

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Some Observations of Lark Buntings and Their Nests in Eastern Montana.—The Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) is one of the most common summer birds in eastern Montana. The males arrive first each spring in the vicinity of Miles City. They come early in May and the females appear in numbers a few days later. Large flocks are maintained for a short time, usually until late May, when the birds disperse preparatory to nesting. The fall migration from this vicinity begins in early September. Small groups composed of both sexes and all ages gather for a few days, then disappear until the next spring.

During the summer of 1944, 18 nests were found and observed on the pastures at the United States Range Livestock Experiment Station near Miles City. All these nests were located on the ground near or under sagebrush. The three species of *Artemisia* most common to eastern Montana were sought as nesting sites. Ten nests were in the shelter of big sagebrush, *A. tridentata*, five were near bushes of silver sagebrush, *A. cana*, and three were protected by fringed sagebrush, *A. frigida*. Even though several other browse species were common on the area, nests were found only in the protection of sagebrush plants.

The nests were found over a 73-day period between May 28 and August 10. One was found in May, fourteen in June, two in July, and one in August. The sharp reduction in July may have been partly due to restricted field activity by the writer as well as to reduced activity by the buntings. The number of eggs or nestlings averaged 4.7 per nest. For the nests found prior to June 10 the number was 5.1 and for those found after that date the average was 4.4.

One nest containing 4 eggs was observed 7 times in 19 days; the young from this nest were fledged. Another nest with 5 eggs was observed 4 times in 18 days during which time the eggs were hatched and the young fledged. These two were the only nests from which young are known to have been fledged. One other nesting is believed to have been successful. Six nests were destroyed before the eggs were hatched and three after the eggs hatched. The fate of the remaining nests is uncertain. Predators known to have destroyed nests included snakes, coyotes and Black-billed Magpies (*Pica pica*). The Magpies destroyed eggs in two instances, whereas snakes and coyotes preyed upon nestlings in one instance each. In other instances the predators could not be determined. Even though the area where these nests were found was grazed by cattle, no destruction or disturbance could be attributed to the grazing animals.

Throughout these observations the nests were attended by one of the adult birds on 68 per cent of the inspections. The females were present on 58 per cent of the occasions and the males on the remaining 10 per cent of my visits to the nests. A female observed feeding five nestlings on two successive days was attended by two adult males. They followed her closely on forays for food and perched on a sage bush only a few inches from the nest while the nestlings were fed. No assistance by the males was observed. On another occasion a dog found six nestlings under a sage bush and snatched two of them out of the nest. At a command both were dropped into a puddle of water that had accumulated during a recent rain. Two days after this experience there were still six downy buntings in the nest, alive and apparently healthy.

The first molting male was observed on July 17. Small groups were still numerous on that date and their songs were frequently heard. By August 15 they were flocking and seldom sang. Faded, ragged males were common but a high proportion was still in summer plumage. By September 10 the molt was complete and none could be seen in summer plumage. The large flocks were gone or dispersed and only small groups of two to six birds or so were seen. None was seen after September 11, but my absence from the area after that date until September 25 precluded the opportunity to determine the departure date satisfactorily. None was seen after September 25 when I returned.—E. J. WOOLFOLK, Miles City, Montana, April 5, 1945.

Black-footed Albatrosses Eating Flying Fish.—The Black-footed Albatross (*Diomedea nigripes*) is the bird most frequently and constantly observed from ships plying between San Francisco and Honolulu. For the greater part of the voyage it is the only bird following the ship. Although different individuals of this species were watched many hours, it was not until we were about 600 miles east of Honolulu that I saw them take any food other than kitchen scraps.

In warm waters the malolo or flying fish frequently leave the water or skitter along on the surface in schools often containing as many as fifty individuals. On two different occasions an albatross was seen to catch a small flying fish as the fish moved past the bird resting on the water. The fish in each instance was swallowed immediately. It is probable that such fish living near and on the surface

constitute a significant part of the diet of pelagic birds in the warm waters of the world.—HARVEY I. FISHER, *Department of Zoology and Entomology, University of Hawaii, January 30, 1945.*

Hooded Merganser at Los Angeles, California.—On November 30, 1944, and on March 10, 1945, a female Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) was observed by the writer at the lake in Lincoln Park, Los Angeles, for the third successive season. One individual was seen during December, 1943, and January, 1944, and two individuals, both females, during December, 1942, and January, 1943.—J. H. COMBY, *Whittier, California, December 11, 1944.*

Sporadic Recurrence of Red-breasted Nuthatches in San Diego City Parks.—Perusal of the recently issued "Distribution of the Birds of California" by Grinnell and Miller (*Pac. Coast Avif. No. 27, 1944*) reveals the gaps in known ranges and emphasizes the desirability of placing unrecorded notes in print. A case in point is the fact that Henry Grey's observation of the Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*) in October, 1919 (*Condor, 27, 1925:37*) is the sole record of this species for San Diego County. The locality was no doubt near Grey's home in Mission Valley, which is within the city limits of San Diego.

The writer now recalls that between December, 1933, and March, 1934, the late A. W. Anthony told several times of seeing Red-breasted Nuthatches in a section of western Balboa Park that is planted with pine trees. In this same general area, Ken Stott, Jr., reported that he observed about ten of these nuthatches on October 4, 1944. On November 29, 1944, Mrs. E. B. Mead found six Red-breasted Nuthatches in a group of incense cedars in Presidio Park, North San Diego. In Presidio Park the writer also observed three birds, probably part of the same group, and heard others, in a small grove of pines on January 20, 1945. Through closer observation, the Red-breasted Nuthatch may be shown to be a regular annual fall or winter visitor to the city of San Diego.—LAURENCE M. HUEY, *Natural History Museum, Balboa Park, San Diego, California, March 23, 1945.*

A Northern Occurrence of the Brewster Booby.—So far as I am aware, there is but one record of the Brewster Booby (*Sula leucogaster brewsteri*) from the Pacific side of Baja California, that of a female taken near the San Benito Islands on August 7, 1923 (see Huey, *Condor, 26, 1924:74*). In going over some of my Baja California notes recently, I find the entry on July 3, 1925, of an immature bird of this species which for some minutes circled about the ship on which I was a passenger. The latitude and longitude at the time was 31° 30' N., 117° 00' W., a position some 200 miles north of the San Benito Islands.—A. J. VAN ROSSEM, *Dickey Collections, University of California, Los Angeles, December 20, 1944.*

Piñon Jay in Ravalli County, Montana.—On January 27, 1945, Truman Smith of the United States Public Health Laboratory at Hamilton, Montana, observed a flock of one hundred or more Piñon Jays (*Cyanocephalus cyanocephalus*) on Gird's Creek east of Hamilton. From this flock he obtained two specimens, of which one was presented to the University Museum by Dr. William L. Jellison of the Public Health Service. Saunders (*Pac. Coast Avif. No. 14, 1921:98*) states that he knew of no records west of the continental divide in Montana. Since that time the following records have appeared: Weydemeyer (*Condor, 29, 1927:159*) observed a flock of about forty near Eureka, Lincoln County, on January 11, 1921, and a small flock on August 21, 1924, north of Libby, Lincoln County. Wells (*Condor, 30, 1928:322*) saw a single individual at Missoula, Missoula County, on November 14, 1926. Weydemeyer (*Auk, 52, 1935:202*) observed a single bird at Fortine, Lincoln County, on November 4, 1932. According to Saunders the bird is not uncommon in parts of eastern Montana. The above flock was apparently the first to be seen in Ravalli County and the two specimens are, to my knowledge, the first to be taken west of the divide in Montana.—PHILIP L. WRIGHT, *Montana State University, Missoula, Montana, March 9, 1945.*

Shrike Robs Sparrow Hawk.—On October 15, 1944, at Chollas Valley, San Diego, California, I saw a male Sparrow Hawk (*Falco sparverius*) perched on a telegraph wire. Closer observation revealed that he was holding a small rodent which had evidently been obtained on a recent foray. I had not given much attention to a Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) which was perched on the same wire not five yards from the Sparrow Hawk, until, suddenly leaving its perch, the shrike flew directly and swiftly toward the hawk, snatched the prey from its talons, and made off carrying the rodent in its beak. This seemed to leave the hawk temporarily dumbfounded. Beal (*U. S. Biol. Surv. Bull. 30, 1907:33*) noted a frequent surveillance of the sparrow hawk by the shrike, which he laid to jealousy and remarked that "no case of actual conflict between the two has been observed." Since I have never read of a shrike's robbing a hawk or seen it except in this instance, I thought that this observation was worth reporting.—M. EUGENE HILL, *San Diego, California, March 23, 1945.*