

LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

PLUMMER PARK

7377 SANTA MONICA BLVD.

LOS ANGELES 46, CALIFORNIA



Western

Tanager

PUBLISHED MONTHLY, SEPTEMBER TO MAY
BY THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

THE LOS ANGELES BRANCH OF THE
NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Vol. 16

February, 1950

No. 6

ROCKS, MINERALS, AND BIRD LIFE

Walking along a foothill trail one day recently we heard a grating sound in a tree overhead and spied a bushy tail drooped over a limb. There would seem to be little connection between that incident and geology and yet the sound told us plainly that the rocks underfoot were shales laid down under the sea at about the close of the Miocene Period. It was really very simple. The only nut a tree squirrel could find at that altitude was the California wild walnut, and that tree rarely grows except in soil derived from the disintegration of this particular type of shale.

Driving across the desert in the spring we often stop to admire the showy desert plume or Stanleya; and when we see it we know that the soil at that point contains the rare element, selenium, which is poisonous to man altho it makes our photo-electric cells possible. Stanleya absorbs selenium from the soil, but the Indians learned to remove it from the plant by boiling the leaves and throwing away the water, thus making them edible. If we search we may also find a species of locoweed growing nearby that absorbs so much selenium that bees sometimes die as a result of collecting the nectar.

On the way to Owens Valley we pass two lakes. The one called Little Lake is the best locality for birding on the entire trip. The other, near Lone Pine, is almost devoid of bird life. When we look for the reason for the difference we find that Little Lake is surrounded by basalt, an iron-rich lava that disintegrates into fertile soil. As a result there is plenty of food and the birds know it. The lake at Lone Pine is in a region of silicic rocks that disintegrate into a rather poor soil and therefore the food supply is deficient.

Wherever we go we note similar phenomena. Potassium salts are absolutely essential to life and their principal source is orthoclase, the potassium feldspar which nature has kindly provided in abundance and with the potassium combined with silica in just the right proportion so that it will not disintegrate and release the salts either too rapidly or too slowly. Plant life, and therefore animal life, would be impossible without a minute amount of magnesium to make the chlorophyll function, and we find that minerals containing magnesium are widely scattered throughout the crust of the earth. Without Vitamin B 12 we would all die of pernicious anemia, but plants would be unable to produce that vitamin for us if nature had not disseminated an almost unbelievably small amount of cobalt through the soil.

It is interesting to learn to know as many different species of birds and other animals as we can, but it is well to realize that back of these creatures there is an amazing complexity of natural laws that are so intricately interwoven that a lifetime of study is too short for their perfect understanding.

Food chains depend on soil and climate. Climate depends upon a multitude of intricately interwoven factors. Rocks result from events that took place millions of years ago as a result of other events millions of years before that.

We admit that the presence or absence of eye rings or wing bars are sometimes of importance, but when we look back of the bird to the marvelous mechanism of nature we feel that we are glimpsing something of the great Creative Power of the universe.

W. Scott Lewis

THE WESTERN TANAGER

Published by the Los Angeles Audubon Soc'y
Free to members, others 75¢ a year
Editor .. George T. Hastings
517 Euclid St., Santa Monica
Phone ...Santa Monica 5-1137

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Student (12 to 18 years) 75¢, Annual \$1.50,
Life \$25, Patron \$100. Joint membership
with the National Audubon Society \$5.00.
Send applications for membership to the
treasurer.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Mr. Bob Batchelor,
Star Route, Calabasas, Calif.
Mr. Pat Gould,
1714 Valley Blvd., Rosemead

WE RECEIVE A LEGACY

When Mrs. Ada Miller died in 1947 she willed to our Society the bonds she had purchased during the war years. These, with interest, have a maturity value of over \$8,000. The will has now been settled and the bonds are in our possession.

MRS. ADA J. MILLER

Those who had the privilege of knowing this quiet, friendly lady will never forget her. She joined our Society in 1930 and her steadfast interest in our program, her faith in the purposes of the society, and her participation in our meetings made her presence always welcome.

She was an ardent conservationist, with a far view of Nature as a whole, not only did she enjoy birds, but also the mountains, streams and forests as they comprise the great out-door world.

On her trips into the parks and forests she was never without a companion. Some of our members recall with pleasure the occasions when they met Mrs. Miller in the inspiring surroundings of Sequoia Park and enjoyed with her some delightful trips.

The San Gabriel Wildlife Refuge was dear to her heart and many were the trips she and her friends from Long Beach made there in her familiar blue sedan. During the early years of its struggle she was always optimistic, looking forward to the time when it would be in truth a refuge and an educational center.

Her legacy to us should inspire us to go forward to realize the ideals she had for our Society.

--Erna Comby

WITH OUR NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

To the groups making Christmas Bird counts were added this year the Santa Ana Bird Club, Pasadena Audubon Society, and the San Bernardino Valley Society.

A fine example for these groups is the nationally recognized record of the Los Angeles Society, which for many years has profited from the untiring efforts of our field leader, Mrs. Caroline Daugherty and her committees.

With all these counts we have covered several hundred square miles of territory and a number of interesting records made such as a green-tailed Towhee on the San Jose Creek, Sora Rails in the San Bernardino area, 150 Lark Sparrows in Irvine Canyon, and a gray-headed Junco on the Mt. Wilson slope. Eagles and other predacious birds feeding on birds that had died on the ice of Big Bear Lake denoted a stark winter in that area.

More and more people are becoming conscious of the value of small refuges. In the San Diego area several small properties have been posted as sanctuaries. Ordinary posting as required by regulations of the Fish and Game department, coupled with a personal or Audubon sign usually provides a fair degree of protection.

On a brief visit here recently, the president of our national society, Mr. John H. Baker, visited our new branch, the San Bernardino Valley Society. While there he got a glimpse of the proposed refuge on Warm Creek. Of this we will hear more later.

--Erna Comby

Last September at Carlsbad Caverns I waited in the evening with thousands of others to see the bats come out. To my right on top of a yucca on a small hill perched an owl. When the bats were swarming out by thousands the owl dived into their midst, missed his prey, and returned to his perch. The next time he dived he remained down out of sight 'til his appetite for bats was satisfied. The ranger who spoke to the crowd about the bats told us the owl came every evening.

--May Alsop

THE AVOCET - AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

When I first pecked my way out of the shell I found that my mother had built our nest out of weeds and grass stems, down on some wet ground. In fact she confided to me that the only reason I and my brothers and sisters were not drowned in the tide-land mud was that she had built up our nest with pellets of mud, several inches above the ground level. Our nest was surrounded with tall marsh grass, so the five olive-colored eggs (speckled all over with dark brown spots) were concealed nicely from prying eyes.

My home is not in Boston, even though I am sometimes called "Blue Stockings" or "Blue Shanks." As a matter of fact I do not live anywhere near Boston - I and my close relatives all are found west of the Mississippi River, my mother tells me. My family really makes its home-nesting site anywhere from eastern Washington to southern Manitoba, down to northern Iowa and to northwestern Texas and across to sunny California. When we make our long migratory flights from our winter play-grounds in Mexico, we often stop in the tidal lagoons of southern California - in fact I and some of my cousins enjoy California so much that we are spending the winter there.

My father says that his family is made up of large handsome birds, 16 to 20 inches long, with fine long legs. We dress very smartly in black and white. Our bills are long, slender and turned up at the tips, which gives us a rakish air, quite satisfying to the young bloods of the clan. Because of the shape of our bills, learned men call us Recurvirostra, which, if you ask me, sounds rather pedantic. Just before the nesting season we acquire a red-dish tinge on our heads, necks and chests, which is really the last word in color combination.

Other little details about us and our way of life may interest you. My three toes in front have a nice web which joins them together and of course I walk easier in shallow water and over mud flats as a result. My song is a beautiful "Wheek" or "Kleek" - at least I think it is beautiful. I get quite excited and sing very fast and repeat my words over and over, like most gossipers. I have a nice red or brown eye, my bill is coal black, and as I have inferred, my legs are light blue.

I have such a good time hunting my food in the soft black mud, as I sway my head from side to side, as though I were mowing with a scythe. I wade in the water and sometimes even run along with the water almost up to my belly. Then again if I get tired of walking, I will swim along and dabble for my food, as the fat ducks do. When our group is busy with nest building we enjoy dancing around in a somewhat staggering manner with our wings extended, and cutting capers generally. If you will come out to the Del Rey lagoons some day you may see some of us enjoying your charming western hospitality. --May Warrick

OBSERVATIONS

GEESE-DUCKS: In the Norco area about Dec. 22, Arnold Small observed several hundred Canada Geese coming in flocks of 50 or more. A beautiful sight.

On Ballona Creek, Dec. 25, Howard Cogswell saw 1 male Redhead and 2 male Greater Scaup Ducks. He writes the Greater Scaups were with about 200 Lessers, in good light. The green iridescence all over the head noted carefully, as compared to the Lesser's bit of greenish at the back of the head.

Hansen Dam Area: Jan. 18-Found 7 species of ducks, Ruddy and Canvas-back in the majority, Eared and Pied-billed Grebes, both Egrets, Great Blue Herons, a flock of 76 Mergansers, mostly American, with a few Red-breasted. (D)

MOURNING DOVES: Flocks of from 20 to 40 feeding in busy city streets and along edges of lawns is surprising as their natural habitat is open country. It must mean they are adaptable.

WHITE-TAILED KITE: Reported by the Fred Blunts soaring and hovering near new Long Beach football stadium - then poised atop a 60 foot tree nearby.

EASTERN PHOEBE: In the Lake Henshaw area. Reported Dec. 26 by Eleanor Beemer, previously by Leola Doner. These 'birders' would like Los Angeles Audubonites to go down and verify their find.

WATCH NOW FOR: Returning Rufous and Allen's Hummingbirds, especially among the flowering Eucalyptus trees. The male Hooded Oriole often comes in February. Look for Purple Finch, Siskins, Hermit Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Lincoln's Sparrows.

--Caroline H. Daugherty

50th CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Los Angeles (same area as in the previous 12 years). December 26, 1949. Forty observers in 22 parties. Total hours, 134 (108 on foot, 26 by car); total miles 231 (65 on foot, 146 by car).

Common loon 11; Pacific loon, 14; red-throated loon, 4; horned grebe, 2; eared grebe, 14; western grebe, 721; pied-billed grebe, 34; brown pelican, 301; double-crested cormorant, 146; Brandt's cormorant, 1; great blue heron, 7; Am. egret, 16; snowy egret, 25; green heron, 3; black-crowned night heron, 10; Am. bittern, 1; black brant, 3; baldpate, 59; pintail, 1362; green-winged teal, 11; shoveller, 10; ring-necked duck, 8; canvas-back, 43; lesser scaup duck, 397; buffle-head, 6; white-winged scoter, 6; surf scoter, 641; ruddy duck, 184; Am. merganser, 17; red-breasted merganser, 29; turkey vulture, 11; sharp-shinned hawk, 13; Cooper's hawk, 3; red-tailed hawk, 22; marsh hawk, 3; peregrine falcon, 1; pigeon hawk, 1; sparrow hawk, 82; Calif. quail, 75; clapper rail (light-footed), 2; Am. coot, 679; snowy plover, 3; semipalmented plover, 1; killdeer, 355; black-bellied plover, 95; surf-bird, 2; ruddy turnstone, 6; black turnstone, 4; Wilson's snipe, 1; long-billed curlew, 3; Hudsonian curlew, 13; spotted sandpiper, 7; willet, 627; greater yellowlegs, 2; least sandpiper, 161; red-backed sandpiper, 22; dowitcher (long-billed), 78; western sandpiper, 50, marbled godwit, 166; sanderling, 232; avocet, 26; black-necked stilt, 1 (wintering over); glaucous-winged gull, 117; western gull, 682; herring gull, 15; California gull, 2516; ring-billed gull, 922; short-billed gull, 1; Bonaparte's gull, 375; Heermann's gull, 98; Forster's tern, 10; band-tailed pigeon, 16; mourning dove, 184; Chinese spotted dove, 94; ringed turtle dove, 61; screech owl, 1; horned owl, 2; burrowing owl, 3; poorwill (Lusky), 1 (seen and heard at close range, -Russells); white-throated swift, 22; Anna's hummingbird, 138; belted kingfisher, 9; red-shafted flicker, 68; acorn woodpecker, 16; yellow-bellied sapsucker (red-naped), 1; yellow-bellied sapsucker (red-breasted), 2; downy woodpecker, 2; Nuttall's woodpecker, 3; ash-throated flycatcher, 10 (more wintering over in this same area each year); black phoebe, 133; Say's phoebe, 16; horned lark (California), 120; Steller's jay (blue-fronted), 2; (on high foothills, Brode, et al); scrub jay, 1-9; crow, 1; plain titmouse, 31; bush-tit, 265; creeper (Sierra), 1; wren-tit, 342, house wren, 6; Bewick's wren, 16; long-billed marsh wren, (tule), 2; canyon wren, 1; mockingbird, 177; California thrasher, 84; robin, 42; hermit thrush, 14; western bluebird, 54; blue-gray gnatcatcher, 11; ruby-crowned kinglet, 21; Am. pipit, 79; cedar waxwing, 289; loggerhead shrike, 42; Hutton's vireo, 2; orange-crowned warbler, 6; Audubon's warbler, 1115; Townsend's warbler, 1; yellow-throat, 7; Wilson's warbler (golden-pileolated), 1; English sparrow, 339; western meadowlark, 393; redwing, 64; hooded oriole (Arizona), 1 (male, wintering over in beach foothill area - observed for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour by Warrick et al); Brewer's blackbird, 1638; brown-headed cowbird, 7; black-headed grosbeak, 1 (observed by E.M. former N.P. Naturalist and W.D.Q. - another bird wintering over); purple finch, 55; Cassin's purple finch, 6; house finch, 2340; pine siskin, 76 (75 observed in alder trees - E.M. - W.D.Q.); Am. goldfinch, 59; Arkansas goldfinch, 165; spotted towhee, 64; brown towhee, 341; Savannah sparrow, 41; Belding's sparrow, 14; large-billed sparrow, 2; lark sparrow, 40; rufous-crowned sparrow, 3; Oregon junco, 56; chipping sparrow, 176; white-crowned sparrow, 624; golden-crowned sparrow, 42; fox sparrow, 30; Lincoln's sparrow, 1; song sparrow, 122.

Total 145 species and subspecies; about 22,006 individuals. Birds in general were the scarcest experienced observers have ever seen at this time of year in this same 13 year old count area ... many of our observers working their same area for their 13th consecutive year. Most of the usual species could be found by closer hunting, but fewer individuals. Seen in count area on Dec. 25, road runner, 1; on day of count, yellow-billed magpie, 1; J.R. (evidently an escape as this magpie is resident in Santa Barbara County and north - about 150 miles away).

Wyatt A. and Christine M. Kent, Mr. and Mrs. G. T. Hastings, Stanley Brode, May Warrick, Clara Splitter, John Cunningham, Mrs. Theodore Jahn, Alma Stultz, May Wait, Caroline H. Daugherty, Pat Gould, Bill Hawkins, Arnold Small, Dr. Robert Taylor, Ralph Mall, Howard Cogswell, M. S. Dunlap, Enid Michael, W. D. Quattlebaum, Roy E. Johnson, Philip Banks, Bess M. Hoffman, Alice Lewis, Justin and Earl Russell, Arthur, Constance and Dale Berry, Clara S. Weedmark, Don Bleitz, Dorothy Groner, Gertrude Woods, Mr. and Mrs. R.W. Julian, Mary B. Salmon, C.R. Thomas, E.P. Terry, John H. Wentz, Nellie Spencer.

This count organized and compiled by Caroline H. Daugherty

THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

Officers - 1949-1950

President.....Mrs. Neil H. Lewis, 212 N. Wilson Pl., L. A. 4
Secretary.....Mrs. Bess M. Hoffman, 1112½ S. Orange Dr., L. A. 35
Treasurer.....Mrs. C. J. Parker, 821 N. Garfield Ave., Alhambra

CALENDAR FOR FEBRUARY, 1950

THURSDAY, Feb. 2. Field Trip. Chatsworth Reservoir Grounds. To see geese, ducks, many shore and land birds, band-tailed pigeons, Lewis's Woodpeckers, etc. Our Tanner motor bus will leave Los Angeles, 6th and Olive streets (park side) 8:30 a.m. Will stop to pick up passengers corner Hollywood and Cahuenga Boulevards at 8:45, Laurel Canyon and Ventura Boulevard at 8:55. Round trip fare \$1.65. Have exact change. Make reservations early with Miss Edith Crane, 4925½ Cimarron St., L. A. 37, AYminster 2-8458. Take lunch. Dress warmly. Those driving go out Ventura Blvd. to Topanga Canyon Blvd., right to Rosco Blvd., left to Fallbrook St., right to Reservoir gate. Be there close to 9:30 when gate will be open to admit visitors. Leave Chatsworth Reservoir Grounds about 3 p.m. Lunch at 11:45 at picnic tables.

Leader - Mrs. Caroline H. Daugherty - Charlston 6-1747

THURSDAY, Feb. 9. Evening Program Meeting, 7 p.m. Echo Park Branch Library, 520 Glendale Blvd., Los Angeles.

Take Temple St. bus (No. 11), or red car on Glendale Blvd.

Use outside door to lecture room on north side of building.

First half hour, - announcements, reports, etc. At 7:30 "Flowers of the San Gabriel Mountains," illustrated lecture by Ranger Leslie Cammack of Crystal Lake.

THURSDAY, Feb. 16. Afternoon Program Meeting, Los Angeles County Museum, Exposition Park, at 1:30.

Mrs. Caroline Daugherty will show kodachromes of points of interest and fall coloring on a September trip to Colorado, and also, of the great concentrations of wild geese and ducks on the Sacramento Federal and State Wildlife Refuges, near Willows, - in the Sacramento Valley.

THURSDAY, Feb. 23. Study Class at Plummer Park at 10 a.m.

Take P.E. trolley Santa Monica-West Hollywood line. Get off at Fuller Ave., walk one block west.

First hour - Birds of Prey as destroyers of rodents and of birds.

Second hour - Plants and Man, the basic source of all food.

Mrs. Mary B. Salmon in charge of the class.

SUNDAY, Feb. 26. Field Trip to the Arboretum, Rancho Santa Anita, 9 a.m., No. 303

Old Ranch Road. Enter from E. Colorado Blvd., just west of Santa Anita's north parking lot, and opposite old Santa Fe Ave. Station. By street car, take Glendora-Moravia car, 6th and Main Sts. to Golden West Ave., walk north 1/2 mile to Vaquero Road, turn right (east) to arboretum entrance.

Guided tour of the grounds, history of the trees and visit to the new green house with its exotic plants.

Leader = W. D. Quattlebaum

THE SAN GABRIEL RIVER WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

2594 South Durfee Ave., El Monte - Telephone FOrest 0-1872

Mrs. O. M. Stultz, Director

Mrs. M. Gertrude Woods, Assistant Director

Maintained by the National Audubon Society, with the cooperation of its Southern California affiliated societies and branches. Regularly scheduled field trip, the second Sunday of each month, starting from the entrance at 9 a.m.