

## Western



## Tanager

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

THE LOS ANGELES BRANCH OF THE  
NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 26

November, 1959

Number 3

A MEXICAN ADVENTURE

(Concluded)

By J. W. Huffman

The region around Lake Catemaco in southern Veracruz is one of the most unusual as well as one of the most fruitful in all of Mexico from the viewpoint of the birder. Due to the warm climate, high rainfall (almost 200 inches per year in some areas), and relatively low level of cultivation, extensive rain forests are found from sea level to up to about 4500 feet. Because of certain geological factors, considerable precipitation may occur in any month and there is no well defined dry season as there is in much of Mexico. The varied bird life of this region has been attributed in part to these unusual conditions (see note).

Our short stay at Catemaco was during a typical period, climatically speaking. Rain, drizzle and sunshine succeeded each other for the three days. No confirmed birder objects to a little wetting-down. However, he generally looks forward to drying out at the end of his day. The quaint Hotel Playa Azul, where we stayed along the shore of the lake, was not designed to a birder's taste. As in many Mexican hotels, all rooms in the Playa Azul opened upon a common outdoor balcony. In the Playa Azul, however, the outdoor scheme was extended. Between each room and the balcony were large, head-high windows with screens, but without glass, so that, in effect, we were living in a screened porch. This arrangement was probably quite satisfactory during fair weather, but we found that each morning our clothes felt as though they had just been sprinkled down for ironing. As you might imagine, the arrangement of screened-in bedrooms and bathrooms opening on a common balcony created a rather intimate atmosphere.

Although our most exciting birding was done on the east side of the lake, (the opposite side from the hotel), the highway toward Coatzacoalcos south of the lake also proved interesting. In both of these areas we had a good example of the value of the "edge effect" in birding. At a point about ten miles south of the town of Catemaco, an impenetrable forest bordered cultivated fields, a short distance from the highway. On December 30, along the edge of this forest, a large "wave" of birds was passing. This is a phenomenon that has frequently been observed, that during the non-nesting season a number of different species will be found feeding together in a loose flock that appears to move past the observer as a wave. For about a half hour we observed this "wave" which contained many wintering passerine birds, such as northern warblers and orioles, as well as resident Mexican species. In it we observed, besides many species we had previously seen, the following new birds: Gartered Trogon, Grayish Saltator, Gray-collared Becard, Barred Ant-Shrike, Rose-throated Becard, Rufous-browed Pepper-shrike, Lineated Woodpecker, and Yellow-throated Euphonia. (Note: For an interesting and more comprehensive discussion of the physical geography and birdlife of this region, see "Avifauna of The Catemaco Basin of Southern Veracruz, Mexico", E. P. Edwards & R. E. Tashian, Condor, Sept.-Oct. 1959)

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### THE WESTERN Tanager

Free to members...Others \$1.50 annually  
 Editor Emeritus.....George T. Hastings  
 Editor.....Hubert H. Weiser  
 3749 Shannon Road, L.A. 27....NO 4-2753

### THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

Organized 1910.....Incorporated 1951  
 "To promote the study and protection of  
 birds and other wildlife, plants, soil,  
 and water."

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 guests before and after each meeting.

Birds of prey were numerous south of  
 the lake. Seen along the highway or  
 over the bordering fields were the  
 Laughing Falcon, White-Tailed Kite and  
 the following hawks: Red-tailed, Marsh,  
 Sharp-shinned, White-tailed, Sparrow,  
 Roadside, and Red-shouldered.

Early the next day, December 31, a  
 young Mexican boy took us in a small  
 outboard powered rowboat across the lake  
 and up a small river into the rain for-  
 est. This youngster of about 13 years,  
 this "Muchacho", was an outstanding  
 example of the Mexican people's good  
 natured acceptance of things as they  
 are. The day was drizzly with a brisk  
 wind whipping up whitecaps on the lake.  
 As we headed into the wind, the tops of  
 the whitecaps blew across the boat, and  
 we were soon all soaked to the skin and  
 shivering, despite our sweaters and  
 coats. Our pilot and guide was clothed  
 only in cotton trousers. Every wave  
 that broke over the boat, causing con-  
 sternation to the passengers, was to him  
 a huge joke, a cause for merriment. Dur-  
 ing the hour-long crossing, he nearly  
 shook himself overboard shivering and  
 turned as nearly blue as is possible  
 for one with a coffee-brown skin. He  
 brought no lunch, although we had indi-  
 cated that we were out for the day.  
 When we landed, he propped his bare back  
 against a wet tree and signified, grin-  
 ning, that he would await our return.

After exploring on land for about an  
 hour with troubled consciences, we went  
 back, drew straws to determine who would  
 lend him an upper garment, and left a  
 couple of sandwiches.

What was probably our best find of  
 the day occurred during our morning  
 crossing of the lake. Margaret, Mrs. B  
 Baker, who was gifted with exceptionally  
 keen sight, called our attention to a  
 yellow object in a tree at the lake's  
 edge. The first to get my binoculars  
 up, I was delighted to see that the yel-  
 low object was the throat and breast  
 patch of a Keel-billed Toucan. As the  
 boat approached the shore, we saw that  
 there was a pair of these magnificent  
 birds. When they flew, their immense  
 bills gave the impression of a body  
 forward of the bird's head in addition  
 to the normal one aft. (Cont. Pg. 15)

The river that we ascended led to what is, I believe, the village of Cuetzalapan on the east side of Lake Catemaco. Generally, tourists are conducted to this spot to observe fish and other underwater life, since the waters of the river are very clear. We went ashore about a mile from the river's mouth, at a point where a wagon trail comes down to the water's edge. A few yards upstream from this spot, further passage by water is prevented by fallen trees and debris. Following the wagon trail for about 100 yards, we found a number of interconnected clearings at the rain forest edge. Here were about a half-dozen dwellings constituting, so we were informed by our guide, the village of Cuetzalapan. Typical of the poorer residences in Mexico, they were little more than a circle of loosely joined boards, surrounding an earthen floor and capped with a thatched roof.

We spent the remainder of that day exploring the clearings and the adjoining forest. The flora was spectacular and we found ourselves wishing we knew more of botany. Some of the trees, although very large, were almost completely clothed with parasitic vines or air plants. We counted at least 20 varieties of these plants on one particular tree.

The "edge effect" was very pronounced. During every circuit of the clearings, a new feeding flock of mixed species was encountered in the trees or undergrowth at the edges of the cleared areas. Most of the birds we had seen before were seen here again, and to our list we added the Green Parakeet, Clay-colored Robin, Black-throated Oriole, Gray-throated Chat, Yellow-billed Cacique, Ringed King-fisher, Amazon King-fisher, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Gray-headed Tanager, Common Black Hawk, Squirrel Cuckoo, Hooded Warbler, Montezuma Oropendola, Golden-olive Woodpecker, and Chestnut-colored Woodpecker. We returned many times to a group of flowering bushes that always contained several Bananquits and Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds. Probably the most thrilling sight was a curious Gartered Trogon who followed us around the clearings and sat several times within a few feet,

in open view, staring at us with big yellow-rimmed eyes.

One of the Mexican farmers came out of a house and walked across the clearing toward us. In Spanish, we explained what we were doing. He seemed to approve of our interest in nature, for he took us to see a low tree with large green fruit resembling hedge apples, or osage orange. He called it a "Castana". Our dictionary translated this as "chestnut". Our new friend cut one in half with his machete, and we saw that inside were a number of kernels imbedded in a pithy matrix. We pried out some of the kernels and found that they did, indeed, taste like chestnuts.

When it grew late, we regretfully left the forest and returned to our boat and its pilot, who was still holding up the tree. As we started downstream, Jim cried out that there was a strange bird in the water ahead. For some reason, I could not locate it, but Bill identified it as a Sun-Grebe. The others watched it swim to the bank and disappear in the undergrowth, while I was still trying to sight it. I never did. It will be one of my very good reasons for going back.

We started our return trip to Mexico City, the next day, January 1, by the route we had come. We all resolved that we would return to this very same place as soon as possible, to stay for a longer period, and in the same company if we could.

#### CONSERVATION

By Otis Wade

The County Supervisors of Santa Barbara County have received notice from the Santa Maria Valley Sportsmen's Assn., that it is cancelling its contract with the County whereby its members receive \$1.00 for each coyote and bobcat killed, 50¢ for each weasel and 15¢ for each crow.

According to the association secretary, Mr. Paul Sword, the group is ending its ten-year hunt for predators because "killing them is not considered good conservation practice". Predators, explained Mr. Sword, "can be counted on to wipe out the weak and sick game."

THURSDAY, OCT. 14, FIELD TRIP

This trip was hot but an enjoyable success for those 20 who were led by Edna Burt with Mr. Hastings as Ornithologist.

Areas covered were Zuma Beach State Park, Tapia Park and Malibu Lagoon. 43 species of birds were seen with the most interesting being Eared Grebe, Brown Pelican, Great Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, Surf Scoter Kestrel, Snowy and Black-bellied Plover, Hudsonian Curlew; Willet, Dowitcher, Western Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, Sanderling, Avocet, Bonaparte and Heerman Gull, Acorn Woodpecker, Say's Phoebe, White-breasted Nuthatch, Bewick Wren, Hermit Thrush, Western Bluebird, Audubon Warbler, Yellow-throat Oregon Junco, White-crowned Sparrow.

Catharine Farquhar.

Mr. and Mrs. Edward Terry were gracious hosts to 60 members and friends of the Los Angeles Audubon Society when they opened their charming home and gardens at 2586 Aberdeen Ave. for the Annual Tea on Sunday, Oct. 11 from 2 to 4 P.M. Mrs. Maurice Alvey and her committee, members of which were Mrs. Paul Dodds, Mrs. Neil Lewis and Mrs. Joseph Dunn, had arranged a delightful affair. Invited to pour were: Mrs. Edward Terry, Mrs. R. W. Julian, Mrs. Russell Wilson and Mrs. Robt. Sandmeyer. Several members of the Society had made delicious cookies, which were greatly enjoyed by everyone.

Mr. Terry escorted groups of the guests through the gardens where an interesting collection of cacti and succulents was an outstanding feature. He also provided an unexpected opportunity for some birding on a large scale when a big flock of California quail streamed down from their hiding places for the daily treat provided for them by Mr. Terry. An exciting thing to see.

GEP-Historian.

COME TO THE CHRISTMAS PARTY

December 3, 1 to 4 o'clock - Plummer Park, Great Hall.

The annual Christmas Party given by Los Angeles Audubon Society for its members and friends. There will be musical entertainment and the singing of Christmas Carols. Coffee and cake will be served by the program committee. Remember to bring gifts of food for the birds of Audubon House.

Audubon Society publications of books and other materials, useful and beautiful gifts for your friends, will be on sale.

HOLIDAY SHOW

A feature of the Christmas Party, December 3, will be a display of Holiday Decorations, wreaths, table arrangements, corsages, novelties, etc., a Share-Your-Ideas exhibit. Bring one or more of your Christmas ideas to add to the show, and see what other members have made. Some materials found out of doors, such as cones and pods, will be used in some of the pieces, examples of Outdoor Handicraft.

OLIVE ALVEY, Chairman

OCTOBER 8 BOARD MEETING

At the last Executive Board Meeting our new Finance Chairman, Mr. F. W. Brown, was introduced. Mr. Brown, an attorney of much experience and wide acquaintance, succeeds Mr. Reg. Julian who has given much valuable time and expert judgment to the job. Reg. will continue on the Finance Committee and will be joined on it by Jim Huffman and C. V. Duff. These four, in our estimation, will make up a fine committee in every respect, Mr. Duff having been especially successful in other similar work.

H.W.

Members are reminded that purchases made through our Sales Dept. at Audubon House support the conservation and education program of our Society. We are now taking orders for the Audubon Christmas card, calendars, stationery, books, etc. (Continued Page 17)

We have on hand now some notepaper, the Pough Land, Water and Western Audubon Guides, Hoffman's Birds of the Pacific States, and the Peterson Field Guides. We have the Tucker Hummingbird Feeder and the Audubon Call, etc. We will be very pleased to order any gift items members may wish and only ask that orders be placed sufficiently in advance of the holiday rush to assure prompt receipt.

Otis Wade, Sales Chairman

THURSDAY, Sept. 24

Thursday Morning Meeting. Highlight of this, the first meeting of the season for this group, was Mr. George Hastings' Nature Walk through the grounds of Flummer Park. Each member was given a copy of a comprehensive map of the area, the map showing all trees and shrubs planted there. There are also several pages of interesting facts about the plants. After an informal meeting, coffee and cookies were served.

Olive Alvey

#### THE OWLS OF KURT SCHLIEPHAKE

Sammy, the male Screech Owl, is about a year old now. He's very tame and sophisticated except when a hot dog with string inserted for tail is dragged across the floor. Sammy then becomes excited and swoops down from his perch to make the catch. Sammy has never seen a mouse but we imagine he wouldn't prefer one to a hot dog anyway. Sammy fell out of his nest when he scarcely had feathers. Audubon Society delivered him to Mr. Schliephake to take care of. Fate stepped in recently. Sam now has a girl friend - she with the big eyes - Susie. Susie was flying around a lady's house when the police arrived to protect the lady and Susie, who ended up at Mr. Schliephake's. Susie is not so tame as Sam. She feints to the left when anyone feints to the right. It's always that way with a woman - always opposite. When you move your head to the left, she moves hers to the right.

These two beef-heart eaters aren't

the only people watchers Mr. Schliephake has taken care of. Right now he has two Black-headed Grosbeaks, one with a broken leg which Mr. Schliephake set. He has two Sparrow Hawks, one with a wing permanently damaged by cruel and careless buckshot. Mr. Schliephake cared for and released (besides many more common birds), a Saw Whet Owl, Red-tailed Hawks, Snowy Egrets and a Jacana.

Mr. Schliephake likes to talk about birds. If you're down that way, say hello to this dedicated bird lover and fellow Audubon member at 5051 Sunset Blvd. He runs Paradise Bird Hospital and has perfected techniques of operating on injured or sick birds, both wild and tame. With eye surgeon instruments, mainly, he comes to the aid of broken bones, stomach obstructions, tumors, sinus trouble. He has patience, kindness and skill. You should meet him.

H.W.

#### BIXBY SLOUGH TRIP

Bixby Slough, surprisingly during such a dry year, was remarkably full of water. There were lots of cormorants, auguring well for ducks later, but the few ducks we saw were mostly the traditionally early arrivers such as Shoveller and Cinnamon Teal. We started a bit too late for good morning birding. Fishermen and a few boaters had arrived before us. After lunch, those of us who could stay on until about 3:30 P.M. did better. We spent most of our time near the big concentration of shore birds and waders close to the junction of Vermont Ave. and Anaheim.

There were well over 40 Avocets at rest in shallow water. Quite a wonderful sight to me, especially when one or two would take off away from the sun with brilliant lights on those striking black and white backs and wings. Here, too, there were many Dowitchers, an immature Black-crowned Night Heron, a Sora Rail, a Florida Gallinule, a Horned Grebe or two and Greater Yellow-legs.

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During the course of the day Marsh Wrens and Audubon Warblers were sounding off but would not show themselves. We got Pied-billed and Eared Grebes, Egrets, Green and Great Blue Herons, Ruddy Ducks, Redwings, an Orange-Crowned Warbler, Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers, White-Crowned Sparrows - 42 different species in all. Dramatic events were bouts between Gallinule and small turtle and Cormorant and tremendous (for him) catfish. Both battles ended in favor of the birds.

The trip was in charge of Betty Meyerfeld and son, Alan. They are devoted to the area and have known it thoroughly for many years. It was a pleasure to have such old pros as leaders of the 25 people who made the trip.

There is no swimming nor water skiing now at Bixby Slough. Boats are limited to very small slow ones. The Los Angeles Audubon Sanctuary's a reasonably secure part. Those dedicated people who have fought so long for Bixby Slough can well be proud of gaining very significant minor objectives. In conservation, 100% major objectives are hard to come by these days.

Hugh Weiser

#### CALIFORNIA AUDUBON CAMP By Patrick Bennett

Situated in the High Sierra, in fact, only a few miles west of the summit of the Donner Highway, U. S. 40, lies the Sugar Bowl, a little valley containing the famous Sugar Bowl Ski Lodge. Here it is that the National Audubon Society either opens up or broadens the knowledge of the wonderful world of nature to those who come to learn.

A well-organized program greets the camper from the very first day. Rising at the sound of a bell, then another bell for breakfast. After that, the morning walk takes place or it may be a ride in one of the fleet of station wagons followed by a walk in a more distant locale. Five different leaders for four different groups of campers. You may be taken on the insect walk, the bird walk, the geology walk, or on an outing specializing in mammals or in plants. The schedule for the day is

posted the evening before. After the walk comes a period of free time followed by lunch, and then an hour of "quiet time" (for siestas if desired). The afternoon outing is similar to that of the morning, but with a different counsellor to lead it, and, of course, concerning a different subject. In the evening, after supper, there's a program in the chalet (really a bar and dance hall in the winter). It may be a lecture, illustrated with slides or a movie, it may be a session of folk dancing, or towards the end of the two-week period, it may be Camper Talent Night. Each group then puts on a skit giving their impressions of the camp and the counsellors, and, of course, the energetic director, Bill Goodall. Bedtime is scheduled for ten o'clock, which, though an early-seeming hour at first, does not seem so after several mornings of 6:30 rising.

What are some of the features of the camp that leave enduring memories? Seldom does a naturalist have so fine an opportunity to live for so long a time in the exclusive company of those who appreciate and admire those things which he values. He is taken on trips through beautiful scenic areas, little marred by human endeavors. He learns many secrets of Nature's world from men whose profession is that of the college instructor, but whose technique is simple and uncomplex. He learns of the birth of the mountains, why lowland-laid sedimentary rocks are found in patches at the tops of the Sierran granite. He discovers birds' nests, inconspicuously camouflaged, though in an open field. Frogs jump suddenly from a streamside and swim rhythmically through the crystal clearness of a brook. At dusk the tall trees stand silhouetted against the western sky, the finery of each tiny firm branchlet etched black against the fading light. At night, the city dweller, used to stars faintly seen through the hazy atmosphere, is overwhelmed by a sky filled to repletion with stars. And there, high in the eastern sky flows the Milky Way in all its glory, streaming along from Cygnus to Sagittarius, unveiled by even a hint of haze. The long trip back to the lowlands can scarcely be looked forward to once the magic spirit of the mountains takes hold of one.

(To be continued)



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President: Mr. James W. Huffman 2912 Manhattan Ave., Manhattan Beach  
Registrar of Members: Mrs. Robert Sandmeyer 355 Elm St., Burbank

CALENDAR FOR NOVEMBER, 1959

- November 10 TUESDAY EVENING MEETING - 8:00 P. M. SHARP in Great Hall, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd. The program will be "Birds of Southern California Coast and How to Know Them". Speaker - Ernest Willoughby. There will be skins and interesting exhibits. This program is especially recommended for those planning to attend the field trip the following Saturday. Bob Blackstone, Chairman
- November 12 EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING.
- November 14 SATURDAY FIELD TRIP TO PLAYA DEL REY. Jim Huffman and Ernest Willoughby will give instructions in the identification of birds of the coastal marine areas. Demonstration will be designed particularly to aid those who may have difficulties with the winter or immature plumages of the gulls and shorebirds, but the experienced should also find it interesting. Group will meet at the Pacific Ave. bridge over Ballona Creek at 8:00 A. M. Jim Huffman - FR 2-7124
- November 17 SCREEN TOUR. THE NEW WORLD REDISCOVERED - Laurel Reynolds. Tuesday evening 7:45 Virgil Junior High School, 152 North Vermont Ave., Los Angeles.
- November 19 THIRD THURSDAY FIELD TRIP to new Los Angeles County Park, the Wm. S. Hart Ranch, Newhall, Calif., operated by Los Angeles County Dept. of History, Science and Art. The Wm. S. Hart memoirs of Will Rogers, Wyatt Earp, Tom Mix and western paintings by Charlie Russell merit your visit. This 200 acre ranch has trails through the property, picnic tables in shady nooks. Bus leaves Grand Ave. entrance of Biltmore Hotel at 9:00 A. M. sharp. Fare \$2. Please have exact change.  
Leader Edna Burt - PL 5-1044
- November 21 SCREEN TOUR. THE NEW WORLD REDISCOVERED. Laurel Reynolds. Saturday afternoon at 2:00 o'clock. John Burroughs Junior High School, 600 South McCadden Place, Los Angeles.
- November 21-22 SUNDAY FIELD TRIP to Buena Vista Lake, Taft and Carrizo Plain and Morro Bay has been postponed until December 5-6 due to conflict with screen tour and Thanksgiving.
- November 26 THURSDAY MORNING MEETING will not be held due to Thanksgiving.