

bird which distinguishes it from its relatives in the same genus. Where the character is one of habit or pertains to its notes and song the present participle is the form the adjective takes. Thus we have Laughing Gull, Cackling Goose, Whooping and Whistling Swans, Whooping Crane, Ant-eating Woodpecker, Worm-eating Warbler, Warbling Vireo, and Mourning Warbler. Departures from this practice occur in such names as Melodious Grassquit, Clapper Rail and Trumpeter Swan, but these forms seem permissible.

There are two names, however, which are very much off color, Screech Owl and the Song Sparrow. It seems that, aside from the grammatical error committed, the more prevalent practice should have dictated that these names be Screeching Owl and Singing Sparrow. Screech Owl and Song Sparrow seem good enough names through long usage, but witness how ludicrous the above list of birds would appear were we to change their names to agree with the form expressed in the case of the owl and the sparrow. We would have Laugh Gull, Cackle Goose, Whoop and Whistle Swans, Whoop Crane, Warble Vireo, Mourn Warbler, Melody Grassquit, Clap Rail and Trumpet Swan!

Nouns are used as adjectives, but the meaning is totally different from that in which the present participial form is used. Thus, where we have cow-barn, tire-rack, shot-gun or iron knife the meaning is a barn for a cow, a rack for tires, a gun for shot, and a knife of iron; simply a phrase shortened into two nouns, one of which is used as an adjective. The meaning of Screech Owl and Song Sparrow is obviously an owl which screeches and a sparrow which sings, and not an owl for screeches nor a sparrow for or of song.

So when we get around to doing any changing of names let us set these right before the Gull, Swan and Goose laugh, whoop and cackle at the poor little owl and sparrow!—
J. R. PEMBERTON, *Colton, California.*

Are there Two Forms of the Bryant Marsh Sparrow in San Francisco County?—Joseph Mailliard's note on the Bryant Marsh Sparrow in a recent issue of THE CONDOR suggests a solution to what has been a puzzling problem to me for some time. I have found the Bryant Marsh Sparrow breeding on the Islais Marsh, south of the Potrero district. But there are other birds apparently of this species, averaging somewhat lighter, however, found resident in the Presidio, on the Ingleside Golf Links, and high up the slopes of Twin Peaks. I have noted them many times during the breeding season at the two last named stations. Most of the books speak of this sparrow as though it were found nowhere else than on the salicornia marshes near sea level. It is my opinion that there is an upland form of *Passerculus sandwichensis bryanti* which verges toward *P. s. alaudinus*, and that it ranges from Humboldt County south at least to the Transition area of San Francisco County. I may add that I noted this same light-color Bryant Marsh Sparrow last July on the uplands of western Sonoma County some miles from the sea.—W. A. SQUIRES, *San Francisco, California.*

Caspian Tern in the San Joaquin Valley.—At the time of the appearance of the September (1916) number of THE CONDOR, I had what appeared to be in newspaper parlance a "scoop" on the Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*) in the way of a late summer, or early fall interior record, and had a short article upon this subject scrolled out, waiting only the disappearance of this species from the scene before finishing it up and sending it in to the Editor. But meanwhile the above-mentioned number of our journal came out containing John G. Tyler's *Supplementary List of Birds of the Fresno District*, in which there are several records of this species.

However, as Grinnell's *Distributional List of the Birds of California* gives this bird as a "Rather rare winter visitant and migrant, both coastwise and in the interior", with a few records following, most of which are winter with only two spring and no fall records, it should be worthy of note that several individuals have been paying a prolonged visit to the Rancho Dos Rios, near the mouth of the Tuolumne River, Stanislaus County, as many as a dozen having been seen at one time and two specimens taken for positive identification.

It happened this summer that some seepage water was left on our ranch in a depressed piece of ground several acres in extent, and the resulting shallow ponds proved very attractive to several species of aquatic birds. Among these the Caspian Tern chose

these ponds for a temporary abiding place from which it sallied forth from time to time to scan the neighboring lagoons for stray fish floating on the surface of their waters, flying up and down each lagoon or lakelet for a few turns, picking up a tidbit here and there and finally returning to its resting place at the shallow ponds.

For several years past large terns have been noticed in the spring, mostly in May, flying north in groups of two or three, some days quite a number passing by, perhaps half a dozen being in sight at once. But no opportunity ever offered for procuring a specimen for positive identification, although there seemed but little doubt as to the species being *Sterna caspia*. It always happened that when my gun was near, the birds were too far away to reach, and when they were near enough the gun was too far away! Returning in the fall the same thing happened. This fall, however, the large terns were first noticed on September 4, when three or four were seen flying up and down a charming little lake upon the shore of which the main house is situated. Retiring shortly from this lake the birds flew over the shallow ponds spoken of above, which they evidently made their headquarters.

For several weeks after this date some of these birds were always in evidence, while their rather harsh cry or else a sort of gentle little short and trilling whistle could be heard not only at any time of daylight but even in the late dusk of the evening. They were very wary and the chances of happening within gunshot greatly against the collector, but two specimens were finally secured, proving their identity beyond a doubt. On October 6 there were still three or four of the birds on the place.—JOSEPH MAILLIARD, *San Francisco, California*.

Nesting Habits of the Virginia Rail in Mariposa County, California.—On June 5, 1916, while mowing grass in a small marsh on our home place, on Smith Creek near Coulterville, Mariposa County, California, my father discovered the nest and eggs of a Virginia Rail (*Rallus virginianus*). The nest was a tower-like structure composed of flat marsh grasses. It measured eight inches in height and the same in diameter. The ten brown-and lilac-spotted eggs were just beginning to be incubated.

As compared with eggs of other birds nesting in this vicinity they resemble most closely those of the Valley Quail, but are proportionately longer and darker colored. The grass clump in which the nest was situated was not disturbed in mowing, and near by there was a high bank from which the nest could be easily observed. When anyone approached the vicinity of the nest the incubating bird would slip quietly off; but sometimes she could be heard splashing through the water as she ran. Usually she did not go more than six feet from the nest and would then stand quietly in the grass where she would appear like nothing more than a dark shadow. Whenever any one of us would go near the nest, which we did almost every day, the female would utter a low clucking sound.

Nothing was seen of the male until June 18 when, as we approached the nest, an ear-piercing scream came from him as he stood some distance away in the marsh grass. This whistle was answered by a similar but softer note from his mate. The male showed himself only momentarily as he skulked through the grass as if attempting to distract our attention from the nest.

On June 19 there were six coal black young in the nest. They had black-ringed pink bills, and their feet were very large in proportion to their bodies. Now the demeanor of the female changed. She forgot her shyness and walked out in the open within three feet of where we stood. She fluffed up her feathers after the manner of a sitting hen and uttered many clucks and whistles which were answered by the shrill whistle of the male. He was not so brave as she, and did not show himself except at intervals. On this same day several of the young clambered out of the nest into the water. We replaced them and quitted the vicinity so as not to disturb the family. Later in the day we visited the nest again and found the female absent. Soon the male whistled, his mate answered, and she soon appeared from a grass clump, swimming and wading across a bit of open water to the nest.

By the evening of the nineteenth another egg had hatched and on the morning of the twentieth two more. The last egg hatched on the afternoon of the twentieth. On the morning of June 21 the family had departed and we saw no more of them, save for one that showed itself for a moment in the marsh one day late in July.—DONALD D. McLEAN, *Coulterville, California*.