

Western Tanager



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No. 7

A BURROWING OWL FLYCATCHES

By Charles Albert Harwell

On our desert tours I have seen many Burrowing Owls here and there but never had heard a song to know it until I ran it down in the town of Indio on the night of March 10, 1942. At 10 p.m. I found an evident pair at the Coachella Valley hospital. One of the birds was perched on top of a pole about forty feet above the ground. This one sang a half dozen songs in the space of ten seconds and did not sing again in the two hours I kept them under observation. The song range was that of the Pygmy Owl and it seemed to say "what for" rather quickly. If you want to hear it, play record 4B of the Brand series of American Bird Songs.

The other bird of the pair was discovered on the pavement under a street light approximately one hundred feet from the mate. I heard a blowing sound that made my hair stand on end and approached to find an owl crouched low with wings out-spread issuing the weird sound. I watched and listened, and would describe the call as "who-wah-ooa." It was repeated four times, each requiring two seconds and the range was that of the Mourning Dove. A car passed and the owl flew to a brace-wire eight feet from the ground and directly under a street light and near the Neon sign of the hospital. From behind a sign post thirty feet from the owl I watched with eight-power glasses.

The owl and I saw a large insect with legs dangling, hovering about the Neon sign. The owl took to wing and poised Sparrow-Hawk like about two feet above the insect. It remained about three seconds in one spot just waiting for the zig-zagging prey to get into the proper place, then it dropped straight down so easily and quickly that I failed to note just how it was done. Nor did I note exactly whether the insect was taken by feet or bill, though I believe it was the former. The owl then flew back to the wire a few feet below where the swallowing act took place.

From that date until the tours closed April 22nd I made almost nightly visits to these birds and got to know them quite well. They seemed to own about four city blocks. I could always call out at least one of them by whistling the "what for" song. Though the two were under observation many aggregate hours, I never heard a song except from one of them, and believe that one was the male, and observed the flycatching act only one other time, at 11 p.m. on March 17.

I am sorry we won't be able to have the tours this spring as I would like to show many more people these interesting birds.

On May 7, 8, and 9 the California Conference of the National Audubon Society with its affiliated societies of this section of the State is to be held in Los Angeles. Committees are busy building their programs and the Los Angeles Audubon Society will act as host. It has been decided that the first day will be spent at Plummer Park. Second day activities and field trips now being planned will be announced later. Mr. Baker, president of the National Audubon Society will be in California at that time and will meet with us.

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Membership Dues: Annual \$1.50, Sustaining
\$5 annually, Life \$25, Patron \$100

APRIL CALENDAR

FIELD TRIP, Thursday, April 1, - Huntington Library, San Marino. Take Sierra Madre car on Monrovia line, Gate 12, Pacific Electric Station, 6th and Main Sts. Los Angeles, at 9:14 a.m., arriving at Huntington Library Station 9:52. (Because of constantly changing schedules, check with station before leaving) Fare 25¢ each way. Ten minute walk up San Marino Ave. and Stratford Rd. to entrance where party will be met by guides. No admission to grounds after party starts and party must stay together. Leave grounds at 12 noon. Cars leave San Marino Station for L. A. at 12:09 and 12:44 p.m. Those wishing to remain for the afternoon bring light lunch and return to the grounds at 1 p.m.

FIELD TRIP NO. 2 Thursday, April 8, -Fox Ridge Estate, 1922 N. Foothill Blvd., Altadena. One half mile south of old Mt. Wilson Toll House and alongside Eaton's Canyon Wash. Being rained out of March Field Trip - this "Special" will surely compensate. There are many acres including oak groves - short canyons - shrubby slopes stretch Eaton's Wash and on the mesa - wild flowers, shrubs, trees...making it all rich in bird life -and - April is Warbler time. Going by street car: Take Pasadena Short Line on 6th & Main, L.A. at 8:12 a.m. Get off in Pasadena at Fair Oaks and Colorado Sts. From southwest corner take No. 2 Bus (Hill Ave.) and ride to New York St. corner where Audubon "pick-up" cars will meet you. Round trip fare 50¢. Bird walk will start from in front of residence at 9:15-9:30. Take lunch. Meet at Picnic Tables 12 noon.

BOARD MEETING, Thursday, April 15, - 10 a.m. State Bldg. Exposition Park.

PROGRAM MEETING, Thursday, April 15, State Bldg. Exposition Park. - 1:30 p.m. Mrs. Harlan Eckler, speaker. All who saw the artistic pictures of eastern birds shown by Mrs. Eckler at our Christmas Party will want to see what she has recorded of our California birds while spending the winter at Santa Monica. Come and bring your friends.

STUDY CLASSES, Thursday, April 22, at Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd.
Nature Study: 10 a.m. Subject- "Plants in Legend and Fable" by Miss Charlotte Hamilton.
Birds: 11 a.m. Subject- "Warblers" by Mrs. Mary B. Salmon.

A WORD FROM OUR PRESIDENT:

"A dozen wild Whistling Swans on a small wayside lake in the San Joaquin valley was the incentive recently, for passerbys to linger and gaze with delight upon these noble birds. Like white-sailed ships they floated majestically, their calm and aloof beauty seeming to set them apart in a busy workaday world. To the left a trio of White Pelicans in perfect formation rode the choppy wavelets and, in the foreground, a flock of inevitable Coots made a striking foil to the alabaster loveliness of the swans. Long famed in story and song the wild swan has a distinctive place in the natural environment. In addition to the enjoyment that one experiences from such a picture in Nature, it is gratifying to know that it is due to protective measures that the Whistling Swans are increasing since it was only a few years ago that they were critically depleted by the ruthlessness of man."

JOHN MILLER of Bel Air, our youngest member, reports a California Heron visiting his garden and numerous flocks of Western Robins in the trees.

MRS. H. W. ANDERSON of Sherman Oaks, whose son is at Officers' Candidate School in Miami Beach, sent this excerpt from one of his letters; "We were called out to attend an air show over the parade ground. Several B.26's and A.30's performed. A sparrow hawk not to be outdone, darted over the field and hovered for long periods of time to show that he could do something the planes could not do. The 6000 of us applauded him."

THERE SEEM to be no restrictions or priorities on building in Flummer Park this spring. Many new homes are under construction. A pair of Bush-tits have erected the largest mansion so far, making their foundation of spider webs. Even continuous rains did not stop the work. The frail, lacy pocket is about ten inches in length and hangs in an olive tree. Decorations are now being placed. I saw, today, part of a grapefruit blossom being attached. One day I saw the pair, very busy picking gum from a peach tree in a neighbor's yard half a block away from the nest. They would take a bite and pull it out into long threads, then loop it up and fly over the roof of a house to the olive tree where it no doubt was used to cement the other materials together. It reminded me of children pulling chewing gum into threads. The Bush-tits are perfectly quiet as they work. These busy little mites destroy olive scale, moth eggs and many harmful insects and their eggs.

A pair of Bewick Wrens have taken the small brown cottage at the east end of the porch at Audubon House. They were undecided whether the old gourd house or the new cottage was the better - but decided on the new house. The Mocking Bird has chosen the pepper tree where he has built for three seasons. The Hermit Thrush is still at home in his canopy - the wild cineraria bush. He comes regularly for his evening bath, but no song, so far have I heard.

I have seen a Gambel Sparrow, a Mocking Bird and a Linnet wearing a band that Mr. Duff, no doubt, had placed on their legs three years ago.

--Mary Barnes Salmon.

FIELD GROUP: Sunday, April 11, - Eaton's Canyon Sanctuary and adjoining Fox Ridges Estate. Typical foothill oak and chaparral species. Drive to North Foothill Blvd. and Midwick Drive in Altadena, half mile south of old Mt. Wilson Toll House. Walk will start about 9:30 a.m.

Sunday, April 25, - San Gabriel River Bird Sanctuary - arrive at your own time, you'll find others birding. Meet for lunch at entrance, 2578 Durfee Road. If you are "game" to start at dawn on either trip, covering nearby and more varied areas, contact Howard L. Cogswell, 3807 Sierra Grande St. Pasadena (SY 6-5563); this will be migration season and many new species are to be expected.

NATURE LOVERS who cannot attend these field trips will be especially interested in the Sunday afternoon lectures at the L.A. County Museum. On March 28, Dr. W. Dwight Pierce, Curator of Entomology, will give an illustrated talk entitled "Insects in the War," and on April 11, Dr. John A. Comstock, Associate Director of Science, will talk on "Camouflage in Nature." These lectures start promptly at 3 p.m.

SOME NOTES ON BIRD DISTRIBUTION

In our twenty-one crossings of the Continental Divide since 1930 in "Betty," the Model "A" Ford, we have had a chance to check and recheck many of our bird notes. It has been gratifying to find considerable consistency in the general distribution of eastern and western species, as well as that small group of Scissor-tail Flycatchers, Lark Buntings and Dickcissels occupying the middle western states.

On account of the migratory habits, it has not been so easy to establish distribution north and south, for southern species are continually experimenting with nesting grounds farther north. For instance, the southern Mocking Bird has moved definitely northward. Of course there is a distribution for altitude which we especially note in California and the west.

While the hundred mile belt extending through Dallas, Texas and bending northwest through Nebraska and the Dakotas may be taken as a general "no man's land" for meeting of the eastern and western species, many birds range farther, both east and west, and there is a section of Washington and Oregon where a number of eastern birds, like the Catbird, Yellow-breasted Chat, Brown Thrasher, Bob White and Eastern Kingbird, seem to get through to the west.

Meadowlarks have a way of sitting on fence posts and singing lustily as cars pass. This characteristic gives a motorist a fine chance to listen for the changing song which distinguishes so sharply the extreme east and west. The vast deserts at the south cause this song to change more abruptly nearing Dallas than in the north, where intermediate variations are heard almost to Illinois before the strictly eastern song strikes the ear.

Of late years great flocks of Lark Buntings have left their central distribution for the winter grains to be found in Arizona, and even in the Imperial Valley.

We speak of the Western Mourning Dove, but if there is a five mile stretch anywhere between the Pacific and Atlantic coasts where these swift-flying partially desert-dwelling birds may not be encountered, we have not found it. The Arkansas Kingbird, also, seems to be seen almost from coast to coast.

Our first impression of the Road Runner connected it with California and Mexico; but we have since seen them even east of Dallas, Texas. On the other hand, the Linnet, so common in California, is one of the first species to be left behind when touring east.

In 1886 there were six states reporting no English Sparrows. At the present time I should say that Wyoming has the fewest, no portion of which state is less than 3000 feet in altitude. There are still none in Alaska.

This is not intended to be either scientific or authoritative, but a personal impression inviting others to a comparison of experiences.

--Josiah Keely

ATTENTION! Teachers, Students, Bird Lovers - The Cardinals are singing! So plan to join the special bird walk for Easter week, Tuesday, April 20, at San Gabriel River Bird Sanctuary, 2578 Durfee Road. Meet at entrance at 9:00 a.m. Bring lunch. Take Alhambra Motor Coach at 6th & Los Angeles Sts. in L.A. at 7:20 a.m. Walk across tracks to northwest corner and take Long Beach bus which arrives at Durfee and Lexington Rds. at 8:43. Entrance is half block north. Check with Pac. Elec. for any change in schedules. Mr. Charles A. Harwell is to lead the walk so a treat is in store for us.

HAVING CONCLUDED a most successful series of bird study classes for Boy & Girl Scouts at the L.A. Museum, our Extension Chairman, Mrs. Mary V. Hood, with her many helpers, is starting four evening lectures for Scout Leaders at Plummer Park. Time 7:15 p.m.

March 29th	"City Birds".....Mrs. Mary V. Hood
April 1st	"How and Where of Bird Watching".....Howard L. Cogswell
April 4th	Field Trip to Echo Park
April 5th	"Birds of L. A. County You Should Know"...Don Eckelberry
April 8th	"Birds from Sea to Sierra".....C. A. Harwell
April 11th	Field Trip - Eaton's Canyon (see notice of Howard L. Cogswell- page 29)