

REPORT ON THE ORNITHOLOGY OF THE DEATH VALLEY EXPEDITION OF 1891, COMPRISING NOTES ON THE BIRDS OBSERVED IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, SOUTHERN NEVADA, AND PARTS OF ARIZONA AND UTAH.

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The present report includes an enumeration of all the birds observed throughout the region traversed by the different members of the expedition. It was considered advisable to unite all the observations in one general report rather than attempt to treat of the avifauna of special localities in a number of separate papers. At the same time a few local lists may be found under particular areas in Part I.

A number of side trips were made to special localities by small parties, which not only materially increased the observations on the birds already met with, but also added a number of species to the list. Among these trips may be mentioned one made by Dr. Merriam and Mr. Bailey, who extended their observations as far east as St. George, Utah. They were thereby enabled to add valuable notes on several of the birds of the Great Basin not seen elsewhere. After the main party had disbanded in the fall, a trip was made by Mr. Nelson along the coast from San Simeon to Carpenteria, and one to Monterey by Mr. Bailey, which resulted in partially filling up a wide gap among the water birds.

Owing to the unusual interest shown in matters relating to Death Valley, and to the entire absence of reliable information concerning the species inhabiting this area, it seemed best to append a special list of the birds observed there, with brief annotations. This list is believed to be reasonably complete, since the valley was visited by one or more members of the expedition every month except May, from January to June inclusive. A list of the species found in Owens Valley is added for comparison. (See pp. 150-158.)

The known ranges of a number of species were much extended by the expedition, notably in the cases of *Oreortyx pictus plumiferus*, *Dryobates scalaris bairdi*, *Chordeiles texensis*, *Pyrocephalus rubineus mexicanus*, *Calypte costae*, *Icterus parisorum*, *Leucosticte tephrocotis*, *Junco hyemalis thurberi*, *Spizella atrigularis*, *Peuceea cassini*, *Harporhynchus lecontei*, and a few others; and the distribution of many better-known species was more definitely determined.

The known range of the plumed quail (*Oreortyx pictus plumiferus*) was carried eastward from the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada to Mount Magruder, Nevada, and to all the desert ranges of southern California west of Death Valley. This valley apparently limits the distribution of this bird on the east, as the species was nowhere seen in the Grapevine or Charleston mountains, although both ranges are well timbered and bear brush which might afford suitable food and shelter.

Baird's woodpecker (*Dryobates scalaris bairdi*) was quite common among the tree yuccas on the Mohave Desert at Hesperia, and its range was extended northward to Vegas Valley, Nevada, and the valley of the Santa Clara, in southwestern Utah, by Dr. Merriam. The vermilion flycatcher also was secured in the same valley, though previously unknown north of Fort Mohave, Ariz. The Texas nighthawk (*Chordeiles texensis*) was found to be a common summer resident in all the valleys east of the Sierra Nevada from Owens Valley, California, to St. George, Utah, where Dr. Merriam secured the eggs. It was taken also in the San Joaquin Valley, California, near Bakersfield. Scott's oriole (*Icterus parisorum*) is another species whose range was carried northward from a short distance above our southern border in California to about latitude 38°, where it was common in places among the tree yuccas, and also on the slopes of some of the desert ranges as high as the junipers and piñons. Along the northern line of distribution it was found in Nevada at the Queen mine in the White Mountains, at Mount Magruder, and in the Juniper Mountains, and in Utah in the Beaverdam Mountains. Costa's humming bird (*Calypte costæ*) was very common wherever water occurred throughout the desert region, ranging northward nearly to latitude 38°, and eastward to the Beaverdam Mountains, Utah. Its nest was frequently found in the low bushes and cactuses on the hillsides near springs and streams.

The discovery that the gray-crowned finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*) breeds in the southern Sierra and in the White Mountains is especially interesting both because its breeding range was previously unknown, and because no species of the genus had been recorded from the Sierra Nevada south of about latitude 40°, while the present species was common nearly to the 36th parallel.

Most satisfactory results were accomplished in working out the distribution of Thurber's junco (*Junco hyemalis thurberi*), a recently described race whose range was not definitely known. In the Sierra Nevada it was common from the Yosemite Valley, the most northern point visited by any member of the expedition, to the southern end of the range, and in the desert ranges eastward to the Grapevine and Charleston mountains, where its place was occupied, in winter at least, by its more eastern representative, Shufeldt's junco. The little black-chinned sparrow (*Spizella atrigularis*) was found to be not an uncommon summer resident on the slopes of several of the desert ranges and also on the east slope of the Sierra Nevada as far north as Independ-

ence Creek in Kearsarge Pass. This was a great surprise, as heretofore the species has been recorded within our limits only along the southern border, and its presence was not suspected until a specimen was taken in the Panamint Mountains in April.

LeConte's thrasher (*Harporthynchus lecontei*), contrary to our expectations, was a common resident throughout the principal desert valleys from Owens Valley at the east foot of the Sierra Nevada across southern California and Nevada to southwestern Utah, where it was found nearly to the summit of the Beavercreek Mountains. Northward it was observed in Owens Valley almost to Benton, a short distance south of the 38th parallel. It was also taken by Mr. Nelson in the southern part of the San Joaquin Valley, California, about Buena Vista Lake.

The bird life of a region is materially affected by various agencies, such as changes in the character of the country brought about by the destruction of forests, the drying up of springs and water courses, and other causes. But in the High Sierra the sheep industry is doing more than anything else to make that region uninhabitable for certain species of birds and also for other forms of life, as long since pointed out by Mr. Henshaw (Appendix JJ, Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1876, p. 225). During the summer the sheep almost totally destroy all the smaller plants and shrubs which, except in the wet meadows, do not grow again until the following spring. The writer has walked for miles along the hillsides where these animals had recently grazed without seeing a plant of any description save the larger woody shrubs. That the destruction of vegetation by sheep in this region is a potent cause of the scarcity of ground-inhabiting birds is evident by contrast to anyone visiting the national parks where no sheep are allowed to graze and where the vegetation is consequently uninjured and many species of birds abundant.

One member of the expedition, Mr. Vernon Bailey, traversed the Virgin Valley in southwestern Utah and eastern Nevada and the Detrital and Sacramento valleys, Arizona, during the winter of 1888-'89. His notes on several of the birds observed are incorporated in the present report.

With few exceptions it was thought better not to include matter from published reports partially covering the same region, since most of this material has been republished already in Mr. Belding's *Land Birds of the Pacific Coast District*.

In the following report 290 species and subspecies of birds are dwelt upon at greater or less length. The nomenclature adopted is that of the American Ornithologists' Union.

The writer wishes to extend his sincere thanks to all members of the expedition who assisted in collecting specimens or information for the present report. He wishes also to acknowledge the kindness of Mr. L. Belding, who furnished data on certain birds observed by him during a short trip to the Yosemite National Park in June, 1891. In all important instances credit is given to the observer under the head of each species.

**Dendragapus obscurus fuliginosus.** Sooty Grouse.

The Sooty Grouse was nowhere common, and the only ones seen outside of the Sierra Nevada were one by Mr. Nelson in the upper part of the White Mountains, in July, and a pair by Mr. Stephens at the Queen mill, Nevada, in the same mountains, July 11-16.

On the eastern slope of the Sierra, one was seen by Mr. Stephens at Menache Meadows, the latter part of May; another on Independence Creek about the same time; one adult and two broods, at Bishop Creek, August 4-10; and it was found sparingly at the head of

↑ not Nevada

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← not Nevada.  
Owens River, in the latter part of July. In the Sequoia National Park a few were seen both at the saw mill and at Halsted Meadows. At Horse Corral Meadows a flock of ten or fifteen was seen and two secured, August 11. Several were seen in Kings River Cañon about the meadows, August 13-16; at Big Cottonwood Meadows throughout the summer; and grouse were not uncommon near timber line, at Mineral King and vicinity, during August and first half of September. Mr. Nelson found a few about the summit of Mount Piños in October.

*Record of specimens collected of Dendragapus obscurus fuliginosus.*

Collector's No.	Sex.	Locality.	Date.	Collector.	Remarks.
146	♀ juv.	Sierra Nevada Calif.....	Aug. 7, 1891	F. Stephens.....	Bishop Creek.
147	♀ juv.	.....do.....	.....do.....	.....do.....	Do.
150	♀ im.	.....do.....	Aug. 9, 1891	.....do.....	Do.
151	♀ ad.	.....do.....	.....do.....	.....do.....	Do.
160	♂ ad.	.....do.....	Aug. 23, 1891	.....do.....	Olancha Peak.
10	♂ ad.	.....do.....	July 6, 1891	B. H. Dutcher..	Big Cottonwood [Meadows.]