

Western Tanager



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BIRD POPULATION COUNTS

Having as one of its major functions the conservation of bird life, the National Audubon Society is working to develop the interest of more and more observers in keeping tab on the fluctuating numbers of various species. Besides the normal seasonal change in numbers, there are often many gradual increases, or more especially decreases, in abundance of certain birds that go unnoticed for lack of accurate counts--until too late to apply the most effective conservation measures.

New regulations of Audubon Magazine's Christmas Counts now puts them on a true population count basis, and contributors to the bi-monthly "Season" reports are all urged to continue such counts throughout the year. Comparison of numbers of any species seen per mile of habitat in succeeding years will then give definite data as to which species are losing ground and in need of more urgent protection.

On December 26, 1943, members of our Los Angeles Audubon Society took two Christmas bird counts, besides the one in the Los Angeles area reported in the last Tanager, one at Lake Elsinore by Frank G. Watson (see below), and one in the Big Bear Lake region of the San Bernardino Mountains by four parties of observers. This, the fourth year of the count in the latter area, disclosed that wintering canvasbacks are apparently increasing on these mountain lakes, 6500 being counted this year, over twice as many as in 1942, and three times previous years. The "Cans" and American mergansers (650) and the ever-present coot (only 15,000 this year--a new low here) are the dominant waterfowl species when ice covers all shallow water as it did the last two years. Of the several hundred baldpates usually accompanying the canvasbacks only 20 were seen this year, for reasons not readily apparent.

Some 500 mountain bluebirds, 500 robins and 900 cedar waxwings were seen feeding on the abundant juniper berry crop, this perhaps being the reason for the scarcity of the latter two species in the lowlands this winter. Likewise numerous band-tailed pigeons were seen in snow and ice-covered areas in Santa Ana Canyon on slopes of Southern California's highest mountains and on the desert slope Mr. & Mrs. Comby found Gambel's sparrows abundant as usual (300), though both these birds are reported scarce on the Pacific slope. Rareties listed were: Bald eagle, 1 adult (Price, Clements); golden-crowned kinglet, 1 (Storcken, Murdock, Nelson); and winter wren 1 (Cogswell, Taylor).

On the Lake Elsinore count, as at Big Bear, birding in general was poor due to a strong north wind, this year's count totalling 65 species compared with 75 in 1942 in a shorter time afield. Last year 35,000 shovellers were counted, this year only 60, this reduction probably being due to the absence of green algae in the water and the consequent lack of micro-animal life on which the ducks fed last year. On the flats around the lake were counted some 1200 horned larks, the most numerous bird in that area; 3 snowy plovers were seen on a sand bar, acting just as if they were at the beach. Other interesting items were: White pelican, 11; Canada goose, 3; Cowbird, 6; and Vesper sparrow, 2 (in grassy field well spotted but not covered with sagebrush); Chinese spotted dove, 1 --first recorded in the Elsinore count, having apparently extended its range this far from the Los Angeles area.

---Frank G. Watson and Howard L. Cogswell

Complete lists of these two bird counts in Audubon Magazine, Sect. II, Jan.-Feb. 1944

THE WESTERN Tanager

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

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By

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NOTES: On Friday, March 24, at 2:30 p.m.
Mrs. J. H. Comby will give a talk titled
"Why Study Birds in Wartime?" in Barker
Brothers' Auditorium. Plan to be there.
Audubon Magazine for Jan-Feb. contains
the Christmas Bird Counts for Los Angeles
By Mrs. Daugherty, Big Bear Lake by Mr.
Cogswell and Lake Elsinore by Mr. Watson.
Among other timely and interesting arti-
cles, read Mr. Harwell's "Pattern for
Listening," and Stanton G. Ernst's "Feed-
ing of Game Birds."
We regret to announce the passing of two
valued members, Mrs. J. L. MacSwiggen and
Miss Harriet E. Culver.

HEADQUARTERS

Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd.,
Los Angeles 46. From down-town Los Angel-
es take Santa Monica Blvd.-West Hollywood
car, Subway Terminal; get off at Fuller
Ave., walk one block west to park entrance.

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Annual, \$1.50; Sustaining, \$5.00 annually;
Life \$25; Patron \$100. Fiscal year ends
June 30.

For transportation information call our
chairman, Mrs. Wilbur F. Willis, MO 16350.

CALENDAR FOR MARCH

THURSDAY, Mar. 2, FIELD TRIP. Playa del Rey. Shore and back bay areas for shore birds.
Take "edondo Mptor Bus - Via Playa del Rey - Olive St. deck, Subway Terminal Bldg. 423
So. Hill St. L.A. Bus leaves 8 a.m. and 8:50 a.m. Get off at Playa del Rey stop and
Vista del Mar St. Round trip fare 40¢. Wear warm clothing and take a lunch. Meet at
breakwater at noon. Bird walks will start from bus stop at 9 and 10 o'clock. Los
Angeles return bus leaves Playa del Rey at 1:07, 2:07, and 3:07 p.m. Check for Motor
bus possible schedule changes by calling TUCKER 7272 - Information.

THURSDAY, March 9, EVENING STUDY MEETING. Manning's Coffee Shop, 319 W. 5th St. L.A.
Dinner at 6 p.m. Feature will be the superb U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service film,
"Courtship of the Western Grebe" with detailed scenes in technicolor of these birds'
spectacular actions on the breeding grounds. Also, study all our grebes and join in
discussion of their nesting habits and behavior.

SUNDAY, March 12, FIELD TRIP. San Gabriel River Bird Sanctuary. Spring is well un-
der way; cardinals and many other birds will be in full song. The entrance to the
sanctuary at 2578 Durfee Road, between Pico and El Monte, can be reached by the P.E.
car and bus. Take Pasadena-Oak Knoll line leaving 6th & Main Sts. NE corner, at 7:32
a.m., get off at La Senda station and walk one short block east and take Pasadena to
Long Beach bus going south across Huntington Drive at Atlantic, arriving at sanctuary
(Temple School) at 8:43. Fare one way 35¢.

BOARD MEETING, Thursday, March 16. 9:30 a.m. L.A. Museum Bldg. Exposition Park.

A WORD FROM OUR PRESIDENT:

We are aware that the natural environment of a country at war is under great stress when all resources must be made available to the greatest extent. Nevertheless no effort is too small or too great to guard against the needless exploitation of our forests, wildlife and soil. To develop a greater appreciation of their value, to be alert and ready to act where protection is needed, to be ever conscious that Nature's bountiful endowment is the basis of our great country- in such ways may we on the home front be worthy custodians of our land.

March Calendar, Continued.

THURSDAY, March 16, PROGRAM MEETING. 1:30 p.m. L.A. County Museum, Exposition Park. Appropriately for Arbor Day month the topic will be trees. We are fortunate in having as our speaker Mr. George T. Hastings of Santa Monica who is a recognized authority in the botanical field as well as in many other departments of nature study. "Around the World with the Trees of California" is the enticing title Mr. Hastings gives to his illustrated lecture. Don't miss it.

Mr. W. Scott Lewis will give another nature quiz. Under his able direction the quiz is both amusing and instructive.

THURSDAY, March 23, STUDY CLASSES. Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd. - 10 a.m. Mrs. Mary Hood will take charge of the entire program for the morning, combining birds and botany in a detailed discussion of Life Zones. This will be illustrated by numerous maps Mrs. Hood has prepared, and by colored slides of birds and vegetation occurring in the different zones.

SUNDAY, March 26, FIELD TRIP. Location to be decided at March 9th evening meeting.

CORPORAL ARTHUR T. SKOPEC, of New York, who has many friends in the Los Angeles Audubon Society, writes from North Africa: "I have seen two new species, a white wag-tail and a buff-backed heron. This heron is very interesting, all white (winter plumage) with a yellow beak and dark legs. It has a habit of associating with cattle, where it picks ticks, etc. from their hides. Every herd has its herons."

HUMMING BIRD SONGS. "Do you like the song of our Anna's humming bird? I do, but there seems to be a difference of opinion as some call it a scratching and grating attempt to sing while I would definitely say that there are liquid notes as well.

This leads to an interesting question because the notes of these tiny beauties are about as high as the human ear can perceive. It has been proved that some people hear a much higher vibration than others, so perhaps some of us are able to enjoy the full song of the Anna's hummingbird while those who describe it as a scratching sound are only hearing the lower notes.

I would like to believe that all hummingbirds sing but that it is on a pitch beyond the range of our ears. We hope new facts concerning this will ultimately be brought to light.

--Mrs. W. Scott Lewis

MRS. H. A. HINSHAW, whom many of you will remember lived in a house trailer near Chiloa, writes from her new home in Trinity Co. "Through the back window of the house trailer this is what I see: numerous juncos (Thurbers, Oregon, Slate-greys and a few pink-sided), two pair of varied thrushes, one pair of russet-backed thrushes, two pair Valdez fox sparrows, eight pair California purple finches and a large number of green-backed goldfinches. This is a lovely spot with plenty of running water. I have made several pot holes along the stream which fill with water and where the birds can bathe individually or in groups." She wishes to be remembered to those who knew her.

PILEATED WOODPECKERS. "One morning in late June, 1927 a forester cut down a dead yellow pine in the Camp Fire Girls summer camp area near Lake Vera, at Placerville. When the tree hit the ground out popped two large birds. The forester gathered them in his arms, took them to the camp where they were placed in a chicken coop to await my identification and advice. I happened to be out on a bird walk with the Guardian's Group.

The birds were pileated woodpeckers, a young male and female in good plumage, certainly just about fully feathered enough to quit the nest. I decided to let them rest until evening and went to have a look at their former home. By stepping along the tree trunk I found the nest cavity had been 100 feet above the ground and that the ponderosa pine was 4 feet in diameter at breast height. The tree struck the ground with such force that a slab had broken loose exposing the entire nest cavity and hurling the young to the ground.

Gathering the two hungry woodpeckers in my arms I went alone that evening to the nest location and placed the male as high as I could reach on the bark of a tall pine close to the nest tree. With vigorous lurches this bird climbed 100 feet in just 15 minutes. Now I released the female young on the bark of the same tree and then hid behind a nearby pine to watch with binoculars. Her progress was slower. It took her 30 minutes to climb 100 feet. By this time both parents were in the immediate neighborhood, kuck, kuck, kucking either encouragement or admonitions to their offspring. Sometimes one of the parents would light near one of the young but I never saw feeding operations. Rather the parent would climb vigorously up the tree trunk seemingly to urge more rapid progress.

Darkness came on and I left the family of four closely gathered near the top of this 200 ft. pine. Early the next morning I returned to find there was no woodpecker in the nest region. At approximately one mile from the original nest site I came across two pileated woodpeckers which I assumed from behavior and pattern were one adult and one of the young of yesterday's tragedy."

--C. A. Harwell, California Representative

OUR EVENING MEETING of February 10 was attended by 75 persons who enjoyed Mr. and Mrs. Harlan Eckler's presentation of their excellent kodachrome slides, taken during the past year and a half mostly in the areas close to L. A. where many of us go "birding" regularly. Seeing such familiar bird friends on the screen as Savannah and Belding's sparrows, various sandpipers, Bonaparte's gull, etc. and the rarer visitors that many saw at the San Gabriel River Sanctuary --the green-tailed towhee and Harris sparrow -- was quite a treat. Discussion included a study of identification of our 5 species of grebes, with constant reference to the specimens so kindly brought from the L. A. County Museum by Mr. Willett.

THE JANUARY STUDY CLASSES, at Plummer Park, were unusually stimulating. The program was opened by the president of the Southwest Bird Study Club, Mrs. Alma Mason, who gave a very informative talk on the development of bird wings. Mrs. George T. Hastings spoke about the flowers of Chile. Mr. Hastings then lectured, in his usual delightful manner, on the subject of flowering plants, their position in geologic time, and their arrangement in families. Illustrated with colored slides and with his own elaborately constructed charts of various flowers, those who were unable to attend this meeting missed a real treat. Equally as interesting were the pictures shown at our program meeting on February 17 of the White-tailed kite and the red-bellied hawk taken by Mr. James B. Dixon and his son Ralph E. Dixon of Escondido. Months of hard work and patient waiting were well repaid by the marvelous results shown in these records of the life history of the two birds.