

# Old Santa Cruz

• • By Ernest Otto

(Editor's Note: The late Ernest Otto, famed and beloved waterfront correspondent for the Sentinel-News and writer of the "Old Santa Cruz" column, left a number of columns written before his recent death. They will be published weekly by the Sentinel-News.)

Both boys and girls had a hobby in the early days which is unknown today, the collection of birds' eggs.

They would get large boxes from any dry goods store for the asking, line the bottoms with cotton or flour and be ready to start their collection. In Santa Cruz generally, the eggs were blown out with two holes, one at the top and the other at the bottom. But real and professional collectors used only one hole and refused to exchange for eggs with two holes.

The nearest spot for collectors to go seeking eggs was in the trees, shrubs and vines along the riverfront.

The boys had their own pet names for the birds which produced the eggs and few biologists or scientists would be able to recognize the birds under the names given them locally.

An egg which was found almost anywhere was that of the linnet. The bluish-green mottled eggs were found in orchards, between shutters and down along the riverbottom.

Another bird found commonly along the riverbottom was the night bird, which left its large bluish-green striped eggs usually in nests in blackberry vines.

The golden-crested wren, never seen now, was a bird with a golden head which looked like a parakeet. Its egg was larger than that of the night bird.

The chippy of the sparrow family was not particular where it built its nest. The nests of the turtle dove, built from small sticks, would be found high in the willow trees.

Another white egg, which looked almost as though it had been polished, but was rare, was found on the banks of the river. This was the water ouzel's eggs.

A fluttering in the bushes would lead the boys to a hunt for one of the more beautiful eggs, the white and brownish-red mottled egg of what was known as the ground flutterer. Lucky was the boy who found one.

The thrush of course had nests here and there. Their eggs were mottled green and black. Robins sometimes were seen in season, but the writer never heard of a boy who had discovered a robin's egg in the nest. If a boy had one in his collection, it was through exchanging with an easterner.

In the same section were found what were called red birds. Some of them made nests in the stringers of the Water street bridge.

The boys also collected nests. A prize would be the long moss-covered graceful nest of the titmouse. The nest was a real ornament and always was removed from the branch or vine on which it was built. The eggs were small and white.

The tiny nest and tiny eggs of the hummingbirds also were highly prized.

The Baltimore oriole never is found here now, but in the old days was seen on trees in the orchards. The nest was long and suspended. It was double woven, and usually made mainly of horsehair.

The fluttering of a quail in the brush would indicate a nest nearby on the ground beneath a bush or vine. The nest often would yield as many as 20 roundish white eggs covered with brownish spots.

Just as now, one of the common birds of the area was the blackbird which usually nested high in the pines or eucalyptus.

In those days, birds in the city had more places to nest because the city had more trees then. Santa Cruzans lined the streets with shade trees, and the larger yards had gardens with trees and orchards.

There were more marshy spots to attract the beautiful red-winged blackbirds. Their main nesting place was on the Wright property off King street in dock which grow as high as the picket fence. Their eggs were greenish blue mottled with black as compared to the brownish-yellow and black of the regular blackbird.

Near the city limit, the marsh on the Moore ranch below the Amaya home on the Dakan and Young slaughterhouse property was a forest of willows which was a nesting place for the night heron with its large greenish blue eggs.

The Moore ranch had more birds' nests than any other site. The king birds had white eggs with reddish marks and the linnets' nests were all through the orchard. Under the barn eaves were a line of hundreds of swallows' nests with hundreds of white and brown eggs. Inside the barns were found bluebirds occasionally.

The pure white eggs of the bank swallows could be found in the round holes in the sand stone bluffs along the coast. In the meadows especially in the King street section could be found the pretty white and brown meadowlark and on the bluffs above where building now goes on were only squirrel holes with the nests of ground owls.

Neary's lagoon was the nesting place of mud hens, mallards and other ducks. Brave boys would be lowered by ropes from the bluffs to gather the large seagulls' eggs. And some were reported to have climbed tall redwoods and found eagles nests.

George Ready and Del Snow, who made the first movies of wild life in Africa, were the ones who gathered the most birds' eggs and knew where the most birds nested.

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