

THE CONDOR A MAGAZINE OF WESTERN ORNITHOLOGY.



Volume IX

January-February 1907

Number 1

PHOTOGRAPHING MAGPIES

BY EDWARD R. WARREN

IN many parts of the West the conglomeration of sticks and twigs, which a magpie gathers for a nest, is a conspicuous object in the trees and bushes along the streams and elsewhere. Rude and shapeless as they look when viewed from the outside, they are really comfortable homes; for inside the mass of sticks is built a nest cavity of mud, lined with fine rootlets, and overhead is a roof of twigs, with the entrance usually on the side, tho one occasionally runs across a nest with little or no roof. The cavity is often eight to ten inches deep. The nest shown in the picture is not the one in which the young birds lived; that was in a clump of willows so thick that the nest would not photograph well. These nests are used for several seasons: The one in which my family lived was occupied for at least three summers, and in the winter of 1900-01 was partly destroyed by storms and the weight of the snow; in the spring of 1901 a new nest was built in an adjoining clump.

The nests of *Pica pica hudsonica* are anywhere from ten to forty feet above the ground; but I think between ten and twenty feet will cover three-fourths of the cases. The one in the cut showing eight eggs was very exceptional, not much over three feet from the ground to the front door: just a nice height for photographic purposes. I promised myself a nice series of pictures of the young birds from that nest; but when I thought the time had come for them to be sitting up and taking notice, and went there with the camera, I found someone else had also taken notice and the nest was empty.

The family of young birds whose pictures I did take were in a nest near Crested Butte, Colorado, and, as luck would have it, I found them the very day they hatched, so that their ages were known exactly. That was on the 27th day of May, 1900. It was my first season at photographing young birds and I tried some impossibilities in the way of attempts at pictures in the nest. The picture taken at thirteen days old, tho poor, shows their growth from the naked natal condition during that time. At 18 days they had advanced still more, and another three days showed an astonishing progress; for on the twenty-first day I had my



COLORADO MAGPIES THREE WEEKS OLD

Photographed by F. R. Warren

hands full to get the picture, the youngsters being most decidedly lively, and keeping me busy replacing them as they hopped off the perch. This, one or more was sure to do when I thought I had them all right and turned toward the camera. But patience was finally rewarded.

Learning by experience, when I went to take the four weeks old picture I enlisted the aid of the two young daughters of the friend on whose ranch the nest was situated. On going to the nest the family of magpies were all in the branches outside. They could not quite fly, but could, and did, hop around in a most exasperating manner. One could not be caught, and we were forced to be content



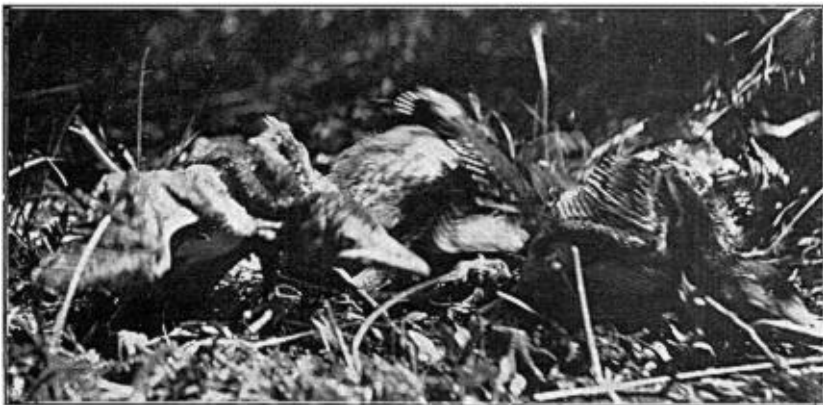
MAGPIE'S NEST IN COTTONWOOD TREE

with five. This number, however, proved sufficient to give us all the trouble in posing we really needed. This day was the first when the old birds had manifested the least anxiety while the photographer was at work. Usually the parents, if about, flew away silently at my approach and disappeared. But this time they were in the neighborhood all the time, screaming loudly, as if to tell us they had raised their family successfully so far and did not wish them interfered with.

I went again a week later and found the youngsters taking short flights. Thanks to experimenting with a new and untried lens not a single picture was secured. But one is given herewith of a bird seemingly about the same age, and



INTERIOR OF MAGPIE'S NEST



MAGPIE NESTLINGS 13 DAYS OLD



MAGPIES, 18 DAYS OLD

evidently, from his actions and those of his mother (or father), just out of the nest.

I have never been successful in taking a really good picture of an adult magpie: they are too cute, tho if one could find a tame specimen in good condition it could, of course, be done readily. They are quite easily tamed if taken young, and often learn to speak a few words more or less distinctly, but they need a large cage, and most of those one sees in captivity look rather miserable.



MAGPIES, FOUR WEEKS OLD



YOUNG MAGPIE, JUST OUT OF NEST
ABOUT FIVE WEEKS OLD

As in the case of other members of the crow and jay family, there is a difference of opinion as to the value of magpies to man. No doubt they eat many insects, carrion, and very likely a few mice; but they eat eggs and young of other smaller birds, steal more or less grain, and I have heard them accused of picking at sores on the backs of horses, burros and cattle, and doing considerable harm in that manner.

Colorado Springs, Colorado.

MAGPIES ON THE LA PLATA

BY M. FRENCH GILMAN

THE La Plata River is a small stream in southwestern Colorado, much like our southern California rivers. It flows into the San Juan, a tributary of the mighty Colorado. The growth in the river bottom and on the adjacent banks seems to form a magpie's paradise, judging from the numbers of these birds and their old nests. Beginning where the stream issues from the La Plata Mountains, near the mining town of Hesperus, on down the river for about ten miles, the birds fairly swarm. They are found in smaller numbers along the stream to its junction with the San Juan and then down that river as far as I have been: Shiprock, New Mexico.

The center of the population—*Pica pica hudsonica* population—seems to be near the Fort Lewis Indian School, in La Plata County. Here the river bottom widens and is covered with a dense growth of narrow-leaf cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*), black birch (*Betula occidentalis*), paper-leaf alder (*Alnus tenuifolia*), two kinds of willow, a few aspens (*Populus tremuloides*), some scattering pines (*Pinus flexilis*), and the usual undergrowth of such altitudes, 7,500 to 8,120 feet.

On one side of the river is a mesa covered with scrub oak (*Quercus undulata*