

Western



Tanager

PUBLISHED MONTHLY, SEPTEMBER TO MAY
BY THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY, Inc.

THE LOS ANGELES BRANCH OF THE
NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 18

October 1951

Number 2

BIRDS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

A great many interesting facts about birds can be gathered from local newspapers of the 1870's and 1890's. Immense flocks of Sandhill Cranes, now rare, covered the hills near Ballona Creek. These great birds, with a wingspread greater than that of a swan, were so unafraid of man that hunters could go among them as among so many hens and kill large numbers by using their guns for clubs.

In migration season, great wedges of wild geese flew over Los Angeles (population then about 25,000) enroute to or from the coastal marshes. Their honk-honking could be heard plainly by people in their homes and offices.

A strange collision between migratory birds and modern civilization occurred in March, 1883. A flock of wild ducks journeying north at night ran afoul of the tall electric light mast illuminating several blocks at First Street near Alameda. Like moths blinded at a candle flame, they hurled themselves at the lamps. Nearly all of the lamps on the mast were found broken next morning, and half a dozen dead ducks were picked up at its base.

Ducks, geese and other water birds found a veritable paradise in the vast marshes then extending behind the Venice ocean front sand dunes from Ballona Creek almost to the present Ocean Park. In November, 1886, an observer standing on the Del Rey hills saw on the blue ocean below him a flock of at least ten thousand ducks and geese, riding the waves so close together that they seemed a solid mass. Just beyond them was another flock nearly as large, and to the left still another. When such aggregations of birds rose into the air they literally darkened the sky.

Hunters, unhampered by game laws of the modern type, slaughtered the birds wholesale. At Tell's Lagoon, in the present canal area of Venice, seventeen men one day in January, 1876, killed 1326 ducks and 28 geese, a bag not at all uncommon at the time. The surplus game was sold in the open market at Los Angeles at about 5 for \$1.00, in the country for a penny apiece. In Santa Monica lived a professional hunter typical of a considerable number of such persons, who earned an average of \$5.00 a day the year round. In one winter, between September 15 and March 15, he shot 2200 ducks and 400 wild geese, besides thousands of snipe, plover, curlews, rabbits and other game. So profitable was the business over a period of years that he was enabled to purchase his own home plus half a dozen building lots.

Quail were so numerous in the Southland that a packing company was established in 1881 to can the multitude of carcasses brought in.

The principal newspapers in the Los Angeles of 1870 - 1900 were the Herald, Star, Express, Commercial, Tribune and Times. Certain editors seemed more interested in nature than others, but no one of them would really qualify as a conservationist by present standards. There was one exception, possibly, in Southern California, the scientific minded editor of the Santa Barbara Press in the 1880's. He told with a good deal of ironical applause about the business of sling-shooting Santa Barbara hummingbirds on a large scale for use, when stuffed, as decorations for ladies hats.

Henry W. Splitter

THE WESTERN Tanager

Published monthly, Sept. through May by the Los Angeles Audubon Society, Inc. \$1.00 per year, free to members.
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THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY, Inc.

Founded 1910, for the protection of Birds, other Animals and Plant Life.

Membership ---

Joint with the National Audubon Soc., including subscription to Audubon Magazine, \$5.00.

Local, Student (12 to 18 yrs.) \$1.00; Annual \$2.00; Life \$25.00; Patron \$100.
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 Miss Jeanette Wright,
 1819 Washington Ave., Santa Monica

To be scientific should not necessitate being abstruse. To be worth while a truth need not of necessity be unpleasant, nor need it lack beauty.

Loye Miller - Lifelong Boyhood

This year California will have a single, instead of split, duck hunting season, from Oct. 26 to Dec. 24. A good time to stay away from gun club areas.

Through their endowment for locomotion, great numbers of birds may be thought of as inhabitants of a Garden of Eden wherein not even one kind of fruit is forbidden them. Ritter -

The California Woodpecker and I.

OUR PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This month begins our meetings for the coming year. We have made some changes from last year. Because the Tanager comes out the first of the month, it seems wise to have our afternoon program on the first Thursday. It will always be at the L.A. County Museum at 1:30 in the afternoon. So, should the Tanager be delayed in reaching you, or the first Thursday be very early in the month, our members will always know where and when the meeting will be.

The field trip has been changed to the third Thursday. This should give everyone ample time to plan for the trip, which can be reached by public transportation or private car. And these trips will deal with all phases of natural history.

The evening meeting will come in the second week, but will be on Wednesday instead of Thursday because this night is open at the County Museum. These meetings are planned by the Leadership Training committee and I am sure our members will find them of outstanding quality.

The fourth week in the month will have the Sunday field trip, also a study meeting on the Thursday in Flummer Park. The Sunday trips are planned for the serious bird student and will feature longer trips. We will plan to have leaders for beginning students as well as for the more advanced.

We hope these changes do not seem too radical and that everyone will find them satisfactory. But if not, suggestions from the membership are in order.

Maybelle DeMay.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON

The Southern California Audubon Branches and affiliates will gather for the annual workshop session in the Marine Room of the Laguna Beach Hotel, with the Laguna Beach Audubon Society as host club, on October 20.

Topics of interest regarding our Audubon program will be presented and will be followed by discussion in the assembly. Details of the meeting will be available later. Luncheon, tax and tip will be \$1.75. Make reservations early with your President, by October 15th at latest. Let us unite for the advancement of the Audubon cause in Southern California.

Erna Comby

SEA-GOING SNIPE

Down from the far north they stream, millions of tiny dark gray and white birds, along both coasts of America, (though most abundant along the Pacific), down the center of the continent to the Gulf, along the coast of Europe and across to the Mediterranean, across Asia to the Indian Ocean and down the coast past Japan and the Philippines. We are fascinated as we watch them by scores and hundreds, light as thistledown on the water of our ponds and sloughs, or just beyond the line of breakers in the ocean, as they zig zag erratically about or spin around with constant quick jabs of their needle-sharp bills for the minute organisms they stir up. Loye Miller in *Lifelong Boyhood* introduces us to these birds, - "Those remarkable sea going snipe, the Phalaropes. Technically they are classed with the wading birds, marsh dwellers, mud paddlers - those bare-footed little chaps who roll their trousers up as high as anatomy will permit and dabble about the shores of ponds or help animate the sandy beaches." On they go, stopping for a week or a month where food is plentiful, down to far southern oceans. Dr. Miller tells of seeing red Phalaropes in February rafting in uncountable numbers in the Gulf of Tehuantepec on the southern coast of Mexico, adding "from here to Juan Fernandez is winter home for the Pacific squadrons of the red Phalaropes." Beebe says, in *Galapagos-World's End*, "Phalaropes seem little adapted for pelagic life, and yet here in the Pacific thousands of miles from land, I have seen them in enormous flocks, daring wind and water, trusting to the bounty of the sea for food and to the buoyancy of their dense plumage and air-filled bodies for safety." "In a half gale I have watched their marvelous seamanship, paddling steadily up wind, able by some perfected knowledge to keep in the sliding, shifting valleys and free of the choking spume drift."

Then in April or May the mysterious something happens - call it instinct, a phase of the life cycle, a stimulus from hormones from the developing gonads, - and they start back for the north. By June they are near the Arctic Circle. The female has now donned her brilliant nuptial dress with bright rufous on the neck and back and ardently wooes the plainer, coy male, she selects a suitable site near some pond or river bank and encourages him to make a simple nest with bits of moss or grass. Here she lays the three or four mottled eggs, then leaves to the truly hen-pecked mate the duties of incubation and caring for the downy young till they are fully feathered and ready for the long, leisurely southern trip.

Red Phalaropes breed above the Arctic Circle all around the pole and migrate chiefly well off shore, only rarely visiting our shores. Northern Phalaropes breed both above and below the Circle, as far south as the Aleutian Islands and Scotland. It is these northern Phalaropes that we see in such great numbers, (one of our members reports seeing "zillions" in the Newport Back Bay) and which are seen on inland lakes. The third member of the family, Wilson's Phalarope, less common with us than the northern, are easily distinguished by their larger size, lighter gray color, and, when they fly, by the conspicuous white rump. They are entirely American, breeding from British Columbia and north-eastern California to Kansas, formerly to New Jersey and New York. They winter from central Chile and Argentine to Patagonia and the Falkland Islands. They were first described from Paraguay in a natural history of that country.

In my century-old *Birds of New York* the northern Phalarope is called the Hypoborean Lobefoot and the Wilson's Holopod. Of the latter it is said that they are abundant near the coast of Maine and are called Sea Geese by the fishermen. The Peruvian fishermen according to Murphy in his *Oceanic Birds*, call Phalaropes, *Pollitos del Mar*, (little sea chickens).

The Western Tanager has observations for August and September every year, sometimes for October, of northern and Wilson's Phalaropes. In 1941 Charles Michael reported a northern at Bolsa Chico in December. Curiously we have never had observations of them in May when on their return trip. Possibly because they spend only days here at that time, instead of the weeks they are with us in the fall.

George T. Hastings

OBSERVATIONS

SHORE AND WATER BIRDS

American Egret and California Blue Heron at Sanctuary, Sept. 17 (Stultz)
60 Semi-palmated Plovers on the beach near Ballona Creek, Sept. 9 (Pyle, Hastings) Many Northern, 2 Red Phalaropes, Venice marsh Sept. 9 (Pyle, Small) 10 Northern at Devil's Gate Dam, Sept. 1, 2 on the Arboretum lake, Arcadia, Sept. 5 (Quattlebaum); Glaucous-winged Gull, Santa Monica, Sept. 9, first seen this season (Hastings). Elegant Terns still in considerable numbers (Pyle, and others) A Pomerian Jaeger on beach near Ballona Creek, Sept. 9. Approached to within a few feet and good pictures secured (Pyle, Small)

Man-O-War Bird, a rare visitor. On July 13 Bill Hawkins and Jerry Dobson found an immature bird at the Balboa Back Bay region. It had the white head of a young bird. "We had a close observation of it for about twenty minutes. Twice we saw it open its long forked tail. It was hunting low over the water, at times it would fly inches above the water picking up food from the surface."
QUAIL

California Quail and Ring-necked Pheasants raised young at Sanct. We see them almost every day (S)
PIGEONS, DOVES

Band-tailed Pigeons nesting in Monrovia Canyon, July 20 (Irma Rogers)
Mourning and Chinese Doves in increased numbers at Eagle Rock, Sept. 1 (Curry)
GOLDEN EAGLE

Seen frequently over Fish Canyon area (Rogers)
HUMMINGBIRDS

Many Allens and Rufous feeding on wild tobacco, Fish Canyon, July 10 (Rogers)
Anna's and Black-chinned in lively skirmishes about feeders till the latter left on Sept. 12 at Sanctuary (S) Young Anna's practicing diving flights in early September, apparently preparing for early nesting, Eagle Rock (C)

FLYCATCHERS

Many Olive-sided in woodland at Sanct. Sept. 17, being chased by Black Phoeby (S)
SWALLOWS

Purple Martins over northern part of Monrovia all summer (Rogers)

THRUSH

Several pairs of Russet-backed nested in Monrovia Canyon, singing early and late from early June to mid July (Rogers)
Flocks of Western Bluebirds, Eagle Rock, Sept. 14 (C)

KINGLET

Golden-crowned, in yard and at bird bath, quite fearless and allowed close approach, Santa Monica, Sept. 9.

(Marguerite Driver)

WARBLERS

Sept. 17, the trees at the Sanctuary seemed full of warblers - Calaveras, Macgillivray's, Black-throated Gray, Pileolated. (S)

ORIOLES

Arizona Hooded, females and young, Monrovia till Sept. 10 (Rogers)

3 young Hooded at feeders in Sanct. in early Sept., all left by the 15th. (S)

GOLDFINCHES

Green-backed singing more than formerly at Eagle Rock, Sept. 14 (C)

Willow, Green-backed and Lawrence's feeding on seeds of evening primrose Sanct., from last of Aug. to date (S)

The wild grape crop at the Sanct. is much better than last year, Mockingbirds, Thrashers and Cardinals are feasting (S)

A DELIGHTFUL EXPERIENCE

Those who were fortunate enough to have attended the Sunday field trip on May 27 at Buckhorn Flats, had one of the most delightful experiences that come to a bird finder. During a rest period when everyone was seated quietly, Howard Cogswell, the leader, began to whistle the call of the male pygmy owl. In a few moments the small birds started to gather together, working their ways down through the trees to within a few feet of the performer. First a chickadee, followed by two more, then a wood pewee, Audubon, black-throated gray and orange-crowned warblers, Cassin's and warbling vireos, and finally a green-tailed Towhee which raised its chestnut crown from time to time in its excitement. Everyone present had fine close-up studies of the birds.

Dorothy Groner

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Officers - 1951 - 1952

President Mrs. Maybelle DeMay, 504 E. Oak St., El Segundo
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Calendar for OCTOBER, 1951

- Thursday - October 4. Afternoon Program Meeting, 1:30, in the Los Angeles County Museum, Exposition Park. Mrs. Mary V. Hood will show more of her beautiful kodachrome pictures and tell of nature work done during the spring and summer.
- Wednesday- October 10. Evening Meeting in the County Museum at 7 P.M. Enter at the south west corner of the building. Mrs. Hood will describe the adventures the Hoods had over a period of several years following On Matthes Trail as they located the spots where the famous geologist of the Sierras took pictures over twenty years ago. The pictures will show what changes have taken place in the back country of Yosemite.
- Thursday - October 18. Field Trip to Palisades Park, Santa Monica and the ocean front. Meet at the foot of Santa Monica Boulevard in Palisades Park at 9:30. For a study of trees of the park and gulls and other birds of the beach. Take bus on Olive Street between 6th and 7th marked Santa Monica or the Santa Monica bus at the terminal on Olive Street between 4th and 5th. Time by bus 1 hour. By car come out Wilshire, Santa Monica or Olympic Boulevard to Santa Monica. Bring lunch. Leader - George T. Hastings.
- Thursday - October 25. Study Class at 10 A.M. in Plummer Park. Organization of the class and planning for the season. An examination of some of the bird skins in our collection. Mr. W. Scott Lewis will give a nature talk illustrated with kodachrome slides.
- Sunday - October 28. Field Trip to Irvine Park and vicinity. Meet at park entrance at 9 A.M. Bring lunch. Take Highway 10 (Firestone) or 101 to Orange. Follow signs to Orange and Irvine Park.

VISITORS WILL BE WELCOME AT ANY OF THE MEETINGS OR TRIPS

THE SAN GABRIEL RIVER WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

664 N. Durfee Avenue, El Monte - Telephone FOrrrest 0-1872
Mrs. O. M. Stultz, Director Mrs. E. Gertrude Woods, Assistant Director
Maintained by the National Audubon Society, with the cooperation of the Southern California affiliated societies and branches.
Regularly scheduled field trips the second Sunday of each month, starting from the entrance at 9 A.M.