

Western Tanager



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SUGAR BOWL BIRDS

By HOWARD L. COGSWELL

This year, as last, Audubon Nature Camp staff and campers will be arriving at Norden, 7000 feet high in historic Donner Pass, in mid-June, amid the remnants of snowbanks only to find that the summer resident birds have already arrived by their own air-lift. The south-facing slope along the highway through the pass will be free of snow and the songs of Fox Sparrows, Green-tailed Towhees and Cassin's Finches will resound in the early summer sun there; but less than a mile and a half away it is still late winter. In the deep woods below the Sugar Bowl, mile-wide pocket next to the Sierran crest alongside Mt. Judah and Mt. Lincoln and protected from the sun and wind by Mt. Disney, the snow clings on into the calendar summer month even as it does below the volcanic agglomerate cliffs of the "Bowl" itself - depending upon how deep it has drifted the past winter.

In June it is melting fast and the Wood Pewees and Western Tanagers seem to feel that it should be gone, for they search continually for the all too meager fare of insects in and about the treetops over lingering snowbanks. They are not yet in full voice, nor are the Audubon's Warblers, also common in the woods. Only the Mountain Chickadees and the White-headed Woodpeckers and other such birds which can find their complete foraging and nesting requirements fulfilled by the trees themselves, together with the Juncos, always the first to take advantage of any little slope laid bare by the sun, are nesting there then. Such, at least, was the season in 1948 (said to be several weeks late). But wait!

The rapidity with which early spring is swamped out by a summer which compacts a full dozen wildflower shows into the meadows before it too is crowded out by the cooling and browning weather of August amazed all of us who spent a summer for the first time at this altitude. From the very first the White-crowned Sparrows sang their "O, say, see the pretty girl" steadily from the willow clumps in the meadow opposite the lodge and before two weeks of camp were over the herbs were up and the leaves out enough to offer hiding places for their nests, placed always at the spreading base of a willow, a pine sapling, or later on amid tall corn lilies. By early July the dawn chorus of bird song grew to full volume and a group of ardent volunteers rose at 3:15 A.M. to make a full scientific list of the awakening time of each species, beginning with a Hammond (or Wright, who is to say?), Flycatcher's "ps-see" at 3:39, followed by a Tanager's "prit-ic" and the first real song from the White-crowned Sparrows at 3:43½. A bit later the Hermit Thrush far off in the woods left us enraptured by his leisurely flutings, which every now and then go way off the top of the musical scale; and then, still before it was really light, came his cousin, the Robin, closer at hand, drowning out the fainter voices of both Kinglets and the far-off Thrush.

All during July nesting was the prime activity in the bird world about the lodge. For a time we had 7 Robin pairs all engaged in feeding young or incubating eggs at various corners of the buildings or in immediately adjacent trees. Cassin's Finches carried material for nests, but we never found them. A Williamson's Sapsucker pair, each in different dress, fed squealing young and chased chipmunks from their nesting hole 65 feet up in a tall red fir stub on the slope of Disney Peak. Campers who were assigned to watching and recording the activities of a given nest discovered that it was a most fascinating aspect of bird study - and illuminating, too. Few realized that parent chickadees, between the two of them, carry food to their nearly grown

young at the rate of once every 30-50 seconds - or that the Pine Grosbeak may not visit its three young oftener than once an hour or so, although it warbles softly from the woods all about the nest! The discovery of the nest of this robin-sized finch, almost as rare a sight ornithologically as any species in California, was a highlight of the summer; and many campers enjoyed keeping tab on it until the young left. Evening Grosbeaks were frequently seen, and a nest found a few miles away; but the more erratic Crossbills either did not get down to actual nesting, or successfully hid their homes from us.

No sooner are most birds nesting, however, than the first migrants arrive on their southward journey. Male Rufous Hummingbirds were present by early July, already free of nuptial duties in Oregon and Washington. For about a week they battled with male Calliope hummers around the thickets, now covered with bitter cherry blossoms or surrounded by lupines and elephants'-ears; and then the male Calliopes were gone, although the females stayed on to August to incubate the eggs and raise young without assistance - as is normal with hummingbirds. The migrant tide of Rufous hummers was swelled by many immatures and females before the month was out and the fury of their constant battles, although mostly sham, provided added interest and items for the notebook of August campers who sat for a while in the columbine field across the creek from the lodge.

Earlier in the season most of the warblers, of which there are nine species breeding in this section of the Sierra, were found more readily in our trips down to the Transition Zone forests, where black oaks and more abundant understory shrubs provided varied feeding and nesting habitats. Audubon's was common all summer in the conifers near the lodge and Pileolates in the willows of the meadow; Calaveras and MacGillivray's were heard singing (and seen by those with sharp eyes) in Ceanothus and cherry thickets amid the pines on more open slopes, and Hermits in the bit of more mature forest at Big Bend. A great influx of migrants came in August and then all these species, and Orange-crowned, Yellow, and Black-throated Gray as well, straggled in flocks through the woods about the lodge. Adults, outnumbered by the young of the year, were difficult

to see; and the absence of songs, indeed of most call notes except the non-specific "tsip" used by all warblers, led us to adopt a "Let them come to you" attitude. Vireos were mixed with these groups, all busily gleaning from the mountains' harvest of insects before their trip southward; and usually each flock would contain a few Chickadees, a Nuthatch or two, and maybe a Creeper as well.

Another bird, however, which had been conspicuous only at higher altitudes than the lodge earlier, came down in numbers in August. This was the Clark's Nutcracker, which we saw in flocks of up to 35 even down into the manzanita chaparral areas in American River Canyon. Observations on our trips over Mt. Rose on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe indicated that the crop of white-bark pine cones, upon which the Nutcrackers largely subsist in years of abundance, was practically nil. Mountain Quail and Blue Grouse were moving, too, up slope temporarily to take advantage of the ripening crops of berries with their growing broods. After camp was over they would be together for only a while and then the quail start their long trek afoot (in October, according to folks who live at Sugar Bowl the year around) down the mountain ahead of the winter's snows, whereas the grouse survive even deep snows by taking to the trees and feasting all winter on a monotonous diet of fir buds.

Thus the seasons change - even in California where 'tis said we have a year long "mild" climate. The birds at Sugar Bowl are adjusted to a rapid summer season which we coastal residents sometimes forget exists in our state. Audubon Nature Campers can, accordingly, experience either early spring, the rush of a Canadian summer, or the drama of impending on-sweep of autumn and winter - depending upon whether they attend an early or a late session at Sugar Bowl Lodge.

"God, keep some silent places for us still
Apart from those where man forever goes;
Some altars lit by sunset on the hill,
Or alcoves in the canyon wall where glows
The crystal drop of moisture on the fern,
While ancient firs bend tenderly above;
For souls of men must sometimes deeply
yearn
For silence such as this, to sense Thy
love."

(Author unknown to Editor)

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THE NATURAL HISTORY COURSE for youth

leaders, conducted by Mrs. Mary V. Hood and the Youth Leadership Committee of the Los Angeles Audubon Society on Wednesday evenings in the Educational Department of the County Museum ended fittingly with a field trip March 27. The subjects of Survival, Life Zones, Insects, Seashore Creatures, Nature Handicraft and Tracking were covered by experts who shared their knowledge and enthusiasm with the students, who represented such groups as teachers, boy and girl Scout leaders, Camp Fire Girls, Woodcraft Rangers, churches and the Forest Service.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the group was the sustained attendance and interest and the spirit of friendliness among the membership, shown by the sharing and swapping of hobby and collection materials, as well as adding to the store of information.

Minuteographed notes and bibliography of the various subjects were given out at each lecture, and a sales table was supplied with books and pamphlets pertaining to the subjects covered.

---ALICE LEWIS, Committee Chairman

THE INDIO-MECCA field trip March 27 attracted 38 members and guests, and the promise to show us the vermilion flycatcher and the Abert's towhee was brought to fruition by the leader, C. J. Parker. Among other birds seen were: Cactus wren, road-runner, Gambel's quail, verdin, cactus woodpecker and phainopepla. Miss Cecilia Foulke welcomed the group to the 46-acre estate of Dr. Johnson, at Mecca, and pointed out the nesting places of the vermilion flycatcher and the Texas night-hawk. Afternoon activity, while not devoid of bird study, centered around myriads of blooming desert flowers and the particular thrill of finding the beautiful desert lily, which is said to be blooming this year for the first time since 1941.

Altogether, we observed 36 species of birds and an even greater number of desert plants.

----PAUL M. SULLIVAN

THIS ISSUE OF THE Tanager is the last for the current fiscal year, which ends June 30. The editor wishes to express her sincere appreciation of the help extended her during the year. Notice of the field trip June 2 will be issued later

OBSERVATIONS

WATER BIRDS: Great concentrations WESTERN GREBES, off shore near Santa Monica, Apr. 7. BRANDT'S and BAIRD'S CORMORANTS nesting on bird rocks off Monterey shore with the ever-watchful Western Gulls standing around waiting for an unguarded egg snatch. Also, BLACK OYSTER-CATCHERS, in pairs, along rocky coast, Point Lobos Park, and PIGEON GUILLEMOTS, flying to and from recesses in nearby rock cliffs, Apr. 3.

LAND BIRDS: BAND-TAILED PIGEONS, pair, feeding off table near house window, El Monte, Miss Wakeman. MOURNING DOVES by the hundreds flocking over Griffith Park, Apr. 3, Justin Russell. ROADRUNNER, an unusual visitor in So. Pasadena yard, Apr. 11, Laura Greely.

HUMMINGBIRDS: Becoming more numerous. Abutilon and Cestrum shrubs in full bloom and full of nectar are a battle ground for these little warriors, Burbank yard, Daugherty. Apr. 8, Anna's, Black-chinned, Rufous and Allen's noted and on Apr. 11, male Costa's arrived. Marg. Parker reports Anna's (4), Allen's (5 males-few females), Fish Canyon-Mch. 8, and Rufous seen there Mch. 11-Mrs. Roy Rogers. In Vista, Mch. 26, Florence McDonald found Rufous.

ATTRACT Hummingbirds by planting Abutilon and Cestrum Shrubs.

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER, Burbank, Mch. 26. WESTERN FLYCATCHER, Griffith Park, Apr. 3, Russell. PHAINOPEPLAS arrived in their old Burbank haunts Apr. 11, Daugherty. GRAY and WARBLING VIREOS, Calaveras, Black-throated Gray, MacGillivray's and Golden Pileolated WARBLERS, observed Apr. 8, in San Diego area-Alice Bowersock.

ORIOLES: Arizona Hooded arrived at Burbank, Mch. 21. In El Monte, Bullock's on Mch. 26, Hazel Lewis. A pair of Bullock's in bird bath, Los Angeles, Mrs. Morain, Apr. 3.

RARITIES: Around Mch. 26, San Gabriel River Wildlife Sanctuary, Gertrude Woods found the rich songster of the east, the CATBIRD, an extremely rare find. A few days later, Miss Wilson, of Banning, observed a CATBIRD in that area. On Apr. 10, in S.G.R.W. Sanctuary, Alma Stultz found the seldom seen BLACK and WHITE WARBLER.

WATCH NOW FOR: Wandering Tattler, Knot, Phalaropes, Terns. Black-chinned and Costa's Hummingbirds, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Russet-backed Thrush, Long-tailed Chat.

----Caroline H. Daugherty

THE ASILOMAR CONVENTION

The National Audubon Society with its California affiliates held a conference at Asilomar April 1-3, 1949. Conditions were ideal for the meeting. The weather was perfect, the setting on Beautiful Monterey Bay superb, and the delegates were privileged to have the dynamic leadership of President John H. Baker, Master of Ceremonies, who had painstakingly arranged the program of thirty-five reports from various California districts. The Monterey Peninsula Audubon acted as host and a warm feeling of friendliness and cooperation was evident throughout all the sessions.

Los Angeles Audubon had the largest delegation, 22 members. Eight other societies sent delegates. It was inspiring to meet them and to hear reports of their work.

The central theme of the conference was Conservation, with the duty of youth training being stressed by practically all the speakers as a fundamental of Audubon work.

Lack of space forbids mention of the excellent talks made by delegates from cooperating organizations, some twenty of them, all having to do with the important work of training youth along conservation lines special attention being given to the projects in California.

Los Angeles members were proud of the showing made by our representative, Mrs. Mary V. Hood, who covered in a comprehensive talk the many activities of our society. She was given enthusiastic applause. Copies of the April issue of THE WESTERN Tanager were distributed.

There was an exhibit of beautiful bird paintings, some of the most striking being the work of Artist Adamson, of Berkeley. A highlight of the evening program was the showing of the charming motion picture in color, "Birds of a Feather" filmed by Mrs. Laurel Reynolds. Films of the Audubon Nature Camps in California and Texas were most interesting, as was the color film of the work of the 4-H Clubs.

The Sunday morning field trips, captained by members of the Norden Camp staff had each an enthusiastic following.

----HELEN W. SHEARER

DO NOT FAIL TO ATTEND the program meeting May 19 and participate in the election of our new officers, nominated at the April meeting.

THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

President Mrs. Mary V. Hood
Secretary, Mrs. Bess M Hoffman, 1112½ S. Orange Dr., Los Angeles 35, Walnut 8937

CALENDAR FOR MAY, 1949

THURSDAY, May 5. Field Trip...to the Dorothy May Tucker Memorial Bird Sanctuary, at "Oakwood" in Modjeska Canyon and a stop for birding in Irvine Park. There will be Hummingbirds at the Sanctuary and Blue Grosbeaks at their old stand. White-tailed Kites, plus many other species of birds. Antelope Valley wild flowers are unpredictable this season, but we know we shall see some on this trip. Our Tanner Motor Bus will leave Los Angeles, 6th & Olive Sts. (Park side) at 8:15 A.M., returning around 4:30 P.M. in Los Angeles. Bus will run via Whittier, Fullerton, Anaheim, Orange and El Modena, through Santiago Canyon to Oakwood in Modjeska Canyon. Special round trip fare \$1.85.. please have exact change. Take lunch. PLEASE MAKE RESERVATIONS EARLY with Miss Edith Crane, 4925½ Cimarron St., Los Angeles 37, AXminster 2-8458.

Leader...Mrs. Caroline H. Daugherty.....CHARleston 6-1747

THURSDAY, May 12. 7 P.M. Los Angeles Central Library, Fifth St. and Grand Avenue. First floor. Mrs. Elizabeth B. Goolden, First Vice-President, presiding. The speaker of the evening, Mr. E. V. Duff; his subject, "One of the Great Ornithological Events of the Century." Mr. Duff is the assistant business manager and junior past president of the Cooper Ornithological Club.

THURSDAY, May 19. 1:30 P.M. Los Angeles County Museum, Exposition Park. Mrs. Hood presiding. Kenneth E. Stager, Curator of Ornithology, of the Museum, will present the "bird of the month." Business will include voting on the report of the Committee on Nominations for 1949-50. Speaker, Mr. Joseph E. Burgess, Science Teacher at Washington High School, who for the past 17 years has spent his summers as a national park ranger naturalist. He will speak on "A Vacation for Bird Lovers At Lassen Volcanic National Park", showing by means of kodachrome slides some of the park's scenic beauty, bird habitats and wildflowers.

SUNDAY, May 22. Field Trip, Charlton Flat Area. Drive up Angelus Crest Highway from La Canada district to the Flat. Do not turn left to the desert or right to Mt. Wilson. Meet at the Charlton Flat Ranger Station at 8:30 A.M. Bring lunch and spend the day. One of our best spots for mountain birds. Leader..Miss Dorothy E. Groner.

THURSDAY, May 26. Study Class, 10 to 12 Noon. Long Hall, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., on the Pacific Electric Santa Monica Blvd., -West Hollywood Line. Leader, George T. Hastings. The Program will be, First Hour: Migration of Birds; Second Hour; How Plants Got Their Names; Linnaeus the Namer; Kodachrome slides of some common flowers. Bring lunch and spend the afternoon at headquarters.

THE SAN GABRIEL RIVER WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

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C. W. Hamilton, Warden

Maintained by the National Audubon Society, with the cooperation of its Southern California affiliated societies. Regularly scheduled field trip the second Sunday of each month, starting from the entrance at 9 A. M.

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