

west and the red farm buildings glowed a keen red, the fence posts standing as bars of gold. Over the fields the projected shadows of the buildings made irregular domes of cold green across the sunlit yellow green of the young wheat fields. On a July night a thunder storm at supper time made an obscured sunset, but when the heavy rain fell from the sky, the darkness lightened and an unusual color effect was given the landscape. The squares of plowed ground stood out black against the intense vivid green of the grain fields. It was at once a repressed but illuminated sunset, the light apparently being reflected from the clouds.

After trying east winds, electric storms, and unprecedented rains, near the middle of July the wind veered to the northwest giving us one of the perfect, heavenly prairie days with serene blue sky, ever shifting cloud forms, and a caressingly soft prairie breeze that brought the sweet breath of new-mown hay. As I watched the ever-changing white forms in the sky, I wished that a moving picture film might be taken of clouds on the prairie. Now a row of pointed caps marked the east, now small irregular cloudlets floated along the southern horizon; then cumulus masses formed but to dissolve, while far-flung exultant clouds held the eye in the high sky. Bands of light illumined the wheat fields, and from a fence post a Vesper Sparrow sang his uplifted song, in rare harmony with it all.

(To be continued)

SIX WEEKS IN THE HIGH SIERRAS IN NESTING TIME

By MILTON S. RAY

WITH FOUR PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

BY RETURNING for a number of years to the same localities in the Tahoe region I have had opportunity to note the variations in its bird-life from year to year, both in abundance and variety. Almost every season I have added new birds to the Lake Valley list, though each year, too, I have failed to record certain birds present the previous seasons.

The winter of 1911 had been one of very heavy snowfall, and while en route from Truckee to Lake Tahoe on the thirteenth of May the train track led the entire distance through snow, in places as deep as twelve feet. Willows and aspens along the roaring streams showed as yet no signs of leaf. Notwithstanding this wintry outlook, I noticed a newly completed nest of the Water Ouzel (*Cinclus mexicanus unicolor*) on the top of a large boulder in the middle of the Truckee River near Deer Park Station, while nearer Lake Tahoe I noted numerous American Mergansers (*Merganser americanus*) in pairs flying up stream.

Snow, three to twelve feet deep, running down to the water's edge, covered the western shores of Lake Tahoe everywhere along the route to Bijou, where I arrived at 1:45 P. M. in time for a short tramp afield. I saw the Audubon Warbler (*Dendroica auduboni auduboni*), Calliope Hummingbird (*Stellula calliope*) and seven other species in the winter-like solitudes, before a blinding snow-storm

drove me back to camp. The next day I observed a pair of California Jays (*Aphelocoma californica californica*), a new bird for Bijou and Lake Valley and whose occurrence here is really remarkable when one considers the fact that a high mountain area of between fifty and sixty miles separated these birds from their usual haunts (the western Sierran foot-hills), while to the east, only a few miles over the range, the Woodhouse Jay is to be found in not greatly dissimilar country. Although residents told me the birds had been seen about for several weeks, they were apparently not nesting.

At Bijou, with its more open and mostly second growth timber, the season was earlier than at the northern end of the lake, but here, as along the Truckee River, the aspens and willows were still bare, and, although the snow was present only in patches, the brown turf beneath showed as yet no sign of the coming grass. Only two pairs of birds were noted engaged in nest-building—Mountain Chickadees (*Penthestes gambeli*) in a stump and Cassin Purple Finches (*Carpodacus cassinii*) in a tall, unclimbable Jeffrey pine.

The next day, May 15, a trip was taken to Rowland's Marsh. Here, on an island, I witnessed the arrival of thousands of Tree Swallows (*Iridoprocne bicolor*). A hundred pairs or so took up homes in the vicinity, while the others flying north and northwest, continued on after a short rest. In the marsh pond lilies were just budding out beneath the water, the tules, flattened and brown, were lying dead, while the marsh grass, in places where the snow had retreated along the shore, was making its first feeble



Fig. 6. BELTED KINGFISHER WHICH MET DEATH BY BECOMING ENTANGLED IN WIRE FENCING; BIJOU, AT LAKE TAHOE, MAY 18.

appearance after the long winter sleep. The trip to the marsh was taken primarily for the purpose of investigating the nesting of the Canada Goose, which I have treated in a previous article (CONDOR, XIV, 1912, p. 70).

Sleet fell on May 16 and the day was dark, windy and cold. Near Lakeside Park (Stateline P. O.) I noted a Western Evening Grosbeak (*Hesperiphona vespertina montana*) the first I have recorded for Lake Valley. Not far distant, for some time I watched the tactics of rival pairs of Mountain Chickadees and Western Bluebirds (*Sialia mexicana occidentalis*), both trying to build in the same cavity, while from an aspen a Modoc Woodpecker (*Dryobates villosus orius*) was flushed from a nest-cavity twenty feet from the ground and holding four fresh eggs.

On the way to Cave Rock next day, near Edgewood (Nevada) I noted a colony of Cliff Swallows (*Petrochelidon lunifrons lunifrons*) engaged in plastering

their mud nests, forty-seven in number, along the rafters of an open cow-shed. As I came near, the birds began circling upward until they were almost lost in the clouds. Later they came down again and resumed building, but six hours afterwards when I passed the spot on my way back to camp, every one of the birds had disappeared. The day closed without any other than the usual species being noted and no nests, save a second Modoc Woodpecker's with three fresh eggs and a Red-shafted Flicker's (*Colaptes cafer collaris*) in course of excavation.

On May 18 it stormed until 3:15, when I went abroad on a short ramble. The only interesting discovery was the finding of a Western Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon caurina*) which had met its death by becoming entangled in wire fencing on the hotel grounds and which is shown in the accompanying photograph (fig. 6).

Having heard of the former nesting of Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) on the range of mountains southeast of Bijou and as the weather had now become clear and still, I decided next morning on making a trip to this region. During the whole of a long day's tramp afield, I saw three eagles, but found no nests, although I did locate, in a massive Jeffrey pine about 150 feet up, an occupied nest of the Western Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo borealis calurus*) to which, however, I did not climb. In one respect this nest is worthy of notice being the only tree-nest of a large raptore that I had ever found up to this time in the High Sierras.

On May 20, on the edge of a swampy tract, I came upon a pair of Sierra Red-breasted Sapsuckers (*Sphyrapicus varius daggetti*) engaged in nest-drilling in a tamarack pine. The birds worked alternately for about equal periods and I watched them for a considerable time.

On the 21st, in company with two friends, a tramp was taken over the eastern summit and down into Carson Valley, Nevada. Here numerous nests of common species were noted, and, owing to a lower elevation, most of them contained eggs. Some nests noted held young which, in the case of the Nevada Redwing (*Agelaius phoeniceus nevadensis*) were as yet unfeathered, while those of the American Magpie (*Pica pica hudsonia*) were almost ready to leave the nest. Of more than passing interest were colonies of Brewer Blackbirds (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) nesting in tules along fresh-water sloughs, although there existed abundant opportunity for tree-nesting. Seven nests examined were made of mud, manure, grasses, weed-stems and rootlets, and were lined with horse and cow hair. They held from two to six eggs, all apparently in a fresh condition.

On my return to Bijou, May 25, the first find worthy of record was a nest of the Mountain Chickadee in the top of an old stump, with five nearly fresh eggs, and one of the Williamson Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) the day following, with six eggs in which incubation had just begun. The nesting cavity was fifteen feet up in a dead lodgepole or tamarack pine and the eggs lay on a bed of bits of wood excavated by the birds. While I was in the tree both the parents, so wonderfully unlike in coloration, made their appearance, the male uttering from time to time, as it went up and down the nearby tree trunks, the remarkably loud and characteristic call-note.

At Rowland's Marsh, two days later, I noticed at least a thousand Cliff Swallows in migration. The birds rested for a time in the same grove of dead pines in which the Tree Swallows had been seen previously and where many of the latter had since taken up their abode. I came upon a pair of Western Ruby-crowned Kinglets (*Regulus calendula cineraceus*) engaged in tearing the nest of

a previous year apart to use the material in the construction of a new one. The latter, however, I failed to find and it was apparently located at a considerable distance.

I excavated a nest of the Modoc Woodpecker on May 30 with four partially incubated eggs. The birds had cleverly hollowed out an aspen knot and, though but fourteen feet up, the nest was difficult to find. Not far distant a nesting cavity of the Red-shafted Flicker was noted with eight slightly incubated eggs, this was in process of excavation on May 17. On approaching the cow-sheds which had apparently been deserted previously by the colony of Cliff Swallows, I was surprised to find they had all returned and that most of the nests now held eggs.

An American Merganser was seen on May 31 close to Bijou with six young just hatched, and on June 2 the first Pacific Nighthawk (*Chordeiles virginianus hesperis*) of the season was noted. Later in the day a nest of the Williamson Sapsucker and one of the Sierra Red-breasted Sapsucker, both with completed sets of five eggs, were duly chronicled. The latter birds were quiet in their nesting precincts, compared to the noisy Williamson.

On June 4, I came upon a Belted Kingfisher apparently engaged in nest-burrowing in a sand bank along the lake shore. Revisiting the spot some days later, this burrow proved to be but a decoy, for the occupied one, partly concealed by overhanging pine roots close by, now held small young.

Messrs. Henry W. Carriger and Chase Littlejohn arrived at 1:30 P. M. on June 4, and with characteristic energy Carriger, a few hours later, had us all afield. The first find of the triumvirate was a nesting hole of the American Sparrow Hawk (*Falco sparverius sparverius*) in a tall dead pine, but no one cared to make the climb. The one nest found of importance was by Carriger—a Pigmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea pygmaea*) in a narrow slit-like cavity seven and one-half feet up in an old pine stump, with eight fresh eggs. Littlejohn collected the female parent which contained, unfortunately, an additional egg with the shell not yet hardened, thus marring a set of very fine specimens.

On June 5, the entire day was spent afield. We rose early, as Carriger had a way of making life miserable for anyone abed once daylight streaked the east, or even when said streaking was still a matter of question. The first finds were by the writer, among which were a nest of the Mountain Chickadee with six fresh eggs, and one of the Williamson Sapsucker with a like complement. Most noteworthy, however, was a nest of the Pigmy Nuthatch which I located thirty feet up almost at the very top of a dead limbless pine stump, which required considerable work to reach, and then only with the aid of all hands and two long and rather unwilling ladders, borrowed at a nearby lake resort, and nailed together. Both the dead tree and the ladder creaked and rocked far too much for my liking as I went cautiously upward, and my investigation was hastily and anxiously made. The sitting bird was flushed from the nest, which was built in a narrow slit-like crevice, excavated by the birds, and lined with wool, cottony substances, snake skin and feathers. It held seven eggs slightly incubated. Carriger located two nests of the Williamson Sapsucker, one with small young, and the other with six slightly incubated eggs; while Littlejohn noted two incomplete sets of the Red-shafted Flicker, one with five eggs, and the other with but one. He also collected a male Green-tailed Towhee (*Oreospiza chlorura*) which dissection showed was about to breed. Easily the most important record, however, was made along the Little Truckee River, where we saw, flying at a height of 100 feet

or more, four birds whose call, form and flight none of us could identify. That they were new for the Lake Valley check-list we all felt sure. Littlejohn, with a really remarkable shot, succeeded in bringing down one of the birds, which proved to be a Pinyon Jay (*Cyanocephalus cyanocephalus*), the first we had ever seen in the field.

In meadow land on June 6, we noted the Wilson Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*). This is the second time I have seen this bird in the region, and it is not unlikely that it will be found nesting here. A long day afield yielded no collectable specimens, except a nest of the Audubon Warbler, found by Carriger, with five well incubated eggs, all the others being of the more common species which already had full representation in our cabinets.



Fig. 7. HENRY W. CARRIGER CHOPPING OUT A NEWLY DRILLED NEST-CAVITY OF THE WILLIAMSON SAPSUCKER; FORNI'S, 8000 FEET, NEAR PYRAMID PEAK, ELDERADO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, JUNE 12.

On June 7, although we invaded new territory, what we found was a repetition of previous outings: nests of the Audubon Warbler, Red-shafted Flicker, Sierra Red-breasted Sapsucker and Williamson Sapsucker. The typical nest of the latter here is in a trunk of sound wood outwardly, but soft in the interior. In one place some of the trees had been used for years and contained many entrances to former nests and many blind holes. I do not believe the latter are excavated for use as decoy cavities, but believe that they are rather the result of the birds finding the wood too sound for easy penetration.

June 8 was full of surprises. The first of these came when I found a nest of the Calliope Hummingbird. This held one fresh egg, and was seven feet up on

a lodgepole pine limb that slanted downward. Dissection showed the parent would not have laid a second egg for a considerable time. The egg is large for the size of the bird, it being but little smaller than an egg of the Anna Hummingbird. This is the first nest I have found of these tiny midgets, which seem especially diminutive among the great forest trees that characterize their home. Later, Carriger and I came upon a nest of the Slender-billed Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis aculeatea*) fifteen feet up in a natural crotch-cavity between two great twin Jeffrey pines that branched out from a single trunk. The nest was not only notable in that it was one of the very few that I have found of this species in the region, but also in that an immense colony of black ants which was continually journeying up and down the trunk past the nest did not molest the small unfeathered young which lay in open view a few inches farther in. Equally interesting was discovery by Littlejohn of a nest of the Thick-billed Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca megarhyncha*) in buck brush two feet up. The nest, made almost entirely of bark-strips and rootlets, was collected with its three fresh eggs and one of the parents.

We made a long journey by boat on June 9 through the Rowland's Marsh. While going through the tules I called attention to what, some distance off, appeared to be a bird upon a floating nest. My companions laughed, and Carriger said it would no doubt prove to be but a stick amid drift wood. As we came nearer we were all amazed to behold an American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) with outspread wings and upright bill. Surely we had left our camera in camp at a very inopportune time. The bittern taking flight disclosed five eggs (fairly well incubated) lying upon the floating nest of cut tules. Owing to the backward growth of the marsh vegetation, the nest was in open view; later, however, it would have been difficult to locate. We also found three nests of the Canada Goose as previously related (CONDOR, *loc. cit.*). A nest of the Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) was also found on a sand spit by Carriger with nine eggs in an advanced state of incubation.

Next morning, June 10, we left afoot for the Pyramid Peak region. En route I noticed a Parkman Wren (*Troglodytes aedon parkmani*) engaged in nest building in an old barn along the road, while at the upper end of Lake Valley, Carriger and Littlejohn engaged in wild pursuit of a bird which they declared must be entitled to a new number on the California check-list. After a spirited chase, the specimen was secured and proved to be but a partial albino Thick-billed Sparrow.

At Meyer's Station, in looking into some nests of the Cliff Swallow in a shed over the stock-scales, while Carriger jokingly derided me for showing a backward tendency toward the collecting tactics of more youthful days, I made a most unusual discovery. In one of the nests which was in no wise peculiar I found two eggs, fresh and of a crystalline whiteness, unmarked and considerably larger than eggs of this swallow usually are. Greatly interested, I awaited the return of the birds, which proved to be Cliff Swallows, and although but a partial set, I decided to take the specimens as we were about to leave on a trip of undetermined length. On June 14, on our way back, I found the birds had rebuilt that portion of the entrance which I had torn away and deposited another egg of glossy whiteness. By another trip to this site on June 21, I secured a fourth similar egg, slightly incubated, thus completing one of the most unusual sets of eggs of the Cliff Swallow of which I have knowledge. Except for their very glossy shells and for being slightly longer and more narrow, they closely re-

semble the set of eggs I have of the Gray-crowned Rosy Finch. The specimens easily equal in glossiness any eggs in my series of the Modoc Woodpecker or Williamson Sapsucker, and measure in inches as follows: .95x.63, .83x.60, .95x.64, .97x.60 (Davie gives average size of eggs of the Cliff Swallow as .82x.56).

At dusk we reached Phillips' Station, where much of the country was still covered by deep snow, and next evening, June 11, we made Forni's at the base of Pyramid Peak. Here too the whole region lay under deep snow. In some places the drifts were of such depth that the bare willows and other small trees were almost completely buried. Carriger located a nest of the Mountain Chickadee near Phillips' with seven (well spotted) eggs, another near Forni's with eight, and still another near our cabin the day following with six; all three sets

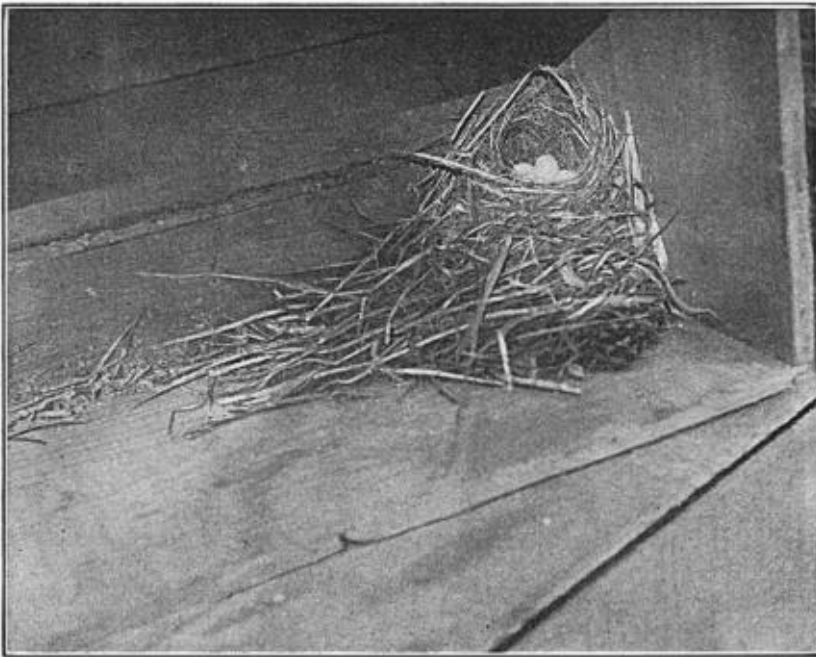


Fig. 8. NEST OF SIERRA JUNCO, AT PHILLIPS', IN THE SIERRAS OF ELDOORADO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, PLACED IN ABSOLUTELY OPEN VIEW IN THE CORNER OF AN EMPTY BOX. THIS SITE MAY HAVE BEEN SELECTED ON ACCOUNT OF THE DEEP SNOW WHICH AT THIS DATE (JUNE 13) COVERED THE GROUND ALL ABOUT.

were fresh. He also found eight feet up among strips of the bark of a fir, a nest of the Sierra Creeper (*Certhia familiaris zelotes*), made of fine twigs, soft grayish bark fibers, moss and soft bits of wood, and containing two fresh eggs. Later he excavated a dwelling of the Williamson Sapsucker, shown in the illustration (fig. 7), which proved but newly drilled. The only other nest found was by the writer, a freshly built one of the Blue-fronted Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri frontalis*). Littlejohn closed the day's work by bowling over a lone coyote in the snow.

One June 13, on the way back to Phillips', Littlejohn noted for a second time the Tolmie Warbler (*Oporornis tolmiei*), and at Phillips' Carriger and I came upon a nest of the Sierra Junco (*Junco oreganus thurberi*) that would have gladdened the heart of a novice. Close to the hotel the birds had built in

absolutely open view, in the corner of an empty box which rested on another. The nest held four fresh eggs and appears in the photograph herewith reproduced (fig. 8).

While en route, and on and after our return to Bijou, we continued finding numerous nests, but these, with a few exceptions, were of those species already recorded. Of more than average interest were four nests of the Western Ruby-crowned Kinglet, two of which, found by the writer on June 14 and 15, held seven and eight fresh eggs, respectively, while the other two, discovered by Carriger, each held eight eggs slightly incubated. Anyone who has not searched for these diminutive bird homes in the thick Sierran woodland must not think, however, they are as easy to locate in the forest as would appear from our unusual success during these days.



Fig. 9. NEST OF WRIGHT FLYCATCHER, WITH BIRD SITTING, NEAR TOP OF YOUNG JEFFREY PINE; NEAR LAKE TAHOE, JUNE 23.

At Rowland's Marsh, on the edge of a sand-spit, I found a nest of the Pintail (*Dafila acuta*) on June 16, made of grasses and a few feathers and holding six slightly incubated eggs, and also shot an immature Bonaparte Gull (*Larus philadelphia*), new for the region, which Littlejohn identified.

My companions left on June 17, and I continued field work alone. On June 19, southeast of Bijou, I flushed a Thick-billed Sparrow from its nest in some thick buck-brush. The nest was made of twigs and bark strips and lined with fine grasses, and contained three eggs in which incubation was well begun. On June 21, not far from this nest, I discovered one of the Green-tailed Towhee in a similar situation, made of twigs and bark strips, lined with fine rootlets, and holding four fresh eggs. The sitting bird flushed, or rather slid off of the nest, in a most unobtrusive fashion, without stirring branch or leaf, and at once disap-

peared. All three of us had spent many a long hour endeavoring to locate a nest of this species, which is not especially abundant here, and I was much gratified in finding this, our first one. The call note of this bird is very similar to that of the Sacramento Towhee, which it replaces in these altitudes.

On June 23 I collected my first nest of the Wright Flycatcher (*Empidonax wrighti*) with a set of four fresh eggs. I had located this nest previously on June 19, when it held a single egg. It was twelve feet up in a small Jeffrey pine (see fig. 9), against the trunk, and was made of grasses, grayish fibres and webs, and lined with rootlets, grasses and feathers. The female parent was taken with the set and is now number 19112 in the University of California Museum of Vertebrate Zoology.

On June 24 a nest of the American Water Ouzel was noted with three fresh eggs, and a Pacific Nighthawk's with a set of two, slightly incubated.

The day following, my last afield, I climbed to a nest of the Cassin Purple Finch twenty-five feet up in a lodgepole pine, but found it to hold but two fresh eggs, although young of the year were now abundant. The day and trip fittingly closed with the finding of five eggs in a dainty little nest of the Western Ruby-crowned Kinglet, cleverly tucked away, almost out of sight, although but twelve feet up in a lodgepole pine.

San Francisco, December 2, 1917.

THE SCARLET IBIS IN TEXAS*

By R. A. SELL

WITH ONE PHOTO

THE EXACT status of the Scarlet Ibis (*Guara rubra*) in the avifauna of the Texas coast region has been a subject of speculation and good-natured controversy for at least twenty years. Much of this discussion has been among sportsmen, real estate agents, summer and winter resort boosters, and railway agents. While no data should be considered that does not emanate from a reliable source, it is about as easy to believe some noisy sportsman when he says that he has seen a Scarlet Ibis, as it is to believe a quasi-ornithologist who asserts that "the Scarlet Ibis is never to be seen on the Gulf Coast." Especially is this so when the former presents a mounted specimen and gives a vivid description of the circumstances under which he killed his bird.

Positive evidence is based upon something tangible. This may be a guess,

*The writing of this article was stimulated by the comments of the Editor of *The Auk* (vol. xxxiv, pp. 360,373) in which he conjectured that the informal reference in a preceding CONDOR article (vol. xix, pp. 43-46) to an occurrence of the Scarlet Ibis in Texas was made without the realization by either the author of that article or by the editor of THE CONDOR that the species had not been previously authenticated as belonging to the avifauna of Texas. The Editor of *The Auk* was correct in his surmise, and all his remarks were quite to the point. Never-the-less it is a satisfaction all around now to be able to present the subject of the occurrence of the Scarlet Ibis in Texas in rather full detail, thanks to the industry of Mr. Sell. We would suggest that the *Auk* Editor might himself have been a bit more critical, in the case of the Colorado record of the "Harpy Eagle"!—EDITORS.