

## FIFTEEN YEARS IN A BLIND

Herbert Clarke

My goal is to photograph satisfactorily all the species of birds of the United States. At this date my picture "life list" stands at well over 300. But I still have not decided what is a satisfactory photograph. I find that I am continually trying to get a better picture of an already photographed species.

Because I photograph strictly for personal pleasure, I follow my own set of rules for procedure and composition. I do not concern myself with what is salable or desirable to other people. Even so, many of my photographs have appeared in various publications, earning enough money to more than pay for my hobby.

The birds in my photographs are wild and unrestrained. No man-made object or out-of-place item is allowed to appear in the pictures. I discard photographs in which the subject is not sharply focused and properly exposed. Usually I throw away most of my pictures, much to the enrichment of Kodak.

The equipment I use has been acquired and modified after much trial and error. I use a motorized Nikon for stalking, taking flight pictures, and remote control work. My other camera is a Nikkormat. Its fast shutter synchronization (1/125th sec.) is excellent for use with electronic flash.

Depending upon the size of the bird and its distance from the camera, I employ a variety of lenses ranging in size from a 35mm wide angle to a 600mm telephoto. Those most frequently used are a 400mm F4.5 Auto-Nikkor for "setups" when shooting from a blind, and a specially adapted 500mm F4.5 Takumar mounted on a gunstock for hand held operations.

I shoot mostly in color because both good color prints and black and white prints can be made from slides. Only Kodachrome II film is used. Its fine grain and excellent color rendition more than make up for its slow emulsion speed. I willingly accept this handicap in those low light situations when a faster film would permit the use of a higher shutter speed to stop action or a smaller lens setting for greater depth of focus.

Flash is used whenever possible. Two electronic units are most often utilized, each one set close to and on either side of, the subject. Consistent, evenly illuminated exposures can be thus obtained while stopping the movement of the bird. Each flash is powered by a 510 volt

battery-pack adapted so it can be switched on and off at the camera to conserve power during the bird's absence. Use of battery-packs provides two important advantages. The units recycle quickly for second-chance shots and allow extended use in the field without the bother of recharging. There are times when three flash units are used. The greater illumination is helpful for more distant shots or in stopping down for added depth of field. Usually the bird quickly gets used to all the paraphernalia and goes about its business paying little or no attention to the clicking of the shutter or flashing of the lights.

In going afield on a photographic expedition I take, in addition to the usual camera equipment, such items as ropes, aluminum foil (for makeshift reflectors), a plastic jug, a lightweight homemade blind, and an eight-foot step ladder. That ladder being carried far into the wilderness by car, hand, and boat has elicited all sorts of comments when viewed by disbelieving eyes. Each situation presents its own unique set of problems to solve and having a seemingly minor item often has saved the day. For instance, the plastic jug when used as a artificial water drip in the desert, attracts an astounding variety of usually difficult-to-photograph small birds.

Even with elaborate preparations, I have been thwarted by my unpredictable quarry or I have made some mistake in the excitement of the moment. After all these years I still can get "buck fever" when something unexpected happens suddenly.

All the illustrations here are reproductions made from color slides which were taken in southern California.

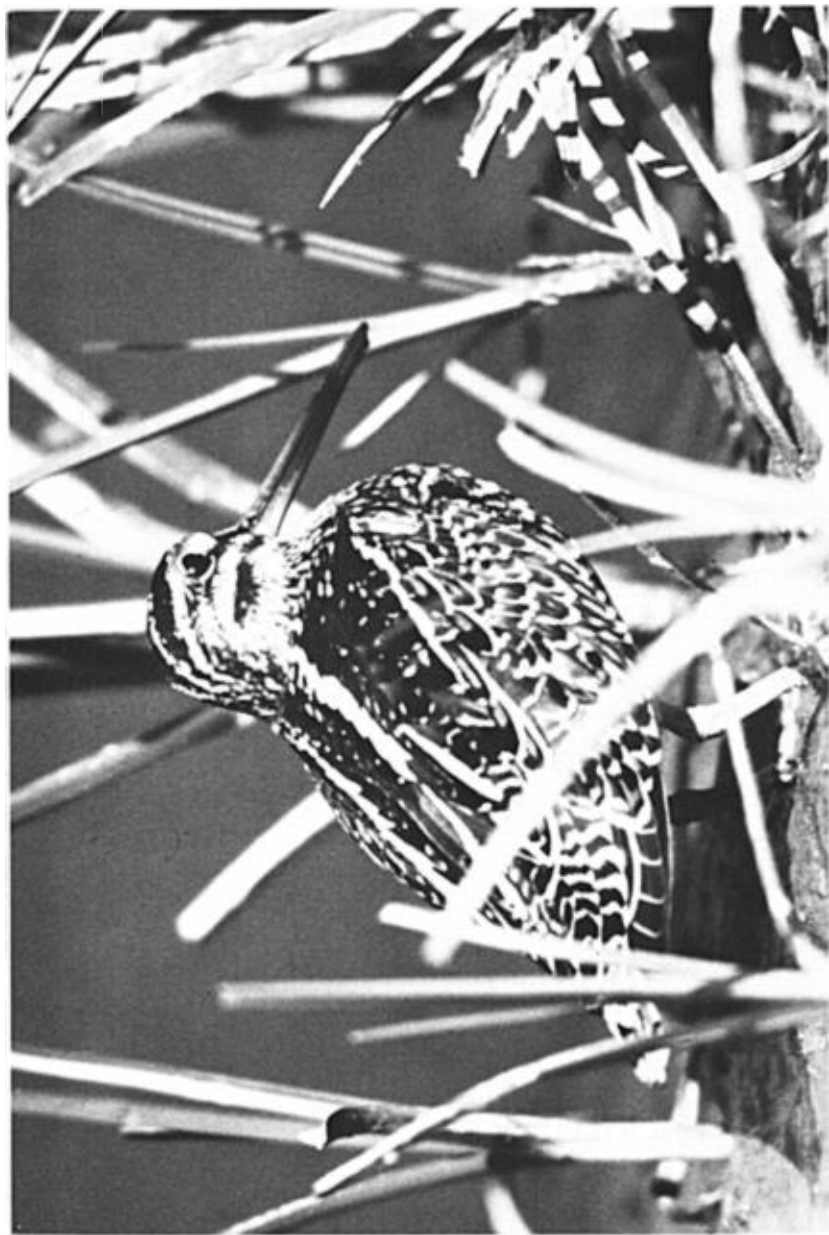
*2027 El Arbolita Drive, Glendale, California 91208*



Elf Owl (*Microathene whitneyi*), Desert Center, California, April 1973, 300mm lens, electronic flash F8.0.



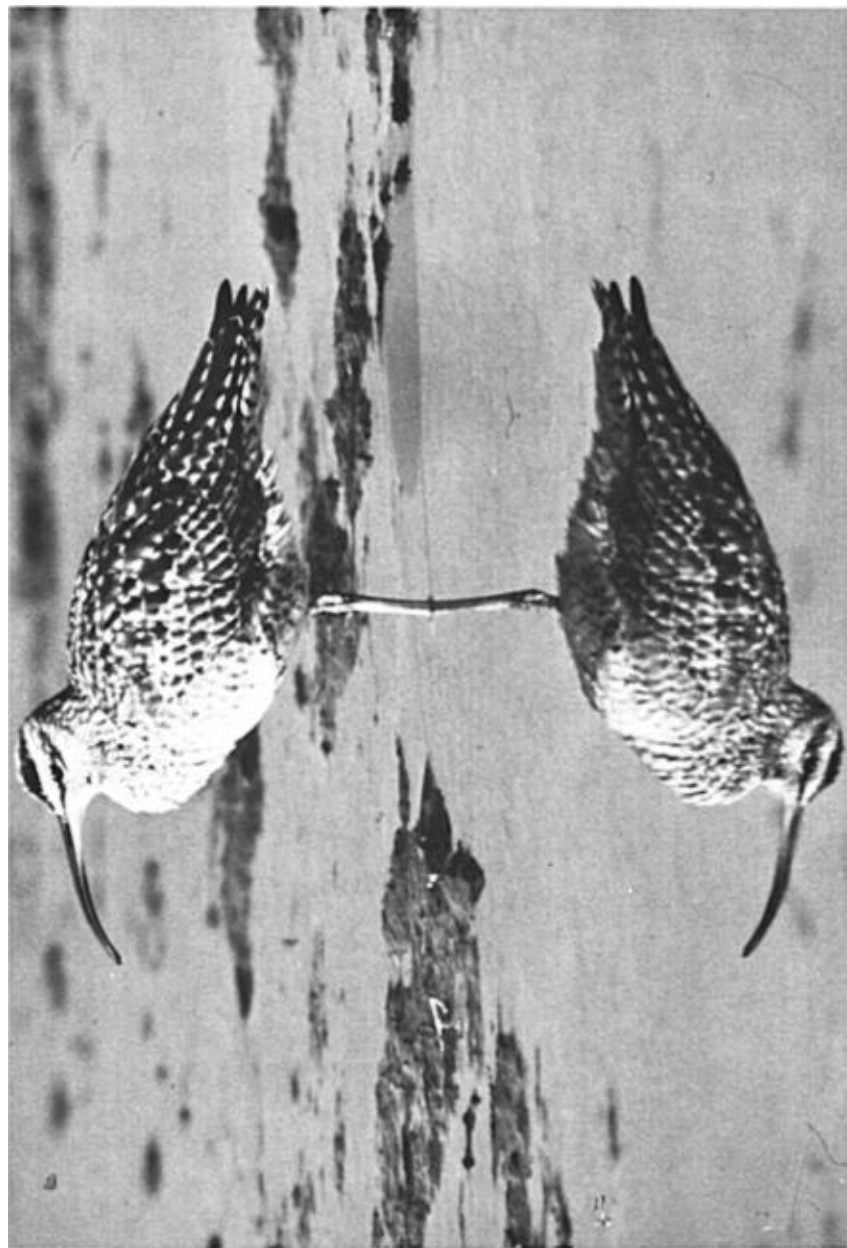
American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*), Goose Lake, California, June 1967, 400mm lens, 1/250 F6.3.



Common Snipe (*Capella gallinago*), San Diego, California, October 1968, 400mm lens, 1/250 F5.6



Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*), Desert Center, California, April 1972, 500mm lens, electronic flash F6.3.

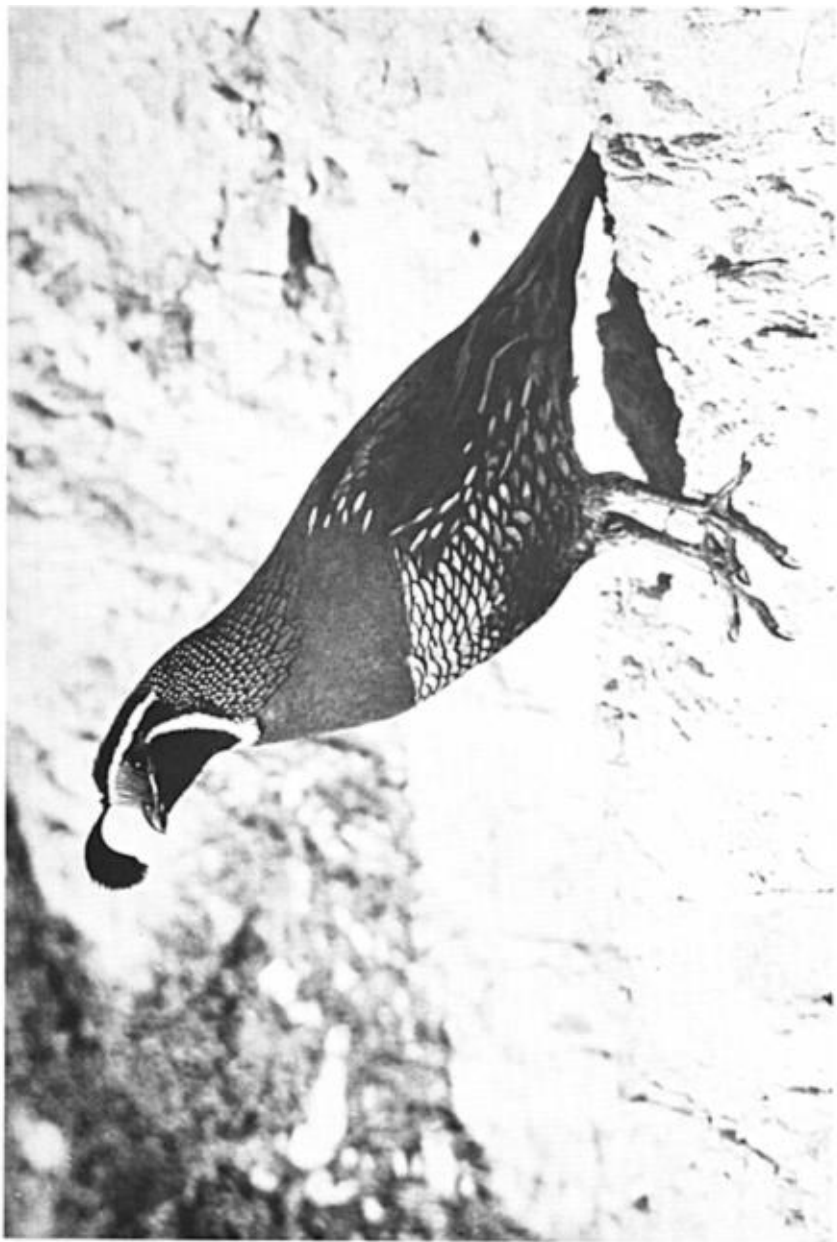


Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*), Malibu, California, November 1972, 500mm lens, 1/250 F4.5.



Le Conte's Thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*), Maricopa, California, March 1970, 500mm lens, 1/250 F6.3.





California Quail (*Lophortyx californicus*), Glendale, California, June 1964, 400mm lens, 1/250 F5.6.



Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*), Twentynine Palms, California, April 1969, 400mm lens, electronic flash F5.6.



Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*), Maricopa, California, April 1968, 400mm lens, 1/250 F5.6.



Townsend's Warbler (*Dendroica townsendi*), Desert Center, California, April 1972, 500mm lens, electronic flash F6.3.