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LEARNING BIRD SONGS

--By W. Dan Quattlebaum--

Bird study offers more, I think, of interest and helpfulness than does any other nature study. For seeing birds in their habitat not only takes us into Nature's garden but brings us into her conservatory of vocal music. Birds are about the only creatures in all nature that really sing. Crickets, katydids, cicadas, "peepers" and certain other frogs, do make a kind of music. But it is a cut-and-dried singsong all the time. The call and song of birds show personality and variation and are a joy forever. Is it too much to say that the singing of birds is unique in nature? If we agree that it is unique, then to learn and enjoy bird calls and songs is the bird-lover's unique adventure.

Now, learning calls and songs is not easy. If it were, perhaps it would not be worth our attention. And even good bird books will not be of much help, for the songs can not be put on paper. The quickest way is to go out with one who knows and let this one tell you the bird that makes such a call or song. The best way, however--and the one which brings the most fun--is to sharpen up your interest, polish up your attention, open up the windows of your soul, and fare forth all on your own. Give strict attention--your now keen attention--to each tsip and peep that you hear. Then, hunt the bird, and watch him until you actually see him make the call or song. If you hear a song, look for the bird and see him sing. Note carefully the striking features of his song--how he begins, low and high notes, runs or trills, and the ending. Then, carefully file the song-and-singer away in your memory for future reference, so that when again you hear that song, you may quickly turn to your memory and find the bird. This will, of course, take lots of time and practice. Some special practice and experience will be required to distinguish between songs that are somewhat alike--say, between those of the mocker and the thrasher. It may help you to have confidence in yourself if, when you hear a song, you will make an intelligent guess as to what bird it is, and then check up on yourself. The first time I heard a San Diego Wren sing, I thought he was a song sparrow. But since I checked up on myself, there is no confusion whatever.

I know of no satisfactory way to represent on paper the calls and songs of birds. But if I could and should, you would be cheated of a grand adventure. If you happen to be no longer young and frisky, let me tell you a secret. I was only 45 when I began to specialize in bird songs.

To know calls and songs aids greatly in identification. In fact, I make no decision on some birds--like the Traill Flycatcher and the immature purple Finch--until I hear a call or song. At Palisades Park one winter we saw and heard what we thought were Gambel Sparrows. But noticing, on close attention, a difference in the song, we decided that they were Puget Sound Sparrows.

In The Auk, January 1935, there is "A Method for the Intensive Study of Bird Song," by A. R. Brand, which you should read. His method is by photographing bird song on motion picture film, and his finds are truly remarkable. Let me quote a

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LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

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The Los Angeles Audubon Society has regular meetings on the first and third Thursday of each month--the first being a field trip, and the next a program meeting which is held in the State Building at Exposition Park at two o'clock in the afternoon.

Dues for annual membership in the Society are \$1 per year, with life membership \$10, and Patron \$100.

If you are interested in studying and protecting your feathered friends, won't you identify yourself with us?

"The evening air of late February in the Everglades of southern Florida is soft and mild. Delicate scents from unseen blossoms come with the breeze, together with the voices of myriad frogs in incessant but attractive chorus from the marshes. Suddenly, from the moss-destooned live oaks in this peaceful background, comes an outburst of demoniacal laughter, guttural in sound and startling in its abruptness, causing in me pleasant tremors of excitement.

Thus begins Alexander Wetmore, Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, in his article, "Shadowy Birds of the Night," which appears in the February, 1935, issue of The National Geographic Magazine.

With five illustrations of his own, and twenty-one portraits in color of silent-winged owls of North America contributed by Major Allen Brooks, Mr. Wetmore gives us a most interesting article on the birds that we seldom see.

Another article that most of you will want to read appears in the current issue of Reader's Digest, entitled "Give Your Hobby Its Head."

CAL - N - DAR

FEBRUARY						
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- (7) Field Meeting at Lincoln Park. Meet at the north entrance at 9:30 a. m. Bring a pocket lunch, field glasses and a notebook.
- (14) All day Board Meeting at the home of our president, Mary Barnes Salmon, in Westwood Hills.
- (21) Program Meeting in the State Building at Exposition Park, President Salmon presiding. Conservation and Protection of Birds will be the subject of the meeting.

The speaker will be announced later.

LEARNING BIRD SONGS (Cont.)

little. "A small piece of film shows that in the very short space of one sixth of a second four distinct notes were produced with a range of considerably over an octave. Two songs of the Winter Wren show that an average of sixteen distinct notes with a corresponding number of distinct stops were produced each second. In three Song Sparrow's song, I found an average of about sixteen notes and corresponding stops per second. Only two of the bird sounds studied are within the range of the human singing voice. Numerous birds have most infinite variations in their songs. In many species two members of the species rarely sing exactly the same cadence, and individual bird may have eight or 10 or more variations of his ancestral song."

Let me here wish for you some day the good fortune of hearing the loveliest of bird song and some strange calls--such as the flute-like notes of the Wood Thrush, the piping, trilling song of the Louisiana Water Thrush, the uncanny call of the Loon and that strangest of all, the far-carrying, coughing, surging call--Amer. Bittern.

LEGISLATION

Many important bills affecting Fish and Game laws were introduced in the January session of the 1935 legislature at Sacramento. Following are the titles of a few that were submitted regarding birds. These bills will be brought to the Field Meeting on February 7 so that you can read them in full. You will want to be present at this meeting, for, as an Audubonite, you are naturally interested in any legislation affecting our birds.

Assembly Bill 117 (Heisinger). An act to amend sections 1174 and 1175 of the Fish and Game Code, relating to birds.

Assembly Bill 481 (Walker). An act to amend section 1200 of the Fish and Game Code, relating to Doves.

Assembly Bill 483 (Walker). An act to amend section 1175 of the Fish and Game Code, relating to predatory birds.

Assembly Bill 678 (Nielsen). An act to amend section 1203.6 of the Fish and Game Code, relating to pheasants.

Assembly Bill 1276 (Frazier). An act to provide for the investigation and study of the control and suppression of blackbirds, coots, linnets, horned larks and other birds or animals in relation to damage to agricultural crops and making and appropriation therefor.

Assembly Bill 2295 (Frazier). An act to amend an act entitled "An act to provide for the inspection, quarantine and registration to aviaries and other places where shell parrakeets are sold, offered for sale, trade or barter; and to provide for the inspection of all birds which may be kept in such places; to declare the urgency thereof and provide that this act shall take effect immediately," approved by the Governor May 26, 1933.

Assembly Bill 2345 (Donihue). An act to amend section 1586 of the Penal Code, relating to the propagation and care of game birds by prisoners.

Senate Bill 855 (Powers). An act to amend section 1200 of the Fish and Game Code, relating to the season on doves.

Senate Bill 1031 (Keough). An act to amend section 1177 of the Fish and Game Code, and to add a new section to said code to be numbered 1201.5 relating to sage hens.

A NEW PRESS CHAIRMAN

Mrs. George L. Veatch has been appointed by President Salmon to undertake the responsibility of presenting to the public the doings of the Los Angeles Audubon Society. This office was left open recently when the former Press Chairman found it necessary to move to Sacramento.

AN EXCERPT FROM "WESTERN WILD FLOWERS AND THEIR STORIES"

BY CHARLES F. SAUNDERS

(Contributed by Mrs. Oliver C. Edwards)

Five centuries or so before the Spanish conquest, the Aztecs made their appearance in the valley of Mexico, unwelcome intruders among a people who had long occupied the land and had no use for foreigners.

For several years the new-comers led a nomadic existence, battling their way from pillar to post, and even enduring slavery at one period, until on a day, in what students of the Aztec Calendar reckon to be the year 1325, they came to a halt on the marshy borders of a great lake. There upon a branching nopal (pear cactus) springing from a rock jutting up from the water was perched a great eagle, with its wings spread to the sun and fast in his beak a writhing serpent.

The Aztec leaders hailed it as a sign that here the people's wanderings should cease, and on pilings in the swamp was begun the building of the capitol, Tenochtitlan (the place of the tuna), upon whose site stands the present City of Mexico. You will see the incident depicted in the modern coat-of-arms and repeated on the national flag--a devise that is, as a matter of fact, an adaptation from the Aztec hieroglyphic for the ancient capitol of the Montezumas.

THE STORY OF A TREE

--By Mrs. Robert Fargo, President Emeritus--

In the year 1932 there was a great wave of tree planting all over the United States, and in the spring of that year Mrs. James M. Brennan, as leader of the Field Day, chose Lincoln Park for the planting of a tree by the Audubon Society. The tree selected was a Magnolia. Mrs. Bicknell, who was then our President Emeritus, after a few appropriate remarks, threw the first shovel of dirt, and each member followed, completing the beautiful ceremony of planting a tree.

Mrs. Brennan continued the good work by encouraging each member to plant an individual tree. As I had not responded to the call she phoned to me several times urging with strong enthusiasm that I join in the work. I replied that I had not an inch of ground. She suggested a flower pot. This did not appeal to me, however, as the tree would die when it outgrew the pot. It could never become A TREE.

In April of 1933 I was visiting my nephew in the San Joaquin Valley, which is a vast stretch of level country with only here and there a ranch. When showing me a 60-acre piece he had planted to potatoes my nephew said, "Here is where I shall build my home." My inspiration came at once. I thought, "Here is where I shall plant my tree, where it can grow to be tall and grand, and a landmark for all who travel the highway."

The next day Ruth and I went to Bakersfield and selected a Sequoia Sempervirens being informed by the gardener that it was adapted to the conditions of the valley soil and climate. The following Sunday being Milton's birthday, we planted the tree. The family all joined in making it a formal ceremony. Each gave a sentiment and threw a shovel of dirt. Banard, age 10, gave Joyce Kilmer's "Trees," and little Norma, almost 8, said, "He who plants a tree, He plants Love." I shall give my sentiment in full. "I dedicate this tree to posterity, to Children and Children's Children. May it grow tall and straight and wide, and may its branches lure the birds to build their nests and rear their young and sing their songs therein. When the new house is built may children play beneath its shade, ladies gather for afternoon "Tea" when the sun is low and the breezes make music among its leaves, and may men sit in rustic chairs on the lawn and smoke their cigarettes while talking politics and farming. I dedicate this Sequoia Sempervirens to posterity, and present it to my nephew, Milton Lehr, on his 37th birthday." Milton responded, "And I dedicate this tree to you, Aunt Minerva, and may you come up often to see it grow."

The tree did not show much growth the first year, but on October 9, 1934, Banard wrote to me: "I am going to tell you everything about the tree. Its height is 6 feet 8½ inches. It has not grown tall much but has filled out quite a bit. In the winter it is the one green spot. I think it is a very fine tree."

Last month I spent Christmas Week on the ranch and motored over to see the tree. I found it flourishing but a very slow grower, and it was "the only green thing in sight."

A BIRD'S LIFE

It was a cold day--a very cold day. Wind whistled through the barren branches of the trees, while snow flakes as big as dollars were turning all to white. Way out near the end of a branch was a tiny bird's nest, and in it, beside the broken shells of two others, was one egg quite whole. Mother bird looked anxiously into the nest, while father on a branch nearby placed protecting wings about his two hungry, cold, featherless and most dejected looking offspring. The expression on the father's face told clearly that he had no sympathy with little birds who kept their parents in the cold while they rested inside of a shell. Finally, with a very disgusted shrug, mother bird chirped: "Well, stubborn, if you do decide to come out--meet us in Palm Beach!"