

**The Subspecific Status of the Hutton Vireo of Vancouver Island.**—The latest critical comments upon the Hutton Vireos of the Northwest Coast portion of the general range of *Vireo huttoni* were published almost simultaneously twelve years ago by two authors: Oberholser (Auk, 39, 1922, pp. 77-78) and Grinnell (Condor, 24, 1922, pp. 32-33). These students, arriving at their conclusions independently, were in agreement that *Vireo h. obscurus* Anthony, based on a specimen from Beaverton, Oregon, must be synonymized under *V. h. huttoni* Cassin, originally named from Monterey, California. But not quite such accord was shown as to disposal of the name *V. h. insularis* Rhoads, named from Victoria, Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

In this last regard, Oberholser (*op. cit.*, p. 78) made the following statements: "Unfortunately for the status of *Vireo huttoni insularis*, none of the Vancouver Island or other British Columbia specimens can be satisfactorily separated from California birds from the region about San Francisco Bay. The male type of *Vireo huttoni insularis*, from Victoria, British Columbia, and another specimen from the same locality, appear at first sight to be somewhat darker both above and below than California examples, but this apparent difference is readily traceable to some accidental soiling of the plumage. These facts, together with the lack of any differences shown by other specimens from Vancouver Island, take away all the present claim that *Vireo huttoni insularis* has for recognition as a subspecies." Grinnell (*loc. cit.*) stated: "Hutton Vireos from Vancouver Island are notably rare in collections. In the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology there are but two, both from Victoria. Both are dark as compared with Monterey *huttoni*; but both look to me to be smoked. I wouldn't care to rest the case for or against *insularis* on this scanty material. But before this name is given formal recognition by the A. O. U. Committee on Nomenclature, perfectly fresh, unfaded material should be available in fair quantity."

It happens that Major Allan Brooks has long been interested in this question—of the status of the Vancouver Island Hutton Vireos; and as a result, despite the apparent scarcity of the birds, he has now assembled a fair series. Out of this series he lately forwarded to me eight specimens, selected as not smoked or stained and hence of positive significance, with the suggestion that I look at them critically and report my findings. These specimens are before me at this writing, and I find them to show unquestionably darker, especially greener, tone of coloration dorsally and laterally, than specimens in corresponding condition of plumage from Oregon and California. However, I can detect no peculiarities in measurements or proportions.

In detail, the Brooks birds were collected in the months of December, January and March, at Comox, Nanaimo and Craig's, Vancouver Island. There can be no question that they are free from any adventitious discoloration and that they are unworn and unfaded. In a selected example, no. 3541, Brooks coll., from Comox, January 20, 1920, the back is nearest Dark Greenish Olive (of Ridgway, 1912, pl. XXX), as contrasted with near Deep Olive (the same, pl. XL) in no. 30488, Mus. Vert. Zool., from Seaside, Monterey County, California, of date January 12, 1919. While I am quite able to see a tendency toward the "sooty suffusion" remarked by Rhoads, my own eye receives the greatest impression of a more intensified greenness in all of the Vancouver Island birds. This is so well marked and so uniform a feature, in comparison with the southern populations, that I have no longer any hesitation in adjudging the Vancouver Island population of Hutton Vireos to represent a recognizable race, *Vireo huttoni insularis*.

Incidentally, one bird in the collection of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology from the Puget Sound region of Washington (no. 37080, South Tacoma, taken by J. H. Bowles, December 7, 1906) is very near, if not identical with, some of the Vancouver Island birds, and points toward a range for *insularis* possibly inclusive of the Olympic Peninsula and some adjacent territory. But available and pertinent material is too meager for the settling of this point.

It turns out, then, that Rhoads' original comments (Auk, 10, 1893, pp. 238-241) upon the Vancouver Island race which he named were, both nomenclaturally and ecologically, peculiarly appropriate.—J. GRINNELL, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, California, June 15, 1934.*

**Nesting of the Pacific Evening Grosbeak in the Vicinity of Echo Lake, Eldorado County, California.**—Evening Grosbeaks (*Hesperiphona vespertina brooksi*) made their appearance in the Echo Lake region during the summer of 1934 on June 22. Arriv-

ing in considerable numbers for this rather rare species, many of them started nesting immediately. Wherever two birds selected a site they could be heard noisily engaged in collecting the rather delicate materials which go into the construction of their nest.

One pair selected a location some 35 feet up at the end of a large limb of a tamarack which stood on the edge of a path that was used constantly by a number of people. This location afforded the writer an unusual opportunity to observe the building process. The female did all of the work, although the male was in constant attendance. Three separate areas seemed to be used exclusively for the gathering of material. The female would fly to one of these spots, alight on the ground and after fussing around for a few moments would gather a carefully selected beakful of materials. During this process the male would invariably be within a few feet of her, chattering incessantly. As soon as a load of material was gathered she would take flight in a direct line for the nesting site, with the male right behind her. During this flight she emitted a monotonous, choked, call-note, while the male vigorously and noisily proclaimed his presence to the wide world.

Arrived at the nesting site the female busily engaged herself with the delicate task of arranging her load of materials while he again stood noisily by and seemingly urged her on. Right from the start the nest-building was performed from the inside out; that is she placed herself in the center of the nest structure and then placed the materials with her beak, weaving them into their permanent position by screwing her body around. Starting shortly after daylight each morning, the female averaged one trip every three minutes. Slightly over a minute was spent in arranging the material in the nest and the balance of the time in making the round trip to the material-gathering center. About nine o'clock in the morning time was taken out for about an hour for feeding and preening. Again, about one in the afternoon, a similar period was noted. Aside from these two periods the female worked constantly, from daylight until dark, with the male always in attendance but never deigning to do any of the actual labor. Many times he seemed to goad her on to greater effort, as some straw-boss might drive his crew!

It was my good fortune to observe this pair select the nesting site, after no end of fussing and inspecting on the part of the female. The placement of the first load of materials was also witnessed and I had visions of following the nesting routine through to its ultimate completion—the day when the young would be able to leave the nest. But I reckoned without mother nature, for after two full days of observation, during which time the nest had reached an estimated two-thirds completion, along came one of those typical freak snow storms which are not uncommon to the Sierra at that time of the year. It started snowing and blowing a gale about four in the afternoon and lasted most of the night. At first the Grosbeaks kept right on with their nest-building, but along about five o'clock I heard them no more. The next morning, with about four inches of snow on the ground, they were nowhere to be seen or heard. Constant observation for several days thereafter failed to disclose any sign of them, and so ended my opportunity to carry on a little study. Whether the birds were killed in the storm or were simply discouraged, it is impossible to say. A Cassin Purple Finch (*Carpodacus cassinii*), which was nesting in an adjoining tree, was found frozen to death on her nest and three eggs, and doubtless many other birds suffered a similar fate.

Not to be daunted I spent the next several mornings in a search for other nests of the Evening Grosbeak. By diligent and persistent work three were finally located, but they were at such a distance from camp as to make constant observation impossible. The location of each nesting site was the ultimate result of many laborious hours of trailing either the male or the female or both. The loud, raucous note of the male can be heard at quite a distance, especially early in the morning. At this time, generally around 4:30 or 5:00, the female leaves the nest and goes for a brief jaunt with her mate. In quest of food, and probably exercise too, after a long night on the nest, the pair keep up a constant Grosbeak conversation. It is this chatter which made it possible for me to trace them to their nests. As soon as the male seemed to think that his mate had been away from her nest long enough, he herded her back to it with perfectly visible proddings and scoldings. Once in the air they generally followed a direct line from the feeding location to the nest, chattering incessantly during this flight. Once the female was ensconced again on her nest, the male would generally fly back to the feeding area. And strangely enough, each pair seemed to have a definite area in which the birds did almost all of their feeding. Here the

male could generally be found, although he made frequent and regular trips back to the nest to see that everything was safe at home.

At no time was I able to find the male aiding with incubation or nest building. In the one nest that I was able to observe containing young, he did help with the feeding process.

The second nest was located about 45 feet up and three feet out from the trunk of a small tamarack. The tree stood not thirty feet from an occupied cabin near the lake shore. It contained four fresh eggs which the female had not yet started to incubate.

Nest number three was situated about thirty feet up at the end of a small branch of a tamarack. This tree too stood just a short distance from an occupied cabin on the lake shore and in almost every respect was identical with number two. It contained three well incubated eggs.

Nest number four was located well up on the steep mountainside overlooking the lake. Several days were required to locate it, primarily because of the distance which the birds flew from the feeding to the nesting location. The nest itself was placed just a short distance out from the trunk and on top of a fairly large limb of a red fir, some forty feet above the ground. The nest itself was similar in every respect to those above and contained three well-incubated eggs.

When flushed, the females invariably stayed within a few branches near their nests, chattering and complaining incessantly. In no case was a female flushed by throwing an object at the nest, although in one case the nest was actually hit with a small stick. Not until I was within a few feet of it would the female leave, and in each case as soon as I retreated she would go back on again. Her chattering generally brought the male, within a few minutes, which shows that the feeding area must be close enough to the nest that the parents are in constant communication. The nests of these birds are all practically the same, judging from those mentioned above. They were all quite visible from below, of almost identical size, and constructed from similar materials. Following are measurements (all figures are average), from nest number two: Depth outside, 4 inches, width  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches, length  $9\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Depth inside,  $1\frac{7}{8}$  inches, width  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches, length  $3\frac{7}{8}$  inches. Materials, framework entirely of small, dead spruce (?) twigs averaging from three to nine inches in length and evidently broken off from the tree. Inner part, or nest proper, constructed of fine rootlets (chiefly dark brown and I think from small tamarack shoots) and a few, fine, strawcolored grasses which are interwoven into the top or surface layer of the nest lining. This second or inner part of the nest varies from an average thickness of slightly less than an inch on the bottom to  $\frac{5}{8}$  of an inch at the top of the sides. This part, too, is much darker and browner than the outer structure of twigs, which are a typical evergreen gray.—DUDLEY S. DEGROOT, *State College, San Jose, California, August 28, 1934.*

**The Lesser Yellow-legs near San Diego in Winter.**—Mrs. Michael and I spent the day of January 10, 1934, at Mission Bay, San Diego County, California. Last November when we were there we had several visits with the Greater Yellow-legs (*Totanus melanoleucus*) and got to know this species fairly well. The Lesser Yellow-legs, (*Totanus flavipes*), however, remained a complete stranger. About all we knew about him was that he is a small facsimile of the Greater Yellow-legs and that he is not supposed to be in this section of the country at this time of year.

On the day in question soon after we arrived at the mud flats two birds took wing and instantly we realized that they were not among the shore birds that we were accustomed to seeing. We both guessed Yellow-legs. Their graceful flight carried them up an arm of the slough. We followed along the railroad track and where the arm of the slough meandered close to the track we found the birds feeding. One was feeding in the company of two Willets and two Godwits, the other was on the shore near a Willet and a Black-bellied Plover. Now we were intrigued; the birds were too small to be the Greater Yellow-legs. Feeding side by side with the Willet, the Yellow-legs appeared but half his bulk. Standing with his head held high, there was not such a great difference in the height of the birds although it was quite apparent that the Willet was the taller of the two. Now the Willet is a slender bird, but the Yellow-legs was noticeably of a more slender build. He was a rangy bird, of quick and jerky movements, and he moved over his feeding ground with long strides.