

T H E

Western Tanager



MRS. RAYMOND BRENNAN, Editor
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EL PAISANO -- THE STORY OF THE ROADRUNNER

(Condensed from an article by Harold C. Bryant)



The roadrunner is a bird that caught the interest of the early Spanish Californian who named it "Paisano" (the countryman).

The scientist, as well as the layman, has a real interest in the roadrunner. This North American bird belongs in the cuckoo family. Though having relatives in Borneo and Sumatra, it has but one close relative in the new world, the Mexican roadrunner. One other true cuckoo, the California cuckoo, which frequents willow thickets, is found in California.

The range of the roadrunner includes Colorado and Kansas on the east. This bird is more common in Texas and Arizona. The northern limit of its range in California is Shasta County. Largely restricted to the chaparral belt, it is found south into Lower California. When the roadrunner is running at full speed, the tail is lowered until it nearly touches the ground. Its strides are long and the bird appears to glide along with ease. Acting as a rudder, the tail is jerked from side to side with each turn and it is held erect as a brake when the bird stops. Having gained the shelter of bushes, the bird stands with head erect and the tail teetering up and down nervously, ready again to outdistance its pursuer. Though reputed to be the speediest of birds on the run and capable of beating the fastest horse, yet support for this view is lacking.

Nests are to be found as early as March and as late as July, but the bird is considered one of the earlier nesters. A large bulky structure of sticks loosely laid together is placed several feet above the ground, usually in a mesquite or a cactus. This habit of placing the nest above ground seems strange with a bird so strictly terrestrial in habit. However, a niche in a rocky wall is a rarity. One peculiarity is to be found in the dry horse manure which almost invariably constitutes a lining for the nest. A cast-off snake skin or some feathers are frequently found. The eggs vary in number from three to nine. It takes about eighteen days for them to hatch and both parents help in incubation. Nestling roadrunners seem to lack the charm of other small birds for they are described as "most hideous in aspect". They have a coal-black skin and are ungainly in form. When disturbed they attempt to frighten the intruder by making a clicking noise with their bills. Nestling birds are fed largely on lizards. W. L. Finley, describing experiences with a family of roadrunners in Arizona, tells of the parents sticking whiptailed lizards, head down, into the open mouths of the young birds. Unable to swallow the whole lizard, the hind legs and tail were left sticking out. At intervals the young birds would take another gulp and the lizard would disappear another half inch. After a sufficiently long period the end of the long tail would finally disappear.

A preponderance of evidence favors the bird. The destruction of such unquestioned pests as grasshoppers, cutworms, caterpillars, and wireworms, and of such rodents as mice is to be desired even if the amount of destruction is relatively small. The taking of this sort of food on wild land is evidence that this bird when feeding in cultivated fields is likely to be distinctly beneficial. The destruction of a roadrunner can be justified only under exceptional circumstances, and certainly the wholesale destruction of the species because of its supposed habit of destroying

(Continued on Page 12)

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AUDUBON SONGS

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The Los Angeles Audubon Society holds two regular meetings each month -- the first Thursday being Field Day, the third Thursday, a program meeting held in the State Building at Exposition Park at 2 P. M. The annual dues are \$1.25; Life Membership \$10.00, and Patron \$100.00.

Let us lift our voices like birds and sing. Mrs. Elsie Humphreys has written the following verses to express our joy on Field Days.

SOCIETY CHEER SONG

Hail! Hail! Our Field Days here!
Come let us hie away!
And Greet the birds--We say,
Hail! Hail! Los Angeles Audubon!
Come and join us everyone!

(Tune: Hail! Hail! The Gang's All Here)

SOCIETY WELCOME SONG

Los Angeles Audubon,
Los Angeles Audubon,
Extends a glad welcome
To friends who have come.

(Tune: "Happy Birthday.")

RADIO

Tune in over K.E.H.E. on Saturday from 12:15 to 12:30 for fine program on "Birds."

DECEMBER

Calendar table for December with days of the week (S, M, T, W, Th, F, S) and dates (1-31). Some dates are circled or marked with numbers in parentheses.



BIRDS CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL

Thursday, December 2nd, at Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., 10 A. M. to 2 P.M. From what we hear, all the birds in Plummer Park are preparing to entertain you. Some of the members are planning to help, and a fine program has been arranged. The birds will be watching for you about 10:00 o'clock. As the birds menu would not appeal to you, please bring lunch as usual. Mrs. Grace Brown, our hospitality chairman, is in charge and you should see her eyes sparkle! We know she is planning to serve you coffee. There is a large hall where we can picnic if it rains.

Saturday, December 4th, Mrs. E. E. Cobb will be in charge of a Bird Christmas Festival for the children, from 11:00 A. M. to 2:00 P. M., at Plummer Park. Children bring picnic lunch. It should be a joyous time in Birdland. Adults cordially invited.

The Board meeting, December 9th, will be held at the home of Mrs. Grace Brown, 327 North Highland Avenue, at 10 A. M. We are to be her guests at luncheon. Please telephone Mrs. Brown at York 1308 whether or not you will be present.

There will be no indoor meeting during the month of December, but don't forget the Bird Festival on December 2nd, 1937.

INDOOR MEETING - OCTOBER 15th, 1937

Our speaker, Mr. George T. Peabody, came to us in spite of a severe illness and held us spell-bound with his nature-lore, bringing home to everyone the great need for conservation of all our natural resources. His charming legends, too, will long be remembered. Mrs. Edwards responded to his question, "What do you think is the purpose of nature study?" in a convincing and delightful way. Mrs. William Harriet Myers answered his question as to the "Achievements of Audubon" which made us proud to know what had been accomplished and gave us renewed hope for the future. More power to you, Mrs. Myers, and the California Audubon!

OCTOBER FIELD DAY

The meeting was held at Woodland Park, October 4th, a misty day, but out of the mist we identified many familiar birds -- among them, the American Bittern, Long-tailed Chat, Cardinal, American Egret, Belted Kingfisher, Slender-billed Nuthatch, Hutton Vireo, Western Robin, Alaska Hermit Thrush, Audubon Warbler, Townsend Warbler, Tule Yellow-throat and flocks of our welcome winter visitors, the Cedar Waxwings.

We were so happy to have Mr. and Mrs. Michael with us and so proud to be the first to introduce them to Woodland Park and the Cardinal.

After lunch, Mrs. Michael told us about her trip this summer. Mrs. Humphreys gave us some interesting facts about the Common Sulphur Butterfly. Mrs. Edwards talked about the stonecrop called Calk Lettuce which is so fond of the perpendicular cliffs along the Ocean of Southern and Lower California. Mrs. Morain described some Elderberry's back in her "Old Home Town," and various California varieties.

NEW MEMBERS

We are happy to extend a hearty welcome to the following new members:

- Mrs. Gertrude C. Marsh
- Mrs. Alma W. Mason
- Mrs. Mary B. Crawley

AUDUBON STATIONERY

Audubon stationery has been printed for our members with the Audubon Seal in three colors. Twelve sheets and twelve envelopes for 25¢. Lovely for Christmas letters. Telephone or write to Mrs. Brown if you wish to order. YOrk 1308 - 327 No. Highland Avenue.

ADDITIONAL STATE BIRDS

Supplementing the article on State Birds, in the November, 1937, issue of THE WESTERN Tanager, Page 8, we wish to make the following correction:

Kansas Western Meadowlark (Not Mockingbird)

ADDITIONS:

South Dakota Western Meadowlark Iowa Eastern Goldfinch
 Virginia Robin

ADVERTISING SECTION

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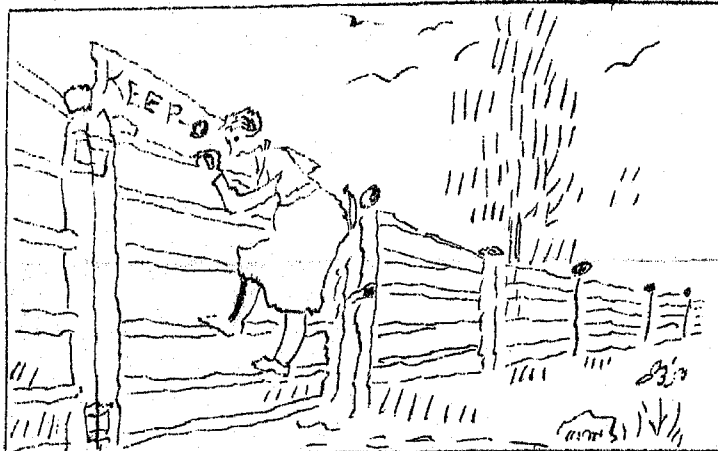
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the eggs and young of quail is unwarranted. It is to the interest of every citizen of the State to protect carefully this most curious and interesting bird, the road-runner.

THE SHARP-SHINNED HAWK MAKES A KILL

On Thursday, November 4th, Mrs. Michael and I had the great pleasure of a bird walk with enthusiastic members of the Los Angeles Audubon Society. The weather was not propitious for birding, but the territory over which we wandered surely was. During the day we managed to list 45 different species of birds.

After lunch, Miss Faddis became the leader of a second bird walk. Miss Faddis does not believe in signs. She veigled her following into barbed-wired fences and to open fields to mingle with cattle. Some of us were not just sort of a reception we ceive from the cattle, but has promised an American for such a sight we were run the gauntlet. We did the Egret, but did see a flock of Brewer and Red-Blackbirds come to the bathe. In the flock there scattered Cowbirds, and



She in-climbing go into cattle. sure what would re-Miss Faddis Egret and willing to not see great mixed winged stream to were a few feeding

close by were a number of Killdeers. While we were examining the flock, picking out a Cowbird here and there, there came a great shout from the Crows that were perched in the cottonwoods across the field. The Killdeers leaped to wing and went wailing away. The Blackbirds in a wild panic fairly exploded into the air. Through the milling Blackbirds came a killer on his way, bent on bloody murder. He had spotted his target, and "Bullet Hawk" that he was he sped to the kill. He plucked a bird from the air and mid an explosion of feathers he carried his victim to the ground. A perfect kill; and then off to a thicket of willows and grape vines to enjoy a bloody feast.

Some of the ladies were shocked to see murder committed before their very eyes. To me it was a thrilling sight, for surely the Sharp-shinned Hawk has his place in the scheme of things. Besides it may have been one of the Cowbirds that was taken and this would be but poetic justice.

The ladies would not have been shocked had they heeded the "Keep Out" sign. Mere poetic justice!

Charles W. Michael

(Editor's Note: "Seeing Ourselves as Others See Us" might well be the title of the above contribution!?)

TO THE LOVING MEMORY OF MRS. LEON S. GRISWOLD

Past President of the Los Angeles Audubon Society

We miss her -- the cozy home is silent as we pass by; the birds, flitting about amonst the flowers she so carefully tended, stop to bathe at the fountain and to investigate the feeding tray for tid-bits, but she is not there.

Her many friends, members of the Audubon Society who came at her bidding to the cabin in Sierra Madre Canyon, will always remember those happy gatherings, the bird walks, the squirrols racing through the branches of the live oaks, and the bird houses hanging therefrom, with worried parents peering at so many strange faces.

Her life has been enriched by her great love of nature.

Cora Bassett

And now we wish to extend heartiest Holiday Greetings, and to wish you all a Joyous Christmas and a Prosperous New Year!

