

Western Tanager



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HIGHLIGHTS FROM A CROSS COUNTRY TRIP

This summer on a 7500 mile trip my husband and I renewed acquaintance with old friends in Nature and made many new ones. Highways and more often byways led us across the country, through the Southern States to the Gulf and the Atlantic Ocean, back through the Central States after a short visit to Audubon headquarters in New York.

Our first thrill was a Mississippi Kite, which dipped and glided close overhead. Subsequently we saw these birds in four different areas. Here in Texas the fields were gardens of wild flowers, - Caillardias, Godetias, a small daisy-like flower and purple thistles, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Orchard Orioles were in evidence, and Chuck-will's-widows and Eastern Screech Owls called in the night.

On previous trips the Cassin's Sparrow had eluded us, but we saw him at his best early one morning in New Mexico. This little gray bird fascinated us as he flew up into the air from the top of a shrub, singing as he rose, then flutteringly descended to a nearby shrub, waited a few moments, then did it all over again. Here also Bob Whites sang robustly, and Painted Buntings with their incredible colors perched in the full sun on the tree tops.

Brick paved roads led us up to the Possum Kingdom State Park where beautiful oak shaded hillsides shimmered in the hot sun. Night found us a few miles away in another tiny state park at Mineral Wells. Where a small stream flowed under a bridge shaped like a Gothic arch a lone Mallard swam busily about. In the early evening hours a Titmouse called and Chuck-will's-widow said over and over again "Chuck a chunk of white oak, widow," or so it was interpreted to me.

Although not unfamiliar with the South, its swamps, waterways and tropical vegetation lured us again along the trail of cypress, huge oaks, tupelo and tulip trees. At Bellefontaine State Park on Lake Pontchartrain, La. we wandered among the gigantic oaks festooned with long veils of smoke colored "moss." This is the old Mandeville Plantation and here we heard again the Carolina Wren, a Carolina Chickadee looked us over and a pair of Parula Warblers flew in and out from their nest in a banner of hanging "moss." The Redbird, as the Cardinal is called, lured us here and on other occasions with his song which is more vigorous and varied in pattern than that which we know.

A day of driving along the Gulf brought much appreciated cool breezes, and the beautiful aquamarine water as it lapped the snowy beaches was a sight long to be remembered. Schools of porpoises frolicked near the shore, and as we travelled over bridges and causeways that spanned the bays and the inlets that come to meet the gulf, gulls and terns lazily idling through the clear air, we felt very far from the turbulent world in which we live. On a small lagoon among a flock of shore birds and fish crows a Black Skimmer gleaned with his pendulous lower mandible, flying only a few inches above the water, back and forth in precise rows as a farmer would plow his field.

For the first time we saw the Limpkin, one of America's rare birds. This unbelievable inhabitant of the swamps is found in Florida and Georgia. Our first acquaintance with this dark brown bird with white spots and strips was from a small boat,

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THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

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OUR EMBLEMS ---THE MARIPOSA LILY

Among the most beautiful western wild
flowers are the Mariposa or Butterfly
Lilies. There are some forty species of
Calochortus, natives of the western
states, most of them of California. Our
emblem is Calochortus venustus, the "charm-
ing beautiful grass." From the bulb-like
stem each spring a few slender leaves come
up to be followed by a stalk bearing dain-
ty bowl-shaped blossoms, pale rose or li-
lac in color with a reddish blotch near
the base of each of the three petals. In
Wild Flowers of the West, Edith Clements
says "Like a swarm of bright butterflies
are these Mariposas, fluttering their gay
banners under the caress of the breeze.
Their petals wear many colors from white
to lilac and deep wine-red, marked with
deeper blotches of contrasting tint."

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky;
So was it when my life began
So is it now I am a man;
So be when I shall grow old,
Or let me die.

--Wordsworth

A message from the Chairman of the
National Membership Committee:

"Like me you are probably fond of
the outdoors. You like birds, trees,
flowers - all forms of wild life- the
wind in your face- the bark of the fox
in the moonlight or the song of the thrush
'in the cool gray hush of the dusk, in
the dim green place of the tress,' You
are of the lucky company that
'Finds tongues in trees, books in the
running brooks,

Sermons in stones, and good in every thing.

These things in which we take de-
light are being attacked, torn down, shot
down, cut down and blotted out. It is
economic folly to waste beneficial ele-
ments of our national life. It is unin-
telligent to let ignorance, selfishness
and carelessness prevail when enlight-
ened opinion and united effort can make
the world around us a better, kindlier
and more beautiful place.

For ourselves and our children, for
health and happiness, we should join in
the fight to preserve and protect the
wildlife that remains of the vast heri-
tage that was once the wonder and treas-
ure of this country. Alone, one person
can do little. But many thousands, in an
efficient organization, can do great work.
The National Audubon Society is such an
organization, wide in scope, strong in
principle, rich in ideals and fearless
in action for the fine things we cherish
today and hopes we have for the future.
I feel it an honor to have been a direc-
tor of this body. I hope you take pride
in being a member of it.

John Kieran"

WE ARE HAPPY TO WELCOME

THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS:

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and as we glided over the dark water around the knees of the cypress trees we heard the eerie cry of the Limpkin before we saw it standing in a tangle of vegetation. This ibis-like bird is not easily alarmed and we were quite close to it. Our attention was called to clumps of pearly white eggs, grape size, attached to reed stems and tree roots. These are snail eggs and upon them the Limpkin feeds, an example of extreme specialization in which nature indulges now and then. All about us were evidences of this environment so strange to us. Alligators were snoozing in the sun, their eyes and snouts above the water. Nearby was a handy cafeteria for them in a row of unsuspecting turtles sunning themselves on a half submerged log. On a tall dead tree was an Osprey's nest with adult birds and several half-grown nestlings. Little Blue and Ward's Herons posed on small islands made by the tree roots and a Cottonmouth Moccasin lay gracefully draped over some roots.

We took a short boat trip into the Okefinoke swamp in the locale where the picture "Swamp Water" was filmed. Baby alligators were playing around and we had an excellent view of the Anhinga with his beautiful silvery etched back. The usual herons and a White-faced Ibis appeared. The highlight was a Prothonotary Warbler, in full view and singing. We climbed the 280 foot tower from which we could see for miles in every direction the vast expanse of this mysterious country, with its lakes, water prairies and trembling earth, which in its primitive state was the home of more species of wildlife than any other spot in the United States.

We were captivated by the charm and beauty of the Shenandoah Valley as we saw it from the Blue Ridge Mountains. Here we made the acquaintance of the Chestnut-sided Warbler, and the Chewink had a good time "fooling" us with his song. It is a land of orderly fields, with brilliant orange-flowered milkweed and acres of pungent fennel. Over all broods the delicate haze of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Space will not permit a complete account of this interesting experience, but I cannot close without mentioning that gem, the Roosevelt Sanctuary at Oyster Bay on Long Island. This twelve acres of trees

other plants and bird life in the shadow of the grave of Theodore Roosevelt, seems a perfectly balanced unit of nature. Here the elusive Ovenbird calling his "teacher, teacher" with an eastern accent came into view, and Blue-winged Warblers bathe in the pool. A Broad-winged Hawk flew through the trees. It was a treat to walk along the woodsy path in the dappled shadows, where so many, including T. R. himself, have enjoyed those things which never grow old.

We followed just a narrow ribbon across the country, but we too can say, "This is America and we love it."

-- Erna Comby

TANAGERS - A CORRECTION

Attention has been called to errors in our October number in the article Our Emblems - The Western Tanager. There are three Tanagers in the west: the Hepatic Tanager is found from Arizona to western Texas; the Cooper's Tanager, a subspecies of the eastern Summer Tanager, breeds from southern Nevada to Texas, and comes into California near the Colorado River, and our Western Tanager. Ordinarily found only in the west it has been found a few times as far east as Maine. In the fall the male Tanager loses the red of his head more or less completely; the yellow and black of the body remain much as in summer.

Miss Ruby Curry reports the following seen in her backyard: two Gambel's Sparrows, attracted by corn meal thrown out for them, stood facing one another, about six inches apart. One lifted his head and sang. As soon as he stopped the other lifted his head and sang. Seven or eight times they repeated this singing alternately with their bills raised. Miss Curry asks do you suppose they were saying grace, or just greeting an old pal?

It is reported of one of our members (Wordsworth would certainly have considered her a kindred spirit) that on seeing a new bird in the south jumped up and down in the road, exclaiming over and over, "It's a Gull-billed Tern, it's a Gull-billed Tern."

From our Exchanges:--

The Gull, the monthly publication of the Golden Gate Audubon Society reports an unusually fine ocean trip in September out to and around the Farallon Islands. On the trip members saw well the Black-footed Albatross, Sooty, Pink-footed and Gray-backed Shearwaters, Murres, Auklets, Guillemots, Jaegers and at least a dozen other birds. The leader of the trip who writes the account was Howard Cogswell.

The Topeka, Kansas, Audubon News for July reports that during the first six months of this year their members reported 233 species of birds seen. The list published is a composite of lists turned in by 15 individuals or small groups. We note on the list 6 species of geese, 20 ducks, 14 hawks and two eagles, 27 warblers, and 21 sparrows. Good birding, Topeka!

In the October number of the Audubon Warbler, published by the Oregon Audubon Society is an article by their president, Mr. Phil E. Lewis, on a conference called by the governor of the state on a project to build a dam and cut off the water from some 8000 acres of Crump Lake in order to raise grain on the area. The lake is now an important breeding and feeding site for waterfowl. Visiting some islands in the lake Mr. Lewis reports "So many gulls and white pelicans covered the islands that, on approaching by boat, it looked like a densely covered flower garden. When on one of the islands we had to be very careful lest we step in the nests. We hope the Audubon Society and others interested in conservation of bird life and game may be successful in having the project stopped.

At the entrance to the Roosevelt Bird Sanctuary at Oyster Bay, N. Y. stands a fountain with the statue of a little girl holding a flat dish, with birds perched on the edge. The former director, Dr. Swope, said that a visiting class of children asked why a little girl was at the Roosevelt sanctuary. We replied that the fountain represented the Spirit of Youth, because Theodore Roosevelt always retained the enthusiasm of youth. The pupils did not grasp the idea till their teacher explained, "Theodore Roosevelt always got a kick out of things."

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OBSERVATIONS

IN THE MARSHES: Among the usual numbers of Willets, Godwits, Curlews, Dowitchers, Plovers, Least and Western Sandpipers, - 3 Pectoral Sandpipers, Oct. 9 (Southwest Bird Study Club); 1 Knot, Oct. 5 (Audubon Society Field Trip); 30 or more Red-backed Sandpipers, Northern Phalaropes at Bolsa Chica, Oct. 16 (Stultz).

WOODPECKERS AND FLYCATCHERS: Downy Woodpecker, Alhambra (Humphreys); a small migration of Ash-throated Flycatchers in Burbank, Aug. 24 (Daugherty); a Vermilion Flycatcher at Sanctuary Oct. 11 (S).

CHICKADEES, THRUSHES, ETC.: Mountain Chickadees from Sept. 15 on in Eagle Rock (Curry); Hermit Thrush Oct. 10 (D); Waxwings Sept. 19 (Wait); many Robins at Crestline Sept. 30 (Pope), at Sanctuary from Oct. 8, eating ripe persimmons; many Western Bluebirds Burbank Oct. 8 (D); Pipits at La Crescenta Oct. 9 (Conklin); Western Gnatcatchers and 1 Phainopepla, Sanctuary Oct. 8.

VIREOS AND WARBLERS: Hutton's Vireo, Oct. 8 Sunland (Shearer), Warbling Vireo Aug. 30 Burbank (D); The first Audubon Warbler on Oct. 1 (C).

SPARROWS AND FINCHES: Small flock of Purple Finches with many Goldfinches, Sunland Oct. 8 (Shearer); Male Western Tanager in winter plumage, Santa Monica, Oct. 12, very late for our area; Gambel's Sparrows, adults, Eagle Rock Sept 23, immatures on Oct. 8 (C); first seen at Sanctuary Sept. 30 (Gould), Santa Monica same day; White-throated Sparrow, Sanctuary Sept. 30 (Gould); Lincoln Sparrow, Topanga, Oct. 15.

HAWKS AT POINT MUGU: William Laskey saw on Oct. 18 5 Marsh Hawks; 11 Red-tailed Hawks; 18 American Kestrels (Sparrow Hawks); 19 White-tailed Kites (possibly some duplication, but seen over a wide area and 6 at one time); Cooper's Hawk feeding on a Redwinged Blackbird; 1 Merlin (Pigeon Hawk) the black phase; 1 Great-horned Owl; 10 Turkey Vultures.

WATCH NOW FOR: Wild Ducks on city ponds, Sooters on the ocean, Hermit Thrush, Ruby-Crowned Kinglet, Junco, Fox Sparrow, Purple Finch and Pipits.