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COLLECTING IN THE GILA VALLEY.

BY F. T. PEMBER.

(Continued from page 6.)

Looking toward the cloudless sky we see several Turkey Vultures and large hawks floating lazily over its valley, while other hawks may be seen sitting upon dead trees and stubs. I either shot or saw closely Western Red-tail, Mexican Goshawk, Ferruginous Rough-leg, Swainsons, Sparrow and Sharp-shinned hawks, also White-tailed Kite. Have also seen Barn, Long-eared, Short-eared, and Pigmy Owls. On my last visit I felt anxious to secure as many specimens as possible of Leconte's Thrasher, but one seldom gets them even when seen, for they are very wild and on the ground run very fast, acting and looking, if only the back is seen, like the Sage Thrasher.

After several ineffectual long shots one day, I was returning, hot, dusty, and tired to the so-called hotel, by the shortest route across the desert; it was some time past sundown, and the place was two miles from the river bottom in a very open part of the desert and where I little expected to see a bird of any kind; but I did see one, running from one greasewood bush to another as lively as a quail, and a quick shot at long range, in the dusky twilight, proved effective. I did not then know what it was, and on going to it was de-

lighted and surprised to find a fine Leconte's Thrasher. I thought it strange that it should be found in such a locality. The next day I was out looking for more in the same place, as near as I could locate it, but I searched unsuccessfully for a long time. Gradually I worked my way nearer the bottom lands, and when almost on their border, though still in the desert, and where the ground was broken into low ridges, I saw plenty of this rare species. There must have been fully fifty, in a scattering flock, as we often see robins in September. My hopes were high now and I thought to get a dozen or more. But the birds were very wary, and ran from bush to bush, or took short flights, always designing to keep well out of gun shot range. At times as they ran under a low bush, I could have killed five or six at a shot had I only been nearer by one half the distance. I followed them about persistently as long as I could find one to follow, taking very long shots from time to time, and succeeded in getting just four out of the whole lot, by shooting ten or twelve times. Where they went to I never knew, as they seemed to scatter out in all directions, and I did not see another that day. I cannot understand why these birds should be so shy in such a country. Not so with the woodpeckers, however, for the Indians prize their feathers very highly, and have hunted them so persistently, particularly the Gilded Flickers, which are plenty here, that many of them will leave the cactus in which they live before you get within 200 yards of them.

I fear this article is getting too long, and will give some incidents of one day's shooting, and close.

On the morning of April 16th, 1892, I started early, with horse, wagon and driver, also plenty of water, hatchet, rope, etc., for a day's collecting across the desert, to the west of Gila Bend. No birds at first, but after a drive of a mile or more I saw a small bird drop over a little ridge of lava. Leaving the wagon, I went to the point where I saw it last. It had vanished, but in its place I flushed a fine pair of Texan Night-hawks, both of which I secured. I have taken a dozen or more about here, and all agree with each other and

with those taken further west, except one pair, which are very much paler than the others and may prove a new subspecies. These birds are found on the sand or on the bare volcanic rocks which are so hot it is difficult to hold the hand on them. And just now we see the absurdity of naming a new bird for a state or locality, for the Texan Night-hawk is the common and only Night-hawk of Arizona and California, while the Night-hawk *C. Virginianus* is the common and only Night-hawk over a large portion of Texas. Further on we cross an *arroyo* with high banks and see a number of swallows flying about them. We stop long enough to get three. They are of the Rough-winged species. Driving for some cactus we see several Gila Woodpeckers and Gilded Flickers leave them. Hiding behind a bush, as best I can, I await their return, and after waiting half an hour shoot one of the former, but the last named have been too well schooled to be caught in that way. While watching for them I saw a pair of Cactus Wrens feeding their young in the fork of a cactus, and fully 25 feet high. One of the old birds came with food every two or three minutes. I have found nests of this species almost by the hundred in some places, and except in one instance, all were in low branching cactus from three to five feet high. The exception was twelve feet high in an elder tree. But the cactus they love so well does not grow in this part of Arizona, and this nesting site only offers another instance of birds changing their habits to correspond with their surroundings. These were the only wrens of any kind that I saw. I now spend an hour or more for eggs and succeed in getting a fine set of Gilded Flicker and two sets of Gila Woodpeckers. For a long time I was puzzled how to get eggs from the cactus, as it needs a ladder twenty or thirty feet long; but I solved it at last and can climb any of them with the aid of a hatchet, though a rope is of great assistance. It is slow work at best, as many of the spines must be trimmed off, and notches cut in the trunk for hands and feet. A rope around the cactus and your own body gives you a better chance to work. In this case I made use of the wagon to give me a

start and then see how few spines I can take off and make the ascent. Found I could get over and around many of them, but several times before I got down again I wished I had taken off just a few more. While cutting into a woodpecker's hole a Pigmy Owl flew from a hole higher up ; so I had to go to that, but found nothing for my trouble. Working nearer the river, among the mesquite trees, I get a few quail and shoot a Chaparral Cock from the wagon, with dust shot. I next took a rather long shot at a Ferruginous Rough-leg. Two or three feathers floated out in the air in one direction and the balance went off in a body in another. A Crissal Thrasher soon tried to fly across the road in front of us. A shot filled the air with feathers ; but the bird kept on, finally falling in some bushes eighty yards away, where we found him after a long search.

Then I saw several Abert's Towhees and got two of them. My next find was not in the line of ornithology, but was what is called a Gila Monster—one of the largest of American lizards, though perhaps not large enough for the name. It is also known as Gila Horror, and the name "fits them like a glove." They are eighteen to twenty inches long, stocky, thick-set, heavy built fellows, beautifully colored in black and orange, and are as venomous* as rattlesnakes, and twice as ugly. They usually run away if they can, but stop them and tantalize them a little and they act like an enraged cat. Push a stick towards them and they will bite it fiercely, and after getting their teeth well into it, will "roll over" like a trained dog, so as to make the teeth tear and lacerate the wound. I tried "dust" on this one at twenty feet, but he wore a coat of mail, and it only stunned him. I supposed he was dead, and came near being bitten, as I went to pick him up by the tail. At the first touch he "changed ends" so quick I could scarcely see the motion, and it was no part of a second till the end of his nose was just where the tip of the tail had been. I had him repeat the performance several times, but with more caution. I skinned him that evening, and found it the slowest job of the kind I ever did, for the strong, wiry

*It has been discovered recently that the Gila Monster has no poison fangs.—Pub.

muscles of the flesh seemed to be fairly woven into the skin, so that it must be cut away very carefully at every point.

The best find of the day was the nest of the Mexican Goshawk. It was some 25 feet high in an old thick-branched mesquite. I shot the female as she left the nest which was another very rare specimen, and then tried to persuade my driver to go up to the nest; but he wasn't a climber, and "couldn't see it" in the light I did, so had to do it myself. These trees have very stiff, wiry branches, covered with thorns, and the job I had getting to that nest I do not like to repeat often, though I would go through almost anything for another set of as rare eggs. The nest held three eggs entirely fresh, and about the size of those of the Broad-winged Hawk. They are white, slightly nest stained, and are obscurely marked with reddish-brown.

We took our lunch on the river bank under some large cottonwoods, stopping at times for a shot at a warbler, to listen to some distant bird note, or to watch some of the water birds along the river. I saw American Egret and a flock of White-faced Glossy Ibis, but too far away to shoot.

At length we turn our faces once more toward Gila Bend, shooting and hunting eggs on the way; but as it would be too much of a repetition to describe it, I will relate but one more incident of the day. We were well on our way back, and I was following up an *arroyo*, with a surface of broken lava, and a growth of low trees and bushes with an occasional cactus, from which the woodpeckers would fly at my approach. My driver was following along the ridge outside so as to keep me in sight. Was having poor success with birds, when all at once came the sharp, buzzing alarm, or challenge of a monster rattlesnake. His head was towards me, raised a foot high, and he showed no disposition to try to get away. I tried to frighten him; but he would not scare, and watching every motion seemed to defy me to come nearer. A charge of shot quieted him, when I found that he was five feet and seven inches long and as large as a man's arm. Within five rods of this place I killed two more and heard three or four others in the bushes. I began

to think that they were too numerous about there ; that I did not care particularly for any more birds that day ; so started for the wagon, and drove back to town.

From this day's hunt I made good skins of thirteen Gambel's Partridge, two Chapparral Cock, one Mexican Goshawk, one Long-eared Owl, three Abert's Towhee, one Lucy's Warbler, one Pileolated Warbler, two Orange crowned Warblers, two Gila and one Baird's Woodpecker, three Phainopepla, two Texan Nighthawk, two Crissal Thrasher, three Rough-winged Swallow, and one Plumbeous Gnatcatcher ; also the Gila monster. Besides I had several sets of very desirable eggs. Back at four o'clock. A bath is first in order to get off some of the dust and sand ; then I measure and tag my specimens, work at skinning till past midnight, and finish the job in the morning.

Such is a partial account of a short collecting trip to this desert valley ; and if any reader chooses to try it he may be sure of plenty of specimens, with much to please, interest, and instruct, and so much that is strange, weird, and seemingly unnatural ; but the accomodations are sure to be of the poorest, and I fear he may find some things disappointing, unpleasant, and postively annoying.

THE PRAIRIE HORNED LARK.

(*Otocoris alpestris praticola.*)

LYNDS JONES.

More than a year ago* we began to tell the life history of the prairie form of *Otocoris*, promising to complete it another time. The seasons that have intervened have afforded us opportunity for further study, and we feel sure that no one will be the loser from the delay.

The present paper is concerned only with the courtship and nesting habits of these larks, leaving them when the summer moult begins.

Even in January, when the bright, warm sun has eaten holes in Winter's mantle, and the buds on the more for-

* *Semi-Annual*, Vol. II, No. 2, July, 1890, p. 27.