

AN UNUSUAL NESTING LOCALITY FOR THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN NUTHATCH

By GEORGE RICHARDS

WITH TWO PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

ALTHO but an amateur, I have like most other students my own idea concerning the habits of certain birds. Having worked among the birds a few years and found several nests of the Long-tailed Chickadee at an altitude of less than 5500 feet, I thought nothing of them except as interesting nests, like those of the other common birds. But when I became acquainted with a more experienced bird student, and told him of these nests, he greatly doubted my identification, until this spring when he saw the nests and the birds and satisfied himself as to their identity.

I had come to the conclusion that, as the location was but ten miles from the eastern base of the Rocky Mountains and streams thickly bordered with cottonwoods and willows flowed from the canyons, the breeding birds from higher altitudes sometimes followed the streams a short way out on the plains and nested there.



ROCKY MOUNTAIN NUTHATCH AT ENTRANCE TO NEST-CAVITY

Therefore I was both pleased and surprised when my brother returned home, May 14, 1908, with the news of having found a nest of the Rocky Mountain Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis nelsoni*). But again the practiced bird student was skeptical and immediately asked "to be shown." When my brother first found the nest he declared that he saw both birds, male and female, carrying something into the hole which appeared to be nesting material. The nest was visited the 15th, but nothing was determined as to whether there were eggs or not. Thinking it too early for eggs, the nest was not revisited for several days. Armed with a keyhole saw and cameras, our next trip was made May 22nd and to my joy, and the astonishment and dismay of the egg collectors our ears were greeted with the squeaking of hungry babes. Judging from the size of the youngsters on this date they were undoubtedly hatched when the nest was first found, and what was thought to be nesting material was in reality food for the young.

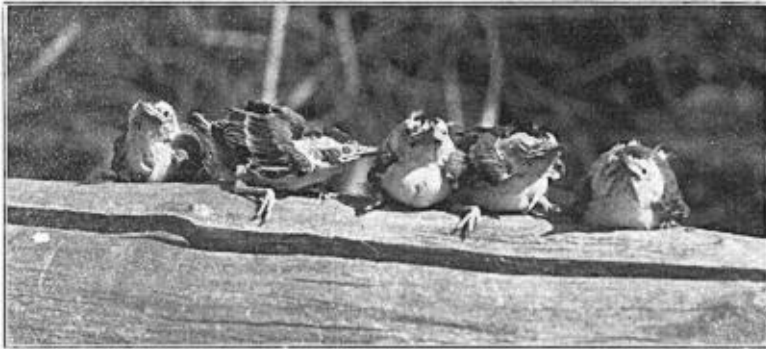
There was only the female to be seen now. Where the male had gone was hard to tell. The female was as tame as a chickadee, coming and going and feeding her young, with the writer standing only a foot or so distant. She worked incessantly, passing from nest to tree trunk, and, finding suitable food, at once returning. She usually brought millers, which were common at that time of the year. By actual count she visited the nest twenty-seven times in one hour,

each time bringing food of some kind, at least twenty of which were millers. Only once or twice out of the twenty-seven times did she appear to feed the young by regurgitation.

Usually when alighting upon the home tree she uttered a rolling note—"cră, cră, cră"—rapidly repeated, and instantly several wide open mouths appeared at the entrance of the nest cavity, each begging for the expected morsel.

A day or two later the young were taken from the nest to be photographed. Instead of being interested in posing before the magic camera, they seemed more inclined to hide their faces in the underbrush. Perhaps they were ashamed because of not being thoroly dressed. There were five young and a dead bird in the nest.

On attempting to place them on a vertical tree trunk they either could not or would not (perhaps both) cling to the tree as their parents do. The young were replaced in the nest and upon our return two days later we found they had flown. The nest was chiefly composed of fine rabbit hair, placed in a cavity of irregular shape and about six inches deep, in a scrubby willow about six feet from the ground. The surrounding country was open wooded pasture, but the ground immediately surrounding the tree was slightly swampy. This nest was located on



BROOD OF YOUNG ROCKY MOUNTAIN NUTHATCHES

the south branch of the Platte River near Littleton; and about ten miles south of Denver, Colorado, at an elevation of about 5370 feet.

[NOTE.—The above observations of Mr. Richards demonstrate an important fact in a rather unusual faunal condition existing along the South Platte River for several miles below the point where it issues from the mountains.

This river which is the main stream draining a large portion of the mountainous central part of the State, flows thru a deep canyon for many miles before it reaches the plains region, and from the mouth of the canyon for a distance of fully fifteen miles out into a typical prairie (Upper Sonoran) country there is a distinct sprinkling of mountain and foothill forms, both animal and vegetable. Thus, beside the two typically mountain birds mentioned above, the Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Lewis Woodpecker, and Violet-green Swallow nest here, at an altitude fully 1500 feet below what is ordinarily considered the lower limit of their breeding range.

Among the mammals, the beaver is very abundant, even to the very limits of the City of Denver; the Busy Chipmunk (*E. a. operarius*) is common, fully 1100 feet lower than the lowest records; while bobcats (probably *L. uinta*) are more or less common during the winter; and a few deer have been seen well out onto the prairie.

This peculiar condition so far as I can ascertain does not exist on any of the other streams flowing from the mountains out onto the plains, and its cause can only be accurately ascertained by an exhaustive study of the vegetation, climate, and other conditions upon which faunal distribution depends.—R. B. ROCKWELL.]
Denver, Colorado.

NOTES FROM BUENA VISTA LAKE, MAY 20 TO JUNE 16, 1907

By C. B. LINTON

BUENA Vista Lake is about thirty miles southwest of Bakersfield, Kern County, California; it is twelve miles long by eight miles wide and very shallow. There is no vegetation along the southern and western shores excepting here and there a patch of salt or devil-grass; on the north for several miles is a stretch of alkaline desert with an occasional patch of mesquite and sage. At the northeast corner where the Kern River empties into the lake (and where is also the outlet, the mouth of the Kern River and the Lake outlet being separated only by a narrow levee) is found an abundant growth of tules and willows, the latter bordering the Kern River in dense thickets and groves for miles. About two and one-half miles from the lake, along the river, is quite an extensive marsh caused by the overflow of the river during the winter months. It is near this marsh and in the vicinity of the mouth of the river that all collecting was done, small canoes being used for transportation.

In the limited time at my disposal here, very little could be done, the field being a little too large for one man to work in so short a time.

Aechmophorus occidentalis. Western Grebe. Common on the lake. Would undoubtedly have bred, had not the plume hunters been present.

Podilymbus podiceps. Pied-billed Grebe. Fairly common in the lake and river marshes. Breeding.

Larus californicus. California Gull. Several immature Gulls were seen about the lake, probably this species.

Sterna caspia. Caspian Tern. Two seen. One secured, May 26, in Kern River marsh.

Sterna forsteri. Forster Tern. Fairly common near breeding colony of Black Terns. None found breeding.

Hydrochelidon nigra surinamensis. American Black Tern. Large colony nesting in river marsh.

Phalacrocorax auritus albociliatus. Farallone Cormorant. Breeding in immense numbers in the partly submerged willow trees in the lake; two to six nests to the tree was the rule. Fully fledged young and fresh eggs were found in late May.

Pelecanus erythrorhynchos. American White Pelican. Two large colonies were visited; one of about 250 nests, on a small sandy island in the river mouth; the other of perhaps 500 nests, on the lake shore. The nests of the latter colony were mostly well constructed of tules and marsh grass covering about two acres. The nests on the island were merely holes scooped in the sand.

Nettion carolinense. Green-winged Teal. Several seen.

Querquedula cyanoptera. Cinnamon Teal. Fairly common. Breeding. Fresh sets and young noted in late May.