

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

The Western Gnatcatcher as a Nest Mover.—In 1938 Mr. J. D. Graham, of Benicia, and I found ten nests of Western Gnatcatchers (*Poliophtila caerulea amoenissima*) near Cordelia, Solano County, California.

We are convinced that reports such as made by Chamberlin (Condor, vol. 3, 1901, pp. 33-36) of this species removing nests from one location to another are true and that this is a characteristic and commonly practiced custom. A nest found with one egg on May 21 was completely gone on May 29 and there was no trace of it either on the limb or under the tree. A careful survey led us to believe it was removed, piecemeal of course, to another site, although it is a matter of conjecture what happened to the egg. With little doubt another pair which was putting the finishing touches on their nest on May 29 moved their nest, as there was no trace of it a week later. I watched a pair of these birds on June 5 busily tearing apart a gnatcatcher's nest and flying away with parts of it. My efforts to locate what was possibly a new site were unsuccessful as they traveled to a distant point. It occurred to me that jays might have destroyed some of our missing nests; Dawson (Birds of California, 1923, p. 815) suspects that "fully half" of the gnatcatcher nests are robbed or torn up by jays. With little doubt jays bother gnatcatchers as well as other birds during the nesting season. However, I do not believe jays would take every vestige of nesting material from a nesting site. Cobwebs and downy materials adhere to the limb even when a nest is carefully removed by hand, and in the case of our missing nests the limbs on which they had rested bore not a single web or trace of down. It would seem that a jay would have no interest in so completely destroying a nest, whereas the busy little original owners might easily be suspected of transferring every treasured bit of home-building material to another location.—EMERSON A. STONER, *Benicia, California, August 23, 1939.*

White-winged Dove in Santa Cruz County, California.—On July 18, 1939, a White-winged Dove (*Melopelia asiatica*) was seen in Larkin Valley, about five miles west of Watsonville, Santa Cruz County, California. The bird was perched on a wire beside the road, where it remained until we got out of the car. It was closely and carefully observed, both at rest and in flight, by myself, Dr. Laurence M. Dickerson and Mr. A. C. Hawbecker. There was no question as to the identity of the bird, but it may, of course, have been an escape. The nearest records of occurrence of this species seem to be at Twenty-nine Palms, San Bernardino County (Heller, Condor, vol. 3, 1901, p. 100; Carter, Condor, vol. 39, 1937, p. 85; at Escondido, San Diego County (Dixon, Condor, vol. 14, 1912, p. 196); and in Santa Barbara (Parmenter, Condor, vol. 25, 1923, p. 107). Mr. Hawbecker has seen the bird several times during the subsequent month. The identification of the bird is so certain that he has not tried to collect it.—R. M. BOND, *Soil Conservation Service, Berkeley, California, September 5, 1939.*

July Records from San Pedro, California.—On July 23, 1939, while the writer and his wife were cruising on the ocean a few miles off San Pedro, California, a number of terns were seen and tentatively identified as the Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*). As the earliest fall date previously recorded for this species in southern California is August 13 (Willett, Pac. Coast Avif., No. 21, 1933, p. 76), it seemed worth while to substantiate the July occurrence by a specimen. Consequently the locality was revisited July 25, with the result that several of the terns were again encountered and an adult female collected. As expected, it proved to be *S. hirundo*. A few minutes before the tern was secured, two Rhinoceros Auklets (*Cerorhinca monocerata*) were seen and one (a male) was shot, this also being a first record for July. The above two specimens are in the Los Angeles Museum.

Shortly after we had started for port, and while still about five miles out, an adult Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) crossed our bows in pursuit of a tern. Although this bird was not collected, it was seen so clearly that the twisted tail feathers were plainly visible. This is an early date for the species in southern California.—G. WILLETT, *Los Angeles Museum, Los Angeles, California, August 29, 1939.*

Foraging Dexterity of a Lazuli Bunting.—Instances of foraging behavior that are especially adapted to meet particular physical situations are numerous indeed among birds. Less frequent are occasions when an element of learning, in contrast to instinct, is clearly manifest in feeding technique carried on in the wild. We may be confident of the adaptability of birds in general in seeking their food, but when actions are nicely gauged to take advantage of some unnatural object in the environment, we are the more assured of the individual's powers of comprehension and adjustment.

On August 3, 1939, Dr. Ernst Mayr and I watched a male Lazuli Bunting (*Passerina amoena*) that had learned a handy method of feeding on grass heads. The bird was first noted as it flew along the roadside in Strawberry Canyon, Berkeley. It alighted on the barbed wire fence ahead of our car and began feeding at once. Canary grass (*Phalaris californica*) grew to a height of 20 to 26 inches and thus extended above the lowest fence wire which was 18 inches above the ground. This species of grass appears to have insufficient rigidity to support a bunting on the tips of its stems. The bunting flew laterally from the wire to a distance of about one foot, seized a grass head in its bill and returned with it to the wire, the grass stem bending over readily. The bird then lowered its bill to the wire and clasped the compact seed head against the wire with its left foot. In this position it picked out the seeds. When the head was well broken apart and the seed supply depleted, the grass stem either slipped free or was allowed to spring back to its normal position. Immediately the bird flew out for another grass head, hovered and returned, and the feeding was continued. This activity was seen at least six times in succession, the foraging taking place to either side of the wire. The bunting seemed able successfully to gauge the distance to which it could operate. Tall grasses no more than 15 inches away always were taken. At no time did it fail through attempting to bend over a head that was too short or one that was too far away.

The fence for 100 feet passed through grass of similar height and maturity. Undoubtedly the bird had lived in or about this vicinity during the current summer and had developed, to its special advantage, this method of feeding from the fence wire.—ALDEN H. MILLER, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, California, October 12, 1939.*

Four Species New to Grand Canyon National Park.—Since publication of the "Check-list of Birds of Grand Canyon National Park" in July, 1937, four species new to Grand Canyon have been recorded. All of these were observed in 1939.

About 3 p.m. on February 12, I found a Western Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea ochracea*) sitting on a clump of burro brush about one-half mile above Indian Gardens. The place marked the lower limit of the snow at that time. I was able to approach within fifteen feet of the bird and to observe it for several minutes. To my knowledge the only other record of this species from northern Arizona is that listed by Swarth (*Pac. Coast Avif.*, No. 10, 1914, p. 54) which was reported by Kennerly from the Little Colorado River in December, 1859.

A Rocky Mountain Pigmy Owl (*Glaucidium gnoma pinicola*) was discovered in a ponderosa pine by Mrs. H. C. Bryant, about one-half mile east of Grand Canyon village on April 25. Attention was drawn to the owl by the calls of Long-crested Jays. Later, on the same day, Dr. H. C. Bryant, Mrs. McKee and I all had opportunity to see the owl where it sat about thirty feet above the ground. A few days later its nest hole was found by Mrs. Bryant in a neighboring pine and on June 4, when I revisited the site, this hole was still being used. Furthermore, about ten feet below it, a hole of



Fig. 53. Young Saw-whet Owls; south rim of Grand Canyon, Arizona.

Photo by A. L. Brown.