

Western Tanager

PUBLISHED MONTHLY, OCTOBER TO JUNE
BY THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY



THE LOS ANGELES BRANCH OF THE
NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOL. 14

February, 1948

NO. 5

SIX CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

By HOWARD L. COGSWELL

Ending the "birding" year 1947 with Christmas Bird Counts for Audubon Field Notes Magazine, members of the Los Angeles Audubon Society together with cooperating members of other nearby nature study organizations devoted a total of $416\frac{1}{2}$ man-hours in a total of six separate counts. Each count was taken within the prescribed 15-mile diameter circle, the general areas and number of species recorded in each being as follows: Dec. 20, Big Bear Lake, 91; Dec. 21, Los Angeles to Santa Monica, 152; Dec. 26, Malibu to Lake Sherwood, 113; Dec. 27, Pasadena and Mt. Wilson to San Gabriel River Sanctuary, 117; Dec. 27, Mecca and vicinity to north end of Salton Sea, 40; Dec. 28, Calipatria and vicinity to south end of Salton Sea, 90.

Including, as these do, almost every habitat in southern California (except open ocean offshore), the combined list of all the counts would be expected to be a long one -- and so it is: 219 species plus at least 8 additional "identifiable" subspecies. This is within 60 species of being a complete list of every kind of bird ever recorded in southern California in mid-winter! A few more may be added when we read of the several counts made in Orange and San Diego counties by groups of observers there. All the counts, if taken in accordance with specified regulations and sent in in time, will be published by the National Audubon Society in cooperation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

Most of the kinds of birds not listed on one or more of our counts are rarities and would not be expected every year anyway; but a few species known to be present in the areas were merely not located on the actual counts. Such were the golden eagle and duck hawk on the Pasadena count, Williamson's sapsucker and various small owls on the Big Bear count, Gila woodpecker, Harris hawk, ground dove and several small desert birds on the Imperial Valley and Mecca counts, and probably also the royal and Caspian terns on the Los Angeles count. A study of these "misses" before count time next year will help to boost our results then and should bring the combined list for southern California to at least 250 species.

The Los Angeles count, published in full in this issue, had by far the largest number of observers in the field and produced the highest number of species and the second highest count of individuals. The total of 148 species plus 4 subspecies is one better than last year's all-time national high of 151. The number of individuals (22,939) was surpassed only by the Calipatria count, of which 100,000 were red-winged blackbirds. The large numbers of waterfowl of a few years ago were not to be found there this year, however, partly because of the open hunting season. The Big Bear count of individuals (3046) was also way down because of the nearly complete freezing of the lakes and consequent reduction of waterfowl population. Tallying the numbers of birds reported on the various counts gives the impressive total of 162,630 individuals. The species recorded in numbers of 1000 or more, in order of decreasing abundance were: red-wing, Brewer's blackbird, yellow-headed blackbird (5000 at Salton Sea), coot, ring-billed gull, house finch, Audubon's warbler, Gambel's sparrow, California gull, robin, bush-tit, pintail and eared grebe.

Some highlights of the counts other than the one at Los Angeles, follow:
Malibu: Black brant, 1; ferruginous rough-leg, 1; short-billed gull, 23; varied thrush, 14 (at Tapia Park); vesper sparrow, 9; red-wing, 6000, and Brewer's blackbird,

(Continued on page 20)

THE WESTERN TANAGER

Published by the Los Angeles Audubon Socy. Free to Members. Non-members, 75¢ annually. Editor Miss Laura Greely
904 Kendall Ave., South Pasadena Telephone: Blanchard 7-1849

President-Emeritus ... Mrs. Mary B. Salmon
President Mrs. Mary V. Hood
Executive Secretary . Mrs. Bess M. Hoffman
1112½ S. Orange Dr., Los Angeles 35
Telephone: Walnut 8937
Treasurer Mrs. C. J. Parker
821 N. Garfield Ave., Alhambra
Telephone: Atlantic 1-2490

MEMBERSHIP DUES: Students (12-18 years), 75¢; Annual, \$1.50; Life, \$25; Patron, \$100. Joint Membership, Los Angeles and National Audubon societies, with Audubon Magazine, \$5 (minimum). Send applications, with the dues, to the Treasurer, at above address.

THE NEWLY APPOINTED COMMITTEE ON NOMINATION of officers for 1948-49: Miss Bonnie C. Green, 774 N. Heliotrope Dr., Los Angeles 27; telephone, MO. 1-5537; chairman; Mrs. Neil H. Lewis, 212 N. Wilton Pl., Los Angeles 4; Mrs. C. L. Christianson, 1065½ N. Oxford Ave., Los Angeles 27. The committee will welcome suggestions.

SIX CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS, Continued from first page: 2700, going to roost in tules at Lake Sherwood.

Pasadena: Wood duck, 1; redhead, 2 (females, on a gravel pit pond in San Gabriel Wash); turkey vulture, 9; red-bellied hawk, 4 plus; pigeon hawk, 3; barn, screech and horned owls (all the last six species in San Gabriel River Sanctuary area; owls by Mr. Comby, who did a midnight to midnight count); Lewis woodpecker, 4; ash-throated flycatcher, 1; Cassini's kingbird, 2; dipper, 2 (in Santa Anita Canyon - Loomis & Truman); mountain bluebird, 36; Townsend's warbler, 3; pileolated Wilson's warbler, 2; cowbird, 36; cardinal, 15; Lawrence's goldfinch, 2.

BIG BEAR: Common loon, 1; blue-winged teal, 3; Amer. golden-eye, 2 (Dunlap); mountain quail, 11; eagles, very likely immature bald, 2 (Woods); Chinese spotted dove, 2 (at ranch on desert slope - a new extension of range -Woods); belted kingfisher, 1 (a first winter record for the area -Cogswell, Smith); Lewis woodpecker, 3; cactus woodpecker, 1; white-headed woodpecker, 1 (only); Clark's nutcracker, -a very unusual concentration of three flocks of 30 plus each -Murdock); winter wren, 1; Leconte's thrasher, 1; Townsend's solitaire, 7; pine siskin, 138; Lawrence's goldfinch, 85; slate-colored junco, 1; savannah sparrow, 2 (a first for this count - Dunlap).

MECCA: Gambel's quail, 35; snowy plover, 6; black-necked stilt, 1; vermillion flycatcher, 3; pinyon jay, 2; verdin, 7; robin, 16 (all by the Ecklers and Mrs. Jayne).

CALIPATRIA: White-faced glossy ibis, 451; Canada, white-fronted and snow geese; bufflehead, 1; mountain plover, 14; lesser yellow-legs, 5; tree swallow, 300; vermillion flycatcher, 2; Abert's towhee, 60; crissal thrasher, 2; sage thrasher, 2; Brewer's sparrow, 2.

Perhaps most interesting of all are the records of white tailed kites on 3 counts, -Malibu, Los Angeles and at San Gabriel River Sanctuary; a gratifying increase in a formerly nearly extinct species. A very notable invasion of red-breasted nuthatches which has been in progress since September was also shown in the same 3 counts and 17 (!) were tallied at Big Bear by Mr. Dunlap.

NEW MEMBERS, WELCOME !

Samuel Ayres, Jr., M. D.
4665 El Camino Corto, La Canada
Mr. Samuel S. Gertzen
480 Diamond St., Laguna Beach
Mr. Frank V. Rhodes
310 Eleventh St., Santa Monica
Mrs. Mary Schuld
701 Westminster Ave., Alhambra

IN MEMORIAM

With deep regret we learn of the death of Miss Cassia Gier. Miss Gier was one of our newer members, having joined the Society less than a year ago. Great sorrow has come also to our member, Mr. Otto Zahn, in the death of his wife, and to another member, Miss Miriam S. Faddis, whose sister, Dr. Council Yerkes, has passed away.

To these bereaved friends and their families the Society extends sympathy.

THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, Los Angeles Area. Dec. 21, 1947. Territory: A section of Los Angeles radiating $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles from La Cienega Blvd. and Airdrome St., including stretches of seashore, marsh, open country, golf courses, oak-wooded canyons, chaparral, river bed, reservoirs, campus and city parks, and city suburbs. Forty-four observers in 23 parties, representing Santa Monica Nature Club, Southwest Bird Study Club and the Pasadena and Los Angeles Audubon societies. Organization of field work by Mrs. Caroline H. Daugherty; compilation by J. H. Comby. Total, 148 species, plus 4 additional subspecies; 22,939 individuals.

LOONS: Pacific, 3; red-throated, 3.

GREBES: Horned, 2; eared, 27; western, 260; pied-billed, 86

PELICANS & CORMORANTS: Brown pelican, 61; Farallon double-crested cormorant, 32; Brandt's cormorant, 2; Baird's pelagic cormorant, 2.

HERONS: Great blue, 11; green, 12; Amer. egret, 44; snowy egret, 26; black-crowned night heron, 40.

SWANS: Whistling, 4 (Silver Lake; C.H.D.)

DUCKS, ETC.: Mallard, 1; gadwall, 1; bald-pate, 123; pintail, 666; green-winged teal, 57; shoveller, 333; ring-necked, 51; canvas-back, 18; lesser scaup, 272; ccm. golden-eye, 3 (K); white-winged scoter, 25; surf scoter, 481; ruddy duck, 297; red-breasted merganser, 59.

HAWKS: White-tailed kite, 2; sharpshinned hawk, 12; Cooper's, 4; red-tailed, 24; marsh, 9; pigeon, 2 (H.L.C., M.G.W.); sparrow, 64.

QUAIL: Valley California, 120.

RAILS, COOT: Light-footed Clapper rail, 3; sora, 1; Florida black gallinule, 2; coot, 1713.

SHORE BIRDS: Snowy plover, 7; semi-palmated, 20; killdeer, 316; black-bellied plover, 308; surf-bird, 6; ruddy turnstone, 3; black turnstone, 20; Wilson's snipe, 8; long-billed curlew, 1; Hudsonian curlew, 16; spotted sandpiper, 11; willet, 598; greater yellowlegs, 33; least sandpiper, 288; red-backed sandpiper, 28; E. dowitcher, 3 (K); long-billed dowitcher, 337 (K); W. sandpiper, 172; marbled godwit, 166; sanderling, 294; avocet, 165; black-necked stilt, 4.

GULLS & TERNS: Glaucous-winged gull, 90; Western, 69; herring, 13; California, 825; ring-billed, 1648; short-billed mew, 1; Bonaparte's, 503; Heermann's, 132; Forster's tern, 50.

PIGEONS & DOVES: Band-tailed pigeon, 12; mourning dove, 348; Chinese spotted dove, 98; ringed turtle dove, 92.

ROADRUNNERS: Roadrunner, 1.

OWLS: Screech, 2; horned, 6; burrowing, 2; short-eared, 1.

SWIFTS, ETC. White-throated swift, 116; Anna's hummingbird, 177; belted kingfisher, 9.

WOODPECKERS: Red-shafted flicker, 137; Calif. woodpecker, 12; red-naped sapsucker, 1 (M.G.W. et al); red-breasted sapsucker, 4; willow downy woodpecker, 6; Nuttall's woodpecker, 11.

FLYCATCHERS: Ash-throated, 1 (M.G.W.); black phoebe, 159; Say's phoebe, 30.

LARKS: Horned, 15.

JAYS, ETC.: Calif. scrub jay, 164; raven, 2 (U.C.L.A. campus; A.L.B.); W. crow, 1.

CHICKADEES, ETC.: Mountain chickadee, 3; plain titmouse, 43; bush-tit, 626; red-breasted nuthatch, 7 (1-C.H.D., 6-S.B.); wren-tit, 241; house wren, 14; Bewick's 23; long-billed marsh, 2; canyon, 1.

THRUSHES, ETC.: Mockingbird, 110; Calif. thrasher, 56; robin, 311; varied thrush, 1 (R.M.); hermit thrush, 105; W. bluebird, 54.

OTHER PERCHING BIRDS: W. blue-gray gnatcatcher, 19; golden-crowned kinglet, 11; ruby-crowned kinglet, 117; Amer. pipit, 67; cedar waxwing, 246; Calif. logger-head shrike, 26; Hutton's vireo, 7; orange-crowned warbler, 6; myrtle warbler, 8; Audubon's warbler, 2212; Townsend's warbler, 2; yellow-throat, 13; English sparrow, 435; W. meadowlark, 287; redwing, 30; Brewer's blackbird, 887; dwarf brown-headed cowbird, 3; purple finch, 158; Cassin's purple finch, 8; house finch, 2164; pine siskin, 6 (D.E.G.); willow Amer. goldfinch, 84; green-backed Ark. goldfinch, 239; Lawrence's goldfinch, 1; spotted towhee, 82; brown towhee, 465; savannah sparrow (not including sub-species following), 77; Belding's savannah sp., 30; large-billed savannah sp., 1; lark sp., 3; rufous-crowned sp., 11; slate-colored junco (with Oregons; H.L.C.), 1; Oregon crowned (Gambel's, etc.) sp., 960; golden-crowned sp., 110; fox sp., 29; Lincoln sp., 12; song sp., 104.

OBSERVATIONS

The Louisiana heron, previously reported from Mission Bay, San Diego (See The Tanager, Dec., 1947, p. 11), was found there again Dec. 9. This is the slim, graceful bird Audubon called "Lady-of-the-Waters." It is common in southern states, nesting in large wooded swamps and on wooded islands in inaccessible bogs. Also observed in the Mission Bay area Dec. 9, - 40 black brant, a flock of 23 royal terns, many baldpate (the duck common to the San Diego back bay country) and 8 buffle-head ducks.

From the Palos Verdes Estates country the R. N. Shuarts observed, Dec. 12, 7 white-tailed kites, all perched on a bush at one time in a small canyon. The Shuarts see 2 to 3 kites on every trip in that area.

In the Playa del Rey area, Jan. 3, Miss Martha Lengerman reports seeing 33 black-necked stilts, - by far the greatest number of stilts wintering over ever reported.

On General Mac Arthur Park lake are many lesser scaup ducks, a few ring-necked and canvas-back and a beautiful Anthony's green heron. On Lincoln Park lake are numbers of baldpate ducks. On Echo Park lake are pintail, a white pelican and 3 Anthony's green heron, and the little cackling goose is back for the winter, - evidently the same little goose that has spent the last several winters in this park. At Silver Lake reservoir 4 whistling swans came in Dec. 16 and were still there as of Jan. 5. These swans breed almost entirely north of the Arctic Circle, and winter south to Chesapeake Bay and Currituck Sound on the Atlantic and to Sacramento Valley in California. We are especially favored in having these 4 immature whistlers winter here.

WATCH NOW FOR: Allen's and rufous hummingbirds. The rufous is a migrant here, breeding in Washington and Oregon. Allen's breeds from Ventura County north. Both may be seen feeding in the flowering eucalyptus trees.

----CAROLINE H. DAUGHERTY
Field Leader

TREE SWALLOWS

Major Clifford Pangburn, widely known ornithologist who was stationed here for a time during the World War, but now in Florida, sends one of our members the following notes, dated Nov. 17, 1947:

One of the interesting bird sights here from now until spring is the flight of the tree swallows. They winter here in enormous numbers, and much of the time are deployed over the whole area. However, they like myrtle berries, which are their food when weather conditions clear the air of insects. They also seem to like to fly in huge, compact, circling flights.

Our house is a center of an area where these conventions are held. Right now at the window in front of my typewriter, there is a gathering of them so large that I hesitate to guess at figures. There are certainly 7500, and I really think 20,000 would be more accurate. They wheel about so rapidly and in so many directions that counting is entirely impossible.

I have estimated the length, width and height of the area in which the flock is concentrated. Conservatively, it runs to about four million cubic yards. So if there is one swallow in each 500 cubic yards of space, there are 8000. The fact is I believe the concentration is much thicker than that. The denser sections of the flocks form an almost opaque mass of birds against the sky. When eating myrtle berries they wheel in a disc, and suddenly 500 to 2000 drop at once on a clump of bushes. They pick off two or three berries each, and then with a roar of wings all take off again. The whole proceeding is one I do not recall seeing described in any of the books.

IN CALIFORNIA, the tree swallow is, in the main, a summer resident, March (or even February) to October. It passes the winter, irregularly or locally, in the lowlands of southern and west-central California. This is climatically the hardiest of our swallows. As to relative numbers, locally common to abundant. ----Distribution of the Birds of California, Grinnel and Miller, p. 273.

THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY
President Mrs. Mary V. Hood
Executive Secretary, Mrs. Bess M. Hoffman, 1112½ South Orange Drive, Los Angeles 35
Telephone: WALnut 8937

CALENDAR FOR FEBRUARY, 1948

THURSDAY, Feb. 5. Field Trip, Chatsworth Reservoir Sanctuary. Good area for both land and water birds. Tanner Motor Bus will leave 6th & Olive Sts. (park corner), Los Angeles, 8:30 A.M. Will stop to pick up passengers corner Hollywood and Cahuenga Blvd., Hollywood, 8:45 and Ventura Blvd. and Laurel Canyon 8:55. Round trip fare \$1.75. Exact change, please. Take lunch. Make reservations EARLY with Mrs. Bertha Ensign, 1403 Angelus Ave., Los Angeles 26; telephone, Olympia 1073. Those driving go out Ventura Blvd. to Topanga Canyon Blvd., right to Roscoe Blvd., left to Fallbrook St., right to Reservoir gate. Please be at Reservoir gate close to 9:30, when gate will be open to admit Audubon visitors. All will leave Chatsworth Reservoir grounds by same gate about 3 P.M. Lunch at 11:30 at picnic tables, followed by Nature talks. Leader, Mrs. Caroline H. Daugherty; telephone, CHARleston 6-1747.

THURSDAY, Feb. 19. 1:30 P.M. Los Angeles County Museum, Exposition Park. Mrs. Hood presiding. Kenneth E. Stager, Curator of Ornithology, County Museum, will present the "bird of the month." W. Scott Lewis will show his new motion pictures, in full color. This movie starts with close-ups of insects, including the life history of the beautiful fennel swallow-tail butterfly. Then come lizards, laugh-provoking chipmunks and other small creatures, followed by sea-lions, bears and deer, the characteristics of each being described in the lecture. The last half of the reel features gulls, shore birds, ducks, geese, grebes, and the American egret.

THURSDAY, Feb. 19. 7:00 P.M. NOTE CHANGE IN DATE. Central Public Library, 5th Street and Grand Ave., Los Angeles. Howard L. Cogswell presiding. The National Audubon is sending us for this occasion the new (1946-47) films of the Nature Camp and Center activities. Of much importance to us in view of the early establishment of such a camp in California. The study section will center around plant-animal communities of the broad-leaved woodlands.

SUNDAY, Feb. 22. Field Trip, Playa del Rey. Take Redondo Motor Bus via Playa del Rey, Olive Street deck, Subway Terminal, 423 S. Hill St., Los Angeles, at 7:20 or 8:50 A.M. arriving at Playa del Rey and Vista del Mar streets about 3/4 hours later. Bird walk will start about 9:30 from the restaurant. Take lunch, and after the walk meet on bridge along the shore south of the restaurant at 11:30. A short program will follow. Leader, Arthur L. Berry; telephone, ATLantic 4-6575.

THURSDAY, Feb. 26. 10 A.M. to 12 noon. Study class, Long Hall, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd. Take Santa Monica-West Hollywood car; get off at Fuller and continue on foot one block west to park entrance. Bring your Peterson, or Hoffman, or both. Program will comprise: (1) Cranes, rails, gallinules and coots; (2) Shorebirds, not so far covered; (3) A short lesson and quiz on botany. Bring your lunch and stay for the eating of it with us under the trees. Take time to visit headquarters.

Leader, Walter Scott, Chairman, Nature Study Committee; ANgelus 2-4649.

SATURDAY, Feb. 26 and MONDAY, March 1. Audubon Screen Tour, - "Happy Valley," by Tom and Arlene Hadley. See special announcement. Admission by Screen Tours Club membership card only.

NATURE LEADERS' WORKSHOP. WEDNESDAYS, Feb. 4, 11, 18 and 25. Los Angeles County Museum, Exposition Park. For leaders of youth groups. Members of the Audubon Society who wish to help will be welcomed. Leaders, Mr. & Mrs. A. L. Berry; ATLantic 4-6575.

SAN GABRIEL RIVER WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, operated by the National Audubon Society. Mrs. O. M. Stultz, director. Field trip, Sunday, Feb. 8, starting at 9 A.M. from the entrance, 2610 S. Durfee Ave., El Monte. For desired information, telephone Whittier 6-3748.