

## BIRD RECORDS FROM THE TUCSON REGION, ARIZONA

By CHARLES T. VORHIES, RANDOLPH JENKS, and ALLAN R. PHILLIPS

While it is not possible to lay down a strictly delimited area as a definition of what we mean by "the Tucson region," we have in mind primarily that area of the Lower Sonoran Zone immediately surrounding Tucson, and within a radius of twenty to twenty-five miles of the city. Practically all of the occurrences discussed here are from this small area, with occasional references to more distant points. The most important exception is Picacho Reservoir, and this is still in the Lower Sonoran Zone and at a lower altitude than Tucson.

Since the definite records presented add materially to our knowledge of the birds of this region, it seems to us desirable to place them in the literature. Two species, the Herring Gull and the Sabine Gull, are here newly recorded for the State.

*Gavia immer elasson*. Lesser Loon. This species was mentioned by Visher (Auk, 27, 1910, p. 280) as a "tolerably common migrant" about Tucson, but the first unquestionable record appears to be that of an immature male captured alive near the Ajo road, some ten miles southwest of Tucson, late in October, 1932. This bird was brought to Vorhies and by him placed in the University aviary. It refused food and died on November 4. Lesions in the form of small yellow nodules were found abundant in the abdominal air-sacs.

In October, 1933, an immature female, identical in plumage with the above male, was found on the southeastern edge of the city, near the Southern Pacific railway tracks. Its history was practically a repetition of the other. It died on October 28.

Neither of these birds was in or near water when found, and it would appear that as passing migrants they became weary or exhausted and even after resting were unable to take off from land. These are the only loons seen by Vorhies during his nineteen years of residence in Tucson. Measurements indicate the subspecies *elasson*. Both are in the University collection.

*Podilymbus podiceps podiceps*. Pied-billed Grebe. Vorhies has seen this bird frequently in the past several years at such places as Indian Dam (on the Santa Cruz River, 10 miles south of Tucson), Agua Caliente Ranch (15 miles northeast), and Binghampton Pond (5 miles northeast), but without in every case recording the occurrences. In Bird-Lore's "Thirtieth Christmas Bird Census," Taylor and Vorhies recorded three Pied-billed Grebes (Bird-Lore, 32, 1930, p. 61) northeast of Tucson. More recently recorded dates are May 8, 1932, March 11 and 25, May 21, and October 15, 1933 (Picacho Reservoir, 55 miles northwest); March 24, April 15 and 28, and May 19, 1934. The record of April 15 (Indian Dam) was of three individuals on open water, quite undisturbed, observed in the act of calling. On August 20, 1934, a Pied-billed Grebe was reported to Vorhies, and by him secured, from four miles northeast of the city. This individual, taken on dry land, proved to be an adult male. The only previous record for the region is that of two specimens taken by Herbert Brown at Tucson, February 18, 1886 (Scott, Auk, 3, 1886, p. 383).

There is a specimen, a young female, in the Herbert Brown collection (State Museum) from Tucson, October 14, 1888.

*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*. White Pelican. There being but a single record known to us for this region, the following occurrences are noteworthy. April 18, 1930, Vorhies and Taylor saw a flock passing northward over the desert five miles west of Tucson. In 1932, reports reached the University of the presence of pelicans on Picacho Lake. May 21, 1933, Vorhies and Jenks, with some other students, visited the lake and found a flock of 60 to 75 of these birds. The caretaker believed they nested there the previous summer. Accordingly, on June 16 and 17, Vorhies again visited the lake to look for possible nesting and found 100 individuals. Though many birds showed the breeding season excrescence on the beak in May, no indication of nesting could be found, nor could it be expected, as there was no island available as a nesting refuge. On July 4, Vorhies and Taylor again investigated the nesting possibilities, with negative results. About 20 birds were then present. October 15, 1933, the authors saw six pelicans on this lake. April 14, 1934, about 175 were

present and on December 8, 1934, there were seven. Thus it appears from our records and information furnished by the caretaker at the lake that White Pelicans have been present continuously, or almost so, at Picacho Lake for two years or more.

*Phalacrocorax auritus albociliatus*. Farallon Cormorant. Cormorants, apparently all of this species, are not uncommon about Tucson, occasionally putting down in almost any good sized pool of water. Twice they have dropped into the University swimming pool, where Vorhies first saw one in the spring of 1918. They seem to be most common in April and October, though Howell (Condor, 18, 1916, p. 210) records them in the winter. One of several at Agua Caliente Ranch was photographed by the owner, Dr. Blake, on October 20, 1933. On April 15, 1934, Vorhies with the class in ornithology, at Indian Dam, saw at close range an individual in the unmistakable breeding plumage of this species.

*Casmerodius albus egretta*. American Egret. This species was observed at Picacho Lake on May 21, June 17, and October 15, 1933. Two were reported at Indian Dam, May 7, 1933, by a member of the ornithology class, John Cassady.

*Egretta thula brewsteri*. Brewster Egret. Observed at Picacho Lake on May 21 (Vorhies and Jenks) and June 17 (Vorhies), 1933. Three were reported by Cassady at Indian Dam, May 7, 1933. On October 2, 1933, Vorhies and Taylor saw a lone individual beside a small pool in the borrow pit along the highway 40 miles northwest of Tucson. The car was stopped opposite the bird, which was observed for some time at a distance of not more than 50 feet. It showed little alarm. On April 14, 1934, four were seen at Picacho Lake by the ornithology class.

It seems evident that egrets of both the above species are becoming more common in southern Arizona. In addition to the above specific records Vorhies has had several reports which indicate with fair certainty one of the white egrets, but without specific identification. In June, 1932, such a bird lived about the pools on the grounds of El Conquistador Hotel, at the eastern edge of the city, for a week. The hotel was at that time closed for the summer. This was probably an *Egretta*. At Picacho Lake, July 4, 1933, Vorhies and Taylor saw white herons which were too far away for specific identification. In September, 1934, D. M. Gorsuch saw four egrets, species not known, at a represo 35 miles south of Tucson on the Santa Rita Experimental Range.

*Butorides virescens anthonyi*. Anthony Green Heron. This bird regularly breeds in the Tucson region, Vorhies having seen a nest at Indian Dam each of the past three years. Notable as a winter occurrence, however, is the record of Taylor and Vorhies for December 24, 1929 (Bird-Lore, 32, 1930, p. 61).

*Anser albifrons gambelli*. Tule Goose. On February 15, 1935, Vorhies collected a specimen of this species at Binghampton Pond, which proved to be *gambelli*. Its identity has been checked by Swarth. While the species has been twice reported from this state, no specimen has previously been taken, and the subspecies most apt to occur here is unknown. The present record is, therefore, of more than local interest. It establishes an occurrence of *gambelli* as defined by Swarth and Bryant (Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool., 17, 1917, pp. 209-222) outside of the Sacramento Valley, California, in winter. Since it would appear from the present meager knowledge of distribution of the subspecies that *A. a. albifrons* would be the form more likely to occur in Arizona, this record does not subspecifically identify the flock reported recently by Vorhies and Taylor (Condor, 37, 1935, p. 175). This bird was a lone individual, in tules or weeds, in a small pond; this circumstance characteristic of *gambelli*. The birds seen by Vorhies and Taylor were a flock of thirty, in the open, more characteristic of *albifrons*.

*Mergus merganser americanus*. American Merganser. An adult female, victim of the hunting season, was found in good condition in the edge of the water of Picacho Lake on December 8, 1934, by Vorhies, and preserved. The species is rare here. Scott (Auk, 3, 1886, p. 384) recorded it on the San Pedro River; and there is one female in the Herbert Brown collection taken at Tucson on December 1, 1886.

*Mergus serrator*. Red-breasted Merganser. An apparently uninjured female was picked up in a dry ditch near the Veterans Hospital just south of the city, and brought to Vorhies on October 30, 1933. It is preserved in the University collection.

*Coragyps atratus atratus*. Black Vulture. On September 4, 1934, Vorhies saw a soaring, circling flock of forty of these vultures ten miles south of Tucson. During the next two weeks many of these birds were seen in the same region. This is at

least two months earlier in the fall than they have been noted previously. (See Taylor and Vorhies, *Condor*, 35, 1933, p. 205.)

*Falco columbarius richardsonii*. Richardson Pigeon Hawk. On January 28, 1933, a female of this species was killed at a chicken pen four miles north of Tucson, and reported to Vorhies who secured and preserved it. This individual bore Biological Survey band number A420558, from which it was learned that the bird was banded on July 6, 1931, at Rosebud, Alberta, Canada, by W. R. Salt. This appears to be the first record for the immediate region of Tucson. One other for southern Arizona was taken at Safford on December 12, 1930. This individual was also banded at Rosebud by Salt. (*Bird Banding Notes*, 2, 1933, p. 150.)

*Limnodromus griseus scolopaceus*. Long-billed Dowitcher. Jenks took a specimen at a reproso one mile east of Sells (59 miles southwest of Tucson) on March 18, 1933, which was identified by Dr. Grinnell of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology. There are three specimens of this species, taken at Tucson, in the Herbert Brown collection. One of each sex was taken May 15, 1887; the third, a female, bears no date.

*Himantopus mexicanus*. Black-necked Stilt. Jenks took a male at Binghampton Pond on May 11, 1933, which was prepared as a study skin by Vorhies. The class in ornithology saw six or seven at Picacho Reservoir on April 14, while 24 were seen there the following day by a member of the class; and the same group saw five at Indian Dam on May 19, 1934.

*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*. Herring Gull. An individual dead for several days was found in the city by Phillips on November 17, 1933. Although very badly mangled and dirty, the head, one wing, and one scapular were preserved and later identified by Grinnell. This is an addition to the published Arizona List, although there are two well preserved specimens in the Brown collection. One of these is an immature male taken November 16, 1894, on the "Santa Cruz, near Tucson." The other is an unsexed immature taken January 12, 1903, without locality record, but probably from Yuma. The identity of both Brown collection specimens has been checked by Mr. G. Willett of the Los Angeles Museum.

*Larus delawarensis*. Ring-billed Gull. A gull believed to be of this species was seen by the authors at Picacho Reservoir, October 15, 1933. Vorhies also saw several gulls there on April 14, 1934, and believes at least two were Ring-billed Gulls.

*Xema sabini*. Sabine Gull. A young male of this species, identity of which has been checked by Willett, is in the Brown collection. This is an unpublished first record of the species in Arizona, and since it was taken at Tucson, it is included here. The date is September 15, 1892.

*Chlidonias nigra surinamensis*. Black Tern. A single bird was seen at Indian Dam, May 7, 1933, by Cassady. Jenks took a specimen at Binghampton Pond May 12, 1933. While this species was reported common in August by Visser (*Auk*, 27, 1910, p. 280), the record has not been accepted, and Vorhies has had no evidence in nearly two decades to verify such a record.

*Melopelia asiatica mearnsi*. Western White-winged Dove. A single individual was seen by Vorhies and William Hudspeth, an ornithology student, on December 8, 1934, in mesquite at the southwestern edge of the city; an unusual winter occurrence.

*Asyndesmus lewis*. Lewis Woodpecker. Hudspeth reported to Vorhies the occurrence of an individual in the cottonwoods at the southwestern edge of the city on November 24, 1934. This is a rare occurrence in the Lower Sonoran Zone of southern Arizona. Mearns (*Auk*, 7, 1890, p. 254) recorded the species in this region "during the blazing weather of April." Herbert Brown recorded their "unusual abundance" near the city from September 28 to October 28, 1884 (*Auk*, 19, 1902, pp. 80-83). Hudspeth's is the first record from this region in more than forty years.

*Empidonax hammondii*. Hammond Flycatcher. Two birds appeared in lower Sabino Canyon (2900 feet altitude), twelve miles northeast of Tucson, on January 18, 1934 (Jenks), and were seen regularly thereafter. One collected by Phillips, February 24, was identified by Grinnell. No other winter records are known to us.

*Camptostoma imberbe*. Beardless Flycatcher. The only previous records in our area are from the Santa Cruz River south of Tucson and from the lower slopes of the Santa Rita Mountains. On April 22, 1928, at Agua Caliente Ranch, Vorhies heard a strange note, which was traced to a pair of small flycatchers engaged in nest building. On May 7 the same note was heard at Nicholson's Ranch in the Santa

Rita Mountains. When collected by Dr. Walter P. Taylor the bird responsible proved to be of this species.

A specimen in the Museum of Northern Arizona was taken by Phillips on Rillito Creek, seven miles northeast of Tucson, October 22, 1933 (prepared by E. C. Jacot). Another specimen was taken by Phillips in lower Sabino Canyon on January 7, 1934, where from one to three of these birds were seen by Jenks and Phillips from February 15 to March 23. Phillips saw one individual in lower Otero Canyon, 4000 feet altitude, east slope of the Baboquivari Mountains, 55 miles southwest of Tucson, on February 18, 1934; he also has records of single birds seen there on March 31, April 5, and May 15, 1932, which on the basis of size, color and habits were doubtless this species. This, however, is not the westernmost record, for Taylor heard several and collected one at the Fresno Experiment Station, on the west side of the same range, on June 21, 1932.

The best field character of this species seems to be its call, a musical, whistled *pee-erp*. Phillips noted the bird's resemblance to a Ruby-crowned Kinglet or Stephens Vireo, while Taylor compared it to the Arizona Vireo. In actions it differs from most flycatchers, as it habitually gleans after the manner of kinglets, vireos, and warblers. It is often found among scrub mesquite and other small shrubs.

*Progne subis subis*. Purple Martin. Recorded as a summer visitant in the Tucson region (Pacific Coast Avifauna no. 10, 1914, p. 62), the status of this species as a nesting bird seems not to have been definitely recorded as yet. Vorhies has noticed the martin at irregular intervals in summer for a number of years, and for the past few years has considered it highly probable that it nested in the cavities in the giant cactus, or sahuaro. Fifteen to twenty miles east of Tucson, these birds may be observed almost any day in the summer season. Finally, on July 16, 1933, at the University Cactus Forest (twenty miles east), Vorhies observed Purple Martins carrying food into a flicker cavity in a sahuaro. Fortunately he was accompanied by Dr. H. C. Bryant and Dr. Walter P. Taylor, who verified the observation; and a little later the same morning, the observation was repeated at another sahuaro.

*Aphelocoma sieberi arizonae*. Arizona Jay. A single bird was seen well at close range along the Santa Cruz River just southwest of the city, April 18, 1934 (Phillips). It was first recognized by its call.

*Sitta carolinensis nelsoni*. Rocky Mountain Nuthatch. Early in November, 1934, an occurrence of nuthatches in the Santa Cruz River bottoms was reported to Vorhies by Hudspeth. On November 9, a short trip and a few minutes of time among the cottonwoods disclosed the presence of at least two or three, one of which, a male of this species, was collected. Some were still present there on December 18. Reports, unrecorded in the literature, indicate that careful check-ups every winter might reveal the fairly regular occurrence of this species.

*Vermivora celata orestera*. Orange-crowned Warbler. A single bird was seen regularly in lower Sabino Canyon from December 16, 1933, to February 24, 1934 (Jenks and Phillips). Phillips collected this individual and one of two others on February 24, and both have been identified as of the subspecies *orestera* by Grinnell. Warblers, presumably of the same subspecies, were seen occasionally in Tucson the same winter (Jenks and Phillips).

*Dendroica nigrescens*. Black-throated Gray Warbler. The first winter record of this bird for Arizona or the United States seems to be that of Taylor and Vorhies from the Tucson region, December 26, 1927 (Bird-Lore, 30, 1928, p. 66), when three individuals were seen. Two were seen regularly in lower Sabino Canyon from November 12, 1933, to March 18, 1934, by Jenks and Phillips. These records indicate the possibility of scattered but not uncommon occurrence of this species far north of its recorded winter range.

*Seiurus noveboracensis notabilis*. Grinnell Water-thrush. This species has proved not uncommon near Tucson the last two years, at least in May. Jenks collected a specimen at Binghampton Pond May 24, 1933. Phillips took specimens in the Santa Cruz River bottoms on April 26 and May 13 (five seen on the latter date); and single birds were seen on April 28 and May 15, 1934. The 1933 specimen has been identified by Dr. Alden H. Miller of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology as of the newly proposed subspecies *limnaeus*. Other records presumably pertain to the form *nota-*

*bilis*. Water-thrushes have been previously recorded several times in this region, both in spring and fall.

*Calamospiza melanocorys*. Lark Bunting. This common winter resident sometimes arrives remarkably early in the fall. Vorhies and Taylor saw a flock of twenty-five or thirty near Sahuarita on the Tucson-Nogales highway July 25, 1933. A single male was noted the same afternoon just south of Tucson. In 1934 Vorhies again saw two flocks of this species, near Sahuarita, on August 12; Phillips, a flock of five some 25 miles north of Tucson August 17; and Vorhies, a male in summer plumage at the eastern edge of the city on August 19. Similarly early southward movements have been noted in Texas, New Mexico, and California. (See W. W. Cooke, *Bird-Lore*, 16, 1914, p. 267.)

*Junco caniceps*. Gray-headed Junco. A male was taken by Phillips on the Santa Cruz River bottoms one mile southwest of town on April 9, 1934, and was identified by Grinnell.

*Passerella iliaca schistacea*. Slate-colored Fox Sparrow. Quite a number were seen in lower Sabino Canyon from December 15, 1933, to February 27, 1934 (Jenks and Phillips). Three specimens were taken, all of which were identified as of this form by Grinnell. There is only one previous record of a Fox Sparrow from the region, a female *P. i. canescens* taken from a flock, at Oracle, March 8, 1922, by F. H. Kennard (*Condor*, 26, 1924, p. 76). See Stephens (*Condor* 16, 1914, p. 259) for correction of an error in records.

Our thanks are due Mr. A. H. Anderson who first reported from Binghamton Pond the presence of the Black-necked Stilt, the Black Tern, and the Water-thrush taken there by Jenks.

*University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, February 18, 1935.*

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## COMMENTS UPON THE SUBSPECIES OF *CATHERPES MEXICANUS*

WITH ONE ILLUSTRATION

By J. GRINNELL and WM. H. BEHLE

Recent attempts to allocate specimens of *Catherpes mexicanus* in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology to their subspecies has resulted in the feeling that there are not two, far-western recognizable races as indicated in the last A. O. U. Check-list; that is to say, *C. m. punctulatus* is not satisfactorily distinguishable from *C. m. conspersus*. This impression, acquired from cursory examination of the specimens, was intensified when it became realized that the type localities of these supposed forms are exceedingly close together and when the earlier descriptions were found to be inadequate.

In 1903, Oberholser (*Auk*, 20, pp. 196-198) reviewed the genus *Catherpes* Baird and recognized five forms in it, all of which were considered to be subspecies of *Catherpes mexicanus*. At this time, *C. m. polioptilus* was described as new, being split off because it was thought to be paler than *C. m. albifrons*, and to have a "much shorter bill." Its range was designated as from "western Texas through New Mexico, Arizona, and northwestern Mexico to Lower California."

Ridgway (*Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus.*, No. 50, Part III, 1904, pp. 653-663) continued to recognize the five forms which Oberholser listed, but he commented (p. 661) upon *polioptilus* as follows: "This is not a clearly defined form, like the others here recognized, but rather a variable series of intermediates, segregated for nomenclatural convenience." This statement made us begin to wonder whether these races of wrens were being sustained with the idea of fitting all forms into an artificial classification, rather than into a natural one which had as its object the proper expression of variation and relationships.