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COLLECTING IN THE GILA VALLEY.

BY F. T. PEMBER.

While collecting in Arizona, I have stopped for a week, on two occasions, at Gila Bend. This was the last of April, 1890 and again about the same date in 1891. Now this is not a summer watering-place, nor pleasure resort of any kind, neither is it a sanitarium; and every time you go there you wish you "had n't come." The town consists of a railroad eating-house and hotel, railroad boarding-house, two or three little stores and saloons, and six or eight low houses, utterly devoid of paint. There are no trees, shade, nor grassy lawns. This comprises the American part of the place. Besides there is an encampment of Papanoes Indians, with a few "Greasers." It stands on a treeless, waterless, and almost rainless part of the Arizona Desert (once the Great American Desert), in its scalding, blistering heat, and beneath a nearly cloudless sky. It has no excuse for being there at all, except that it is the nearest point on the S. P. R. R. to the Gila River for a long distance, and the company wanted a water-tank there. This they supply from a pumping station on the river, six miles away. That is why the town is there, and because it is the nearest R. R. point to the river, is why I was there. I also selected it because there are a great many giant cactus—the home of several species of woodpeckers, pigmy owls, &c.—in that locality.

The first thing in the way of birds to attract my attention, in that desert village, was a splendid pair of large, glossy ravens, which were feeding in front of the hotel and along the railroad track. They seemed to have no fear, and one could go within twenty-five feet of them. This is the Mexican raven, *Corvus corax sinuatus*. I rather envied them their skins, but did not like to shoot them there, and although I saw them every day, could not catch them "out of town." Next I found a flock of eight or ten killdeer, that seemed to make their home near the water-tank, and at least four miles from any other water. These, and a flock of Brewer's blackbirds, constituted the bird population of the place. This was on my first visit. On my next, the ravens were not there, but the killdeers and blackbirds were the same as before.

From this point it was my custom to make daily excursions to the river bottom, either on foot or by wagon; and by the last I would make longer journeys across the desert and among the giant cactus, coming to the river several miles away. The very nearest point on the river is said to be but four miles away, though it seems ten when you walk it; and the river bottom, or lower land, is from one to two miles wide. The desert, in places, is utterly destitute of vegetation, though it usually has a few scattering greasewood bushes, from one to three or four feet high, with an occasional cactus, or group of them, which reach a height of 30 to 40 and even 50 feet. These are straight clubs, or with two or three arms, the very old ones only having from five to seven or eight branches. They are always full of woodpecker holes. The lower places, or where water settles or runs in time of rain, have mesquite, ironwood, paloverde, and other trees, usually some 25 feet high, but in places, 40 or 50 feet. On the river bottom the growth of trees, bushes, and vines is very luxuriant, so that in places it is very difficult to get through the tangle at all, or to find any game you may chance to kill. But along the outer border, or where the desert and bottom lands meet, is wonderfully fine

shooting for many of the Arizona birds. This border is three miles or more away, with little or no shooting between; but by bearing to the east for a mile, I came to one of those dry runs, with bushes and a few low trees, which increase as we follow it towards the river, and now our collecting may begin.

One of the first birds to claim our attention is the Ash-throated Flycatcher, which can be taken in any desired quantity. The pretty little Yellow-headed Tit, or Verdin, is next noticed. They are rather common, and one is likely soon to find one of their curious nests, which is some five inches in diameter and as round as an orange. They bristle all over with thorns and ends of stiff twigs, and the round entrance on the side is so small that a finger will scarcely enter it. Whether by chance or otherwise, this, of all the nests I have found, has been on the south or south-east side. Authors say the nest is in bushes four or five feet high, but I have found them at least fifteen feet high. A nest and set of the lovely little eggs are a charming addition to my collection. As we follow along, the Mockingbirds become numerous, but are exactly like those we get from one ocean to the other. Now why is it, that the desert with its wonderfully strong sunlight and lack of shade, develops so many pale races, sub-species and species, among so many species and genera of birds, and seems to have no influence whatever on others?

We now begin to see Gambel's Partridge, in pairs or small coveys, hurrying across the wash or running from bush to bush, while the California Shrike seems very common. The glossy Phainopepla are now plentiful, but seem rather shy, and may show you the white in their expanded wings several times before you succeed in shooting them. They, with mockers, shrikes, and ash-throated flycatchers, occur far out on the open desert. We now see sparrows of several species. Among them are Brewer's, Western Chipping, Western Lark, Black-throated, and Sage Sparrows. All along I have noticed what I supposed to be Black-tailed Gnatcatchers, but which prove to be Plumbeous Gnatcatchers, and they are very abundant in this section. Now

we come to some giant cactus and away go a pair of Gila Woodpeckers without waiting for a shot. Here is a chance to hide behind a bush and await their return, with a strong probability that you will tire of it and start on before they come back. They are wild about their nesting places, and you have to watch for them, or shoot them as they are feeding on some of the dead trees of the river bottom, where they seem tame enough.

On this route, one day I secured a pair of Baird's Woodpeckers. I can call them nothing else, though they show more white on forehead and less on back and sides of head than my Texas specimens. The central pair of rectrices are also spotted, and the peculiar smoky brown of the nasal tufts scarcely shows at all. I got these birds in the early morning, and there was something in the slant rays of sunlight coming across the desert that magnified every object, and they looked to me as large as Pileated Woodpeckers. I crept up behind some bushes and actually fired a charge of No. 8 shot at one, and when I went for my game could not understand how it could be so small. I have never seen anything like it before nor since, but in a country that can produce a mirage every day in the year, we need not be surprised at anything.

But the *arroyo* we are following broadens and deepens with large trees, and bird life increases. Quails are becoming very numerous and several species of warblers abound. Of these the Sonora Yellow, Pileolated, Western Yellowthroat, and Orange-crowned are most common, while the neat little Lucy's Warbler is by no means scarce. It is a tax on time and patience however to get many of the last, for they persist in keeping on the opposite side of a thick bush, and after you have waited awhile for a shot, away they go to another, to repeat the operation.

At length we reach the broad bottom lands of the valley, with a large growth of trees and shrubbery, and we find game more abundant and tamer than we have ever seen it anywhere. Here are Gambel's Partridge and Mourning Doves by countless thousands, and it seems as if there was a Jack Rabbit or Cotton-tail under every bush, with fresh

“signs” of deer and other large game. On my first visit there I wanted skins of a few dozen Gambel’s, and I entertained the notion that No. 8 shot were the proper size to kill them with. I had but few of them with me, and to make them go as far as possible, shot the birds on the ground, in the open spaces between the bushes, where I could get from two to five at each discharge. “Not sportsman like,” you say? Well, it was specimens I was there for. Besides, I do not like to carry too great a weight of cartridges, or to hunt birds out of the almost impenetrable chaparral when dropped one at a time on the wing. Time also seems too valuable when there are so many rare specimens about. After using all of my No. 8 shot and three charges of No. 12, I tried fine dust shot and found that at 25 to 30 yards I could kill as well or even better, than with larger sizes. Firing at a group of three to five, somehow the little shot would find the heads of every one of them and kill them stone dead. It seemed to me that I could have killed a thousand in a day.

Doves were so numerous that one could shoot all the time, at pairs or groups of several birds. I could have killed more rabbits in a short time than I could carry. How the country furnished food for so much animal life was to me a mystery. I was told of a party that trapped 24,000 quail for the San Francisco market; thousands were shot, for their use, by people along the valley, while the R. R. eating-house was constantly supplied. This was on my first visit. The next winter a terrible flood swept over the whole valley, washing it out in places and covering it with rubbish and sediment in others. On my last visit game did not seem so abundant, though there was enough, and one could shoot more than he needed in a short time. Eggs of quail could be found easily, and I have found several fine sets in a day without looking for them. At this season all were fresh, though I saw one bird five miles out on the desert, with a flock of young the size of small chickens.

On my first afternoon’s shooting here, I started a covey of Gambel’s Partridges which flew into a mesquite.

thicket near by. Coming close enough for a shot, I found it so dense that I could not see them, and they kept flying away until I thought that all had gone. Just then a thrush with a long curved bill flew into the same thicket, but nearly on the opposite side from me. A glimpse of something through the thick foliage, followed by a quick shot, and then comes a hunt for my bird which I may have killed or not. I had to go around the clump of mesquite, breaking my way through a dense tangle of wiry bushes, and at length find a place where I can "crawl under." Judge of my surprise when I found, not only a nice male Crissal Thrasher, but three fine male Gambel's Partridge within three feet of each other. The fine dust had found them and killed all so dead that I had not heard a flutter.

The last mentioned thrush is quite common, and Bendire's is by no means rare, while Leconte's is also often seen. Palmer's Thrasher I feel sure I saw but did not take it. Here now we may find all the birds already mentioned, and many others, such as Abert's Towhee, Green-tailed Towhee, Chaparral Cock, Gilded flicker, Plumbeous Bush Tit, and many other species.

(To be continued.)

THE NESTING OF THE BLUE-HEADED VIREO,
AT FITCHBURG, MASS.

(*Vireo solitarius*.)

BY I. C. GREENE.

Previous to 1890 the nest and eggs of the Blue-headed Vireo were not known to the ornithologists in this vicinity. On May 2, when I was on one of my collecting trips, and in the deep solitudes of a thick pine wood, in a beautiful valley through which a sparkling brook of some size followed its winding course among the rocks, my eye caught sight of a small nest suspended from one of the dead limbs of a pine tree. I approached the spot and found that the nest was one of a Blue-headed Vireo.

The two birds were engaged in finishing the nest. After