

NOTES ON SOME SPECIMENS IN THE ORNITHOLOGICAL
COLLECTION OF THE CALIFORNIA
ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

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AMONG the specimens in the research collection of the Department of Ornithology of the California Academy of Sciences are some of especial interest either by reason of their rare occurrence in this state (California), the particular locality in which they were taken, the date of capture, or on account of their exhibiting some unusual characteristics. The recent publication from the University of California Press, entitled "The Game Birds of California", by Messrs. Grinnell, Bryant and Storer—a splendid contribution to California ornithology in its particular line, and most painstakingly up-to-date at the time work was stopped upon it—is the criterion by which the value of many of these records has been determined. Although the existence of much of this record material in the Academy's collection was known to these authors, they did not, at the time they were working upon this book, consider it as being available to them. The following records, then, seem to be of sufficient value to be worthy of note.

Mergus serrator Linnaeus. Red-breasted Merganser. While this species is a common winter visitant along the sea coast of California it has been but seldom recorded from the interior of the state. The Academy collection contains one such specimen, a male, taken near Merced, Merced County, California, on January 10, 1878.

Lophodytes cucullatus (Linnaeus). Hooded Merganser. This species of merganser was formerly frequently seen in California, occurring as a fall and winter, or even spring, visitant in small numbers on various marshes, small streams, and ponds in many localities, though probably rarely or never in numbers. In recent years it has become scarce and is seldom reported. Its peculiar appearance has led hunters to shoot it on every occasion, which is a way with the gunning fraternity, "just to see what it looks like." Its flesh is also fairly good eating, so that this species is in line for extinction along with many others, unless carefully guarded. There are two specimens in the Academy collection, a male taken near Los Baños, Merced County, January 4, 1909, and a female from Lakeport, March 12, 1908.

Anas platyrhynchos Linnaeus. Mallard. The collection contains a fine series of this species, in many plumages, but the only one to be specially noted here is a partially albino female, taken near Los Baños, Merced County, on September 1, 1908.

Anas, sp? No. 12581, C. A. S. collection, is a female duck taken near Los Baños, Merced County, California, October 7, 1908, which is labelled *Anas fulvigula*, and so catalogued. The specimen, however, does not entirely conform to the description of that species, although approaching it to a considerable degree. This specimen may be described as follows:

Top of head in color like that of female *platyrhynchos*, but the feathers are rounded and dusky with edges narrowly buffy, the buff making a sort of fine crescent on each feather and creating a scaled appearance, whereas in *platyrhynchos* the feathers of the head are long and narrow with the nearly black centers in strong contrast to the broadly marked buff edgings, giving an appearance of dark, longitudinal streaking, with the buff quite prominent. Malar region buffy and whitish, with narrow dark brown or dusky streak, as in *platyrhynchos*. Throat and chin buffy white, lightest on throat, some of the feathers being buffy with distinctly whitish tips. Lower down on the throat, and corresponding to the position of the white neck ring of the male *platyrhynchos*, is a patch of white, about 15 mm. in width, extending approximately half way around on

each side of the neck, making a kind of semicircle that is somewhat broken by the intrusion of light buffy feathers. Breast a tawny brown, as deep as that of a female *platyrhynchos* in July plumage but with the dusky centers of the feathers much more restricted, paler, and showing much less contrast with the brown edgings.

The abdomen and sides correspond more nearly to those of the Mottled Duck (*Anas fulvigula maculosa*), there being considerable lighter tipping to the already light brown feathers, which all have, however, the blackish brown spot near the tip. This lighter brown, almost white, tipping is not at all regular although all the feathers seem to be of the same molt—that is, they are new feathers—giving the abdomen a slightly mottled appearance other than that caused by the blackish-brown spotting. The back is much like that of the Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*), with a distinctly purplish tinge to the larger feathers of the posterior portion and also to the scapulars. The speculum is *bluish green*, with a white border formed by the narrow white tips of four or five of the greater wing coverts, except for the bluish cast corresponding to that of *fulvigula*. The upper tail coverts are brownish black, with tawny tips, while the under coverts are dusky, with narrow, whitish-buff tipping. The four middle tail feathers are blackish brown and the remainder lighter colored, with pale buff edgings. The lining of the wings is mostly white.

Both bill and feet are so darkened by age and drying that the finer distinctions of color are not sufficiently discernible to be of much value in the determination of this specimen. Its general appearance and markings show it to be closely related to the Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), while its peculiarities connect it with either the Florida Duck (*Anas fulvigula fulvigula*), or the Mottled Duck (*Anas fulvigula maculosa*). The green speculum with whitish border looks very much like that of *fulvigula*, but in the spotting and mottling on the abdomen there seems to be shown resemblance to *maculosa*, although it is possible that this latter characteristic in this specimen may be merely individual and not inherent. It might not show this spotting and mottling in a different state of plumage, or later in the season.

The measurements of this specimen are as follows: Total length (taken in the flesh), 26.0 inches (660.4 millimeters); extent 38.5 in. (976.9 mm.); wing 11 in. (279.4 mm.); tail 4.7 in. (118.6 mm.); exposed culmen 2.15 in. (54.6 mm.); depth of bill at base .88 in. (22.5 mm.); greatest width of upper mandible .92 in. (23.3 mm.); tarsus 2.26 in. (57.6 mm.); middle toe, without claw, 2.26 in. (57.5 mm.).

Mareca penelope (Linnaeus). European Widgeon. The Academy collection contains a male of this species taken near Los Baños, Merced County, on December 5, 1908, by R. H. Beck. The European Widgeon has been taken occasionally in this state in years gone by, according to reports, but is becoming more and more rare as time goes on. There are very few California specimens in collections, but there are probably some mounted birds in private hands throughout the country. This bird is commonly mistaken for a cross between the Baldpate and some other species, the Cinnamon Teal being usually the accredited party of the second part.

This specimen in the California Academy of Sciences is in nearly full winter plumage, but still retains a few feathers that are remnants of either the post-nuptial or juvenal plumage. It differs from the description given in Ridgway's Manual of North American Birds, p. 95, as follows: There is a complete circle around the head, including forehead, lores and chin, contiguous to the base of the bill and extending posteriorly for about 15 mm., that is of a pale rusty coloration, spotted with dusky, and distinctly noticeable. Such a marking as this is not mentioned by any authority I have as yet seen, and may be only an individual variation. The measurements of this specimen are: Wing, 263 mm.; tail, 95 mm.; exposed culmen, 32.4 mm.; depth of bill, 18.0 mm.; width of bill, 15.5 mm.; distance from nostril to tip of bill, 24.4 mm.; distance from nostril to lores, 8.9 mm.; tarsus, 36.4 mm.; middle toe, without claw, 38.2 mm.

Marila marila (Linnaeus). Scaup Duck. This species is an irregular yet not uncommon winter visitant to California, but it occurs almost altogether along the coast. The Academy collection contains, however, one specimen recorded from the interior, a male taken near Los Baños, Merced County on January 25, 1909, and two others which are rather late seasonal records, having been taken in Alameda County on May 20, 1903.

The measurements (in millimeters) of these three specimens are as follows:

C. A. S. No.		Locality	Date	Wing	Tail	Exposed culmen	Depth upper mandible	Width upper mandible	Tarsus	Middle toe
13178	♂	Merced Co.	Jan. 25, 1909	212.1	59.2	44.9	19.8	25.4	38.6	57.9
11754	♀	Alameda Co.	May 20, 1908	badly worn	58.4	43.2	19.3	25.1	43.2	58.9
11755	♀	Alameda Co.	May 20, 1908	204.5	55.9	40.1	17.8	23.9	38.1	56.4

Marila collaris (Donovan). Ring-necked Duck. This is another rather rare species in this state, being seldom recorded nowadays, of which there are several specimens in the Academy collection, two males and six females, all taken near Los Baños, Merced County, in the months of October and November, 1908, and January, 1909.

Harelda hyemalis (Linnaeus). Old-squaw. A male in the collection was taken on December 13, 1911, near San Rafael, Marin County, California, a rather unusual place to find this species.

Grus canadensis (Linnaeus). Little Brown Crane. While this species seems to be much the more common of the two representatives of this genus in the state, both of which appear to be losing ground though protected by law, there are but few California specimens to be found in collections. Hence the Academy is fortunate in having ten specimens of *canadensis*, all of which were taken in Merced County. Those labelled only "Merced Co." were all taken by R. H. Beck, who had his headquarters at Los Baños in that county, and the presumption is that they were all obtained in that vicinity. On account of the scarcity of available specimens from California the measurements of the ten are given herewith.

C. A. S. No.		Locality	Date	Wing	Exposed culmen	Depth of bill at base	Tarsus	Bare portion tibia	Middle toe with claw
13213	♂	Merced Co.	Mar. 23, 1909	479	94.0	22.1	184.0	72.1	71.1
13211	♂	Merced Co.	Mar. 23, 1909	504	101.6	26.4	218.4	75.2	72.6
13212	♂	Merced Co.	Febr. 18, 1909	495	113.8	27.2	213.4	71.4	66.0
13214	♂	Merced Co.	Febr. 18, 1909	463	95.5	24.9	180.0	69.6	58.4
13661	♂	Merced Co.	Apr. 26, 1909	476	98.2	26.6	196.0	71.6	66.3
13215	♀	Merced Co.	Mar. 23, 1909	475	98.5	23.1	192.0	66.5	61.5
13216	♀	Merced Co.	Feb. 22, 1909	480	92.9	22.4	191.0	65.2	72.6
13217	♀	Merced Co.	Feb. 18, 1909	444	91.2	25.4	186.0	65.4	58.9
22443	♂	Los Baños	Oct. 3, 1897	458	97.8	24.4	194.1	74.2	66.7
22444	♀	Los Baños	Oct. 3, 1897	474	95.4	21.8	212.2	66.5	70.9

There are also three specimens of *canadensis* from Alaska in the collection, none of the measurements of which exceed the above.

Grus mexicana (Müller). Sandhill Crane. At the present time this species is rarely met with in California and specimens from this state are also scarce in collections. In fact so scarce are they that the authors of "The Game Birds of California" (Messrs. Grinnell, Bryant and Storer) found only four skins, outside of the Academy of Sciences, for measurements and comparison. Since the date of publication of that work these have been added to the Academy collection, making eight specimens therein

from this state. The measurements of these are given herewith.

C. A. S. No.		Locality	Date	Wing	Exposed culmen	Depth of bill at base	Tarsus	Bare portion tibia	Middle toe with claw
13207	♂	Merced Co.	Feb. 27, 1909	564	138	29.4	254	104	84
13208	♂	Merced Co.	Feb. 27, 1909	550	158	29.2	243	100	89
13209	♂	Merced Co.	Feb. 27, 1909	555	150	32.0	232	87
13210	♂	Merced Co.	Feb. 27, 1909	502	135	28.7	244	95	87
22438	♀	Merced Co.	Jan. 20, 1898	524	153	35.1	240	83
22439	♂	Merced Co.	Jan. 20, 1898	543	140	40.1	231	105	88
22440	♂	Merced Co.	Jan. 20, 1898	545	170	33.6	245	102	90
22441	♂	Merced Co.	Jan. 20, 1898	543	145	33.3	243	110	90

The first four of these were taken by R. H. Beck, while he was stationed at Los Baños, Merced County, and the last four were bought in the flesh in a San Francisco market, the seller stating that they came from near Los Baños. The measurement of the bare portion of the tibia is omitted in two specimens of *mexicana* for the reason that the bone seems to have been pushed up into the skin in each case in such manner as to make the measurement misleading.

In *The Auk*, vol. xxxv, 1918, p. 204, among the proposed changes in the American Ornithologists' Union *Check-List* is that set forth by Dr. L. Brasil (Brasil, *Genera Avium*, xix, 1913, p. 4) to make *Grus mexicana* a subspecies of *G. canadensis*, but no reasons are given in either place cited for this change in status. While we have no large series of these two species in the Academy we are at least fortunate in having in the collection some fifteen specimens of *G. canadensis* and eight of *G. mexicana*, a large enough number from which to make fairly reasonable averages of measurements. Brasil states that in *G. canadensis* the tarsus is always less than 220 mm. and in *G. mexicana* always more than 250 mm., and gives these measurements as the distinction between the two forms; yet, as they do not overlap, no intergradation is shown.

While none of the examples of *canadensis* in the Academy, nor a number in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, reach the 220 mm. maximum of Brasil, several of the *mexicana* come under his minimum of 250 mm. for that species, even going as low as 231 mm. As the matter now stands it seems as if further evidence would be necessary to make a convincing case of such intergradation and few of us will accept the conclusion reached by Brasil until more and clearer evidence is placed before us.

Steganopus tricolor Vieillot. Wilson Phalarope. This phalarope is known to breed in favorable localities in northern and northeastern California from the Lake Tahoe region north, and occurs during the spring and fall migrations in other places, mostly inland. It has been casually reported as breeding at Los Baños, Merced County, but has never been actually recorded as doing so. There is, however, a nest in the Academy collection that was taken in the vicinity of Los Baños, Merced County, by R. H. Beck, on June 22, 1908, and contains four eggs with incubation noted as "advanced". The identity given is "♂ shot". While there is nothing on the label denoting that this is the parent of this set, no. 13471, C. A. S., is a male bird taken on that date in that locality, and the only one taken on that day. So it is fair to assume that it is the parent. On the data blank of this set, after a description of the nesting site, are the following words: "3 or 4 pairs probably nesting, tho found no young later on." In 1907 and 1910 Mr. Beck took specimens in June and July at or near Los Baños, so it would seem as if this species bred there regularly.

Macrorhamphus griseus scolopaceus (Say). Long-billed Dowitcher. While this species is a common spring and fall migrant through California along the coast and in the valleys west of the Sierras, there are in the collection several specimens from Alameda County, taken between April 4 and May 30, and between July 9 and 20. The former are unusually late spring records and the latter interesting as being taken actually in the summer season.

Tringa canutus Linnaeus. Knot. The latest date of occurrence of this comparatively rare migrant during the spring migration in this state that has been recorded is May 10, as given in "The Game Birds of California". There are, however, in the Academy collection a number of specimens of adults of this species taken in Alameda County, supposedly on the San Francisco Bay shore, between May 10 and 24, a male and two females having been taken on the latter date. The plumages of these specimens are in all stages between winter and breeding.

Pisobia maculata (Vieillot). Pectoral Sandpiper. There are very few records for California of this species and the two males taken by R. H. Beck near Los Baños, Merced County, on September 15 and 18, 1908, and a female from Point Sur, Monterey County, taken by E. W. Gifford on September 9, 1911, add materially to the meager list of occurrences.

Ereunetes mauri Cabanis. Western Sandpiper. This species is an abundant spring and fall migrant along our coast and to a certain extent in the interior as well, wintering from San Francisco Bay southward. The return movement from its northern breeding grounds has been usually recorded as reaching the latitude of San Francisco toward the end of July, but there are many specimens of both sexes in the Academy collection taken as early as July 13 to 15, all adults from Alameda County, and four males from Monterey taken July 16. Incidentally there are numerous juveniles taken in August.

Totanus flavipes (Gmelin). Lesser Yellow-legs. The Academy is singularly fortunate in having seven specimens of this bird of California take, as there are but nine other occurrences recorded within the state's borders. Of the seven, one male and one female were taken on September 21, two males and two females on October 6, 1908, near Los Baños, Merced County, and one male on August 19, 1907, on Monterey Bay. As this species can only be distinguished from its close relative, the Greater Yellow-legs, by its smaller size, and as both species are wary and difficult to approach sufficiently close to admit of positive identification, the Lesser Yellow-legs may have occasionally been mistaken for the commoner form. It is probably not as rare a migrant in this state as absence of records would imply, and a systematic and continued search for it in proper localities would in all likelihood develop this fact.

Numenius americanus Bechstein. Long-billed Curlew. In "The Game Birds of California" this species is mentioned as occurring in the San Joaquin Valley throughout the year, but is not recorded as breeding there. The Academy collection contains specimens from Merced County, taken in July and August. The above authority also gives it as migrating southward along the California coast in July, and says that these birds ". . . do not seem to reach inland spots such as the shores of San Francisco Bay until August or September . . ." This statement is rather contradicted by the presence in the collection of a male taken in Alameda County, July 15, 1910, and two females from the marsh at Alviso, Santa Clara County, taken on July 27, 1909.

Aegialitis semipalmata (Bonaparte). Semipalmated Plover. This bird is a very common migrant along the coast of California and there are abundant records. Among the specimens in the Academy collection, however, are several which help to determine the time of arrival in the San Francisco Bay region of the south-bound migrants from their breeding ground in the north. Most of the published records of this species at this period of migration are from southern California, but there are two females in the Academy taken in Alameda County, on July 13, 1909, and several in early August.

Archibuteo lagopus sancti-johannis (Gmelin). American Rough-legged Hawk. There is one specimen of this rare visitant to this state in the collection, this being a male taken near Los Baños, Merced County, on December 1, 1908.

Most of the above records were made by R. H. Beck and E. W. Gifford at times when they were occupied in collecting more or less steadily in one spot, and they clearly prove that protracted observations in suitable localities would result in many additions to our geographic and seasonal records for the state of California.

San Francisco, California, November 27, 1920.