

### The Crissal Thrasher in California.

BY M. F. GILMAN, BANNING, CAL.

THIS thrasher, *Harporhynchus crissalis*, is not always listed as a California bird, but nevertheless it is quite common in portions of the Colorado desert this side of the Colorado River. Great numbers of them can be found in the dense thickets of mesquite and screw-bean in the depressed portion of the desert near the Salton sink. In what is known as "Conchilla Valley," which is west of Salton, lying from 10 to 260 below sea level, are found several new settlements, embryo towns—Indio, Thermal and Walters, and the old Indian villages of Toros, Martinez and Agua Dulce. Near all these places the mesquite and screw-bean make great thickets and the crissal thrasher is at home.

Twenty miles west of the rim of the ancient sea and about 500 feet above its level, is Palm Springs, a small settlement in what is called Palm Valley. From here the desert narrows till it merges into San Gorgonio Pass twenty miles to the west,—a narrow valley or pass 2,500 feet elevation, between San Gorgonio and San Jacinto peaks, 11,900 and 10,800 feet high. In such a range of life zones—from sub-tropical to Hudsonian—the diversity of species is great and there is much over-lapping.

In twenty miles you may go from groves of native wild palms,—(*Washingtonia filifera*), to bare mountain peaks above timber-line and carrying snow most of the year; and a summer temperature of from 130° in the shade to below freezing point; and a range of birds from the verdin, Leconte thrasher and Gambel partridge to Clarke nut-cracker, thick-billed sparrow, and Audubon warbler.

In January 1899 I secured my first crissal thrasher at Palm Springs. Later in the season I noticed a pair about, and on May 4 secured a set of three eggs. The nest differed little from the California thrasher, being more compactly

built and not quite so bulky. It was in a mesquite three feet from the ground and built close under a large branch, so there was hardly room to get my hand into the nest. The eggs slightly incubated, were a little smaller and shorter than those of the California thrasher, and plain green in color. The bird was very shy, and I never succeeded in seeing her on the nest, she always slipping out on the opposite side before I could approach very near.

In March 1901, in company with Nathan Hargrave of Banning, another bird lover, I made a trip to Toros and Martinez to study these birds where they were more numerous. On March 18 and 19 we found ten nests containing eggs or young. With one exception they were all built close up to an overhanging limb making it difficult to insert the hand. All but one were also in the densest part of the mesquite and rather hard to see. And hard to get at too as anyone who has crawled through a mesquite thicket can testify. The nests were from 2½ to 6 feet from the ground—the average being about 3½ feet and only one 6 feet. The sets were ½, ⅓ and ¼—about evenly distributed as to number of each.

The nests contained in some cases, fresh eggs—in others incubation far advanced and one had young birds in it. From brief observation I should say that individual birds nest near the same spot year after year. Nearly every nest found was near from one to three old nests, probably belonging to the same bird as no new nests were ever found close to each other. In one case three nests were found in the same tree—one new and two old ones. The number of old nests made more work for us, as we examined all seen. In such a dry climate with the annual rainfall from nil to possibly four inches, a year-old nest does not differ so much from a new one as might be expected

and sometimes a look into the nest is required to make certain. But the old nests were sometimes a help as we made a close search in their immediate neighborhood and were often rewarded by finding the new one.

We found the birds very shy and rarely succeeded in seeing the bird leave the nest—which she did quietly, slipping from the bush on the side farthest from us. The bird is a very pleasing singer but not equal to the California thrasher. He sings less frequently and does not often perch on top of the brush during the performance but

seems to prefer the cover of branch and leaf. The song is rather in a minor strain—B flat I should say—and has fewer variations than that of his near relative. In company with the thrashers were seen many Abert towhees (*Pipilo aberti*) and two unfinished nests and one set of eggs found. A few Lecomte thrashers. (*Harporhynchus lecontei*) were seen on the outskirts of the thickets but they seem to prefer the more open and sandy country—the desert proper,—with which their light sandy “complexion” harmonizes.



### The Louisiana Tanager.

(*Piranga ludoviciana*.)

BY J. H. BOWLES, TACOMA, WASH.

**T**HIS handsome member of the tanager family is, perhaps the most brilliantly plumaged of all the birds in the northwest. Being an eastern observer, I eagerly looked forward to the first acquaintance with this relative of my favorite of the Massachusetts groves, the scarlet tanager (*Piranga erythromelas*.) Nor was I disappointed, for in comparing fully plumaged males of both species, although unlike in color in every respect, it would be hard to say which is the more beautiful.

For the benefit of eastern readers, it may be as well to make a few comparisons between the subject of this article and the scarlet tanager. Its habits differ considerably from the latter, as it is principally a bird of the clearings, while *erythromelas* is more given to the seclusion of the woods.

Among our northwestern migrants it is almost the last to come and the first to go, appearing in large numbers about the middle of May, and leaving early in September. Although essentially a warm weather bird, the majority seem to pass on to the north of Washington, as it can hardly be called a common bird around Tacoma at any time excepting that of migration.

Nest building in Washington and Oregon is seldom commenced before the first week in June and is more often delayed until much later in that month. The earliest set recorded is one of four eggs, incubation commenced, taken on June 4. The latest is a set of three, incubation slight, taken on June 28. Both of these sets were taken in Waldo, Oregon, by my brother, Mr. C. W. Bowles, and both were undoubtedly first sets.

The favorite location for the nest is an oak or fir, preferably the latter, on or bordering a prairie. Often, however, a tree is selected on some hillside from which nearly all the large timber has been cleared. In position, the nest is invariably *on* a branch, never in an upright crotch in my experience. As a rule it is placed at some distance from the main trunk of the tree, usually from six to ten feet and often much more. The height from the ground varies from fifteen to fifty feet, though any above thirty feet may be considered exceptional.

In these respects its habits are similar to those of the scarlet tanager, although the latter prefers a more secluded nesting place. The nest itself is also similar, with the exception that it is usually a considerably more bulky structure.