

putting a bough between us. . . . My first impression was that it might be a catbird which had strayed from his rightful home. I crept up . . . and easily approached within twenty feet. It made no note and did not pay the least attention to my maneuvers. When I killed it, I was still more puzzled, for it was totally different from anything I had ever seen. It appeared much like some European thrush." Johnson describes its plumage in detail, then gives a number of points, notably the slighter notching of the bill, in which the specimen differed from the Western Robin. These differences he seemingly thought might have been produced along with the supposed disturbance in the color-producing mechanism, though even after having decided to call the bird a melanistic Robin there seems to have been some doubt in his mind as to the correctness of the identification. The behavior of the bird so far as described above quite agrees with that given for the English Blackbird in its home range.

Had Johnson measured his specimen he would have found that it was quite different from the Western Robin. The measurements are as follows: Total length (dry skin) 240 millimeters; wing 113; tail 99; tarsus 30.3; bill from feathers on forehead 20; from skull 21.8. The wing measurement in particular is well below the minimum for the Western Robin.

What is the probable source of this bird? It seems very unlikely that it was a wild stray, an "accidental" from Europe; so far as I can ascertain, the species has not hitherto been reported anywhere on the American continent. Save for a slight abrasion of the tail feathers, which might be a consequence of its brush-seeking propensities, the specimen does not show anything which would suggest that it was a recently-escaped cage bird.

It so happens that a short time prior to the capture of this bird there was some activity in the importation of European song birds on the Pacific coast. A. W. Anthony (Zoe, II, 1891, pp. 6-11) has referred to a society which was formed at Portland, Oregon, in 1888, for the importation of European song birds. In May, 1889, about five hundred individuals, representing a number of common European species were received and released near Portland. Included in these were sixteen pairs of "black thrushes (*Turdus merula*)."

The latter were reported in the spring of 1890 as among the species which survived, though the evidence for correct identification in this report was not wholly satisfactory according to Anthony. In Europe the Blackbird is migratory. It may be that some of the birds released at Portland migrated south into California and that Johnson secured one of these. The chance of this seems small, though it is not an impossible occurrence. Or, the activities of the Portland society may have inspired some one in the neighborhood of Oakland to import and release European birds. There is no record of this so far as I can find.

In brief, then, a specimen of the English Blackbird, originally reported as a melanistic example of the Western Robin, has been taken in California. This leads me to ask, in closing, has any collector ever taken a melanistic example of the Western Robin?—TRACY I. STOREY, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, California, December 21, 1922.*

Mimicry in Bird Songs.—The article on the Mimetic Aspect of the Mocker's Song by Mr. Donald R. Dickey (Condor, xxiv, pp. 153-157) is of unusual interest. Mr. Dickey evidently assumes that birds in general acquire the ability to sing by inheritance rather than by imitation of parents. Would it not be equally as good a supposition to think that the young mocker he mentions had learned to "imitate" the Sparrow Hawk, Killdeer, and Cactus Wren from hearing its male parent sing these notes? At least, if Mr. Dickey is right, the instance is of more than mere ornithological interest, for it involves the inheritance of acquired characters, the possibility of which some modern evolutionists have denied.

The question brings to mind the imitations by the Starling in the eastern United States. This bird, so recently brought to America, has learned to imitate the notes of many American birds. If such a thing is possible, there would hardly be time for this species to acquire these notes by inheritance. Yet imitations of some species, such as the Wood Pewee, Chickadee, Grackle, Cowbird, and Bluebird are so common, at least in southern Connecticut, that they almost seem to be part of the Starling's own notes.

Mr. Charles A. Upner (Auk, xxxviii, p. 459) has remarked this concerning the Wood Pewee note, and has suggested that the similarity is a coincidence and not an imitation.

Having been acquainted with the Starling in America since 1902, I doubt the coincidence, and believe that the Wood Pewee note originated as an imitation. The first Starlings that I knew at New Haven, Connecticut, between 1902 and 1908 did not, to my knowledge, sing this note. Returning to the region in 1913, after an absence of five years, I found the note commonly used by them.

It is my belief that this Wood Pewee note and other imitations are handed on from parent to offspring not by inheritance, but by imitation of the parent by the offspring. In the days when the number of individual Starlings in America was still small, one or more birds learned from the Wood Pewee its plaintive three-note song *pee-a-wee*. Since then new generations of Starlings have learned this note mainly from their parents, not from the Wood Pewee. The fact that the Starling is increasing in numbers, that a majority of its young live to maturity, has fixed the Wood Pewee note in the Starling's vocabulary so securely that it seems to be one of its own notes and not an imitation.

This seems to be true also, to a lesser extent, with the notes of the Bluebird, Grackle, Chickadee, and Cowbird. All these notes are much commoner with Starlings than are any imitative notes in the songs of the two native imitators of this region, the Catbird and Brown Thrasher. The fact that the Wood Pewee sings two two-note songs also, "pee-ah" and "ah-wee" and that these have not, to my knowledge, been acquired by the Starling seems to point to the correctness of my conclusions, though this might also be taken as evidence that Mr. Upner's suggestion concerning the Wood Pewee note is right.—ARETAS A. SAUNDERS, *Fairfield, Connecticut, December 8, 1922.*

Some Late Occurrences of the Barn Swallow in Southern California.—The tens of thousands of swallows of several species which congregated about Buena Vista Lake, Kern County, California, in the late summer following the breeding season and during the fall migrations in 1922 reached the peak of numbers about the first of October. The species present are named in the order of abundance.

Tree Swallow (*Iridoprocne bicolor*); Barn Swallow (*Hirundo erythrogaster*); Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon lunifrons lunifrons*); Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*); Violet-green Swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina lepida*); and Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*).

After October 1, a daily decrease was noticeable until by the 15th practically everything except Tree Swallows (which winter commonly in the locality) had passed on. Cliff Swallows were seen on October 12 in fair numbers. They had almost disappeared on October 13, and the three that were noted positively on that date were not collected. The Barn Swallows remained a few days longer. About two hundred scattered birds were seen on October 13, and one specimen taken. As late as October 16, three were seen, none of which was secured. They all passed close overhead, but at inconvenient moments when no gun was at hand.

On November 3, 1921, on the marsh at Anaheim Landing, Orange County, California, a trio of Barn Swallows was seen flying south. They passed over at such short range that there could be little chance of a mistake in the identity.—A. J. VAN ROSSEM, *Pasadena, California, December 21, 1922.*

Unusual Shelter of Some Hepburn Leucostictes in Winter.—Mr. Luther J. Goldman, Predatory Animal Inspector, United States Biological Survey, has sent in the following observation from Washington State:

"On January 10, 1918, I observed a flock of Leucostictes fluttering about a cliff overhanging the banks of the Snake River, near Alpowa, southeastern Whitman County, Washington. On closer approach, I found they had taken shelter from the raw wintery wind in the deserted mud nests of a colony of cliff swallows. As I watched them a part of the flock flew to a nearby hillside, fed about for a few minutes and returned to the cliff, and, clinging for a moment to small sharp projections, they one by one dis-