

Cassin Auklet, *Ptychoramphus aleuticus*

BY HOWARD ROBERTSON

ON Thursday afternoon, June 8, 1899, after the only pleasant day's sailing on a two week's cruising trip, we arrived at Santa Barbara Island, to extend our ornithological investigation and add a few more specimens of birds and eggs to our collections. We had had several day's collecting on the Anacapa Island, resulting only in the taking of numerous sets of the western gull and a few birds. We had hoped to find the Cassin auklet breeding here, but our observation only extended in any degree of completeness to the northern island of this group; and not finding the auklet burrows there, and being concerned in saving our necks, had declined to scale the sides of the middle island. We knew from a previous record published by Mr. Grinnell that the auklet bred in numbers on Santa Barbara Island, and our captain promising to land us in a place of easy access, we lost no time in covering the distance between.

We reached Santa Barbara about 2:30 P. M., and anchoring in a large cove, immediately loaded our skiff and rowed to the shore. The sides of the island around the cove drop very abruptly to the water-line, while beyond, to the northeast, it slopes gradually down to the water's edge. We had hoped to land at one of these low places, but our captain much preferred to land us on a large rock inside the cove; and there he accordingly dumped us, and after pulling the skiff up on the rock, we scrambled, with the best of our ability, and by the aid of an old rusty chain, to the top of the island. We threaded our way among the gulls' nests and, after examining a few, proceeded to the southern end, where the higher land slopes gradually towards the cove. Here we found a number of auklet burrows and at once went to work. There is no particular rule in auklet land that we could find for the birds to follow in their home building. Each bird seems to follow its own idea (and that is often crooked) in its method of digging, while his neighbor perhaps, in a spirit of conceit, in trying to improve, makes matters (for the collector) ten times worse. We examined many burrows, some of which were easily followed to the nest, and others, on account of the many turns, had to be given up entirely. They ranged in depth from two feet to six or seven feet, some being tunneled just beneath the crust of the ground, while others went straight in and, on account of the dust and accumulating dirt, were very hard to follow. There was one burrow that was something of a curiosity. It was dug in the form of a spiral, the nest being placed, after two complete turns, almost directly underneath the entrance. Near the entrance of many of the burrows there were a number of old sticks and feathers, probably the remains of a last year's nest. I think in nearly all the instances where this occurred the burrows were occupied. The nest was invariably placed at the end of the burrow, though in several instances the burrow extended beyond a short distance, perhaps six or eight inches, and was composed of a few sticks and a few loose feathers, placed indiscriminately on the damp sand. In placing the hand in an uncovered burrow over the unoccupied nest, a certain degree of warmth could be felt, caused without a doubt, by the heat from the body of the incubating bird and retained by the damp sand.

The egg, when fresh, is of a creamy white color and they vary greatly in size, as the examples here will show. After incubation has commenced the shell becomes darker, more toward a light bluish color and is very often discolored. One of the parent birds was present in each nest that contained an egg and care had to

be taken in its removal, because auklets have very sharp toes! When once out from its dark burrow and brought into the bright light, the bird had some trouble in getting its bearings; it would flutter about hopelessly a few moments and then, suddenly righting itself, dart quickly over the cliff toward the ocean. I watched several during a performance of this kind and found I could follow them with my eye until they struck the water, when the color of the bird and that of the floating kelp blended so nicely, that, at a distance, one could not be distinguished from the other.

In many of the nests there were young birds ranging in age from those newly hatched to ones nearly full grown, having only a little down clinging to the feathers about the neck. The little fellows were of more interest than the others; they looked for all the world like little black chickens, downy and soft, but too dainty to handle. When brought into the light they would sit blinking at you with the wise expression of the proverbial owl.

We examined in all a great number of nests and found very few empty ones; in those containing young birds, the parent bird was always absent, as there would be hardly room for the old bird and a young one half grown. Our observation extended only to this one colony. I have no doubt that the birds nested elsewhere on the island; but our time was limited to part of one afternoon and the next morning, so we could not do as much exploring as we wished. We finished off nicely, and having plenty of specimens, were anxious to set sail for Santa Monica, where we could get a square meal and a good wash. Our captain, while an expert oarsman, was a headstrong sailor, and no doubt questioned the old adage that "a miss is as good as a mile." His curiosity respecting the truth of this often carried us into some ticklish places, and we were heartily glad to scramble up on the wharf at Santa Monica and feel something solid beneath our feet again.

Notes from Santa Barbara, California

BY JOSEPH MAILLIARD

WHILE in Santa Barbara, recuperating from illness, from the middle of April until the latter part of July of last year, I utilized my time in doing what little my health would allow in the way of collecting birds and notes appertaining to them. My efforts being greatly restricted by circumstances the results were not by any means as great as could be desired, yet it was my intention to publish a list of the birds not noted in Jeffries' article, *Auk*, V. April, 1888. On second thought, however, the probability of being able to do more and better work in this vicinity at future dates leads me to postpone doing so until my notes are more voluminous. Later on, with the assistance of Mr. A. P. Reddington of Santa Barbara, I hope to be able to publish an annotated list that will be of greater interest and value.

Birds seemed to me to be very scarce that spring, and this idea was confirmed by residents interested in such matters. My observations were necessarily confined mostly to the outskirts of the town, and in this territory the apparently abnormal destruction of birds' nests was most noticeable. Though not making a specialty of nests a good many were noted. Not being allowed to climb trees, those above reach could not be observed, but of the many recorded for the purpose of noting