

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*.