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BIRDING IN TEXAS
WHERE EAST MEETS WEST AND NORTH MEETS SOUTH

By
Arnold Small

LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY, II
PLUMMER PARK
7377 SANTA MONICA BLVD.
LOS ANGELES 46, CALIFORNIA

Texas is the birdiest state of all. It boasts at least one hundred more species on its state list (about 540) than California. Claims its very own Peterson Field Guide, harbors one of America's rarest birds, the Whooping Crane; encompasses one of the most remarkable bird-finding areas in the United States at Rockport, and boasts of an area where the avifauna is more akin to Mexico than to North America. It would be impossible to recount the many lucrative bird-finding places in Texas and a much better account, may be found in Olin S. Pettingill's "A Guide to Bird-Finding West of the Mississippi". It is rather the purpose of this article to describe a trip recently taken to some of the more interesting parts of this state.

Having visited and birded in Texas on three previous occasions, it was my intention on this particular trip to round up some of the birds peculiar to Texas which for one reason or another, had escaped me on other visits. The particular species in which I was interested are primarily summer residents and for this reason (and no other) we undertook this excursion in June, a most unpleasant month for travel in south Texas. In fact, had we endeavored to chart a route which would take us through the hottest portions of the U. S. for that reason alone, we could not have done a better job. Consider the June temperatures in places like Blythe, Phoenix, Lordsburg, El Paso, Van Horn, Austin, Brownsville, Big Bend National Park, (whew!) Tucson, Gila Bend, Yuma and Indio. For this reason we determined to drive by night and look for birds by day. This turned out to be a very sensible plan since we covered an amazing amount of territory in this manner, and as the country we traversed is, for the most part, scenically quite uninteresting, we missed not much in that regard. Also, driving across these deserts by night is very fast (with a minimum of traffic) and pleasantly cool. Thus, we could devote a maximum amount of time looking for birds. The question naturally arises - when does one sleep? The answer, quite as naturally - when one can. Careful planning and groundwork is the key to success in any such venture and because of the local birding contacts we had established long before leaving home, we had excellent luck in locating the birds we wanted in a minimum amount of time. For example, one could spend several days looking for the Black-capped Vireo and Golden-cheeked Warbler on the Edwards Plateau. This region encompasses a lot of real estate, and one could conceivably miss these birds, which would be most unfortunate, considering the time; effort and temperature endurance one had invested in the journey. It was because of such local contacts that we were able to see these birds within an hour after stepping from the car in Austin.

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THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

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 and water."

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The directions offered in Pettingill's book are, for the most part, quite reliable. But areas change, new roads are built and old ones deleted, birds shift from area to area, and so forth. So it is the on-the-spot birder who will prove most helpful to the stranger. Even in such a restricted area as on the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge in the lower Rio Grande Valley, unless one knew exactly where to look for the Alta Mira Oriole, Black-headed Oriole, and Yellow-green Vireo, one might search the jungle-like growth fruitlessly for days (and in that heat, an unkind fate) without luck.

Our first target species was the Cave Swallow which is found only in about 15 limestone caverns in Texas and New Mexico, many of them inaccessible by auto. En route to Rocksprings the road first took across endless desert where Scaled Quail and White-necked Ravens broke the monotony, and White-winged Doves were unbelievably abundant. Soon after we had crossed the Pecos River (hypothetical boundary which separates east from west ornithologically) we encountered our first Scissor-tailed Flycatchers. These delightful birds were to be with us for the next 2000 miles of driving. The Devil's Sinkhole near Rocksprings is a cavity some hundred feet deep in the Edwards Plateau. It was here that we found several hundred of the Cave Swallows (like a Cliff Swallow with a pale throat). The Edwards Plateau of limestone is dissected in many places by a series of rivers. It was to the Frio River that we went next for the Green Kingfishers. On the Prade Ranch, where the Frio River flows through 8 miles of ranch property, we drove the car along the "river road". Contrary to our expectations, this road did not follow the river, but ran under it. The hard limestone bed of the river made it possible to drive the length of the river on the ranch, and thus we were able to search a long stretch of the river for the kingfishers. This was one of my most unforgettable experiences as this river has cut an exquisite canyon through the Edwards Plateau, and the contrast of this cool, verdant canyon to the dry

plateau above was refreshing. Eventually we simply deserted the car and waded the river while looking for birds among the lush growth of its banks. We succeeded in finding the Green Kingfishers (a pair) and enjoyed seeing other birds more typical of the deep south. Black and Turkey Vultures drifted along the canyon walls. Carolina Wrens and Carolina Chickadees sang from the thickets while the cascading song of the Canyon Wrens drifted down from the heights above. Color was added by the Blue Grosbeaks, Painted Buntings, Summer Tanagers, and Orchard Orioles and the titmice which called from the treetops were Tufted. Red-eyed and White-eyed Vireos added to the southeastern flavor of the birding but Bell's Vireos reminded us that we were still pretty far west. The overhanging limestone walls were festooned with mosses, ferns and even orchids among which nested thousands of Cliff Swallows. Eastern and Black Phoebes passed each other in their search for insects. Several families of Armadillos suggested that we were close to Mexico. The Colorado River follows the fault line which delineates the Edwards Plateau near Austin from the Central Texas Region to the east. It was here, among the oaks, walnut and "cedars" (really junipers) that we met the Golden-cheeked Warbler (the only bird which breeds exclusively in Texas) and the Black-capped Vireo. Red-bellied and Red-headed Woodpeckers, Crested Flycatchers and Indigo Buntings were all old friends.

(To be continued)

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Almost half of the 68,000 subcatchable size rainbow trout stocked last fall in the City of San Diego's Morena Lake by the Department of Fish and Game were caught as better than nine-inch average fish in the first six days of angling there this year. The fish had nearly tripled in weight since they were put in the lake.

May number of OUTDOOR CALIFORNIA

Allen Hummingbirds Nesting and Rearing of Young

By Dorothy F. Lilly
(Continued from last month)

Often one would practise at sipping nectar. Probably it found a pleasant sweetish stickiness on the rose-rust tinted leaf tips of the Guava when it licked them with its long black tongue. It was suggestive of a very young child working over the silky ears of a soft toy bunny.

Flying techniques improved daily. However it would be a long time before these twins could rock in midair like their mother. To humans they might seem in flight to be exquisite, gauzy, fairy magic but to their mother, no doubt, as slow and awkward as a lumbering old helicopter, though more appealing.

While most of the day was spent perching on a twig, preening feathers, scratching, peering inquisitively at anything moving, such as birds of other styles or big and little insects, the young hummers appeared at times to be playing children's games. One would sort of bump the other off a limb. Then with much "tsup-tsupping" and tiny squeaks they would chase each other up and down the length of the narrow hedge-enclosed lawn area which was their nursery. Sometimes they appeared to be pretending to feed each other.

Each day they learned more about collecting their own food and the period between the regurgitated feedings became a minute or so longer. April 22 was the last day I saw the mother giving them food. If one begged when she was near she flatly turned it down with a flip of her bill. One laconic "tsip" sounded very much like "Go feed yourself. You're big enough."

She seemed increasingly solicitous about the contents of her nest. Early every morning she gathered fresh material to reline it, both dry grass and white plant floss. She made trips two to five minutes apart. On two mornings when she seemed to have finished I saw the male come and hover over her nest. It was my first look at him.

According to published data, her eggs would require 12 to 15 days to hatch. I was cautious about disturbing her and the nest was high so I did not look, but in a few days she could be observed feeding the nestlings. Since that time I have been able to watch the hatching progress more closely and have generally found the period to be nearer to 15 days. Sometimes the female will stay away from her nest between the time the first egg is laid and the day or so later when she lays the second. Other times she may start incubation right away with the appearance of egg number one. From my few observations I thought both eggs hatched about the same time. What came out of them was hardly more than a shadow in the bottom of the nest. Even that might be concealed by down.

The younger her babies, the more intolerant a female Allen is of snoopers. Very seldom does the male give any assistance with guarding the area. Once only, in the three years I watched them, did one buzz me fiercely, the spot on his throat a disturbingly brilliant scarlet. Because of his habitual absence, the female must be capable of distinguishing friends from enemies and separating them. I was familiar enough to be considered a harmless though movable object but she would sputter violently at any stranger. Resident birds were tolerated if they did not come too close to her nest, excepting the Scrub Jays who were given a machine gun barrage of "Skip-skip-skip's" until they moved away from trouble. She constantly reminded me of a watchdog.

During the second week of May, feedings were less frequent and by evening half an hour apart. The first pair were nowhere to be seen that week. On May 15 they showed up again, perching on the Guava as if it belonged to them still. That was until SHE came along and advised them to clear out, utterly refusing them any further attention. Each day they would just happen around for a preen in the sunshine and perhaps to watch their amazing mother work. All was peaceful.

On May 23, the youngest pair had breakfast in the nest, then made their first flight about the nursery yard.

Mid-morning all four fledglings perched on the Guava tree at once. An older one appeared at times to be hoping for a handout but the mother always dodged. She was quick and efficient and could fly twice as fast as any of them.

(To be continued)

October 27, Thursday morning Meeting, Plummer Park, Long Hall, 10 to 12 o'clock. Mrs. Catherine Freeman, a long-time member of L.A. Audubon Society, will show lovely pictures she and her husband have taken. The title for these unusual pictures, "Avian Cliff Dwellers of the Gaspé" Taken by two such expert photographers, these studies of birds, flowers and animals are some of the best we have ever had. Mrs. Freeman, now retired from teaching at John Burroughs School, was in charge of visual education there. Her studies of the yucca moth were bought by the New York Museum of Natural History and are among the best ever taken of this subject. We are indeed fortunate to have Mrs. Freeman as a working member of our society.

Olive Alvey, Program Chairman

JUNIOR ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The first meeting of the year was held at Fern Dell Nature Museum. President Ronnie Franklyn introduced John Peebles who then showed movies of African animals and Florida sea life.

TUESDAY EVENING MEETING

The September 13th meeting at Plummer Park was notable for the attendance of two famous Audubon figures. The always ingratiating and delightful Bill Goodall introduced our National Audubon president, Carl W. Buchheister. Mr. Buchheister gave us an extremely interesting talk. The meeting was a happy event that transformed a fine writer in Audubon magazine into a warm personality and a great, persuasive leader.

THURSDAY MORNING FIELD TRIPS

Due to popular demand the Thursday morning field trips will continue as such & not be transferred to Wednesdays. The first of the season will be October 20th. Please see calendar sheet for details.

Among ducks, the Pintail is one of the strongest and fastest fliers.

From May number of OUTDOOR CALIFORNIA.

FLYING FISH

Ernest J. Willoughby

One of the most wonderful sights I know is that of a fish breaking suddenly from the water ahead of a boat, and, supported on filmy, translucent wings, skittering over the water into the air for a flight which may carry it 200 feet or more before it plunges back into the ocean. On later summer and early fall pelagic birding trips off the Southern California coast, one often sees this performance by the California Flying-fish (*Cyselurus Californicus*).

Our flying-fish belongs to the family Exocoetidae of which there are about sixty species found in the warmer oceans of the world. The California Flyingfish grows to a length of about 18 inches, and is one of the larger of the family. Its body is streamlined, tapered smoothly for low fluid resistance. The pectoral fins are hugely expanded into well-developed wings, and its pelvic fins are expanded into auxiliary supporting and stabilizing planes. Another striking modification is the elongation of the lower lobe of the caudal fin.

Evidently the fish's flight is a means of escaping predators (such as bonito, tuna, dolphin, and porpoise.), and is often spectacular. Swimming under water with its fins folded along its sides, the flying-fish builds up speed. Then, breaking the surface head-first, it spreads its pectoral fins wide, supporting its body with these wings while leaving the elongate lower lobe of the tail fin in the water. In this attitude, it lashes the water violently with its tail, thus building up air speed for a few feet before expanding its pelvic fins to lift the tail from the water and send the fish gliding a foot or so above the surface for many yards. Often, upon losing air speed, a fish drops its tail into the water and resumes sculling, building up more speed and continuing on with the flight before plunging back into the water. I have seen fish thus sustain themselves in the air for distances upward of 200 feet or more. A feature of this glide which I have noted several times is that it is not

always flat, but carries the fish up over wave crests and down into the troughs in an undulating course.

Not many years ago a great controversy raged over the issue of true flight (flight sustained by wing action) vs. gliding flight in these fish. Those in favor of true flight cited the fluttering of the pectoral fins often seen while the fish were both taking off and gliding free of the surface. Those in favor of gliding flight maintained that the fish hadn't the muscular and skeletal development needed for flight-sustaining wingbeats. It is interesting to note that David Starr Jordan and Barton Warren Evermann, in their book American Food and Game Fish (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1908), could not agree on this question, Evermann maintaining that at least the larger species of the group had a real wing-flapping flight, and Jordan holding that the fins had no large power of motion of their own (Page 244).

The question was argued actively until in 1941 Edgerton and Breder published some high-speed photographs of California Flying-fish in flight (Edgerton, H.E. and Breder, C. M., Jr. 1941. High Speed photographs of flying-fishes in flight. *Zoologica New York* 26: 311-314), after which one finds few references to the issue. The photographs show a marked rolling of the fish from side to side during the taxi run, a rolling induced by the lashing tail and which caused the pectoral fins to bend, accounting for the illusion of wing-flapping. The fluttering of the wings sometimes seen while the fish are gliding clear of the water is probably caused by turbulence in the air flowing over the flexible, membranous wing (one can duplicate the effect by holding a piece of stiff paper or cardboard edgewise to a fast stream of air). Thus there are fish which, although they may not flap along like a bird, nevertheless can glide through the air for distances that astonish many a sea traveler.

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ARBORETUM BIRD WALKS

Beginning Sunday, October 2nd, the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum will resume its escorted bird walks on the first and third Sundays of each month.

Anyone interested in helping as a guide should contact Ted Masemore, Trails Chairman, Pasadena Audubon Society, 345 Highland Place, Monrovia, EL 8-5513. The bird walks will leave the entrance to the Arboretum at 7:30 A.M.

CHRISTMAS GIFTS FROM AUDUBON HOUSE

Cards reproducing Audubon's painting of the White Winged Crossbill. 15¢ each; less in quantity. Calendars with matching envelopes. 20¢ each; less in quantity. Order before Oct. 15th to insure timely delivery. Call or write Esther Johnson, Sales Chairman, OL 2-3653, 1250½ Holt Ave. Los Angeles. Bird and wildflower stationery, letterettes, matches, bird song recordings, Handmade, printed cloth carriers for Field Guides, 50¢; Audubon Bird Calls \$1.35. Natural history games and books for children. Books for grownups. Membership pins and lapel buttons, miscellaneous items. All sold before and after meetings. Profits go toward scholarships at Audubon Camp. Do your Christmas shopping early - at Audubon House.

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OCTOBER 20th

You can't possibly afford to miss Allan Cruickshank on October 20th. This world-renowned man of birds, nature, writing and photography was taught well and inspired greatly by our own George Hastings.

Hear Allan Cruickshank on the first screen tour - "River of the Crying Bird".

* * * * *

CONSERVATION

California has appropriated \$500,000.00 with which state officials and the State Division of Beaches & Parks are negotiating with Big Creek Timber Co. There are high hopes of saving the most scenic virgin redwoods west of Big Basin Park. Plans include waterfalls, fish and game areas along Berry Creek and west fork of Waddell Creek.

Ealo. Alto Times 8/18-8/25

CALIFORNIA STATE PARK COMMISSION has created Caswell Memorial State Park on Stanislaus River off highway 99 south of Stockton. 358 acres of virgin valley oak will thus be protected.

On Aug. 10th Secretary of Interior Fred A. Seaton reported favorably on legislation to establish POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE.

These are some of the "plus" items.

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Some notes from OUTDOOR CALIFORNIA

New Game Birds Planted by Dept. of Fish & Game.

In January of this year the Dept. "planted" 800 Turkish chukar partridges in 4 areas of the state, the nearest to our area being in Little Rock Canyon. This bird closely resembles the Indian chukar which had already been successfully introduced and for which there have been open seasons since 1954. The Turkish chukar prefers a moister climate than the Indian, but, like it, lives in steep rough country with a scattering of low bushy cover. About 1,000 more of these birds are to be released in March. The birds were raised on a game farm in New Mexico.

Trout take a Plane Trip

Last year the State Dept. of Fish & Game "planted" a total of 6,540,927 trout by twin-engined airplane. Of these, nearly 4,000,000 were rainbows, most of the rest eastern brook trout.

G. T. Hastings

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

CALENDAR FOR OCTOBER, 1960

- October 1 JUNIOR GROUP Saturday 9:45. Conservation Field Trip through Griffith Park. Meet at Ferndell Museum. John Peebles, Leader.
- October 2 ANNUAL TEA, at home of Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Small, Sunday, 2:00 to 5:00 P. M. 3028 Cavendish Drive, Los Angeles 64. RSVP VE 7-2272.
- October 6 EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING. Audubon House 7:30 P.M. Thursday.
- October 8 SATURDAY FIELD TRIP. Harbor Park (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 8:00 A.M. Bring lunch and binoculars. Leader: Betty Meyerfeld, PL 6-8740. Mr. E. W. Anacker of City Parks and Recreation will tell us about proposed Sanctuary and Observation Tower.
- October 11 TUESDAY EVENING MEETING. 8:00 P.M. in Great Hall, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd. Mr. Ernest Willoughby will speak on "Birds of the Northwest Alaska Coast", recounting observations made while he was a member of an expedition making an ecological survey of this area - Illustrated with color slides. Bob Blackstone, Chairman.
- October 20 THIRD THURSDAY BUS TRIP to Bixby Slough, Cabrillo Beach and Pt. Fermin. Bus leaves Biltmore Hotel, Grand Ave. entrance at 8:30 A.M. sharp. Cost \$2.50. Please have exact change. Make reservations 4 days before the trip. Edna Burt, leader, PL 5-1044.
- October 20 SCREEN TOUR, 8:00 P.M. Allan D. Cruickshank - "Rivers of the Crying Bird". John Burroughs Junior High School - 600 So. McCadden Place.
- October 23 SUNDAY FIELD TRIP. Upper Newport Bay. Wintering ducks and shore birds Meet at 8:00 A.M. on Highway 101 just south of Traffic Circle in Long Beach. Leaders: Don and Caroline Adams, FRontier 2-5536.
- October 27 THURSDAY MORNING MEETING. Plummer Park, Long Hall, 10 to 12 o'clock. Mrs. Catherine Freeman will show pictures of Avian Cliff Dwellers of the Gaspé. Her studies of birds, flowers and animals are some of the best we have ever had. An outstanding program. Bring lunch. Olive Alvey, Chairman.

L. A. AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERS, ATTENTION!!

Do you have a friend, neighbor, or acquaintance who shares your interest in the study and conservation of nature? If you do won't you please send their names and addresses to the Registrar of Members:

Mrs. Robert Sandmeyer
355 West Elm Avenue
Burbank, California

We would like to acquaint them with the Audubon Society and invite them to become members.