

The Vermilion Flycatcher in the Central Mohave Desert.—Two miles above Camp Cady in eastern San Bernardino County water rises in the bed of the Mohave River and continues as a perennial stream until it reaches a point two miles below the old fort site. In the moist bottoms along this small meandering stream is a thick growth of honey mesquite, screw bean, large cottonwoods and tall-trunked willows. At the time of a recent visit (May 2, 1947) to the Camp Cady Ranch, which is situated in the midst of this desert verdure, I had opportunity to observe a small "colony" of Vermilion Flycatchers (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*). Mr. Lee Smith who resides at the ranch tells me that there are at least three pairs of these birds which to his knowledge have been nesting there for a number of years. Since Camp Cady is at least a hundred miles from known breeding habitats of this bird in the Colorado River bottoms and at the Salton Sea, Camp Cady marks the site of another of those interesting "island habitats" one sometimes finds in desert oases.—EDMUND C. JAEGER, *Riverside College, Riverside, California, May 15, 1947.*

Yellow-billed Magpies' Reaction to Poison.—In the summer of 1916 I witnessed an exhibition of intelligence by a colony of Yellow-billed Magpies (*Pica nuttallii*). These birds were numerous along the banks of the Merced River near its confluence with the San Joaquin River, California. The inhabitants of the ranch welcomed the presence of the native birds and for some time tolerated the depredations of the magpies in the melon patch and chicken pens. The birds pecked holes through the rinds of both ripe and immature melons, thereby destroying many more melons than they consumed. In the chicken pens they were observed in the act of breaking and eating eggs, and less frequently they were seen killing baby chicks. These also were eaten, or partly eaten before the old hens chased the intruders away.

Two or three birds were shot, but the chief effect of this measure was to make the rest of the colony extremely wary. They seemed to sense the presence of a gun and quietly flew out of range, setting up a chattering when they alighted as though to warn other birds of possible danger. Ambush was ineffective because it was too time-consuming, so the raiding of the garden and chicken pen continued, although at a reduced rate.

Finally one of the boys hit upon the idea of using poison to deplete the ranks of the magpies. A few grains of strychnine were inserted in the flesh of a piece of watermelon five or six centimeters square. The poisoned melon was tied on top of a post out of reach of stock and chickens. Within a few minutes a magpie flew to the perch, inspected the melon closely, and ate heartily for several minutes. It then stopped, shook its head vigorously, scratched at its beak, hopped agitatedly about on the post and adjacent wire, and flew to a near-by tree. There it chattered rapidly and began to hop and fly from branch to branch in a very excited manner. After a few minutes of violent activity it half fell, half flew to the ground, where it soon died, chattering intermittently between the violent convulsions.

No other bird approached the bait during the rest of the day. The following morning, however, another magpie alighted on a perch where a fresh bait had been displayed, ate heartily for a few minutes and repeated, in general, the actions of the bird poisoned the previous day. It was noted that during the chattering and violent activity of the stricken bird several other magpies watched intently but silently from the branches of the same and adjacent oak trees. When the dying bird fluttered about on the ground, chattering vigorously, the others suddenly took flight, protesting vociferously as long as they were within hearing.

From that day on throughout the summer not a magpie was seen to approach the garden, the chicken pen, nor the yard about the house. Neither did they return to those areas in the summer of 1917. It seemed as though the birds that had witnessed the deaths of the two victims had carried the word to other members of the colony. The birds continued to live on the ranch but so far as was observed in the two summers I lived in the vicinity, they did not approach nearer than about two hundred yards from the scene of their fellows' violent end. I have no information concerning their behavior in the summer of 1918 or in subsequent seasons, so I do not know how long the birds shunned the relatively small area made unattractive by the death of two of their number.—IRA L. WIGGINS, *Natural History Museum, Stanford University, California, July 22, 1947.*