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OF BIRDS FROM GUATEMALA

BY

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CATALOGUE OF A COLLECTION OF BIRDS FROM GUATEMALA

BY NED DEARBORN

The collection of birds treated in this paper was derived from three sources. Messrs. Edmund Heller and Charles M. Barber, who spent the winter of 1904-5 in Guatemala making general collections for the Department of Zoology, supplied 49; Mr. Barber, who continued the general collecting the following year, furnished 138; and the writer, making birds his chief object, collected 1,000 during the early part of the year 1906. The total number, then, is 1,187, comprising 305 species and subspecies, mostly skins, though several skeletons and alcoholic specimens are included. All localities represented by specimens are indicated on the accompanying map, which also shows the route followed by the writer.

This route, for the most part, was the line of least resistance. From Puerto Barrios, the port of entry, to El Rancho, the Guatemala Northern R. R. furnished convenient transportation; and from Guatemala City to Mazatenango and San José, by way of Esquintla, the Guatemala Central R. R. was employed. Between El Rancho and Guatemala City, and from Patulul to Tecpam and back to Guatemala City, it was necessary to go on horseback, pack horses or Indians being employed to carry luggage, according to which happened to be the more convenient. As a rule, however, an Indian *moso* is preferable to a horse as a carrier for packages of 100 pounds or less.

The localities visited and the days spent in collecting at each, are as follows: El Rancho, January 4th to 11th; Los Amates, January 15th to February 9th; Puerto Barrios, February 12th; Gualan, February 14th to 17th; Lake Amatitlan, February 24th to 27th; San José, March 5th to 9th; Mazatenango, March 15th to 21st; Patulul, March 23d to April 5th; Lake Atitlan, April 7th to 10th; Tecpam, April 11th to 15th. The physical aspects of these places, and the conditions encountered at each of them, have such a bearing on the collection that a prefatory word concerning them is not impertinent.

El Rancho, the first stopping place, has an elevation of about 1,000 feet. Its dry season is long, and the rainy season is somewhat uncertain. In January the earth presents a baked appearance.

Cacti are common, and away from the river very few trees have foliage. By ascending the mountains to the north of the town, green trees and brooks of cool water may be found, but these all disappear long before reaching the valley. Perhaps the most striking object in the landscape of the valley is the tree cactus (*Cereus*), which is the especial home of the Santa Cruz woodpecker (*C. sanctacruzi*) and the cactus wren (*H. capistratus*). Its fruit is much sought by orioles and the long-tailed jays. Birds were fairly abundant. In addition to the species secured here, may be mentioned the mangrove swallow (*I. albilinea*) and the killdeer (*O. vociferus*), neither of which is represented in the collection.

Los Amates, elevation about 60 feet, is in the rubber country. The village is on the bank of the Motagua River, and the region immediately surrounding it is densely covered with a great variety of vegetation. It is practically useless to attempt to collect away from the railroad or a path of some sort. Two weeks were spent at Finca Chapulco, a rubber plantation, three or four miles from the village. Mr. William McFarlane, manager of this estate, is not only a good host but a most agreeable companion, and the stay there was pleasant as well as profitable,—notwithstanding the rain which fell twelve out of the fourteen days. This region, away from the river, offers occasional ridges covered with pine (*P. caribaea*), and also open savannas bearing a coarse grass as high as one's head. Many species of birds occur, but few of them are abundant, and the rank nature of the vegetation makes collecting rather slow.

Puerto Barrios was visited in February for the purpose of sending specimens to Chicago. The steamer was a day late, and an attempt was made to do some collecting. The place is a swamp, the only way out being over the railway. Birds were scarce and well nigh impossible to obtain.

Gualan is at the head of canoe navigation on the Motagua River, and just within the limits of the semi-arid area which extends up the Motagua Valley far beyond El Rancho. Its altitude is about 250 feet. Its proximity to the swamp country makes it a particularly good collecting ground, inasmuch as both lowland and upland species are to be found, and in winter there are comparatively few obstructions to travel in any direction. The way from El Rancho to Guatemala City is mountainous, and until the Pacific side of the divide was reached, perhaps 20 miles northeast of the city, very few birds were seen.

The collecting at Lake Amatitlan was in the neighborhood of

the narrow part of the lake, where the railroad crosses it. The altitude is about 4,000 feet. The depth of the lake is about 100 feet, deep water extending to within a few feet of the shore. A number of hot springs are located along the southern margin. Excepting where erosion has cut down the side of a mountain and filled a portion of the lake, the strip of shore is narrow,—in places there are sheer ascents from the water. Green vegetation was confined to the lake shore, and practically all bird life was near the water. A number of species not encountered on the Atlantic slope were collected here. The jay (*C. melanocyanea*) and the sparrow (*M. biarcuatum*) were the two most striking species, both being new and abundant.

San José was the next locality visited. The heat here was so great that it was found necessary to retreat to the highlands to recuperate, at the end of five days. It is a good collecting ground, however. The lagoons teem with wading birds, and in the woods were found a number of forms not taken elsewhere. Near the beach were found a number of species peculiar to mangrove swamps, while the woods farther inland were well tenanted with birds, and not too hard to get through.

Mazatenango and Patulul are similarly situated, their altitude being about 1,800 feet. This region is watered by numerous streams from the Cordilleras and is largely under cultivation, sugar and coffee being the staple products. The forests contain some of the finest trees that were seen anywhere, and where the underbrush has been removed for planting coffee, finer conditions for collecting can scarcely be imagined. The writer joined Mr. Barber at Patulul and continued in his good company till the work was ended at Tecpam. We were especially fortunate at Patulul in not only being granted the privilege of hunting on property of the land holders, but furthermore, in being entertained by them. Sr. Don Guillermo Peitzener, proprietor of Finca San Julián, a sugar plantation, accorded us full home privileges, with every convenience amply provided. Birds were plentiful, and the collection grew rapidly there in such species as inhabit cultivated land. When we wished to work the woodland forms, we were given an equally cordial welcome at the coffee plantation known as Finca San Fernando, by its owner, Sr. Don Frederico Müller-Winter and his gracious and accomplished wife. When we came to this place after a ride on horseback over a narrow trail for several miles through the forest, we named it Paradise, and still hold that it is a credit to the name. Here is a home so remote from commercial hurry, that nervous wrack is unthinkable. A mountain,

with its base at the very door, on the one hand, a stream of water on the other, a closer environment of useful and ornamental trees and herbs, seclusion, books, a piano, a table well supplied from two continents,—finding all this at San Fernando, and enjoying it, we voted down the "Swiss Family Robinson" and set up a real ideal.

The north shore of Lake Atitlan, near Panajachel, which was our next stopping place, is too precipitous to follow, except where two small streams have worn out short valleys and made a little alluvial soil. Bird life was confined almost entirely to these valleys and the lake, which is about 5,000 feet above the sea, and has a depth of about 1,000 feet. Here we first saw the mockingbird (*M. g. guatemalensis*), the whippoorwill (*A. chiapensis*), the grebe (*C. d. brachypterus*) and the fine, large humming-bird (*C. rufus*). We took two days for the journey from the lake to Tecpam, in order that we might collect some things that we had been unable to obtain previously. Several miles of this road follow a *barranca* having a stream at the bottom, and its sides well wooded with oak and pine. In this place we secured the ant-eating woodpecker (*M. formicivorous*), the black-eared bushtit (*P. melanotis*) and the swift (*S. zonaris*). The altitude of this gorge is about 6,500 feet.

The region about Tecpam presents a striking contrast, in both fauna and flora, to the lowlands. In the vicinity of the town the land is mainly under cultivation, but towards the northwest, only a few miles away, rises Sierra Santa Elena to the height of about 10,000 feet, covered with forest to its summit. The altitude of the town is about 7,500 feet. As one ascends the mountain he finds the long-leaved pine to be the common tree between 8,000 and 9,000 feet, but above the latter elevation cypress trees exclude all other varieties. We passed a night and a day as guests of Sr. Don Guillermo Thom, who lives on the mountain at about 9,500 feet, and is the only practical forester in the republic. Here, again, we found a real home, having all the comforts desired by refined people, in the heart of a cypress forest five days' journey by ox-team from the source of supplies, Guatemala City. Here we found the junco (*J. alticola*), the kinglet (*R. s. clarus*), the green toucan (*A. prasinus*), the thrush (*C. f. alticola*), the red warbler (*E. versicolor*) and other species not seen elsewhere. The cypress woods are quite impenetrable without an ax. Fallen trees, thick bushes and long dripping moss make it almost impossible to move out of the cleared paths. A longer stay at Tecpam would have been profitable, but three days were all that could be spared for it.