

Riverside County, California, November 29, 1885; Rosarito, Baja California, Mexico, February 17, 1925; Gray's Well, Imperial County, California, January 9, 1926; Punta Penascosa, Sonora, Mexico, February 19, 1934; Pilot Knob, Imperial County, California, February 18, 1938.—CLINTON G. ABBOTT, *San Diego Society of Natural History, San Diego, California, December 15, 1939.*

The Nectar Eating Habits of the Purple Finch.—In February of 1939, at my home in Berkeley, California, I noticed that the California Purple Finches (*Carpodacus purpureus californicus*) were singing every morning in a plum tree which was in full bloom. On closer observation the birds were seen to be plucking blossoms. Each bird worked systematically, and in one movement picked a blossom and snipped open the base; it then removed the nectar while holding the blossom in the bill, following which it dropped the blossom to the ground. Upon examination the dropped blossoms were found to be undamaged except for removal of the nectar. The birds' unhurried swiftness was interrupted only when they paused to sing. In March the purple finches transferred their attentions to the apricot trees and continued the same procedure. Four of the eight trees which were under observation were worked consistently, while the other four trees were not. Of the four trees that were not worked one had been pruned.

In July and August when the fruit ripened, the four apricot trees whose blossoms had been thinned by the purple finches had fewer, but larger, fruits. Of the four apricot trees which had not been visited by the purple finches the three unpruned trees were loaded with small fruit. In this instance the purple finches presumably had been beneficial rather than harmful. The tree which was young and had been pruned bore fruit comparable in size and quantity to the four trees visited by the purple finches. Because observations were made for only one season, it is not possible to determine whether these results were actually brought about by the purple finches or merely coincidental to other factors such as soil fertility, moisture, insects, and the general health of the trees.

Was the nectar eating habit of the California Purple Finch formerly beneficial and is it now harmful because of the introduction of man made factors? Is this habit harmful when practiced in pruned orchards or is it of further benefit? Has this nectar eating habit always or ever been harmful, or has it had any noticeable effect? These questions should be answered at least in part by further observations. Different findings may be expected where different kinds of trees and different ecological conditions are involved.—NED W. STONE, *Berkeley, California, September 28, 1939.*

Bendire Thrasher in Lincoln County, Nevada.—On May 16, 1939, while Dr. R. M. Bond, of Berkeley, California, and I were driving from Caliente to Pahrangat Valley in southeastern Nevada, we saw a pair of thrashers apparently new to both of us near the roadside about three miles north of Delmar, and at an altitude of about 5500 feet in the Joshua tree belt. We collected one of the birds, which proved to be an adult male *Toxostoma bendirei*. So far as I am aware, this is the first record of the Bendire Thrasher being taken anywhere in the state of Nevada.—STANLEY G. JEWETT, *Portland, Oregon, September 17, 1939.*

The Clapper Rail of Morro Bay.—On February 6, 1939, I took a mated pair of Clapper Rails on the salicornia-covered island in the center of Morro Bay; at least three others were seen at the Federal Sanctuary on the east side of the bay and Dr. A. T. Marshall, who has long been a resident of Morro, considers the species to be a scarce but regular permanent resident at other points around Morro Bay.

Having secured the specimens it should naturally be considered an easy matter to decide whether the birds were the California Clapper Rail (*Rallus obsoletus obsoletus*) or the Light-footed Rail (*R. o. levipes*), but after careful comparison with the series in my own collection and consulting all available works of reference, I am in considerable doubt both as to what to call my Morro birds and as to the validity of the subspecies *levipes*. The latter until recently was always regarded as a full species!

My series consists of twelve good skins of *obsoletus* from San Francisco and Tomales bays and two skins of *levipes* and *beldingi*. I have also gone over the series in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology. As far as I can see the recognized distinctions of back color, breast color and superciliary stripe are without value, as a series of the northern birds will show specimens with all the characters of the southern forms. The only tangible difference, and that an extremely slight one and possibly due to exposure, between the northern form and the two southern ones is the browner centers to the feathers of the mantle in the two southern subspecies; in the northern form these centers are black.

On this count I would call the Morro birds *Rallus obsoletus obsoletus*, although the locality is closer to the range of *levipes*; on the other hand the measurements of the female come well within those given for *levipes*. But an analysis of the distinctions in measurements shows that there is actually

very slight difference in the dimensions of the supposed subspecies. All this goes to prove how badly we need an up-to-date text book on North American birds, especially when we are trying to identify the larger species.

The measurements of the Morro Bay birds are as follows: ♂, wing 162 mm., culmen 61, tarsus 59, mid-toe and claw 64; ♀, wing 148, culmen 53, tarsus 52, mid-toe and claw 56.

During August and September, 1923, I collected at Morro Bay and neither saw nor heard Clapper Rails, although I worked the salicornia flats and islands carefully. From this and other evidence I think it must be recognized that the species is more of a wanderer than it is generally credited as being. The conclusions to be drawn are that the clapper rails of the Pacific coast are not isolated in three different areas but may be found at any point along the coast that affords suitable living conditions, from Tomales Bay (and probably farther north) to Cape San Lucas, and that *beldingi* is a slightly differentiated subspecies while *levipes* is an intergrade between *beldingi* and *obsoletus* and not worthy of recognition.—ALLAN BROOKS, *Okanagan Landing, British Columbia, October 26, 1939.*

An Albino Eared Grebe.—On July 29, 1939, water birds were quite numerous on the salt pools at Dumbarton Bridge. On the last pool to the north as one approaches the bridge from the east, I noticed on that date a group of three Eared Grebes (*Colymbus nigricollis californicus*), one of which was almost pure white. On August 7 it was seen again in the same pool at closer range and on October 7 it was so close to the roadway that its rosy eye was easily seen. It was still with two normally plumaged birds somewhat separated from the large flocks that were feeding in the same pool.

Since October 7, I have seen the albino grebe each time I have crossed the bridge, October 14, 21, November 18, 28, December 5, January 3, 1940, and February 10. One time it was near the center of a closely packed raft of more than two hundred Eared Grebes. Its continued presence in this same pool suggests that the flocks seen there each winter are probably sedentary during the season.—AMELIA S. ALLEN, *Berkeley, California, February 10, 1940.*

Wren-tit at High Elevation.—On July 26, 1939, a Wren-tit (*Chamaea fasciata*) was heard by the members of the Yosemite School of Field Natural History at an elevation of 6600 feet on the Snow Creek Falls trail in Yosemite National Park. There appeared to be only one bird present in the growth of manzanita and huckleberry oak which covers the south facing wall of Tenaya Canyon in this section. In passing this spot on September 29 I heard two Wren-tits calling for a period of at least ten minutes. Dr. A. H. Miller has told me that he heard one of these birds in approximately the same location in the summer of 1920 and, in Dr. Joseph Grinnell's notes for 1915 I find that he heard "at least two Wren-tits" in the same general locality on September 29 of that year.

From these observations it seems that the Wren-tit is of regular occurrence in this particular section of Tenaya Canyon, and may even nest there.—VINCENT MOWBRAY, *Oakland, California, November 21, 1939.*

Gas Flares and Birds.—On May 13, 1939, a badly singed and "baked" specimen of the Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*) was sent to me by Mr. Henry Gremmel of Bloomington, Texas, for identification. He informed me that hundreds of these birds fluttered like huge moths around the gas flares in that oil field on the night of May 12. None was observed the following night, but a few were noticed the third night, after which they were not seen again. Mr. Gremmel is of the opinion that not more than ten of the birds were killed by the flares at his station on those two nights. Evidently these birds were migrating, because they did not appear at the flares until after 9 p. m.; none was observed there during the day.

There are hundreds of these open gas flames in the oil fields of Texas, consequently the toll to birdlife resulting from contact with the flames must be tremendous in periods of migration.—WILLIAM B. DAVIS, *Department of Fish and Game, College Station, Texas, November 6, 1939.*

Solitaire Distress Calls.—While birding about the mouth of Big Cottonwood Canyon, Salt Lake County, Utah, January 28, 1939, I heard a call which I could not place. It sounded more like a gnatcatcher than anything that came to mind and seemed to come from a thicket thirty to forty feet distant. I walked cautiously to and through the thicket without nearing the call, then glancing into the lower branches of some cottonwoods bordering the stream, I saw a Townsend Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*) giving distress calls.

Supposing he had discovered a roosting owl, I approached closely for observation yet found no owl, but the solitaire was looking at some object across the stream. There, in a rose bush was a