

distantly from the mainland than any other of the Santa Barbara group of islands, and it was natural to expect that any non-migratory land bird found there would show results of this sequestration, especially inasmuch as certain other birds on islands closer to the mainland do so plainly.

The characters that I thought I saw in the San Nicolas Rock Wren justifying my naming it as new were, as compared with mainland birds, larger bill and feet, and paler, more "dusty", coloration. But the birds I had from the island were all taken in May, and the adults were badly faded and abraded; furthermore the plumage (and I have part of my original series before me now) proves to have been adventitiously stained, probably by the clayey earth of the gully-walls within the cracks of which the birds lived (see Grinnell, *Pasadena Acad. Sci.*, Publ. No. 1, 1897, p. 10). The difference in color between those San Nicolas wrens and mainland birds was, and is, striking; but I now believe it to be entirely extrinsic.

As to size of bill and feet, there probably is some slight difference; but most of what I claimed for the bill proves to be non-intrinsic. Apparent length of culmen, as well as thickness at base, is, in many kinds of birds, now well known to increase with wear: the feathers about the base of the bill, especially those on the forehead, shorten, even retreat in a sense, thus "exposing" more of the bill for measurement by the calipers.

My suspicions as to the tenability of "*pulverius*" began long ago and have been getting stronger of late years; but their climax was capped as a result of studies I have been making lately of Rock Wrens from Lower California. In doing this, I examined all the material, in several large museums, from throughout the range of *Salpinctes obsoletus*. And in the John E. Thayer collection, on October 7, last, I came across a series of Rock Wrens from San Nicolas Island, taken several years after I was there, in the fall soon after completion of the one annual molt. Close scrutiny of these failed to disclose a single tangible distinguishing character.

Historically, *S. o. pulverius*, after its publication in the *Auk*, was quickly adopted in current literature. Ridgway gave it full place in his "Part III". It was "accepted" by the A. O. U. Committee, after some hesitancy, it is true, in the 1910 edition of its Check-list; and so on. The first author to question its validity was Willett (*Pacific Coast Avif.* No. 7, 1912, p. 101). Howell, in his review of the island bird-life (*Pacific Coast Avif.* No. 12, 1917, p. 96) accepted it, but with pronounced reservation, following Swarth (*Condor*, xvi, 1914, p. 213) who had found no ground at all for the color characters claimed for it, but still saw a little bill difference, enough to justify him in continuing the name. Any difference there may be in this latter regard is so slight and unstable (as shown by Swarth's measurements), especially when the range of bill-length in a large series of continental birds is considered, that I am unable now to see any practical value in it. I am thus compelled to accede, in this instance, to the justness of Dawson's animadversions (*Birds of Calif.*, 1923, p. 683)!

This case is not alone in illustrating how difficult it is to quash a "subspecies", once it gets into printed lists. To summarize, the name *Salpinctes obsoletus pulverius* was based on characters of an adventitious nature, not phylogenetic ones. I counsel that the A. O. U. Committee drop the name from their manuscript under compilation for the new official Check-list. Another bird name goes into synonymy, the necropolis for mistakes in systematics.—J. GRINNELL, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, Berkeley, March 13, 1927.*

A Woodpecker Destructive to Cacao Fruit.—The name *Celeus castaneus* is applied to a very elegant woodpecker, in color a prevailing chocolate brown, with a flowing buff-brown crest, and of medium size. It inhabits a considerable part of the Caribbean lowlands of Central America. If the scant records published pertaining to it can serve as indication, it could have been nowhere common in Costa Rica subsequent to the extended cultivation of cacao. Today even, it is rarely met where there is no cultivation of this tree. But wherever plantations are now existing, it is to be found in abundance, and it is an acknowledged nuisance.

This is a very quiet species, not at all shy, and if surprised when feeding on the fruit which, by the way, grows on the trunk and larger limbs only, it will quickly ascend to the leafy terminal branches. Preferring the fruit when yet quite green, it finds no trouble in drilling the soft covering. Usually, only a few of the many seeds are extracted, and from these the mucilaginous covering only is eaten. Thereafter,

these openings are often used to advantage, and enlarged, by squirrels. Later, as the fruit that remains ripens and rots, it is feasted upon by many insects, among them the lovely owl butterflies (*Caligo* sp.) greatly relishing the now sweet pulp.—AUSTIN SMITH, *San José, Costa Rica, September 7, 1926.*

An American Hawk Owl Record for Vancouver Island.—In January, 1926, I found in the shop of C. W. Tow, taxidermist, Victoria, B. C., an American Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula caparoch*) shot by D. Irwin in the act of killing a European Partridge at Cedar Hill, near Victoria, B. C., December 29, 1925.—G. D. SPROT, *Cobble Hill, Vancouver Island, B. C., January 24, 1927.*

A Pacific Coast Race of the Yellow-crowned Night Heron.—In studying the collections made in the interests of the San Diego Society of Natural History on a short trip to Scammon Lagoon, on the west coast of central Lower California, Mexico, during May, 1926, it was found that the specimens of Yellow-crowned Night Herons show characters that seem worthy of subspecific recognition. A new race is therefore proposed, with the following name:

Nyctanassa violacea bancrofti,¹ subsp. nov. Bancroft Yellow-crowned Night Heron

Type.—Breeding male; no. 10654, collection of the San Diego Society of Natural History; collected at Scammon Lagoon, Lower California, Mexico, by Laurence M. Huey, skinned by George G. Cantwell, on May 25, 1926.

Subspecific characters.—Similar to *Nyctanassa violacea violacea* (Linnaeus), but larger, and with a heavier, longer bill in both vertical and lateral profiles.

Range.—The Pacific coast of Lower California from Scammon Lagoon south, the Gulf of California as far north as the San Luis Islands, and thence south along the Pacific coast of Mexico and Central America at least to Salvador.

Remarks.—The four Scammon Lagoon birds have the edgings of the inter-scapulars clear ashy with no trace of brownish, such as is present in all of the apparently adult eastern birds examined. However, the writer is not prepared to attach any significance to this at present. Two birds from Salvador in the collection of Mr. Donald R. Dickey are not typical of the new race, but

are very much closer to it in bill characters than to *violacea* of the southeastern United States.

Measurements.—Averages and extremes: Adult male, breeding, 3 specimens, including type: wing, 298.0 (297.0-299.0); tail, 114.6 (112.0-117.0); exposed culmen, 77.6 (76.0-80.0); depth of bill at base, 24.8 (23.2-26.4); tarsus, 98.6 (96.2-100.2); middle toe, minus claw, 63.9 (63.0-65.8); width of bill at base, 21.0 (20.3-21.6). Adult female, breeding, 1 specimen: wing, 287.0; tail, 115.0; exposed culmen, 74.6; depth of bill at base, 24.2; tarsus, 100.0; middle toe, minus claw, 61.0; width of bill at base, 21.0.

Specimens examined.—*Nyctanassa violacea violacea*, Suwanee River, Florida, 4²; Key West, Florida, 3²; Broro Neck, Georgia, 1². *Nyctanassa violacea bancrofti*, Lake Olomega, Salvador, 2²; Scammon Lagoon, Lower California, Mexico, 4⁴; San Benito Islands, Lower California, Mexico, 1⁴.

¹ Named for Griffing Bancroft, of the San Diego Society of Natural History, who organized the trip on which the specimens were collected.

² Specimens from the Museum of Comparative Zoology.

³ Specimens from the Collection of Donald R. Dickey.

⁴ Specimens from the Collection of the San Diego Society of Natural History.

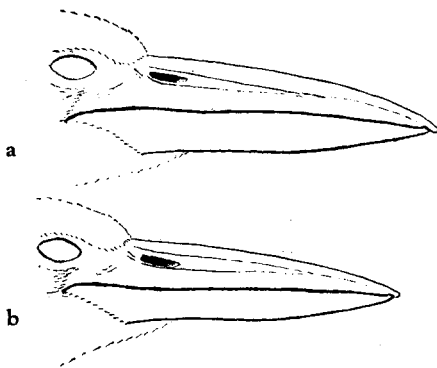


Fig. 56. BILLS OF YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT HERONS. $\times \frac{1}{2}$.

- a. Type of *Nyctanassa violacea bancrofti*.
- b. *Nyctanassa violacea violacea*, ♂ ad.; no. 225341, Mus. Comp. Zool.; Broro Neck, Georgia.