

Winter Observations on Anna's Hummingbird.

BY W. O. EMERSON, HAYWARDS, CAL.

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NO OTHER group of birds possesses such mysterious interest as the hummingbirds whose brilliancy of plumage entitles them to be called "gems of the air." Living among highly colored flowers from the tropics to the icy north, never in the dust of the earth, the hues of the rainbow are theirs. During the open winter of 1897-98 I had an opportunity to see the hardy Anna's Hummingbirds every day around my house, among the flowering shrubs and blossoming eucalyptus trees. From November 12 they became so common that at any time one or two could be seen resting on the ends of cherry branches or gathering gnats or sweets from the eucalyptus blossoms. One was shot on the 21st which surprised me on picking it up to see that it had not yet attained the perfect helmet. Around the base of the bill were still a number of pin-feathers. Another, collected on the 25th, had only one-half of the crown patch developed, the other feathers at the base of the bill being still in silvery cases. From this I judge that many males do not get their adult feathers till late in winter.

On the 26th and 27th a dozen or more could be seen chasing one another through the eucalypti, scolding and twittering like young swallows. This was more to be noticed among the males, the females many times sitting side by side on the same branch. December growing cooler, only one now and then would be seen in the early forenoon or near dusk, although males were shot on the 2nd, 11th, 19th, 21st and 25th, no females being seen. One

on the 21st had a few pin feathers in the throat patch; one on the 25th had eight or nine perfect feathers in the helmet, the rest of a dull grayish color and the throat patch mottled and incomplete. On cold mornings the hummingbirds would flutter around, hardly able to move their wings, flying in a dull, stupid way as though scarcely awake, but as the air grew warmer they became more lively. Jan. 15 a male was taken which showed a perfect rusty grayish helmet from bill to base of skull, where there are ten or twelve adult feathers lined up around the outer edge. The throat was more of the pattern of the females, being of a grayish lustre, with a reflection of the Ruby-throat. One shot on the 10th had a few feathers at the base of the bill. A female, the first one seen, was shot on the 10th. Another was noticed early in the morning, gathering spider webs along the cypress hedge.

I find no data in any work regarding this winter transition of the male's helmet and throat patch. February 24, 1898, full-fledged young were flying about the garden, showing very early nesting. The data for the first nest found in the past ten years shows a range of four months, as follows: Feb. 22, 1882; Feb. 25, 1883; April 20, 1884; Feb. 21, 1885; Jan. 19, 1886; Jan. 14, 1887; March 20, 1888; March 23, 1889; March 20, 1890 and March 12, 1897. As the cherry trees began to bloom by March 16, 1898, a wave of migration occurred at Haywards. Great numbers of Allen's Hummingbirds appeared and Anna's became more abundant.

Echoes from the Field.

Ravens Nesting on a Railroad Bridge. On April 10th last a sheep-herder brought me a set of three eggs of the American Raven, and on questioning him concerning the nest I learned they were taken from a nest beneath a railroad bridge. This seemed odd, to say the least, as I know of several of their nests on inaccessible cliffs, the birds seeming to intuitively know that man is their enemy. Recently I visited the locality from which the eggs came to verify the truthfulness of the collector's description and to secure the remaining eggs of the set if they had been laid. We travelled some twelve miles of sage desert and came in sight

of the bridge under which the alleged nest was situated. It was apparent that the ravens had selected the bridge for the reason that it was the best place in the district. There were no cliffs within perhaps twenty miles, and as feed was plentiful the ravens had concluded to use the bridge for a nesting site. I found the nest in a confused heap on the ground and two broken eggs near by, the nest having probably been pushed from the trestle by the section men. It had been placed on an upper beam of the bridge and the eggs could not have been more than two feet from the rails. The distance from the ground was about thirty feet. The nest was composed outwardly of coarse sticks, some of them two feet in length. Inside was a snug lining of about five pounds of wool, mixed with soft cedar bark. Many sheep graze on the deserts in winter and the wool was easily obtained. The railroad is used by four trains daily between Lehi Junction and the Tintic mining region and is a branch of the Union Pacific Railway.

H. C. JOHNSON, American Fork, Utah.

Decoy Nests of the Western Winter Wren. I have used the expression "decoy" for the nests that are built by many of our birds, apart from the one used for raising the young. This habit is, perhaps, more characteristic with the wrens than with any other family of our birds, although it is well known as a trait of the Marsh Wrens. The Western Winter Wren, (*Troglodytes hiemalis pacificus*), can easily claim second place in this peculiarity, if, indeed, it does not fully equal the Marsh Wrens. The number of "decoys" built by one pair of these birds varies from one to at least four, and on one occasion I found eight of these false nests that were strung along the edge of a stream bordered by dense growth of all sizes. These were all in a space about 150 yards long and almost in a straight line, but owing to extreme difficulty in locating them, it is probable that there were more. One thing is painfully certain, that I could not find the right nest, although it must have been in the immediate vicinity. I do not, however, feel justified in claiming that all of these belonged to one pair of birds, as four is the largest number I have ever found in any previous case, but only one bird put in an appearance during my entire search. The "decoys" are never so well constructed as the regular nests, but a few weeks ago I was surprised to find that a pair had made over and lined one of last season and laid one egg. Unfortunately a very wet period of weather soaked the nest so thoroughly that the birds deserted. This seems to supply one very good reason for the apparently superfluous "decoys."

J. H. BOWLES, Tacoma, Wash., May 29, '99.

Elevated Nest of the Lutescent Warbler. On May 31, 1897, I found a nest of the Lutescent Warbler placed three feet from the ground in a bunch of vines. It was loosely constructed of a quantity of dry leaves, grass and skeletons of leaves, lined with hair and fine grass. On May 3, 1899, while walking along a creek about one quarter of a mile from where I had found the nest in 1897, I flushed a bird from a nest in an oak tree, and was surprised to see it was a Lutescent Warbler. The nest was six feet from the ground and three feet from the trunk of the tree. A horizontal limb branched out from the tree and a small branch stuck up from it for about eight inches, and over this was a great quantity of Spanish moss, (*Ramalina retiformis*), which fell over the horizontal limb. The nest is quite bulky, composed of leaves, grass and bark strips, lined with hair and fine grass, and was partially supported by both limbs and the moss, which is all about it and which forms quite a cover for the eggs. At this date the eggs were about to hatch and could not be saved.

HENRY W. CARRIGER, Sonoma, Cal.

The Yellow Rail and Saw-Whet Owl in Sonoma Co., Cal. On December 20, 1898, while walking through the salt grass, I flushed a Yellow Rail which flew about twenty feet and alighted. I caught it and carried it about all day and put it in a box that night. The following morning it was quite lively, but I reluctantly killed it. It proved to be a female in fine condition and measures; length, 6½; extent, 13; wing, 3¾; tail 1.20 inches.