

# THE WREN-TIT

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## TURKEY VULTURE NESTLINGS

Imagine yourself riding on horseback, and then suddenly, without warning, from a hole in an oak not more than six feet away, a full-grown Turkey Vulture should come flying past your head, causing your horse nearly to jump from under you. Such was the experience encountered by J. B. Parks on the morning of June 15, 1931, as he was riding after cattle in the Mt. Hamilton Range. Mr. Parks stated in colorful cowboy language that he was so startled it did not occur to him to look into the tree. However, on his return in the evening, he looked into the hole and discovered two young Turkey Vultures.

The oak tree in which the nest was located is a large and evidently very old Valley Oak on the Oak Ridge Range (Sec. 8, T. 6 S. R. 3E. M.D.) The trunk is approximately four feet in diameter and is entirely hollow from the ground up to a distance of eight feet. The opening, made by the falling of



Photograph by Gayle Pickwell.

### TURKEY VULTURE NESTLINGS IN NEST CAVITY IN VALLEY OAK

a huge limb, is six feet from the ground and measures two feet across and four from top to bottom. The nest, if such it can be called, was evidently any spot on the ground at the bottom of the hole, for there was no evidence of grass, twigs, nor any other nesting material.

The young Vultures, when first seen on June 15, were about the size of a full-grown pigeon and, save their heads, were entirely covered with white down. On July 15, when last seen, they were the size of a small turkey, and were covered with dark brown feathers on the back, wings, and tail, with a white ruff around the neck and white down on the breast. Their heads were black and bare.

The behavior of the young birds was extremely interesting. When we approached the tree the night of July 8, they hissed long and loud like Barn Owls. When they became accustomed to our presence the hissing practically ceased, except when they were especially agitated. The odor that arose after

the hissing was nauseating. One of the Vultures was quite spunky and frequently, when a sudden noise was made, spread its wings, hissed, and jumped six or eight inches in an effort to strike us although we were six feet above it. The other was less bold and crouched under a projection on the inside of the trunk.

After many pictures were taken of the birds in the nest, they were snagged by the feet with a hooked wire and taken out and placed on the ground. They resisted very little and made no effort to strike the person holding them; instead, one of them regurgitated large pieces of partially digested meat which gave a tremendously offensive odor. As soon as they were released they crawled under a log. Later they tried to crawl down squirrel holes, and when they could get no further than their heads they stood there quite contentedly, their heads in the ground and the remainder of their bodies exposed, like the proverbial ostrich.

After a short while the young Vultures were put back into their nest in the hollow tree, and apparently they suffered no ill effects from their first appearance in public.

HENRY G. HILL.

### SOME NESTING RECORDS

Nesting birds have an especial appeal. None of our members has time to hunt for nests systematically, but many of them have in the last three months been intrigued by a bird carrying a twig or a worm and have turned aside to find the nest. The following list contains the more significant nesting records that have been reported to us.

- Anthony Green Heron. Nest-building, May 17, Los Gatos, Helen Wright.  
 Snowy Plover. Incubating, Apr. 25, Moss Landing, Gayle Pickwell.  
 Western Mourning Dove. Incubating, Apr. 1, near San Martin, Karl Hazeltine.  
 Red-shafted Flicker. Incubating, Mar. 28, near San Jose, Emily Smith.  
 Nuttall Woodpecker. Young out of nest, May 23, Alum Rock Park, Audubon Society.  
 Black Phoebe. Incubating, Mar. 7, near Los Gatos, Yvonne Champreux.  
 Western Flycatcher. Nest-building, Apr. 21, Los Gatos, Gladys Record.  
 Olive-sided Flycatcher. Nest-building (in live oak), May 12, near Los Gatos, Emily Smith.  
 Rough-winged Swallow. Young in nest, Apr. 16, Alum Rock Park, Gayle Pickwell.  
 Cliff Swallow. Nest-building, Mar. 21, Silver Cr. Hills, Audubon Society.  
 Coast Jay. Young in nest, May 23, Alum Rock Park, Audubon Society.  
 Chestnut-backed Chickadee. Nest-building, Apr. 12, Los Gatos, Gladys Record.  
 Plain Titmouse. Nest-building, Feb. 26, near Los Gatos, Frederick Cobb.  
 Bush-tit. Finishing nest, Feb. 21, near San Jose, Audubon Society.  
 California Creeper. Nest-building, Apr. 4, Lake Canyon, Emily Smith.  
 Wren-tit. Young left nest, May 9, near Los Gatos, Emily Smith.  
 Water Ouzel. Nest-building, Mar. 7, and incubating, Mar. 31, Uvas Cr., Emily Smith; incubating in same nest, June 7, and feeding young, June 17, Gayle Pickwell.  
 Western House Wren. Nest-building, Apr. 11, Los Gatos, Gladys Record.  
 Western Mockingbird. Nest-building, May 14, near San Jose, Henry Hill.  
 Russet-backed Thrush. Eggs in nest, May 23, near San Jose, Charles Piper Smith.  
 Western Bluebird. Nest-building, Apr. 29, near Los Gatos, Frederick Cobb.  
 California Shrike. Incubating, Mar. 5, near San Jose, John Hensill.  
 Western Warbling Vireo. Nest-building, Apr. 26, near Los Gatos, Emily Smith.  
 Cassin Vireo. Nest-building, May 2, Los Gatos, Gladys Record.  
 Lutescent Warbler. Young left nest, May 4, near Los Gatos, Emily Smith.  
 Yellow Warbler. Young left nest, May 25, Los Gatos, Emily Smith.  
 Audubon Warbler. Young being fed out of nest, May 26, Santa Cruz, Barbara Norris.  
 Yellow-throat. Young in nest, May 14, near Alviso, Henry Hill.  
 Pileolated Warbler. Eggs hatching, May 10 (young left nest May 19), Los Gatos, Gladys Record.  
 Western Meadowlark. Incubating, Mar. 1, near Los Gatos, Emily Smith.  
 Bullock Oriole. Nest-building, Apr. 8, near Almaden, Gladys Record.  
 Black-headed Grosbeak. Nest-building, Apr. 9, Los Gatos, Gladys Record; incubating, Apr. 19, San Jose, Henry Hill; 4 nests with eggs, May 23, near San Jose, Charles Piper Smith.

- California Linnet. Incubating, Mar. 15, near Los Gatos, Emily Smith; nest-building, July 22, Los Gatos, Gladys Record.
- California Purple Finch. Young being fed out of nest, June 20, Los Gatos, Gladys Record.
- Green-backed Goldfinch. Young out of nest, Apr. 17, San Jose, Emily Smith.
- Pine Siskin. Young out of nest, May 25, San Jose State College Campus, Emily Smith.
- Spotted Towhee. Young left nest, Apr. 18, San Jose, Henry Hill.
- Brown Towhee. Young in nest, Apr. 18, San Jose, Henry Hill; nest-building, June 7, Los Gatos, Gladys Record.
- Oregon Junco. Building second nest, May 12, near Los Gatos, Emily Smith.

#### SOME MORE "FIRSTS" AND "LASTS"

The Traill Flycatcher arrived in Santa Clara Valley too late to be included in our April list of "Firsts." Its odd, arresting little song was not heard along the Coyote Creek until May 14 (Gayle Pickwell). The Black-throated Gray Warbler and the Western Tanager came through the valley early in May (May 2, Gladys Record). A pair of Tanagers were observed in Alum Rock Park, May 23, by the Audubon Society, and their behavior suggested nesting birds. Further evidence that Tanagers remained to nest is furnished by Miss Record's report of a singing Tanager, July 16, near Los Gatos.

Cedar Waxwings were by all odds the last winter visitors to leave Santa Clara Valley. Miss Helen Wright did not see the last of a flock that wintered in Los Gatos until May 22, and Dr. Pickwell reported a small flock in San Jose May 26.

#### REPORTS OF REGULAR MONTHLY MEETINGS

The April meeting of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society was held on the twentieth at the San Jose State College, President Pickwell presiding and sixteen members present. On proposal of Dr. Karl Hazeltine, Mr. Henry G. Hill was elected a member of the society.

Most of the seasonal observations of birds had to do with nesting activities and have been reported, for the most part, in "Some Nesting Records" in this number of *The Wren-tit*. Of especial interest was Mr. John Price's report that a female Plain Titmouse had returned this spring to the trap-nest in which he had banded her in 1929. Also of interest was Mr. Hill's observation of a family of Bush-tits whose "house had fallen down over their ears," presumably. The nest was on the ground, wedged in between stems of a shrub, and the parents were feeding their well-feathered nestlings as if nothing had happened.

The evening's speaker was Miss Emily Smith, who reported her observations of nesting Black Swifts in Big Basin State Redwood Park in 1927. She contrasted the Big Basin nest-site behind a waterfall with the only two other known sites—one a damp sea-cliff at Santa Cruz and the other a steep, dry rock-wall in the High Sierra. Miss Smith stated that each of three nests observed by her contained but one young bird and that the young remained in the nests about five weeks; that feeding was done by both parents and at long intervals. Two dawn-to-dusk watches by Miss Smith, when the nestlings were well-feathered, showed that the parents remained away from the nest all day, not returning until nightfall to "pump" food into their young.

The May meeting of the society was held on the eighteenth at the San Jose State College, President Pickwell presiding and sixteen members present. Mr. and Mrs. Guy U. Smith and Miss Aline Brown were elected members of the society.

In response to a call for seasonal bird observations, Miss Barbara Norris reported observing in Los Gatos, May 17, an Anthony Green Heron snapping off, with its beak, dead twigs from a sycamore and carrying them to the upper branches of a live oak, where it fashioned them into a nest. Mr. Henry G. Hill reported Cowbirds near Coyote Creek between Alviso and Milpitas May 14; also on that same day a Western Mockingbird's nest in an orchard between Alviso and San Jose. There were three other Mockingbird records for the month—two by Mr. and Mrs. Guy Smith and one by Miss Aline Brown. Dr. Charles Piper Smith told of a reliable report that had come to him of a Cardinal Bird singing in an orchard near Morgan Hill in early May.

Dr. Gayle Pickwell, as speaker of the evening, showed his film strip, "Some Nesting Birds," which he had prepared for the Department of Visual Instruction, University of California Extension Division. As he showed his

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excellent pictures, Dr. Pickwell pointed out instances of protective coloration, of nest-protective reactions on the part of parents, and of self-protective behavior of young birds. In conclusion he discussed some of the difficulties that confront the photographer of birds.

### FIELD TRIP REPORTS

April 25 only four members of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society—Miss Emily Smith, Mrs. Hannah Crall, Miss Dorothy Hildebrand, and Mr. John Price—ventured out into drizzling rain to observe birds in the vicinity of Dumbarton Bridge. The party drove across the Bridge from the Palo Alto side, making frequent stops for observation. On the east side of the bridge they walked out on the levees to the Blue Lantern Duck Club House. Myriads of small flies on the mud flats had attracted great numbers of birds—Pipits and Brewer Blackbirds as well as shorebirds. Twenty-eight species of birds were listed during the three hours spent at the Bridge. Especially thrilling was a flock of at last fifty Avocets, in full breeding plumage, stalking about in shallow water. The following birds made up the list: Eared Grebe, 4; White Pelican, 7; California Blue Heron, 9; Black-crowned Night Heron, 1; Surf Scoter, 1; California Clapper Rail, 4; Semipalmated Plover, 30; Black-bellied Plover, 25; Hudsonian Curlew, 60; Greater Yellow-legs, 3; Least Sandpiper, several; Red-backed Sandpiper, many; Long-billed Dowitcher, 30; Western Sandpiper, numerous; Avocet, 50; Northern Phalarope, many; California and Ring-billed Gulls, several; Bonaparte Gull, 3; Forster Tern, 8; Barn Swallow, several; Cliff Swallow, many; Pipit, many; Western Meadowlark, 3; Brewer Blackbird, 12; California Linnet, 8; Bryant Savannah Sparrow, 2; Salt Marsh Song Sparrow, 6.

The May field trip, on the 23rd, took the form of a bird-nest hunt in Alum Rock Park under the leadership of Dr. Charles Piper Smith. There was a brisk south wind and the sky was partly overcast. The party approached the park through Berryessa in hopes of finding a Mockingbird nest in an orchard on the Madder Road. The pair of birds were there and the male was singing exuberantly, but a nest could not be found. Within the park the Western House Wren was the most actively nesting bird; six of their nests were located in holes in sycamores and oaks by the racket the nestlings made while being fed. Perhaps the day's most interesting find was a nest overflowing with four fledgling Coast Jays.

While nest-hunting within the park along the mostly dry Penitencia Creek the following 47 species of birds were listed; Western Red-tailed Hawk, 2; California Quail, 1 covey; Western Mourning Dove, 1; Screech Owl, 1; Anna Hummingbird, 1; Allen Hummingbird, 1; Red-shafted Flicker, 4; Downy Woodpecker, 1; Nuttall Woodpecker, 2; Ash-throated Flycatcher, 1; Black Phoebe, 7; Western Flycatcher, 4; Western Wood Pewee, 2; Olive-sided Flycatcher, 1; Violet-green Swallow, 6; Rough-winged Swallow, 2; Cliff Swallow, several; Coast Jay, 8; California Jay, 3; Chestnut-backed Chickadee, 2 families; Plain Titmouse, 1; Bush-tit, 1 family and 2 small flocks; Slender-billed Nuthatch, 1; Wren-tit, 1 family and 1 singing bird; Western House Wren, at least 6 pairs of nesting birds; California Thrasher, 1; Russet-backed Thrush, 1; Western Bluebird, 2; Western Warbling Vireo, 7; Cassin Vireo, 1; Hutton Vireo, 1; Lutescent Warbler, 3; Yellow Warbler, 3; Long-tailed Chat, 1; Bullock Oriole, 1; Western Tanager, pair; Black-headed Grosbeak, 3 and several young out of nest; Lazuli Bunting, 1; California Purple Finch, 1; California Linnet, several; Green-backed Goldfinch, several; Spotted Towhee, 4; Brown Towhee, 2; Rufous-crowned Sparrow, pair; Oregon Junco, several; Song Sparrow, 2.

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