

FROM FIELD AND STUDY



The Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster brewsteri*), adults and young at nest. Photograph taken on April 23, 1949, on George Island, in the Gulf of California, Mexico, by Ed Harrison and Frances Roberts.

Post-mortem Color Change in Bird Specimens.—Recently while working up a considerable collection of Fox Sparrows from Alaska, we had opportunity to compare a series of recently collected specimens with others that had been taken in the same localities on approximately the same dates (seasonally) fifty or more years ago. In doing this, we quickly reached the conclusion that it was useless to attempt to identify newly collected birds by comparing them with these older specimens.

We had available for use Ridgway's types of *Passerella iliaca fuliginosa* taken on June 10, 1897; *P. i. insularis* collected May 17, 1868; and *P. i. annectens* taken June 20, 1899. In addition to these types, we had a number of specimens of *P. i. fuliginosa* from or near the type locality that were 50 years old; a number from Kodiak that were taken before 1900; and a series from Yakutat Bay taken between June 19 and 23, 1899. A number of skins of *P. i. unalascensis* taken between 1885 and 1903 were also available together with an excellent series of *P. i. townsendi* taken between 1866 and 1908 from known breeding areas. The older material of *P. i. sinuosa* was less satisfactory, but we did have skins collected as early as 1920.

For comparison, we had a fine series of breeding birds from the type localities or from the same breeding localities and which had been taken on approximately the same seasonal dates as the older specimens. These were all taken between 1940 and 1950, largely in the period from 1943 to 1950.

When the older specimens were arranged according to geographic sequence and the more recently taken birds arranged in comparable order, the amount of foxing or color change was striking. It was apparent that although the newer specimens fitted the original descriptions, the types or older specimens from type localities did not. As we worked with them, notes were made of the differences in the colors of the backs in the two series when checked with Ridgway's color key. Believing that these notes will be of interest to other workers, they have been condensed and arranged by subspecies, as follows:

P. i. townsendi.—The type was not available, but a winter bird from the same locality on the Columbia River and now in the United States National Museum is considered a co-type. The color of the back of this bird is Prout's Brown, while recently taken fall and winter specimens vary from