

Western Tanager



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THE BLACK-CHINNED SPARROW

By Enid R. Michael

A friend and I are lingering near the north brushy wall of Eaton's Canyon, hoping to hear the song of the Black-chinned sparrow. Today is the eleventh of April and the spring bird chorus is in full swing. Warblers, Vireos, Wren-tits, Wrens, Towhees, House finches, Purple finches, - all are generous with their songs. Western gnat-catchers pipe a merry tune. And then, clear and sweet, another song, a new song for my ear! "There, that is the song of the Black-chinned sparrow, I think; but I shall have to see that bird to be sure," exclaimed my companion.

Having started to sing, the new bird was generous in his turn and expressed the beauty of the day over and over in happy bird fashion. Wheet, wheet, wheet, wheet, in flute-like tones, followed by t'dee'dee-de, de, sweet tones ascending the scale and ending in a buzzing trill, and, in case one was close to the bird, a trill at the start of the song could be heard, too.

Presently another song, in character resembling a weak Song-sparrow song, issued from the same thicket. So different from the flute-like song, it must belong to another bird. Could it be the Rufous-crowned sparrow? In like manner we speculated.

With our bird glasses we searched the hillside, but only tantalizing glimpses of flitting shapes, threading through the shrubbery, rewarded our diligence. At length patience had its reward, for in plain sight on a dead yucca stalk, poised on the sky line, was the enchanting singer. There he sat, plain as day to see, and sang both types of songs mentioned above. So, one sparrow sang both types of songs, but what sparrow? That, he was too far away to determine.

Two days later we were again in Eaton's Canyon. In the meantime my friend had returned and explored the north wall, from whence the bird voices had arisen, and he had discovered a favorite perch of the mystery singer. Today he hoped to lead me to the same view. The quest may fail, though, as today the bird may not sing. My companion leads the way up the north wall, and the air is sweet with scent of sage and sage-brush. At length we reach a small grassy flat, surrounded by thickets, and my friend indicates a dry yucca stalk. "He perched right there and sang both songs, so close to me. Such a happy little bird! But such good luck as that could happen only once in a life time."

While he speaks, the bird commences to sing up the slope, and before he finishes the bird dives down and perches on the same dead yucca! He tilts back his pretty head and sings his happy songs. A little breeze stirs the soft down of his breast and ruffles a few stray grey feathers in his crown. In general appearance he resembles a Junco, only a trifle more slender; head slaty grey, back brown, breast plain grey, but a black throat patch and orange-pink bill identify the bird as the Black-chinned sparrow. The Black-chinned sparrow seems to have a wide range on this brushy wall, and his voice, although delicate in character, carries clear across the canyon.

Note: Mrs. Michael is ranger-naturalist, Yosemite National Park, and an honorary member of the Los Angeles Audubon Society. - Editor

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A NOTE FROM A MEMBER IN THE NAVY

"Mahalo nui (many thanks)", writes Howard L. Cogswell from far-away Hawaii, to whom the society, through Mrs. Stultz, sent a Christmas box. "Especially good for removing that occasional feeling of loneliness we get - even with hundreds of other men around - was the long list of signatures from my friends in the L. A. Audubon; some new ones included, for I'll be friends, sight unseen, with anyone interested in birds.... I've added a Skylark to my list. No song, though, and without that he is just an overgrown, streaked Horned Lark."

THE NEW A. O. U. CHECK LIST

W. A. Kent has made an exhaustive study of the change to take place in the next edition of the A. O. U. check list, a preliminary report of which appeared in The Auk, July, 1944. Mr. Kent finds names changed, additional subspecies, species becoming subspecies and vice versa, consolidation of species, etc, etc. The ornithologists responsible for this work, he says, may well be commended for their ability to change their minds when they believe the evidence justifies it. The discovery of the new species indicates much research to keep up with the evolution in the bird world that has been going on since Archaeopteryx. Let us hope for conditions, he adds, that will permit an early issuance of the fifth edition of the A. O. U. Check List.

A NEW YEAR GREETING FROM OUR PRESIDENT,-

In the midst of war we find courage to look forward, to build as we go those bulwarks whose strength shall withstand the ravages of future despoilers; to give a lift to young people in their search for Nature lore; to stimulate an interest that leads to understanding of the cosmos; to play a part in the preservation of the American scene,- to such tasks we set our hand and, looking about us at the steadfastness of earth, sea and sky, we gather from their quiet security a promise for the future.

-----Erna Comby.

THE NOVEMBER CALENDAR was carried out according to schedule, with one exception, when rain interfered. First there was the field trip to Sunland Park, with lunch at the Alma Stultz Bird Sanctuary, followed by an instructive talk on how the Knobcone pine helps reforest burned areas, by Mr. M. V. Hartranft, a former member of the State Forestry Board...It was the usual second-Sunday at San Gabriel River Wildlife Sanctuary that was rained out, but the weather was fine for the Student Members' field trip in Fern Dell on the 25th and some 75 young people arrived for the promised birding, led by Mrs. Daugherty and Mrs. Stultz. Next day, the 26th, Mr. Julian's committee led the Sunday group to Cabrillo Beach, where 14 species of water birds were seen from the breakwater. After lunch the group visited the Museum guided by Director W. L. Lloyd, who talked on "marine life" as he showed case specimens. Mr. George Willett, Curator of Ornithology, Los Angeles Museum, added interesting comments.

THE NOVEMBER INDOOR PROGRAMS. At the evening meeting Nov. 9 and again at the afternoon meeting on the 16th, Mrs. Comby, returned from the annual convention of the National Audubon Society, gave us vivid impressions of the far-reaching activities of the national society. At the evening meeting Mrs. Comby, with Mr. J. T. Forter at the projector, showed beautiful motion pictures of the Roosevelt Sanctuary. At the meeting on the 16th Mr. W. Scott Lewis talked about the San Gabriel River Sanctuary, illustrating his remarks with his own fine kodachromes.... The indoor program for the younger folks, at the Museum on Saturday, the 18th, was again devoted to studying mounted specimens of birds they expected to find on the next field trip.... The final November meeting was the study class at Plummer Park, where, under Mrs. Shearer's guidance, we learned about barn and screech owls, then listened to Mr. Geo. T. Hastings as he told us about exotic plants which have so well established themselves here that one might well be forgiven for thinking of them as natives.

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY in Plummer Park was a delightfully friendly gathering of members and guests, with music and festive decorations, exchange of greetings and an all too brief talk by Miss Althea Warren, City Librarian. Best of all was the presence of our beloved Miriam S. Faddis, who was with us for the first time since her serious accident a year ago. In honor of the occasion she was presented with a woolen afghan to which thirty or more members had contributed squares embroidered with different kinds of birds. While somewhat overcome with surprise, Miss Faddis responded with:

. "A bird at your window to sing you a song;
A rose in the garden to cheer you along;
A ray of bright sunshine to lighten the day
And friends who are smiling to gladden the way,
I thought that the day might be glad if you knew
That these are the things I am wishing for you."

THE BIRDS OF PLUMMER PARK are all a-twitter over the replenishing of their larder through the packages brought to the Christmas Party for them. It is a generous supply, and on behalf of the birds, Mrs. Salmon (their chef!) says "Thank you." It is fun to sit at the window in our reading room and watch the birds at their feeding tables and at the Mickey Bishop fountain close by.

THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

CALENDAR FOR JANUARY, 1945

THURSDAY, Jan. 4. Field Trip, San Gabriel River Wildlife Sanctuary, Durfee and Lexington Avenues, near El Monte. Take El Monte train leaving r.E. Station, 6th and Main, Los Angeles, 7:49 A.M. Change at El Monte station to Long Beach bus leaving El Monte at 8:37 A.M. Get off at Temple School. Take lunch. Mrs. Daugherty, leader. This is to be a "House Warming" for the recently acquired unfurnished residence at the Sanctuary. Let's make it a Household Equipment Shower, and take some useful article of equipment of which we may have duplicates, or can purchase.

THURSDAY, Jan. 11. Central Library, Fifth and Grand Ave., 7 P.M. Mr. R. W. Julian presiding. Prof. J. T. Porter, Superintendent of Schools, Southern California Conference, Seventh-day Adventists, will show motion pictures in color of High Sierra country, birds of an inland lake, the Golden eagle and the Osprey. The preliminary study class will be led by Mr. Rolland Truman.

SUNDAY, Jan. 14. Field trip to San Gabriel River Wildlife Sanctuary. For directions see notice of field trip on Jan. 4.

THURSDAY, Jan. 18. Los Angeles County Museum, Exposition Park, 1:30 P.M. Program arranged by Mrs. Warren J. Holden, Program Chairman. Mr. C. V. Duff, who has had much experience banding birds and has given the Federal government valuable information out of that experience, will tell us interesting facts about banding and migration. Mr. George T. Hastings will show motion pictures, in color, of many of our resident and visiting birds.

SATURDAY, Jan. 20. Los Angeles County Museum, Exposition Park, 10 A.M. The Committee on Youth Leadership, Miss Unterkercher, chairman, will have an hour in the bird gallery for young folks, studying a selected list of mounted specimens; then a talk by our President, Mrs. Comby, on "Birds Everyone Should Know," illustrated with slides, in color.

THURSDAY, Jan. 25. Study Class, Long Hall, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd. 10 A.M. Mrs. Thomas R. Shearer, leader. A short review of last month's study of owls, a discussion of land birds that visit us winters, a talk by Mrs. Ann Young on "The Importance of Scientific Nomenclature," a talk also by Mr. W. Scott Lewis, to be illustrated with slides, on "Geology and Life." Finally, if there is time, the "Question Box." Bring lunch and spend the afternoon at our headquarters.

SATURDAY, Jan. 27. Field trip for Student Members and other young people under 18. General Douglas MacArthur (Westlake) Park. Meet at corner of Alvarado and Seventh Street at 9:30 A.M. Bring lunch. Mrs. Caroline H. Daugherty, leader.

SUNDAY, Jan. 28. Field trip, Griffith Park, Riverside entrance. Take Griffith Park motor coach at Monroe and Vermont Streets 8:30 A.M., arriving at Park Cafe about 9:15. Bird from there to Mineral Wells. Bring lunch and meet at Mineral Wells picnic tables at 12 noon. Leader, Mr. R. W. Julian.

IT IS A PLEASURE TO ANNOUNCE that "Canadian Nature," a magazine with which many of our members became familiar when Miss Ware presented our library with a year's subscription, has asked to exchange regularly with our "Western Tanager." It will therefore continue to be a source of pleasure and inspiration to us. The Magazine has presented us also with a copy of "Canadian Birds," a 32-page booklet written by L. L. Snyder, assistant director of the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology, and illustrated by T. M. Shortt, of the Division of Birds, of that institution. (Canadian Nature, 177 Jarvis St., Toronto, Ontario. 35¢) The booklet contains brief descriptions, with pen and ink drawings, of 75 birds, classified as to typical environments. A definite majority of the birds are resident here, or regular visitors. Our thanks to our neighbor on the North.