down at a female Cowbird that was searching in the bushes below him; when the cowbird noticed me she flew away. Unlike the Song Sparrows in Columbus, Ohio, he gave no note of alarm at this visitor, but began to sing once more. (The cowbird returned the next morning at 9:45 accompanied by a male, and went to the black-jack oak containing the bunting's nest, but upon finding the female incubating, left at once.) From 9:30 to 11:30 the sparrow sang perhaps seventy to eighty songs, from 2:30 to 3:30 p. m. not more than a dozen, and from 9:30 to 11:45 the next morning, about twenty-five.

The usual song is a chipping of six to nine notes, the first two-thirds ascending very slightly, the rest descending in a more marked degree. Its length was 1.2 to 1.5 seconds. When a bird was singing steadily, the number of songs per minute ranged from seven to nine, while the intervals from the beginning of one song to the beginning of the next varied from 4.5 to 10.7 seconds, the average of thirty-one being 7.3 seconds. The song is not loud, and to my mind not at all musical.

On June 6, in another locality west of Camp Boulder, I heard a different song from two birds that the afternoon before had sung the ordinary one. The general character of both was much the same. This new song might be written *hur zig-zig-zig-ziger zah*, both the first and last notes being somewhat lower than the middle portion. Its length was 1.1 seconds; six intervals between beginnings of songs ranged from 9 to 10.5 seconds, averaging 9.8 seconds. From 5:50 to 6:05 a. m. one bird sang this song quite regularly six times a minute.

The most peculiar thing about the Rock Sparrow is its manner of scolding. None of the many birds I had seen had been carrying food, nor had they objected in any way to my presence until at 2:30 p. m. on June 5, when I reached a rocky hillside covered with black-jack west of the camp. There I was startled by the most extraordinary outburst of scolding and complaining, very loud, shrill and nasal. The note sounded to me like *peer*, and later, when more vehement, *tau*. Sometimes a few gentle *tsips* were mixed into the tirade. At 2:40 this Rock Sparrow uttered 71 *peers* and 1 *tsip* in one minute; at 2:56, after I had started to explore, there were 128 *peers* and 16 *tsips* in one minute, a much more rapid rate than with most birds I have met. As I approached him he treated me to a new sound, the strangest of all, a kind of chatter something like the rattle of a Kingfisher, given with throat and tail quivering. Sometimes this did not last more than two seconds, but at other times, it extended from 4.8 to 5.5 seconds.

I then saw the other parent for the first time. She had two larvae in her bill and was minus her tail. Curiously enough, the only note she gave was the

*tsip*. I retired under an oak to give them a chance to quiet down, but to no purpose, for as soon as I reappeared, the male was at it again: *tau tau tau chreeeeeeeee*. In one minute he uttered 64 *taus* and 56 *tsips*. It was impossible to get any idea of the location of the nest, for the bird made a great commotion over widely different places.

Wishing to make sure that it was the male that had the extensive vocabulary, I made a wide circuit and came up on top of the hill where I could see a dead tree on the territory of this particular pair. After some wait, the bird with the tail appeared on this tree and gave two songs.

Early the next morning I visited the hill top again, but, although two neighboring males sang fairly steadily from 5:30 till 6:30, the bird observed previously did not sing at all. When I came down to bid them goodby, I found both parents carrying insects; my greeting from the male consisted in 137 *taus* in the space of one minute.—MARGARET MORSE NICE, *Amherst, Massachusetts, August 18, 1929.*



Fig. 75. NESTING SITE OF ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER IN INSULATION BOX IN MORAGA VALLEY, CONTRA COSTA COUNTY.

**Unusual Nesting Site of Ash-throated Flycatcher.**—There is a station on the Sacramento Short Line in Moraga Valley, Contra Costa County, called Valle Vista. The line is on the side of a hill and a small station house is in place for patrons. The County road parallels the line and at this point is about fifty feet distant and twenty feet lower in grade. There are numerous poles along the right of way and adjacent thereto, and owing to the numerous changes in alignment it has been found necessary to use guy wires to make the line safe. The surrounding territory is fairly open in character having been subdivided into small acreages. Several houses are in the vicinity. A small creek flows through the flat fields and is lined with heavy brush, willows, and other trees.

On May 16, 1929, the writer was attracted to a lone Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens cinerascens*) sitting on a telephone wire alongside the road. Having stopped the auto so as to watch, it was but a short time before another flycatcher, the female, was seen to fly up from the creek carrying nesting material in her bill. In a short space of time she flew to the top of an insulation box such as surrounds a guy wire of the power line. This particular insulation box, within fifty feet of the station building, is about five feet long and is built with an opening about four inches square surrounding the guy wire. The bird disappeared within the box and her nesting site was revealed.