

NESTING OF THE DUSKY POOR-WILL NEAR SAUGUS,
LOS ANGELES COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

By A. J. VAN ROSSEM and J. HOOPER BOWLES

WITH ONE PHOTO

IT IS probable that the majority of us are acquainted with most of the Poor-wills, even within their regular ranges, mainly from their weird calls that come to us shortly after dusk. We consider ourselves fortunate if we are able even occasionally to flush one of the birds, and thus to obtain a fleeting glance or two as they disappear through the underbrush. Among their favorite haunts seem to be the sides of canyons where there is a heavy growth of wild lilac and white sage; and it was in such a locality that A. J. van Rossem was fortunate enough to discover the nest and eggs that are described in this paper. As is not infrequently the case with some of our best finds, the collector was not even thinking of birds at the time, being in hot pursuit of a rare butterfly instead. Dashing through the thick brush he nearly stepped upon the sitting bird, which flushed from her eggs almost between his feet. As was natural enough, the butterfly continued down the canyon unmolested, and the ardent entomologist, upon retracing his steps to the spot where the bird had made its unexpected appearance, was promptly transformed into a most enthusiastic oologist.

No attempt whatever seemed to have been made at constructing a nest, the eggs lying on the bare ground among pebbles, etc., in the shade of some dense brush that bordered upon a small open space, as may be seen in the accompanying illustration. Only one of the parent birds was in evidence and, after flushing from her eggs, she returned twice while van Rossem was at the nest. The date was April 18, 1919, at which time the incubation was only slightly advanced. This is much the earliest of any set that we have been able to find recorded, June and early July being dates for the very few previously taken.

This set of eggs of *Phalaenoptilus nuttalli californicus*, two in number, was sent unblown to J. Hooper Bowles, of Tacoma, Washington, in whose collection it is at the present writing. A good supply of the materials upon which the eggs were laid accompanied them, for nothing shows off a set of eggs in a collection to better advantage than the materials upon which the bird placed them. This is always true from a scientific viewpoint, and usually from an artistic point of view as well.

In a majority of the descriptions that are given for eggs of the various forms of the Poor-will, the color is stated as white, without markings, sometimes with a pinkish tinge. However, such was by no means the case with the set of eggs under discussion. Before blowing, the ground color was a strong salmon pink; but this, after blowing, turned to a clear, glossy, pinkish white, strongly suggesting eggs of the Merrill Parauque (*Nyctidromus albicollis merrilli*), although the pink of the Poor-will eggs showed a closer approach to salmon. Around the larger ends was a rather dense wreath of lavender and dusky spots and dots, making the eggs look exceedingly like the marked eggs of some small petrel. In fact that is what the present owner thought they were at first,

as the box was opened before the explanatory letter arrived for reading. It will always be a matter for regret that the eggs were not photographed soon after blowing, as in the course of time many of the smaller dots have faded out, leaving only a comparatively few spots and dots to show where the heavy wreath was once located. The strong pinkish tinge has also very largely gone, in spite of the fact that the eggs have been carefully kept from exposure to the light. However, in comparing them with such pure white eggs as those of the Stephens Whip-poor-will (*Antrostomus vociferus macromystax*), or eggs of

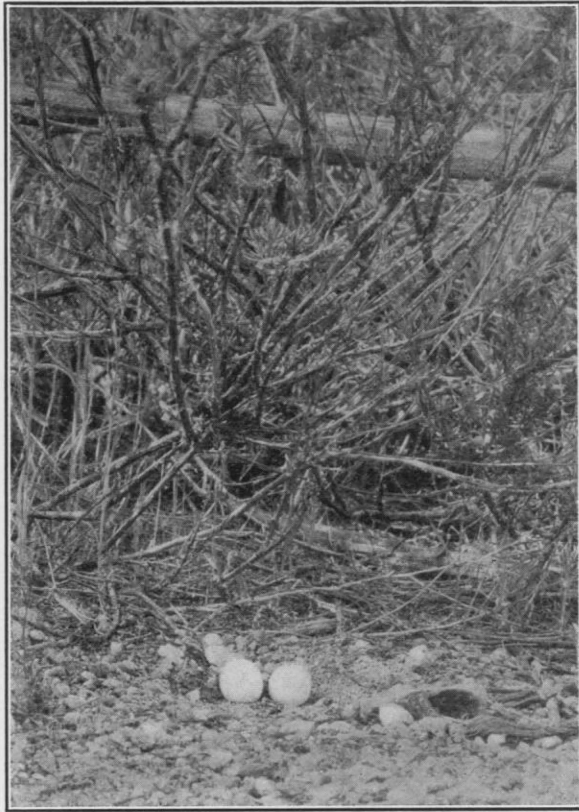


Fig. 10. EGGS AND NESTING SITE OF THE DUSKY POOR-WILL.

any of the woodpeckers, the pinkish tinge is in marked evidence.

In shape the eggs of the Dusky Poor-will are a decided oval, almost equally rounded at the two ends, although the smaller egg comes to a very abrupt and small point. In dimensions this set of eggs measures in inches 1.05x.77 and 1.00x.76, being very much smaller than the eggs of any other goatsucker that nests within the borders of the United States.

Tacoma, Washington, December 13, 1919.