

### California Jay Again.

Mr. Taylor's remarks about "A Provident Bluejay" in the March number of the CONDOR may be supplemented by some observations which perhaps will prove interesting to some of our readers. The theory that the Jay buries the nut so that it will acquire a mouldy or wormy flavor is hardly tenable. A nut buried in this manner, if sound, will not become either wormy or mouldy, but will soften up and finally sprout. Whether the bird prefers the softness or the actual sprout is hard to determine, but the fact that the Jays, both the *Aphelocoma* and *Cyanocitta* of this coast, will pull up grain, peas or corn after it has sprouted, while they but sparingly pick up any loose kernels lying upon the surface, proves that they delight in either the softness of the grain or in its sprouted state. I have had acres of peas that were sown in the end of March to be cut green for feed when large enough, practically destroyed by these birds. In fact, unless watched or poisoned, they have sometimes pulled up nine-tenths at least of the peas. Yet they do not do this every year, some seasons not doing any damage at all. It seems to depend on what other food supply may be obtainable at the time.

I remember one spring when a patch of about an acre and a half was sown with a mixture of peas and oats, and the peas were pulled up as fast as sprouted, by the jays, so that the crop consisted of oats alone. In this instance the land was bordered by a growth of trees that made a fine shelter to which the birds could retreat when disturbed. I shot over forty in one afternoon on this occasion and a good many on succeeding days, but they soon became so wary that it was impossible to get another shot after one was killed, and yet the crop was destroyed.

Some years they destroy a lot of corn, and other years almost none. But to show that Mr. Taylor is partly right

about a wormy flavor being pleasing, I have found that if there are wire worms in a field of corn the jays, if they pull the corn at all, will choose the sprouted kernels that are pierced by and contain a worm. At times, however, they will pull the corn and eat the sprouted kernels when no wire worms are present in the field. As the corn coming through the ground shows no indication of worms at the period in which it is pulled up by the birds, it is hard to guess how they know which are infested and which not. I have proved that they do know how to select by shooting a number in an infested field and invariably finding that they have chosen only wormy grains.

This year the Jays, in conjunction with Towhees, Juncos and a few Flickers, badly damaged some late sown oats beside the house. I watched them with glasses from the porch. They would dig away with their bills a little earth from the stalk where it just showed through, get a good grip and pull. If the stalk broke they would try the next one. When the whole plant came up by the roots they would jump to the nearest lump of earth and pick the kernel out of the husk, leaving husk, roots and stalk lying on the lump. There were no worms in this grain at all. Shooting one occasionally would cause them all to fly to the nearest trees, but they would be at it again in a few minutes, with some on watch. Grain on the surface might have lain there a long time and they would only peck at it a little once in a while.

All this proves that they want their grain in a soft or sprouted state. On the other hand, I have seen Jays time and again carry off pieces of bread or biscuit from the yard and bury them in the grass on a hillside, keeping this up as long as the supply continued. As the bread is soft enough in the first place this must be done either to preserve it for future use or, as Mr. Taylor suggests, perhaps for the purpose of developing worms.

When the Jays are actually destroying a crop of peas or corn, I have learned to poison a good many by coating some of the grain with a thin solution of glue into which strychnine has been stirred and scattering this on the surface of the field. They will pick up a grain or two now and then, and it does not take many to prove fatal. This can only be done with large grains like peas or corn, as otherwise a great many other birds would suffer also. Even then a number of coons, skunks etc., eat the dead jays and pay the penalty. However this system of poisoning is only resorted to when a matter of absolute necessity to save a crop.

It is worthy of note that the Blue-fronted Jays, in the instance of robbing the pea fields, are as numerous as the California Jays, while two or three weeks later, or in the middle of April, the former will have nearly all disappeared, while the latter remain numerous all through the breeding season. The Blue-fronted Jays apparently scatter widely among the heavily timbered hills and breed in the thick clumps of bay, or in the tall firs and redwoods, returning with their young to the bottom lands, however, in ample time to destroy as much fruit in our small family orchards as they possibly can.

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### Nest and Eggs of the California Creeper.

Having noticed but little definite information concerning the nesting of the California Creeper (*Certhia f. occidentalis*), I submit the following notes on a nest and five eggs which were collected for me by Mr. Loren E. Taylor of Fyffe, Cal. The California Creeper is a summer resident of the redwood belt of the Coast Range of California, as also of the great pine region of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, in both of which localities it is to be classed as common. Nevertheless, the eggs have remained scarce

in collections for years, owing to the fact that the nest is a difficult one to locate in the forest, and as with many other species, it is most successfully found by watching the bird carrying building material.

On April 16, 1898, Mr. Taylor observed a pair of Creepers building in a crack of a dead pine stub about three feet from the ground and six inches back from the surface. The nest with its five eggs were collected on April 30 by Mr. Taylor who kindly presented them to me. The nest was simply a mat of fine cedar bark with which was mixed a few feathers, and measures about five inches long by two inches across and a depth of one and one-half inches.

The eggs have a white ground color and are liberally spotted with flakes and confluent blotches of reddish-brown, nearest the large ends, with underlying shell markings of lavender. The eggs measure .60x.48, .58x.47, .58x.46, .57x.46 and .57x.45 inches. This set is now in the possession of Miss Jean Bell of Ridley Park, Penn. C. BARLOW.



To those of our readers who appreciate a "thing of beauty" in typographical art, we recommend *Sunset*, a beautifully printed and illustrated magazine issued by the Southern Pacific Company monthly. *Sunset* is probably the finest printed magazine on the Pacific Coast, each number being replete with half-tones of California's resources which are entertainingly embellished by the pens of gifted contributors. *Sunset* is a pleasure to look at and to read, and those interested should address E. H. Woodman, Editor, 4 Montgomery St., San Francisco.

MR. CHAS. A. MOODY of the Southern Division has two delightful essays on the wild flowers of California in the February and March numbers of the *Land of Sunshine*, both of which reflect Mr. Moody's intimate knowledge of botany.