

Western Tanager



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"ANOTHER FIRST FOR MY LIFE-LIST" By LOUISE A. LUCKAN

When Mr. J. H. Comby announced that he had space on a chartered boat for a few more pelagic birders for February 8, the passenger list was soon completed. The trip to King's Landing at Newport Beach produced a number of birds along the highway, but we did not begin checking our lists until the boat was away from the dock and almost free from the breakwater.

Inside the harbor the gulls, pelicans, loons, terns and grebes were swimming or resting on the floats and buoys, as if to challenge us to show reason why they should accompany us out to sea. Mr. Comby, knowing the ways of birds, was prepared for just such a challenge. A chunk of suet from his basket produced a scramble by three gulls; after that our sponsor needed only to continue cutting larger or smaller pieces to increase the number of birds following.

The birds made no false entrances. The ring-billed and western gulls were soon accompanied by Heermann, glaucous-winged and herring gulls. Brown pelicans manoeuvred around our boat, then made an interesting exit back toward land. One pelican remained in our escort. It proved to be a real clown, providing a good laugh whenever it flew in close and landed a short distance from the boat's wake. We wonder, - did it repeat the stunt many times to give Miss Curry, with her camera, an opportunity to take its picture? The Pacific loon introduced himself, waited long enough for us to note his outstanding markings, then went about his regular performances. In the distance a shearwater gave us a view of his feeding habits and flight, and soon a flock of sixteen approached the boat so that we could say "Black-vented!" - a first for many of us. While checking that we heard "Fulmar in that group of gulls" from Mrs. Stultz. Sure enough, a Pacific fulmar flew by, showing its stocky body. Later several others came close. "An immature kittiwake to the left" from Howard Cogswell, caused us to turn our binoculars in that direction. Other smaller birds landed on the water, but dived as our boat circled them. Both the rhinoceros auklet and Cassin's auklet visited us. They stayed nearby so that we got a clear view as the boat slowed down. This was true also of the Xantus's murrelet. Dr. delaubenfels explained that the Alcidae were seldom seen, and here we had good views of three species.

Nearing the south end of Catalina Island, we wondered if the bald eagle would present itself. Mr. and Mrs. Eckler pointed out the female on the nest, and the next moment she flew to a high cliff where a young male joined her. Together they soared around the peaks several times. On the rocks below were hundreds of dozing sea lions, three species of cormorants and several black turnstones; in the water close by, sunfish, sharks, porpoise and two whales.

But it was time to return to the mainland. Mrs. Comby suggested that "J. H." open the other package to call our escort back. Ralph Mall helped, and by tossing suet into the air succeeded in feeding an individual gull to the point of satiation. Suddenly we heard "Jaeger to the left!" All glasses turned in that direction. The gulls flew forward right. A dramatic performance, - "How the Jaeger Got Its Name," - ensued. The other gulls flew to the assistance of the one attacked. Evidently the Pomarine jaeger got its desired food from the full, for it remained on the water a minute and reappeared later. Since our return trip covered the same route, many of our newly made friends returned to investigate the food, which by this time was almost used up.

We had seen 33 species of ocean birds, and everyone in the group had from one to six new birds for his life-list.

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CHRISTMAS BIRD-COUNTING FOR AUDUBON FIELD NOTES By Howard L. Cogswell

The recent Christmas bird counts, of which three were undertaken by local Audubon members, have focused attention on the more worthwhile aspects of the great sport of bird listing. Rather than merely listing the species observed, the Christmas count places a quantitative value on the list, each bird being counted, or if in large numbers, estimated. When taken over the same area for many years such counts become of real scientific worth in showing year to year variations in numbers of wintering birds and in building a true picture of the bird life of our various habitats.

The three counts taken in our section of California show a remarkable diversity of bird-life, including as they do almost every habitat in the area. The combined list for the Los Angeles, San Gabriel and Big Bear Lake counts totaled 180 species and 47,888 individual birds. Where else in the country can so many kinds of birds be found in midwinter within 80 miles of a metropolitan area!

The Los Angeles count of 151 species (published in full in the February "Tanager") bettered the previous all-time record for the whole nation by 15 species, in spite of missing about 10 regularly recorded in previous years. Although nearly half the observers' time was spent in chaparral and canyon areas, most of the rarities turned up at city parks, the beach, etc. Mr. and Mrs. Kent, at Ballona Creek mouth, reported the most unusual one, - a female Harlequin duck, hitherto not definitely recorded south of San Luis Obispo. A female bufflehead on a city park lake, a golden eagle over Santa Monica mountains, a grasshopper sparrow in Baldwin Hills, and rarely wintering birds such as black-throated gray warbler and ashthroated flycatcher, were other high lights of this count, now in its 10th year. The black oyster-watcher which many people saw at Ballona Creek during the previous month could not be found on count day.

The San Gabriel count. From the willows and cottonwoods and broad fields of the San Gabriel River Wildlife Sanctuary to the oak and chaparral areas near Pasadena and the pines on top of Mt. Wilson there are so many birds in midwinter that we decided this year to count them. On Dec. 28, accordingly, 28 observers cooperated in covering the best portions of the 15-mile diameter circle (size prescribed by Audubon Field Notes rules), centered so as to include as many different habitats as possible. Despite the scarcity of water birds on this inland count, a list of 109 species was produced.

Atop Mt. Wilson Dr. de Laubenfels and Robert Braman found it bright and sunny and a Townsend's solitaire and a flock of Cassin's finches graced their list; but then they had to hike through dense clouds half way down the mountain, nevertheless getting the only Steller's jays of the day in the middle of the cloud. John Tobin and friends went into Santa Anita Canyon to get the dipper and recorded not just one, but three dippers, a flock of white-throated swifts, a hairy woodpecker and 25 fox sparrows. A flock of Lawrence's goldfinches (Dawson, Smith), a grasshopper sparrow (Tobin), slate-colored junco and black-throated gray warbler (Cogswell), and the winter's largest flock of band-tailed pigeons (30, Quattlebaum), were also listed. Meanwhile, at San Gabriel River Sanctuary, the Combys tallied 1 pileolated and 2 myrtle warblers, 2 Wilson's snipe and the local pair of white-tailed kites, and both they and Mrs. Michael found red-bellied hawks, Virginia rails and pheasants. Lincoln Park and Devil's Gate Dam held 7 species of ducks; a female wood duck at Santa Anita Rancho Park since November, was conveniently counted Dec. 28 by Mr. Van Wagner; and in San Gabriel Wash several artificially stocked fish ponds attracted a noteworthy Caspian tern. Our thanks to all who helped put this new count over so well in its first year.

The Big Bear Lake Count. Our most wintry count, Dec. 29 at Big Bear Lake, started out in crisp snow with a temperature of 16° F. Shallow areas of the lakes were nearly all frozen and hunters were out in force as early as we, but several hundred ducks far out on the lake were identified by means of a spotting scope (Galen Smith and H. Cogswell). We counted only 250 canvas-backs and 9 American mergansers, both usually much commoner, and even the ubiquitous coots were estimated at only 9000 (Normal, 30,000 +); but 6 gadwalls and 1 mallard were species not often found on this count, now in its 7th year. Three bald eagles and 2 golden eagles were seen within a

(Continued on Page 27)

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT --

Conservation Week is observed in California March 7 to 14. It is with misgiving that we survey the loss of much of the natural wealth of our state, and a sense of urgency overwhelms us as we view the rapid strides with which changes that are of doubtful value are occurring. Thoughtlessness and lack of knowledge are two factors in the destruction that has caused our natural resources to dwindle to their present alarming status. We can increase our own knowledge by studying modern methods of conservation in land use, forest and wildlife management and water preservation, for these are basic values. Our Society has a golden opportunity to be of service in this great cause by helping the thoughtless person to learn to "see" and "hear", for the most ardent advocate of Conservation is he who can rightly evaluate the out-of-doors world, through an understanding of the simple things which we all love, - the trees and birds, the sunshine on the hills, the wind in the reeds, and a thousand other evidences that make up the magnificent universe. ERNA COMBY

CHRISTMAS BIRD-COUNTING. (Continued from Page 26)

half hour at Big Bear, and a cooper's hawk kindly dashed through a mixed flock of robins, Townsend's solitaires, Cassin's finches and pygmy nuthatches, causing them to fly up en masse, thereby enabling us to count them better than we could as they foraged through the pines and junipers.

Over on the desert slope Mrs. Stultz's party was fortunate in having several of the desirable species already located for them by Mr. and Mrs. Miller, who live nearby. Their list included a roadrunner, Say's phoebe, 15 sage sparrows, 20 desert sparrows and 1 plumbeous gnatcatcher (first on this count for these two species), Leconte's thrasher, sage thrasher, rock wren and 14 (!!) cactus wrens. They also found a Wilson's snipe at boggy Cushenbury Springs near the base of the mountains.

The Murdocks and Bill Dawson covered Santa Ana Canyon, on the Pacific slope of our mountain count and added 7 mountain quail, 3 Williamson's sapsuckers, a downy woodpecker and Hutton's vireo (both at exceptionally high altitudes for winter), and the usual chaparral birds - wren-tit, Bewick's wren, California thrasher, green-backed goldfinch, brown towhee. Along the Santa Ana River they found also, after much looking, the one dipper which has eluded us in all prior years but two.

All parties found and tabulated more bush-tits and mountain chickadees than in any previous year; but mountain bluebirds and pinon jays, frequently locally common, were not to be found. Total list on the count was 74 species (1 more than last year's "record") and 10,793 individuals.

Some generalizations that can be gleaned from all three counts are: (1) robins were scarce everywhere, in marked contrast to last year's abundance; (2) waxwings and western bluebirds also down tremendously; (3) bark crevice feeders, such as chickadees, nuthatches, creepers and bush-tits, all well up in numbers; (4) large hawks quite scarce, no Ferruginous roughlegs being found at all, and (5) most important of all, Southern California has the best birding in the country; so plan now to join in next year's Christmas counts. Also, see the announcement in January-February Audubon Magazine concerning the separate publication of "Audubon Field Notes" and join with other observers of your area to contribute worthwhile material to make it a year-round magazine of interest to bird-listers and scientists alike.

AN ANNA HUMMING-BIRD dropped down on a bare sandy spot in our garden, spread its wings, changing its position now and then, and took a sunbath! It behaved exactly as do doves and mockingbirds, relaxed and quiet for several minutes. At first I thought the bird was dying, or had been injured, but after enjoying the hot sun on its body, it righted itself and flew away. ---- MARY BARNES SALMON.

ADVANCE NOTICE of the field trip April 3. The plan, subject to change, is to go by bus to Chantry Flat, Santa Anita Canyon, above Sierra Madre. Watch the April Tanager for full information. ---- CAROLINE H. DAUGHERTY

THE WESTERN TANAGER

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Headquarters in Plummer Park, 7377 Santa
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President Mrs. J. H. Comby
Route 3, Box 378-F, Whittier
Telephone: Whittier 41-4236
Editor Miss Laura Greely
904 Kendall Avenue, South Pasadena
Telephone: Blanchard 7-1849

HONORS! To represent the National Audubon Society, Mrs. J. H. Comby has been appointed a director on the California Conservation Council, chairwomaned by Gen. Warren E. Hannum, head of the State Department of Natural Resources.... C. V. Duff has been elected president and Miss Dorothy E. Groner re-elected secretary of the Cooper Ornithological Club, Southern Division.... Upon nomination of the Los Angeles Area Council, B. S. A., approved by the National Executive Board, Robert B. Maule has been awarded the Silver Beaver medal, for "distinguished service to boyhood."... Of course you have seen our own Mrs. Willis's picture in the January-February "Audubon Magazine!" It was taken by Mr. Willis and, with other pictures, the work of Mrs. Mary V. Hood, it illustrates the story Mrs. Willis tells of how she comes to the rescue of orphaned or injured baby birds.
Congratulations to all!

PRIZES! Walter Scott, chairman of the Committee on Nature Study, is offering prizes to be awarded at the Study Class May 22, for (1), the best original drawing, sketch or hand-drawn picture of any kind relating to nature; (2), the best home work following the "Study Guide" of the Committee on Youth Leadership, Mrs. Salmon's "Life List" or a combination of them, or any original system, and (3), the best poem or other literary composition relating to nature. All contributions will continue to belong to the author. For desired information, telephone Mr. Scott, ANgelus 2-4649.

EATING DINNER DOWNTOWN prior to the next Screen Tour? If so, meet others, like-minded, at the Unique Coffee Shop, 1848 S. Figueroa St., 6 P.M., Monday, March 17. Mrs. Eckler will be in charge; Mrs. W. F. Willis, 4759 Ambrose Ave., Los Angeles 27, will take reservations. Must be made by Friday morning, March 14. Price, \$1.30 in advance.

NEW MEMBERS, WELCOME!

Mr. & Mrs. Hiram E. Beebe
1847 N. Wilson Ave., Hollywood 28
Richard Bungay
122 W. Lomita Ave., Glendale 4
Mrs. Lucile R. Crary
4000 Via Picaposte, Palos Verdes Est.
Miss Miriam Harriet Hart
1957 N. Bronson Ave., Hollywood 28
Miss Miriam Hubbell
100 E. Harriet St., Altadena
Dr. & Mrs. Guthrie R. Price
521 Alta Vista Drive, Sierra Madre
Mrs. Fred M. Roark
129 Sunset Terrace, Laguna Beach
Mrs. Kenneth Starege
10539 Edison Blvd., North Hollywood
Mrs. Ada F. Thompson
5636 Fulcher Ave., North Hollywood
Mrs. Adolph Wallner
13924 Wedington St., Van Nuys
Mrs. Adene B. Wilcox
4521 DeLongpre Ave., Los Angeles 27

WELCOME, also, to Mr. Merritt S. Dunlap, 8163 Madison Ave., South Gate, who has returned recently from the Service.

OBSERVATIONS: Our wintering wild duck population far below old-time par; however, around 600 pintail, 200 shoveller, 6 baldpate, seen Feb. 5, Playa del Rey area; also, 100+ avocet and numbers of large-billed sparrows all over jetties. Again the elusive black oyster-catcher seen there Jan. 30 (E. Goolden). A few black-necked stilts decided to winter over (unusual for them); have been seen on our marshes throughout the winter months. Mrs. Stultz observed 7 on Nigger Slough Jan. 25, one showing the breeding-plumage pink flush on the underparts. One was seen Feb. 5, Playa del Rey marsh; also one short-eared owl. Five American mergansers, Silver Lake, Feb. 5. Georgie Ware has discovered a hide-out of Lewis's woodpeckers, observing 6 in Sand Canyon Feb. 2. Observed around Los Angeles almost every winter some years ago, but now exceedingly hard to find. Western robins back in good numbers. A regular invasion of them worked the Glendale foothill areas Jan. 16 to 25; flocks seen in Griffith Park, Feb. 6.

WATCH NOW FOR black-chinned, rufous and Allen's hummingbirds, martins and swallows, Arizona and Bullock's orioles.

--- CAROLINE H. DAUGHERTY

LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

MRS. J. H. COMBY, President

CALENDAR FOR MARCH, 1947

THURSDAY, March 6. Field Trip. Cabrillo Beach (and possibly the harbor trip). Our last chance this year to see shore and water birds. Our Tanner Motor Bus will leave 6th and Olive Streets, Los Angeles (park side), 8:30 A.M. Round trip \$1.50. (Exact change, please.) Take lunch. We will stop at Nigger Slough and along the way for birding. Lunch hour will be announced upon arrival at Cabrillo Beach. In the afternoon we will visit the Marine Museum under the guidance of Dr. Wm. L. Lloyd, director. Bus will leave for Los Angeles about 3 P.M. Make reservation early with Mrs. J. L. Morain, 1041 S. Gramercy Dr., Los Angeles 6; Parkway 0339. Fare must be paid unless reservation is canceled before Wednesday, March 5. Mrs. Caroline H. Daugherty, Leader; telephone, Charleston 6-1747.

SATURDAY, March 8. 9 A. M. to 12 Noon. San Gabriel River Wildlife Sanctuary. Student members and other young people are invited to meet with the Committee on Youth Leadership, to study birds. Leader, Mrs. Hassel Smith. To reach the Sanctuary see directions below.

THURSDAY, March 13. 7:00 P. M. Central Library, Fifth St. and Grand Ave., Los Angeles. First floor. R. W. Julian presiding. Speaker, W. N. Jupe, who is coming from Palm Springs to show us "Pictures of California Hummingbirds". Mr. Jupe will have his own motion pictures, in color, of these and numerous other birds, the taking of which, he writes, has given him many hours of incomparable enjoyment.

MONDAY, March 17. Screen Tour. See special Screen Tour announcement.

THURSDAY, March 20. 1:30 P.M. Los Angeles County Museum, Exposition Park. Mrs. J. H. Comby presiding; Mrs. O. M. Stultz, chairman Program Committee. Speaker, Wm. W. Scott Lewis, with Mrs. Lewis at the projector. Subject, "Springtime on the Mohave." With his own Kodachromes, Mr. Lewis will show wildflowers of the Mohave Desert, with special emphasis on the food plants used by the Indians. This lecture will illustrate in an interesting way Mr. Lewis's belief that the various departments of nature are so interwoven that no one can really understand one without knowing something of the others.

SUNDAY, March 23. Field Trip: Bolsa Chica Gun Club ponds, Bolsa Bay and nearby beaches (A. M.) and Cabrillo Beach in San Pedro (P. M.), where you can choose a visit to the Marine Museum and nearby rocky shore or walk out the breakwater for more birding. This trip will cover all the coastal habitats for birds and other seashore wildlife, - ducks, shorebirds, sea lions, barnacles and Salicornia and kelp. Chartered motor bus will leave Los Feliz and Brand (N. W. corner), Glendale, at 6:45 A.M.; Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., at 7:10 A.M.; and Crenshaw and Manchester (S. E. corner) in Inglewood at 7:45 A.M. Round trip fare \$1.50. Make reservation EARLY with Mrs. C. L. Christianson, Hillside 5940. If driving, go via Firestone and Norwalk Blvds. to Bolsa Chica Road and Los Patos Ave. or via Sunset Beach to same corner (1.2 mi. from Coast Hi-way on Los Patos), whence group trip will start about 9 A.M. Leader, Howard L. Cogswell; telephone, Whittier 6-3748.

THURSDAY, March 27. 10:00 to 12 Noon. Study Class, Long Hall, Plummer Park; 7377 Santa Monica Blvd. (Santa Monica Blvd. - West Hollywood car; get off at Fuller and continue on foot one block west to park entrance.) Program will comprise: (1) Study of the second half of the 22 families of Passeriformes as outlined on the sheet used in January, which you will please bring again; (2) Brief review of the first half; (3) One representative, hawk family, one of the crane family and one of the plover family. Bring your lunch and stay for the eating of it under the trees. Leader, Walter Scott, chairman, Committee on Nature Study. Telephone, Angelus 2-4649.

SAN GABRIEL RIVER WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, operated by the National Audubon Society. Field trip, Sunday, March 9, starting from the entrance, 2610 S. Durfee Ave., El Monte, at 9 A.M. The Pasadena-Long Beach bus, four trips each way daily, stops at Temple School, opposite Sanctuary. From downtown Los Angeles go to El Monte by P.E. bus or train in time to transfer to Long Beach bus leaving El Monte at 8:39. Telephone information, TU 7272, for best schedule. If driving, go east on Third Street to Beverly Bl. continue on Beverly to Durfee Ave., thence north to Sanctuary.

VISITORS WELCOME. For information, telephone MO 1-6350 or BL 7-1849.