

Western Tanager



VOL. II

MRS. RAYMOND BRENNAN, Editor

No. 7

April, 1936



EASTER GREETINGS!

GROSBEAKS I HAVE KNOWN Mary B. Salmon, President

The family of grosbeaks have lovely (and varied) colors, beautiful voices, and friendly habits to recommend them to our study. The Latin name is "Fringillidae," and it is the largest group of U. S. Birds--comprising sparrows, linnets, buntings, finches, cross-bills, and grosbeaks. Their name means "big or heavy bill."

The "Cardinal" is one of the most beautiful, being about eight inches long, having a flame colored suit, with red bill, black mask, and a top-knot. His song is delightful and seems to me to say -- "What, What, Cheer"! -- repeated many times. They build a rather frail nest, and often the young birds are lost in storms. I had the satisfaction once of helping to save a family of four young ones, in an unusually rainy season, by placing the nest and young birds in a small round sewing basket and tying it securely to the branches of the bush in which it had been built. Imagine my delight when the parent birds continued to feed their young as though nothing had happened.

The Blue Grosbeak is one of those rare and lovely birds of the glorious sky color mixed with black and dusky. It is marked similarly to the Indigo Buntings of the eastern United States. Its song is beautiful and long continued during mid-day of the nesting season. I spent an entire day last summer, on the U. C. L. A. campus, making the acquaintance of a family of blue grosbeaks: seeing the father, who sat and sang on the topmost branch of a willow; the mother who flew in and out of the brush, caring for two young apparently just a few days out of the nest.

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak is an eastern bird--very beautiful with a vest of white, on which is a V-shaped splash of rose. Also the wings have an underlining of rose, and the rest of the body is black and white. They are wonderful singers. Someone has described the song as a "glorified robin's song." They are such devoted lovers, and seem to have an ideal home life. I have known intimately many rose-breasted grosbeaks.

The Evening Grosbeak is a pale gold color, marked with olive shades, black and white. I became acquainted with these members of this aristocratic family in Yosemite, when they were feeding, near a hotel, on garbage! Dr. Cous says his name suggests "the far-away land of the dipping sun. His colors, black, white and gold suggest the allegory of the day's changes. His black wings close round his bright vesture, as night encompasses the golden hues of sunset. The white foretells the dawn of tomorrow!"

The Black-headed Grosbeak is the one we all know here in the southwest, and will soon be back to cheer us with his melody. He is less highly colored than others of his clan, but, in his spring plumage, we could almost mistake him for an oriole among the leaves. He is orange, black, and cinnamon in color. The highly colored bird is the male, and all of the female grosbeaks are modestly attired in sparrow brown.

One more grosbeak to mention is the Pine, a northern one which I have not met. His color is light carmine, or rosy red and gray. Said to be a fine singer.

Shakespeare says the "lark sings at Heaven's gate," and, surely, we can say the grosbeak sings at the heart's gate, wherever he is met.

THE WESTERN Tanager

Published by the Los Angeles Audubon Society
Free to members. Outside subscriptions 50¢ per year

LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

Officers

President Emeritus.....Mrs. Robert Fargo
President.....Mrs. Mary Barnes Salmon
First Vice-President....Miss Charlotte Hamilton
Second Vice-President.....Mrs. E. E. Eldridge
Recording Secretary.....Mrs. Willard Wikoff
Corres. Secretary.....Mrs. James M. Brennan
Treas. and Membership.....Mrs. Fred J. Lee

3516 Roseview Avenue, Los Angeles

Librarian.....Miss Jennie Winchester

Auditor.....Mrs. Leonard S. Hall

Chairmen of Committees

Birds and Wild Life.....Mrs. E. E. Eldridge

Wild Flowers.....Mrs. Oliver C. Edwards

Butterflies.....Mrs. Ella W. Hamilton

Trees.....Mrs. Grace S. Hall

Historian.....Mrs. Roy L. Sergeant

Education.....Mrs. Leon S. Griswold

Hospitality.....Mrs. J. W. Mabb

Press and Transportation...Mrs. George L. Veatch

3730 West 27th Street, Los Angeles

Editor.....Mrs. Raymond Brennan
6384 Rodgerton Drive, Hollywood - Granite 3228

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 \$1.25 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?

great deal of work in pictures--especially in the cartoons, where his is the voice behind the bird on the screen. His imitations are most authentic.

INTERESTING ITEMS

We want to thank the unknown donor of two interesting books to our Audubon library -- Egyptian Birds by Whymler, and Singing in the Wilderness by Paettie.

Audubonites will be pleased to learn that both Miss Bassett and Miss Morton are recovering.

If you would like to purchase an excellent pair of field glasses at less than half price, telephone West Los Angeles 32215.

If you were not present at the March Program Meeting, you missed four very fine treats:

(1) Lloyd B. Austin, Mountaineer and Guide, owner of the famous Tamarack Lodge in the Sierras, who gave us a beautiful introduction to Dr. Mountain Trail.

(2) Mary Fossler, Professor of Ornithology at U. S. C., who told of the serious danger with which our birds are threatened--

that of attack by parasites--caused by careless sanitation in bird sanctuaries. (4) Our own Mrs. Edwards, who told of her recent trip to Death Valley; and

(4)--

"THE MOCKINGBIRD OF THE AIR"

In tones that were exquisitely rich and clear, Mr. Harold Allen, commonly known as "The Mockingbird of the Air," brought to us the song of the Meadowlark, the Loon, Whippoorwill, Mockingbird, Magpie, and many other birds. As an imitator of birds, Mr. Allen is featured in several programs coming over the Columbia Broadcasting System. He also does a great deal of work in pictures--especially in the cartoons, where his is the voice behind the bird on the screen. His imitations are most authentic.

MONTHLY CALENDAR

APRIL SECOND. Field Meeting and Breakfast. At nine o'clock on this day Audubonites are to meet at the Vermont entrance to Griffith Park to be the guests of our Field Chairman, Mrs. Eldridge, at a breakfast of bacon and eggs. If you plan to be present, make your reservation with Miss Ella Johns, Hillside 5572, not later than March 30. There will be no charge to you, but if you bring a guest, that will cost you 25¢. Tables will be placed at the north side of the Greek Theatre.

APRIL NINTH. Board Meeting. At Mrs. Fargo's. Two p. m.

APRIL SIXTEENTH. Program Meeting. State Building in Exposition Park at 2 p.m. Mr. John H. Baker, Field Secretary of the National Association of Audubon Societies, will speak on "Wildlife Conservation in America," illustrating with motion picture film. THIS WILL BE A JOINT MEETING WITH THE PASADENA, INGLEWOOD, AND STATE AUDUBON SOCIETIES, WITH OUR OWN LOS ANGELES AUDUBON ACTING AS HOST. A RECEPTION WILL BE HELD RIGHT THERE IN THE STATE BUILDING AFTER THE MEETING. EVERYONE IS URGED TO BE PRESENT. DON'T FORGET THE DATE. APRIL 16.

BIRD NOTES

On the Field Day at San Pedro, on March fifth, the outstanding birds, among the many seen from the Break-water, were: Lesser Scaup Duck, Black Turnstones, Herring Gulls, and Geermann Gulls. Flocks of Cormorants and three whales also attracted much attention.

Several flocks of Cedar Waxwings have visited the Sycamore Trees on June Street in Hollywood during the past two weeks.

Our Butterfly Chairman requests that members be on the watch for the Dog-head Butterfly and to report the number seen. This is California's State Butterfly Emblem.

Miss Hamilton saw five American Egrets in a tree near Ojai, where they remained several hours. Their aigrettes could be plainly seen.

At Bennett's Well, that oasis of such historic interest in Death Valley, the following strange congregation of birds was seen on March 7, in less than fifteen minutes, by Mrs. Edwards: Pied-billed Grebe, American Pintail Ducks, American Coot, Solitary Sandpiper, Mourning Dove, Road-runner, Swallows, Humming-bird, Black Phoebe, Say Phoebe, Robins, Mountain Bluebirds, Plumbeous Gnatcatcher, Red-winged Blackbird, Green-backed Goldfinch, Linnets, and Gambel Sparrows. In other parts of Death Valley were seen: Red-tailed Hawk, Golden Eagle, Burrowing Owl, Pacific Nighthawk, Ravens, Cactus Wren, Canon Wren, Sage Thrasher and one pair of English Sparrows.

Mrs. Hall reports seeing a Western Tanager in San Marino, and also that both the Bullock and Arizona Hooded Orioles have arrived.

FROM A LETTER WRITTEN ON MARCH 6, 1936, BY AUDUBONITE MRS. WALTER ANTHONY En Route from Manila to Yokohama -- On Her 'Round the World Tour

"You can't go birding on a boat, and the Raby Castle on which we are making a world tour is no exception. Even in good weather, of which we've had but little, there's no encouragement to take to a life boat in "birding" expeditions. In short, if the birds do not see fit to come to you, they must remain unseen somewhere below that rim of the horizon which is ever the circle of which you are ever the center. Thus our Raby Castle has been until now quite like the ark where only the birds on board may be studied--in our case with a knife and fork at a table snowy with immaculate linen.

"One day, however, it was different. It happened after we had been making our way towards a typhoon for nearly a week after the lights of San Pedro had twinkled to and then under the curb of a troubled world. We had been followed by the gulls (Western and California), that had been a colorful, flashing convoy eternally wheeling about us or dropping for a rest in the wake of our rolling ship, or quarreling raucously over refuse (such refuse!) as was deemed by the crew's cook to be unfit for his Cantonese friends.

"Captain Harper told us that, by the following day, the gulls would be gone and their places taken by a larger, nobler bird, the name of which he nor any of the other officers knew or had ever heard. They were fine, deep sea birds, he said, and waxed enthusiastic over the marvels of their rapid yet effortless flight.

"Next day, however, the gulls were not gone; that is, some of them weren't, though their numbers had dwindled to about eight or ten. Early in the afternoon, the Captain called us hurriedly to the upper deck, and there in the distance we saw a splendid fellow, with great brown wings outspread but motionless, upholding a white body that shone in the fitful sun of a stormy day. The bird, apparently getting its energy direct from a forty to fifty mile gale, rapidly overtook us, but not too closely. At some distance, perhaps a hundred yards or more, from the ship and almost level with her water line, he made circles around us, skimming through the breaking rollers which made it almost impossible for us to get and keep the glasses on him. After satisfying himself that the obnoxious land birds were still with us, and that we had thus not lost the "odor of mortality" which is a land-lubber's aroma, he disappeared as he had come and into the spray-whipped wilderness of fresh air and tumbling waters.

"He'll be back again with his friends," our Captain assured us, "he always comes first to look us over. He'd be back in a couple of hours if the gulls weren't with us." Alas, the gulls remained just one day too long -- at least two of them did.

Continued on Page 28

MRS. ANTHONY CONTINUES

"Wearied with his long flight, a great Western gull alighted on one of the two Season posts to which the loading booms are attached. On its lofty cowl the weary bird rested. Perhaps he fell asleep. In any event he was tragically unobservant of a tiny Cantonese sailor who had picked himself out of a group of his fellows on the deck and now was climbing up the post on a gossamer ladder made for a vaudeville acrobat. The girth of the post hid the slight figure of the huntsman whose right hand, with talon-like fingers reached up slowly, cautiously, while the crew below looked on silently. His head is now almost level with the cowl and in a flash, as quick as the descent of a spider on a fly, the slender brown fingers were around the vibrant throat of his prey. There was a prodigious flapping of powerful wings and a shrieking from the strangled bird, while cheers and shouts from below attested unanimous approbation. Not long afterwards a flurry of feathers in the wind represented about all of the bird there was left from the boiling pot, in which it was joined by another incautious gull that had tempted fate and Tang Toy's appetite - Tang Toy being the sailors' cook. Somehow, I did not order 'fowl' from the cabin cook's menu for three days.

"Next morning when we looked out of our porthole, the gulls had gone - back to their California coasts where the law protects them from the murderous fingers of sailors from Canton. In their place, sure enough, were the unidentified birds -- but not the white-bodied spy that had come and gone. He never did reappear except once when in company with another, equally pure of plumage, he passed us, skimming close to the waves, dipping into their hollows and out and over them and through the spray, with never so much as the quiver of a wing. The convoy that came was like the pioneer in size, shape, color, beak, feet and legs, only brown with tips of white most picturesquely laid on. What are they? I'll give you the markings as I took them independently of Mr. Anthony's markings which I will also give you. First, mine:

"Size, 18 to 20 inches; wingspread of 3 feet; wings narrow and sharp-shouldered; body, rather slender; tail, short. In color it is a sort of mouse-brown, with white rump and white markings on its tail. White line back of the eye. The bill is hooked, short, and stout. The head is rather flat, and brown in color.

"The body is about two feet long with a square-cut tail beyond which the webbed feet extend perhaps two inches when the bird is in flight. The color is brown, touched with a grayish shade. There is a tip of white at the tail, a tip of white at the extremity of each wing, and a white rim around the base of its bill. Also there is a dab of white over each eye but a close view is required to reveal this. I enjoyed one such privilege when the bird flew parallel with me, and only a few feet away, for several seconds. The rump of the bird is white, as may be seen when the flight is above the observer. On some but not on all there is a short strip of white along the back of the neck. The beak is characteristic. It is strongly Hebraic and looks as cordial as a pawnbroker's. The wing-spread is four feet (in this Captain coincides) and the shoulders are sharp. It is never quarrelsome and it is silent. I've never heard it utter a sound. In the strongest wind it is most at home. No movement of its wings is discernable and its flight is unbelievably beautiful and graceful."

"These observations were made during the very few hours when we could venture out on deck, so heavily was our stout ship laboring with a full-fledged typhoon."

FROM THE POEM ENTITLED "DUCKS"

by F. W. Harvey

When God had finished the stars and whirl of coloured suns
He turned His mind from big things to fashion little ones;
Beautiful tiny things (like daisies) He made, and then
He made the comical ones in case the minds of men

Should stiffen and become dull, humourless and glum,
And so forgetful of their Maker be, As to take themselves -- quite seriously
Caterpillars and cats are lively and excellent puns:
All God's jokes are good--even the practical ones!

And as for the duck, I think God must have smiled a bit
Seeing those bright eyes blink on the day He fashioned it.

And He's probably laughing still at the sound that came out of its bill!