

**Gulls.**—Few common bird groups have kept their family secrets better than have the gulls. Specific divisions and plumage sequences are still debatable. Apparent wide individual variation coupled with a several-year period of immaturity prevents positive allocation of many specimens. But since gulls breed in great colonies, many of them accessible, a splendid opportunity to solve some of these problems awaits banders.

This work has been actively begun by Mr. Theed Pearse, of Courtenay, B. C., who writes under date of July 20, 1923: "Last year I banded just over 100 Glaucous-winged Gull nestlings on Mittenach Island in the Gulf of Georgia, about 100 miles north of Vancouver, B. C. These young birds were all banded on the left leg. I hope to get over there this month, when all young birds will be banded on the right leg, my idea being that, in this way, identification on the wing might be assisted and that, taking into account the plumage, it should be possible to tell at a glance during the next two or three years the age of any banded bird. Next year I shall hope to band on the left leg.

"We have at Mittenach a colony of Gulls that, this year, was estimated at over 1500 pairs and the breeding rocks are easily accessible, so that it is a colony where extensive banding operations could be carried out. Unfortunately the birds suffer very much from egg stealing, Indians and others (and crows). Last year, the number of estimated pairs there was 500 and there were no birds of the year flying, so that the birds banded, with perhaps as many more eggs, represented the total output from this number of pairs."

**Shall We Have Snakes or Birds.**—On July 2, 1923, I killed on suspicion a Gopher Snake (*Pituophis c. catenifer*) four feet long. The birds were making a big fuss over it. Dissection disclosed a House Finch in its gullet and an egg of a Road-runner in its stomach. The House Finch wore band no. 52057 and had been banded as a half-grown nestling on June 23. The snake was killed almost directly under the nest where the bird was raised, but as the nest was under the eaves of a plastered garage, the snake must have caught the bird after it left the nest.

On July 4, a similar fuss led me to a Black Racer (*Coluber lateralis*) which was about seven feet above the ground among the branches of the same tangle that had sheltered the gopher snake. The racer was mouthing a bird, which it had already killed, and which was found to wear band no. 52058. This bird was another baby House Finch from the same nest as no. 52057. The snake had eaten a small lizard prior to catching the bird.

While it seems remarkable that two nestlings from the same nest should be caught by different snakes, and most extraordinary that these two culprits should have been caught red-handed, the incident compels a realization of the menace that the larger snakes are to our bird life.—J. EUGENE LAW, *Altadena, California, July 31, 1923.*

## FROM FIELD AND STUDY

**Further Indictment of the Brewer Blackbird.**—Referring to the notes on Predatory Brewer Blackbirds by Mr. A. W. Anthony in the May-June, 1923, issue of the Condor, will say that several years ago we had similar experiences with this bird at the State Game Farm near Corvallis, Oregon.

When the pheasant eggs were hatched, it was the custom to put the hen mother in a coop out in the field and the baby pheasants were allowed to go in and out and feed in the open. The Brewer Blackbirds (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) developed a taste for young pheasants. They were caught red-handed killing the little game birds. They pecked the eyes out and ate the brains. The rest of the body was untouched. I was very much surprised at the time and couldn't account for this blackbird developing such a taste. At the time the young pheasants were fed on maggots. The blackbirds were also attracted by this food and I took for granted that a blackbird had inten-

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tionally or in an accidental way pecked the pheasant chicks and had discovered that the tender heads were as tasty as maggots.

There were a number of Brewer Blackbirds about the farm, but as near as I could judge the habit was not common in the flock but only in individual blackbirds. The keeper shot several and killing of the pheasants stopped for that season. It is evident, however, from these and Mr. Anthony's observations, that there is a taint of murder in this yellow-eyed black race.—WILLIAM L. FINLEY, *Jennings Lodge, Oregon, June 6, 1923.*

**The 'Following' Habit in Hawks and Owls.**—Do certain hawks and owls habitually 'follow' moving objects that pass through their hunting grounds? If so, what is the meaning of the habit and who else has observed it? What species practice it? I have become interested in this subject since learning of the two following instances.

1. A Prairie Owl (*Speotyto cunicularia hypogaea*) made a daily practice of 'pursuing' a bird dog when the dog was turned loose for exercise near the golf links of the Albuquerque Country Club. These links are on open mesa country thinly sprinkled with low plants like snakeweed. When the dog first appeared on the owl's range, he would chase the owl for a short distance. When this was over, the owl would chase him for distances up to 150 yards, flying about five feet behind and above him as the dog hunted. This performance occurred almost daily during May, 1923, between 5:30 and 7:30 A. M. It always appeared to be the same bird, no other being known to inhabit the neighborhood.

2. Several years ago a quail hunter asked me why hawks follow an automobile. I told him I had never seen them do so. He then told me that in a certain locality there was a small hawk which persistently followed his automobile whenever he passed through the locality. He thought the hawk was "waiting for him to cripple a quail."

It seems probable that these instances indicate a habit of following moving objects for such 'game' as they may stir up by reason of their movement.—ALDO LEOPOLD, *Albuquerque, New Mexico, May 31, 1923.*

**A Comment on the Alleged Occurrence of *Mesophoyx intermedia* in North America.**—In the Canadian Field-Naturalist for April, 1923, xxxvii, pp. 64-65, Mr. Francis Kermodé details the history of the mounted specimen of the Plumed Egret, *Mesophoyx intermedia*, in the collection of the Provincial Museum at Victoria, British Columbia, and seeks to establish the authenticity of this specimen as a natural straggler to that province. Before accepting this extraordinary addition to the North American list it will be as well that all the facts bearing on the case are presented, and I regret that Mr. Kermodé has not submitted these himself.

There is no question that the bird is *Mesophoyx intermedia*, an egret of wide distribution in eastern Asia; I believe that it was originally substituted to represent one of the American egrets, and my reasons are as follows: Mr. Kermodé's personal acquaintance with the specimen in question dates from September, 1890, and he submits the evidence of a photograph taken about that time which proves beyond doubt that this identical specimen was in the museum at that time.

In May, 1891, shortly after this photograph was taken by Mr. A. H. Maynard, I made my first visit to Victoria and to the newly established museum. At that time several taxidermist shops in the city had a number of Japanese mounted birds displayed; among these I can vouch for specimens of *Mesophoyx intermedia* in full nuptial plumage. On inquiry I found that these had been procured from a commission house doing business in the city (F. Davidge and Company). A visit to this establishment showed me a large collection of native-made Japanese skins representing a good proportion of the birds of that country, each species wrapped up in bales of ten or a dozen. Among them were several bundles of these Japanese egrets, mostly with full nuptial plumes. At least two of these bundles had been broken up for customers who had purchased the best specimens. Mr. Albert Maynard informed me that these very much compressed skins relaxed readily and could be made up into mounted form without much trouble.