

Some of the Summer Flycatchers of Arizona.

BY O. W. HOWARD, FT. HUACHUCA, ARIZONA.

[Read before the Southern Division of the Cooper Orn. Club, Aug. 30, 1899.]

SULPHUR-BELLIED FLYCATCHER.

THIS large and handsome flycatcher is one of the rarest and least conspicuous of its family and its range in the United States is extremely small, it being found only in the higher mountain ranges of Southern Arizona and Southern New Mexico. I believe there are more of these birds in the Huachuca Mts. than in any other range north of the Mexican line, although

other flycatchers being entirely absent. A person might be in the immediate vicinity for hours without seeing them and for this reason the nests are hard to locate, although a person could find them if he had plenty of spare time in which to watch the birds. After the eggs are hatched the birds become quite bold and noisy and may be easily located by their peculiar note which



Nest and eggs of the Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher.

even there very few are found. During four successive seasons' collecting in this locality I have not seen more than a dozen pairs of the birds, and during that time have examined five nests, all of which contained young,—the result of collecting birds' eggs on Sunday! The birds are so shy and so different from other flycatchers that it takes a long time to become acquainted with their habits.

In the breeding season the birds keep in the thick foliage of the trees and catch their insect prey in a very quiet way, the twitching, uneasy habits of

sounds like the squeaking of a limb or a wheelbarrow which needs oiling.

I noticed the first birds on the 4th of June and I do not think they arrive before the 1st. In my observations of these birds I have found that they use the same nesting cavity year after year and as soon as they appear in the spring they may be seen in the vicinity of their old nests. The nesting season of this species is very late; I do not know of any eggs being taken before the first of July and I found a nest with young just hatched on August 28, 1899. I think fresh eggs may be found

from the first of July until the 15th of August. All the nests I know of were placed in sycamore trees along a creek in the bed of a canon, at from 5,000 to 7,000 feet elevation. As a rule the cavities are large enough to admit the hand without enlarging, and vary from six inches to one foot in depth, and the distance from the ground ranges from twenty-five to fifty feet.

The nest in the illustration was taken by Mr. W. B. Judson on our trip in 1896, on July 16. It was placed in a sycamore tree about forty feet up in a natural cavity ten inches deep. This nest was within a stone's throw of our camp and was not found until two of the three eggs had been laid. We had seen the birds in the vicinity several times, but our suspicions had not in any way been aroused by their actions and we paid little attention to them until Mr. Judson happened to see the female fly from the cavity and thus we found the nest. All the nests I have examined were made entirely of stems of wild black walnut leaves without any attempt at lining whatever, excepting that the finer stems were placed on the inside of the nest.

OLIVACEOUS FLYCATCHER.

The Olivaceous Flycatcher is a common summer resident in various mountain ranges of Arizona and New Mexico. It is found very commonly in the oak belt in the Huachuca and Santa Rita mountains at from 5,000 to 7,000 feet elevation. Although the birds are so numerous, the nests are very hard to find. During four seasons' collecting in these mountains I kept a sharp lookout for the nests of this bird but until this season I did not secure a single egg. In the season of '96 we spent many hours watching the birds in hope of finding a set or two of their eggs, but were only rewarded with a nest of four young birds about ten days old. This nest was in an ash tree within three feet of a trail on which we were passing almost daily. It was placed in a natural cavity about twenty feet up and ten inches below the entrance. We had seen the birds in the vicinity of this nest and watched them several times but not once did the birds cause the

A set of three slightly incubated eggs found Aug. 5, 1897, by Mr. F. C. Willard of Galesburg, Ill., was placed in a sycamore, fifty feet up, in a natural cavity in the trunk of the tree and about ten inches deep. This nest was directly over a creek. A nest which I found this season (on July 20, 1899) contained two young of this species just hatched. The nest was placed in a natural cavity in a sycamore about forty feet up and was the same cavity from which I secured a fine set of young in 1897. The nests are very large, with a shallow cup, measuring about three inches, inside diameter. The outside diameter varies according to the size of the cavity in which the nest is placed. Notwithstanding the crude material used in the composition of the nests they are rather compact and easily preserved. I have no calipers with me so cannot give the dimensions of the eggs, but they are about the size of a Kingbird's or slightly larger, rather oval in shape and marked over the entire shell with scratches and blotches of chestnut and reddish-brown with under shell markings of purple, the ground color being a shiny buff.

least suspicion as to the location of their nest until Mr. Judson espied the female with food for the young and saw her go to the nest.

In 1897 I noticed a pair of these birds in a certain locality several times and made up my mind they were about to build in the vicinity, so I placed some cotton along a barbed wire fence and watched results. The birds did not bite that day, but a day or two after I came back to the same place and noticed that some of the cotton had disappeared, so I sat down to watch and it was not long before one of the flycatchers lit on the fence and took a good sized piece of cotton and flew off to where its mate was perched, dropping the cotton on the way. I watched the birds for fully an hour after this but there was no further attempt made at gathering building material.

By mere accident a friend secured a single egg of this species for me last season. My friend had climbed an ash

tree to examine a nest of the Arizona Woodpecker which contained young, and while up the tree he noticed a likely-looking cavity in another limb of the same tree, so he chopped it open and found it contained a nest of the Olivaceous Flycatcher with a single egg and shells of others—evidently a deserted nest. The nest did not differ materially from two others which I am about to describe. While walking down a canon one day late in May, through some thick timber, an Olivaceous Flycatcher, presumably a female bird, flew past me and I noticed something in its mouth as it flew by. The mate followed shortly after and both birds lit on a dead oak stump not fifty feet away. I was well hidden and stood perfectly still. The birds seemed to be rather nervous and sat there for some time when the one with the building material entered a deserted woodpecker's excavation about six inches below where it had been sitting. Satisfied that the birds were only building I left the locality and returned again on the 4th of June expecting a fine set of four or five eggs, but to my disappointment the birds were not in sight

and when I looked into the nest I found it deserted. The two eggs which it contained were almost entirely hidden by the disarranged nesting material. Needless to say I took the two eggs with the nest and was glad to get them. The nest was composed almost entirely of rabbit's fur with a few tail and wing feathers of jays sticking upright around the outer edge. The nest was ten inches below the entrance to the cavity and fifteen feet from the ground; elevation about 6,500 feet. The eggs very much resemble those of the Ash-throated Flycatcher but are much smaller and the markings are finer. Mr. F. C. Willard of Galesburg, Ill., examined a nest of this species on the same date, it being placed in a natural cavity in the trunk of a sycamore tree forty feet up. This nest contained four fresh eggs but unfortunately two of the eggs were broken while chopping into the cavity. The nests did not differ from the last and the eggs from the two nests are scarcely distinguishable. Counting the egg of this species taken by my friend in '98, there are only five eggs now in existence of the Olivaceous Flycatcher.

BUFF-BREASTED FLYCATCHER.

Very few facts, if any, have been published regarding the breeding habits of this rare little flycatcher. The birds are even less numerous than the Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers, their range within the United States being about the same. I first met with the birds in 1896 during that eventful trip made from Los Angeles by wagon, a distance of about 700 miles, the party consisting of W. B. Judson, H. G. Rising, H. S. Swarth and myself. We expected to meet this flycatcher shortly after our arrival in the Huachuacas and kept a sharp lookout for them all the time, but were for sometime disappointed, until finally one afternoon I was taking a stroll up the canon above the camp when I spied a small flycatcher sitting on a dead twig in the top of an oak tree on the hillside. The bird was new to me and I at once took it for granted that this was the Buff-breasted Flycatcher. I stood behind a tree watching the bird until the light grew dim and I was

obliged to make my way back to camp as I had to pass through a narrow and very rocky gorge known as "The Box,"—not a very safe place to wander around in after dark.

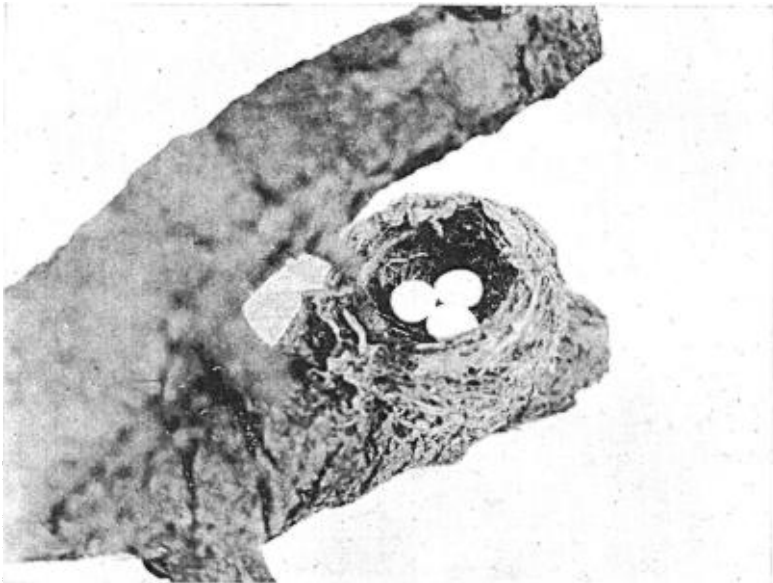
When I reached camp that evening I reported what I had seen and all were much interested so on the following morning June 5, 1896, all four of us made our way to the place where I had seen the flycatcher, but the bird was not in sight and we were about to make our departure when I spied a nest in a pine tree just above our heads. I at first thought this was the flycatcher's nest so I soon had my climbers on and was up to the first limb where I stopped to rest and while doing so my eyes fell on another nest in the same tree and not far from the one I had seen from the ground. The last nest looked more promising and as I sat there looking at it I noticed a very small tail sticking just over the edge of the nest. It did not take me long to climb up

even with the nest and a few kicks on the limb flushed the bird which proved to be a Buff-breasted Flycatcher. The nest was in a fork near the extremity of the limb and about twelve feet from the trunk of the tree and fifty feet from the ground.

The only way the nest could be taken was by the use of a rope, of which we had plenty. One end of the rope was passed over a large limb about twenty-five feet diagonally above the nest, then pulled around until both ends met on the ground, whereupon

size and shape of a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher's nest; the composition was of bits of dry soft leaves, fine straws and rootlets with a lining of fine fibers. The bird was very bold and not easily flushed from the nest.

The usual note of this flycatcher is scarcely describable but is entirely different from that of any other flycatcher that I have met. When flushed from the nest the bird will keep up a short low "chip". Another nest of this species found June 13, 1896 was placed in a pine tree, saddled on a large



Nest and Eggs of the Buff-breasted Flycatcher.

the boys below took up the slack and walked out until the rope passed within a foot or two of the nest. When everything was ready I twisted the rope around one leg and slid down even with the nest. After flushing the bird once more I peered over the edge of the nest to see the first four eggs of the Buff-breasted Flycatcher that had ever been found. After placing the eggs in my mouth I cut off the limb with my hatchet and slid down to the ground, leaving the other boys to pull the rope down and coil it up while I packed the treasures. The eggs were plain buff or dull white in color and of oval shape. The nest was very compact and about the

limb about four feet from the trunk of the tree and forty feet above the ground. This nest contained three eggs about two-thirds incubated and the nest and eggs did not differ from the preceding set. I found another nest on July 16, 1896 also situated in a pine tree and not far from the one last mentioned. The nest was placed in a fork near the extremity of a large limb, about ten feet out and thirty-five feet from the ground. This nest was also taken by use of a rope as described and contained three fresh eggs, but an examination of the female showed that the full clutch had been laid.

I did not secure any more eggs of this

species until July 10 of the present year, when I took a fine set of four eggs, the nest being placed in a pine sapling and saddled on to a large limb about six feet out from the trunk of the tree and thirty feet from the ground. Elevation, 9,000 feet. This nest and eggs do not differ from those I found in 1896 excepting that the nesting material is a little different, owing to the

difference in altitude. Mr. F. C. Willard found a nest of this species in 1897 saddled on a large limb in a pine tree thirty feet from the ground. This nest rested against the trunk of the tree and in climbing, Mr. Willard put his hand over the nest,—not knowing it was there—and unfortunately crushed the eggs.



A Northern Record for the Black-chinned Sparrow.

(*Spizella atrigularis*.)

BY D. A. COHEN, ALAMEDA, CAL.

[Read before the Northern Division of the Cooper Orn. Club, Sept. 2, 1899.]

ON May 27, 1899 while working my way through the low, rather sparse, black sage covering a knoll in the Coast Range Mountains in Alameda county, near the line of Contra Costa county, I observed a small bird alight in one of the bushes, but before I could raise the gun it had hidden itself amongst the cover. During that brief space I caught a glimpse of the black chin and wondering what the strange bird could be, decided it was possibly Bell's Sparrow (*Amphispiza belli*). Efforts to flush it or catch sight of it again were unavailing. About two miles farther along the rocky hills, descending from a rocky ledge and barren soil with a sparse growth of sage and scrub oak to where the more fertile soil supported a healthier and more abundant growth of vegetation, I had just shot a Lazuli Bunting on a gentle incline down to the canon. Here and there was a small rock and on one of them I sat for a brief rest when a bird song, very much like that of the Lazuli Bunting in tone and duration, met my ear.

The singer had no time to repeat as he hopped about the top of a tall shrub, because a charge of dust shot ended the life of the individual which I could not clearly recognize in the strong light. Upon picking up a cleanly-killed specimen I knew it to be akin to the bird I had just previously seen, and judging it to be a male because of its song, I searched for the female or for the nest. Here was an ideal place for the nest, both sun and shade in varied quanti-

ties,—a miniature ravine, shaded by a few willow, small bay trees and burr oaks, that had been a rill in the rainy season, losing its way a hundred yards farther down the slope to a grassy hillside above the thick brush along the creek, while on each side of the ravine was mixed vegetation characteristic of the richer soils, also an occasional sage bush and rock straggling from the rugged territory higher up. One or two patches of wild blackberry vines, beds of bracken, clumps of lupine and thistles and mixed brush where a tall, coarse perennial grass flourished, were diligently searched without sign or note of a bird of any sort.

Mr. W. Otto Emerson identified the specimen as the Black-chinned Sparrow (*Spizella atrigularis*). It measured in inches 5.90; 7.88; 2.60; 2.80. Bill, pinkish-brown; irides, brown. It was a male in rather worn plumage and possibly breeding close to the spot where it was taken as this was the best site as to varied topography for its size of any for miles. The bird's song and bold actions indicated its mate was nesting in the vicinity if similar actions of other small birds are taken into account.

Mr. Belding's "Land Birds of the Pacific District" quotes on this sparrow as follows, in part:—"Santa Ana Plains, Los Angeles Co., Dec. 10-14, 1884, rather common—F. E. Blaisdell. San Bernardino, F. Stephens, tolerably common; breeds in the foothills. Colton, April 28, 1884, a fine male shot by R. B. Heron. April 29, male shot by Chas. W.