

The swallows are quite capable of retaining possession of a nesting box against the sparrows after they have seriously started nesting, but this does not take place until early June when the sparrows are well established. Though the swallows take up their territory soon after their arrival in March, and there is always a fight for it, for the next two months they visit the site irregularly and it seems then that the sparrows are able to get ahead and cannot be ejected.—THEED PEARSE, *Courtenay, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, December 30, 1939.*

Townsend Solitaire at Benicia, California.—Townsend Solitaires (*Myadestes townsendi*) have not often been observed near Benicia, and therefore three observations of this species in the winter of 1938-1939 I deem of interest to record.

On December 26, 1938, five miles northeast of Benicia, I observed one feeding with Western Bluebirds (*Sialia mexicana*) on toyon berries on a brushy hillside.

On March 5, 1939, in my yard in Benicia a cat caused some commotion among the birds. A Hermit Thrush and a Robin scolded, attracting a Solitaire which came down from a large pepper tree to within ten feet of me, eyeing the cat but making no utterance of any kind.

On March 9, 1939, what was probably this same individual was in my yard. It was interesting to note the similarity in the wing pattern of this bird to a Mockingbird in rather poor plumage. This individual was probably attracted to my yard by the abundance of pepper berries.—EMERSON A. STONER, *Benicia, California, March 22, 1939.*

An Early Record of the Dickcissel in Arizona.—The Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*) is a bird typical of the Mississippi Valley and the plains east of the Rocky Mountains. It is a straggler as far west as New Mexico (F. M. Bailey, *Birds of New Mexico*, 1928, p. 681). Arizona records are few, and apparently there has been none since 1884. Swarth (*Pac. Coast Avif. No. 10, 1914, p. 61*) summarizes the status of the species as follows: "Only known to occur in Arizona as observed by Henshaw . . . , who found it in small numbers and secured specimens [5] on the San Pedro River, at Fort Crittenden and at Fort Lowell, in August and September, 1873 and 1874; . . . specimen taken by Brown at Tucson, September 11, 1884 . . ."

Among some small bird bones from Indian dwellings that were sent to me for identification by Mr. J. C. McGregor of the Museum of Northern Arizona is a maxilla of *Spiza americana*. The bill of this fringillid is so well set off structurally from that of other North American types that no doubt arises concerning its identity. The maxilla of *Spiza* is distinguished from that of others of somewhat similar proportions particularly by the depth of the internarial bridge which bears a ventral keel. The maxilla from the Indian dwellings, no. A. O. 486, Mus. N. Ariz., was taken at Ridge Ruin, locality NA 1785, two and one-half miles east of Winona Village, Upper Sonoran Zone, Coconino County, Arizona. The room in which it was found was used during the twelfth century, A. D.

One does not expect to find the bones of distinctly rare species in Indian dwellings. The record here reported, the first for northern Arizona, and the nineteenth century records for southern Arizona lead one to suspect that the Dickcissel at least migrated through this part of the Southwest in moderate numbers in past times. In the Atlantic coast area the species has diminished in the last century. May not there have been a similar retreat on the western frontier of the bird's range?—ALDEN H. MILLER, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, California, January 21, 1940.*

Mountain Plover at San Diego, California.—An encouraging note in connection with a bird usually feared to be growing rarer, is the fair size of two flocks of the Mountain Plover (*Eupoda montana*) which have been observed in the vicinity of San Diego within the past couple of years. On November 18, 1939, L. W. Walker, of the San Diego Natural History Museum staff, found a flock of some 75 individuals on the U. S. Navy flying field, Kearny Mesa. They remained there for a number of days and he saw them more than once. Always, he said, there seemed to be two component parts to the group. Each part, about half of the whole, would usually keep to itself, but should all the birds happen to be together and there was any disturbance, the two halves would instantly separate and maneuver as units. He described the plovers as absurdly "dumb." Not only would they permit easy approach, but when two specimens were collected for the San Diego Society of Natural History, their companions, he said, would come running up to gaze at each dead bird. He considered the birds hardly smart enough to escape the airplanes and thought there might be some fatalities from this cause.

The other flock of Mountain Plover, which was also reported by Walker, was found on January 1, 1938, at Coronado Heights, near the south end of San Diego Bay. It contained about 35 individuals, of which a few were collected. Beside these two records, specimens in the collection of the San Diego Society of Natural History show the following localities and dates on their labels: San Jacinto Valley,

Riverside County, California, November 29, 1885; Rosarito, Baja California, Mexico, February 17, 1925; Gray's Well, Imperial County, California, January 9, 1926; Punta Penascosa, Sonora, Mexico, February 19, 1934; Pilot Knob, Imperial County, California, February 18, 1938.—CLINTON G. ABBOTT, *San Diego Society of Natural History, San Diego, California, December 15, 1939.*

The Nectar Eating Habits of the Purple Finch.—In February of 1939, at my home in Berkeley, California, I noticed that the California Purple Finches (*Carpodacus purpureus californicus*) were singing every morning in a plum tree which was in full bloom. On closer observation the birds were seen to be plucking blossoms. Each bird worked systematically, and in one movement picked a blossom and snipped open the base; it then removed the nectar while holding the blossom in the bill, following which it dropped the blossom to the ground. Upon examination the dropped blossoms were found to be undamaged except for removal of the nectar. The birds' unhurried swiftness was interrupted only when they paused to sing. In March the purple finches transferred their attentions to the apricot trees and continued the same procedure. Four of the eight trees which were under observation were worked consistently, while the other four trees were not. Of the four trees that were not worked one had been pruned.

In July and August when the fruit ripened, the four apricot trees whose blossoms had been thinned by the purple finches had fewer, but larger, fruits. Of the four apricot trees which had not been visited by the purple finches the three unpruned trees were loaded with small fruit. In this instance the purple finches presumably had been beneficial rather than harmful. The tree which was young and had been pruned bore fruit comparable in size and quantity to the four trees visited by the purple finches. Because observations were made for only one season, it is not possible to determine whether these results were actually brought about by the purple finches or merely coincidental to other factors such as soil fertility, moisture, insects, and the general health of the trees.

Was the nectar eating habit of the California Purple Finch formerly beneficial and is it now harmful because of the introduction of man made factors? Is this habit harmful when practiced in pruned orchards or is it of further benefit? Has this nectar eating habit always or ever been harmful, or has it had any noticeable effect? These questions should be answered at least in part by further observations. Different findings may be expected where different kinds of trees and different ecological conditions are involved.—NED W. STONE, *Berkeley, California, September 28, 1939.*

Bendire Thrasher in Lincoln County, Nevada.—On May 16, 1939, while Dr. R. M. Bond, of Berkeley, California, and I were driving from Caliente to Pahrangat Valley in southeastern Nevada, we saw a pair of thrashers apparently new to both of us near the roadside about three miles north of Delmar, and at an altitude of about 5500 feet in the Joshua tree belt. We collected one of the birds, which proved to be an adult male *Toxostoma bendirei*. So far as I am aware, this is the first record of the Bendire Thrasher being taken anywhere in the state of Nevada.—STANLEY G. JEWETT, *Portland, Oregon, September 17, 1939.*

The Clapper Rail of Morro Bay.—On February 6, 1939, I took a mated pair of Clapper Rails on the salicornia-covered island in the center of Morro Bay; at least three others were seen at the Federal Sanctuary on the east side of the bay and Dr. A. T. Marshall, who has long been a resident of Morro, considers the species to be a scarce but regular permanent resident at other points around Morro Bay.

Having secured the specimens it should naturally be considered an easy matter to decide whether the birds were the California Clapper Rail (*Rallus obsoletus obsoletus*) or the Light-footed Rail (*R. o. levipes*), but after careful comparison with the series in my own collection and consulting all available works of reference, I am in considerable doubt both as to what to call my Morro birds and as to the validity of the subspecies *levipes*. The latter until recently was always regarded as a full species!

My series consists of twelve good skins of *obsoletus* from San Francisco and Tomales bays and two skins of *levipes* and *beldingi*. I have also gone over the series in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology. As far as I can see the recognized distinctions of back color, breast color and superciliary stripe are without value, as a series of the northern birds will show specimens with all the characters of the southern forms. The only tangible difference, and that an extremely slight one and possibly due to exposure, between the northern form and the two southern ones is the browner centers to the feathers of the mantle in the two southern subspecies; in the northern form these centers are black.

On this count I would call the Morro birds *Rallus obsoletus obsoletus*, although the locality is closer to the range of *levipes*; on the other hand the measurements of the female come well within those given for *levipes*. But an analysis of the distinctions in measurements shows that there is actually