

Western



Tanager

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A MEXICAN ADVENTURE

(Continued)

By J. W. Huffman

Our good luck came at the palatial Hotel Ruiz Galindo in Fortin de Las Flores. On the evening of Sunday, December 28, Jim and I were seated beside the hotel pool, which is freshly covered with gardenias daily, and I was having an excellent Mexican "cerveza" I looked up to see a couple passing our table. They wore binoculars and the man carried a gun stock mounted spotting scope on his shoulder. We introduced ourselves and found that they were Professor William Baker of Youngstown University and his wife Margaret, also on a Mexican birding trip. By fortunate coincidence the Bakers were motoring, by Fiat, out of Mexico City to Veracruz and planned to return to Mexico on the same date that we did. Further, Bill Baker had a letter from Don Eckelberry, a long-time friend, suggesting a visit to Lake Catemaco, our goal. Both parties had qualms about the Fiats and felt that two cars in a party would add a factor of safety. We decided the team of four would be a natural. We were very grateful for the chance that threw us together with the Bakers. Excellent birders, their companionship greatly enhanced our enjoyment during the rest of the trip.

Early on the 29th we went down into Metlac Canyon. This beautiful and heavily wooded gorge crosses the highway between Orizaba and Fortin de Las Flores, about a mile from the latter. There is a private road along the Metlac River, north from the highway, running up the canyon about a mile to a hydroelectric plant. A Senor Rabago, who is in charge of the hydroelectric plant and who lives on the premises, is very courteous and friendly to birders and, when asked, will extend the run of the place. Metlac Canyon can be very productive. Some species we saw there were Tufted Flycatcher, Melodious Blackbird, Fan-Tailed Warbler, Kiskadee, Social Flycatcher, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Black-headed Oriole, Plain Brown Jay, Black-headed Saltator, Ferruginous Fygmy Owl, Green Jay, Red Warbler, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Olive-backed Warbler, Bush Tanager, Yellow-winged Tanager, Water Ouzel, Band-backed Wren, and Hepatic Tanager.

Toward noon that Monday we left Metlac Canyon and drove toward Veracruz City. The groves of trees and the meadows along the highway between Cordoba and Veracruz City are well worth working. Here we found Masked Tityra, Blacked-capped Tityra, Rufous-breasted Spinetail, Scott's Oriole, White-tipped Brown Jay, White-collared Swift, Red-billed Pigeon, Groove-billed Ani, Yellow-tailed Oriole, yellow-backed Oriole, and Ruddy Ground Dove. Migrants from the north are widespread throughout Mexico in the winter months. In many wooded areas we could easily imagine that we were in an eastern U. S. Warbler wave. All of the following were in breeding plumage: Nashville, American Redstart, Wilson's, Black and White, Magnolia, Hooded, Myrtle, Black-throated Green, Yellow, and Water Thrush. Wintering male Indigo

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THE WESTERN Tanager

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 guests before and after each meeting.

Buntings, mainly brown, with blue feather
 tips here and there, gave us some puzzling
 moments.

On Highway 74 about four miles before
 it reaches Veracruz City is an area called
 Boca Del Rio, where a large river empties
 into the Gulf of Mexico. This is an excel-
 lent area for fresh and salt water birds.
 Here we found among others, the Osprey,
 Olivaceous Cormorant, Jacana, Man-of-War
 Bird and several species of Gulls, Terns,
 and Herons. A little nearer Veracruz City
 on the same road is the fabulous Mocambo
 Hotel. We stayed overnight here on our
 return trip, and I recommend it as a spot
 not to be missed, principally on account
 of the fine food. To illustrate, for din-
 ner at the Mocambo we were served an appe-
 tizer, as much as we wanted of a delicious
 soup, a whole fish each, a meat entree,
 vegetables, a marvelous fruit pudding for
 dessert and coffee. This cost us each 15
 pesos, or about \$1.25! Pursuing further
 the subject of food, my favorite next to
 birds, I will mention a delightful item
 that is enjoyed daily in the better Mexi-
 can dining rooms. At first you eat the
 papaya, a large yellow melon, for break-
 fast because everyone else is eating it.
 Sprinkled with fresh lime juice, it has
 a very subtle, ingratiating flavor. Soon,
 however, you are looking forward to it
 every day. In a week you wonder if you
 can get along without it. They say it
 becomes a habit, but is very good for the
 stomach, being rich in pepsin.

South of Veracruz City on the Gulf,
 one is definitely out of the regular tour-
 ist lanes. Accommodations and the English
 language are hard to find. The birding
 gets better, however, the farther south
 one goes. One of the hazards of touring
 Mexico for birders is the temptation to
 explore every promising place along the
 road and consequently upsetting schedules.
 Such places are very frequent on Highway
 180 between Veracruz City and Catemaco,
 particularly in the vicinity of Alvarado,
 where a confluence of the ocean and
 several rivers creates innumerable lagoons
 and marshes.

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At Alvarado the road is interrupted by a large bay and we had to take a ferry. The ferry service was quite satisfactory, but we were considerably annoyed by the horde of small boys that apparently have taken it upon themselves to conduct the whole operation. They told us, by signs and rapid Spanish, where to park to wait for the ferry. Then, while we were waiting, they smothered our car and its occupants in their endeavor to wheedle small coins by offering to act as our agent in buying a ticket, by selling us some trifle or by displaying their knowledge of English, by counting on their fingers. "One, two, three," they chanted, until their knowledge was exhausted; and then, "Dinero, please." They expected only a few cents, but there were so many of them. I will never forget the wonderful look on their faces when Jim opened up his wallet to find a coin and they saw a number of small bills, to them a fortune.

Along the road north and south of Alverado we saw many interesting land and water birds. As I mentioned, the problem is not to find interesting spots but to decide which of the many watering holes, marshes and woodland plots to explore. There were numerous Snail Kites hawking lazily near the road. The attraction, we found, was many snails, some as large as a fist. One of the most beautiful sights of the trip was a flock of about one hundred fork-tailed Flycatchers feeding together and chasing each other. Their long tail feathers whipping behind gave them a very graceful appearance. Some other birds seen along the road were the Green and the Pygmy Kingfishers, Louisiana Heron, the Blue-gray Tanager, characteristically gathering in flocks of about fifty birds, the Black-cowled Oriole, Painted Bunting, Rufous-naped Wren, Mexican Grebe, and Gray Hawk. We did not reach Lake Cate-maco that Monday until midnight, where after some considerable searching, we found the Hotel Playa Azul and checked in. It had been a long and fruitful day.

(To be continued)

MALIBU LAGOON AS A BIRDFINDING AREA

By Ernest J. Willoughby

Although Malibu Lagoon is regularly visited by birders living in the Los Angeles area and is considered by many to be one of the outstanding points along the local coast for shore and water bird observation, it is curiously not mentioned in A Guide to Bird Finding West of the Mississippi by Olin S. Pettingill, Jr. (New York, Oxford University Press (1953)). Thus the newcomer or visitor to the area may not be aware of this lagoon's excellent birdfinding opportunities.

Located just twelve miles northwest of Santa Monica on U.S. Highway 101A, Malibu Lagoon constitutes the mouth of Malibu Creek. The lagoon extends from the beach (where it sometimes has connection with the ocean at high tide) inland several hundred yards, and is crossed by the highway a hundred yards or more north of the beach.

The best period of the year for birdfinding here is late summer (July or August) through April, when the lagoon alternately attracts fall migrants, winter visitors and spring migrants. Migrants and winter visitors include most of the shorebirds found in Southern California such as Willet, Marbled Godwit, Short-billed and some Long-billed Dowitchers, Whimbrel, Yellowlegs, Western, Least and Red-backed Sandpipers; Snowy, Semi-palmated and Black-bellied Plovers, etc. Northern and Wilson's Phalaropes are often found here during late summer and fall. Quite rarely seen are the Baird's and Pectoral Sandpipers and Red Knot.

Malibu Lagoon attracts many gulls and terns. All the common gulls are found there in winter, and, according to season, Forster's, Common, Caspian, Least and Royal Terns appear regularly. In recent years large flocks of Elegant Terns have gathered at the lagoon from August to November.

Waterfowl which regularly appear in winter at Malibu Lagoon include Black

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Brant, Mallard, Baldpate, Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Red-breasted Merganser, and others. Ruddy Ducks are found generally throughout the year. Other water birds found at Malibu Lagoon are Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, American and Snowy Egrets, Coot, Sora, and four species of Grebes.

Under the bridge crossing the lagoon many cliff swallows nest in summer. Barn Owls have also nested there. Redwings are found chiefly north of the highway among the cattails and willows growing there. Savannah Sparrows (Belding's and in winter some Large-billed) occur at the expanse of salt-water marsh (sometimes quite dry) at the southwestern side of the lagoon. Long-billed Marsh Wrens, Yellowthroats, Song Sparrows and other passerine birds commonly associated with streamside brush and marsh habitat can be found here, too, chiefly along the western border of the lagoon.

Because of its great variety of shorebirds, waterfowl and other birds attracted by the combination of beach and surf, mud flats, open water, salt marsh (when flourishing), cattails and rushes, willow and brush, Malibu Lagoon is one of my favorite birding spots. I have found that the most productive part of the day is early morning when fewer people are about. Dogs and young children delight in romping about the area thus unsettling flocks of resting shorebirds. The late afternoon may be quite rewarding to birders, too.

PELAGIC FIELD TRIP

The Labor Day Pelagic Field Trip in the vicinity of San Clemente Island was enjoyable and enlightening. We got underway from Newport Bay shortly after midnight Sunday and arrived off San Clemente Island at dawn. The sky remained overcast until noon then cleared to bright sunshine. The sea was calm. Although the bird population was not as dense as it was this time last year, there was plenty to be seen.

Everyone got a good look at a Black-footed Albatross at close range and several took motion pictures. Pink-footed and Sooty Shearwaters were plentiful and a Black-vented Shearwater was sighted on the return trip. A few Leach's Petrels were seen and Black Petrels were about most of the time. Ashy and Least Petrels were also sighted. Several Brown Pelicans sailed by in their characteristic in-line procession. Red Phalaropes were in immature or winter plumage. Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers, as is their custom, gave the gulls and terns a bad time. Western Gulls followed the boat much of the time. Sabine's Gulls were very beautiful with their striking wing pattern and term-like flight. A few Arctic Terns were among the Elegant Terns. Three Xantus' Murrelets permitted us a good view of them. The most unusual bird of the trip for this habitat - was a Mourning Dove that flew round and round the boat but was afraid to land. Bill Lehmann

Tuesday Evening Meeting, held Sept. 8, was devoted to the relating by members of vacation experiences searching for birds. Herb Clarke, Mrs. Porter and Don Adams spoke respectively of trips to Montana and North Dakota, Florida and Glacier National Park. Arnold Small, Ernest Willoughby and Bob Blackstone showed color slides of Arizona and Canada. Afterward refreshments consisting of plenty of fruit punch for the thirsty and cookies provided by Caroline Adams, Olga Clarke, Mimi Small, Helen Sandmeyer, Marion Wilson and Melba Blackstone. The success of this first Tuesday Evening Meeting to be held in September has encouraged us to continue to begin our season in that month rather than in October as heretofore.

Bob Blackstone

NEW BOOKS

FUNDAMENTALS OF ORNITHOLOGY, Van Tyne and Berger, \$11.75. This is a thoroughly detailed and technical publication on the subject intended for the advanced student and as a college textbook. The section given over to classification of world birds by families with drawings and descriptions of type species is especially good. There is a copy in our library, courtesy of the publisher, John Wiley & Sons. Special orders will be taken by the Sales Department.

1001 QUESTIONS ANSWERED ABOUT BIRDS Allan and Helen Cruickshank, \$5.00. We now have a stock of this book at Audubon House. Probably no other single book contains so much bird information, and no questions we've been asked so far have gone unanswered. Arranged by subject and completely indexed it is a "must" for every birder. A suggested gift item of real value and quality.

Otis Wade

THE BIRDS OF ALBERTA, by W. Ray Salt and A. L. Wilk, is a notable and recent addition to the ranks of regional bird books. Published by the Government of Alberta, it is obtainable from the Queen's Printer, Edmonton. It includes accounts of all of the 315 species of birds known to occur in the province. All species are illustrated, most in color, and distribution maps are shown for each species. Many of the illustrations, unfortunately, are rather poor. In spite of this shortcoming, however, anyone who is interested in the birds of Alberta should find this book valuable for the up-to-date information it contains relating to the distribution and occurrence of birds in this province. It is the first and only book in this field.

Bob Blackstone

SCREEN TOURS SCHEDULED FOR OCTOBER

ROCKY MOUNTAIN RAMBLES

Emerson Scott, Tuesday, Oct. 20, 7:45
Virgil Junior High School
152 North Vermont Avenue, Los Angeles

THE SHANDON HILLS

Eben McMillan, Saturday, Oct. 24, 2:00
John Burroughs Junior High School
600 So. McCadden Place, Los Angeles

BIRDING IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

By Arnold Small

The prolonged drought of 1959 foretold of disastrous fires to come during the extra-dry months of the summer. Extreme vigilance on the part of the U.S. Forest Service and other interested personnel, as well as an alerted public, obviated any large forest fires in the Southern California mountains. A few small blazes broke out here and there but were quickly controlled. Northern California and the Central Sierra Nevadas did not fare so well, however, as disastrous fires raged in those areas during the early and mid-summer. The prolonged drought did not have the expected effect on most birds. There seemed to be an ample supply of weed seeds and insects for the smaller species although quail were reported to have brought off smaller broods and in several instances California Quail actually appeared within urban Los Angeles. These birds probably moved down from the dry foothills in search of water. The Brown Booby which appeared at Martinez Lake in September, 1958 was still to be seen there more than a year later. The author is at a loss to explain the presence of typical winter waterbirds along the sea-coast during the summer. As many as five Black-legged Kittiwakes (in immature plumage) spent the winter and most of the summer at Malibu Lagoon. Some 50 Surf Scoters were seen throughout the summer off Playa del Rey together with about 20 White-winged Scoters (unusual enough in these numbers during the winter). A Common Murre and a Pigeon Guillemot were at Playa del Rey during the late summer, while both the Black Turnstones and the Surfbirds had appeared on the Ballona Creek breakwater by the end of August. The late summer and early flight of Elegant Terns to Southern California was extraordinary and for the first time, this species was known to have bred within the continental limits of the U.S. as 31 nests were found in June at the Old Salt Works at the south end of San Diego Bay. Most of the nests, however, were destroyed by vandals although Fred Gallup of Escondido banded 7 young. Many birds of this species were seen far out to sea during the summer months. Although the warming

trend of the ocean waters continued, pelagic birding was rather dull. However, 2 Red-billed Tropic Birds were reported at Los Coronados Islands during mid-August, none of these birds was observed in our local waters, although repeated trips were made to the southeast end of San Clemente Island. Arctic Terns were fairly abundant well out to sea and Black Petrels likewise were not difficult to see, especially in late August. Leach's Petrels were low and only 1 Least Petrel was found near San Clemente Island on Sept. 7. Shorebirding was spotty, due most likely to the rapidly disappearing habitat which they require. Water skiing on Upper Newport Bay, as well as the development of Newport Dunes, probably contributed to their decline there. Many Northern Phalaropes with smaller numbers of Wilson's Phalaropes were at the evaporating ponds of the salts works at Upper Newport Bay during late summer. As many as 4 Red Knots and 3 Pectoral Sandpipers were at Malibu Lagoon in late August.

In addition to the Screen Tours listed for October, the following lectures have been scheduled:

THE NEW WORLD REDISCOVERED

Laurel Reynolds

Tuesday, November 17

Saturday, November 21

HIGH HORIZONS

Wm. Ferguson

Tuesday, January 5

THE SHANDON HILLS

John Taft

Tuesday, February 23

LAND OF EARLY AUTUMN

Cleveland P. Grant

Saturday, February 6

SECRETS OF THE SEA

G. Clifford Carl

Tuesday, March 15

PUERTO RICO, U.S.A.

Fran Wm. Hall

Saturday, March 19

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CALENDAR FOR OCTOBER, 1959

- October 8 EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING
- October 10 SATURDAY FIELD TRIP to Bixby Slough. Drive down Vermont to Pacific Coast Highway. Across highway about one block, turn into parking lot on left side of road. Meet at 9:00 A.M. Bring lunch and binoculars.
Leader-Betty Meyerfield PL 6-8740
- October 11 SUNDAY, 2 to 4 o'clock. LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY ANNUAL TEA at home of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Terry, 2586 Aberdeen Avenue, off Vermont, north of Los Feliz. R.S.V.P. Call: WE 9-7403; No 1-8036; HO 7-9495 or
NO 2-9966.
- October 13 TUESDAY EVENING MEETING - 8:00 P.M. in Great Hall, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd. A talk "Turtles and Tortoises" will be presented by MR. DAVID DUVAL, a fellow member and major in biology at USC. Talk will be illustrated with color slides and there will be a display of specimens, including some live chelonians.
Chairman-Robert E. Blackstone
- October 15 THURSDAY FIELD TRIP to Zuma State Park Beach and to Tapia Park. Tanner bus leaves Grand Ave. entrance to Biltmore Hotel at 8:30 A.M. sharp. Fare \$2.50. Please have exact change. Lunch at Tapia Park. Birds here would appreciate dry break, cake, raisins and grain. Please make reservations sometime during week before trip. Leader-Edna Burt-PL-5-1044.
- October 20 SCREEN TOUR - ROCKY MOUNTAIN RAMBLES - Emerson Scott. Tuesday evening 7:45 Virgil Junior High School, 152 North Vermont Avenue, Los Angeles.
- October 22 THURSDAY MORNING MEETING - Plummer Park, Long Hall. 10 to 12 o'clock. Of particular interest will be a talk, with pictures, by Mrs. Russell Wilson, Executive Secretary of Audubon and House Chairman of Audubon House. She will speak on "Birding in Arizona". Also there will be a film, "The Most Wonderful Show in the World", made by The Friends of the Zoo". Bring lunch and enjoy a visit with friends.
Chairman-Olive Alvey
- October 24 SCREEN TOUR - THE SHANDON HILLS - Eben McMillan
Saturday afternoon at 2:00 o'clock. John Burroughs Junior High School
600 South McCadden Place, Los Angeles.
- October 25 SUNDAY FIELD TRIP will be to the marshes and lagoons along the coast south of Los Angeles. Group will cover Bolsa Chica and Newport Bay. 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 Long Beach.
Leader - Bob Blackstone
CR 6-3879.