

Western Tanager



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THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

By Mrs. Marie V. Beals, Librarian, National Audubon Society

The Christmas bird count is largely carried on by amateurs. These bird amateurs have been potent factors in the science world. In fact, long before the existence of scientific organizations, there were amateurs.

Dr. Frank M. Chapman was the founder of this custom. The first census (now called count) was taken in 1900, and since that date this game of counting birds has attained the dignity of a contribution to ornithology. Today these annual findings are sufficient to merit a special publication of the National Audubon Society. Since the first Christmas count was taken, over 8,000 reports have come from all the states and provinces north of the Rio Grande. Counts have also been published from Baffin Island, Northwest Territory, Alaska, Newfoundland, Cuba, Puerto Rico and India.

And so again this Christmas, for the forty-sixth time, amateurs started at day-break, tramped the hills and the swamps, the woods and the fields, in sunshine and in storm, until the shades of night began to fall, and even after darkness some lingered in the hope of hearing the hooting of an owl, to add its name to their list.

Up to 1944, seven states, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Wisconsin, have taken bird counts from the beginning, without missing a year. The largest number of states and provinces to participate in any one year was forty-eight. The largest number of published counts, 222, was in the 1930 issue of Bird Lore (now Audubon Magazine). In 1944 Audubon Magazine received 238 counts, but only 200 could be printed because of lack of space and paper shortage.

The distribution of the forty-fifth Christmas bird count shows a general concentration north of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi River. More counts are needed from all the states and the provinces, especially from the provinces, the western and southern states and the three most northern New England states. If the counts were more representative of the various vegetative and physiographic types to be found in the different states and provinces, the scientific value of the count would be increased a thousandfold.

It is a thrill, of course, to discover the presence of a rare species, but an accurate count of the regular winter birds is of greater scientific value than a big list of rare or accidental species. The locality chosen for the bird count should be a representative one of the region and not merely the area that will give the largest list of birds. Bird counts taken over the same routes, Christmas after Christmas, are of the highest value, and each succeeding Christmas increases their value. The bird count is to indicate the bird population of the locality, rather than to build up a long list of species.

Today many counts go over the 100 mark each year. Inland, especially in the north, counts are smaller; perhaps four or five species will be all an active person can find; but no matter how many birds are observed, each count is important, for it reveals at Christmas time the distribution and occurrence of our species in our states and provinces.

THE WESTERN Tanager

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- President Mrs. J. H. Comby Route 3, Box 378-F, Whittier Telephone: Whittier 41-4236 Executive Secretary . . Miss I. M. Wilson 4314 Los Feliz Blvd., Los Angeles 27 Telephone: NOrmandy 1-4279 Treasurer Miss Bonnie C. Green. 774 E. Heliotrope Dr., Los Angeles 27 Telephone: MOrningside 1-5537 Curator-Librarian . . Mrs. Mary B. Salmon 1117 E. Fuller Ave., Los Angeles 46 Telephone: GRanite 9312 Field Leader. . Mrs. Caroline H. Daugherty Telephone: CItrus 2-2437 Evening Program Chairman. . . E. W. Julian Telephone: WAlnut 7853 Editor. Miss Laura Greely 904 Wendall Ave., South Pasadena Telephone: MAnchard 7-1894

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Membership Dues

Student (12 to 18 yrs. of age), 75¢. Annual, \$1.50; Life, \$25; Patron, \$100. Joint membership with National Audubon Society, with "Audubon Magazine," \$5 (minimum). Annual dues payable July 1; delinquent Dec. 31. Membership Chairman, Miss Charlotte J. Fox, 5442 Monroe St., Los Angeles 38. Telephone: HI 2433.

OBSERVATIONS: Dec. 23, Playa del Rey area, a very rare golden plover, in a flock of black-bellied plover; closely studied by four observers, one of whom is quite familiar with this bird in the East. Also, short-billed gulls, 12 black brant and all three cormorants. Western robins and cedar waxwings continue to grow in number in city outskirts and canyons, where they feast on the abundant Toyon berries, their rightful food. Bailey's mountain chickadee and slender-billed nuthatches also reported from city outskirts.

LOOK NOW FOR migrating hummingbirds. Allens will be first to arrive. Sometimes hooded orioles come through in February. Please report your observations to -

Mrs. Caroline H. Daugherty

NATURE COURSE. The Committee on Youth Leadership, Mrs. O. B. Pratt, Chairman, announces a special Nature Course, to be given by Mrs. Mary V. Hood, assisted by other members of the society and using the facilities of the Section of Education, Los Angeles County Museum. The course, dealing with Birds, Plant Life, Reptiles and Mammals, is open to all members of the society and to group leaders and counsellors of other organizations. Starting at 7 P.M., February 19, the class will be held at the museum twice a week for six weeks, and will last approximately two hours each. For desired information, telephone Mrs. Hood, HE 0974.

THE NEWLY APPOINTED Committee on Nomination of officers for 1946-47: Mrs. W. F. Willis, 4759 Ambrose Ave., Los Angeles 27, Chairman; Mrs. W. Scott Lewis, 2500 Beachwood Drive, Los Angeles 28, and Mr. T. F. Parker, 1717 Crest Drive, Los Angeles 35. Show your interest in the society by sending to any member of the committee your suggestions for president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, curator and historian.

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT -

The first rains of winter fall upon the waiting earth and lo, with no waiting between the scenes, the first act of Nature's drama unfolds. Willows unfurl their catkins, hills are greening, and a male oriole, immature, suns himself high in the leafless sycamore, to show that he has not heeded the call to fly to a warmer clime. The miracle of Spring never grows old; there is always something new and exciting in the age-old drama. Let us enjoy it, and learn to understand it, you and I, for on every hand

"Whether you look or whether you listen
You can hear life murmur, and see it glisten."

ERNA COMBY

THE SIXTH ANNUAL BIG BEAR LAKE CHRISTMAS COUNT.....

Howard L. Cogswell

On Dec. 30, 1945, our mountaineer Christmas bird-counters for the first time did not have to wade in snow nor look at ducks and coots on the ice. An exceptionally mild fall, with no snow remaining in the parts of the San Bernardino Mountains we ordinarily cover, brought many changes in the bird life; and a perfect warm sunny day on the 30th brought much pleasure to those who participated. Most of the side roads were passable, enabling us this year to cover thoroughly some areas usually out of reach because of snow, and the resulting day's list from the three cooperating parties, totaling 13 observers, members and guests of the Los Angeles Audubon Society, was the best ever obtained on the Big Bear count, - 73 species.

The full count will of course be published in the March-April issue of Audubon Magazine (Section II of full edition only), but highlights of the day's birding may be of interest here:

- 1- Hooded merganser; a female with the usual "Americans" on Big Bear, carefully examined through Lt. Morgan's spotting scope by several of the same party; a first record for our Big Bear counts.
- 2- Pigeon hawk; 1, in Santa Ana Canyon, perhaps attracted by concentration of finches there; another "first" on the count.
- 3- Saw-whet owl; at Barton Flats we were awakened from our sleeping bags at 3:45 A.M. by his steadily repeated "tooting." Another "first."
- 4- Verdin. 1, on desert slope. Second time on the count.
- 5- Green-tailed towhee. Very unusual at this date in breeding range of the species at Big Bear. No doubt a collateral of the mild season,
- 6- Slate-colored junco. 1 each on desert slope and in Santa Ana Canyon.

Several other species not ordinarily found on our snow-swept count were probably late stragglers due to the mild weather, as a myrtle warbler with several Audubon's on the desert slope, house wren and brown towhee in Santa Ana Canyon, and least sandpiper on the lake shore. Conversely, the mild conditions all over Southern California had not yet brought the great concentrations of canvasbacks, baldpates and other cold-weather ducks usually found on Big Bear and Baldwin lakes; but between the two parties working there we managed to get a fair list of species, if not of individuals, only three species found in previous years being missed. Coots as always were the dominant waterfowl, 25,000 this year being the conservative estimate of several observers. For anyone who has never seen such a concentration of coots, they alone make a winter trip to Big Bear worth while.

Another aspect of our changed count this year was an extensive fire last year in the chaparral of the Santa Ana Canyon slope, which reduced tremendously the number of bush-feeding chaparral birds we found; but it brought us an unexpected concentration of finches to feed on the seeds so easily found on the fringes of the burnt area. Flocks and flocks flew overhead, some remaining unidentified, but we counted 120 Lawrence's goldfinches, 150 pine siskins, and somewhat lesser numbers of Cassin's and California purple finches and green-backed goldfinches. Hairy and Nuttall's woodpeckers, too, were slightly more numerous than usual, feeding on the trunks of charred pine and oak trees.

Next year, be it warm and summer like, or with two-foot deep snow covering, we hope for more observers and an exhilaratingly different day of birding is in store for those who come to Big Bear in winter.

THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, LOS ANGELES AREA Mrs. Caroline H. Daugherty

The annual Christmas bird count in the Los Angeles area was taken Dec. 27, 1945, by 26 observers in 10 parties, representing the Los Angeles Audubon Society, the Pasadena Audubon Society, the Southwest Bird Study Club and the Santa Monica Nature Club. The territory was the same as that of the previous eight years, taking in a short stretch of seashore, marsh, open country, golf courses, oak and holly wooded canyons, chaparral slopes, river bed, reservoirs, campus, parks and suburbs. Heavy to light to overhead fog in all sections until noon; clear, sunny, to 4 p.m.; overhead fog from then on. Temperature, 46 to 48°; wind, W, 1-7 m.p.h. Ground wet; grass and weed growth just appearing.

LOONS: Pacific, 1; red-throated, 1.
GREBES: Horned, 1; eared, 17; western, 15; pied-billed, 44.
PELICANS & CORMORANTS: White pelican, 1; brown pelican, 60; double-crested cormorant, 76; Baird's cormorant, 2.
HERONS, Etc.: Great blue heron, 7; Amer. egret, 29; snowy egret, 46; Anthony's green heron, 2; black-crowned night heron, 27; Amer. bittern, 1.
DUCKS, Etc.: Baldpate, 2; pintail, 158; Wood duck, 1 (seen in area since Nov. 26; H & C); green-tailed teal, 15; cinnamon teal, 2; shoveller, 3; redhead, 1; ring-necked duck, 3; canvas-back, 1; lesser scaup, 485; white-winged scoter, 5; surf scoter, 309; ruddy duck, 162; red-breasted merganser, 26.
HAWKS: Sharp-shinned, 2; Cooper's, 5; red-tailed, 9; ferruginous rough-leg, 3; marsh, 5; pigeon, 1; sparrow, 81.
QUAIL: Valley quail, 113.
RAILS, COOT, Etc.: Light-footed rail, 2; sora rail, 2; Florida gallinule, 2; coot, 984.
SHORE BIRDS: Snowy plover, 71; killdeer, 93; black-bellied plover, 314; surf-bird, 9; ruddy turnstone, 1; black turnstone, 19; Wilson's snipe, 5; long-billed curlew, 18; Hudsonian curlew, 21; spotted sandpiper, 2; willet, 1034; greater yellow-legs, 5; least sandpiper, 409; red-backed sandpiper, 12; long-billed dowitcher, 210; western sandpiper, 75; marbled godwit, 249; sanderling, 124; avocet, 193.
GULLS: Glaucous-winged, 126; western, 184; herring, 2; Calif., 158; ring-billed, 2791; short-billed, 2; Bonaparte's, 719; Heermann's, 114.
TERNs: Forster's, 3.
PIGEONS & DOVES: Band-tailed pigeon, 105; mourning dove, 230; Chinese spotted dove, 130; ringed turtle dove, 26.

ROADRUNNER, 1.
OWLS: Barn Owl, 1.
SWIFTS & HUMMINGBIRDS: White-throated swift, 211; black-chinned hummingbird, 1 (observed closely from all angles; seen campus area; D); Anna's hummingbird, 123.
KINGFISHERS: Belted kingfisher, 4.
WOODPECKERS: Red-shafted flicker, 59; Calif. woodpecker, 13; red-breasted sapsucker, 2; downy woodpecker, 1; Nuttall's woodpecker, 5.
PERCHING BIRDS: Cassin's kingbird, 3; black phoebe, 88; Say's phoebe, 6; horned lark, 153; Calif. jay, 113; plain titmouse, 24; bush-tit, 395; slender-billed nuthatch, 1; wren-tit, 152; house wren, 1; Bewick's wren, 19; long-billed marsh wren, 3; mockingbird, 163; Calif. thrasher, 76; robin, 2649; hermit thrush, 45; western bluebird, 22; western gnatcatcher, 4; ruby-crowned kinglet, 87; Amer. pipit, 97; cedar waxwing, 631; phainopepla, 2 (wintering over; seen in canyon area); Calif. shrike, 32; Hutton's vireo, 2; dusky warbler, 2; myrtle warbler, 1 (heard calling. H.C.); Audubon's warbler, 1399; Townsend's warbler, 1; yellow-throat, 12; English sparrow, 393; western meadowlark, 252; San Diego red-wing, 145; Brewer's blackbird, 1952; dwarf cowbird, 20; Calif. purple finch, 108; house finch, 1308; willow goldfinch, 31; green-backed goldfinch, 70; spotted towhee, 38; brown towhee, 176.
SPARROWS: Savannah, 42; Belding's, 23; large-billed, 6; lark, 15; rufous-crowned, 5; Oregon junco, 243; chipping sparrow, 23; Gambel's, 761; golden-crowned, 75; fox, 8; song, 87.

TOTALS: Species and sub-species... 136
Individuals, about 22,553

CALENDAR FOR FEBRUARY, 1946

THURSDAY, Feb. 7. Field Trip, Redondo Beach. Take Redondo Motor Coach, Subway Terminal, 423 S. Hill Street, Los Angeles, 8 A.M. Round trip fare, 69¢. Get off at Torrance Blvd., close to city park. Take lunch. Walk will start from picnic tables in the park about 9:30 A.M. Leader, Mrs. Caroline H. Daugherty.

SUNDAY, Feb. 10, 2 to 4 P.M. San Gabriel River Wildlife Sanctuary Museum. (See notice below for directions.) An illustrated talk on birds, for Student Members and other young people. Presented by committee on Youth Leadership, Mrs. O. B. Pratt, Chm.

THURSDAY, Feb. 14. 7 P.M. Central Library, Fifth St. and Grand Ave. First Floor. Mr. R. W. Julian presiding. Speaker, Mr. George J. Reichert, representing Los Angeles County Department of Forester and Fire Warden. His address, "Realm of the Wild," will be illustrated with pictures of wildlife throughout the United States, taken in the interest of conservation by the Federal Forestry Service.

THURSDAY, Feb. 21. 1:30 P.M. Los Angeles County Museum, Esposition Park. Second floor. Mr. George J. Reichert has very kindly consented to repeat the address scheduled for Feb. 14. See the prededing notice. Mrs. Carl P. Smith, chairman, Program Committee will preside.

SUNDAY, Feb. 24. Field Trip, Oak Grove Park and Gould Mesa, Pasadena. Entrance on Foothill Blvd., west of Devil's Gate dam. Leave Los Angeles on Pasadena Short Line leaving Sixth and Main Streets, N. E. corner, at 8:04 A.M. Arrive in Pasadena at 8:45. Get off at Fair Oaks and Colorado, cross Colorado Street to N. E. corner, and take Lincoln Avenue bus (Route 2) leaving there at 8:55. Go to West Campus, Pasadena Junior College. Autos will be there to take you to park. Should you prefer to walk to the park from the college, go west on Wyoming Street to Arroyo, thence north to Devil's Gate dam. Bird walk will start from park entrance at about 9:15. Leader, Howard L. Cogswell. Telephone, SY 6-5563.

THURSDAY, Feb. 28. 10 A.M. Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd. From downtown Los Angeles go by Santa Monica Blvd.-West Hollywood car, get off at Fuller Ave., walk one block west to park entrance. Mrs. Thomas R. Shearer, chairman, announces a lecture by Miss Ruby Curry: "Gulls Around the World." Please study in your textbook the ring-billed, Heermann and short-billed gulls. The program will be followed by the usual "Question Box." Bring lunch and spend the afternoon at headquarters. There are many birds in Plummer Park this winter.

SAN GABRIEL RIVER WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Owned by the National Audubon Society and operated with the assistance of a local committee representing the Los Angeles, Pasadena and California Audubon Societies and the Southwest Bird Study Club. Chairman, Mrs. J. H. Comby.

SUNDAY, Feb. 24. Field trip, starting from the entrance, 2610 S. Durfee Ave., El Monte, at 9 A.M. Leaders will be provided by the local committee. Take lunch, and meet at the picnic tables at 11:30 to discuss the morning's observations. The Pasadena-Long Beach bus, four trips daily each way, stops at Temple School, opposite sanctuary. From downtown Los Angeles, go by El Monte bus or train and transfer to Long Beach bus leaving El Monte at 8:38 A.M. (Telephone TUCKER 7272 for best schedule). Returning busses leave Temple School at 3:46 P.M. for Pico and at 4:57 P.M. for El Monte. If driving go east on Third Street to Beverly Blvd., continue on Beverly to Durfee Ave., thence north to sanctuary. Visitors will please register with Mrs. Richardson at sanctuary residence. Sanctuary telephone, WHittier 6-3748.

VISITORS WELCOME. For desired information telephone NO 1-4279 or MO 1-6350