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IMPRESSIONS OF A NATURE HOBBYIST

William L. Lloyd

This is not written to inform you of new and startling facts about birds, but to reifresh your memory regarding interesting things that are too commonplace to attract your attention.

Most birds are constructed for a life in the air. The leg and wing bones are tubes designed to give the utmost strength with the least weight. The vertebrae of the trunk have been fused together and with ribs and breast bone form a strong box to protect internal organs and make a base for the wing muscles. These great breast muscles are attached to a deep keel on the front of the breast bone. The eyes of most birds are on the sides of the head and see independently of each other, so that a robin on the lawn, might watch a cat with one eye and a worm with the other and judge the chances of securing the worm before the cat was upon it.

Few people realize the size of a bird's eye. It is so large that it fills all the forward part of the skull, pushing the brain far to the rear. The telescopic property of many birds' eyes is almost beyond belief. A hawk half a mile in the air is able to see a small bird or mouse on the ground. The feathers too are wonderfully adapted for flight. Wing feathers are so light and yet so strong and flexible that they enable a bird to maneuver and to power dive with a speed hard for the eye to follow, and stop within a few feet for a perfect landing. Feathers that cover the body serve chiefly to prevent the loss of the body heat and few substances are equal to them for insulation.

The modern bird has evolved by a great series of trials and errors. The first reptile-birds had strong teeth, and well-developed teeth meant heavy jaws which made them top heavy, so the present sharp, horny beak was developed.

Animals that must show great agility in the gathering of food or in escaping from enemies learn to walk on their toes. Watch a dog or cat, a deer or a horse, or a bird and you will find that it walks on its toes. A bird's heel is up near the feather line, in fact most people think of it as the knee.

Wading birds have very long legs and often a webbing between two toes to keep them from sinking so deeply in a soft bottom. Water birds carry the webbing to the tips of the toes to form swimming paddles. Ground birds have flexible toes that bend up which enables them to walk easily. Tree living birds spend so much time with their toes curled around twigs that they lack the toe flexibility of ground birds so must hop when on the ground.

Cords in a bird's toes run up behind the heel to the leg muscles. When these cords are stretched they curl the toes down, so when a bird prepares to sleep in a tree, it lowers the heel which puts the necessary strain on the toes to lock them around the perch and the bird may then sleep in safety.

In nest building birds have made use of most of the trades that man has developed later. Barn and cliff swallows make a cement of mud, which is in principle the masonry used by man. Kingfishers and bank swallows build tunnels, woodpeckers drill holes in trees, they are the wood workers. Orioles and many others make marvellous homes, they are the weavers.

Continued on bottom of Page 20

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 THE WESTERN Tanager

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THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY  
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 "To promote the study and protection of birds and other wildlife, plants, soil and water".

## MEMBERSHIP

Joint with the National Audubon Society, including subscription to Audubon Magazine, Regular \$5.00, Sustaining \$10.00, Active \$25.00, Supporting \$50.00.

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California Woodpeckers store, besides acorns from several species of oaks; hazel nuts, California walnuts, English walnuts, almonds, pecans, and date pits, cherry pits, Eucalyptus fruits, bracts of pine cones, pebbles and rock fragments.

Ritter

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 The California Woodpecker and I

California Office

THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY  
 639 Sutter St., San Francisco  
 William Goodall, Pacific Coast Representative  
 Sandy Sprunt, Assistant Representative.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Will I see you at our annual get-together on the third? I hope so, for what better way could there be to get the Christmas spirit early than to spend the afternoon enjoying a splendid program and visiting with friends of long standing and meeting others who will be friends of the future?

Then, at the other end of the month, of course, you will help with the Christmas Bird Count, to see how many of our feathered friends are staying with us, and what others, just "Tourists", have come to winter in our sunshine.

So, my sincere wish to you all is that from the dawn of December first, till it's departure on the thirty-first, you will find the full meaning of Christmas with its glorious message of peace on earth, good will to men.

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 Bessie Pope

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 SHORE BIRDS FLYING

I watch the lovely sight of a group suddenly turned into a constellation of birds, into a fugitive Pleiades whose living stars keep their chance positions; I watch the spiralling flight, the momentary tilts of the white bellies, the alternate shows of the clustered grayish backs. No aspect of nature on the beach is more mysterious to me than the flight of these shore bird constellations. The constellations form in an instant of time and in that same instant develops its own will. Birds which have been feeding yards apart from each other, each one individually busy for his individual body's sake, suddenly fuse into this new volition and flying, coast as one, tilt their dozen bodies as one, and as one wheel off on the course the new group has determined. There is no such thing as a lead bird or guide. By what means, by what method of communication does this will suffuse the living constellation that its dozen or more tiny brains know it and obey it in such an instancy of time?

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 Henry Beaton - The Outermost House

One of our library books seems to have interested someone so much that the borrower has neglected to return it. So, for the sake of others who might enjoy it, please return BIRDS OF THE BIBLE to Mrs. Salmon.

WREN-TITS REVISITED  
Loye Miller

My Springtime conference with the Wren-Tit as recounted in the September '53 issue of the Tanager, was such a pleasant experience that my next visit to Southern California took me promptly to the same spot on the steep wall of Tamescal Canyon. It was pleasant indian summer weather in mid-October. Nesting season was long past, the fall moult had been completed, food was abundant and probably the Wren-Tit had put on something of an undercoat of fat - just in case. Were his nerves also a little less near the surface perhaps? At any rate he was less ready to respond in defense of his territory. On October 13, at 4:30 p.m. I sat in exactly the same spot occupied on my April visits. Audubon's warblers were in extreme abundance and activity. A Mockingbird was in autumnal song on a nearby light pole - but no Wren-Tit was evident. I gave two "pipes" at ten second intervals and a Wren-Tit answered from well down the hill. He gave four pipes at three second intervals, then fell silent. He did not change location, and I could induce no further reaction. On October 17 at sunrise the hillside was in complete shadow. All was silent till after my sixth pipe when a bird answered fairly nearby (40 ft.). He piped four times at three second intervals, then remained silent. No further reaction could be induced. On the same spot at sunset it took ten of my pipings to rouse him. He piped four times, then was silent.

On October 18 at sunrise (7:30) it took nine pipings to rouse him. On the 20th at sunrise and again at 2:30 p.m. two birds were calling about 50 yards apart down the hill. I waited some minutes after they fell silent, then began piping. No reaction could be induced by my continued effort. However in the afternoon as I was enjoying the soft air and sunshine a bird was seen in the bush about 20 feet below me, I piped and he came to ten feet, then to six feet. He was silent though I was piping actively. He finally gave a few notes as he moved about the bush feeding among the clusters of sumac berries. I was struck by the ventriloquial effect of these notes. They were given at six feet but sounded as though the bird was 100 yards away. (There were no bushes at such a point). On the 25th at 10:00 a.m. I went down into the canyon and quietly entered the thicket from below. The sunshine was almost hot. Only the Audubon's warblers were vocal. I stood quietly in the thicket and piped and piped with no effect. Just as I was getting into the car fifty yards away, a Wren-Tit piped four times from where I had been standing trying to stimulate him.

I am almost ready to concede that in all these October visits I did most of the talking (some visitors enjoy such conversations) and what appeared to be replies may have been merely spontaneous and not stimulated. At any rate October gives the Wren-Tit an outlook different from that of April. But I had a lot of fun!

16th Annual CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT of the Los Angeles Audubon Society.

On Sunday, December 27 (rain or shine) we will take part in the bird count of the National Audubon Society. We have the same area as in other years and observers may, if they wish, have the same small area they covered last year. To make the count as complete as possible we need the help of all our members. If you can go with a party for the day, or if you will count the birds in your own yard or block, send your name and address as soon as possible to: Mr. Herb Clark, 518 So. Grand View Street, Los Angeles 57.

Herb is taking over in place of Bob Pyle - now in Hawaii - who did such a fine job last year. Last year 116 observers in our area counted 63,399 birds of 151 species. This was the largest number of observers and the largest total of birds seen we have ever had. No other count in the United States exceeded ours in the number of species, only one other equaled it - that of the Laguna Atascosa Refuge in southern Texas.

Of course not every bird in the area can be counted, to try and find what proportion of the birds were seen John Cunningham selected 18 small representative areas, figured what part they made of the whole, then had the birds in these small plots counted as accurately as possible and estimated that there were at least 235,000 birds in the area on that day.

### WHAT'S GONE ON IN THE SOCIETY

Grace H. Phillips, Historian

We got off to a good start with our Study Class at Plummer Park, October 22. Thirty-six members and guests were present. Our new Pacific Coast Representative, Mr. William Goodall spoke a few words. An Indian guest, Sunflower, gave a short talk on her writings about the Amerindians, their legends and the close tie they feel with all nature.

Mrs. W. Scott Lewis showed us some of our own color slides of Ballona Creek and some of the birds seen on the field trip to Playa Del Rey the previous week. Mr. Lewis's lecture on WATER AND LIFE was a tremendously fine presentation of the relation of water to all life on the planet.

The second hour, Mrs. Salmon, our librarian told of the books on our shelves and urged us to use and enjoy them. Mr. Hastings commented on three books giving the life of Audubon. Mrs. Philip Lewis read a short review of Brandt's BIRDS OF ARIZONA, and Miss Leta Adams added a few reminiscences of Mr. Brandt and his preparation of the book. Grace Phillips spoke briefly of Peattie's new book, THE NATURAL HISTORY OF WESTERN TREES.

A garden plant exchange is a new feature instituted by our President, who brought some bulbs and plants. Other members are asked to take part in this.

### Pelagic Bird Trip of October 25.

This will remain in memory as the "Fulmar Trip." It was our privilege to see a remarkable concentration of 30 of these birds about the bloated carcass of a defunct sea lion; two of these birds were in the white phase. The skipper carefully maneuvered the boat into the most advantageous

position while cameras clicked and film ran out. Alexander Sprunt, Jr., and his son Sandy each added a new bird to his "life list". There was some lively discussion among our sharpest bird students concerning the two species of Jaeger seen - were the tail feathers blunt or pointed? Among birds seen were two Sabine's Gulls, Black Oystercatcher, Red Phalarope, Sooty, Pink-footed, Slender-billed and Black-vented Shearwaters and others. Two birds that were quite out of place were an Audubon's Warbler seen in flight 10 miles west of the islands and a coot feeding on kelp 17 miles out. Forty-three members and friends of the society made the trip.

Dorothy Groner.

The Thursday Afternoon Program Meeting at the museum was well attended.

Mrs. Roland Ross told of a proposed Field Trip to Mexico during the Christmas vacation sponsored by the Los Angeles State College and led by Mr. Ross of the college. Mrs. Ross showed colored slides of the region of Acoconeta where previous trips were made. One showed a group of egrets nesting in tree tops, another a conclave of brown pelicans, and several of Mexico's "Sanitation Squad" - turkey vultures. On display were skins of colorful Mexican birds, one a jay with a blue tail over 12 inches long.

Anyone interested in going on this trip should get in touch with Mr. Ross at the College.

Mrs. Mary Hood told of her work as Nature Collaborator at Yosemite National Park during the summer; giving nature talks to children, taking photographs for the staff, etc. Although funds for nature study in the National Parks has been much reduced, Yosemite is one Park that is still trying to interest and instruct visitors in the lore of the out-of-doors.

### JINGLE BELLS!

Thursday afternoon, December 3 at Fiesta Hall, Plummer Park, 2 o'clock. This is the only indoor program of the month. So all come.

Mrs. Nell Lewis, our Hospitality Chairman, is reviving the Christmas Tree for the Birds, which was part of the Christmas party in earlier days, so bring packets of seeds, raisins, dry bread, etc., as gifts for the birds around Audubon House.

There will be a program of music and readings at 2 o'clock, followed by refreshments and the "party" at 3. From the Audubon Center at El Monte and our Sale's Chairman, Mrs. Christianson, there will be for sale Bird and other Nature Books, Nature Games, cards, note paper and other things suitable for Christmas gifts.

Take Pacific Electric, West Hollywood bus to Fuller Ave., walk one block west.

This is YOUR party.

Join us in a sociable time.

### CHRISTMAS PARTY!

## OBSERVATIONS

Ruby Curry

- DUCKS, GEESE:** Elsie Kennedy and Helen Reed saw in Malibu Lagoon, Nov. 11, a large Canada Goose and one Black Brant, also many Shovellers, Ruddy Ducks and others.
- HAWKS:** Oct. 19, Red-tailed, Buckhorn Camp; Oct. 26, Sharp-shinned, Coopers, Sparrow, Oak Grove Park.
- QUAIL:** Oct. 26, covey of 5 Valley Quail, Oak Grove Park; 20 daily, Eagle Rock (C.).
- SHOREBIRDS:** Red Phalarope, a dead one picked up on beach, Santa Monica, Nov. 2 (David Modell).
- PIGEONS:** Oct. 26, small flock, Bandtail, Oak Grove Park.
- ROAD RUNNER:** Oct. 20, at Ave. 60 bridge, (K. Hardt); Mrs. Lillian Conklin had one run up her drive in La Crescenta, duck under her car, leap to garage roof, then fly low over yard and away; Oct. 22, in a patio in Pacific Palisades Nellie Spencer had one walking about within a few feet, staying in the patio for a long time, then walking along the patio wall.
- OWLS:** Nov. 8, Pasadena Screech giving his bubbling notes which were preceded by the cries of his probable bird victim, Eagle Rock, (C.).
- POORWILL:** Nov. 2, 5:30 p.m. two calling together, probably preparing to migrate or hibernate until Feb. when they usually return to the Eagle Rock hills. (C.)
- WOODPECKERS:** Nuttall's and many California, Oak Grove Park, Oct. 26; White-headed, Buckhorn Camp, Oct. 19, (S.W.B.S.C.); Flickers digging deep holes for a repast of ants.
- JAYS:** Oct. 19, Blue-fronted Jays, Clark's Nutcracker, Buckhorn Camp.
- TITS, CHICKADEES:** Very large flocks of Bush-tits, Oak Grove Park through October; November, Wren-tits calling and scolding throughout the day on hills and in residential districts, Eagle Rock (C.); Flocks of Black-eared Nuthatches, Charlton Flats, also many Bailey's Chickadees, Oct. 19.
- WRENS, THRUSHES:** Bonnie Green reports that 2 male and 1 female Western Bluebirds have been in her yard in La Crescenta many times every day since Nov. 1; Mrs. L. Conklin in La Crescenta had a Bewick's Wren in her gar-

den for the past several months which followed her about, keeping near her as she worked, with his buzzing notes given continuously. K. Hardt has a House Wren which flies into a hole in her garage roof, out to a wire and back, repeatedly; Hermit Thrush arrived Oct. 20, Eagle Rock (C.).

- KINGLET, WAXWING:** Oct. 19, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Charlton Flats; Oct. 20 eight Cedar Waxwings in tall Eucalyptus tree, E. Ave. 41 (K.H.)
- WARBLERS, VIREO, ORIOLE:** Mrs. Russell Wilson writes of the thrill she and her husband had when a Black and White Warbler was seen on the trunk and large branches of an acacia tree outside their window in North Hollywood on Oct. 17; two days before the first Audubon's and a Robin had arrived; Oct. 13 they had a male Pileolated Warbler; Oct. 10, 20 to 30 Audubon's on the lawn, 6 in the bird bath at one time; 5 Meadow Larks feeding on new clover and dichondra lawn, La Crescenta (B. Green); Nov. 5 Townsend's Warbler, (K.H.); Oct. 19, Hutton's Vireo, Charlton Flats (C.); Nov. 15 and again next day a female Bullock's Oriole on lawn and in tree, Santa Monica, Hooded Orioles had visited daily in the summer but none seen since last of August (Hastings).
- FINCHES: SPARROWS:** Oct. 22, Bell's Sparrow, stayed for some time in yard, N. Ave. 22 (Mrs. Leona Hoogenboom); an adult Golden-crowned singing, also one immature, Eagle Rock (C.); Valdez and Stephens Fox Sparrows, Buckhorn, Oct. 19; Western Lark Sparrow, Oak Grove Park, Oct. 26 also a Gray-headed Junco, an unusual migrant here (C.).

## IMPRESSIONS OF A NATURE HOBBYIST

Continued from first page.

There is the Lazy Bird also. The Cow Bird will make other birds do its work by depositing its egg in the nest of another, usually smaller bird. I have found more than one nest with a false bottom covering over the foreign egg so it could not hatch. This is an example of thinking. There is no doubt birds think and reason within their range of understanding.

SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER OBSERVATIONS AT THE  
AUDUBON CENTER  
Alma Stultz

- Sept. 1 The last mature Hooded Oriole left, Black-chinned Hummingbirds were replaced by Anna's.
- Sept. 13 For the first time two Virginia Warblers were noticed here by Bill Hawkins, leader with Pat Gould of the "Second Sunday Walks". Their groups and others have found Black-throated, Gray, Pileolated, Lutescent and Calaveras Warblers. For several days Slender-billed Nuthatches and Mountain Chickadees were unusual visitors at the time of fires in the mountains.
- Sept. 10 Enid Michael and the Pasadena Audubon Society saw a Townsend's Solitaire. A Phainopepla was seen over the following week. A flight of about 10 Vaux Swifts came through the center and an estimated 100 were seen over the Rio Hondo.
- Sept. 23 First returning Gambel's Sparrow, they and Audubon's have come in increasing numbers till almost full winter numbers are here.
- Sept. 26 Full fall song fills the air from Mockingbirds, Thrashers, Starling, Green-backed Goldfinches and others. A Great-blue Heron over the trickle of the San Gabriel River, also 6 Wilson Snipe. All water birds will be scarce till construction work on the Whittier Dam is completed as the river bed is used by the trucks.
- Oct. 10 Gray-Headed Fox Sparrow found by Pat Gould and John Tramantino.
- Oct. 11 Cedar Waxwing, forerunner of the winter groups, also American Pipit. Black-throated and Townsend's Warblers prominent.
- Oct. 12 Cabanis Woodpecker came visiting the Stultz. The hunting season brought many Mourning Doves to take refuge.

## CHEEPS AND CHIRPS

The Tanager is now in its twentieth year as the first number was published in Oct. 1934. At that time Mr. and Mrs. James Brennan were, and had long been, among the most active members of the Society. Their son, Raymond, persuaded his wife that the Society deserved to have a magazine. With the approval of the Board, Mrs. Lois Brennan started the Tanager and edited it for two years, giving it the character it has maintained since. Mrs. Brennan is a Life Member and still interested in the Society, but devotes her time largely to her home and her thirteen year old daughter Wendy, who shows signs of becoming a fine musician.

Mrs. Josephine Willis has been known to all our members as the lady who can raise orphan birds. She has given directions for the care of young birds to many, telling of the feeding formulas she has worked out. We greatly regret that an accident last January and following illness has left her incapacitated. Her doctor's orders, DO NOTHING, have been very hard for her to follow. We all hope that recent improvement will continue and that we may soon enjoy her presence at our meetings.

When our Society was incorporated two years ago all our legal work was done for us by Roland Truman. He was chairman for Youth Leadership and in charge of our evening meetings for a few years. Now he writes that he wants to:

Cheep and Chirp and Crow  
as he has recently been married to Laurel A. Weiber, M.D. The Trumans spent their honeymoon in Yosemite. There they watched several Stellers Jays attack a Great Horned Owl, took pictures of a bear up in an apple tree eating apples, and approached to within fifteen feet of a Red-tailed Hawk resting in Tuolumne Meadow. We wish the Trumans many happy years together and Good Birding!

## AUDUBON CENTER OF CALIFORNIA

664 N. Durfee Ave., El Monte  
Mrs. O. M. Stultz, Director

Phone: Forrest 0-1872

Mrs. M. Gertrude Woods, Assistant Director

Nature Museum open daily 2-5, except Sunday and Monday.  
Guided Field Trips second Sunday of each month, starting at 9 a.m. at the entrance

Led by Pat Gould and Bill Hawkins.

gate.