

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

A Peculiar Feeding Habit of the Short-billed Gull.—On several occasions during the past season (February 6, 15; March 2 and 3, 1933), I have observed Short-billed Gulls (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*) obtaining food in shallow water of the lagoon at the mouth of the Carmel River, California, in a manner which I have never seen described before.

When the sand bar dividing the lagoon from the sea has been opened up, frequently by artificial means, a large area of coarse sand, with shallow river channels winding through it, is exposed where previously lay the pent up river water augmented by winter rains. In these rivulets, or in certain parts of the flats where a small bit of still water has been cut off from the flowing courses, I have seen both adult and immature birds standing in an inch or two of water and briskly paddling their webbed feet up and down alternately, then stopping to peck lightly at the surface of the water thus stirred up from the bottom. Sometimes they will paddle and peck at the same time. The process apparently serves a purpose similar to the whirling of the Northern Phalarope (*Lobipes lobatus*).

Once I saw a bird feeding in this fashion in a shallow water course leading out of the meadow bordering the lagoon where the bottom was quite muddy, but the other occasions have been where there was a coarse, sandy bottom. Seven individuals on February 6 were seen to indulge in this activity simultaneously. It was in this same rivulet draining the marsh, but at a point farther down stream where the water was flowing over sand.

On two occasions I have watched a Coot (*Fulica americana*) walking behind a Short-billed Gull to peck at the surface where the latter had been paddling. Once the Coot made a pass with its bill at the gull to drive it away from such a place.—LAIDLAW WILLIAMS, *Carmel, California, May 1, 1933.*

Three Magpies Rob a Golden Eagle.—The eagle is often regarded as "king of the air," but there are times when the eagle's supremacy may be seriously questioned, as will be seen from the following incident.

On August 23, 1932, at Igloo Creek in Mount McKinley National Park in Alaska, I watched three magpies (*Pica pica hudsonia*) successfully take a ground squirrel away from an adult Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos canadensis*). When first observed, the eagle was standing on and eating a ground squirrel that it had just captured. Three magpies flying by stopped to investigate. After the situation had been carefully surveyed by the magpies walking completely around the eagle, two of the magpies took turns swooping down at the eagle's head. This attack was repeated five times with increasing intensity until the eagle struck back at its tormentors. In doing this it was forced to relinquish its hold on the squirrel in order to use its talons. While the eagle's attention was thus engaged, the third magpie sneaked in, on the ground, and carried off the squirrel, which was later shared *without fighting* with the other two magpies.

Interpretation of bird behavior by human beings is open to criticism, but the question naturally arises—was this robbery planned?—JOSEPH S. DIXON, *Wild Life Division, U. S. National Park Service, Berkeley, California, February 10, 1933.*

The Eastern Brown Thrasher at Altadena, California.—About the middle of February of this year, Mr. Jack Abbott of Altadena told me that friends of his had reported the presence of a Brown Thrasher at a feeding station near the bank of the Arroyo Seco. The following Sunday, Mr. Abbott and I called at the place but, though we waited several hours, the stranger failed to put in an appearance. During the following week, word came that the bird had returned, so, on March 5, armed with a camera, I again watched the station and was rewarded by several views at a range of five or six feet. On March 12, Mr. Abbott and I compared the living bird with skins of both the Brown and Sennett thrashers. This direct comparison, backed by the accompanying photographic evidence (fig. 32), would appear to place the Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*) definitely on the list of California birds. In this connection it is well to recall that Baird, Brewer and Ridgway (*Hist. North Am. Birds, 3, 1874,*

p. 500) cite the species from California, their basis being the statement by Dr. Cooper that he had seen, "unmistakably", a bird at Clear Lake [Lake County] in September, 1870. It is probable that Dr. Cooper's record is a perfectly valid one, although up until now it has, properly, been accorded only hypothetical standing.

The exact locality of the present record is 614 West Mariposa Street, Altadena. This is a residence surrounded on three sides by orange groves and close to the east bank of the Arroyo Seco. Mr. and Mrs. Rodewald, the owners of the property, tell



Fig. 32. EASTERN BROWN THRASHER AT ALTADENA, CALIFORNIA. PHOTO TAKEN MARCH 12, 1933.

me that the thrasher was extremely wild when it first appeared about December 1, 1932. It was certainly very shy and wary on the two occasions when I saw it, and there was nothing in its manner or appearance to suggest an escaped cage bird. My sincere thanks are due to Mr. and Mrs. Rodewald, not only for their courtesy in permitting a total stranger to use their sun room as a blind and observation post, but for their assistance in helping to secure several pictures of this rare visitor, which, at the date of writing, is still coming to the station.—A. J. VAN ROSSEM, *California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California, March 23, 1933.*

Winter Occurrence of Turkey Vultures in the Napa Valley, California.—While driving north in the Napa Valley, between Yountville and Oakville on January 15, 1933, I noted several Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura septentrionalis*) flying about a hill near the road. I stopped my car and counted fifteen of them. Returning two hours later past this same point, there were more buzzards in the air. I drove a short distance on a side road on this return trip in order to get directly below the soaring birds, and observed them for about ten minutes with my field glasses, counting fifty-nine in the air at one time. Some flew low down while others were high in the air. It would seem that there must have been one or more large dead animals on or near the hill. My notes do not record any previous winter occurrence of Turkey Vultures in the northern part of the San Francisco Bay region.—EMERSON A. STONER, *Benicia, California, March 14, 1933.*