

AN EARLY SPRING TRIP TO ANACAPA ISLAND

By HOMER C. BURT

WITH ONE PHOTO

WITH a week's supply of provisions on board, the writer, in company with Mr. Sidney Peyton, brother of a fellow Club member, and Mr. Walter Harrison, left Ventura harbor Tuesday morning, March 14 of this season (1911) on the launch "Ana Capa", owned by Mr. Ray Webster of Ventura. Our plans were to spend a few days on Anacapa Island that we might get better acquainted with the several pairs of Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) that make the island their home. We had planned on getting away earlier in the month but owing to the long siege of rain and stormy weather we have had this spring, Mr. Webster was unable to bring the launch up from San Pedro where it had been in anchorage for the winter.

The day was fine and we had a very pleasant trip across the channel, making the run to the harbor in a little over three hours. After landing our provisions and blankets on the beach we all got busy making things comfortable in the little shanty up under the cliffs, which Mr. Webster kindly gave us the use of during our stay on the island. A good dinner was soon fixed up for us by "George" the boat's engineer, who proved to be quite a chef; and we afterward enjoyed more than one fish and mutton dinner fixed up by him and Mrs. Webster, who came over two days later to stay until the sheep shearing was over.

The tide being low, Peyton and myself decided to spend the afternoon exploring the south side of the west island, while the rest of the party were going up on top to see how the band of sheep had fared for the past several months. We succeeded in working our way well around the island, a feat which can only be done at low tide, owing to the high cliffs towering above one all the way around. Cormorants and Western Gulls (*Larus occidentalis*) were common flying about or sitting on the rocks off the shore. A pair of Black Oyster-catchers (*Haematopus bachmani*) were flushed from a mussel bed on the rocks, but were too wary to allow us to get within gun-shot. We also flushed a Wandering Tattler (*Heteractitis incanus*) from among the rocks, which was knocked down by Peyton. Another Tattler was taken later near the same spot, both birds being males. There was much to interest one on all sides, so the afternoon quickly passed, and it was getting late when we got back to camp.

The other party arrived soon afterwards with good news which put us all in high spirits. They had located an eagle's nest on one of the high cliffs of the north side of the west island, with the old bird on the nest, so things certainly looked promising for the morrow.

We were up bright and early the next morning, Wednesday, and, loading ourselves with camera, shot-gun, lunch, and 130 feet of rope, we started up over the rough trail for the nesting site. Traveling was comparatively easy after reaching the top of the island, where there was a surprisingly heavy growth of clover and fox-tail grass, making a delightful home for the Island Horned Larks (*Otocoris a. insularis*) and Meadow-larks (*Sturnella neglecta*) which were common on all sides. No time was lost in reaching the top of the cliff above the nest, which turned out to be on one of the highest cliffs of the island.

It would have been impossible to pick out a wilder or more commanding site than the one selected by this pair of birds. One hundred and forty feet down from

the top of the cliff a pinnacle twenty-five feet high had been formed by the years of crumbling away of the rocks, and it was on the very top of this that the mass of sticks had been shaped into a nest. And there reaching from the base to about half way to the top of the pinnacle was another great pile of sticks which had no doubt been used for years as a home by the eagles, but had been deserted for the new site.

The rope, which was in two pieces, was tied together and one end dropped over the edge of the cliff, but it lacked about ten feet of reaching to the base of the pinnacle. Luckily for us though, there was a ledge on the face of the cliff down about 100 feet, which was wide enough to give a safe footing, and also giving the opportunity to get some photos of the nest at close range, as the top of the pinnacle stood out within thirty-five feet of the ledge.

Peyton went down first on the rope, taking the collecting pail and the shot-gun in case things got too warm for us. I followed next with the camera, and was soon on the ledge beside him. A photo was taken of the nest and the two eggs, which could be plainly seen in the cup-shaped place in the center of the nest. A section of the rope was next lowered down to us by Mr. Harrison, and with the assistance



Fig. 47. ARCH ROCK, AT THE EAST END OF ANACAPA ISLAND, CALIFORNIA

of this, Peyton got on down to the base of the pinnacle. By climbing up over the old nest he was soon on top of the pinnacle and reaching over after the two dirty white treasures, which were carefully packed away in the collecting pail.

The nest, which was about five feet across, was built up of sticks and limbs of all sizes up to the size of a man's wrist, the top being a soft bed of dead fox-tail grass. As there are very few trees on Anacapa, the sticks used in making the two nests must have been carried over from Santa Cruz Island, which lies about five miles to the west. From the size and amount of material used it must have been the accumulation of years, and required a great deal of labor and perseverance on the part of the old birds.

It was some relief when we got back on solid ground again with the set all safe. I have followed Mr. Peyton and his brother on some of their trips after White-throated Swifts and Ravens on the mainland, and though that's usually pretty rough work, I believe the Bald Eagles have them beaten for choosing rough nesting sites, this pair especially. The experience was worth the risks, though. It was a great sight from the top of the cliff. Looking across the channel one could plainly see mountains rising up on the mainland, the higher ranges, capped with

snow, adding to the scene. And it certainly looked a long way down to where the surf pounded against the bottom of the cliff.

We had expected trouble from the old birds while getting the eggs, but they kept well out over the water while flying back and forth, never coming closer than seventy-five yards while we were down at the nest.

After eating lunch we went on around the end of the island, searching the cliffs for possible Duck Hawk nests. As nothing of interest was found we started back over the trail for camp. A pair of Sparrow Hawks (*Falco sparverius phalloena*) was noted on the way. They seemed to be much out of place in that treeless place. A larger hawk was noted flying low over the cactus, which I was fortunate in bringing down with the shot-gun. It was later identified as a male Marsh Hawk (*Circus hudsonius*) by Mr. G. Willett.

Camp was reached in time to take a plunge in the surf before supper, which was very bracing after a strenuous day. The evening was spent in preparing the specimens collected on the trip. We had expected a big job in saving the set of eggs taken, but on blowing them found they were both infertile. Here rises a question for some of the learned ones. How long would the old bird have incubated the eggs before leaving them? The eggs had already been in the nest perhaps long enough to have been hatched, for they were badly nest stained, and the lining of the shell came out with the contents of the eggs.

The following day, Thursday, was spent in canvassing the middle island. Starting from camp we searched the cliffs along the north side of the island until we reached the point where the middle island is separated from the eastern by a small channel of water. At low tide a small beach is left bare between the two islands, but it is impossible to cross over on account of the high cliff on either island. With the field glass the cliffs were carefully scanned on the south side of the east end, and a second nest of the Bald Eagle was soon located by Peyton. This nest was built in a similar location to the first one found, being on top of a sharp pinnacle well down from the top of the cliff. Looking through the glass a white head could be seen rising up above the edge of the nest, and the old male was located sitting on the top of a cliff near by. Nothing could be done with that nest until a landing could be made on the east island, so we started back for camp along the crest of the cliff on the south side.

A pair of Duck Hawks (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) was flushed from one of the high cliffs about the middle of the island. They probably had a nest somewhere nearby, as they would not leave the cliff, but although we spent some time searching for it we were unable to locate it. As on the west island, we found the Island Horned Larks and Meadowlarks common along the top. A Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos leucopterus*) was also noted singing from the top of a bunch of cactus. Although none was seen by our party, Mr. Webster informed us that on several occasions he had observed Burrowing Owls on top of the island.

On returning to camp and telling of our find, Mr. Webster agreed to take us aboard the launch and land us down on the east end the following morning. We found Mr. Webster very willing to assist us in any way he could during our stay on the island, and he favored us in several ways in order to make our collecting successful. The Bald Eagles are grand birds from an ornithological standpoint, but they are looked upon as pests by the sheep owners. Mr. Webster informed us that several of his small lambs were destroyed every year when the young eagles were almost large enough to leave the nests.

We were aboard the launch and on our way to the east end by sunup the next morning. As the landing there is very poor we were anxious to get on the island

before any wind came up. It was agreed to come after us at noon, but we landed a good supply of water and provisions with us. There is no water on the east islands, so it is necessary to be prepared in case of a blow.

We were greeted by loud clamorings and flopping wings of a perfect swarm of Brown Pelicans (*Pelecanus californicus*) and Western Gulls, up on top of the island. This was the same place that was visited by some Cooper Club members in the summer of 1910. A number of pelicans were noted flying with long strips of sea weed in their bills, for mending the old nests, but none of them had begun to lay their eggs.

Our time was limited on the island, so we made directly for the eagle's nest located the day previous. The old male sighted us as we neared the cliff, and flew out over the water giving an alarm note repeated several times, but the female did not leave the nest until we peered down over the top of the cliff. As she sailed out over the water we gazed eagerly to see if there was a set of two or three eggs in the nest. Instead of eggs we spied two moving objects that looked like balls of downy cotton in the center of the mass of sticks and grasses. The young eagles looked to be about two or three days old. A half-eaten fish was lying on the edge of the nest, while several backbones of good sized fish could be seen scattered around. Not wishing to keep the old bird away from the nest too long we passed on around the island, leaving them in their glory.

Shortly after noon we sighted the launch returning for us, so everything was carried back down on the rocks at the foot of the cliff, and we were soon back on the launch bound for the harbor, I suppose to the relief of the Pelicans and Gulls, as they settled back down among the nests on top of the cliffs.

The afternoon was spent rounding up the sheep by Mr. Webster and the two shearers, so we volunteered to help. While driving some stray sheep out of one of the small rocky gulches running up in the island, Peyton located a Raven's (*Corvus corax sinuatus*) nest in the niche of a small cliff. The deeply cupped top of the nest was warmly lined with wool, but the eggs had not yet been laid. This I am sure was the only Raven's nest on the islands, for we pretty thoroughly canvassed them all.

Saturday, the 19th, we remained around the harbor fishing and getting our things together, as we were to be taken home the next morning, the weather permitting. So far we had been fortunate, as the weather had been very calm all week.

The launch had to be run up to the sheep shearers' camp at the west end of the island before leaving for the mainland, and Peyton and Harrison went along in it, while I remained at camp to finish packing up. While passing up the island, near the cliffs, a third nest of the eagles was located on the ledge of a cliff, and the old bird could be seen on it. It was a great temptation to stay another day on the island, but everything was packed and loaded on board, so we had to pass it up, and say good-by to Anacapa and the eagles.

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Two Species New to California. Ovenbird. *Seiurus aurocapillus*. While engaged this spring in photographic work on the Farallones (*in re* the Farallone bird-group being prepared for the California Academy of Science), I had opportunity to observe several small bird waves, each of which brought us a motley assortment of eastern forms. On the 29th of May a strange