

Western Tanager



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CHRISTMAS CENSUS - PAST AND PRESENT

By Elizabeth Lawrence

Thoughts of "Christmas Past" are the traditional accompaniment of the celebration of "Christmas Present." So it is also with the birdwatchers' "world Series," the Christmas Bird Count. For, although one is busily absorbed in the events of the present count, there are moments, now and again, when the mind flashes back, remembering the highlights of other days, of "Christmas Census Past."

Particularly is this true when contrasts are involved. Waking up on the appointed day to find snow on the ground, or being greeted by a bitter cold dark morning in New England, as in the past, was so different from this sunny California morning on the opposite end of the continent, in December 1957! The obvious difference in the weather made the present day less of a challenge, (although the hazardous icy roads were replaced by the only slightly less dangerous Los Angeles Freeways)! A light coat which could be shed at noon, replaced many layers of heavy winter clothing, and a way to carry hot soup, or a method of adjusting binoculars with mittened hands did not have to be devised. Indeed, more like a spring census did it seem to me that day under the Southern California sun.

Many birds observed and counted on the census were new species for me, recent "life birds" with which I had become acquainted since my arrival in the West a few months ago. The most exciting of these, of course, was the breathtaking male Vermillion Flycatcher, whose flame-bright plumage gleamed in the sun, a living symbol of the denial of winter, a scarlet Christmas light, brightening the darkest season of the year as Christmas itself does-- a revolt against the traditional somberness of bleak December as I had known it.

This species, as well as others, was a reminder of my new "habitat" in the Southwest. The White-tailed Kites were an exciting record for an eastern bird finder. Birds such as Bush-tits, Wren-tits, Lawrence's Goldfinches, Pipits, House Finches, Brown Towhees, White-throated Swifts and Cinnamon Teal were unfamiliar species before my westward journey and were birds I had never counted on past censuses. Species like the Spotted Dove and the Ringed Turtle Dove were Los Angeles specialties which increased both our census list and my own life list this year.

Many of the birds counted that day, however, were merely western counterparts of familiar eastern species, whose "cousins" at least, could be counted the same day at home. Their family resemblance made them instantly identifiable. Birds in this category included the Rufous-sided Towhee, so much like our Red-eyed Towhee which has recently been separated from the former only by being designated as a sub-species in the new A.O.U. Checklist. Bewick's Wren was a new species of a familiar genus. Numerous Audubon's Warblers replaced their abundant Myrtle Warblers, the birds which had always braved our winters and brightened them. Oregon Juncos here supplanted the numerous Slate-colored Juncos on our eastern counts. The Black Phoebe was the western replacement for the Eastern Phoebe, a bird for which I remembered making a special search in a snowy woodland so it could be included in our Christmas count list.

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THE WESTERN TANGER

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THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

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 "To promote the study and protection of
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 and water."

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 7377 Santa Monica Blvd....HO 7-9495.

Open: Wednesday, Thursday and
 Saturday - 2-4 p.m.

3rd Wednesday - 7:30-8 p.m.

4th Thursday (members only)
 9-10 a.m., 1-4 p.m.

Groups by appointment.

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The hunters, fishermen, boating enthusiasts and so forth, are vocal all out of proportion to their numbers. They are extremely well organized and receive considerable support from dealers and manufacturers of sports equipment. Frequently, indeed, they are under the leadership of men who have a monetary interest in advancing their sport. Furthermore, the members are fired with sufficient enthusiasm that they are willing to devote quite a bit of effort and money to get what they want.

For these reasons the sportsmen's groups are able to bring a considerable amount of pressure to bear on legislators and administrators who are concerned in the handling of our resources. Decisions on conservation questions are too frequently the result of political expediency rather than intelligent appraisal of the problems, due to the pressures exerted by these groups and/or the equally well organized groups which are interested in the commercial exploitation of our resources.

I am not suggesting that conservationists should adopt the sometimes questionable tactics employed by these groups; it is not in our character to do so. I do, however, think we should display a lot more enthusiasm than we do in upholding the things we believe in. It is not enough to sit around clucking one's tongue and saying that something should be done.

We are going to have to make up our minds whether or not we want sanctuaries, parks and adequate legislation protecting our natural resources from exploitation, badly enough to be willing to put effort and money into it. Before some issues are settled, considerable of both may be required. We are going to have to stand up and be counted, and every conservationist is going to have to ask himself how much these things really mean to him.

Robert E. Blackstone.

The April Field Trip to Yuma, Arizona will be held on the third week-end in place of the fourth. The dates will be April 19 and 20.

Census-Past & Present - continued

Mountain Chickadees rather than the Black-capped were the active and cheerful sprites of my first western census, while the Red-shafted Flicker with salmon-red wing linings was the brighter analogue of the otherwise similar Yellow-shafted Flicker.

Many, though, were old friends, differing from eastern birds only in subspecies and not distinguishable in the field from those I might have seen if I were home. Greater yellow-legs, Least sand-pipers, Cedar Waxwings, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Robins, Goldfinches, Cowbirds, Red-winged Blackbirds, Mourning Doves, and Sparrow Hawks, which seem equally abundant on either coast, were momentary bridges across the continent, making it possible at times for Christmas past to merge with Christmas present.

In the east, wintering Brown Thrashers and Catbirds, which could be heard singing in the thickets at dawn, had been a special assignment in my territory close to the Atlantic. In contrast, it was an exciting variation within the same family of birds this year to observe the California Thrasher, who appeared to me like some grotesque "land curlew" singing in the treetops. And the omnipresent Mockingbirds were amazing in their abundance here, which is in direct contrast to our small number of individuals of this interesting species.

Of course I felt nostalgic for the birds that mean home-- for the Hooded Mergansers swimming through the crystal clearness of a half-frozen pond, for the Purple Sandpipers on a rocky shore, for the Redpolls, Snow Buntings, Snowy Owls and Pine and Evening Grosbeaks which were the highlights of other Christmas counts. But who could wish to be elsewhere when the sedate yet comic California Quail strut out with their ridiculous top-knots bobbing? And who would forego the memory of the jewelled flash of Anna's Hummingbird against a backdrop of flowers, a living, vibrant sign that this is the land where winter never comes? And who would not forever recall the incessant flute-like strains of the Western Meadowlark, delighting the ear throughout the day, a song which so easily distinguishes this

bird from our Eastern Meadowlark, from which it is separated by the rank of a full species? And who could but rejoice in his first view of that famed bird of all western birds - the Roadrunner, whose presence made this Christmas count so different from others in the past, and so memorable. No, I could not be homesick for long, with the bright blue western sky above and a bird such as the Vermillion Flycatcher flashing its brilliance through the trees like a tropic dream, a lyric splendor, soon to become a vivid and lasting memory of a Christmas census past, to brighten the perhaps more somber day of a census yet to come.

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AUDUBON JUNIOR CLUB CAMPAIGN

With this issue of the Tanager you are receiving a copy of the Audubon Junior Club folder which describes one of the most vital programs of your National Society. At the just concluded meeting of our Branch Representatives, the need for bringing this important resource to the attention of persons directly in contact with our boys and girls, was stressed. While this is a year round program, the fact that Spring is on the threshold makes it particularly intriguing to all outdoor activities and studies.

Therefore, it is the hope of your Board of Directors and the staff of the Pacific Coast Office of the National organization, that you, personally will make every effort to place this information in such hands. Teachers in the elementary schools, youth and church leaders and "that neighbor down the block" who encourages after school and week-ends nature programs will thank you for introducing them to Audubon Junior Clubs, for this material will enrich and vitalize their own nature and conservation interests.

When you have placed this ONE FOLDER and you discover others who would like to receive it, have them write immediately to: Audubon Center, 1000 North Durfee Avenue, El Monte, California.

Thank you for "joining the team" in this campaign.

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES FOR 1958

At the annual conference on federal legislation last December, sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation, the following bills, either pending or expected to be introduced, were discussed as 1958 goals:

The Engle bill to regulate military land withdrawals and require observance of conservation laws on military reservations (H. R. 5538).

Strengthening amendments to the Coordination Act (S. 2496, H. R. 8631).

Amendments to the Duck Stamp Act to earmark revenues for wetlands acquisition and increase the fee to \$3 (H. R. 8699).

Legislation to establish a national system of wilderness preservation (S. 1176 and similar bills).

Bills to authorize research on the effects upon wildlife of chemical pesticides (H. R. 783 and S. 2447).

The Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Bill (S. 846).

Appropriations needed to carry on essential federal conservation programs.

Acquisition of additional wintering grounds for the Whooping Crane and as an addition to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (H. R. 9353 and S. 2886).

Legislation to control billboard advertising along the new Federal Interstate High System (S. 963 and others).

Bills to limit trappers on federal lands to the use of humane devices (S. 2489 and H. R. 9303).

NATIONAL WILDLIFE WEEK PLANS ANNOUNCED

The National Wildlife Federation has also announced that the 1958 observance of National Wildlife Week will be March 16 through 22. The theme this year of "Protect our Public Lands" will focus public attention on the importance of publicly-owned forests, parks, ranges, wilderness and wildlife areas. The Federation points out that....."these lands, which are managed by federal, state, county and community agencies for public use, include more than a quarter of the land of the nation. Over 250 million pleasure visits are made to them each year by outdoor enthusiasts - nature lovers, hunters, fishermen, campers, etc. Added

to this use are the many economic benefits from watershed protection and the production of timber, minerals and forage." Walt Disney will serve as National Honorary Chairman of this year's program.

AUDUBON HOUSE

On December 30, Mrs. Wyckoff, Director of Plummer Park for many years, retired from this park and will retire from the County Parks and Recreation in July. She will be missed by all the friends she has made here. We wish her happiness in her years of retirement and hope that she may be able to do the many things which she has not found time to do during her busy days of service.

We wish to welcome Mr. Merling, the new director of Plummer Park. He will have this park in addition to West Hollywood Park. Many plans are always under way for the Parks and Recreation personnel and we wish him success in this new duty.

Our thanks to Mr. Owen Palmer for bringing us a Red-breasted Sapsucker to be mounted. Any one wishing to send in a dollar or more to help with the mounting of these birds that are brought to us may send it to the Treasurer or to the Los Angeles Audubon Society headquarters.

LIBRARY

The Library has been moved to the east room of the Headquarters. This room will be for members and we hope to have current nature and conservation material available for use.

We urge those attending the Thursday morning meeting to bring their lunch and visit with us at Audubon House in the afternoon. Books may be taken from the Library one month and returned the next. The AOU CHECK LIST is on the reference shelf. The WARBLERS OF AMERICA will be available by the February meeting.

The Library will be open to members attending the Wednesday evening meetings from 7:00 to 7:45.

OUR 20TH CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The annual Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday, December 29th, 1957, starting at 5:30 a.m. and lasting until after dark, searching for owls. Seventy-two observers in 23 parties turned out for the count this year, and many spent as long as ten hours covering their territory. Area was the same since 1937 - 7-1/2 mile radius centering near Pico and La Cienega Blvds. Day was sunny, temperatures from 43 to 71 degrees, wind light - 5-10 m.p.h., visibility low in morning, clearing in afternoon. Total party hours - 199 (163 on foot-36 by car); total party miles - 383 (106 on foot, 277 by car).

After spending all day in the field, about 30 birders met for dinner and a preliminary check and discussion of the Count. The final count showed a total of 148 species and about 34,000 individuals, as compared to 147 species and 31,000 individuals last year.

This seemed to be a "Robin" year, as the number counted was about twice that of last year, and also a year for the Horned Owl, as 11 were seen by one party. The interesting birds spotted which were not on last year's list were: Osprey, Cassin's Auklet, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Russet-backed Thrush, Myrtle Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Abert's Towhee and Harris's Sparrow.

The full list compiled by Mr. Tom Goodman is as follows:

Loons - Arctic 14, Red-throated 40; Grebes - Horned 56, Eared 81, Western 839, Pied-billed 44; Pelican - Brown 38; Cormorant - Double-crested 6, Brandt's 1, Pelagic 23; Herons - Great Blue 8, Am. Egret 13, Snowy Egret 12, Green Heron 2, Black-crowned Night 6; Canada Goose 1, Black Brant 1; Ducks - Mallard 15, Am. Widgeon 3, Pintail 19, Green-winged Teal 2, Shoveller 9, Wood 1, Ring-necked 4, Canvas-back 1, Lesser Scaup 529, Buffle-head 1, Ruddy 60; Surf Scoter 1155, White-winged Scoter 2; Red-breasted Merganser 48; Turkey Vulture 2; Sharp-shinned Hawk 6, Cooper's Hawk 7, Red-tailed 29, Marsh Hawk 2, Osprey 1, Pigeon Hawk 6, Sparrow Hawk 71; California Quail 182; Amer. Coot 1115; Snowy Plover 114, Ringed Plover 33, Black-bellied Plover 63, Killdeer 321; Surf-bird 43, Black Turnstone 34, Wilson's Snipe 26; Hudsonian Curlew 13; Spotted Sandpiper 25; Willet 1897; Greater Yellow-legs 12, Lesser Yellow-legs 1; Least Sandpiper 68, Red-backed Sandpiper 60, Western Sandpiper 106; Dowitcher 85; Marbled Godwit 354; Sanderling 698; Am. Avocet 176; Black-necked Stilt 1; Glaucous-winged Gull 28, Western Gull 153, Herring Gull 15, Calif. Gull 195, Ring-billed Gull 1406, Short-billed Gull 52, Bonapart's Gull 31, Heerman's Gull 119; Forster's Tern 4; Cassin's Auklet 1; Band-tailed Pigeon 4, Mourning Dove 867, Spotted Dove 82, Ringed Turtle Dove 83; Road runner 2; Screech Owl 1, Horned Owl 13; White-throated Swift 199; Black-chinned Hummingbird 7, Anna's 263; Belted Kingfisher 5; Yellow-shafted Flicker 1, Red-shafted Flicker 137; Acorn Woodpecker 48; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 6, Downy Woodpecker 10, Nuttall's Woodpecker 25; Cassin's Kingbird 1; Black Phoebe 46, Say's Phoebe 2; Scrub Jay 462; Crow 58; Mt. Chickadee 12; Plain Titmouse 114; Bushtit 774; White-breasted Nuthatch 2, Red-breasted Nuthatch 4, Pygmy Nuthatch 7; Wren-tit 493; House wren 10, Bewick's Wren 52, Canyon Wren 2; Mockingbird 554; Calif. Thrasher 164; Robin 4058; Russet-backed Thrush 9, Hermit Thrush 136; West. Bluebird 30; Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 19; Ruby-crowned Kinglet 103; Pipit 99; Cedar Waxwings 1155; Loggerhead Shrike 56; Rutton's Vireo 3; Solitary Vireo 1; Orange-crowned Warbler 8, Nashville Warbler 4, Myrtle Warbler 1, Audubon's Warbler 2758; Yellowthroat 1; House Sparrow 683; West. Meadowlark 232; Red-winged Blackbird 10, Brewer's Blackbird 1787; Cowbird 1; Purple Finch 108, Cassin's Finch 1, House Finch 2739; Pine Siskin 2; Am. Goldfinch 170; Lesser Goldfinch 148, Lawrence's Goldfinch 13; Spotted Towhee 115, Brown Towhee 829, Abert's Towhee 6; Savannah Sparrow 185, Lark Sparrow 166, Rufous-crowned 6; slate-colored Junco 1, Oregon Junco 1413, Chipping Sparrow 116, Harris's Sparrow 3, White-crowned Sparrow 1348, Golden-crowned Sparrow 100, Fox Sparrow 62, Lincoln's Sparrow 2, Song Sparrow 138.

Those participating in the count were: Eugene Anderson, Clarence Beasley, Robert Blackstone, Warren Blazer, J. Stanley Brode, Herbert Clarke, Olga Clarke, Ethel Craig, Mary Craig, Loring Dales, Caroline Daugherty, Merritt S. Dunlap, David DuVal, John V. Frederick, Elizabeth Fulton, T. C. Gee, Mayme Gee, Dorothy Goddard, Tom Goodman, Maizie

Goodman, Pat Gould, Bill Griffin, Kay Hardt, Allen Hardt, George T. Hastings, Paul Herman, Mrs. Harry Hoffman, Dick Holmes, J. W. Huffman, Jimmie Huffman, Warren Hunt, Esther Johnson, Reginald Julian, Mrs. Reginald Julian, Ione Kaplan, Elsie Kennedy, Ruth Kennedy, Ben King, Mrs. Wayne B. Knight, Arnold Krieger, Elizabeth Lawrence, Betty Meyerfeld, Alan Meyerfeld, Marjorie Moody. Linda Ochoa, Gudrun Pepke, Clara Pflager, Marvin Pistrang, Helen Reed, Earl Rugraff, Robert Sandmeyer, Mrs. Mary B. Salmon, Mrs. Chester W. Schaeffer, Roscoe Schaffert, Catherine Shaw, Fern Shelford, Mrs. Oscar Slattebo, Arnold Small, Dick Smith, Nell Spencer, Mrs. Clara Splitter, Norma Splitter, Bob Strathearn, Alma Stultz, Mrs. Harold Swain, R. L. Taylor, Margie Taylor, John Tramantano, Otis Wade, Clara Weedmark, Russell Wilson, Marian Wilson.

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BIRDING IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

For those of us who enjoy winter birding with the ever present possibility of something really fancy to arrive, late December and January was almost a perfect dud. Spring-like weather prevailed from Christmas through the middle of January and instead of seeing Kittiwakes and Loons, we saw peach blossoms and Anna Hummingbirds carrying nesting materials. Land birding was a little more interesting. For those who sought loons, northern gulls, alcids, etc., this season afforded almost nothing interesting except a Cassin Auklet at Venice Beach December 28 (Ben King Jr., Robert Blackstone, Arnold Small). Waterfowl numbers were low throughout the southern part of the state due no doubt to mild weather to the north. Snow Geese at the Salton Sea numbered about 7000, which is down 3000 from normal for this time of year. The Rosses found two Blue Geese among the Snows near the Salton Sea Dec. 21, and reported the only Mountain Plover (150 est.) recorded. These were in a field near the south end of Salton Sea. A single Ross's Goose was seen among the Snow Geese there Dec. 26 (AS, Pat Gould, Dick Holmes, John Tramantano).

The Elf Owls were heard calling at Cottonwood Springs in Joshua Tree National Monument Dec. 20 (Rosses). Numerous reports were received of Poor-wills calling on warm evenings in December and January. This indicates that many (if not all) of these birds actually winter here (in hibernation) and more reports are needed to round out this picture. I would welcome all such reports of calling Poor-wills for the winter season.

Hunting pressures in the Newport Bay area forced more than 10,000 dabbling ducks to congregate there during early January. Among this horde were 27 Canada Geese (large race) and 1 White Pelican. A small number of northern and Wilson Phalaropes could be found wintering along the beaches.

Winter populations of land birds were quite encouraging and perhaps the factors which influence the influx of wintering waterbirds are not the same as for Passerines. Witness the great numbers of Cedar Waxwings and Robins with us this year. A small number of Varied Thrushes was among the visitants but the numbers of these birds was low. A Harris Sparrow was reported from Sycamore Canyon near Whittier during late November (fide John Tramantano). Wintering Vermillion Flycatchers were near San Diego, Finney Lake (south Salton Sea), and El Monte. A single Gray-headed Junco came to the Clarke's feeder near Glendale on Jan. 11 and was seen by many observers. ---Arnold Small.

Warren Hunt reports seeing an Eastern Kingbird on a trip to the San Gabriel Mountains - black back, greyish underparts with a wide band across the end of a slightly fan-shaped tail.

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The great annual migration of California Gray Whales from the Northern Pacific to the breeding lagoons of Baja California is under way and great numbers have been sighted off Point Loma daily.

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CALENDAR FOR FEBRUARY 1958

February 4 & 8-SCREEN TOUR, Tuesday, February 4, 7:45 p.m., at Virgil Junior High School and Saturday, February 8, 2:00 p.m., at John Burroughs Junior High School. Subject: "Penguin Summer" by Dr. Olin Pettingill, Jr. Penguins! Comical seabirds that invariably bring a smile, for their upright position, deliberate behavior and awkward movements are like caricatures of dinner-jacketed men. On an expedition for Walt Disney, Dr. Pettingill of Wayne, Maine, produced an epoch-making color film of the Falkland Islands, where penguins and people live fascinating, isolated lives.

February 8-SATURDAY FIELD TRIP to Bird Sanctuary at head of Vermont Street. We will adjourn early enough for Screen Tour.
Ethel Craig, Leader.

February 13-EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING, Thursday, 7:30 p.m., at 912 Victoria Avenue.

February 19-WEDNESDAY EVENING MEETING, at 8:00 p.m. sharp, Great Hall, in Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd. Subject: "Birds of the Night." Program will include sound recordings, slides and skins of owls, goat-suckers, rails, woodcock and other nocturnal birds.
Arnold Small, Chairman.

February 23-SUNDAY FIELD TRIP will be to the marshes and lagoons along the coast south of Los Angeles. Group will cover Bolsa Chica, Newport Bay and as far south as Maxton Brown Sanctuary in Oceanside, if time permits. This should be an excellent trip for wintering ducks and shore birds. Meet at 8:00 a.m. on Highway 101, just south of traffic circle in West Long Beach.
Jim Huffman, Leader.

February 27-THURSDAY MORNING MEETING - 10:00 a.m. in Long Hall, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd. Mr. George T. Hastings, Editor Emeritus and long-time friend of the Society will speak on "Blossoms, Bees and Birds." A well-known teacher of nature subjects; he and Mrs. Hastings have conducted classes wherever they have lived, both in the east and in Santa Monica, their present home. To illustrate his talks on botany, Mr. Hastings uses detailed paper models of the intricate structure of flowers.

Mrs. Isabella Bright, also an Audubon member, will give a talk on "Adaptation of Birds to their Environment." A teacher of natural sciences and agriculture in the city schools, Mrs. Bright is an authority on bird study, so her talk should be most interesting.

Olive Alvey, Chairman.