

March, 1930

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

an altitude of about 8,000 feet, my attention was drawn to a number of small ducklings bobbing and bouncing along the course of the clear, swift and icy-cold stream below the trail. (See fig. 47.)

Hastily dismounting, I headed the birds off on their swift, down-stream course and found that the brood consisted of an adult female and her family of five large downy young. Even when the family was approached to within twelve or fifteen feet, the mother refused to fly off and leave her young, but always tried to escape by swimming swiftly up or down stream. The young were equally adept at breasting

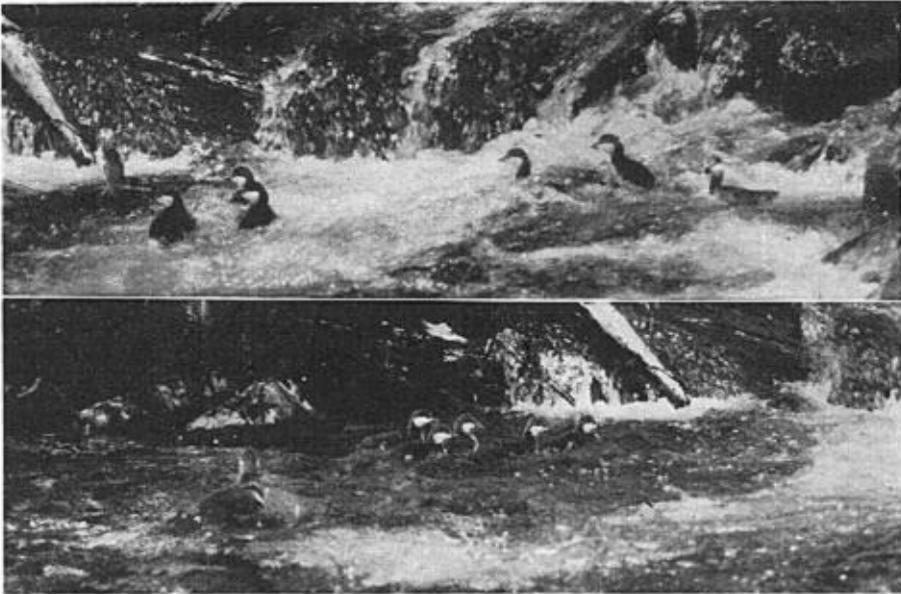


Fig. 47. PACIFIC HARLEQUIN DUCKS (TWO VIEWS); PARENT WITH FIVE YOUNG. IMNAHA RIVER, WALLOWA NATIONAL FOREST, WALLOWA MOUNTAINS, OREGON; JULY 29, 1929.

Photographed by Major John D. Guthrie.

the swift current. After photographing the family, I left them in peace on their rushing torrent amid the towering peaks of the Wallowa Mountains.—STANLEY G. JEWETT, *Portland, Oregon, October 11, 1929.*

Wasp Eaten by a Mockingbird.—The common yellow-and-brown wasp (*Polistes*) has, in addition to its formidable sting, a hard, tough armor which makes it difficult to kill. Having previously noticed the discreet attitude assumed by the California Thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum*) upon encountering this insect at a drinking-place, it was with some surprise that, on the morning of October 21, I saw that a Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos leucopterus*) had captured a good-sized individual, which was still buzzing angrily. The Mockingbird dealt with the wasp vigorously, though with circumspection, and finally swallowed it piecemeal.—ROBERT S. WOODS, *Azusa, California, December 3, 1929.*

Wire-perching Woodpeckers.—The ease with which certain woodpeckers can perch on wires has been observed only lately by me, in spite of a lifetime of "bird-watching." I recently recorded this ability on the part of a Lewis Woodpecker (Condor, xxxi, 1929, p. 252) in the belief that it was perhaps something unusual. In the early part of September, 1929, I was staying at "The Willows," a resort about 35 miles east of San Diego, where a grove of live-oaks is passed by the pole-bordered highway to El Centro. Here the California Woodpeckers (*Balanosphyra formicivora bairdi*) daily used the electric wires as perches both for resting and as a vantage

point from which to hawk for insects. Not infrequently more than one bird might be seen perched on the same wire between two poles. Adults and young-of-the-year seemed equally disposed to make use of the wires. It is therefore evident that wire-perching is no unusual feat for woodpeckers of the genera *Asyndesmus* and *Balanosphyra*, to which *Melanerpes* should probably be added. Perhaps *Colaptes* can stand on a wire, but I am still inclined to question whether other, more definitely "tree-trunk," groups of woodpeckers are capable of so doing. Observations of others on this score would be of interest.—CLINTON G. ABBOTT, *San Diego Society of Natural History, San Diego, California, December 10, 1929.*

Observations on the Dwarf Cowbird.—During the time from 1920 to 1929 it has been interesting to note the apparent increase of the Dwarf Cowbird (*Molothrus ater obscurus*) in southern California. In 1920, the sight of a cowbird in the willow thickets of the San Gabriel River district and adjacent semi-arid washes was not common, and eggs were found only occasionally. Up to 1925, my records failed to show the finding of cowbird eggs in nests of any other species but California Yellow Warbler and San Diego Song Sparrow.

In 1926, I was able to get into this district but once during the nesting season. I found cowbirds flying about, in mating antics, in considerable "bunches" as compared with the season of 1920. During that one-day trip through the willows, I noted several California Yellow Warbler nests which contained cowbird's eggs, and I collected one of this warbler, the female of which was incubating, as a true maternal instinct urges, upon three eggs of the cowbird and not a single one of her own! These three eggs are, without a doubt, from the same cowbird as they are practically identical in shape, color, and size. What a delightful time the yellow warblers would have had supplying the demands of three such hungry ruffians!

In 1927, during the months of April and May, I found cowbird eggs in a much wider variety of nests, and it was about five o'clock on a May afternoon that I was extremely fortunate actually to see the performance of a female cowbird when she steals the opportunity to do the famous "sneak stunt" which carries on the race.

I was sitting beneath a sycamore taking a little rest, looking at an Arizona Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus nelsoni*) nest which was swung about twenty feet up, near-by. The female oriole was sitting on eggs at the time and was on the nest while I sat there, somewhat concealed by shrubbery. For some reason, she flew off the nest, probably to find a bit of food before darkness fell, and disappeared in the surrounding bushes. A few minutes after the oriole left the nest, a female Dwarf Cowbird flew quietly down from another part of the sycamore tree under which I was sitting, and scrambled into the oriole nest. To me, it seemed as though the affair was pre-arranged or timed by clock, for there certainly was no time lost in getting on the nest.

The total time the cowbird remained on the nest could not have exceeded two or three minutes. During this time she laid her egg, either kicked out, or with the use of her bill, removed one of the oriole's eggs, and was gone. The thing happened in such quick time that I hardly had time to see whether she took the oriole egg out of the nest before she laid her egg, or afterwards. However, I know there was an egg removed to make room for this "parasite", because I found the oriole egg where it was dropped.

In the course of a few minutes, the female oriole returned to her incubating duties, evidently unmindful of the fact that a radical change had been made in her household, a change which she probably would never discover, although the young cowbird would eventually be twice the size of her own young, and with about double the food capacity. This occurrence I have never seen since, and probably is a sight that one will witness only once in a lifetime.

In 1928 and 1929, I added several more species to the list of the victimized. One in particular was that of a Phainopepla (*Phainopepla nitens*) feeding a young cowbird in its nest with one of its own offspring. The cowbird actually was forcing the young "Pep" from his rightful cradle, and the adults were simply gorging the hoggish young cowbird with all the food it could hold, seemingly forgetting about their own "child" that was "somewhere in the bottom" of the overcrowded nest.

The following is a detailed report of cowbird parasitism for nine years of observation over a restricted area.