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WITH BOB-WHITE IN MEXICO.

BY E. W. NELSON.

*Plate II.*

WHILE traveling in Mexico a few seasons ago, I arrived at a small town near the southern end of the tableland in the State of Puebla. The first business in hand was to secure suitable quarters for myself and assistant. Having accomplished this I was ready at an early hour the following morning for a tramp into the surrounding country. It chanced to be market day, and passing the outskirts of the town I met a straggling procession of Indians, in picturesque costumes, some driving heavily loaded donkeys, others carrying on their own backs crates of fruits, vegetables, handmade pottery, and other simple wares. All were pushing forward eager to take part in the keenly relished pleasures of petty chaffering, which would enable them to return home with a few *decimos* knotted in the ends of their sashes. Some of the men saluted me with a polite "bueños dias senor," but I noted that their conversation was carried on in the Aztec tongue, as spoken by their fathers centuries ago.

Once free of the last houses a convenient opening in the fence was soon found, and I crossed into a great field which reached for miles down the broad, open valley. Areas covered with wheat and corn stubble indicated the character of the last crops,



while farther away broad belts of brilliant green sugar cane were in vivid contrast to the dry browns and yellows of the general surface. The sun was shining brightly, and the fresh balmy air seemed full of life-giving power. The musical notes of Meadow-larks were heard at intervals, and on one side of the valley flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds were swirling back and forth over some small marshy spots grown up with tules. Through the valley bottom flowed a little stream of clear, sparkling water, which, before reaching the distant shore of the Pacific, runs a wild course through the mountain gorges of Guerrero. Behind me arose the mysterious pyramid of Cholula, crowned by a white walled chapel, which now occupies the place of ancient sacrifice. Over to my right stood the gigantic form of the Smoking Mountain — hoary old Popocatepetl — with the gleaming robe of the White Lady — Iztaccihuatl — shining over his shoulder. In front a sweeping plain descended for many miles through a district of great sugar estates to the far horizon, where it was walled in by the blue front of distant mountains.

Turning to one side I approached some scrubby bushes which appeared to offer shelter for birds or other game. Suddenly the familiar accents of my mother tongue fell on my ear. I listened with bated breath. Again arose in clear, round tones, the calls so familiar in my boyhood days, 'Bob White,' 'Bob White.' With eager steps I hastened forward to a small group of acacias, and there, quietly perched on top of a bush, was an old friend, the author of the notes. It is difficult to describe the mingled pleasure and exultation caused by this unexpected meeting. It proved to be the Puebla Bob-white (*Colinus graysoni nigripictus* Nelson) and during the following days a number of others were seen, and it became evident that my friend of the first morning was one of a colony located in the neighborhood.

Afterwards, during my Mexican travels, I learned that the Bob-whites are widely spread in that country and although many of them have changed the color of their dress more or less, yet their customs and tricks of speech remain much the same as in their northern home.

At a later date during this same season, while working down the eastern slope of the Cordillera in Vera Cruz, near the City of



Orizaba, we found others of the family, known as the Black-breasted Bob-white [*Colinus pectoralis* (Gould)]. They were living in brush-grown and weedy old fields — sometimes straying about the coffee plantations — and were on friendly terms with most of their tropical neighbors. Fortunately, in these parts guns and dogs are few, and mostly harmless, so that Bob's days were generally peaceful and contented. But even here life was not without its cares, for the spotted tiger cats and woolly-haired opossums, with sad lack of consideration, were given to nocturnal raids that filled them with terror and sometimes lessened their numbers.

From Orizaba our wanderings led far away over plains and mountains to the City of Tehuantepec, on the hot lowlands bordering the Pacific coast. There we found our friends again but known as the Coyolcos Bob-white [*Colinus coyolcos* (Müll.)]. They were common, and although their garb had changed considerably, yet their voices and mode of life remained true to the family traditions. Indeed, so fixed are old habits among them that even long association with the suave and politic Mexican has failed to cure Bob of one custom that I often deplored during my youthful days, when, gun in hand, I sought to make his acquaintance. I refer to that abruptness of manner which is shown in such a disconcerting way when one comes upon him in his favorite haunts.

Near Tehuantepec their home is on the partly wooded and partly grassy plains. Old fields and grassy prairies, that extend irregularly amid the scrubby forests of that district, are their favorite haunts. Here the mesquites, mimosas, acacias, cassias, Brazil wood, ebony, mahogany, Spanish cedar, and other tropical trees and bushes, give the landscape quite a different aspect from that which Bob is accustomed to see in his northern home. Old cornfields and weedy indigo plantations are popular resorts and furnish an abundance of food. Brush fences of thorny scrub are built about these fields and serve as fine places of shelter in times of danger. The Quails do not penetrate heavily wooded bottoms along streams, where the moisture causes a vigorous tropical forest growth, unless some farmer hews out a clearing for his cornfields. In these forest belts the Motmots, Trogons, Red-



and-Yellow Macaws, several species of Parrots and other tropical birds abound, and a little farther south troops of spider monkeys are encountered. In many places it is but a few steps from the dense shade of the bottoms, where the harsh screams of the Macaws dominate all other woodland notes, to the borders of grassy prairies where our friends pass their sedate lives associated with Meadowlarks and Sparrows. Throughout this region where deer, peccaries, Tree Pheasants and other game is plentiful, smaller birds are considered unworthy of powder and shot, all of which conduces greatly to peace of mind among the Bob-whites.

While traveling down the coast from Tehuantepec into Chiapas we found them numerous most of the way, and they were a constant source of interest and pleasure. Their cheerful notes were frequently heard from the scrubby bushes near the trail, and the neat, trimly built little fellows carried on their small affairs with little regard for our presence. While riding at the head of the pack train I frequently found them scratching in the sandy trails, dusting themselves or searching for food. At such times it was amusing to note the pretty air of doubt and hesitation with which they awaited my approach before finally moving rather deliberately a few yards to one side, when I came too near. Now and then the male could be heard uttering little querulous notes as if in subdued protest at being disturbed. After entering Chiapas, the coast was left behind and we passed into the interior through a series of beautiful open valleys ornamented with scattered bushes and belts of trees. It was during the rainy season and the vegetation was growing luxuriantly; everywhere were myriads of flowers, and the innumerable plume-like heads of tall grasses nodded gracefully in the passing breezes. In these valleys the Bob-whites were very common. It generally rained during the night, but the clouds broke away at dawn leaving a brilliantly clear sky. We were up and on our way at sunrise, amid the invigorating freshness of early morning, when every leaf and twig bore a pendant water-drop that sent out quivering rays of light with the first touch of the sun. On every hand were new flowers and strange birds. Now and then the Central American Mockingbird, in full-throated ecstasy, poured out its rich song, and over it all, at short intervals, the clear call of 'Bob White'



arose from a bush or low tree. At an altitude of about 3000 feet we passed out of their range and did not find them again until we reached the valley of Comitán, on the Guatemalan border, where their notes were heard. A few miles farther on, just after entering Guatemala, a single female, which proved to be quite different from those taken in Mexico, was brought me by an Indian. This specimen served as the type of the Guatemala Bob-white (*Colinus insignis* Nelson). Beyond this nothing was learned of them in these remote parts.

From Comitán valley we made a long circuit over the Guatemalan highlands and reached the Pacific coast again on the border of Chiapas. There, on some grassy prairies in the midst of the forested coast plain, a few miles back from the sea, we found many Bob-whites of a previously unknown branch of the family.<sup>1</sup> In this vicinity an attempt was made many years ago to establish a large colony of Americans. They came with great flourish of trumpets and large expectations, but the climate did its silent work so effectually that two or three stranded relics were all that remained. Over the desolate sun-scorched flats near by, the same cheery call of the Quail sounded in the ears of the Mexican ox-drivers and muleteers as they carried their cargoes of coffee and cacao to the coast, that I had heard from many a field and thicket over thousands of miles of varied country to the north. Among these sturdy little Americans there appeared no sign of degeneration, and it was pleasanter to meet them than some of my countrymen of a larger growth. So many failures at colonizing people from the north in these hot southern lands had come to my notice that I had become skeptical of its successful accomplishment in any instance; yet here in the tropics were the Bob-whites, essentially a group of the temperate regions, living as cheerfully as possible and upsetting my preconceived ideas.

After passing some time in this district we hired an ox cart one evening and were trundled across the plains to the coast during the cool hours of the night. There, on the sandy shore, we waited ten days for a steamer which finally carried us back to

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<sup>1</sup> *Colinus salvini* Nelson.



Tehuantepec. From this place a railroad crosses the Isthmus to the port of Coatzacoalcos on the Gulf of Mexico, and we took advantage of it to reach the eastern coast. Coatzacoalcos is a curious little town destined to play an important part in the development of southern Mexico and western Guatemala. It is one of the few places in Mexico where small frame houses are the prevailing style and reminds one more of some small mining camp in the Far West than of a seaport on the Gulf of Mexico. Here where yellow fever, malaria, and other ills stalk about according to the season, we heard of howling monkeys, jaguars, tapirs and other tropical creatures with which we still desired to become more familiar. For this purpose we ascended the Coatzacoalcos River about twenty miles to the town of Minatitlan, a place once noted for its enormous trade in Spanish cedar and dye woods. We remained here some days in the midst of the coast lowlands where the tropical forest is interrupted by grassy prairies of considerable extent. In visiting these prairies we were surprised and delighted to find another of the Bob-whites that had not been previously known even to those most familiar with the ramifications of this good old stock.<sup>1</sup> Afterwards we found them a few miles out of Coatzacoalcos, and they were seen a little farther north in the open country about the shores of beautiful lake Catemaco. This latter point is probably near their limit in that direction. The handsome appearance of this unexpected species is shown in the accompanying drawing (Plate II) by Mr. J. L. Ridgway.

The distribution of the Mexican Bob-whites is curious and shows that the family has been long in the land. They range over parts of the cool tableland and extend down to the tropical lowlands of both coasts, but are unaccountably absent from many apparently suitable places.

Many changes have taken place in their garb owing to the influences and requirements peculiar to such varied situations, but the general style is retained so that their relationship cannot be mistaken.

A representative of this group lives in Yucatan which, it is said

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<sup>1</sup> Godman's Bob-white, *Colinus godmani* Nelson.



by some, belongs to the family proper, but if this is so, there must be a bar sinister on its escutcheon to account for some of its peculiarities.

At present eleven branches of Bob-whites are known to live in various parts of Mexico, and our work has enabled us to introduce four of them to the friends of the family. Wherever they were encountered over this great area it was interesting to observe how closely they continue to resemble one another in notes and habits. From the border of Canada to Guatemala they hold true to a general style of speech and manners that always betrays their connection; with the possible exception of the Yucatan branch, of which I am unable to give any definite information.

For the charming qualities and pretty ways of these little friends of the field, I trust their days may be many and their numbers never grow less.

As it is quite possible that some of our mutual friends may have the opportunity to call upon these Mexican connections of 'our Bob,' I have taken some trouble to secure their names and addresses which are given below. The directory is complete, I believe, up to date.

1. *Colinus ridgwayi* Brewster. Ridgway's Bob-white. Sonora; ranging south from the Arizona border. (Between 1000 and 2500 feet above sea level.)
2. *Colinus virginianus texanus* (Lawr.). Texas Bob-white. North-eastern Mexico; Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. (From near sea level up to 2500 feet.)
3. *Colinus graysoni* (Lawr.). Grayson's Bob-white. Southern part of tableland; from San Luis Potosi and northern Jalisco to Valley of Mexico. (3000-7500 feet.)
4. *Colinus graysoni nigripectus* Nelson. Puebla Bob-white. Tableland of southern Puebla. (3000-6000 feet.)
5. *Colinus pectoralis* (Gould). Black-breasted Bob-white. Eastern base of Cordillera in Vera Cruz; from Jalapa to Isthmus of Tehuantepec. (500 to 5000 feet.)
6. *Colinus godmani* Nelson. Godman's Bob-white. Lowlands of southern Vera Cruz; probably also ranging into Tabasco. (From sea level to 1500 feet.)
7. *Colinus coyolcos* (Müll.). Coyolcos Bob-white. Pacific coast of Oaxaca and Chiapas; from City of Tehuantepec to Tonalá. (From sea level to 3000 feet.)



8. *Colinus atriceps* (Ogilvie-Grant). Black-headed Bob-white. Putla, western Oaxaca. (About 4000 feet.)

9. *Colinus salvini* Nelson. Salvin's Bob-white. Coast plains of southern Chiapas, near Guatemalan border. (Sea level to 500 feet.)

10. *Colinus insignis* Nelson. Guatemala Bob-white. Valley of Comitán in Chiapas, into adjacent border of western Guatemala. (3000-6000 feet.)

11. *Colinus nigrogularis* (Gould). Yucatan Bob-white. Yucatan. (Sea level to 500 feet.)

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## SUMMER BIRDS OF SITKA, ALASKA.

BY JOSEPH GRINNELL.

THE WELL-KNOWN humidity of the Northwest Coast apparently reaches its extreme in the region about Sitka. The temperature is moderate throughout the year, and this, together with the excessive moisture, favors the growth of the heavy coniferous forests which cover almost every bit of land from the sea-level up to the lower limit of the summer snows on the mountains. Every one of the hundreds of small islands which convert Sitka Bay into an intricate network of narrow channels, is densely timbered, even to the water's edge.

However, along the shores, especially at the heads of the numerous inlets where the streams enter the ocean, are narrow strips of shorter vegetation, such as alders and salmonberry bushes. These small tracts of deciduous growth, together with the taller timber immediately adjoining, are the localities most frequented by the smaller land birds. In fact, the dark mossy forests but a few rods back from the coast are almost destitute of bird life.

For the most part the shores are rocky and the land rises directly out of the water, so there are few beaches. Indian River is a swift mountain stream which rises among the snow-capped peaks scarcely ten miles to the northward, and enters the sea a half mile east of Sitka. At its mouth are rather extensive sandy tideflats and bars, which are about the only ones in the vicinity and so form an important attraction to the Waders.





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