

Western Tanager



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MATINICUS ROCK

Pat Gould

One Saturday afternoon last summer a group of us from the Audubon Camp of Maine made a trip to Martinicus Rock in Penobscot Bay. The weather was good and the sea calm, making possible the hazardous landing. At low tide or in rough weather it is impossible to get on or off the island. The island is virtually round and comprises about thirty acres of mostly barren rock. Debris and sediment settled between the rocks on the western side form a spongy soil in which a few hardy plants exist. In spring a variety of flowers appear to brighten for a time an otherwise drab island. A lighthouse at the southern end is operated by the Coast Guard. The three men stationed there are delighted to have visitors at any time.



Arctic Tern

After resting a bit we were on our way to explore the Arctic Tern colony. Most of the young were flying and many of the old birds had left. The Coast Guard estimated that about two thousand pairs nested on the island. With the Arctic Terns

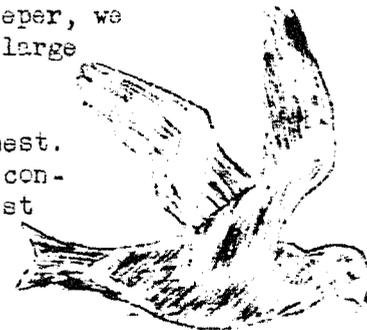
were a few Common Terns and probably one or two Roseate Terns, but we found no evidence of their nesting. As one enters their territory they utter a keeya cry and dive at you, sometimes missing your head by only an inch or two. Next time I visit an Arctic Tern colony I'll wear a helmet.

As we walked northward from the tern colony a large flock of gulls arose. The air became full of the peculiar laughing cry that left no doubt that these were Laughing Gulls. Approximately 35 pairs nest on the island. The nests were confined to the grassiest part of the island and many were completely hidden by the tall grass. We were lucky enough to find a couple of nests with eggs and a few young birds that were not yet able to fly.

In the same area but extending much farther, were a great number of burrows in the spongy earth. What a thrill when I put my hand down a burrow and pulled out an adult Leach's Petrel. Most of the burrows contained young of varying sizes, a few had fragile white eggs. We estimated that about two hundred pairs nested on the island.

On the east side of the island where the cliffs were steeper, we found Black Guillemots nesting, possibly forty pairs. The large black-spotted eggs were laid under large rocks and hard to find.

The greatest find of the trip was an Atlantic Puffin's nest. It was under a large pile of rocks and hard to get to. It contained a half grown young one. This was the only puffin nest we found, but from the number of adults on the water there must have been about twenty-five pairs nesting there.



Leach's Petrel

We left this small island with its abundant bird life with the feeling that we had fulfilled one of the great needs of a person who loves the out-of-doors. It gives one a satisfied feeling to have spent a brief time on an oceanic island and thrilled to the wierd cry of the petrels and the restlessness of the great Arctic Tern colony. And to see the Atlantic Puffin is an experience of a lifetime.

THE WESTERN Tanager

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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I heard the sound of spring a few weeks ago. Yes, the frogs have come back to the lily pond and are again giving their melodious (?) croaks. Where have they been since they left? I wish I knew. But as usual they have returned, and I don't need a calendar to tell me that spring is nearly here. I wonder if the goldfish mind the intrusion. They keep on peacefully swimming and saying nothing, so, who knows?

The tiny song sparrow that has spent the winter in the garden still gives me a welcome at the dawn of each new day. Who could help being happy when hearing his cheery song?

Mr. Mocker has his special supply of raisins on the front porch. Four raisins at a time seem to be his limit before taking flight to swallow them at his leisure.

Just common city dwellers, all; but very entertaining companions they prove to be. How many species of out-of-city dwellers do you suppose we'll see on the field trips at the coast and in the hills? With our new Saturday trip in addition to the Thursday and Saturday ones, the number should be large.

I hope you take a good look at the calendar sheet for this month and see how many times you can join us. There is always the chance that the Fulvous Tree Duck will be at Playa del Rey again and the Varied Thrush at Irvine Park, to say nothing of the Cardinals at the Sanctuary. So, be like Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm:

"When joy and duty clash,
Let duty go to smash."

Come spend a day in the open and get a new lease on life.

Bess Pope

To repay evil with kindness is the religion I was taught to practice, and this will forever be my rule.

- Audubon's Journal, Oct. 9, 1824

CALIFORNIA OFFICE
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639 Sutter Street, San Francisco

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WHAT'S GONE ON IN THE SOCIETY

Grace H. Phillips

FIELD TRIP, January 21. Clear weather after rain brought out a good-sized group to the County Arboretum. Before entering the gate, bands of peacocks were seen along the road, descendants of the birds kept there when it was the Baldwin Ranch. Their noise and dirt are tolerated for their decorative value.

The Arboretum grounds are being gradually planted with plants and trees from all over the world. The Ranch House is being restored, with mid-Victorian furniture.

Mr. Dan Quattlebaum of the Arboretum staff led one group "birding", and Mrs. Enid Michael another. Forty-four birds were listed; marsh and shore birds on the small lake fed by perennial springs, hawks in the air and the usual tree-and-ground feeders. A thrill for those seeing it was a Ruby-crowned Kinglet erecting his brilliant crest, while the song of a Brown Thrasher persisting through the roar of traffic on the road, was a pleasure to others.

The leaders, at lunch in Arcadia Park told of the birds seen and gave anecdotes of Birds they had known.

The SUNDAY FIELD TRIP, January 24, was pretty well rained out, but three of the faithful members went in to the Chatsworth Reservoir and Miss Catherine Shaw identified eighteen birds in the short time they were there, water and land birds. There were great numbers of Meadowlarks singing.

The STUDY CLASS, January 28, was treated to an unusually fine lecture on Flowerless Plants, and some forms so far down the scale of life that it is uncertain whether they should be called plants or animals, manuals of botany and zoology both claiming them. Mr. W. Scott Lewis illustrated with colored slides showing various algae and bacterial colonies, with clever drawings of microscopic life impossible to photograph. By the request of all, he will continue this subject at our March STUDY CLASS, as he has a great deal more material to show of groups of plants somewhat higher in the scale.

An informal INFORMATION PANEL was held the second hour. Questions from the audience were answered and discussed by the Board of Experts; Messrs. Hastings and Lewis, Mesdames Hood and Wait. Mrs. J. L. McBride reported on an increase from 13 to 39 in the number of Turkey Buzzards nesting and feeding in the Palos Verde Hills.

It was announced that Mr. Lewis will conduct a class in Plant Morphology at his home, 2500 Beachwood Drive, after each Study Class, starting February 25. He promises a lot of hard work and a rich reward in increased knowledge.

Those who attended the AFTERNOON MEETING at the Museum, February 4, enjoyed free travel over most of Alaska, bumping across the Arctic Circle, and into the Gold Rush Country. Mrs. Alma Stultz, a former President of the Society, now Director of the Audubon Center at El Monte shared her vacation with us. At the start of the meeting Mr. Kenneth Stager had presented as the Bird-of-the-Month the Black-footed Albatross that ranges the entire Pacific. Mrs. Stultz saw the Short-tailed (white) Albatross, seldom seen except in Alaskan waters. Aboard ship on the 4th of July she could not help exclaiming to unheeding passengers that our National Bird, the Baldheaded Eagle, was flying above them.

After telling of the great variety of plant and animal life, holding up bird skins from the museum, she gave short descriptions of many points of interest, then introduced Mr. and Mrs. Ray E. Smith, who were on the same trip, and they showed us their fine color slides, Mrs. Smith doing the narrating. Colors of sea and glacier, forest and tundra were exceptionally true. The most spectacular views were of the volcano that "blew its top" while they were in Anchorage, and they flew 80 miles to get the pictures of the eruption.

Glimpses of native life were shown. Of great interest were scenes of the little town of Kotzebue on the Behring Sea. It was on this plane flight that the Russian owned Island of Big Diomedes and the mainland of Siberia were seen.

OBSERVATIONS

Mid January to February 15
Ruby Curry

- LOONS:** Jan. 27, Lake Los Angeles, Red-throated and Common, close together, (G.H.); Feb. 8, off Huntington Beach pier, 1 Red-throated (R.C.).
- GREBES:** Harned, Eared, Western and Pied-billed at Bolsa Chica, Feb. 8, (South West Bird Study Club).
- DUCKS:** Hooded Merganser, female, Echo Park, Jan. 23 (R.C.).
- HAWKS:** Red-bellied, Arboretum, Jan. 21, (Audubon Field Trip); Red-tail in the first week in February one began adding to the nest that has been used for several years in Palos Verdes. The high wind of Feb. 14 destroyed this nest (Charlotte McBride).
- SHORE BIRDS:** Pat Gould writes "On the river bottom of the Sanctuary there has been a great increase in Wilson Snipe, 25 seen on a Sunday field trip, also a Green Heron, a Black-crowned Night Heron, 7 Cinnamon Teal, and a Canvasback. Yellow throats abundant, no Waxwings, only 2 Robins: at San Antonio College, near Pomona, thru' January thousands of Brewer's Blackbirds, hundreds of Western Bluebirds, Gambel's Sparrows and Killdeers abundant, Robins and Audubon's Warblers scarce." Feb. 5 at Bolsa Chica many Forrester's Terns plunging for fish, Long-billed Dowitchers, Godwits and Willets probing in the mud; Avocets sweeping the water for food. Along the margins of the pond both Long-billed and Hudsonian Curlews (S.W.B.S.C.)
- ROAD RUNNER:** 2 at Crystal Springs, Jan. 25, (Mrs. L. Stoner & R.C.). A park employee is catching gophers and feeding them to the Road Runners.
- HUMMING BIRD:** Rufous, first of the season Feb. 9, Palos Verdes (C.McB.).
- WOODPECKERS:** Red-naped Sapsucker, Jan. 18, Farnsworth Park, (L.S. & R.C.). Northern Yellow-shafted Flicker, caught by a cat in Santa Monica yard, Feb. 3, is now a study skin in the museum. It was eating

avocados on the ground with several Red-shafted Flickers (G.H.). One of these was seen and positively identified on the Christmas Bird Count at the Sanctuary by John Tramontano.

THRUSHES: Many Western Bluebirds and Alaska Hermit Thrushes, Arboretum, January 21 (Audubon Field Trip). Mrs. Stultz reports from the Sanctuary "The crop of wild grapes exceptionally good and the vines loaded with "raisins", plenty of food and shelter for Robins and Waxwings, but only 2 Robins and about 50 Waxwings this winter. About three times as many Hermit Thrushes and twice as many Gambel's Sparrows as last year. Wilson Snipe observed daily along the river".

SPARROWS, FINCHES: Along coast near Bolsa Chica, Savannah, Belding's and Large Billed Sparrows, Feb. 8, (S.W.B.S.C.) Flock of 25 Lawrence's Goldfinch, Brentwood, Jan. 29--30 (Clarence Beasley). 2 on bird bath, Santa Monica, Feb. 2 (G.H.); 1 in a Parkinsonia tree, Eagle Rock, Jan. 25 (R.C.).

TURKEY VULTURES AT PALOS VERDES

For at least five years, Mrs. Charlotte McBride has been keeping careful records of the birds and other animal life in the Palos Verde hills near her home. She finds that Turkey Vultures have been increasing in numbers. Vultures return to the area about the first of March each year reaching their largest numbers about the first of July, by which time a few young ones are flying with the others. The past two years one has returned in February and as it roosts in the same place each year it is probably the same individual. In 1949 only 14 vultures were seen in the area, the number was 13 the following two years, but during 1952 and 1953 there were 31 of the birds. They nest on steep, chaparral covered slopes at Palos Verde. By the middle of September the numbers begin to decrease, but a few are still present by the first of October, and one or two may be found up to the first of November. This year the one returned on February 9, bringing another (a mate?) with him.

A TRIP TO GRAY LODGE REFUGE

Ruth Eckler

When Don Bleitz invited us to go to Gray Lodge Refuge we accepted with alacrity, though we had no idea where it was or just how much of a Refuge it was.

It is some miles off Rt. 99E, between Gridley and Colusa. An area, much of it open water and marsh, of some 12,000 acres. We were more than pleased to find that 10,000 acres is an inviolate refuge, so that hunting is only allowed on the outer edges. There was shooting two days while we were there, and it seemed to drive the birds into the Refuge area.

One can drive all around the place and on the open water were scores of thousands of ducks, mallards, pintails, and baldpates with a scattering of ruddys.

In the open fields one seemed to be looking at a snow bank as the 60,000 or more Snow Geese congregated. And when thousands of them rose, with a great rush of wings and much calling, it was a beautiful sight.

Among others were Lessor and Cackling Geese, White-fronted Geese, Fulvous Tree Ducks and one most unusual wanderer, a European Widgeon. It was distinguishable from our Widgeon or Baldpate, in that its head is red, and the stripe down the crown quite cream colored.

Thro! the marshes were uncounted thousands of Red-winged Blackbirds, the ever-present Coot, Sora Rails, Florida Gallinules, Wilson's Snipe, Dowitcher and Western Sandpipers. Also many pheasants.

But the greatest thrill of the trip was when we saw an estimated million ducks go out across the sunset sky to their feeding grounds. They passed over us calling and with a whir of wings, those from the further ponds first, then the next and the next, as though in regular military formation. We stood entranced and awed for over an hour, and still they were flying over.

The Refuge has nice accommodations for a few at a time. So if one wants to go for a day or so they should get in touch with Mr. John Cowan and find if there will be a vacancy.

I recommend the trip to any bird lover, even if they can go just for the day. The best time is from January to April. The water fowl begin to leave for the north during April.

DO BIRDS HAVE "PSI"?

In "Life", January 11, is an article by Aldous Huxley on extrasensory perception - called "psi" (the 23rd letter of the Greek alphabet).

After discussing evidence for such perception as is manifested in telepathy and clairvoyance in human beings, with the conclusion that while these are not understood there is much evidence that they are real, he takes up the homing instinct in pigeons and suggests that they and other animals possess "psi".

He describes briefly remarkable experiments made with pigeons to test various theories to explain their ability to find their way home. In one of these pigeons were divided into two groups all placed in light-tight boxes, one group of cages were placed on turntables that revolved at changing speeds through the whole journey of many miles from their home loft. When released both groups of birds got home equally well. Other experiments were made to test every explanation that had been suggested of their ability to return from long distances over unknown country. "Finally" he says, "there is the hypothesis that pigeons navigate by the sun. If they do they must possess built into their nervous systems the equivalent of a chronometer, a sextant, navigational tables and a calculating machine for correlating the solar data observed at the release point with that observed at the loft." His final conclusion is that we do not know how they do it, and that no explanation offered is satisfactory, so that it may be something outside normal perception, or "psi".

If this is true "psi" is a possible explanation of the equally extraordinary and hitherto inexplicable performance of migratory birds and fish, as well as of the well-known ability of cats to find their way home from long distances.

Which, of course, only means that we use a term we do not understand to "explain" a phenomenon we cannot understand.

Sweet summer is nigh and my spirit leaps
high
As the sun travels further along the
blue sky.

CHEEFS AND CHIRPS

Miss Ruby Curry, who compiles our Observations, has been an active member of our Society for about 15 years. She has often written accounts of her observations of birds and plants made while on summer trips, for the Tanager. Several times she has shown her motion pictures at our meetings, the last time at our February Study Class. She has been secretary of the South West Bird Study Club for several years. At her home in Eagle Rock she always has birds about and watches them closely. Anything you note of interest about birds should be reported to Miss Curry, 1895 Hill Drive, Eagle Rock 41, for inclusion in her page of the Tanager.

The Ecklers, Ruth and Harlan, came from Buffalo some ten years ago. They were active in the Buffalo Ornithological Society and had begun their series of bird photographs while there. Since coming to California, Harlan has been adding high power telephoto lenses to his camera equipment and now has a strobe light with which he can take pictures at one-fifth thousandths of a second. They have frequently shown series of their wonderful bird pictures at our program meetings and we are looking forward to seeing their most recent ones. Having a comfortable trailer home they can travel as they please and settle down for a few days or weeks at places where they find good birding.

Thomas Parker, our Don Tomas, writes, "A kind little Nature Sprite must have led me into that Audubon meeting about ten years ago where a beautiful color movie of birds was being shown. I was fascinated and amazed. "Could it be", I asked myself "that all these birds have been flying around and I failed to notice them?" I lost no time in applying for membership in the Society for I was determined to learn "all about birds." Before that memorable day when I saw the movie, a California Jay was to me a blue-bird, and any yellow bird was a canary. Even now I can identify hardly more than half the birds I see, but I have learned much about bird life - all life. In return for my interest in them, the birds

have given me "wings" upon which I soar high above mundane sordidness and turmoil. Best of all many "birders" have become my friends, and I am very, very grateful.

I like the Audubon Society - sure do!"

One of the new members we welcome this month, Mr. John C. Beugler, writes, "I have studied birds off and on for 59 years. I have a place in Northeast Oklahoma, not far from the Kansas, Missouri and Arkansas lines. We have one of those Hydro-Electric Projects, which gives us a lake 60 miles long by 20 miles wide, so we have water-fowl in abundance. My partner and I keep quite a few bird houses for martins and some hollow logs with a hole bored in the side for bluebirds. We are well supplied with bird neighbors."

A further note on our Christmas Count. Miss Elizabeth Manning, Assistant Editor of Audubon Field Notes has written Mr. Clarke, "If you consider that with three unidentified birds you had 156 species, then your count leads the nation. If you count the 153 identified, then you tie with Sabine Wildlife Refuge in Louisiana."

It is satisfying to know that we rank so high, but nothing to brag about, we are fortunate in living in an area where so many birds spend the winter. Other, smaller, counts are equally valuable if they show a large proportion of the birds of their areas.

The count about Big Bear by members of the Whittier and San Bernardino Societies was 59 species, a very high count for the region. The count of the Friendly Hills Refuge, Hemet and parts of Idyllwild was 3,600 birds of 83 species. The Pasadena Audubon Society counted 13,402 birds of 106 species.

On our Calendar sheet you will notice the Field Trip planned for Saturday, March 6. This is the first of the Saturday trips for this spring. There have been requests for such trips from members who cannot get out either on Thursdays or Sundays. This is an experiment for the Society and the continuing of Saturday trips another season will depend on the attendance this spring.

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CALENDAR FOR MARCH

- Thursday, March 4. AFTERNOON PROGRAM MEETING, Los Angeles County Museum, Exposition Park at 1:30. Mr. Kenneth Stager will present the Bird of the Month. A talk, THE CALIFORNIA INDIANS AND THEIR NATURAL HISTORY, illustrated with colored slides, will be given by Mrs. Mary V. Hood. Members and Friends are invited to meet for lunch in the museum cafeteria and then spend the time till the meeting in informal study in the museum.
- Saturday, March 6. FIELD TRIP, to Playa del Rey, for the study of water and marsh birds and the fun of being in the Out-of-Doors with friends. Bring lunch and your field glasses. Meet at the south end of the Lagoon at 9 A.M. Busses, via Playa del Rey, pass 5th and Olive at 1:43 and 9:16. Later on Venice Blvd. Leader Ethel B. Craig.
- Thursday, March 11. BOARD MEETING, at the home of our president at 7:30. Any member may attend to see how the work of the Society is planned or to offer suggestions.
- Thursday, March 18. FIELD TRIP to Irvine Park and vicinity. Red-bellied Hawks, White-tailed Kites and returning summer residents should be seen. Our Tanner Bus will leave 6th and Olive promptly at 8:30 A.M. Round trip \$1.60. Please have exact fare. Those driving go out Santa Ana Freeway to end, then east on Firestone to Chapman Avenue. In Orange turn left to County Park Road to Irvine Park. Leader Mrs. Nurtha Dunn.
- Thursday, March 25, STUDY CLASS, Plummer Park at 10 A.M. First hour; Mr. W. Scott Lewis will continue the interesting presentation of Flowerless Plants, begun at our January meeting. As usual colored slides and drawings will illustrate his talk. Second hour; a study of Owls by Mr. Dan Quattlebaum of the County Arboretum. Mr. Quattlebaum recently published an interesting account of the Pasadena Screech Owl and will have a few copies for distribution.
- Sunday, March 28. FIELD TRIP to the Audubon Center of California, 664 N. Durfee Avenue, El Monte. From Beverly Blvd., turn left (north) on Rosemead, then right (east) at first signal. From Garvey Blvd. turn right (south) on Rosemead, then left (east) at second red signal. Meet at 9 A.M. at gate. Bring lunch, binoculars and friends. Leader Dorothy Groner
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AUDUBON SCREEN TOURS

Carl W. Buchheister Pastures of the Sea
Tuesday, Mar. 23, 7:45 P.M. Virgil Junior High School, 152 N. Vermont Avenue
Saturday, Mar. 27, 2 P.M. John Burrough Junior High School, 600 S. McCadden Pl.

Every one interested in nature and the out-of-doors is welcome to these meetings and trips. Admission is free except for the Screen Tours.