

Nesting of the Streaked Horned Lark.

BY J. H. BOWLES, TACOMA, WASH.

CONTRARY to the opinion entertained by certain of my ornithological brethren, I think the title of this article will convey to the mind of the average reader at least, an inkling as to the identity of the subject. However, to clear away the doubts of scientists, it is also known as *Otocoris alpestris strigata*. Around Tacoma these little larks are extremely local in their distribution, large areas of prairie being altogether untenanted, while an exactly similar piece of land will be swarming with them. They seem to be largely influenced by their fondness for human society. This is clearly illustrated

comparatively unknown quantity, I spent a large part of my spare time last summer in studying them, with the following results, to which I have added a few dates of the past two years.

They begin to arrive in this vicinity in the latter part of February, for the most part already in pairs. Towards the end of October both young and old assemble in flocks and leave very soon afterwards, although a few single birds usually stay through the winter. The earliest date for eggs was a set of two on April 30, in which incubation was far advanced, and I consider this to be as early as they ever breed here for I



Photo by J. H. Bowles.

NEST AND EGGS OF THE STREAKED HORNED LARK.

by a walk over the links of the Tacoma Golf Club, a section of prairie about one mile long by three-quarters of a mile broad, and which is covered with players all through the year.

The surrounding prairie extends for miles where hardly a dozen pairs of the birds can be found in a day's walk, while on the links last summer I estimated that fully one hundred pairs must have nested. Indeed, so sociable are they that only an occasional nest is placed more than a few feet from the "putting green" or the "tee-off" (golfers will understand.) As Major Bendire considered the nesting of these birds a

have never seen young birds that would indicate an earlier date. The height of the nesting season does not come until the middle of May and lasts through the first week in June, although I took a slightly incubated set of two eggs on July 26.

The nest is a very difficult one to find and my first efforts were most discouraging, indeed I may add, that without the use of my dog I have never found a nest except by chance while playing the game of golf. My dog considers nesting a most welcome diversion during the summer months, when for some inconceivable reason I do not shoot

game birds, even when he points one sitting on her nest. He will hold his point on any nest, if containing eggs or birds, as steadily as on a grouse or snipe, and, judging by the number found, few sets of this lark could have escaped my notice in the place we hunted.

The location of the nest may be almost anywhere on the ground, but the soil must be extremely dry. As a rule the birds scratch out a hole for themselves about two and one-half or three inches deep, both birds working, but I have found nests in the hoof prints of cattle, in cart ruts, holes made by dislodged stones and one that was placed in an unused golf hole. They are usually very frail, slight structures, though occasionally a bulky one is found, constructed of fine dead weeds. An exception to this rule was a very large nest well lined with grass, fir needles and feathers, which is shown in the illustration, *in situ*.

In some twenty-five or thirty nests examined, those containing two or three eggs to the set seemed to be about equally divided, so that either may be called the usual number. The sets found early in the season almost invariably are of two eggs, while three eggs to the set may be expected with almost equal certainty in the latter half of the

season. Only one set contained four eggs and I think this must be considered a very rare exception. The eggs differ greatly in color, the ground varying from a dark greenish-slate to a very light slate-white. The markings vary from a light gray to a deep greenish-red, more or less thickly sprinkled over the entire surface and usually being either confluent or ringed about the larger end.

In shape they vary considerably, some being long and rather slender, while others are more nearly round. The average of twenty-three eggs is .623x.826 inches, the largest measuring .64x.86 and the smallest, .59x.79 inches. Both birds assist in the duties of incubation and are seldom found at any great distance from each other during the entire nesting season. The males occasionally, towards evening, rise in a fluttering manner fifty or sixty feet into the air, uttering a very pleasing sort of twitter, which gradually develops into quite a little song as they reach the apex of the flight and descend. In spite of their fondness for a hot, dry locality, they are very partial to shade while incubating, as I have frequently found nests built under stones, large tin cans, boards, and on one occasion under a large piece of tarred paper which must have formed an admirable umbrella.

Notes on the California Clapper Rail.

BY ERNEST ADAMS.

[Read before the Northern Division of the Cooper Orn. Club, Jan. 6, 1900.]

The California Clapper Rail (*Rallus obsoletus*) has afforded me many a happy hour at its marshy home. I have often thought that their awkward, apparently senseless, traits alone, ought to protect them from the hunter, yet the poor amateur sport who wades through the tall, wet marsh grass or sits shivering all day in his 'blind' without even getting a shot at a duck, is glad enough to pick up a rail or two on his homeward way; and we poor fellows who cannot hit a duck when we *do* get a shot, feel a thrill of delight when one of these birds rises from beneath our feet.

Once I flushed a rail from the grass a few feet ahead of me, and as he was lumbering off to a respectable shooting

distance, another rose and flew within two feet of my head. I "poked" my gun at him but was so much amused at his actions, I forgot to shoot. The first time I ever saw one running up a slough I laughed so hard at him that he stopped and looked at me for half a minute and then stuck his old head in a bunch of grass:—perhaps he was laughing *too*!

During several seasons of collecting, I have noticed that some days I would kill nothing but males of this species, while at another place only females were shot. Again when two of us were separated on the marsh one would procure males and the other females only. This would indicate that in the fall and