

OCCURRENCE AND NESTING OF SOME BIRDS IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY REGION

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In the past few years, while watching birds in the San Francisco Bay region, I have made the following observations which appear to be worthy of record. Some of the reports relate to peculiarities of behavior whereas others establish new localities of nesting, especially on the east side of the Bay. No extensive search of literature concerning the species mentioned here has been made but all of the records appear to represent additions to information contained in Grinnell and Wythe's "Directory to the Bird-life of the San Francisco Bay Region" (Pac. Coast Avif. No. 18, 1927).

Falco sparverius. Sparrow Hawk. Although the winter of 1940-1941 was abnormally wet in the vicinity of San Francisco Bay, a pair of Sparrow Hawks that have been nesting in a bird house in my yard for several years had a complete set of four eggs on March 21, 1941. This early nesting was due, I believe, to a short interval of sunny weather that increased nesting activity. The eggs had all hatched by April 17, and by May 15, the four young, all females, began to leave the nesting box that is placed 25 feet up in an eucalyptus tree. After the young had left the box and were still being fed, I noticed much sexual activity on the part of the parent birds. I was surprised to find a second set of four eggs in the box on June 5. Other than striking the writer on the head while he was making observations at the nest, the female took no further interest in the box after the eggs had been laid and it was assumed she had deserted. The eggs were collected by H. W. Carriger on June 9, 1941, under protest from the male bird who alone remained to defend the eggs even after his mate had left the vicinity. The locality is near Mills College in east Oakland, Alameda County.

Cryptoglaux acadica. Saw-whet Owl. A much decayed owl of this species was found beside a trail in Redwood Regional Park, Contra Costa County, about one-quarter of a mile northeast of Redwood Peak on June 16, 1940.

Megaceryle alcyon. Belted Kingfisher. In 1939, a pair of kingfishers nested in a sandy bank along the lower Arroyo Mocho near Livermore, Alameda County. The seven young were banded May 7, and May 13, 1939.

Progne subis. Purple Martin. A set of five eggs of the Purple Martin was taken by H. W. Carriger in company with the writer and Leroy Jensen, June 12, 1938, near Cedar Mountain, 15 miles southeast of Livermore, Alameda County, at a spot 2600 feet above sea level. The nesting cavity, an old woodpecker drilling, was situated about 30 feet up in a partially dead valley oak. The material on which the five white eggs rested was composed of digger pine needles and green blue-oak leaves. Digger pines, blue oaks and valley oaks are the common trees on the slopes of the hills where the martins were found. The Purple Martin is probably a regular summer visitant in limited numbers in certain sections of the Mount Hamilton range. A flock of six birds in company with several Violet-green Swallows was observed alighting and picking something from the light-colored soil on the side of a steep bank in southeastern Alameda County on June 29, 1941.

Mimus polyglottos. Mockingbird. Although not uncommon in parts of east Oakland in the winter, I had never known this species to nest here. However, in May of 1940, Miss Inez Meader, a teacher at Maxwell Park School in Oakland, informed me that a pair of mockingbirds had a nest in a backyard near Monticello and Virginia avenues. On May 15, 1940, I went to that address and saw the parent mockingbirds feeding young that had very recently left the nest. The nest was situated about six feet from the ground in the center of a small quince tree. One of the young in an early attempt to leave the nest had fallen to the ground below where it died.

Hylocichla guttata. Hermit Thrush. That the Hermit Thrush occurs in a small area in the Redwood growth of the Oakland hills during summer was brought to my attention by Leroy Jensen, who first heard singing males there in July, 1937. From 1938 until the middle of 1941 the attempts of H. W. Carriger and myself to find this species nesting had met with failure. The song of the male birds was the only evidence of the species being in the vicinity. No young were seen and we could not honestly identify any of the adults as females. Only a couple of questionable old nests were brought forth by our diligent searches which extended over many hours in all types of weather. Many times we convinced ourselves that the birds were not nesting, but there was still a slight element of doubt in our minds. June 1, 1941, proved to be a lucky day, for I discovered a pair feeding three young in a nest that was placed 30 inches from the ground in a huckleberry bush. The three young were

banded and one of them photographed. The site of the nest was about 950 feet in elevation and 50 feet up on a slope from a trail that parallels one of the tributaries of Redwood Creek. The site is located in Redwood Regional Park, Contra Costa County, almost a half-mile east from the nearest point on the Alameda County line and not quite one-quarter of a mile northeast of Redwood Peak. The region where the thrushes were discovered is thickly covered with a mature second-growth redwood forest that covers small but steep side canyons and ridges. Other trees and shrubs associated with the redwood in the region are madrone, California laurel, coast live oak, dwarf alder, huckleberry and wild blackberry. The largest number of males heard singing at one time on their breeding grounds was three, although it is quite possible there were several more in the region. Because no



Fig. 18. Young Hermit Thrush, photographed June 1, 1941, in Redwood Regional Park, Contra Costa County, California.

specimens have been collected, the subspecific status of the birds has not been disclosed but presumably it is *slevini*, the coastal form, as the area falls within the general breeding range of that race. Hermit Thrushes may also occur in summer within Alameda County, about three-quarters of a mile southeast of Redwood Peak near where the Contra Costa County line crosses Redwood Creek, but this has not been definitely determined.

Sialia mexicana. Mexican Bluebird. Once fairly common in winter around the writer's home, the Mexican Bluebird in recent years has become rather rare. The last appearance of this bird in my yard was in November, 1939. Formerly it nested in bird houses in the neighborhood over a period of several consecutive summers. In 1934, a pair reared two broods in the bird boxes at my home. The second brood left the nest box on July 7, 1934. I observed that some individuals of the first brood were assisting the parents in feeding the second brood during the period the second brood remained in the nest. A young bird, probably of the second brood, was found dead in the street in front of my home and was sent to the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology in August of 1934.

Poliottila caerulea. Gnatcatcher. On December 24, 1938, while taking a Christmas census for Bird-Lore in the Oakland hills near Mills College, our party discovered four individuals of this species feeding in some baccharis bushes. These were the first I had seen in Oakland. Since that time we have observed at least one on each ensuing census. Although more common in winter, I have also noted gnatcatchers in spring and summer in the Oakland Hills. One was heard in Leona Heights on April 20, 1941, and one was seen in the same region on June 28, 1941. Another was heard just west of Redwood Regional Park on June 23 and 24, 1940. One was noted flying over my yard on September 8, 1939. It would appear from the record made on June 28 that the species might be nesting somewhere in the live oaks and brush back of Mills College. The point nearest to Oakland at which I have observed a nest of this bird is on Las Trampas Ridge, Contra Costa County, where one was found on May 10, 1941.

Dendroica auduboni. Audubon Warbler. The appearance of Audubon Warblers in the vicinity

of Sequoia Park in the hills of east Oakland in late spring was first noted by H. W. Carriger in 1940. Several trips were made to the area just west of Sequoia Park in June of that year by the writer and Mr. Carriger, but although two singing males and a female were observed, attempts to discover indications of nesting were not successful. Again in the spring of 1941, Mr. Carriger noted several singing



Fig. 19. Locality in Sequoia Park, Oakland, California, where Audubon Warblers were found feeding young on June 1, 1941.

males in Sequoia Park. It was not until June 1, 1941, when I found a pair feeding young, that definite signs of nesting were disclosed. The parents were feeding two bob-tailed young that had recently left the nest and were not yet able to follow the old birds around for food. The old birds were observed at close range as they dropped down close to the ground to hunt insects in the brush. The place where the young birds were noted is adjacent to Skyline Boulevard at the northern boundary of Sequoia Park, 1450 feet in elevation, and one-quarter of a mile west of the Contra Costa County line, in



Fig. 20. Fan palm in Dimond Park, Oakland, in which Hooded Orioles nested in June, 1941.

Alameda County. The immediate area in which the birds were found is covered with Monterey pine and Monterey cypress, of which the former seems to be the favorite tree for foraging and probably for nesting.

Dendroica nigrescens. Black-throated Gray Warbler. Throughout the spring and summer of 1938 and 1939 several individuals were noted in a limited area along the upper Arroyo Mocho near Cedar Mountain, Alameda County, where they frequented the digger pines and oaks along the stream. Greater abundance of individuals in the spring undoubtedly indicates migrants passing through the region. At least two, and probably more, remained through the months of May and June in 1938, and May in 1939. Although males were singing and at times pairs were present, no further indications of nesting were found. It is quite possible that at least one pair bred in that region in the summer of 1938 and 1939. No birds at all were observed in 1940 or 1941.

Icterus cucullatus. Hooded Oriole. On June 22, 1941, Brighton C. Cain called my attention to a pair of strange orioles that he had found nesting in Dimond Park, Oakland. The same afternoon I visited Dimond Park and found the birds which proved to be Hooded Orioles. The birds were feeding large young in a nest about 45 feet up in the top of a tall fan palm. The nest appeared to be composed of palm fibers and was fastened on the underside of one of the large outer palm leaves. The parent birds could not easily be observed, as they made swift and direct approaches to the nest. Once the male paused for several minutes on a branch of a near-by Monterey pine and permitted clearer observation. The feeding of the young could not be observed from the ground. When food was brought in there was much chattering from the young. The young left the nest by June 26, 1941.

Piranga ludoviciana. Western Tanager. A particularly late migrant of this species in fall plumage was observed in my yard on November 2, 1939. It was feeding on grapes.

Passerina cyanea. Indigo Bunting. While watching some House Finches bathing in a bird bath at my home in east Oakland, the morning of August 3, 1939, I caught sight of a flash of blue near the bird bath. When the bird moved into better light, I was quite surprised to see an adult male Indigo Bunting in slightly worn plumage. The bunting did not go directly to the bird bath but proceeded to "sip" drops of water that had been splashed on some vines below by the House Finches. After finishing drinking, it flew a few feet away, alighting on a concrete walk where it remained for several minutes and permitted easier observation. Finally the bunting made off in an easterly direction. The summer of 1939 was unusually dry and the Indigo Bunting in its quest for water was undoubtedly attracted by the House Finches that were noisily bathing. There is no question in my mind that it was an Indigo Bunting that I observed. The entirely blue plumage and the small size compared with the House Finches were carefully noted. This individual could have been an escaped cage bird, but it is an interesting coincidence to note that a group of bird students saw a male Indigo Bunting singing in Strawberry Canyon in Berkeley on June 24, 1939. Possibly it was the same individual I saw.

Spizella atrogularis. Black-chinned Sparrow. In search of Bell Sparrow nests on May 11, 1941, in Santa Clara County east of Mount Hamilton, H. W. Carriger in company with the writer flushed a strange bird from a nest that contained four unmarked pale blue eggs. A number of minutes passed



Fig. 21. Nest and eggs of Black-chinned Sparrow found May 11, 1941, near San Antonio Valley, northeastern Santa Clara County, California.

before the shy bird returned, during which time two photographs were taken of the nest. When on the nest, a flesh-colored bill and ashy gray chin revealed the bird as a female Black-chinned Sparrow. The nest was composed of grasses and lined with hair. It was about two feet from the ground in a ceanothus bush. Ceanothus and adenostoma with several scattered valley oaks and digger pines made up the chief plant growth in the area. The area appeared to have been burned over at one time, most of the present brush being only two to five feet high. The spot where the nest was found is on the road between Livermore and Mount Hamilton near San Antonio Valley, about a mile north of the intersection of the road to Patterson. A male heard singing in this same area the day the nest was found was the only other individual of this species seen. These sparrows are referable to the race *caurina* described from Las Trampas Ridge, Contra Costa County (Miller, Condor, 31, 1929:205-207).

Zonotrichia leucophrys. White-crowned Sparrow. On May 10, 1941, while in search of Steller Jay nests with H. W. Carriger in one of the canyons on the northern side of Rocky Ridge near Saint Marys College, Contra Costa County, my attention was called repeatedly to the characteristic opening notes of the song of the Nuttall race of the White-crowned Sparrow. Upon reaching the head of the canyon whence the song came, several adult White-crowned Sparrows were noted in the sage brush. Directly opposite Rocky Ridge is Las Trampas Ridge and on the same day we observed some on Las Trampas. Several individuals were young birds of the year which indicate they nest in the immediate vicinity. This record is interesting as it seems unusually far inland and also the region is more arid than the normal habitat of the subspecies. Just in recent years to my knowledge, this sparrow has become established in the Maxwell Park district of east Oakland. A pair seen feeding large young on May 5, 1939, was my first breeding record for this species in my neighborhood.

Zonotrichia albicollis. White-throated Sparrow. An adult bird was first noted feeding in company with a mixed flock of White-crowned Sparrows and Golden-crowned Sparrows at my home on November 27, 1939. It was trapped and banded on November 28 and was last noticed at my feeding station on December 4, 1939. It was quite antagonistic toward English Sparrows and all intruders of this alien species were vigorously ousted from the feeding trays. This individual and another that was found dead in Mills College, December 22, 1940, and later sent to the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, constitute the only records I have of the appearance of this eastern species near my home.

Melospiza lincolni. Lincoln Sparrow. Since I began banding operations at my present location in the winter of 1938-1939, I have managed to band a Lincoln Sparrow every winter season. I first noticed this species around my residence in the winter of 1933-1934, when I collected one and had it identified (race *gracilis*). Although a few individuals were seen at intervals in the winters, I did not realize how relatively common the species was until December 29, 1940, while taking a bird census for Bird-Lore. Eight individuals were counted within a few minutes in patches of weeds and brush near my home. A late record for this species was April 18, 1941, when I banded an individual that had been singing around the house for several days.

Oakland, California, December 17, 1941.