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NOTES ON SOME SPRING BIRDS OF LA PLATA.

BY ROLAND F. HUSSEY.

FOR about six months beginning July 22, 1914, the writer had his residence in the Observatorio Astronómico at La Plata, Argentina, about thirty miles southeast of Buenos Aires city. During the first few weeks of this period field work was made very difficult by adverse weather conditions: the year 1914 was abnormally rainy throughout Argentina, and the level country about La Plata was nearly impassable through the early spring months. But toward the middle of September conditions improved greatly, and field work soon became comparatively easy.

Observations were made in three general regions about the city of La Plata. The first includes the Bosque park and the observatory grounds — both within the city limits — and a little of the surrounding region. The Bosque is a large artificial woodland set about an artificial lake. The trees here are chiefly the eucalyptus; also there are some willows, poplars, sycamores, etc. Within the Bosque is a zoological garden, to which many small birds are attracted by the abundance of food. Also, the famous La Plata Museum is located in the Bosque.

The observatory grounds are much more open, and several species of ground birds frequent them, notably the Cowbird, the Ovenbird (*Furnarius*), the Chingolo Sparrow, the Ovejera (*Machetornis*), the Guira Cuckoo, and others. There are in all about eighteen buildings on these grounds, several of which have steeply sloping roofs with wide eaves; and here the common swallow breeds quite frequently. The observatory grounds are shut in on three sides by the eucalyptus forest of the Bosque; to the north they are open and a clear view is obtained across the level fields to the river Plate, about five miles distant.

The second of the three general regions mentioned above proved the least profitable. It includes a small pond of open water and an arroyo grown up with rushes, and is surrounded by very wet meadows. It is just off the railroad track about four miles south of the city.

The third region, by far the most important, includes a strip of land along the great municipal sewer to the northeast of La Plata; it is made up of several distinct subregions.

The first subregion is about four miles in length: a vast marsh all grown up with ten-foot grasses, but without other trees or bushes than a few slender willow stalks. The great brick cloaca is entirely above ground through this region, and gives an excellent place of vantage from which an extensive vista over the marsh is secured. Probably there are some areas of open water within the region, as several species of ducks were seen to rise from and settle into the more distant parts.

For the most part the water in this marsh is shallow — not more than eight inches deep in most places, at least under normal conditions. But the river Plate is greatly affected by the winds. A two-days' "pampero" from the south may back up the water until it stands ten feet or more above its usual level, while a wind from the north may produce just the opposite result; and the whole marsh area is more or less affected by the water level in the river, especially during these times of abnormally high or low water. Toward the end of December, as the dry season approached and there were no strong up-stream winds, a large part of this marsh dried up; this produced some change in the bird life, of which the most noticeable feature was the withdrawal of the Snail Hawk (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*).

The second subregion is about two miles long. Here the land is higher, and trees and thorny bushes begin to make their appearance. A large part of this region is given over to small gardens and to pasture. A tramway runs from here to the port of La Plata, where connections are made with a line from the city itself.

The third region extends on about two miles, to the river Plate. This is the most diversified of all those in which work was done. Small gardens, diked about to guard against high water, alternate with bits of open marsh and fragments of the original swampy forest, and with dense groves of poplar and willow and other quick-growing trees, planted for future use as firewood. Wood-cutting is always going on here; and so the region has been given the name Los Talas — apparently with absolute disregard for the rules of Spanish grammar.

The original tree of the swampy forest (*Erythrina crista-galli*) puts forth in December large masses of dark red blossoms, around which numbers of hummingbirds are seen. But this tree has largely been cut off, and is now confined chiefly to a strip along the shore of the river, where the land is cut up into many little islands by narrow canals and ditches. Finally, along the shore of the river itself, is a narrow strip of sandy beach.

Almost no collecting was done by the writer during his stay in La Plata; therefore no species have been included in the following list regarding whose identification there was the slightest doubt: to phrase it differently, none of the forms listed below was regarded as hypothetical. So this list includes but a few of the species whose range includes La Plata.

The nomenclature used here is for the most part that given by Dabbene in the 'Catálogo' to his 'Ornitología Argentina' (1910)¹; in a few cases other names, given by him in more recent publications, have been employed.

1. **Zenaida auriculata** (Des Murs). "TORCASA."—This dove is very common in comparatively open country where there are scattering clumps of trees or bushes; I never found it in heavily wooded districts or in the Bosque — in fact, I never saw it at all near the city. In the spring and summer it was always seen singly or in pairs, but I was told that later it gathers into large flocks. The song is often heard; the notes have a sweet and sorrowful quality which gives something of the effect of our Mourning Dove's song.

A nest found December 22 contained one bird not yet completely feathered out. The nest was a crude structure of sticks, in a thorny bush about four feet from the ground, and was at the edge of a garden plot near Los Talas.

2. **Columbula picui** (Temm.). "TORCASITA," "PICUL."—This small dove was much more frequently seen than the preceding species — not because it was more plentiful, since the reverse is the case, but because it comes around the edge of the town and was quite common in the Bosque. It was usually seen in pairs, though in the winter and the early spring small parties of about fifteen birds were not uncommon. The song of this bird was quite familiar; it is not so pleasing as the song of the preceding species.

3. **Aramides ypecaha** (Vieill.). "GALLINETE."—The powerful cry of alarm and the shrieking chorus of this rail were familiar to me long before I learned the identity of their author.

¹ An. Mus. Nac. Buenos Aires, ser. 3, v. xi.

On one occasion I was so fortunate as to witness one of the strange performances characteristic of this bird. I had concealed myself near an open place in the marsh, hoping to see some of its rarer bird-life, when I heard a loud triple call note, which was answered by other birds. In a very short time about half a dozen ypecahas appeared in the open area; and there, with wings raised and trembling and beaks vertical they rushed about madly, screaming at the tops of their voices. This lasted for perhaps a minute, when all at once one bird seemed to discover my presence and gave the loud alarm cry, upon which all the birds fled.

This was the only time that I saw the ypecaha in its own haunts; but on another occasion I saw one perched upon a fence post at the edge of the marsh, and was able to approach quite close before he showed the least sign of fear. This seemed quite remarkable to me, since the ypecaha, like others of his family, is usually very wary and keeps well concealed.

4. ***Sterna superciliaris*** Vieill.—This little tern was fairly common about the port of La Plata during the winter and early spring. A larger tern (*S. hirundinacea*?) was also seen occasionally.

5. ***Larus maculipennis*** Licht. "GAVIOTA COMÚN" (COMMON GULL).—The spot-winged gull was seen but seldom; usually in flocks of about twenty individuals. On one day only, December 22, did I see any number of gulls. On that day they began to come in sight about ten o'clock in the morning, flying up-stream in small flocks of about a dozen birds, the flocks following each other at intervals of about three minutes, and the gulls continued to pass me for more than an hour.

It has seemed very strange to me that there were so few gulls about the beaches near La Plata, particularly since so much fishing was done and so much refuse was about; and these gulls are particularly noted as scavengers. But although caracaras were occasionally found there, the gulls were seldom seen.

6. ***Larus cirrhocephalus*** Vieill.—While in some plumages this gull and the preceding resemble each other closely, during the breeding season they are distinct. I saw this gull several times, always in company with the other, and all my records were made during the early part of October.

7. ***Larus dominicanus*** Licht.—This large gull was seen only a few times, during the winter months, and always singly or in pairs.

8. ***Belonopterus cayennensis*** (Gm.). "TÉRU-TÉRU."—No one can live long in the Argentine without knowing the Teru; and should he go abroad into the camp the Teru will soon be aware of his presence. The Terus are usually seen in pairs; and each pair has its own little domain to which they are much attached, and they can usually be found there. Toward all intruders the Teru is very bitter; he flies closely about them, shrieking loudly the two-syllabled cry of which the common name is an imitation. I have known them to fly so close as to brush me with their wings.

Being such a noisy bird and so suspicious of strangers, the Teru is considered by many an excellent guardian and as valuable to a household as a watchdog; I myself know of at least two cases where these lapwings are

kept as guardians. Besides, the Teru is an attractive bird, and is often kept in private gardens on that account.

9. **Gallinago paraguayæ** (Vieill.). PARAGUAY SNIPE.— Frequently flushed from wet meadows and marsh-land where the grass was fairly short. In the small arroyo south of La Plata, mentioned in the introduction, this bird was very common, notwithstanding the nearness of human habitations and the frequent passing of hunters. In their general appearance and their habits this snipe seemed to resemble *G. delicata* of North America.

10. **Aramus scolopaceus** (Gm.). "CARÁU"—The Courlan was very plentiful in the marshes all about La Plata and their voices were among the most familiar sounds of the swamp. They were very suspicious and wary toward a man on foot, and would not allow an approach to within a hundred and fifty yards without flying; yet I frequently noted that they took no notice of passing trams though within fifty yards of the track. I never saw these birds anywhere except in the open marsh; but I was told that they perch occasionally in trees.

11. **Butorides striata** (Linn.).—This little blue heron was tolerably common at La Plata, where it seemed to be solitary in its habits. I never saw it anywhere except in the wooded regions at Los Talas—save when in flight—and it seemed very much attached to its particular haunts, and could be found there day after day.

12. **Ardetta involucris** (Vieill.).—I believe this heron to be tolerably common in the open marsh where the grass grows tall, despite the fact that I have very few records of it. So protective is its coloration that its detection is almost impossible even though the spot where it settles is marked carefully. The bird is about the size of the Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*), with the coloration of the North American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*), and like this latter bird, when trying to escape detection it stands motionless among the reeds with bill pointed vertical, and it always keeps its breast toward the invader. Only once was I able to find this little heron after it had dropped into the grass.

I was told that the common name for this bird is "Bruja" (witch), but the name does not seem to be well known. What its significance is I do not know.

13. **Metopiana peposaca** (Vieill.). ROSY-BILLED DUCK.—This was the only member of the family that I saw at all frequently. I always found it in flocks of about half a dozen birds.

14. **Querquedula cyanoptera** (Vieill.). CINNAMON TEAL.—Seen in all but four times, and only during the early spring.

15. **Phalacrocorax vigua** (Vieill.).—I found this cormorant several times; it was always in pairs, whether swimming or flying. I never saw it perched.

16. **Polyborus tharus** (Mol.). "CARANCHO." The Caracara was seldom seen. On two or three occasions I found a pair perched in the trees along the shore of the river while the nets were being hauled in by the fishermen. Except for these, the only ones seen were a pair noted several

times near Conchitas, about midway between La Plata and Buenos Aires.

17. **Circus cinereus** (Vieill.). CINEREUS HARRIER.—Seen only twice, both times by a muddy stream south of the city. They seemed quite sluggish in their movements and quite unlike the next species.

18. **Circus maculosus** (Vieill.).—Larger and darker than the preceding and much more active in its habits. It seemed much more common during the cooler months than later in the year.

19. **Rostrhamus sociabilis** (Vieill.). SNAIL HAWK.—By far the most abundant large bird at La Plata. I first saw them in August flying in great flocks over the marshes; at times their flight was very suggestive of a *Buteo*, and at other times they swept low over the grass like a harrier, or perched upon slender willow stalks which bent nearly double under their weight.

From then until December they were abundant; but above all they were snail hawks, and as the summer weather approached and the marsh dried up, the snails became more and more difficult to find, and the hawks began to disappear. Finally, on January 16 in a whole day's tramp I did not see a single *Rostrhamus*; while beneath nearly every post and willow stalk was a pile of empty snail shells, evidences of the bird's previous residence.

20. **Parabuteo unicinctus unicinctus** (Temm.).—This hawk was seen but twice. Its actions recalled a harrier, but its flight was more sluggish even than that of *Circus cinereus*.

21. **Nyctalops accipitrinus cassini** (Brewer). SHORT-EARED OWL.—Frequently seen flying low over the higher ground at the edge of the marsh, especially where the grass is fairly short. It seems to fly most about twilight, both in the morning and evening, yet I have also seen it near noon in brightest sunlight. It is not at all shy, and did not seem to note my approach with any show of fear. I have never heard other notes from it than a loud hooting at twilight.

22. **Tyto flammea perlata** (Licht.). "LECHUZA."—The Barn Owl is resident about the city of La Plata, and though not very numerous, is well known. Its common note is a hissing scream like the sound of escaping steam; on one occasion I heard the cry which Bendire, speaking of *T. pratincola*, described as "a feeble, querulous note like 'quäek-quäek' or 'äek-äek.'"

23. **Speotyto cunicularia cunicularia** (Mol.).—The Burrowing Owl does not seem to be very common about La Plata. I saw a few in an open field south of the city, but no others except when on a trip to Córdoba.

24. **Ceryle amazona** (Lath.). "MARTÍN PESCADOR."—Once when I was walking along one of the canals in the littoral forest at Los Talas, a rattling call struck my ear, and on tracing it to its author I found this kingfisher. The only other time that I saw it was with several of the next species.

25. **Ceryle americana** (Gm.). "MARTÍN PESCADOR."—This little Kingfisher met with only at the Estancia Pereira, about midway between La Plata and Buenos Aires. A small stream has been dammed to form a

little lake in the midst of an artificial woodland, and here this little kingfisher was quite common in January. A few of its larger cousins, *C. amazona*, were seen at the same time.

26. **Chordeiles virginianus** (Gm.).—The Nighthawk was heard one evening about sunset above the observatory, and I was not long in discovering the two birds. Several days later, January 9, I saw two night-hawks again, possibly the same birds.

27. **Chlorostilbon aureoventris aureoventris** (Lafr. et Orb.). "PICAFLOR."—These Red-billed Hummingbirds were very common both in the Bosque and at Los Talas, first appearing in numbers late in August. They occasionally flew into the buildings at the observatory, but were quick to escape. On one occasion, however, two birds flew into a room through an open door and were unable to find their way out. One flew against the window screens; I let him escape. The other seemed to have lost all sense of direction. He was buzzing about the ceiling, and soon was so thickly covered with cobwebs that he actually could not move his wings, when he fell to the floor. His bill was wrapped around with webs so that he could not open it, his wings and tail were thickly covered, and his feet were all tangled up. I picked him up and proceeded to clean off the webs—a twenty-minute task. When I had finished the bird seemed nearly exhausted, so I dipped my finger in water and held the adhering drop close to his bill. He drank eagerly, running his tongue in and out through the drop, which disappeared very rapidly. A second and a third drop of water followed the first; then I took the bird outside and released him.

The Red-billed Hummer has a rather monotonous song which he delivers while perched: a few quick chirps, followed by five or six squeaky trills in quick succession.

28. **Coccyzus melanocoryphus** Vieill.—The Common Cuckoo was tolerably common in thick groves of trees, and its voice was often heard. It resembles the North American cuckoos more or less, in habits and in notes.

29. **Guira guira** (Gm.). "URRACA" (MAGPIE).—In voice, in appearance, and in habits is this long-tailed Cuckoo unpleasant. And of all the birds about the houses at the edge of town, the Urraca is the most in evidence. Its notes may be heard at all hours of the day: a series of two-syllabled whistles, rather clear and high-pitched at first, but becoming lower and hoarser as the song progresses.

The Urraca seems never to have mastered the art of alighting on a wire or other slender perch. Invariably the bird approaches rapidly and strikes the perch forcibly; he does not drop the tail to check his speed, but carries it straight out behind him. The effect of this is that as the bird strikes his perch the momentum of the tail seems to drive him on, and it is only after a struggle that he is able to maintain his footing.

The Urraca is quite at home on the ground; in fact I never saw him feed elsewhere. At night the birds roost in small companies in the eucalypti.

30. **Dendrocopus mixtus** (Bodd.).—This little woodpecker, the only

one which I saw at La Plata, is rather rare and is confined to the swampy woods along the river.

31. **Furnarius rufus rufus** (Gm.). "HORNERO."— The Ovenbird is one of the most common birds in the region about La Plata wherever there is a support for its nest, and its huge mud oven is a very familiar sight when travelling through the country. The oven is usually placed high and in a commanding position, but not invariably. One of the most unusual nest sites I have ever seen was adopted by a pair of these birds: there is a large copy of the Venus of Melos on a large pedestal in a stream about midway between La Plata and Buenos Aires, and a pair of Horneros built their oven between the feet of the goddess!

32. **Phlœocryptes melanops** (Vieill.).— A tiny bird, yet not hard to find. It is one of the most common birds in the rushes, where its curious woody creaks and tapping notes are most familiar sounds. The bird is possessed of a great deal of curiosity.

33. **Synallaxis albescens albescens** (Temm.).— Several birds either of this species or of *S. spizi*, possibly of both, were rather frequently met with at Los Talas. Each pair seemed much attached to a particular part of the woods, and could usually be found there. They kept well concealed in dense bushes for the most part, where they were difficult to locate despite their loud persistent song. A nest which I saw one of these birds enter was very large, of thorny sticks in a thorny bush, about four feet from the ground, and had a very narrow and crooked passage leading through the thick front wall to the nest proper. It contained no eggs at the time.

34. **Cranioleuca maluroides** (Orb. et Lafr.).— The harsh cackling notes of this bird were not infrequently heard in the marsh, but I was only once able to catch the bird in the act of singing.

35. **Anumbius anumbi** (Vieill.). "LEÑATERO."— The common name of this bird, which may be translated "wood-gatherer," seems particularly appropriate when its nest is seen. These immense stick nests may be found wherever there is suitable support, yet the bird prefers open situations and above all delights in building its home in the top of a slender poplar. Only once did I find a nest in a eucalyptus, and once, on July 25, I found a pair of the Leñateros starting a nest among the lower branches of an ombú.

The nest is not always built in trees. In November I found a nest under construction within and around the lattice-work of a semaphore tower beside a railroad. I watched this construction with great interest. First the nest cavity proper was outlined with rather small sticks, then its wall was somewhat thickened before the construction of the passage-way was begun. The wall of the passage way was extended little by little from the original nucleus of the structure; and when it had reached a length of about ten inches the birds turned their attention to covering the entire outside of the structure with a thick mat of sticks. When the whole had reached about a foot and a half in length and about twelve inches in diameter, it began to interfere with the proper working of the semaphores, and was torn down.

But as far as unusual situations are concerned, the prize goes to a pair of *Leñateros* that built their nest directly upon a trolley wire where a guy wire gave the necessary support; and they seemed utterly unconcerned at the regular passing of the trams below them. I could not see why the nest did not fall from its position; as far as I could tell it was not secured to the wires in any way, but seemed merely to be laid upon them. I finally came to the conclusion that the mere weight of the nest was probably what gave it its stability.

The *Leñatero* is very plentiful, especially about the edge of the town, and his unpretentious trilling song is heard all day long, in the cooler months as well as in the summer. I rarely saw it perch upon fences, and scarcely more often in trees. It feeds entirely on the ground, and its flight seems feeble.

36. ***Thryolegus curvirostris*** (Gould).—Another bird of the marsh, seldom seen in the middle of the day, though its rattling, jarring notes may be heard at any time. Toward evening it comes to the top of the reeds to give its peculiar song.

37. ***Phacellodomus striaticollis*** (Orb. et Lafr.).—This loud-voiced bird is quite common beside the canals and ditches, particularly where there are scattered bushes. It does not seem very shy.

About the middle of October I had an opportunity to watch a pair of these birds building a nest, in a fork of a young tree about eight feet above the water in a canal. The birds did not work continuously at building; at about ten minute intervals they appeared with sticks and twigs, then worked for about five minutes, after which they rested again. During these brief working spells one bird stayed at the nest and put into place the material which the other brought. At intervals one bird or the other gave its peculiar song, the following description of which is taken from my note-book:

“The Reed-bird’s song began with a few chuckling notes, followed abruptly by a series of shrill penetrating shrieks, high-pitched at first, but each a little lower than the one preceding it. The ‘song’ continued about eight seconds, then stopped abruptly. Sometimes the two birds united in a shrieking duet, as do the Ovenbirds and other familiar species.”

While not at work upon the nest the birds kept out of sight in the rushes at the side of the canal. Unfortunately this nest was destroyed before it was completed, and the birds left the place.

38. ***Taenioptera dominicana*** (Vieill.).—These black-crowned tyrants were not seen often, probably because very little time was spent in working the dry barren regions to which they are partial.

39. ***Fluvicola albiventer*** (Spix).—The contrasting areas of black and white on this bird make him very conspicuous. He is quite frequently seen in the marshes and along the banks of the canals.

I was surprised to read that Hudson considered this a shy bird, and rather difficult to see. On the contrary, I often saw it perched conspicuously on low branches and on reeds, close to the water, from where it made

sallies for passing insects in true flycatcher fashion, often coming quite close to me. And I have seen them pursuing each other about, when they passed within a few feet of me, heedless of my presence.

40. **Sisopygis icterophrys** (Vieill.).— I first saw this pretty tyrant bird in the observatory grounds, on August 21; for about a month I did not see it again, then it became quite common where the open country was broken by a few trees or bushes. It is a quiet bird, with many of the habits of the true flycatchers.

41. **Lichenops perspicillatus** Gm. "PICO DE PLATA" (SILVERBILL).— This remarkable tyrant bird is common in marshy regions; it is unique in many ways. The sexes differ not only in color, but structurally and in habits. Both feed on the ground, but the male also gets a part of his food on the wing. All the males seem to possess the habit of shooting up vertically to a considerable height, then dropping back suddenly to their perches; but the performance differs somewhat in different birds. One bird may turn a somersault at the height of his climb, while another may drop back to within a few feet of the perch before executing a lightning-like flip, and I saw one or two birds which did not turn over at all, though I watched them closely for some time. Some birds utter a shrill cry during the performance, others are entirely silent. All seemed to move their wings so rapidly as to produce a humming sound, which varies in intensity from a barely audible whisper to a deep drumming sound easily audible a hundred yards away.

42. **Machetornis rixosa rixosa** (Vieill.).— This tyrant bird is colored in a way which is very suggestive of many species of *Tyrannus*; but its habits are entirely different. It lives on the ground, and is most often seen about the heads of the domestic animals with the cowbirds, and it is due to this fact that they have been given the common name "Ovejera" (shepherd).

43. **Myiosympotes flaviventris** (Orb. et Lafr.).— This little tyrant is one of the most common of the family at La Plata, being found wherever there are scattering bushes or where the weeds grow tall. There is little in its habits to suggest a tyrant bird; rather it suggests a small Vireo, though perhaps it is more energetic in its movements than those birds; and it has a rather formal little song of six or seven notes which it delivers in a jerky manner.

44. **Serpophaga subcristata** (Vieill.).— A small tyrant bird whose appearance and habits suggest a *Polioptila*. It was quite common in the bushes about the observatory, and also at Los Talas. While it was first seen in July, it was most common from September on.

45. **Serpophaga nigricans** (Vieill.).— Much less often seen than the preceding, and only at Los Talas, where it was fitting restlessly along the canals, snatching its food in the air.

46. **Cyanotis rubrigaster** (Vieill.). The "Siete colores" (Seven colors) is one of the most beautiful birds I have ever seen. While he is most at home in the tall marsh grass, he is often found elsewhere during

migration, and on August 11 I found a pair in a flower-bed in the Bosque. As Hudson has said, they are very inquisitive, and if a person approaches their reed-bed they "come out to meet him, uttering their silvery gurgling notes." They are quite plentiful in the great marsh northeast of the city, and I found them there from September 2 until late in January.

47. **Elainea albiceps albiceps** (Orb. et Lafr.).—Fairly common during the spring and summer months, and seen most frequently by the roadsides or on the higher ground.

48. **Pitangus sulphuratus bolivianus** (Lafr.). "BIÉN-TE-VEO" or "BICHO FÉO" (in imitation of its call). The Bienteveo is one of the first birds to attract the attention on coming into such country as that around La Plata. It is exceedingly versatile in its habits, and its notes are quite varied, though all have a rather harsh tone. It is very common in the Bosque, and also around the houses in the country. I found a nest with eggs as late as January 14.

49. **Myiophobus fasciatus fasciatus** (Müll.).—The little brown tyrant is very common at Los Talas late in the spring; it was found singly or in pairs and had the usual habits of the Tyrannidæ.

50. **Pyrocephalus rubinus rubinus** (Bodd.). VERMILION FLY-CATCHER.—The vermilion tyrant bird is commonly called the "churrinche" from its note. I first saw it at the observatory, September 25, and from that date until I left La Plata it was very common in the Bosque and in the camp. It is not fond of heavily wooded districts or of swampy regions. Its habits are largely those of the typical flycatchers.

The Churrinche has a very pretty song which it utters when on the wing, much as does our Goldfinch, but the Churrinche moves its wings much more rapidly. The bird also sings at night without leaving his perch; and this night song is one of the most pleasant memories I have of my visit to the Argentine.

51. **Tyrannus melancholicus melancholicus** Vieill.—This King-bird is common in the littoral forest, and to a lesser degree in the Bosque. It is as pugnacious as the North American Kingbirds, which it resembles in habits even to its hatred toward Hawks and other birds of prey. Though I have seen several Hawks put to flight by these birds, I never saw them attack the most common Hawk of the region, *Rostrhamus sociabilis*.

52. **Muscivora tyrannus** (Linn.).—The "Tijereta". (Scissor-tail) is a bird which cannot be overlooked. I first saw them October 18, when they became fairly common, and remained so until I had left La Plata. Many times in the Bosque at sunset I observed them going through a curious performance, mounting high in the air and whirling about, opening and shutting their tails, and then descending to the trees, all the while uttering percussive notes not unlike those of our Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*).

53. **Iridoprocne leucorrhoa** (Vieill.).—This, the most common swallow of the region, is abundant throughout the year about the houses in the camp and at the edge of town, though most numerous in summer. It

nested in considerable numbers under the roofs of several of the observatory buildings.

This swallow is the first bird heard in the early morning in La Plata, long before there is a suggestion of light in the east.

54. **Progne chalybea domestica** (Vieill).— This sweet-voiced Martin is met with occasionally in the city of La Plata as well as on its outskirts, but is not common as a town bird. It has apparently suffered much from the introduction of the European House Sparrow, and seems now rather to avoid localities where those birds are numerous. The following story, told me by a friend, shows that sometimes the Martins turn upon the Sparrows.

During the summer of 1913-14 a pair of these Martins were seen building a nest under the eaves of a building near La Plata. They had made good progress, when a pair of Sparrows were noticed about the nest quite frequently. Finally, when the nest was almost done, the Sparrows began to approach the nest more closely while the owners were absent, and then to clamber over it, and finally to enter it. Once, when the Martins returned to find the Sparrows inside, a battle followed in which the Martins were decidedly worsted; after this the Sparrows boldly took possession. Then the Martins waited until both Sparrows were inside; one bird saw to it that they did not escape, while the other went for mud and plastered up the opening.

55. **Phæoprogne tapera** (Linn).— This Martin is much more often seen than the preceding, despite the fact that it does not gather in flocks, as do the other swallows of the region. The flight of this bird has a peculiar feature: at times the wings are depressed much as those of a duck taking to water, and are constantly agitated with tremulous flutterings. This bird breeds only, as far as I could learn, in the abandoned nests of the Oven-bird; or, if none are available, it drives out the owners and takes possession of the oven by force.

56. **Petrochelidon pyrrhonota** (Vieill).— I saw this swallow only on a few dates in October, and judged that it was a migrant; later I was told that this is the case.

57. **Troglodytes** sp.— There are two forms of *Troglodytes musculus* found at La Plata. *T. m. guarixa* and *T. m. hornensis*. The first of these is the more common; but the difference between them is so slight that to most people they are a single bird.

The Wren is very common and one of the best known birds in La Plata, where it is called the "Ratonera." The song is suggestive of that of the North American House Wren (*T. ædon*), but is shorter and less varied. The nesting habits are about the same; but one remarkable case came to my notice, which I shall describe here.

About the middle of October a pair of Wrens started to build a nest under a hood in the observatory grounds which had been designed as a shelter for an electric light. They soon abandoned this site, built their nest elsewhere, and raised a brood of seven. Meanwhile a pair of "Mistos"

(*Sicalis pelzelni*) took over the old place, completed the nest which the Wren had begun, and seemed undisturbed; often I started the female from the nest as I passed by along the path. But on November 29 it was a Wren that flew from the nest as I approached. I investigated, and found three eggs of the Finch and two of the Wren in the nest. For several days after both birds were seen about the hood, nor did I detect any signs of ill feeling between them, and I was as likely to start one from the nest as I was the other. But unfortunately on December 3 the eggs were stolen by an Italian boy, and the female Misto was killed.

After about a week the Wrens returned to the nest, four more eggs were laid, incubation was started December 13, the eggs were hatched on December 26, and on January 8 the birds left the nest.

Another pair of Wrens built a nest in a little-used room of the machine shop at the observatory; the nest was placed in a box half full of miscellaneous bolts and screws, and seven eggs were laid which averaged 1.78×1.28 cm. In shape these eggs varied greatly, from some which were nearly elliptical to one which was actually pear-shaped!

57. **Planesticus rufiventris** (Vieill.). "ZORSAL."—I first saw this thrush on the sandy beach near the mouth of the ship-canal at La Plata, where it was running along just as does the North American Robin, cocking its head sideways from time to time as if it were listening for grubs. I did not see it extract any food from the beach; nor did this surprise me, for I should not suppose that a sandy beach so exposed to wave-action would be a very suitable place for a thrush to seek its food; and I decided that this action of the Zorsal was brought about by mere force of habit.

The Zorsal is much less bold than is our Robin; it never comes about the houses, but is confined to wooded districts. Its song resembles that of the Robin, but is more coherent; and it seemed to me that although inferior in strength, the voice of the southern bird is the sweeter.

58. **Mimus saturninus modulator** (Gould). "CALANDRIA."—The only Mockingbird that I saw at Los Talas, and not very plentiful there. Its song is like that of the typical *Mimidæ*, but I could not actually detect traces of other bird songs in it. On the whole I found it rather shy, and only occasionally did I see it about the houses or perched conspicuously.

59. **Polioptila dumicola** (Vieill.).—This dainty little Gnatcatcher resembles the North American *P. carulea* closely, in appearance, in habits, and in notes. In the thickets at Los Talas it was tolerably common during the spring; my only record for the Bosque was a pair seen in an evergreen on December 21.

60. **Anthus correndera** Vieill. "CACHILA."—Four species of Pipits are catalogued as occurring at La Plata; the present species seemed to be the most common. It seemed to prefer marshy ground and wet meadows; at any rate I found very few Pipits on higher ground which showed the white shoulder marks that characterize this species.

The Pipits are very plentiful in the open plains about La Plata. They

are not shy, and unite in small flocks, so that it is quite easy to study their habits.

To sing the Cachila mounts to a considerable height; then with wings turned upward he begins his descent. He drops down a few feet, utters a sweet "Cachila," then swings upward a short distance, and a gentle hissing sound is heard. He repeats this again and again until he reaches the ground. I never saw one rise to repeat the song without alighting on the ground. Thus the descent from a great height is made up of a series of little dips and rises, punctuated with bursts of song.

61. **Geothlypis æquinoctialis cucullata** (Lath.).—This little Masked Warbler is quite common in bushy ground, and it even comes about the houses in the Los Talas region. Its song, as Mr. Barrows says, is very suggestive of a subdued warbling of our Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*).

62. **Stephanophorus leucocephalus** (Vieill.).—This beautiful Blue Tanager is exceedingly shy, and though he may be heard often during the spring, he is very hard to locate. The song is rather pleasing, although somewhat jerky.

63. **Tanagra bonariensis** (Gm.).—Soon after my arrival at La Plata in July my attention was called to a party of these pretty birds in an oak tree in the observatory grounds. From that date until late in September I found small flocks of them in the Bosque. The only note I heard from them was a reedy call.

64. **Sporophila cærulescens** (Bonn et Vieill.). "CORBATITA."—These pretty little Finches appeared in numbers late in November, and were abundant in the fields wherever the weeds grew tall. They were commonly seen in groups of four or five birds, both at Los Talas and at the observatory, where I first saw them December 3. The song is a loud cheery cry, slightly suggestive of the song of the Indigo Bunting.

65. **Spinus ictericus ictericus** (Licht.).—This Goldfinch was but seldom seen. It goes in small parties, and does not seem to differ greatly from our Goldfinch in its habits.

66. **Sicalis pelzelni** Sc. "MISTO."—One of the most common birds about the town is the Misto Sparrow. His song is very unmelodious; it consists of shrill mouse-like squeaks poured out in a continuous stream. Whether this bird takes the initiative for itself in nest-building I cannot say; I have seen them breeding in the abandoned nests of the Ovenbird and of the Leñatero, and I have spoken above of a case where they completed an abandoned nest of the Wren, and later shared it with that bird. The eggs of this bird found in this last nest were marked with large spots of deep brown on a blue ground, and averaged 1.95×1.39 cm.

67. **Sicalis arvensis arvensis** (Kittl.). "MISTO."—This Misto, unlike the last, is a bird of the fields, and very rarely comes even to the edge of town. Through the winter months it gathers in great restless flocks. At this time they are not shy, but as the spring advances and the flocks break up, they become more and more sensitive to intrusion. The male

has a pretty song during the spring months; he flies upward from his perch to a considerable height, beginning his song as he rises; then he descends in a long spiral, the music becoming clearer and sweeter as he nears the ground, and often continuing in a faint whisper after he alights. Occasionally the Misto reascends to repeat his song without alighting.

68. **Brachyospiza capensis capensis** (Müll.). "CHINGOLO."— Throughout a great part of the country the Chingolo is the favorite bird. It is one of the first birds to meet the eye of the stranger, and its pretty habits and its pretty song keep it constantly in view. In La Plata the song usually consists of two distinct parts: the first a clear whistle very like that opening the song of the Meadowlark (*Sturnella*) of eastern North America, and the second a trill like that of the Chipping Sparrow. The song varies with different birds; some omit the clear whistle, others the short trill. The Chingolo often sings at night from his perch, and then the trill at the end is given more slowly and is usually long drawn out.

The nest is built on or near the ground; I have found them in both localities in the observatory grounds. The eggs in each case were four, thickly spotted with brown on a pale blue ground, and averaged 2.05×1.57 cm. The period of incubation is 13 days; four days later the young birds have their eyes open, and eleven days after breaking the egg the young birds leave the nest.

69. **Poospiza personata** (Swains.). "CHILÓE."— I first found this bird on September 12; soon it became common, and was one of the most numerous birds in regions where bushes and scattered trees were found. It feeds on the ground after the usual manner of the ground finches; and also several times I saw it perched conspicuously to make sallies for passing insects as do many of the Tyrannidæ.

The song is heard at all hours of the day, and soon becomes so familiar as not to be noticed. It can be worded "wetch-wetchy, wetch-wetchy, wetch-wetchy," slowly and deliberately repeated many times. It may be that the common name "chilóe" is a transcription of this song.

A nest which I found November 7 contained one egg, pale blue marked irregularly with dark brown, and measured 1.87×1.50 cm. The nest was on the ground under a large thistle, so well concealed that although I marked carefully the exact spot from which the bird flew, I was more than fifteen minutes in finding the nest. Later this nest was abandoned.

70. **Passer domesticus** (Linn.). "GORRIÓN."— The House Sparrow has been introduced into the Argentine with much the same result that followed its introduction into this country.

71. **Embernagra platensis** (Gm.).— This large Finch was found only among the tall reeds in the open marsh, where they are not very shy. Their flight is peculiar—they spring suddenly from the ground and fly laboriously with tail erect and legs dangling. I heard none of their notes except a sudden alarm cry.

72. **Paroaria cucullata** (Lath.). "CARDINAL."— Not at all common. I found them but twice in the woods at Los Talas. They are very con-

spicuous, but not very shy. The song is not noteworthy; it has a cheerful ring, but lacks variety.

73. **Molothrus bonariensis bonariensis** (Gm.).—The common name of this bird is "Tordo," the Spanish form of *Turdus*; but a more suitable name is one which I once heard applied to it: "El Renegado." It is larger and more attractive than *M. ater* of North America, and has quite an attractive little song which it delivers with much display; and at times the bird is so carried away by his emotion that he takes to the air and flies about, singing all the time. The only note I heard from the female was a sputtering alarm call.

In general habits this bird is similar to *M. ater*.

74. **Molothrus badius** (Vieill.).—This gray Cowbird is not nearly so common as the other; it is usually seen in flocks of about fifteen birds. I found it most often in trees, especially the eucalyptus, where its movements were slow and deliberate. Of its breeding habits I learned nothing.

The notes of this bird are more varied than those of *M. bonariensis*; and before taking flight, as Hudson says, "They invite each other to fly with long clear notes powerful enough to be heard a quarter of a mile away."

75. **Agelaius thilius** (Mol.). "TRILI," "TORDO DEL BAÑADO."—This little blackbird is gregarious, and is found on the edge of the marsh in great numbers, where its rather pretty song may be heard from numbers of the birds.

76. **Leistes militaris superciliaris** (Bp.). "PECHO COLORADO."—The name "red breast" is splendidly adapted to this bird. It is fond of moist meadows where the grass is long, and here it appears in considerable numbers in October. The female keeps hidden most of the time; her flight is weak and very erratic. On the other hand, the male is always conspicuous, especially when singing. He rises to a height of some forty feet to deliver a single rather pleasing note, after which he drops back to his original perch. Between two points his flight is low and direct, though rather laborious.

77. **Pseudoleistes virescens** (Vieill.). "PECHO AMARILLO" (YELLOW BREAST).—This is one of the most familiar marsh birds. Its large size and its bright yellow breast make it conspicuous, and its noisy and gregarious habits bring it forcibly to our attention.

In closing I wish to return my thanks to Dr. Carl Bruch and to Dr. Miguel Fernández of the Museo Nacional at La Plata, and also to Dr. Robert Dabbene, of the Museo Nacional of Buenos Aires, for the very valuable assistance which they gave me in my work.