

## FROM FIELD AND STUDY

**Behavior of Northern Phalaropes.**—The first of the Northern Phalaropes (*Lobipes lobatus*) began to appear on the lakes of Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, about the middle of August, 1937, increasing in numbers as the days went by so that by the first week in September there were several hundred birds scattered over certain of the lakes. Some of the lakes the phalaropes avoided almost entirely.

I do not know for how many years the phalaropes have used the lakes of Golden Gate Park as loafing and feeding stations during their fall migrations, but I do know that they appear much more at home in the park than they did in 1936. In that year they were not especially shy, but on the other hand they were not friendly to the human visitors who came to feed the ducks. This year, when people came to cast bread on the water, the phalaropes crowded in to get their share of the food. At South Lake the phalaropes were especially tame. When bread was thrown on the water, the birds hurried from all sections of the lake. The birds that were farther away came on the wing and those that were nearer paddled their jerky way. Soon many were mingling with the ducks and were jabbing eagerly for the smaller crumbs.

By spinning rapidly on the surface of the water the clever phalarope creates a whirling current that brings the water-logged bits of bread to the surface. I actually saw this magic take place while the bird was only three feet away. The spinning habit of the phalarope is well known, but I doubt if it is generally known that the phalarope is also an excellent flycatcher. As I watched the phalaropes, it seemed to me that no bird floats more lightly on the surface of the water and that no bird takes more easily to the air. Time and again I saw birds rise almost straight up from the surface of the water to pluck flying insects from the air. Often a bird would rise fifty feet above the lake to capture a passing insect.

Another day I saw Northern Phalaropes display their flying ability under different circumstances. It was on September 22, 1937, while I spent a sunny hour sitting on the shore of South Lake in Golden Gate Park. A Virginia Rail came out from cover to paddle leisurely along the shore of the little island. I was studying this rail through the binoculars when suddenly the leisurely bird put on a burst of speed and dashed to cover. Looking up I discovered the cause of the excitement; a Sharp-shinned Hawk, on wings of the wind, was trying to snatch one of the six phalaropes from the surface of the water. The phalarope dodged and took to wing, and was going in the opposite direction when the hawk swooped by. The hawk surely could have made a kill had it been willing to take a ducking in order to gain a phalarope for its lunch. Possibly the hawk was not very hungry, or perhaps it was in its mind that here were several phalaropes remaining on the lake, any one of which might furnish a meal. Time after time the hawk circled and came swooping down over a phalarope.

The phalaropes were wise and were reluctant to leave the water. Not once was a phalarope foolish enough to leave the water before the oncoming hawk. Always they would dodge when the killer made the swoop, and always they left the water going in the opposite direction when speedy wings were carrying the killer away. Not being able to frighten a phalarope into leaving the water ahead of its stoop, the hawk was doomed to forego its luncheon. However, when the last remaining phalarope took to wing, the hawk made a desperate attempt to pluck it from the air. The hawk made a quick turn and followed the phalarope. Seemingly he could travel at about twice the speed of the phalarope, but he could not turn or dodge so quickly. After dodging the hawk six or seven times, the phalarope managed to get above the hawk and there it was safe, for the hawk did not attempt to strike from below, nor could the hawk outwing the phalarope in upward flight.—CHARLES W. MICHAEL, Pasadena, California, November 15, 1937.

**Fire Ants Attacking California Quail Chicks.**—Ants of the genus *Solenopsis* may destroy from 4 to 12 per cent of Bob-white Quail nests in Georgia, attacking and eating the helpless chicks as they emerge from the shell (Stoddard, The Bobwhite Quail, 1932, p. 193). In Arizona, ants (genus not determined) are reported to attack and kill not only hatching chicks but also incubating females of both Gambel and Scaled quails (Gorsuch, Univ. Ariz. Bull., vol. 5, 1934, pp. 76-77). Apparently ant depredations on California Quail have heretofore escaped notice.

At Davis, California, fire ants (*Solenopsis xyloni* and *S. molesta*) have been found swarming over the shells of recently hatched eggs of the California Quail (*Lophortyx californica californica*) on a number of occasions. In the course of detailed observation of thirty-two quail nests at this locality in 1936 and 1937, only one case of actual destruction of hatching chicks was noted. The nest (U. F., 1937, 11) in this instance was in an unusually exposed site in a small nut orchard only 50 feet from a paved sidewalk. Four days before the set of eleven eggs had been completed a grass fire had removed practically all protective cover and had actually scorched the shells of five of the eggs. Incubation, however, was carried on until July 25 when the eggs were due to hatch. At 5:50 that

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morning the female bird was observed approaching the nest and behaving in a peculiar manner. Instead of slinking onto the nest and settling down quietly, she walked back and forth and around the nest in a listless manner for 50 minutes, passing within a few inches of her eggs half a dozen times. Finally, she stopped and for ten minutes squatted over the nest with head erect and eyes alert. Then suddenly she flew off to join her mate at the creek 100 yards away.

Upon examination, the entire nest was found to be swarming with *Solenopsis xyloni*. One egg was nearly hatched and the chick, half out of the shell, had already succumbed; a large part of its head had been eaten away. Another egg was pipped and a dozen ants had gained access through the hole, barely two millimeters in diameter. The chick within was still alive but had been so injured by ant bites and stings around the eye and mouth that it failed to recover in an incubator to which it was removed. The remaining nine eggs were unpipped and unharmed.

After carefully clearing away all organic waste, a ring of ant powder (sodium fluoride and pyrethrum) was sprinkled in the dust around the nest to prevent further invasion. The treatment was successful, but the bird failed to return until 7:15 that evening. One of the remaining eggs hatched successfully on July 28; the other embryos had evidently died at an early stage of incubation.—JOHN T. EMLER, JR., *Division of Zoology, University of California, Davis, California, November 23, 1937.*

**Creepers Nesting in Solano County, California.**—On May 29, 1937, while making a "breeding-bird census" for Bird-Lore along Green Valley Creek, about five miles northwest of Cordelia, Solano County, California, I was surprised to locate a nesting Sierra Creeper (*Certhia familiaris zelotes*).



Fig. 29. Nesting site of Sierra Creeper in a dead laurel stub (center) near Cordelia, Solano County, California.

Looking into the end of a badly decayed laurel stub, four feet high and five inches in diameter, J. D. Graham of Benicia, who accompanied me, found four young birds. They did not seem to be Western House Wrens, which were nesting commonly here, so I waited for a few minutes and was rewarded by seeing a creeper, with a spider in its bill, light on the trunk of an adjacent laurel tree three or four feet away. As soon as it saw me at the nest, it commenced to utter a *tsip-tsee* note, and several times flew toward my head as though attempting to drive me away, returning each time to the near-by tree trunk. It entered the nesting cavity only after I had withdrawn a little distance.

The nest was open to the sky in the hollow tip of the decayed stub about six inches down in the hole, the inside measurement of the cavity being approximately three inches in diameter. The nest was of fine, thread-like bark strips, matted with feathers and decaying wood dust. I recognized one of the feathers as that of a Steller Jay, and several were from a Horned Owl. The nesting stub was so badly decayed that it would have snapped off with very little pressure.

I visited the nest again on June 6 at which time the four young birds were still in the nest, though evidently about ready to leave. On that date I took the accompanying photograph (fig. 29) and noted that there was one addled egg in

the nest which I withdrew and prepared for my collection.—EMERSON A. STONER, *Benicia, California, September 22, 1937.*

**The Timberline Sparrow in Arizona.**—While collecting birds near Springerville, Apache County, Arizona, in October, 1937, I noticed flocks of Vesper and Brewer sparrows foraging in a wheat field along the Little Colorado River, 4 miles west of town. An immature male Brewer Sparrow, taken on October 8, has since been identified as *Spizella breweri taverneri* by Dr. H. C. Oberholser