

Western Tanager



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ANOTHER PAGE OF ENGLISH SPARROW HISTORY

By George T. Hastings

In the May, 1948, Western Tanager, Dr. Loye Miller gave an account of the coming of the English sparrow to California, based on his own observations. It may be interesting to go back to the coming of these birds to America. When I was four years old I was given a book, "Little Folks in Feathers and Fur," which I greatly enjoyed as it was read to me. In it is a chapter - The Little Worm Hunters of New York - telling how the English sparrow was introduced into New York to control an invasion of caterpillars. The chapter concludes: "And the trees came out beautiful and green as of old, and the whole big city feels grateful to the pretty little worm hunters from England."

Apparently the first English sparrows were liberated in Brooklyn in 1851. In 1856 six were liberated in Portland, Maine, and increased in numbers there. About the same time 300 were brought to Washington by the Smithsonian Institution, but all died. A second effort made in 1871 was successful and the birds became established.

In 1860 a prominent citizen set 12 birds free near Washington Square in New York City and repeated this for several successive summers. In 1864 the Park Commission set 14 birds free in Central Park, and others were liberated in Jersey City. For some time the New York park authorities fed the sparrows and put up nesting boxes for them. In 1864 the Boston city government bought 200 sparrows in Germany. "Unfortunately all died," so the following year some hundreds more were brought over, some of which survived and were carefully cared for by the city forester. In 1868 20 sparrows were imported to Charleston, and the following year 1000 to Philadelphia.

Thus from 1851 to 1870 several thousand sparrows were brought from England and Germany, at the cost of several thousands of dollars, and liberated in cities from Maine to Carolina. Most people at the time felt that these birds were a very valuable addition to our bird population. They were carefully protected by law at a time when our native birds were being given little or no protection.

Few ornithologists saw any danger in this introduction. Baird, Brewer and Ridgway in "North American Land Birds" (from which much of this information has been taken) say of the English sparrow: "So far they manifest no disposition to molest and drive away our native birds." But two years before this was written, Elliot Coues, in his "Key to North American Birds", stated: "Imported about fifteen years ago during a craze which affected even some ornithologists, making people fancy that a granivorous, conirostral bird would rid us of insect pests, this sturdy and invincible little bird has overrun the whole country and proved a nuisance without a redeeming quality." Today most people consider the sparrow an undesirable citizen, but efforts made to exterminate or control it have been futile.

Efforts to introduce the nightingale, skylark, European goldfinch and other birds have failed, but the starling is established over much of the United States and still spreading, becoming as much of a nuisance as the English sparrow. At the best, man's efforts to improve on what Nature has given us cannot be considered happy ones. If the efforts spent in bringing in foreign birds had been spent in the protection and encouragement of our native song birds, the results might have been really worth while.

THE WESTERN Tanager

"WHOOZIT"

Published by the Los Angeles Audubon Socy. Free to Members. Non-members, 75¢ annually Editor Miss Laura Greeley 904 Kendall Ave., South Pasadena Telephone: Cleveland 7-1849

Shirley Dinsdale, ventriloquist, and her "Judy Splinters," who broadcast regularly from Television KTLA, wanted to learn more about birds and their value to man, so they devoted their programs during the week of July 19 to that subject.

NEW MEMBERS, WELCOME !

- Mrs. Mae Pryce Brooks 2171 Vista del Mar Av., Hollywood 28 Mrs. W. W. Gardner 1102 W. 28th St., Los Angeles 7 Mrs. Maude McKnight 744 S. Carondelet St., Los Angeles 5 Miss Lucy Rising 1414 N. Catalina St., Los Angeles 27

CORRECTION

Change the address of Mrs. Aarah Read (listed incorrectly in the September Tanager) to 254 Camino de Teodoro, Walnut.

FOR SALE

For the convenience of its members and friends, the Society is prepared to sell the following nature study material:

- "Field Guide to Western Birds," by Roger Tory Peterson \$3.50 "Field Guide to Birds" (Eastern), by Roger Tory Peterson 3.50 "Birds of the Pacific States," by Ralph Hoffman 4.00 Check list of the birds of Southern California (Cogswell and Murdock) .02 Study list of common birds of Los Angeles County (Mary V. Hood)... .02 Study Guide, for convenience in recording observations01 Study Guide, with line drawings of 25 common birds, for coloring.. .35 "California Native Plants Desirable for Gardens and Sanctuaries," by Theodore Payne, with notes of birds attracted to them for food or nesting material05

Apply to Miss Rose L. Kahn 512 N. Alta Dr., Beverly Hills or to Miss Clara E. Pflager 141 N. Berendo St., Los Angeles 4

THE SOCIETY'S PURPOSE: "To promote the study and protection of wildlife, plants, soil and water."

Among those invited to participate was Constance Berry, a student-member of the Los Angeles Audubon Society. She told interesting personal experiences with birds, demonstrating with mounted specimens of a chickadee, a nighthawk and a red-wing blackbird, loaned her for the occasion by the County Museum.

On July 22 Shirley and "Judy" were hostesses to "Whoozit," an injured barn owl temporarily in my care. His legal custodian is Wallace Ernst. "Whoozit" is probably the first barn owl to telecast, and as a television subject he was perfect! He winked and blinked amiably at the great lights, turning his head from side to side, and he made no protest when I placed my hands under his wings and spread them out to show their length and their beautiful markings.

As a study subject "Whoozit" is priceless! His mandibles are crossed, making eating a chore. Horseflesh, oyster shell and water comprise his diet. He weighs 1 1/4 pounds; age, probably two years. He adapts himself to human care and whimsey, and demonstrates an infallible sense of hearing and sight - and appreciation. We have watched his digestive gestures at close range, his moulting and feathering - head, neck, secondaries, primaries, tail coverts and tail feathers, in order, "sprouting." His monkey-face has grown from freakish to kindly. His "monkey-shines" include twisting the head to a startling angle of 135 degrees, right or left, giving him an impish look. He has different noises for food, for fear or for anger. Like a dog, he enjoys having his head scratched.

At the broadcast we mentioned a visible proof of owls feeding rats to their young. "Judy" thought it sounded unappetizing, but accepted it as a fact, and agreed that the owl is a friend of man. -----JOSEPHINE V. WILLIS

OBSERVATIONS

The summer months have been tough for land birds. Several successive dry seasons have reduced their supply of wild seeds and fruits. Marsh and shore birds continue to lose their feeding areas through mosquito-control and beach-extending activities, plus building progress. The birds' overall picture shows Southern California, which used to be such a birds' paradise, becoming too populated with mankind who do not realize the importance of reserving a few areas for birds.

SHORE and MARSH BIRDS: Twenty-five wood ibis (white storks) observed by the Sidney Doners on and over the Maxton Brown Sanctuary Lagoon, Carlsbad, July 18. However, the writer found the lagoon water very low August 18. One wood ibis was seen on nearby Santa Margarita River bank and four in their beautiful flight form overhead. There were many American and snowy egrets in both areas. The "Golden Slippers" (snowy egrets) were still wearing their breeding plumage. Black-necked stilts were in migration flocks (40 to 50 plus) and there were numerous Northern phalaropes in both spots. Ten avocet on the lagoon.

On the Los Angeles River Settling Basins, west end of Griffith Park, along Hollingsworth Drive, which have held shallow ponds all summer and will continue to do so until heavy winter rains come, 16 Anthony's green herons, sometimes called "Fly-up-the-creek," were seen August 25. This heron is not gregarious; we seldom see even one; but here they dotted the ponds, either stalking their prey or standing "frozen." Black-crowned night and California herons, also many greater yellow-legs were there.

DUCKS: H. K. Job aptly styles the pintail the greyhound among water fowl. They are usually the first ducks to reach their winter quarters. There were hundreds on the Santa Margarita River and several on the Sanctuary Lagoon August 18. Eleven pintail were seen on the Los Angeles River Settling Basins August 25.

LAND BIRDS: Valley quail brought off few young in the Burbank area, and those were soon reduced by their many enemies. The elderberry crop failed the

phainopeplas this season. No young were seen. Jean Dubois reports two to four band-tailed pigeons feeding on elderberries, July 1 to 15, on a tree in a yard in the center of Glendale.

Robins nested in the San Marino Park area (M.Parker), in Glendale (Getz) and in Los Angeles near the Wilshire Country Club (D). Rufous or Allen's hummingbirds were common in Griffith Park July 11 to August 15 (Justin Russell), Balboa back-bay area August 18 (D), Alhambra August 24 (Parker). A wave of 25 pileolated and a few yellow and lutescent warblers were seen in Griffith Park August 22 (J.R.)

WATCH NOW FOR: Returning wild ducks and shore birds; chipping, Gambel's and golden-crowned sparrows; juncos; ruby-crowned kinglets; Audubon's warblers.

-----CAROLINE H. DAUGHERTY
Field Leader

THE HIGH POINT of my vacation birding was the sight of a Great gray owl. This most uncommon bird, a resident of boreal North America and a straggler in the United States, flew across our path in the forests at Klamath Lake, Oregon, last July. Its huge wing-spread (4½ to 5 ft.) inspired the sudden stop of the car, and a moment later I was fortunate enough to see it perched on a low limb where its size was even more impressive. The gray coloring, heavy round head and great facial disks made its identification unquestionable. Using a large pine tree as a shield, I tried for a closer approach, but when I reached the tree my bird had vanished.

---BESS HOFFMAN

DEWEY NELSON, caretaker of the Los Angeles County Arboretum, reports that in July two herons, the Anthony's green and the black-crowned night, nested in his yard, which borders one side of the arboretum lake.

DO NOT FAIL to visit the conservation exhibit, called "Our Plundered Planet," on display until January 3 in the rotunda of the Los Angeles County Museum.

THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY
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THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

President.....Mrs. Mary V. Hood

Executive Secretary, Mrs. Bess M. Hoffman, 1112 $\frac{1}{2}$ S. Orange Dr., Los Angeles 35

Telephone: Walnut 8937

CALENDAR FOR OCTOBER, 1948

THURSDAY, Oct. 7. Field trip, Redondo Beach, park and shore areas. Special study of gulls, terns and loons. Take Redondo Motor Bus, Subway Terminal, 423 S. Hill St., Los Angeles, 8 A.M. Round trip fare, 86¢. Get off at Torrance Blvd., or as near the city park as possible. Take lunch. Bird walk will start from picnic tables in the park about 9:30 A.M., returning for lunch at 11:45. Program will follow lunch.

LEADER, Mrs. Caroline H. Daugherty; Charleston 6-1747

TUESDAY, Oct. 12, 7:45 P.M. and Saturday, Oct. 16, 2 P.M. Audubon Screen Tour, by Karl H. Maslowski. Admission by Screen Tours Club membership card only. See special announcement issued by Wm. K. DePue, 6055 Fair Ave., North Hollywood.

THURSDAY, Oct. 14. 7:00 P.M. Central Library, Fifth St. and Grand Ave., Los Angeles. First floor. Mrs. Elizabeth Burwell Goolden, First Vice-president, presiding.

Speaker, Dr. John S. Garth, Research Associate, Allan Hancock Foundation, University of Southern California. Topic, "Birds of the Galapagos Islands," illustrated with motion pictures. The study hour, in charge of Miss Louise A. Luckan, will be devoted to suggestions for the year's work. Come prepared to participate. Since the Library closes at 9 o'clock, it is important that the meeting begin promptly at 7.

THURSDAY, Oct. 21. 1:30 P.M. Los Angeles County Museum, Exposition Park. Mrs. Mary V. Hood, president, presiding. Mrs. Hood will show two series of her own kodachromes, - "The Brown Pelican and Other Denizens of the Coronado Islands" and "Highlights of a Summer in Tuolumne Meadows, 1948." Kenneth E. Stager, Curator of Ornithology and Mammalogy, the County Museum, will present "the bird of the month." At the close of the program there will be a tour of the Bird Hall, on the second floor, and of the Conservation Exhibit, "Our Plundered Planet," in the rotunda.

SUNDAY, Oct. 24. Field trip, San Dimas County Park. 8 A.M. From the center of Azusa (Foothill Blvd. and Azusa Ave.) go east 6.8 miles on Highway 66, turn left one-fourth mile to park entrance. Watch for "San Dimas Canyon" sign. Bring lunch.

LEADER, C. J. Parker; Atlantic 1-2490

THURSDAY, Oct. 28. Study Class, 10 to 12 Noon. Long Hall, Flummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd. From downtown Los Angeles take Santa Monica Blvd. - West Hollywood car; get off at Fuller Ave. and continue on foot one block west to park entrance.

First hour: The origin of birds; geological history of birds; development of birds from the egg. Second hour: Nature Poetry. Members are asked to bring one or more favorite poems on any phase of nature. Plan to spend the afternoon in our headquarters.

LEADER, George T. Hastings; Santa Monica 5-1137

THE SAN GABRIEL RIVER WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Mrs. O. M. Stultz, Director, 2594 South Durfee Ave., El Monte

This sanctuary is maintained by the National Audubon Society, with the cooperation of its Southern California affiliated societies. Reached by the Pacific Electric Pasadena-Long Beach bus. Telephone Tucker 7272 for information as to best connection. Regularly scheduled field trip the second Sunday of each month, starting from the entrance at 9 A.M. Sanctuary telephone: Whittier 6-3748.

Advisory Committee

Chairman: Mrs. J. H. Comby, Southern California Representative, National Audubon Society, 200 Kratt Lane, Whittier. Telephone: Whittier 41-4236.

Members: Mrs. Caroline H. Daugherty, Mrs. Anna B. Young, Mr. Otto J. Zahn, Mr. Harlan Cate and Mrs. F. F. Pellissier.
