



These handsome Jerdon's Starlings sat on the barbed wire barriers at the base camp in Viet Nam.

WATCHING BIRDS IN VIET NAM

by IRA JOEL ABRAMSON, M.D.

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I started up the trail leading from my battalion command post into the jungle. As I passed a machine gun concealed beside the trail, I placed a bullet in the chamber of my M-16 rifle and turned the selector to full automatic. I wanted to be prepared to encounter Viet Cong. This was just another bird walk in Viet Nam.

The foliage was so dense that sunbeams did not reach the forest floor, and vines clambered to the treetops, sometimes over a hundred feet above. Spectacularly colored butterflies flitted along the trail.

After walking several minutes, I entered a deserted Montagnard village of thatched huts. However, I had seen many Montagnard villages before, and I knew from their construction that the huts were 'phony'. This was a Viet Cong way station on one of the main infiltration routes from North Viet Nam. My battalion was on a search and destroy mission to seek out such routes and disrupt infiltration of the thousands of North Vietnamese Army soldiers who invade the south each month.

Although I could hear many birds calling, they were difficult to see in the dense foliage. As I left the village and headed deeper into the jungle, I saw a flash of wings in a clearing where the trail crossed a stream. I quickly located a bird with a black head, chestnut back, and long streaming tail feathers - a Paradise Flycatcher - a new bird for my life list.

I continued along the trail a few more yards when suddenly I heard the staccato of rifles and machine guns, and then mortar rounds burst nearby. I reacted instantly by tearing through shrubs and thorns into a ravine alongside the trail and throwing myself to the ground in a concealed position. What was happening? Was it a Viet Cong attack? Was it just our soldiers firing their weapons? With our immensely greater fire power I feared our own weapons far more than the enemy's. I hugged the ground nervously for several minutes until the firing ceased. Then I hurried back toward the battalion worrying how the machine gunner I had passed when I started out would react as I popped into sight on the trail. Fortunately, he wasn't trigger-happy or nervous. As I passed him I asked, "What happened?"

"Cong," he answered.

A helicopter pilot and machine gunner had been wounded by snipers as they prepared to take off. I went down to inspect their wounds. My medics had done a competent job and there was nothing more for me to do.

Indeed, bird watching in Viet Nam has offered me thrills I never previously experienced in more than twenty years of pursuing this hobby.

When I first learned that I would be assigned to Viet Nam, I regarded it as an opportunity to see many new birds. I began to prepare for the tour by visiting the United States National Museum in Washington, D.C., where I compiled a list of the birds of Viet Nam and studied skins of as many species as time permitted. I found that the finest book on birds of the area is "Les Oiseaux de L'Indochine Francaise" by Delacour and Jabouille, an expensive four-volume set with each volume the size of an encyclopedia volume, - not the ideal field guide, especially for a combat zone. However, a number of books on birds of the surrounding countries were of more convenient size and contained descriptions or illustrations of more than ninety per cent of the Viet Namese species.

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BIRDS IN VIET NAM ...

Nevertheless, I knew I could not easily carry books into the field along with a rifle and a pack of military equipment; this forced me to consider the problem of identification without a field guide. No experienced bird watcher is likely to miss obvious marks such as eye-rings, wing-bars, breast streaks or basic color patterns, but other critical details which are inconspicuous may escape notice. I made a list and trained myself to look consciously for obscure features such as color of bill, legs, vent, undersides of wings and tail, and the presence of feathering on the tarsus. I considered habitat, altitude, flocking behavior, food, song and call notes as means of identification. I wanted to avoid seeing a bird in the field, returning to base camp to look it up, and narrowing the identification down to two similar species, one distinguished by a buffy vent and pale legs, the other by a white vent and dark legs that I hadn't noticed.

This training proved extremely valuable and most of the time I was pleased to find my descriptions adequate to identify what I had seen in the field. Still there were times when after careful observation I could only narrow the identification to a few similar species. In such instances I made notes from my reference books which I carried into the field the next time I visited the area. I was usually able to find the puzzling birds again and observe the details I had missed. In some instances where confusing winter or immature plumages were involved, I made sketches which I sent to friends in the United States National Museum who had museum specimens to compare with my sketches.

During my first four months in Viet Nam, I was stationed in the coastal city of Quang Ngai. The area was ninety per cent rice paddy. In contrast to rice growing areas in Texas or Louisiana that I had visited, I was surprised by the absence of grebes, cormorants, ibises, waterfowl and gulls, and by the scarcity of herons, shorebirds, rails and kingfishers. Why were these birds scarce or absent?

There are a few answers that I can suggest. First, the human population is so dense that even in the midst of a rice paddy there are usually numbers of people. Second, birds are hunted and trapped without regard for conservation practices, and long continued exploitation has eliminated many. Even such species as the Striated Weaver (a close relative of the English Sparrow) whose hanging nest is one of the engineering masterpieces of the avian world is trapped in flocks to be served in restaurants. On each walk through the Saigon market place I saw many species of birds I had never seen in the wild. Not all were there for consumption. Some were kept as cage birds and still others were purchased for release on certain holidays in accord with Buddhist tradition.

I wondered what, if any, effect the war had on bird life in Viet Nam. My observations led me to conclude that it has had little. Chemical defoliation is used to so small an extent that its effect

is negligible. The only places where it is used are relatively small areas around our bases to clear foliage and eliminate protective cover for the Viet Cong. In some areas land has been cleared of forest and jungle for military construction, but most of Viet Nam is so heavily forested that this, too, is negligible. I flew thousands of miles over Viet Nam and most of the time saw uninterrupted jungle beneath me. Certainly, the war is far less destructive to wildlife than the "normal" land use that I saw devouring the wilderness of Mexico or the Philippines.

At first with considerable timidity I began to look for birds around our military compound. Each Viet I saw was a possible Viet Cong who could pull out a weapon and shoot me the moment I turned my back. However, experience made me bolder, and I soon came to feel that for the most part the Viet Cong were a weak and unpopular group who could not possibly survive without massive aid from North Viet Nam, Russia, and China. By the time I left Quang Ngai, I had become accustomed to walking through the rice paddies alone and travelling by bicycle as far as twenty kilometers into the countryside.

I did have a few frightening experiences. One day as I walked through the canefields, I found myself completely alone in a small paddy surrounded on all sides by twelve-foot high cane. Suddenly, three Viet Namese dressed in the black 'pajamas' we associate with the Viet Cong (but which are actually worn by a majority of the country people) stepped out of the cane. They pulled machetes from their scabbards and started to shout English vulgarity at me. I was unarmed, but I felt that running would make them bolder, so I continued to walk at a normal pace peering at them from the corners of my eyes, hoping they wouldn't suspect I was unarmed. I got to the edge of the tall sugar cane and made my way to the road where numbers of people going by made me feel safe.

Another time as I drove along a dirt road through the rice paddies, an artillery round exploded nearby. The explosion startled me, but it also startled into flight several concealed Pond Herons, a species I had never seen before.

I became interested in the birds of the Quang Ngai area and hoped to write a paper after a year of observations there. I was disappointed, however, when my observations came to an end with my reassignment to the First Air Cavalry Division in An Khe. My disappointment promptly vanished when I arrived in An Khe for I found the central highlands to be an ornithologist's paradise in comparison to the bird-poor Quang Ngai area. While An Khe was not the best birding locale in Viet Nam, it was probably the most secure, since it was the base camp of the First Air Cavalry Division. The base was surrounded by a heavily guarded, mined perimeter, many strands of barbed wire, observation towers and patrols into the adjacent countryside.

Within the base there were a variety of habitats, -- marshy areas, streams, scrub jungles and, best

keeping just out of sight as if deliberately tantalizing the bird watcher.

I quickly realized that the most productive technique was to blend into the jungle. After squatting silent and motionless for several minutes, I could soon see birds in the open a few feet before me mindless of my presence. I used the same technique when my battalion was on operations in hostile territory, sitting with my back against a large boulder or tree so that I could not be approached from the rear, and confident that as long as I remained silent and motionless I would see anyone approaching from the direction I faced before he saw me.

Gradually the elusive jungle birds began to ignore me, and shy wren-babblers, shamas, and tailorbirds would flit before me. I watched jungle cocks crow and then fight, saw cuckoos as big as crows and brilliant green fruit pigeons. I made the acquaintance of many new bird families.

The barbets were the most tantalizing. They called monotonously and endlessly, but they are leaf green and invisible as they sit motionless in the foliage. How often I strained my eyes to see one that I heard calling close by and didn't see until it abruptly flew, woodpecker-like, and disappeared into the foliage of a distant tree.

In contrast, the most delightful and colorful families were the energetic sunbirds and flowerpeckers -- diminutive hummingbird like gems that live up to the expectations of what tropical birds should be.

The babblers are the most complex group. Birds of this large varied family radiate into niches filled by several other families elsewhere in the world. Many times as I looked at a new bird I would ask myself, "Is that a thrush or a babbler?" "Is that a warbler or a babbler?" "Is that a flycatcher or a babbler?" Some babblers even resemble rails.

The most amazing family, however, was the hornbill family. Most hornbills are huge--some more than fifty inches long. They fly with a roaring swish of wings that can be heard hundreds of yards away. They have immense grotesque bills. Their habits are as singular as their appearance. In the breeding season they hollow a large cavity out of a dead tree. When the female is ready to lay eggs, she enters the cavity and the male seals the entrance with a wall of mud. This dries to a concrete-like hardness leaving a slit just large enough for the male to pass morsels of food to the female imprisoned inside. During the entire three months of the incubation period the male feeds the female, and then the young as well, when they hatch. When the young are ready to fledge, the male hammers the mud wall apart. The female, after three months of inactivity, is fat and flabby and can barely flutter to the ground when she is released. After a few days she regains her strength.

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Paradise Flycatcher (White Phase)



Blackcrested Bulbul



Purple Sunbird



Oriental White-Eye



Little Spider Hunter



Long-Tailed Broadbill



Hair-crested Drongo

of all, a small mountain entirely within the base camp. Hon Cong, as the mountain was called, rose one thousand feet from the floor of the base camp. It was covered by dense rain forest inhabited by bands of gibbons, and occasionally tigers were seen there. The difference in altitude between the base and summit of Hon Cong was sufficient to provide a distinct habitat difference, and there were birds I saw atop Hon Cong which I saw nowhere else in Viet Nam.

I started to explore the base camp systematically, first visiting a patch of woods about a block from my dispensary. The first morning in that wood lot I saw nearly sixty species in an area smaller than a city block. The birds I saw included jungle fowl, parakeets, sunbirds, hornbills, barbets, bulbuls, babblers, sunbirds, drongoes, and mynas -- some of the brilliant, raucous, conspicuous gems of the Southeast Asian tropics.

Not only were the birds new, but bird watching conditions were new. In the temperate zone there is a degree of predictability regarding which species can be seen in a location in a given season, but this predictability is often absent in the tropics and each visit produced a completely different list of species. This variability is the result of mixed flock activity. In the temperate zone mixed flocks are not nearly so spectacular, but after the breeding season one often sees flocks of chickadees, titmice, kinglets, nuthatches, creepers, and woodpeckers traveling together. In the tropics mixed flocks sometimes cover hundreds of square yards and include not only the groups mentioned from our woodlands, but also babblers, old world flycatchers, minivets, leafbirds, flowerpeckers, sunbirds and other groups. They may contain forty species.

Though this description may make you think that it would be heaven for an ornithologist with such a concentration of species and individuals, one seldom has a satisfactory view of an entire exposed bird due to the density of the tropical foliage and the fact that many of the interesting tropical birds are adept skulkers, experts at



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Nov. 24 - EATON CANYON Except for fifteen minutes of feeble sunshine, the day was overcast from beginning to end; but the presence of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and a Mountain Chickadee gave support to the theory that Eaton Canyon is the place birds go when the weather is dull.

Some twenty devotees of birding worked their way along the west canyon walls and up Moist Canyon. The total of thirty-six species was not remarkable, but healthy-sized flocks of Cedar Waxwings, Oregon Juncos, Audubon's Warblers, and Golden- & White-crowned Sparrows warmed the heart. There seemed to be as many Golden-crowned as White-crowns for once, instead of the usual 1 in 100 ratio. Many Rufous-sided Towhees, Hermit Thrushes, and Red-shafted Flickers were observed. Hairy, Downy, & Nuttall's joined the Sapsucker and Flickers to represent the Woodpecker family. A Phainopepla and a couple of Band-tailed Pigeons were among those present.

The weather may have been dull, but the birds and the birders were bright-eyed and lively.

Pauline Cole, -- Trip Leader

Dec. 10-EVENING MEETING - The program for the evening was given by Dr. Charles L. Hogue, Senior Curator of Entomology at the County Museum of Natural History. The lush green foliage of Costa Rica, land of eternal spring, was indeed *restful to the eyes of Californians who are used to the dulled tones of chaparral and desert.* Brilliant flowers; strange insects and mammals; exotic birds of the cloud forest; all these were shown us in a fascinating program of slides taken by Dr. Hogue during months of research in this lovely Central American country. It is to be hoped that some other means of livelihood can be found for the natives who now chop down the cloud forest trees for charcoal to sell in the villages. Priceless habitat is thus destroyed, and species may be lost forever.

Dec. 14-15- CARRIZO PLAINS-The weather was cloudy; most of the birds were at the north end of the Plains, where we saw flocks of Horned Larks of uncountable numbers; abundant House Finches and Wh-crowned Sparrows; good numbers of Mountain Plover and brilliant Mountain Bluebirds. On account of the "shooters" we hesitate to pinpoint the places we saw white-phase Ferruginous Hawks, Marsh Hawk, several Falcons, and at least six Golden Eagles. We saw no cranes Saturday afternoon, and returned to the motel, where Herb & Olga Clarke proved that twenty people can be crowded into a small room for a convivial prelude to the bountiful buffet dinner served by the restaurant. Next morning at 5:30 we drove to Soda Lake, where we observed 500 cranes; they soon took flight, and were a grand sight against a blue-and-gold sunrise. They landed in fields where we watched them feed & dance. Later in the day the Russ Wilsons and the Eric Brooks saw at least 1000 cranes in the air.



calendar

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1969 JANUARY 1969

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	1969

- Jan. 1 HAPPY NEW YEAR
- Jan. 2 THURSDAY - EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING - 8:00 p.m., Audubon House
- Jan. 11 SATURDAY - FIELD TRIP - Lake Norco. Meet at 6th and Hamner in Norco at 8:30 a.m. Take San Bernardino Freeway (Int. #10) to Milliken turnoff, about 10 miles east of Ontario. Go south about 8 miles to Norco. An alternate route would be Santa Ana Freeway and Riverside Freeway to Corona, then north to Norco via Hamner Avenue. Wintering ducks and waterbirds -- Wood Duck, European Widgeon, night herons, etc.
- Leader: Harold Baxter 355-6300
- Jan. 14 TUESDAY - ANNUAL DINNER - Fox & Hounds Restaurant, 2900 Wilshire Boulevard, Santa Monica. "Happiness is 600 Birds," color slide program of Russ and Marion Wilson. Join them on their first trip around the country following retirement. Reservations must be made by January 8 -- \$5.50 per person. Mail to Audubon House, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., 90046.
- Jan. 25 SATURDAY - SUNDAY - FIELD TRIP - Salton Sea. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at Wister turnoff on Highway 111 (about 36 miles south of Mecca) north of Niland. Those wishing to camp Friday or Saturday night may do so at Finney Lake, about 1 1/2 miles south of Calipatria. Enter at Ramer Lake and follow signs. Bring firewood and water. For others there are good motels in Brawley. This is an excellent trip for wintering waterfowl and shorebirds.
- Leader: Larry Sansone UP 0-6398 or Bruce Broadbooks 670-8210

- Feb. 8 SATURDAY - SUNDAY - FIELD TRIP - Morro Bay
- 9
- ALWAYS BRING lunch and binoculars on field trips
- PLEASE no pets, and no collecting of any kind
- EVERYONE WELCOME AT ALL ACTIVITIES

It is not too early to start planning a trip to Texas for the fabulous spring birding there. Jim Lane recently returned from the T.O.S. convention, and brought home a small book giving directions for fourteen different trips in the Houston-Galveston area. Proceeds from sales go toward obtaining speakers, films, etc. for the Ornithology Group meetings. Make checks out to Good Birding Trips and mail to:

Mrs. Katrina Ladwig
3303 Sunset Blvd., Houston, Texas 77005
The price: \$2.00 plus 15¢ mailing charge.

Another book about Texas birding, -this one about bird photography by one of the nation's outstanding nature photographers, is "A Paradise of Birds: When Spring Comes to Texas" by Helen Gere Cruikshank, - photographs by Allan D. Cruikshank; Dodd, Mead, & Co., \$7.50.

Inquire at our sales department about this book.



One Man's Walden

By SANFORD WOHLGEMUTH

The everyday birder, the one tied to hearth and home much of the year, looks with longing (and not a little envy) at the romantic exploits and exploding life lists of the swashbuckling types returning from African jungles, Alaskan tundras and even the exotic Tijuana river bottom. For these pitiable sedentary souls trapped in their lives of quiet desperation there is indeed a Walden of sorts available. In the Los Angeles area practically everyone is within twenty or thirty minutes' drive of some small parcel of greenery -- a neighborhood park, a canyon, the edge of a golf course. Pick your spot and visit it when you can, as often as you can around the calendar. If you're addicted to the List, start a new one for your private refuge and you'll re-live some of the pleasure you received when every bird was a life bird.

Anyhow, fellas, my bag is Tapia Park. Fairly small as parks go it is somewhat off the beaten path in Malibu Canyon with relatively little human traffic -- and delightfully unimproved. No neatly trimmed lawns, no efficient leaf-raking, no sprinkler system, no swings for the kids, no "Tennis, anyone?" What it has is oak chaparral and Malibu Creek and rugged mountains for backdrop. You can push your way through brush, climb rocks, get your feet wet in the tules and (except on a Sunday afternoon) imagine yourself hundreds of miles from Civic Center.

You will find the usual complement of resident chaparral birds: Wrens, Wrentits, Titmice, Towhees, Flickers, Nuttall's, Downy, Hairy, and Acorn Woodpeckers; Quail, Thrashers, and Jays. And, usually, good numbers of individuals of these species. It is an especially good place for Western Bluebirds any time of the year, and in the spring the new blue fairly takes your breath away. I've seen them nesting in a vertical pipe only four feet off the ground. Red-breasted Sapsuckers are not uncommon and with a little bit of luck you can watch them at work making necklaces on the trees. A couple of White-breasted Nuthatches seems to be around most of the time and occasionally you will be rewarded with a Phainopepla.

The streamside-woodland community also flourishes. A fine stand of rushes and willows, tules and sycamores provides habitat for many Yellowthroats, Long-billed Marsh Wrens, Song Sparrows, flycatchers, and goldfinches. Green Herons and Belted Kingfishers are old familiars and a Sora is around, but you'll have to work to find him. In spite of the weekend kids with their collecting cans there seem to be plenty of frogs and tadpoles, crayfish and fingerlings in the stream.

Tapia is a great place for butterflies as well as birds, with hundreds of Monarchs, Swallowtails, Sisters, and Lorquin's Admirals. If you look real hard you will find a few patches of milkweed with the striking yellow-and-black Monarch caterpillar. One year we brought a few home and watched that

miracle of metamorphosis to chrysalis and butterfly.

But I digress. In the summer the population is augmented agmented by Black-headed Grosbeaks, Bullock's Orioles, swallows and swifts. In the winter there are Audubon's Warblers and Ruby-crowned Kinglets in every tree, and the ground and shrubs are full of Oregon Juncos, White- and Golden-crowned Sparrows, and frequently Robins and thrushes. A couple of years ago there was a deluge of Hermit Thrushes -- running along the ground, stopping abruptly, standing tall and flicking their reddish tails. Quite a sight!

Larger birds appear with decent frequency. Along with the ubiquitous Red-tails and Turkey Vultures there are a couple of Red-shouldered Hawks in residence as well as Sharp-shinned and Cooper's. I was considerably startled one day to see a Sharp-shinned in the grass twenty-five feet away from me with a live Song Sparrow in his grasp. When he saw me he flew off carrying the sparrow with him. We've seen an Osprey and a Great Blue Heron fly over, and a year ago a pair of Golden Eagles sailed directly overhead not a hundred feet above us.

As is true most everywhere, Tapia is most interesting during the spring and fall migrations. Warblers in great profusion pass through, and on some days seem to approach the fabled density of the eastern flyways. And then there is the tantalizing possibility of the unusual bird that brings one back. This has been a memorable fall for my wife and me. Here's a list for September and October: an Eastern Kingbird (attacking crows, just like it says in the book); three Summer Tanagers (male, female, and immature male) spending two weeks in the same Valley oaks, posing obligingly and- among other things - dining on bees; Vaux's Swifts in great numbers; Band-tailed Pigeons, Green-tailed Towhee, Marsh Hawk, and at least six American Redstarts! On a couple of days in September this year we saw a combined total of fifty-nine species. Our list for the park is one hundred and two.

A word should be said about the creek. Before man interfered the creek ran dry every summer, the reeds dried back and the willows thinned out. With the winter rains the greenery was renewed and by spring became very lush. About two years ago a sewage treatment plant was constructed on the far side of the stream despite my vigorous but ineffective protest. Now there is water in the creek-bed all year as some of the effluent from the plant is released into it. This has produced a luxuriant growth of rushes and tules and the willows also have prospered. This means more Yellowthroats and Marsh Wrens and more cover for other birds. Maybe the sewage plant was good for Tapia and my conservation instincts were misguided. I hope so. Excessive nitrogen in the effluent has probably been responsible for the enormous multiplication of weeds and algae in the stream, and lately I've noticed a powerful odor of decay. Hopefully, strong winter rains will clean out a lot of this so things can start afresh.

For me, Tapia is a fine place to start afresh, a place to breathe clean air, a place to renew the spirit.

.. MORE "WALDEN" ON NEXT PAGE..

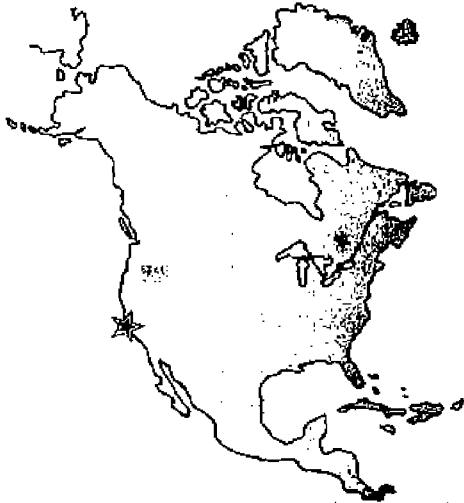
Editor's Note: Sandy wrote another paragraph which he was dubious about including. We believe our readers would want it. Here it is:

"Whither Tapia? How will it survive the projected freeway down the middle of Malibu Canyon, and the residential developments that are to replace the farms and ranches and green hills? I don't know. The pressures will be great - more people, more traffic. It is far too late to stop "progress"; the freeway is on the drawing board and the tracts are in the master plan. The pill has come too late. I suppose all we can do is try to soften the blow and try to "preserve and protect." In the meantime, you live it up -- the bomb hasn't fallen yet."

The "master planners" are our public servants. As of now, let them know that the current philosophy, "the greatest good for the greatest number" means for one hundred years from now as well as for tomorrow.



Point Reyes Bird Observatory



You have the opportunity of becoming a part of one of the most important bird research programs in the world; - the only one of its kind in the western hemisphere. Please read carefully the enclosed leaflet about The Point Reyes Bird Observatory. Where is it? The star marks the spot. The easiest way to help is by becoming a member. Also, the Observatory has an active need for volunteers to participate in its varied activities, and has overnight accommodations for them, including kitchen facilities. Overnight guests are expected to participate in the program of the Observatory and supply their own bedding and food. A basic rate of a dollar per night per person is charged to help defray costs, and reduced rates are available for longer stays. It is best to contact the Observatory at least a few days before a visit.

Make your reservations early

AUDUBON CAMP OF THE WEST

The AUDUBON CAMP OF THE WEST, in the Wind River Range of Western Wyoming, will again offer four two-week sessions in 1969.

Session I - June 29, July 11th

Session II - July 13, - 25th

Session III - July 27, - Aug. 8th.

Session IV - Aug. 10, - 22nd.

The camp is located only sixty miles from the Grand Teton National Park on the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Two units of University graduate or upper division credits are available to registrants (at extra cost). The camp fee of \$150.00 includes board and lodging, instructions, and all field trip transportation. Enrollment for each session is limited to fifty registrations.

"The Camp program offers a greater understanding of the needs for conserving our natural resources and a broader knowledge of life in a variety of habitats," says Paul Howard, the Camp Director. Howard further reports, "The Camp is a field nature-knowledge course of doing and learning under the leadership of well-qualified instructors. The textbook is the out-of-doors. The only prerequisite is interest and participation."

For further information and applications, write:

Director, AUDUBON CAMP OF THE WEST
P. O. Box 4446
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7377 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90046
EDITOR - Betty Jenner, 639 W. 32nd St.
Los Angeles, Calif. 90007
Phone: 748-7510

Art Editor - Bob Sandmeyer
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BIRDS

By G. SHUMWAY SUFFEL



Planning your birding for 1969? Let's look ahead to the winter season. Certainly, your first trip, even for a weekend, has to be the Salton Sea. When hunting season is over, all areas will be open; Snow Geese (with maybe a Blue or two) and ducks are there by the tens of thousands, and, if you want a challenge, try locating the Stilt Sandpipers; more than twenty were counted there on Thanksgiving Day by Guy McCaskie. If you have a few days more try Furnace Creek Ranch in Death Valley, - the weather's perfect, and the date groves, tamarisks, and flooded fields are very productive for the meticulous searcher. Our late November trip recorded numbers of Lewis Woodpeckers, several Sapsuckers (both eastern & western races), one Yellow-shafted Flicker with the Red-shafteds, and two Slate-colored Juncos with the Oregons. In the rare bird category we had two Harris Sparrows in a flock of White-crowns, a Bay-breasted Warbler (G McC) in the tamarisks near a little stream, and an Olivaceous Flycatcher (Bruce Broadbooks) for a first California record. Fortunately it was giving its characteristic plaintive call repeatedly, from the tops of the date palms, or it might have remained just another unidentified mystery bird. They are that difficult to identify by sight alone.

If you have the better part of a week, think about the coast north of San Francisco -- Tomales Bay, Pt. Reyes Peninsula, Limantour Spit and its lagoon, - Emperor Geese, Trumpeter Swans, Yellow-billed Loons and European Teal are just a few of the possibilities here. Then live a little - go all the way to Humboldt Bay and Crescent City for Oldsquaws, Rock Sandpipers, and maybe Snowy Owls (they were there in '67). Now you're much too far away to return by the same route; so get out the long underwear, check the anti-freeze and the tire chains, and turn east along the Oregon border to the land of ice and snow, and arctic birds. Lower Klamath Lake has eagles by the dozen, both Golden and Bald. Tulelake is good for Rough-legged Hawks & Northern Shrikes with Snow Buntings, Gyrfalcons, and Emperor Geese as possibilities. As you go south to Honey Lake and beyond, look for Longspurs, Rosy Finches, and Harlan's Hawks, - they've been seen here. And, on your way home, Death Valley's just a short detour from the most direct route. So it's a long, cold trip, but it's fascinating country, even spectacular, and it can be unbelievably beautiful. See you there in January.

By early December, the winter birds were here in good numbers -- Robins and Cedar Waxwings by the thousands where they concentrated for feeding or roosting; White-crowned Sparrows and juncos by the hundreds, and with them a few of their rarer siblings - another Harris Sparrow (Larry Sansone and Jerry Johnson) and a Slate-

colored and a Gray-headed Junco reported by David Byers and John Dunn, all at Morongo Valley. Dr. Richard Neuman also reports a Gray-headed Junco and two Slate-colored Juncos with a flock of Oregons at his Pasadena yard on Dec 8th. Most interesting were three reports of Bohemian Waxwings, large, dark cousins of our common Cedar Waxwings. They are one of the "invasion species" -- absent most years, then, unexplainably, they come south; here in small numbers, in the northern states in tremendous flocks. The first was found by Jay Sheppard's group at Morongo Valley on Nov. 17th; Ralph Mancke found eight more at Shoshone, on the way home from Death Valley, on the 24th; and Jo Vaughn discovered a small flock in Holcomb Valley, north of Big Bear, on the 27th. It looks like a "Bohemian Waxwing Winter."

The large hawks arrived in unusual numbers-- more than fifty Redtails were seen in a square mile or so of the Irvine Ranch in Orange County. An immature Bald Eagle was at the Ventura Marina on Nov. 16th (Paul Hessler and John Dunn), and a subadult was on the Carrizo Plains on Dec. 7th (Pasadena A.S.). The Osprey at Upper Newport Bay may winter-- it's been there since late August and was seen on Dec. 7th by the Sierra Club Field Trip. Another Osprey was seen at Hanson Dam in Tujunga by Sandy Wohlgemuth on Nov. 15th. The first Goshawk to be reported in Southern Calif. for several years was seen by Arnold Small and Larry Sansone on Dec. 9th at Round Valley, east of Big Bear Lake. Pigeon Hawks were seen at the Arboretum in Arcadia and at Morongo Valley; a Prairie Falcon too. The large falcon in downtown Los Angeles was seen for the third & fourth time by Jerry Johnson and definitely identified as an immature Peregrine Falcon. Let us hope it finds a mate and prospers, as they once did in the skyscrapers of New York City. We have too many pigeons downtown and not nearly enough Peregrines.

Winter Orioles are one of our most interesting local phenomena. It is very doubtful that orioles were able to winter here prior to the introduction of exotic winter-blooming plants, primarily the eucalyptus, and their artificial counterparts, the hummingbird feeders. Now they are rare but regular-- we have two current reports of Bullock's Orioles at feeders: one from Betsy Hoover in Rolling Hills, and a second from Pat Andrews in Brentwood. There was also an adult male Orchard Oriole at a feeder in San Diego in early December. We have had scattered sightings of Baltimore Orioles in past winters from Santa Barbara, San Diego, and locally at Rancho Park and in the Hollywood Hills. The point of this is, study every winter oriole-- the eastern varieties are almost as likely as our Bullock's or Hooded, and if you see a great deal of white in the wing, write a feather-by-feather description, -you might have a rare Scarlet-headed Oriole from Mexico; there are a few records. Not orioles, but similar ecologically are wintering Western Tanager and a Black-headed Grosbeak seen on Nov. 16th by John Dunn in Encino.

In the RARA AVIS department we have more than our share for early winter, with the rarest of all being the Little Gull found by Gene Cardiff near the north end of the Salton Sea on Nov. 16th.

WATCHING BIRDS IN VIET NAM. . . continued

What would happen to the female if the male met with some misfortune while she was imprisoned? An ornithologist once shot a male and then discovered the nest tree with the female incarcerated within. He observed to learn the fate of the female. Fortunately, because hornbills are gregarious and travel in flocks of several families, other males quickly took over the task of feeding the female and she was spared starvation.

Some of the other spectacular Viet Namese birds I had hoped to find evaded me. I didn't see one pheasant during the entire year. I looked futilely for peacocks on many occasions. My closest call came one day after I left the defensive perimeter of the base camp to visit an open woods where I heard peacocks had been seen. Suddenly, I heard small arms fire and bullets whizzed by me, some sounding like raindrops as they hit nearby foliage. I 'hit the dirt' and crawled into a depression in the ground. The shooting stopped. I got up and hurried towards the compound, and almost immediately the shooting resumed. As I dropped to the ground again, I wondered if someone were intentionally shooting at me. This time the shooting was more prolonged. When it finally stopped, I arose with some trepidation and started to run in a crouch. The firing started again, but I had finally come close enough to see its source. It was a squad of American soldiers testing their weapons. I hurried out of the line of fire. Considering that with their automatic weapons they were pouring hundreds of rounds into the trees where I had been walking, I was fortunate not to have been hit. It took me a few days to recover my enthusiasm to look for birds again.

According to my estimate there are about 439 species of birds found in South Viet Nam, of which I saw more than 250 -- nearly sixty per cent-- in the space of my year there. When I reflect on the hazards and difficulties I faced, I consider myself fortunate to have seen so many and come out alive from the experience.

About the Author. .

Our feature article is so informative and so timely that when your editor first read it in the FLORIDA NATURALIST, it was as though a window had been opened on that corner of the world; it would have been unfair not to share it with our members.

Ira Joel Abramson, M. D. was born in Philadelphia in 1933; attended Cornell University, and had the pleasure of studying ornithology there under Dr. Arthur Allen. He graduated from there in 1955 and from Temple University School of Medicine in 1959. He served internship at St. Francis Hospital, Miami Beach, Florida.

He wrote "A Guide to Finding Birds in South Florida", U. of Miami Press, 1961, and several other articles which have appeared in the Florida Naturalist, Atlantic Naturalist, Auk, and other ornithological journals. He served in the United States Medical Corps, 1961 to 1967; two years in Germany, one year in Viet Nam with the First Air Cavalry Division, where he was promoted to Major and awarded the Air Medal. Since July, 1967, he has practiced internal medicine in Miami, Fla.

His total life list of about 1700 species includes over 600 in the U. S. A. He has also birded extensively throughout Europe, Mexico, Caribbean, and southeast Asia.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRDS

. . . continued

This beautifully plumaged adult was seen by many of our members during the next five days as it caught insects while coursing over a small pond. The Olivaceous Flycatcher, previously mentioned, ran a close second, and was also a first record for the west coast of the U. S. Two always rare warblers were also very late: a female Black-throated Blue spent two short days in downtown Pasadena in mid-November, and a Parula was found along the Colorado River below Parker Dam (Jerry & Larry) on Dec. 1st. Guy McCaskie had a Tree Sparrow at the south end of the Salton Sea for a "furthest south" record, Nov. 28th.

A handsome pair of Vermilion Flycatchers was found by Julia Dembrowsky at Legg Lake in El Monte on Nov. 6th, and they were still there on Dec. 1st. They may winter. A European Widgeon appeared to be wintering at the mouth of the San Diego River, and another was reported on the U. C. S. B. campus at Goleta. However, a careful check of thousands of Widgeon at Legg Lake and at Upper Newport Bay revealed nary a European. There were four Blue-winged Teal however. John Dunn reports, and David Byers confirms an apparent second year Glaucous Gull at Malibu Lagoon in early December; all the

field marks were right but the bird was in worn plumage. A small white goose on an Arcadia lawn, then at the high school, and finally at the Arboretum, proved to be an adult Ross' Goose (John Atwood). Careful comparisons with the wing-clipped Snow Geese (with which it did not associate) was the deciding factor in identification. Cattle Egrets are wandering north along the west coast again but nesting has not yet been reported-- 28 were at the south end of the Salton Sea, four below San Diego, two at Pt. Mugu, and locally, seven at the Sepulveda Rec. Area, west of Van Nuys, on Dec. 8th (Russ & Marion Wilson).

Occidental College's pelagic trip from San Pedro to Santa Barbara Island on Nov. 22nd emphasized the fact that we know very little about our pelagic birds in winter. The sighting of more than ten Fulmars (both gray & white phase) suggests that this may be the first good Fulmar winter in five years. Pale-footed Shearwaters were sighted in unprecedented numbers. We saw a minimum of six birds; twice we had two in view simultaneously, --there were probably ten or more. A Slender-billed Shearwater off San Diego on Nov. 24th, by Joe Jehl, was the first report locally for several years.

With the holidays and Christmas Counts out of the way, we now have time to enjoy our birding in a more relaxed manner, and maybe even take a trip -- Northern California in January?

CODE FOR BIRDWATCHING

Florida Audubon Society

1. **GENERAL:** The welfare of the bird and its nest should be your first consideration. Do not let your own pleasure or curiosity interfere with this.
2. **NESTS:** During the breeding season listen intently for warning notes, and be sure you do not stay in the vicinity of a nest long enough for the eggs or young to be chilled. Be careful in choosing a place to watch or eat, or you may be keeping a bird from its nest. If you watch nests, do so from a distance with binoculars. If you find young birds that appear to have fallen from the nest, replace them in the nest if the nest is apparent; otherwise leave the young birds alone, - the parents are close and will protect the baby. (They may even attack you.)
3. **BREEDING COLONIES:** Do not walk over places where ground-nesting birds breed. You cannot be sure that you will not endanger eggs or young, -- not only by treading on them, but by frightening chicks and exposing eggs so that they become easy prey to predators.
4. **FIRES:** Brush fires are easily started and have disastrous effects on the bird population and their nests, so be careful with those matches and cigarette ends.
5. **DOGS:** If you take a dog with you, always keep it to heel or on a lead; an undisciplined dog can create havoc in the breeding season.
6. **LITTER:** Bird-watchers are increasing, so too is litter all over the countryside. Please help in the anti-litter campaign and see that your birding haunts are kept tidy.
7. **SECURITY:** Do not advertise the breeding haunts of rare species. Too many bird-watchers will disturb them, - and there is the danger of collectors. Egg collectors are always seeking information and many a rarity has been betrayed to them in this way. If you find a rare species breeding (especially Bald Eagles) inform your Society and let it remain a secret. It is a Federal and State offense to collect eggs or birds.
8. **COURTESY:** Be alert for posted signs. Always get the permission of the land owner or occupier before entering private property. During the nesting season keep to the paths in the woods or farm lands. Always close gates behind you.
9. **FINALLY:** At all times make as little noise and disturbance as you can. You will see more birds and frighten them much less if you "walk like an Indian."

ON BEING A FOLLOWER ! ! ! !

On a field trip, almost everyone is a follower. Although the trip leader has a responsibility, the followers do too. The following hints for followers, slightly modified, were taken from the Utah Nature Study Society's publication:

Arrive before departure time.

Wait for the leader before starting the walk; and once the walk begins, stay behind the leader! In these ways you will avoid scaring up birds that others may not have a chance to see.

Walk at the pace of the leader, and keep voices low.

Stop when the leader does. Avoid pointing. In describing where to look, use words like "right", "left", "straight ahead", tell height, and describe tree or bush where you see a bird. It is also easy to pinpoint a bird's location in a tree through the clock method. Assume twelve o'clock is straight ahead and up. A bird on the right, for example, would be at three o'clock. Or maybe at 2 or 4 o'clock. On the left side you could use such terms as 8, 9, or 10 o'clock.

It is considered impolite to throw sticks or stones in water, to pick wildflowers, and to snap off twigs or saplings.

The Yellow Bill, November, 1968
Fresno Audubon Society

**Los Angeles
Audubon Society**

*Annual
Dinner*

WOULD YOU LIKE TO "FOLLOW THE BIRDS"
AROUND THE COUNTRY, WITH PLENTY OF
TIME TO TAKE PICTURES? THAT'S WHAT
OUR FRIENDS RUSS & MARION WILSON DID.
THEY WILL SHOW US THEIR PICTURES AT
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READ THE CALENDAR FOR DETAILS.