

If the plumages have not been correctly diagnosed the results will be thrown into error. This might be, if some first-year birds wore second-year plumage, which is unlikely, as if so there would be more intermediates between typical first- and second-year plumages in the fall than one actually does find. That some older birds wear second-year plumage, or second-year birds adult plumages seems more probable, but here the error should fall on one side as frequently as on the other and make no difference in the final results.

It is possible that the counts are not sufficiently great to give the true proportions. Larger counts would of course be more reliable; but in the writer's opinion those made are sufficiently large for approximate accuracy.

If the habits of young and old vary so that any age favors the region where the observations were made more than the others, this would result in an erroneous proportion being obtained. Familiarity with the Herring Gull in various parts of its winter range leads the writer to believe that young or old do somewhat favor certain regions, but that the point where the observations were made is not such a region and that the counts are representative.

SUMMARY

In view of the difficulties of successfully estimating the age which a species of bird reaches in nature, an estimate based on the proportion of young to old is of interest. To repeat, such an estimate from two seasons' observation of the Herring Gull gives average age attained by first-winter birds 6.0 years, second-winter birds 16.2 years, which implies a very heavy mortality between the first and second winters. Very likely the mortality continues heavy for another year or more and the normal age of the species is distinctly greater than the average age reached by second-winter birds, perhaps between 15 and 20 years, but this is mere guess-work.

The writer considers the method here used one of the best, when available for determining age; but results obtained with it by one observer in one locality in so short a time can not be greatly relied upon.

New York City, June 11, 1915.

A LATE NESTING RECORD FOR THE CALIFORNIA WOODPECKER*

By HARRIET WILLIAMS MYERS

FOR TWO seasons, at least, the same hole in a telephone pole that is daily passed by hundreds of street cars and automobiles, has been the home of a pair of California Woodpeckers (*Melanerpes formicivorus bairdi*). There are plenty of oak and other trees nearby, but the birds seem to have a fondness for this pole which is near a group of poles on the corner of Pasadena Avenue and Avenue 62, Los Angeles, only a short distance from the Arroyo Seco. The hole is about thirty feet from the ground and is badly worked and split down. From a small round opening it has become an almost square one nearly twice as large as needed.

While nesting birds have been recorded for every month in the year in California, I had thought July to be the latest for these woodpeckers, and was, therefore, rather surprised to find that this nest-pole contained squealing young on September 11. It was after six o'clock that I passed near the corner on this day

*Read at the A. O. U. Congress, San Francisco, May 18, 1915.

and stopped to watch the birds flying through the air after insects. Sometimes they flew out in big circles, returning, flycatcher-fashion, to the wire from which they started. Sometimes they went straight up into the air and tumbled back, at times catching themselves suddenly in their downward flight, and darting forward. I thought, as I watched them, how remarkably graceful they were for woodpeckers, and how much they foraged like the true flycatchers. It was beginning to get dark and I was passing on when, to my amazement, one of the birds flew to the pole and fed something within. As I listened I knew that my eyes had not deceived me, but that, unusual or not, there were young in that nest.

The next day, from three until four p. m., I watched at the pole and recorded the actions of the birds. I soon noticed that a woodpecker was resting on the wire above the nest, and that two others were busy feeding. This resting bird was a trifle smaller and the black breast-band was more marked with white. In some indescribable way I was impressed with the idea that it was an immature bird. Presently it flew away and I thought no more about its presence until all three came to the wires at once and after two of them had fed and left, this third mysterious bird went into the hole and stayed there.

It was the habit of the adults to fly about in the neighborhood, inspecting the poles, or to fly through the air, for most of their food. Sometimes they were out of sight, but they did not stay long. When a bird came, he, or she, popped into the nest, stayed a minute and came out, sometimes giving the *ja-cob* call, which both used.

After this third woodpecker had gone into the pole-nest, I kept my eyes riveted upon it so as to know how long the bird stayed in there. When the adults came to feed they did not go inside but reached over, fed, and flew away. Three times one of them did this, but the fourth time, when the male came, he stood on one side of the hole and I heard him give low, guttural notes. It seemed quite evident that he was saying: "See here, you young scamp, it is high time that you were coming out of there. Let me get in and attend to your brothers and sisters, as I should." Presently, the truant young, for such he proved to be, appeared in the doorway and, with open mouth, begged for just one bite. "Please don't scold, father dear," I felt sure he was saying, "it was so nice and cozy down there and the children were glad to have me,—really they were."

But the old bird was unrelenting and stayed in his position by the hole until the bird inside, which was undoubtedly a former nestling, came out and flew onto the wire above, when the adult male went within.

Just to prove that he was not all baby, the former nestling turned in and helped feed. Several times he went into the hole and came directly out, and I might have thought that he was in there in hopes of getting fed had I not distinctly seen a big fly in his bill as he entered. Each time as he bobbed into the hole several white bars showed plainly on the underside of the outer tail feathers. It was this marking of a young bird which convinced me that he was a former nestling. In every other respect he resembled a male California Woodpecker. Once more, during my watching, he slipped into the nest, staying eight minutes before they got him out. The first time it had been twenty minutes.

In an hour's watching the birds fed 28 times, the shortest interval being one-half minute, the longest eight. In nine minutes they fed eight times.

On the 15th of the month, when I believe the young must have been about ten days old, they were fed 24 times in 58 minutes. The food given them now was mostly acorns which the adults took from the nearby poles, sometimes digging them out in pieces, and sometimes taking them to the top of a flat pole

where they pounded away for some minutes before coming to the nest with their bills stuffed full of the white bits. From this time until the young left the nest they were fed mostly on these acorns.

Sometimes the birds flew to an oak tree from which they took the green acorns. These were brought to the poles and, I believe, stored away in the holes left vacant by the taking of the old acorns. However I have no proof that green nuts were not fed. It only seemed as if the birds were taking the green ones to the poles rather than directly to the young, and since the dried ones would be easier cracked, it is reasonable to believe they were the ones the birds favored for food purposes. Perhaps green acorns are as indigestible for baby birds as green apples are for baby boys. Who knows!

On the twentieth of the month I was extremely interested to see the male eating black scale from a pepper-tree that grew about a block from the nest.

At this time one large young was reaching far out of the hole and I was told by a neighbor that two of the nestlings were found at the foot of the pole. While it seemed hardly credible that two of them should have been pushed out, there proved to be only one that left the nest, which was either late on the 25th, or early on the 26th of September, fourteen or fifteen days after I discovered them.

About six o'clock of the 26th I found the young bird flying, in rather an uncertain way, from pole to pole, where he hopped about and took food which the adults brought him. There were two or three white bars on the black outer tail-feathers, and a patch below the red crown was gray.

It would seem that this late nesting of the California Woodpecker is not so unusual as we may have believed; for on the 19th of October I found another pole, two blocks farther down this busy thoroughfare, where noisy young were being fed. One was leaning well out of the nest. As in the other case, nuts were being fed; but once I saw one of the adults fly down through the air nearly to the ground and come back with a large, long-legged insect in its bill, proving that the diet was not exclusively of acorns.

Los Angeles, California, April 6, 1915.

DESCRIPTION OF A NEW RACE OF SAVANNAH SPARROW AND SUGGESTIONS ON SOME CALIFORNIA BIRDS

By LOUIS B. BISHOP, M. D.

IN STUDYING a collection, one sometimes finds birds that show an extension of range, or seem worth reporting from a paucity of records of their presence in the place where these were taken, revises his previous opinion in the light of more material, or reaches conclusions in harmony with, or in opposition to, others who have studied the same species. These are my excuses for this paper. For assistance my thanks are due to Dr. Dwight, Mr. Oberholser and Mr. Porter. Most of the birds recorded were collected for me by the late Mr. Marsden.

Fratercula corniculata. The Horned Puffin recorded in the obituary of Mr. Marsden as collected at Pacific Grove on February 17, 1914, was a female in winter plumage including the bill. It is now no. 26172 of my collection.

***Larus kumlieni* (?)**. A young female gull (no. 23689), collected at Pacific Grove on January 4, 1912, by Mr. Marsden, has been compared very carefully more than once by Dr. Dwight and myself with the gulls in the collection of the