

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Magpie-Jay Robs Mexican Cacique Nests.—On the morning of June 23, 1956, I made the following observation on the edge of the small village of Puerto Arista, Chiapas, which is located on the Pacific coast of southwestern México. As I entered Puerto Arista on the road leading north to Tonalá, I heard a commotion in one of the large, bordering trees. Two male Mexican Caciques (*Cassicus melanicterus*), were attempting to drive a Magpie-Jay (*Calocitta formosa*), from the vicinity of two cacique nests. The two nests, hung about a foot apart, were isolated from the main colony, which was located about seventy-five yards away. The jay appeared to be making an attempt to land on the globular part of one of the nests. About a minute after my arrival, the jay succeeded in perching near the entrance hole of one of the pendant nests. Poking its head into the hole, the jay immediately removed one egg, and then it promptly flew out of sight into a nearby grove. I sat down to watch for a possible repetition of this action, and about five minutes later, a Magpie-Jay, presumably the same bird, returned to the nest area. This bird forced the defending caciques from the nest which had not been robbed, and it promptly removed and flew away with a single egg from this nest. I waited for an additional half hour, but the jay did not return.

When the two male caciques were trying to drive away the jay, they displayed threat behavior while perched on the adjoining nests. Both males gripped the fibers of the globular portion of the nests, held their bodies horizontally, erected their long, black crest plumes fully, and called vigorously. When the jay attempted to dislodge one of them, both caciques flew at the jay's head and attempted to strike it with their bills. However, vigorous as their hostile displays were, both caciques were intimidated by the persistent and extremely intense threat displays of the Magpie-Jay. The latter finally forced one of the males to vacate its perch on the side of one of the nests; from this position, the jay repulsed the combined aerial attacks of the two caciques by swift stabbing movements of its head and bill. The jay held its body horizontally, the crest fully elevated, and the feathers of the head, neck, and back erect. This posture was accompanied by loud, rasping calls. After the jay had removed each egg, the two caciques pursued it for about thirty yards, returning in each case to the nest area. At no time did any female caciques join in the attacks on the jay.

The painting by Andrew Jackson Grayson (Condor, 52, 1950:97) shows beautifully the two-nest condition described above. If the crest of the male Mexican Cacique, shown in the lower right in Grayson's painting, is visualized as being more erect and the bird's body is inclined forward, the attitudes of the threatening caciques as they directed their attacks toward the jay can be more easily understood.

The fact that the two nests were isolated from the rest of the colony probably contributed to their vulnerability to predation by the Magpie-Jay. The exposed nest site and the presence of only two of the many males available for defense may have been additional factors in the success of the jays.—ANDREW J. MEYERRECKS, *Biological Laboratories, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, July 24, 1957.*

Laughing Gull Takes Fish from Black Skimmer.—Various species of gulls are known to take food, usually fish, from other birds such as cormorants, gannets, pelicans, herons, ducks, coots, gulls and terns. The methods employed vary and are adapted to the feeding methods of the other species. Such parasitism of Black Skimmers (*Rynchops nigra*) by gulls is hitherto unrecorded so far as I know. The following observations were made, through the courtesy of Luther Goldman, on the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, Cameron County, Texas, in the summer of 1956. My studies during that summer were financed in part by the Mae P. Smith Research Fund of The American Museum of Natural History.

Cayo Atascoso, a sluggish, shallow, meandering arm of water south of Laguna Atascosa, affords excellent feeding ground for Black Skimmers. On the afternoons of June 28 and 29, when these observations were made, the water was muddy and opaque; hence the abundant fish were not visible to birds flying overhead, except when they came to the surface. Black Skimmers, Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*), Caspian Terns (*Hydroprogne caspia*), and Gull-billed Terns (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) stood on a mud bank in the Cayo, while periodically one or several skimmers flew from the bank to skim nearby with the lower mandible deeply immersed. Their rates of catch for the two days averaged one

fish per fifty seconds of skimming time per bird. Most of the fish caught were about three to four inches in length, and the glint of the fish flopping in a skimmer's bill was undoubtedly visible to the gulls on the mud bank from a considerable distance. The skimmers were not able to swallow fish of this size immediately and one or more gulls usually flew up and pursued the skimmer upon observing a catch. On a number of occasions the gulls did not wait on the mud bank, but one or two of them flew a short distance behind a skimming bird, about twelve feet above the water, carefully following each change in direction of the skimmer. A gull sometimes followed a skimming bird for several minutes, losing interest only when the skimmer ceased fishing. However, when the latter made a catch, the gull flew rapidly toward the skimmer, and other gulls joined the chase. Although the skimmers could easily have out-distanced the gulls by flying straight downwind, they were reluctant to leave the feeding area, and they usually gained altitude and flew in ever tightening circles, trying at the same time to swallow the fish. The pursuit sometimes lasted several minutes, but it ended the moment the skimmer swallowed or dropped the fish. The gull which retrieved the falling fish in midair was set upon by its fellows, and, after several exchanges, the fish sometimes fell into the murky water and was lost. The thwarted skimmer ordinarily resumed skimming, usually followed by a gull. Because of this parasitism, the skimmers lost about twenty per cent of the fish they caught.

I have not observed this phenomenon elsewhere, and it was probably the following combination of circumstances which brought it about in this instance: first, the skimmers and gulls were loafing on the same mud bank, and the feeding sorties of the skimmers were thus in plain sight of the nearby gulls; second, most of the fish were large enough to be conspicuous when carried and too large to be swallowed immediately by the skimmer; third, because of the muddiness of the water, the gulls were unable to catch fish by their usual methods.

It is interesting that the Laughing Gulls, given the foregoing circumstances, quickly recognized the connection between skimming and fish-catching in the Black Skimmer.—RICHARD L. ZUST, *University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, Ann Arbor, Michigan, August 9, 1957.*

Sharp-tailed Sparrow and Grasshopper Sparrow in Gunnison County, Colorado.—In 1953 I listed (Condor, 55, 1953:216) a specimen of the Leconte Sparrow (*Passerherbulus caudacutus*) taken near Gunnison, Colorado, on October 24, 1952. Further study of the skins in the college collection has made it evident that this bird is a Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*Ammodramus caudacuta nelsoni*) in rich fall plumage. To the best of my knowledge this is the first record for Colorado. The other specimen of the Leconte Sparrow, mentioned in the same article, taken in May, 1952, is indeed a Leconte Sparrow.

I wish to record also a specimen of an immature male Grasshopper Sparrow taken about one mile south of Gunnison on October 15, 1953. Presumably it is *Ammodramus savannarum bimaculatus*. So far as I know this is the first record of this sparrow for western Colorado.—A. SIDNEY HYDE, *Western State College, Gunnison, Colorado, June 1, 1957.*

Some Recent Bird Records from the Salt River Valley, Central Arizona.—Since the early part of 1953, rather extensive field work has been in progress in the Salt River Valley and adjacent areas about Phoenix, Maricopa County, Arizona. This has resulted in a number of records which we feel should be reported. The field work, for the most part, has been conducted by the writers with a great deal of aid from Dr. A. S. Margolin of the Phoenix College Biology Department, Phoenix, Arizona, R. Roy Johnson, Peoria, Arizona, and James T. Bialac, Phoenix, Arizona. Collecting was made possible through the cooperation of Dr. Margolin. Several records of other observers are included with citation of their names. The following records unless otherwise noted comprise the first recorded occurrence of the species, or race, for the Salt River Valley. The specimens mentioned are now in the Phoenix College collection unless otherwise indicated.

We wish to express our appreciation to Dr. Allan R. Phillips for racial identifications and suggestions on the preparation of these notes and to the observers acknowledged in the text.

Aechmophorus occidentalis. Western Grebe. A single bird was taken at a pond one mile south and two and one-half miles west of Peoria on December 10, 1956.

Ixobrychus exilis. Least Bittern. On June 25, 1955, a grown juvenile, with both the wings and tail still pinfeathers and with down adhering to the nape and posterior parts, was taken at a cattail