

into a dive, then veered off just as the falcon would have sped into its intended prey. The Killdeer had ample time to dive toward the island for cover but it remained flying about in the same small area.

The falcon continued to climb and dive on the Killdeer, but after eight thrusts the Killdeer hugged the water and shore so closely that it eluded the falcon, which soon left the area. This event was the first witnessed by the observer in which a prey species appeared to decoy from its young an avian predator of such superior flying power.—WAYNE H. BOHL, *Tucumcari, New Mexico, April 11, 1955.*

**Gambel Quail and Water Supply on Tiburón Island, Sonora, México.**—As there remains a question in the minds of some as to the water requirements of the Desert or Gambel Quail (*Lophortyx gambelii*), notwithstanding the work of Vorhies (Am. Nat., 62, 1928:446-452) and of Gorsuch (Univ. Ariz. Biol. Sci. Bull., 2, 1934:41-42), the following field observations are presented as further evidence that populations of this species do not require the proximity of free surface water.

From April 22 to 24, 1954, large numbers of quail were observed by E. Tad Nichols of Tucson and myself in the desert brush along and near the beaches on the east side of Tiburón Island, Sonora, México, and several males were heard calling. Fresh spring water is scarce on the island; very small amounts can be obtained only at a few well-known points, and the Seri Indians carry it from inland to their occasional beach camps. Our field headquarters was at such a Seri camp. The nearest fresh water to the position where the quail were observed was approximately 8 miles inland by trail, or a distance of approximately 6 miles airline.

This distance is at least 10 to 11 times greater than the daily cruising range (= home range) of species of quail for which data are available (Gorsuch, *op. cit.*: 48-49). For example, the daily cruising range of the Bob-white (*Colinus virginianus*) is known to be approximately one-fourth of a mile. Even if the daily cruising range of the Gambel Quail is as much as 2 miles, which is probably as much as 3 to 4 times the actual magnitude, the distance to fresh water was still 3 times as great.

The observations were made in April during the particularly dry period which precedes the summer rainfall season. (On Tiburón Island and the adjacent mainland of Sonora, the precipitation pattern is reversed from that in California and Nevada; the wet season is the period from June to September.) There can be little question but that the Gambel Quail on Tiburón Island obtain water required for metabolic processes from the abundant succulent vegetation on the island, as this species does, for example, in southern Arizona, where and when free surface water is not available during the drier periods of the year. If the Gambel Quail on the east coast of this arid island drink water other than that which occasionally falls during the summer rainfall season, it must be sea water. It is beyond reasonable doubt that the Gambel Quail occurring on Tiburón Island do not require free surface water of any kind for their successful maintenance during the dry periods of the year.—CHARLES H. LOWE, JR., *Department of Zoology, University of Arizona, Tucson, November 29, 1954.*

**Taxonomic Comments on the Western Wood Pewee.**—In volume 9 of the "Reports of Explorations and Surveys . . . for a Railroad . . . to the Pacific Ocean . . .," (1858:189-190) Baird hes'tantly applied the name *Tyrannula richardsonii* Swainson (Fauna Bor.-Am., 1831:146) to a series of wood pewees from the western United States and México. But he noted that Swainson's type, from Cumberland House, Saskatchewan, "differs in the proportions of the wings, etc., . . . in some other points appearing more nearly allied to *S. fuscus* [= *Sayornis phoebe*]." Baird thought, however, that "The discrepancies in the proportions of the quills [= primaries] may have been caused by their incomplete growth during the moulting season."

The matter was again discussed by Coues (Birds Northwest, 1874:247), who first noted that Swainson's plate of *Tyrannula richardsonii* is "very wrongly colored" for a wood pewee; but he then followed Baird, stating that "the different wing formula may be reconciled upon the supposition that the type of Swainson's species was a young bird . . ." He also noted that "The plate . . . [is] not so far out of the way for the very young bird, which is rusty-tinged . . ." His conclusion was that "In view of the facts that Swainson's bird was a *Contopus*, and that the present [Western Wood Pewee] is the only one ever known to inhabit the ascribed locality, the identification may be safely made."

No one since Baird and Coues seems to have questioned the matter. Phillips, however, became

puzzled by the type locality of *richardsonii* during his study of our more difficult tyrannids. Having no access to the original description, Phillips enlisted Parkes' aid in an effort to locate and redetermine Swainson's bird. First, we inquired about the type specimen, which we learned is no longer extant.

The facts, as now known, are almost entirely at variance with Coues' statements. The type specimen was taken in June, and the plate bears little or no particular resemblance to juvenal-plumaged *Contopus*. The "rusty" or buffy-brown tinge of young Western Wood Pewees is comparatively slight, and it is most prominent on the light wing-bars, which Swainson neither mentions nor figures. Any bird young enough to have an altered wing-formula would also have an abbreviated tail. The tail-length given by Swainson (two inches, nine lines) is that of a full-grown bird, and matches *Sayornis* rather than *Contopus*. A fact which should be noted here, unknown in Baird's time, is that the wing molt occurs on the wintering grounds. A series of Western Wood Pewees from Ecuador and Peru in the American Museum of Natural History showed wing molt between the extreme dates of December 1 and March 15. An additional consideration is that pewees are late migrants and would not have young out of the nest in June in central-eastern Saskatchewan. The interpretations of Baird and Coues to the effect that the type of *richardsonii* was a young bird are thus quite impossible.

Furthermore, Coues' final summary of reasons for identifying Swainson's type as a Western Wood Pewee ("In view of the facts that Swainson's bird was a *Contopus*," etc.) is also quite erroneous. No one ever examined Swainson's type after Cabanis worked out the genera of North American Tyrannidae, if indeed it was then still extant. The status of pewees at the type locality of *richardsonii* is to this day obscure. W. Earl Godfrey, who kindly lent Phillips the western Manitoba series from the National Museum of Canada, remarks (*in litt.*) that pewees of all kinds seem to be scarce so far north. Both species appear to be represented in the Manitoba series, but the majority consists of late summer birds in such worn plumage as to make identification exceedingly difficult.

The status of the two pewees in Saskatchewan and Manitoba affords an intriguing problem, which we hope will receive careful attention. Zoogeographically, this area is wholly eastern in its affinities, so the Western Wood Pewee appears definitely out-of-place. Therefore it may be that, as in the case of the southern plains race of *Empidonax traillii*, an eastward extension of range is even now taking place. Another indication of this possibility is the absence of records of the Western Wood Pewee as a migrant in the states directly south of the Saskatchewan-Manitoba area. The problem well deserves an immediate investigation, on a continuing basis. Only by careful field studies, preferably in early June (*not* late July and August), will we acquire a satisfactory knowledge of present distribution of the pewees that we need to guide us in detecting range extensions.

We agree with Coues, Trippe, Ridgway, and others that, despite their extraordinary resemblance in form and plumage, the two pewees have not been proved to be conspecific, and we treat them here as two distinct species. The determination of this question should be possible in the area of probable overlap in central-western Manitoba. We are aware of Rand's contention (Bull. Nat. Mus. Canada, 111, 1948:46) of "geographical intergradation," and fully agree that "certain Manitoba specimens are of doubtful allocation"; but much of the basis of Rand's discussion was worn July and August material, which we have seen, in plumage too faded to be useful in such a difficult group. We have not examined the alleged intergrades from North Dakota (Jewett *et al.*, Birds of Washington State, 1953:433).

The availability of the name *veliei* Coues has been another moot point in *Contopus* nomenclature. This name was rejected by its author, but he described its basis; thus it is not a *nomen nudum*, and we consider it to be available under the International Rules and Opinion 4. We do not concur, however, in Fort Whipple, Arizona, as the type locality. Coues characterically ranged far afield in his paper on the birds of Fort Whipple and Arizona, as has already been noted at one point by Swarth (Pac. Coast Avif., 10, 1914:28). From Coues' account, one cannot be sure that he had *any* Arizona specimen that he would have considered to be *veliei*. The only definite locality mentioned is "the mountains of Colorado Territory," and this specimen which is the first, as well as the only definite specimen mentioned, taken by Dr. Velie, must, in our opinion, be considered the type.

After careful study, Phillips is forced to concur in the placing of *placens* van Rossem in the synonymy of *veliei*. The description of *placens* was evidently due to faulty measuring (or faulty transcription of measurements and to the predominance of females, which are smaller and paler than males, in van Rossem's Madera Canyon series.

The race *saturatus* Bishop has had a checkered career. Nearly everyone agrees that Yukon birds are dark, yet few ornithologists recognize *saturatus*. This attitude stems from Ridgway, who remarked (Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus., 50, pt. 4, 1907:522, footnote) "I am, unfortunately, unable to verify any geographic correlation in the matter, these darker birds occurring almost everywhere outside the limits of the supposed subspecies." This sort of statement is all too rife in our literature, by authors who presumably consider pewees to be permanent residents in the Yukon! The one Yukon bird examined (University of Alaska) is somewhat darker than breeding birds of the same sex from Arizona; we therefore tentatively follow van Rossem (Occ. Papers Louisiana State Univ. Mus. Zool., 21, 1945:155) in recognizing *saturatus*.

The Mexican races hardly call for comment, except to remark that, in spite of statements to the contrary, we know of no evidence that any wood pewee winters anywhere in Central America.

With the rejection of *Tyrannula richardsonii* Swainson as inapplicable to any wood pewee (the name probably belonging in the synonymy of *Sayornis phoebe*), the species reverts to the next oldest available name, *sordidulus* Sclater. The races of the Western Wood Pewee, from north to south, should thus stand as:

- Contopus sordidulus saturatus* Bishop
- Contopus sordidulus veliei* Coues
- Contopus sordidulus peninsulæ* Brewster
- Contopus sordidulus sordidulus* Sclater

We wish to thank W. Earl Godfrey, Thomas R. Howell and Brina Kessel for lending pertinent specimens, and H. B. Cott and J. D. Macdonald for their efforts to locate Swainson's type specimen.—ALLAN R. PHILLIPS, *Museum of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff, Arizona*, and KENNETH C. PARKES, *Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, November 9, 1954*.

**Mid-winter Nesting of the House Finch at Los Angeles, California.**— On December 23, 1954, a burst of rapid chirping by a House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) was heard coming from a light fixture on the south side of the Physics-Biology Building of the University of California, Los Angeles. Such light fixtures are about 12 feet above the steps leading into the building and are often used for nesting by House Finches; the fixtures have a small, peaked iron "roof" that shelters a space near the top, and this provides a well-protected nest site. There was a nest visible in the above-mentioned fixture, and the tail of the vocalizing bird could be seen projecting over the edge. On December 24 the nest was inspected several times and there was a bird on it each time. At 4:30 p.m. a bird flew off the nest to an adjacent tree where several other House Finches were gathered. The bird had no red in its plumage and was presumably a female although it could have been an immature male. It went into a begging display like a juvenile, with wings drooping and fluttering, but at the same time sang an adult-type song. One of the other birds then went through the motions of feeding the begging-singing one; whether or not any food actually passed between them could not be told. On December 29 a bird was flushed from the site and three warm eggs were felt within the nest. Later that day the incubating bird was heard chirping vociferously. On December 30 a bird was still incubating, and a male sang frequently from bushes near the nest site.

During the week of December 17 to 23 the weather had been clear and mild, with daily maximum and minimum temperatures ranging from 71 to 82°F. and 53 to 63°F., respectively. From December 24 to 31 the weather was still clear but colder, with daily maximum and minimum ranges of 58 to 64°F. and 42 to 50°F. January 1, 1955, was overcast all day and 1.20 inches of rain fell at the university campus; the temperature varied only between 53 and 48°F. January 2 was clear again, but the nest was deserted and the eggs were cold; possibly the inclement weather of the previous day was at least partly responsible for the desertion.

Smith (Condor, 32, 1930:121) recorded a House Finch nest with four eggs on November 24, 1929, at Walnut Creek, Contra Costa County, California. The nest was empty 11 days later and it is doubtful if any young were raised. Winter nestings of this species are perhaps more common than the published records indicate, and data on hatching and raising of young, if any, at this season would be of interest.—THOMAS R. HOWELL and ROBERT D. BURNS, *University of California, Los Angeles, California, May 10, 1955*.