

BRYANT MARSH SPARROW UPON THE HILLS

By JOSEPH MAILLIARD and JOHN W. MAILLIARD

WITH TWO PHOTOS

DUE probably to the lack of evidence to the contrary the breeding grounds of the Bryant Marsh Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis bryanti*) have been generally assumed to be confined to salt marshes and their immediate vicinity, within a few feet of sea level. Of late years, however, reports have been coming in of sparrows of apparently this form that were found at elevations. An article drawing attention to this appeared among the notes "From Field and Study" in *THE CONDOR* for March, 1917 (vol. xix, p. 69), in which the hope was expressed that the matter would be taken up by bird students and thoroughly investigated.

On account of this limitation of breeding ground a set of eggs taken by Chas. A. Allen on Black's Mountain, Marin County, California, on April 29, 1877, and identified by him at the time as that of the Western Savannah Sparrow

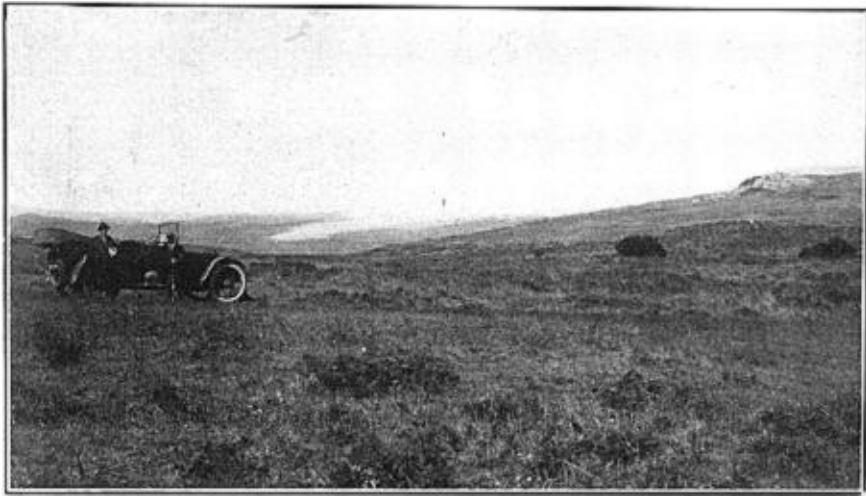


Fig. 11. SPRINGY SPOT, 400 FEET ELEVATION, ON TOMALES POINT, MARIN COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, WHERE THE BRYANT MARSH SPARROW WAS TAKEN IN THE BREEDING SEASON.

(*Passerculus sandwichensis alaudinus*) by the capture of the male parent, which he regarded as being of that form, was allowed to remain for many years without special investigation. Unfortunately Mr. Allen disposed elsewhere of the parent bird and it has not as yet been located, in spite of the request for information concerning it contained in the article above referred to; so that this record has always been considered unique, though unsatisfactory. The probable clearing up of this matter, as outlined below, has proved most gratifying.

On May 31, 1917, while on our way back from a trip to Tomales Point, which forms the southerly side of Tomales Bay, Marin County, California, and while still on the backbone of the ridge which tapers off into the point, several

Passerculus were seen by our party and five captured. These appear to be inseparable from *Passerculus sandwichensis bryanti*.

No further investigations were made by us until May 12, 1919, when a special trip was made to the same ridge, where many of these sparrows again were noted. Sixteen specimens were taken, all of them being identified as *bryanti*. Among these, three females proved to be either laying or about to lay, while one young male was scarcely more than a fledgling. Although no actual nests

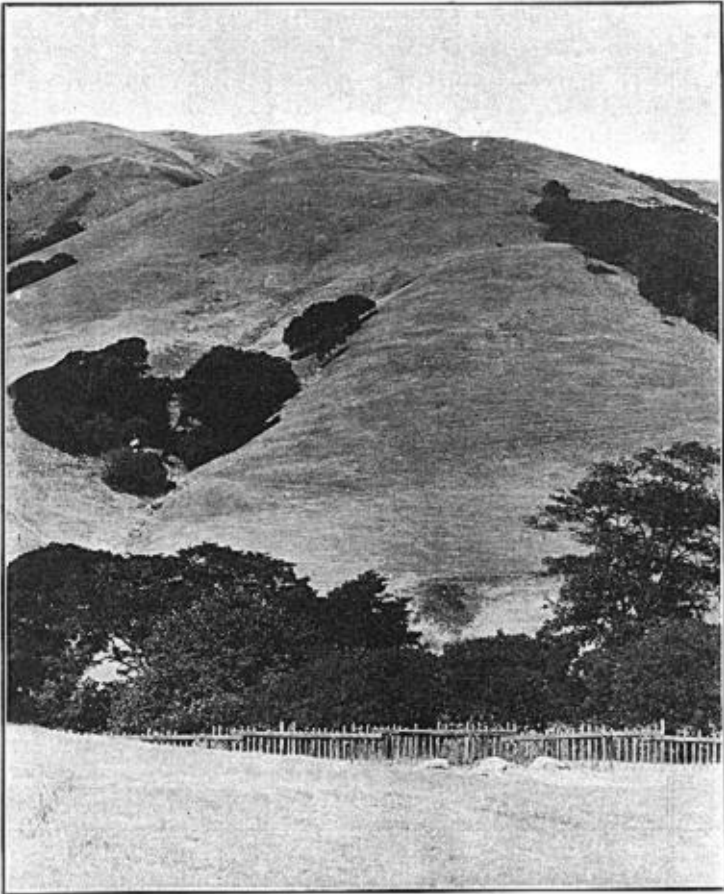


Fig. 12. BLACK'S MOUNTAIN, MARIN COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, ON WHICH THE NEST WAS TAKEN BY C. A. ALLEN, AND ON TOP OF WHICH LITTLE TOOK A BRYANT MARSH SPARROW ON AUGUST 9, 1919.

were discovered, such evidences of breeding in that locality seem practically beyond dispute.

On August 23, 1919, we again visited the ridge and many *Passerculus* were noted, the twenty-four specimens taken, including six juveniles, being identified as *bryanti*, as in the former cases.

This ridge runs parallel to, and the entire length of, Tomales Bay, from the shores of which it rather abruptly rises, in places to an elevation of 500 or

600 feet, terminating in Tomales Point, which forms the headland next above the well known Point Reyes. Except at the very head of Tomales Bay there is little or no marsh land at sea level, the water coming in close to the bluffs. At the commencement of this ridge an interesting growth of Bishop pine (*Pinus muricata*), under which grows salal (*Gaultheria shallon*) in great abundance, gives way to open tops as a rule, the canyons on either side being wooded, brushy, or both.

The open ground on the top is in places given over to patches of brush, and some large areas are covered by the yellow lupine which, at the height of blossoming, gives great charm to the landscape. Springs of water exist here and there, and in one of the areas where most of the sparrows were found there is quite a "cienaga", or marshy spot, even well into the summer. The accompanying photograph is intended to show the type of country in which this sparrow not only thrives, but apparently breeds. The estimated elevation of the locality shown in the photograph is about 400 feet, and the distance from the nearest salt marsh five miles.

On August 9, 1919, the ascent of Black's Mountain was made, and the presence of *Passerculus* established there, even on the summit. The only specimen actually secured was taken by Luther Little, at the time assistant curator of the Department of Ornithology in the California Academy of Sciences, and proved to be identical with the Tomales Point birds, as far as its worn plumage would allow us to judge. As this date presumably was too early in the season for the appearance of migrants it seems fair to conclude that this specimen is of the same form as that taken by Allen as parent of the nest above alluded to.

The photograph reproduced herewith will show the character of Black's Mountain, the altitude of which, by aneroid, is 1140 feet. Its distance from the salt marsh at Tomales Bay is about four miles.

We have carefully compared the specimens taken on these several occasions with many examples of the Bryant Marsh Sparrow from elsewhere, but can find no material differences. Special care has been taken with the measurements of these specimens, as well as with the many others examined from the San Francisco Bay, Santa Cruz and Humboldt Bay regions known to be *bryanti*. The measurements of the Tomales Point birds easily fall within the extremes of the groups from these other localities, and the averages are too close to amount to anything. The latter groups show some slight differences in their averages, as might be expected from the small numbers measured—from four to ten being arranged in each group according to sex, date and locality—but not enough to be taken into consideration.

In color and shading the individuals in each group differ among themselves to quite an extent, and vary a good deal with the time of year; but the specimens from Tomales Point cannot be distinguished, as far as we are able to determine, by any of these characteristics, from those from the other regions mentioned and which have been positively identified as *bryanti*. The only possible exception is in the case of three immature females from Santa Cruz, California, taken on September 3 and 4, which are rather deeper and more of a sort of reddish brown in shade than any of the Tomales Point birds, but they differ in this same way from any of our other examples as well, so it seems to be more a difference associated with stage of immaturity than anything else. Our latest Tomales Point birds were taken on August 23, but seemed older than

these September youngsters; the younger they are the deeper seems to be their shading.

During the season of 1920 we hope to be able to locate some nests of this species both on Tomales Point and Black's Mountain, and the readers of THE CONDOR may rest assured that they will be duly advised through its columns if success crowns our efforts.

San Francisco, February 2, 1920.

A RETURN TO THE DAKOTA LAKE REGION

By FLORENCE MERRIAM BAILEY

(Continued from page 26)

IN THE SHELTER OF ISLAND LAKE

THE GEM of the Sweetwaters, to which the beautiful water fowl have learned to gather from far and near to raise their young, offers a rare opportunity for an ideal State Bird Refuge; but now, at the opening of the hunting season, from being a secure retreat where the birds are sure of peace and plenty, the lake becomes a center of bombardment, its hunting lodge opening on the most protected corner, where families were wont to gather on sunny afternoons to feed and rest. No wonder, then, that the good friend who first took me to the lake, an ardent bird lover who had long been working to protect the birds of the state, should suggest that, unable to prevent the desecration of this natural sanctuary, we should make a trip to the protected shores of Island Lake, near the Turtle Mountains, at the beginning of the open season.

As she told me, a Chicago man who had retained his boyish interest in the birds of the region, had bought fifty feet of shore line on a lake two miles long. Two years after he had completed his purchase, unfortunately, the lake had gone dry, and for five or six years grain and hay had been raised on the bottom; but this year, although seeded to barley, the lake was full of water, large numbers of Ducks were already there, and with the northern flight it was expected that, as in former years, one would see "more birds than water".

Although we could not stay to see the northern flight, the day before the hunting season opened we started on what proved a three day's automobile trip from Sweetwater Lake across the prairies to the Turtle Mountains and then back to Island Lake. After spending the summer on foot on the prairies it was exhilarating and mentally enlarging to go, map in hand, bowling rapidly along over the level miles, telling off town after town—Webster, Garski, Stark-weather, Cando, and Zion (a Dunkard settlement)—their relative importance shown by their grain elevators, some of which were filled from farms of two or three thousand acres; to send the Sparrows flying from the narrow strips of prairie flowers between the road and the harvest fields, strips whose purple asters and wild sunflowers made bands of purple and gold; to look off on small lakes blue as the sky, wavered over by white-breasted Gulls; and to look far