

bank some ten miles northeast of Maxwell, Colusa County, California. During June the cattails in the canal were occupied by a moderate-sized colony of Tricolored Red-wings (*Agelaius tricolor*), and adjoining the canal was a large rice field which was rather heavily populated by nesting Black Terns (*Chlidonias nigra*).

Passing by this den on July 15, 1932, I noted a large quantity of feathers and stopped the car to investigate. The following debris was listed: 64 wings of nestling Black Terns, 16 wings of juvenal Tricolored Red-wings, about 10 inches of the vertebral column of a small snake, 1 pocket gopher skull, 2 giant water beetles (*Hydrous triangularis*), and remains of 1 scorpion (see fig. 57).



Fig. 57. Remains of birds eaten by a family of Burrowing Owls.

It seems quite apparent that this family of owls were opportunists and that much of their food during June was composed of juvenal blackbirds and terns taken from nests within a few yards of the den. Some few young of both species were still in their nests on July 15.

Passing this way fully a month later, I again stopped to inspect the den and found that the current food remains consisted entirely of pellets of beetle fragments, normal food of the species in this area.—JOHNSON A. NEFF, *Fish and Wildlife Service, Denver, Colorado, May 1, 1941.*

A Record of the Northern Flicker in Butte County, California.—Mr. Allan Coon of Durham, Butte County, California, shot two flickers which were drilling holes in his house on a farm two miles west of Durham on November 20, 1940. One was a typical Red-shafted Flicker, *Colaptes cafer collaris*; the second bird was slightly smaller, and the shafts and under sides of the wings and tail were bright yellow. The skin of this second bird has been identified by Dr. Alden H. Miller of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology as that of a typical Northern Flicker, *Colaptes auratus luteus*; it is now in the collection of Chico State College at Chico, California.—E. G. ENGLAND, *Durham, California, January 12, 1941.*

Foraging Behavior in the Western Bluebird.—A loose flock of about ten Western Bluebirds (*Sialia mexicana*) and a Say Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*) was observed feeding on a south-facing, open, grassy slope opposite (north of) St. Mary's College, Moraga Valley, Contra Costa County, on March 1, 1941. A strong southwest wind was blowing with consequent strong up-drafts passing along slopes and through the open draws. The birds were perched on dried weed stalks and fence posts, generally facing the wind. The Say Phoebe remained in the same vicinity, apparently indifferent to the bluebirds nearby. The bluebirds would fly to a position in the up-draft some 6 to 8 feet above the ground, there hover for a second or two, and then soar for a few seconds. On a number of occasions, one or two of them remained in a soaring position without movement of wings for 6 to 8 seconds (fig. 58).

The birds were foraging for insects, which they caught by dropping quickly from their position in the air. It appeared that the wind was blowing insects upward over the hill slightly above the grass. The bluebirds, hovering or soaring and looking down, watched for them; when prey was sighted, the bird turned about face and flew back to catch up with it. Such a behavior was observed on both the open slopes and in the draws. As many as four birds were noted hovering and soaring at one time over a few square yards of area. In the draws, soaring was not as prolonged as on the more

exposed faces; in the former situations, the bluebirds alternately hovered and soared a few seconds each before dropping for prey. The Say Phoebe behaved similarly except that it did not soar but merely hovered. In the Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*), hovering is a characteristic trait (Grinnell and Storer, *Animal Life in the Yosemite*, 1924:625).

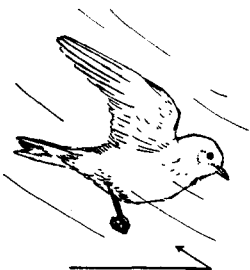


Fig. 58. Soaring position of the Western Bluebird. The arrow indicates the general direction of the wind with reference to the horizon.

Western Bluebirds may often be noted to hover in hunting for food, but the observation here reported presents evidence for the substitution of soaring for hovering under suitable air conditions. Among passerines, soaring of course seldom occurs.—FRANK A. PITELKA, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, California, May 17, 1941.*

A Condor in the San Jacinto Mountains, California.—On January 15, 1941, while in the San Jacinto Mountains, Riverside County, California, Mr. William E. Bullard and I observed what we believe to have been a California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*). The bird was circling around above Fobes Ranch, which is in the middle of the area burned by the Garner fire in 1940, and about ten miles in an airline southeast of San Jacinto Peak. The condor was trying to dodge the attacks of a large reddish-brown hawklike bird. After about a minute, the birds disappeared over a ridge. The condor was identified by its buzzard-like shape and two definite white areas, one under each wing. The birds were so far above us that we could not observe any positive identifying marks on the attacker, but from the observations of others we judge that this was most likely a Golden Eagle.

A dead cow was lying on the hillside above the Fobes Ranch. It was bloated and a portion of the carcass beneath the tail had been eaten away. It is possible that the condor had been eating on the cow carcass when discovered and chased away by the eagle.

A few weeks later, the appearance of a huge bird a few miles southeast of Hemet was reported by some people who believed it might be a condor. Since then we have heard of no reports of birds which might be condors in the San Jacinto Mountains. It is thought that the bird observed was a visitor rather than a permanent resident.—RICHARD H. MAY, *Riverside, California, April 6, 1941.*

The Black Merlin in Southern California.—The Black Merlin (*Falco columbarius suckleyi*) was recorded as a straggler in southern California by Willett in 1912 (*Pac. Coast Avif.* No. 7, 1912:49). The single specimen he records was taken at Claremont, California, on December 6, 1895, by J. F. Illingworth, and it is now in the Grinnell Collection at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology in Berkeley. No subsequent specimen from south of the Tehachapi has been placed on record so far as I can discover. The object of this note is to extend the list of such specimens.

On March 5, 1939, a fully adult male was picked up wounded and brought to Mrs. Myrtle S. Edwards of Claremont, who recognized its importance. The bird died the following day and was prepared by Mr. Karl Kenyon of Pomona College. Mrs. Edwards generously presented it to the University of California at Los Angeles. The specimen is in beautiful plumage. The bluish slate of the dorsal surface becomes smoky black on the hind neck due to suffusion by the brown pigment of the neck ring. The bluish slate of the crown is rendered still darker by the relatively broader black median penciling on each feather. The light brown of the supra- and post-orbital stripe is almost entirely lost. On the ventral surface the black central feather stripes are greatly expanded even down to the tibial flags and crissum which are broadly marked and show but little brown pigment.

The brown wash across the chest is almost entirely lacking and such as appears on the tibial flags is quite a dark chestnut as compared with a high-plumaged winter male of *F. c. bendirei*. Tail bars are narrower and much darker blue, with the terminal band almost obsolete.