

SOME NOTES FROM PICKAWAY COUNTY, OHIO.

BY B. R. BALES, M. D., CIRCLEVILLE, OHIO.

In transcribing the following notes, it might be well to state for the benefit of those readers who do not reside in Ohio, that Pickaway County lies in the south-central portion of the state, and that Circleville, the county seat, is about thirty miles south of Columbus, the capitol.

Barn Owl (*Strix pratincola*).—Since writing my article on this species, (Wilson Bulletin Vol. XXI, No. 1. Pp 35), I have observed the following instances of its occurrence here:—January 21st, 1909; a male that had been shot at the ice house, along the Ohio Canal, within the city limits, was brought to me. It was in good condition and had two mice in its stomach. January 27th, 1909; a male was found along a road side, seven miles north of Circleville. The bird was wounded in the wing and breast, and was very much emaciated. November 10th, 1909; a wounded female was found flapping feebly about on the ground near Stage's Pond, five miles north of Circleville. It likewise was much emaciated. November 18th, 1909; a female that had been shot from a tree along Darby Creek, three miles north of Circleville, was brought to me. The stomach contained the remains of two mice. April 10th, 1910; discovered a nest in an elm tree along Darby Creek, three miles west of Circleville. This tree stands not over one hundred and fifty yards from the tree in which Dr. Howard Jones took the first Ohio set of this species. The eggs of the 1910 set were laid upon the rotted wood at the bottom of a cavity four feet deep and a foot and a half in diameter. The cavity was in the broken-off top of an elm tree, forty-five feet from the ground, was open at the top and contained five eggs, in which incubation varied from one-third to one-half. Both birds were in the nesting cavity when discovered and remained there until the climber had almost reached the cavity, when they emerged and flew to a nearby tree for a moment as if to get their bearings, when they flew to the tree in which the first Ohio set was taken

and disappeared within the cavity. This tree is well shown in Dawson's "Birds of Ohio" Pp. 373. The set taken by Dr. Jones was taken on May 27th, 1897, and fully one-half of the specimens of this species that have been brought to my notice have been taken in this immediate vicinity. It would seem as though most of the birds had been raised in one or the other of the two cavities. I have never heard of this bird showing a special attachment for a certain locality, but this case extending over a period of thirteen years, would seem to indicate, in this case at least, that such is the case. November 14th, 1910; a female that was shot from a barn three miles east of Circleville, along Hargus Creek, was brought to me by a farmer who was "afraid it would take his chickens," unaware that he had killed a mouser that was worth a half dozen cats.

Marsh Hawk (*Circus hudsonius*).—On May 19th, 1910, I had the good fortune to discover the fourth authentic set of this species ever taken in Ohio, (according to Dawson's "Birds of Ohio.") I was approaching a boggy meadow overgrown with marsh grasses in search of rail nests, when I saw a hawk perched upon a fence post in the distance, and remarked to my companion that the bird looked like a Marsh Hawk, but soon dismissed the thought from my mind as improbable. Proceeding well into the centre of the swamp, I flushed the female from her four mud stained eggs. The nest was built upon the ground, surrounded by a number of short, stunted wild rose bushes, where there was a slight elevation above the surrounding marsh, and the ground was therefore dry. The nest was composed mainly of "tassels" from the tops of corn stalks; several weed stalks entered into the composition of the nest, among which was a stalk of teasle and a large smart weed stalk. A tuft of corn silk lay at the edge of the nest. The female hovered about for a few moments, but soon joined the male, who had remained at a distance, when both flew away. The eggs were fresh.

Snowy Owl (*Nyctea nyctea*).—A specimen of this species

was taken near Ashville, eight miles north of Circleville, November 20th, 1910.

Short-Eared Owl (*Asio accipitrinus*).—This species is abundant in winter, but I have taken their nests in but one year — 1906 — in which year I took four sets. The first set was taken on April 21st and consisted of four eggs; the next set was taken on May 1st, and also consisted of four eggs; the third set was taken on May 11th, and consisted of five eggs, while the last set consisted of six eggs and was found on May 19th. All of these sets were found within a radius of one and one-half miles, and were in corn fields close to Darby Creek, near the trees where the two sets of Barn Owl were taken. All of the nests but one were placed upon the ground, with but a few bits of sticks and corn stalk, and an occasional feather from the mother bird to serve as a nest. The exception to this rule was built upon a pile of drift, composed of corn stalks, sticks and trash. I have searched the breeding grounds carefully each year since 1906, but have been unable to discover another nest, although the birds are as abundant as usual during the winter months.

Double Crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax a. auritus*).—A male that had been shot three miles north of Circleville, along the Scioto River, was brought to me October 21st, 1909. There were two birds, but the other luckily escaped. A female was shot in almost the same locality on October 26th, 1910. This specimen was also brought to me. A specimen of this species was shot while swimming in the Ohio Canal, within the city limits, about six years ago, but I find I have no record of the date, but remember it was in Autumn.

Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus philadelphia*).—A specimen of this species was shot while flying about the pond near the ice houses, within the city limits, on November 17th, 1908.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*).—A specimen of this species was shot at the State Dam across the Scioto River, three miles south-west of Circleville, on June 25th, 1908. I was told by several people that they had seen it for almost a

week at this place, before it was shot. It seems unusual to me that this species should be found away from a large body of water at this time of the year. The sex of this specimen was not determined.

Ring Necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*).—A female of this species was brought to me on February 17th, 1909. It was taken from the Scioto River. On March 11th, 1910, two females were brought to me and on March 16th, 1910, I obtained another female. All were shot from the Scioto River, near Circleville.

King Rail (*Rallus elegans*).—While Dr. Howard Jones in his "Nests and Eggs of the Birds of Ohio," mentions seeing young of this species in this county, the first set of eggs was taken May 21st, 1906. There were eleven eggs in this set. On May 23rd, 1907, I took two sets of this species, one of ten eggs and one of twelve. On May 25th of this same year, I found another set of ten, and on May 29th, a set of eleven. On May 20th, 1908, I found a deserted nest of this species containing two mud covered eggs. Excessive rains had raised the water in the swamp, and had flooded the nest. On May 22nd, 1908, at another swamp, I discovered a nest containing eleven eggs. On May 14th, 1910, I found a nest containing eleven eggs, and on May 19th another set of eleven. One who has never seen a set of these beautiful eggs in the canopied nest, cannot realize the beauty from a description. It must be seen to be appreciated.

Least Bittern (*Ardetta exilis*).—Rather common summer resident in suitable localities, especially at Calamus Pond, three miles west of Circleville. This pond, or swamp, is from one-fourth to one-half mile across and the water is from one to three feet deep. It is thickly dotted with buttonwood bushes. Wild rose thickets fringe the shores; saw grasses, tall water grasses and calamus or sweet flag (from which the pond receives its name) are found in its shallower places and cat tails further out. It is an ideal nesting place for this species; in June, 1907, I found fourteen nests between the fourth

and the twenty-first. The nests are mainly placed among the saw grasses in shallow water and are situated from six inches to two and one-half feet above water; eighteen inches is the average height. The nests are composed of saw grass blades, short lengths of smartweed stalks, slender twigs from the buttonwood, and about half the nests examined are lined with finer grasses; at the best the nests are very flimsy, frail and loosely put together. Occasionally a nest is found composed almost entirely of a tall round water grass, but nests so composed are always built in a clump of this variety of grass. Saw grasses are usually bent over to form a platform on which to build the nest; these grasses are often bent over a small branch of buttonwood to give stability to the platform. An occasional nest is built among the diverging twigs of the buttonwood bush, much in the manner of a green heron nest, but nesting sites of this type are rare. The full complement of eggs is usually four or five, although I have taken highly incubated sets of three, and have seen nests containing six young. Fresh eggs have been taken between June 4th and June 21st, although on June 18th, 1908, I found two nests containing young. The young in the first nest discovered were likely almost a week old and were very odd looking fellows. They were covered with a yellowish down except about the eyes, where the greenish skin was bare; the legs were yellow with a green tinge on the dorsal surface. Another nest discovered the same day contained six young in which the pinfeathers were showing. It is doubtful if this nest would have been discovered, had I not seen one of the young birds clinging to one of the round water grasses fully a foot above the nest. While perched upon the slender, swaying water grass, they have a peculiarly pert and saucy look that is ludicrous in the extreme. They are excellent climbers and use their long necks and bills in climbing by hooking the head over the perch and using it as a sort of hook to aid them in scrambling up. The feet are very strong. The young in

this nest tried to peck my hand as I placed it above them; they acted like trained soldiers, all pecking at exactly the same time, as if at a word of command.

Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*).—This species is becoming more common each year. Although straggling birds had been seen previous to this time, the first nest was discovered May 21st, 1907. It was placed among the diverging twigs in an osage orange hedge fence, four miles east of Circleville, along a much travelled road and contained four eggs. The next set taken in the county was taken by Mr. W. Leon Dawson, June 2nd, 1909. Mr. Dawson was spending the day with me and the birds, and while we were driving along a road, eight miles west of Circleville, we heard the male singing. A hedge fence grew along one side of the road, and as the cover was the right kind for nests of this species, Mr. Dawson began searching the hedge and soon found the nest, which contained four eggs apparently well along in incubation. I took another set of four of this species on June 1st, 1910, from a red haw bush in a blue grass pasture about a mile from where the Dawson set was taken. This locality has been noted for several years for its mockingbirds. One pair nesting near the residence of Mr. W. H. Reid, a close bird student, reared three broods in 1908. I shot a male from a wild rose thicket at Calamus Pond on February 21st, 1909. The stomach contained fruits and seeds of wild rose. The mockers that breed near Mr. Reid's arrived from the south, March 11th, 1908, and March 28th, 1910. All of the nests of this species that have come under my observation have been rather loosely put together, but all have been distinguished by having the lining of fine pale yellowish brown rootlets that contrast sharply with the dark body of the nest.