

THE THICK-BILLED PARROT IN CHIHUAHUA

By ALDO LEOPOLD

The physics of beauty is one department of natural science still in the Dark Ages. Not even the manipulators of bent space have tried to solve its equations. Everybody knows, for example, that the autumn landscape in the north woods is the land, plus a red maple, plus a ruffed grouse. In terms of conventional physics, the grouse represents only a millionth of either the mass or the energy of an acre. Yet subtract the grouse and the whole thing is dead. An enormous amount of some kind of motive power has been lost.

It is easy to say that the loss is all in our mind's eye, but is there any sober ecologist who will agree? He knows full well that there has been an ecological death, the significance of which is inexpressible in terms of contemporary science. A Russian philosopher, Ouspensky, has called this imponderable essence the *numenon* of material things. It stands in contradistinction to *phenomenon* which is ponderable and predictable, even to the tossings and turnings of the remotest star.

The grouse is the numenon of the north woods, the bluejay of the hickory groves, the whisky-jack of the muskegs, the piñonero of the juniper foothills. Ornithological texts do not record these facts. I suppose they are new to science, however obvious to the discerning scientist. Be that as it may, I here record the discovery of the numenon of the Sierra Madre: the Thick-billed Parrot (*Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*).

He is a discovery only because so few have visited his haunts. Once there, only the deaf and blind could fail to perceive his role in the mountain life and landscape. Indeed you have hardly finished breakfast before the chattering flocks leave their roost on the rim rocks and perform a sort of morning drill in the high reaches of the dawn. Like squadrons of cranes they wheel and spiral, loudly debating with each other the question (which also puzzles you) of whether this new day which creeps slowly over the canyons is bluer and goldier than its predecessors, or less so. The vote being a draw, they repair by separate companies to the high mesas, for their breakfast of pine-seed-on-the-half-shell. They have not yet seen you.

But a little later, as you begin the steep ascent out of the canyon, some sharp-eyed parrot, perhaps a mile away, espies this strange creature puffing up the trail where only deer or lion, bear or turkey, are licensed to travel. Breakfast is forgotten. With a whoop and a shout the whole gang is awing and coming at you. As they circle overhead you wish fervently for a parrot dictionary. Are they demanding, what-the-devil business have you in these parts? Or are they, like an avian chamber-of-commerce, merely making sure you appreciate the glories of their home town, its weather, its citizens, and its glorious future as compared with any and all other times and places whatsoever? It might be either or both. And there flashes through your mind the sad premonition of what will happen when the road is built, and this riotous reception committee first greets the tourist-with-a-gun.

It is soon clear that you are a dull inarticulate fellow, unable to respond by so much as a whistle to the standard amenities of the Sierra morn. And after all, there are more pine cones in the woods than have yet been opened, so let's finish breakfast! This time they may settle upon some tree below the rim rock, giving you the chance to sneak out to the edge and look down. There for the first time you see color; velvet green uniforms with scarlet and yellow epaulets and black helmets, sweeping noisily from

pine to pine, but always in formation and always in even numbers. Only once did I see a gang of five, or any other number not comprised of pairs.

In spring, I am told, the pair hunts up a woodpecker hole in some tall dead pine and performs its racial duty in temporary isolation. But what woodpecker excavates a hole large enough? The Guacamaja (as the natives euphoniously call the parrot) is big as a pigeon, and hardly to be squeezed into a flicker-loft. Does he, with his own powerful beak, perform the necessary enlargement? Or is he dependent on the holes of the Imperial Woodpecker, which is said to occur in these parts? To some future ornithological visitor I bequeath the pleasant task of discovering the answer.

I do not know whether the nesting pairs are as noisy as these roistering flocks which greeted me in September. I do know that in September, if there are parrots on the mountain, you will soon know it. As a proper ornithologist, I should doubtless try to describe the call. It superficially resembles that of the Piñon Jay, but the music of the piñoneros is soft and nostalgic as the haze hanging in their native canyons, while that of the Guacamaja is louder and full of the salty enthusiasm of high comedy.

I am told that after the acorns ripen, they are attacked by the parrots with as much zest as the pine seeds are earlier. The occasional wanderings of parrots across the border, recorded by Florence Bailey (Birds of New Mexico, pp. 306-307), are doubtless motivated by the search for mast.

One cannot help but wonder what the good roads program now impending throughout Mexico will do for, or to, this species. It does not have a large range; Bailey says only the northern Sierras. I can only hope that Mexico will find ways so far unbound by us to use these mountains without destroying them.

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NEEDLESS PHOTOGRAPHIC FAILURES

By JOHN L. RIDGWAY

The writer's close attention has frequently been directed to a lack of definition in certain half-tone reproductions of photographs appearing in *The Condor*, as well as in many other well-known and widely-distributed scientific publications, while the same volumes often contained beautiful examples of this universally used process of engraving. In calling attention to this rather common variation in quality of print, it is realized that the defects were probably as well known to the editors, and to the authors of the papers themselves, as they were to the present writer. However, he may be permitted to suggest methods which, if adopted, would do much to relieve this condition. Granting the undisputed fact that a loss of some clearness may usually be expected in a half-tone print, a successful cut depends upon a good photograph, or one well retouched, and on suitable paper and careful press work. The failure of many good half-tone cuts to meet requirements is often due to these factors alone; but more often it may be charged to the original photographs which lack the qualities needed to reproduce well.

The popular estimate of photography, compared with every other kind of picture-making, is that it should represent the acme of truthfulness; but, unfortunately, it does not always bear out this desirable standard. The term "photographically correct" is apt to carry with it a feeling of dependable accuracy far beyond that of a mere