

NOTES ON TWO COSTA RICAN BIRDS.

BY GEORGE K. CHERRIE.

Ramphocœlus costaricensis.

I recently published some notes on this species,¹ which I may be pardoned for repeating in this place with a few additions, as the original description of the species was published in 'The Auk' (Vol. VIII, 1891, p. 62). At that time I believed the male and female to be alike in plumage, the six specimens I then had—three males and three females—being exactly alike. However, during a recent exploring trip along the southwest coast region of Costa Rica, I was fortunate in securing a large series of specimens of this bird of both sexes and all ages. This species clearly demonstrates that the adult male *costaricensis* is distinguishable from the adult male *passerinii* only by its slightly larger size and the different wing formula. Females and young males are at a glance distinguishable from female and young *passerinii* by the bright ochraceous rufous breast and rump.

During my stay at Boruca and Palmar (the last of February) the breeding season was at its height, and I observed many of the Costa Rica Red-rumps nesting. In almost every instance where possible I collected both parents of the nests, and in the majority of cases found the males wearing the same dress as the females! In a few instances the male was in mottled plumage, evidently just assuming the adult phase, and in a lesser number of examples the male was in fully adult plumage—velvety black and crimson red.

From the above it is clear that the males begin to breed before they attain fully adult plumage, and that they retain the dress of the female until, at least, the beginning of the second year.

While on this trip I had many proofs that—in spite of its rich plumage, and being a bird of the tropics—*R. costaricensis* is well worthy to hold a place of honor among the song birds. And if the bird chooses an early hour and a secluded spot for

¹ Anales del Instituto Físico-geográfico y del Museo Nacional de Costa Rica, III, 1890, p. 135.

expressing its happiness, the melody is none the less delightful. At the little village of Buenos Aires, on the Rio Grande of Terraba, I heard the song more frequently than at any other point. Close by the ranch house at which we were staying, there is a small stream bordered by low woods and underbrush, that formed a favorite resort for the birds. Just below the ranch is a convenient spot where we took our morning bath. I was always there just as day was breaking. On the opposite bank was a small open space in the brush occupied by the limbs of a dead tree. On one of these branches, and always the same one, was the spot chosen by a Red-rump to pour forth his morning song. Some mornings I found him busy with his music when I arrived, and again he would be a few minutes behind me. Sometimes he would come from one direction, sometimes from another, but he always alighted at the same spot and then lost no time in commencing his song. While singing, the body was swayed to and fro, much after the manner of a Canary while singing. The song would last for perhaps half an hour, and then away the singer would go. I have not enough musical ability to describe the song, but will say that often I remained standing quietly for a long time, only that I might listen to the music.

Thamnophilus bridgesi Scl.

Thamnophilus bridgesi SCL. P. Z. S. 1856, p. 141; Cat. Bds. Brit. Mus. XV, p. 194; SALV. P. Z. S. 1867, p. 144; 1870, p. 194; LAWR. Ann. Lyc. N. Y. IX, p. 107; ZELEDON, An. Mus. Nac. Costa Rica, 1887, p. 114; SALV. & GOD. Biologia, II, p. 199.

Thamnophilus punctatus CAB. J. f. Orn. 1861, p. 241; SALV. Ibis, 1870, p. 110; P. Z. S. 1870, p. 194; ZELEDON, An. Mus. Nac. Costa Rica, 1887, p. 114; SCL. Cat. Birds Brit. Mus. XV, p. 191; SALV. & GOD. Biologia, II, p. 198.

I have before me a series of sixty-eight specimens, thirty-eight males and thirty females. The males might be referred to *T. punctata* and the females to *T. bridgesi*, according to the original descriptions. But in four years' collecting at various points through the country I have never met with a male '*bridgesi*' nor a female '*punctata*.' I have always found the two associated together, and, in my last trip to the southwest coast, mated and

nesting. Consequently I conclude there has been some error, and that *T. punctata* should become a synonym of *Thamnophilus bridgesi*, *bridgesi* being the older name.

In Costa Rica *T. bridgesi* seems to be confined to the Pacific side of the country, and is not an uncommon bird from the coast inland to an altitude of about 2200 feet. It is only found in the densest part of the forest, and is apparently rather solitary in disposition but not especially moody nor silent. A favorite perch is on some dead branch at the edge of a thicket and from ten to twenty feet from the ground. Here the bird will sit in one position for a long time, every few moments uttering its peculiar cackling-like notes. While thus occupied the bird's attitude is very characteristic; the body is held in an almost horizontal position, the tail perpendicular, and the head thrown well back. While uttering the peculiar notes (song or cackle) the tail is vibrated back and forth quite rapidly. The food is chiefly insects, and they are sometimes taken on the wing. The bird, if disturbed, drops quietly down into the thicket.

The nest I have not yet succeeded in finding, although I have seen the birds carrying nesting material. The egg I can describe only from a badly broken specimen that I took from the oviduct of a female killed March 8, 1893. This egg was white, thickly speckled all over with small chocolate-brown spots.

There is considerable individual variation in the plumage, especially of the females, the general color below varying from a clear dusky slate-gray to a rather dark hair-brown. Some specimens have the belly lightly streaked with white, others are without any indications of streaks. Above the color varies from a blackish slate-color with a faint olive wash to a rather light bistre brown.



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