

At other times, too, as when tearing meat from a carcass with the beak, the toes seem to function primarily as balancers rather than as supporters. It was therefore surprising to me to see several Black Vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) use their toes to support their weight when they chose to rest on a wire.

On February 2, 1940, I visited Guaymas, about halfway down the Gulf of California in Sonora, Mexico. A closely-packed group of perhaps seventy Black Vultures was feeding energetically on the great piles of sea bass heads dumped as refuse near the shore of the bay by one of Guaymas' leading

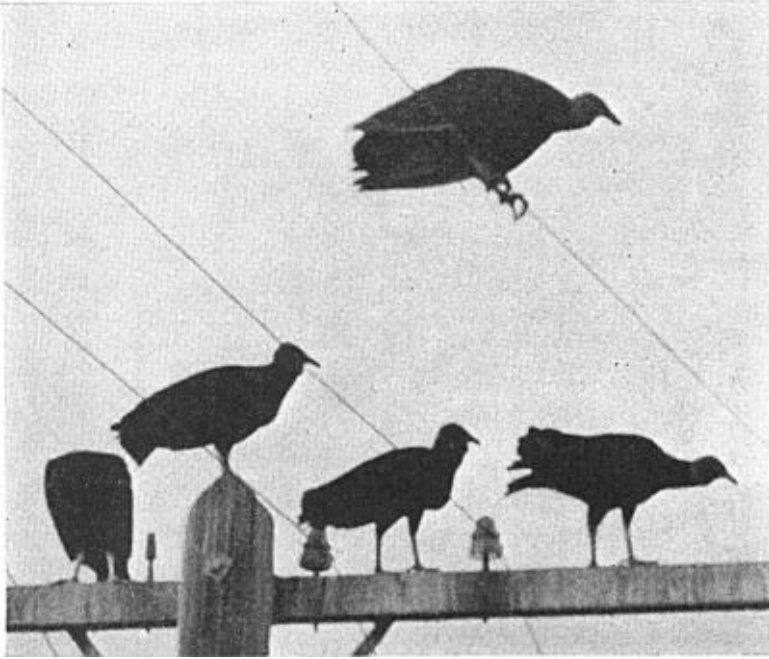


Fig. 63. Black Vulture balancing on telephone wire with wings partly opened and weight over toes.

fish canneries. I watched the birds from a distance of several hundred feet as they hopped about stiffly, grabbing for the best morsels. They were unusually wary for Mexican vultures, often so tame around the streets, and it was impossible for me to get the "close up" I wanted. When the birds took flight, many of them flew to the nearby telephone poles to alight. After the crossbars were filled, they continued to crowd in, while several of the late comers settled on the wires. Surprisingly enough they seemed to experience no great difficulty in balancing, and several remained on them for the best part of a minute, while I advanced for a picture. The photograph I was able to take (fig. 63) shows that the toes are simply curved like hooks over the wire, while the body is thrown slightly forward, making the center of gravity fall directly over the toes rather than over the end of the tarsometatarsus. The wings of the balancing bird are held slightly out as aids in maintaining equilibrium. The usual standing posture is plainly shown in the position of the other birds.

Such skill in balancing must be derived from repeated practice, as the vultures are not naturally suited for perching on such unsteady and precarious objects. Since the telephone wires shown here are near the spot where the fish heads are always dumped, the birds must frequently take to them when alarmed and thus have developed their unusual skill in balancing.—KARL W. KENYON, *Pomona College, Claremont, California, April 25, 1940.*

**An Unusually Low Nest of the Nuttall Woodpecker.**—For the past three years, E. A. Stoner and I have been making trips to a small lake near Cordelia, California, where several nests of the Nuttall Woodpecker (*Dryobates nuttallii*) have been found in the surrounding oak-covered hills. On April 23, 1939, we located a nest not over 30 inches above the ground in an oak stump. On

examining the hole we found a male Nuttall Woodpecker incubating. We reached in and lifted the bird off the eggs, which were just hatching, and examined it for a few moments. On being released the bird returned directly to the eggs. The female was not seen. Most of the nests found were from 10 to 16 feet above the ground; thus 30 inches seems an unusually low nest for these woodpeckers.—J. DUNCAN GRAHAM, *Benicia, California, January 31, 1940.*

**Extension of Range of the Black-chinned Sparrow into Utah.**—While on a collecting trip in southwestern Utah in the spring of 1939, an unfamiliar bird song was heard by Mr. Aaron Ross, one of our party. The bird when secured proved to be a male Black-chinned Sparrow (*Spizella atrogularis evvura*). Later others were collected, making a total of four. These specimens, all males (now numbers 5793-5796 Mus. Zool. University of Utah), were taken April 29 and 30, 1939, at the Danish Ranch, 4200 feet, 5 miles northwest of Leeds, Washington County, Utah. They were collected in an area of sparse juniper and piñon pine along more or less rocky ridges. From the fact that the birds were actively singing and showed enlarged gonads, we inferred that they were birds established in the area and about to breed, although the certainty of this was by no means established.—WILLIAM H. BEHLE, *University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, May 1, 1940.*

**Plain Titmouse Occupies Cliff Swallow Nest.**—The colony of Cliff Swallows (*Petrochelidon albifrons*) at the Life Sciences Building on the Berkeley campus of the University of California was established in 1935. The early history of the colony has been recorded by Grinnell (*Condor*, vol. 39, 1937, pp. 206-210). Since 1936 the swallow nests have often been usurped by English Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*), which usually take possession before the swallows arrive in the spring.

On April 2, 1940, a Plain Titmouse (*Baeolophus inornatus*) was seen to enter two of the swallow nests. It remained in each one for only a few seconds as though merely prospecting. Again on April 3 a titmouse was noted near the nests but was driven away by the swallows. Two titmice were observed entering a swallow nest on April 17. The swallows showed belligerence when the titmice entered the nest on April 20. The successful occupation of the swallow nest was proven on May 10 when a titmouse was observed carrying food into the usurped nest and the cries of young birds were plainly heard.

The retort-shaped mud nest of a cliff swallow is not an extremely radical departure from the usual nest site of the Plain Titmouse in a cavity in a tree. Due to the activities of conscientious tree surgeons, typical sites are now practically nonexistent on the Berkeley campus. It seems likely that swallow nests would be occupied only when no other suitable sites are available.—CHARLES G. SIBLEY, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley*, and DONALD HEMPHILL, *Calistoga, California, June 24, 1940.*