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Western



Tanager

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

THE LOS ANGELES BRANCH OF THE
NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 18

December, 1951

Number 4

THE AUTUMNAL SONG PERIOD
Lloye Miller

I like these late September days. They are pleasant days. The New Englander or the Corn-belt poet may feel that Indian summer is for him alone. "When the frost is on the pumpkin and the corn is in the shock" was not written by a Californian, but the "fall of the year" does come to us here quite as truly as it comes to our eastern cousins and our California birds seem to be just as responsive to it as any rustic poet. Furthermore, they are likely to express their feelings in similar fashion. They have to sing about it. Thus we get the autumnal song fest.

When we bird watchers are in iconoclastic mood we say that the bird sings to advertise his claim to certain territory or to win himself a mate for the nesting season. Oh yes, it may have originated in such fashion - but has it gone no further? Must it stop there? The earliest human artisan chipped out a crude implement to serve a strictly utilitarian purpose. The neolithic artist, however, beautified his implement and thus made it feed his spirit as well as his flesh. Ultimately he may have carved out a pure abstraction that fed the spirit only and it became to him "big medicine" because it ministered to his feeling of well being through its beauty alone. I wonder if the autumnal song of birds may not be somewhat the same. Particularly do I suspect such to be the case with that type of expression that I have for two generations called the "meditative song".

Others have called it the "whisper song" (which it sometimes truly is). Some consider it to be the "primitive song" (which I am confident it sometimes is not). The California Jays have been singing about my yard this fall; singing their rare and pleasing meditative song. It is quite a throaty warble that is strongly suggestive of the California Thrasher, but is lower in pitch. Only occasionally does it include a note with the real Jay quality. The bird sits quietly in thick cover; the warble is scarcely audible beyond a distance of fifteen feet and it seems to be given purely for his own entertainment. In fact, as soon as he realizes that he is discovered, he bounces up through the tree with his characteristic raucous squawk, for all the world as though he were saying, "I'm a rarin', tearin' swearin' tough guy. I don't go for this music stuff. That wasn't me doin' that!"

At eight o'clock the other morning, in a dense fog, one of my mocking birds sat on a 'phone pole singing a scarcely audible jumble of notes that was not broken up into separate patterns as you hear in his customary song but rambled on like Tennyson's "brook" - without end. It did end abruptly, however, when another mocker approached too near. "Traumeri" gave place to sharp attack notes and the intruder was driven off with great vigor. The singer certainly did not give the impression of being a young bird who was timidly trying out his voice. He seemed to be singing for the audience of his own self (though he didn't realize it).

I have recognized also, an autumnal exuberance which is expressed in song. The non-social Black Phoebe takes a fresh start in late August and September. He has completed a strenuous summer's work by raising a family (or two). He has gone through the physiological labor of the complete annual moult that gives him a new suit of clothes. He has perhaps begun to put on a bit of weight underneath that coat of

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THE WESTERN TANAGER

Published monthly, September to May, by the Los Angeles Audubon Society, Inc. \$1.00 per year, free to members. Editor - George T. Hastings, 517 Euclid Santa Monica - Phone EXbrook 5-1137

THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY, Inc. Membership, joint with the National Society. - Regular \$5.00, Sustaining \$10, Active \$25.00 (Includes subscription to Audubon Magazine). Local - Student \$1.00, Annual \$2.00 Life \$25.00, Patron \$100.00.

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Miss Elsa Schwartz, our Recording Secretary, asks to have her correct 'phone number given, as an error was made in our Year Book. The number should be Whitney 1876.

OUR PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Your president was privileged to represent the Society at the National Audubon Convention in New York last month. Our organization is greatly respected nationally, for its fine program and hard working committees, and I was happy to share our experience with others.

In addition, it was a great privilege to meet the fine leaders of the National Society and the talented leaders of other Societies.

At each session, there was free discussion concerning some phase of Audubon work to which your president contributed, and from which she received ideas and inspiration. She will give a more complete report of the convention in January, at the program meetings.

Delegates were present from Detroit, Montreal, Miami, Puerto Rico, St. Louis and South Bend, as well as from many Societies in the New York area.

There were five people from California, Mr. Vaughn MacCaughey and Mrs. Laurel Reynolds from the Bay area and Dr. Telford Work, Mrs. J.H. Comby and your President, from Southern California. Dr. Work and Mrs. Reynolds presented film programs which were very fine.

It is my hope that some way may be found to have more of our members attend these inspiring conventions, and to have the convention held some year in California.

Maybelle DeMay

A REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

In October, a California office of the Society was opened in San Francisco. This is located in the California Teachers' Association Building, at 693 Sutter Street. Miss Mary Joffe is the manager.

In the office, as also at the San Gabriel River Wildlife Sanctuary, is an attractive display of nature books, prints, calendars, Christmas cards, post cards, charts, bird and flower cards, Audubon Nature Bulletins, and other educational leaflets.

In a window display adjoining the street entrance will be found an arresting exhibit. It portrays the state bird and the state flower; and on a scenic map of the state, the location of the Societies' principal activities...In the foreground, are four habitat groups, of ultra-modern design, illustrating Audubon activities in California.

John H. Baker

YOU BELONG AT AUDUBON CAMP

If you like the out-of-doors; if vacation to you means exciting adventures in the High Sierras; if you want to help in the program of intelligent use of Natural Resources - then for two weeks next summer, you belong at the California Audubon Camp at Sugar Bowl Ski Lodge at Norden - close to Donner Pass, Lake Tahoe, Squaw Valley, Mount Rose, Reno, Truckee.

There we learn of the conservation and wise use of natural resources; bird and insect study and its relation to plants; vertebrates and invertebrates and their relation to the land and its forms; and all these in relation to ourselves - what they do for us and how we can preserve for our own further benefits;

The faculty is superb, the food excellent, the lodging quite lush for a camp, the campers from all over the country are wonderful - the scenery most glorious of all, great mountains, lovely meadows, lakes and rivers.

Hiking to Sugar Bowl rim, to Donner Summit, through streams and marshes up to Mount Rose, horseback rides around Ice Lakes on a moonlight night, swimming and canoeing in Donner Lake, cruising for a day on Lake Tahoe, station wagon trips almost daily, to the outskirts of Reno; into Squaw Valley; up and down the ski lift. These and many more exciting activities!

A real vacation; a real thrill to bring back to your class room, club, ranch, community nature activities which are a pleasure as well as a great help and incentive in saving our forests, streams, mountains, plants, animals, birds for our better use and for the future.

I've never enjoyed a vacation more than my two weeks at Audubon this August! I've never seen more beauty anywhere. I've never met a group of people with more varied backgrounds, interested in constructive activities. I've never eaten more nor laughed more, than at Audubon.

Lucille G. Mitchell

The love of Nature helps us greatly to keep ourselves free of those mean and petty cares which interfere so much with calm and peace of mind. It turns "every ordinary walk into a morning or evening sacrifice", and brightens life until it becomes almost like a fairy tale.

John Lubbock

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feathers. There is a purely physical sense of well being of which he is wholly unconscious but which wells up in him as a reserve of nervous energy and he speaks it out in his metronomic song, beating time to his slightly spread tail. He is feeling fine and he has the urge to say so.

The flock-singing of the White-crowned Sparrows, particularly after a shower; has it any function other than an expression of well being? A bare tree top full of Black-birds, every one of them vocalizing, used to inspire us children to say the black-birds were "having church", and the figure still seems appropriate after three score and ten years and many church services.

A half hundred Linnets chattering in a bare peach tree certainly sounds joyous, and who are we to claim all rights to happiness? Or why do we point an accusing finger at one who suggests such an "anthropomorphic" interpretation of this animal behavior? Might we not just as properly accuse the bath-tub baritone of being "ornithomorphic"? Or the cobbler who croons at his shoe pegging; the motorist who sings to the hum of his motor; the farmer who whistles as he swings his out-bound milk pail; are they any more truly happy (or less so) than my October mocking birds, white-crowned sparrows or jays? Happiness is difficult to define, but there is something contagious about these "songs of contentment" and they bring to me a certain something I call happiness. - I like the autumn song season.

LOVELY THINGS

I treasure thoughts of lovely things;
The flower that blooms; the bird that sing
The brook that bubbles by the way;
The sunset at the close of day;
The rainbow arch; the skies of blue;
When shafts of sunlight filter through;
The drifting cloud; the rolling hill;
The peaceful poise when all is still;
The field afame, with sun-kissed flowers;
The happy days; the joyous hours;
The word of cheer; the pleasant smile;
The friend who goes "the second mile";
The world is mine; its tribute brings,
When I remember lovely things.

G. Harmon Jones

Mrs. Jesse Morain reports that on her recent trip to the east, she saw birds everywhere. Her greatest thrill was the sight of three large flocks of White Ibis one day in Florida. The great birds rose and circled overhead, glistening in the sunshine, then slowly settled down. Along the swamp land many Turkey Vultures were seen, but even more of the Black Vultures. Scores of Kingfishers watched from the wires near the canals. In the cities, scores of Grackles were seen and heard. In the Audubon Bird Sanctuary in New Orleans there were Cranes, Flamingoes, Swans and many other birds.

The Elapaio, Journal of the Hawaiian Audubon Society, reports the results of a bird census on the small island of Lysan, north west of the Hawaiian Islands, on the last of June and the first of July. The count of some 270,000 birds is certainly much too low. The 122,000 Albatross of two species were mostly young birds, the parents being off at sea feeding. The 125,000 Terns of three species were mostly single birds at nests, the mates being off at sea. Smaller numbers, though in the thousands, were counted of Shearwaters, Booby, Tropic bird and Lysan Finch and only a few Bristle-thighed Curlews, Lysan Ducks and Tropic birds. No sign was found of the Lysan Rail, Lysan Honey-eater and Miller birds.

Mr. William Lasky reports that on November 16 and 17, he and Mr. Schuyler had a wonderful trip to Los Banyos Game Preserve. Thanks to the cooperation of the Game Management Warden, Mr. Roy Wattenberger, who allowed them to camp on the preserve grounds and assisted in counting the birds, they listed the following: 200,000 Mallards, 1,000 Pintails, 4 Whistling Swans, 200 Canada Geese, 600 White-fronted Geese, 750 Greater Snow Geese, 33 Sandhill Cranes, 3 Bitterns, 30 Ring-neck Pheasants, 1 prairie Falcon, 40 Marsh Hawks, 300 Sparrow Hawks, 4,000 Blackbirds (Brewer's, Red-winged and Yellow-headed) and great numbers of shore birds.

OBSERVATIONS

HAWKS: Red-bellied, 3 at Sanctuary daily through October; White-tailed Kites, 2, Nov. 1, Sanctuary (Stultz)

CURLEW: Hudsonian, 3 at Devil's Gate Dam, Oct. 20, (Ed McArthur)

DOVE: feeding with about fifteen Mourning Doves, one White-winged, Oct. 29 to Nov. 11.

OWLS: Screech, 2, every night; Barn, Sanctuary, (S); Spotted, Crystal Lake area, Nov. 12, (Pyle)

HUMMINGBIRDS: about 20 at Sanctuary daily

WOODPECKERS: Lewis, Altadena, Nov. 10, (Mrs. Morrison); Nuttall and more Downy than last year, Sanctuary (S)

HORNED LARK: small flock near Rose Bowl, Nov. 3, (Enid Michael)

CALIFORNIA JAY: busy all day carrying walnuts from old orchard, Sanctuary (S)

WARBLERS: Audubons in great numbers from Sept. 29 on, "in nearly every tree"; Calaveras, Oct. 27; Yellowthroats, Sanctuary (S); Black and White, Altadena, Nov. 10, (Mrs. Morrison)

WAXWINGS, ROBINS: Cedar Waxwing with Robins, Los Angeles, Oct. 30 (R. McCune), Monrovia area, Nov. 1, (Irma Rogers), flock of 30 Eagle Rock, Nov. 12 (Curry); on Oct. 31 over 2000 Robins with 700 and more Waxwings and about 100 Meadowlarks bathing in the stream Sanctuary, by next day only a few left, (S).

FINCHES, SPARROWS: Thurber's Juncos, flocks nearly every day, Eagle Rock, Nov. 5 to date, (Curry); Golden-crowned Sparrow, Nov. 9, Monrovia, (Irma Rogers); Lincoln Sparrow, Monrovia, Nov. 9, (Rogers), Sanctuary, one with band, Nov. 2, (S).

ALBINO HOUSE FINCH: in Santa Monica, Nov. 5, (John Cunningham).

WATCH NOW FOR: Slender-billed and Red-breasted Nuthatches, Varied Thrush, Black-throated and Townsend's Warblers, and the rare Golden-crowned Kinglet, Pine Siskins, Purple Finch.

In the Whittier Observer for September, is the following: "Our smallest falcon and one of our most beautiful, whether perched or awing, is maligned and misnamed so that every man or boy with a gun feels virtuous in murdering it." It is recommended that an attempt be made to have the name Sparrow Hawk dropped and the more correct name of Grasshopper Hawk adopted universally.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The Los Angeles Audubon Society will take part again this year in the Bird Count for the National Audubon Society. Covering the same area as in the past fourteen years, a circle with a 7-1/2 mile radius from La Cienega and Airdrome St., parties or individuals will make the count between sunrise and sunset on Sunday, December 30. The area being divided into small sections each with assigned enumerators. If you can help for all or part of the day, or if unable to leave home will count the birds about your own home, will you notify Mr. Robert Pyle, 1143 - 21st Street, Santa Monica.

EASTERN KINGBIRD - In the November Tanager, there was a report from Mrs. Wait and Mrs. Daugherty of one seen in Inyo County. Mrs. Beatrice Nielson and her husband visited several lagoons near Santa Cruz, the last of July - "In a willow grove near the lagoon shore, 3 Anthony green herons. One settled near the end of a dead branch in hunched fashion. A split second later it was ducking back and forth from the attacks of an Eastern Kingbird. It soon took wing with its companions. The kingbird seemed pleased with the situation and made half a dozen flights into the area near-by to catch passing insects. This was an unusually beautiful eastern kingbird, -- black head and tail with broad white band. The presence of one a stone's throw from the pounding surf of the Pacific was a surprise indeed."

In the September number of the Wood Duck of the Hamilton, Ontario, Nature Club, Mr. W. Scott Lewis' "One World of Nature" from the Tanager of last March is printed in full; giving credit to the Tanager, of course.

WHAT'S GONE ON IN THE SOCIETY

The October 25 Study Class at Plummer Park was well attended. Miss Pope, Vice-president, opened the meeting. She gave Mrs. Salmon a well-deserved tribute. Mrs. Salmon was elected chairman of the study group. She gave a brief outline of the plans for future classes.

Book reports were given by Miss Elizabeth Patterson, Miss Bessie Pope, and Mrs. Ruth McCune of three of the books in our library. References were made to several articles in recent numbers of the Tanager. Prepared skins and mounted specimens of our local humming birds were studied and members reported their own experiences with these birds.

After a five minute recess, Mr. W. Scott Lewis, assisted by his wife, gave an illustrated lecture on forest trees and plants to which these trees are hosts. Mr. Lewis plans to devote his part of the programs to forest trees and their uses.

It is hoped that many members will avail themselves of the opportunity in both the Study Group and on the Thursday Field Trips to learn the names and characteristics of trees, as it will add more enjoyment to their lives.

* * * * *

The October 28th Field Trip to Irvine Park was led by Miss Dorothy Grener. Twenty three persons were in attendance and thirty-nine kinds of birds were seen. Cedar Waxwings were feeding on wild grapes; Other birds of interest were the Robin, Phainopepla Prairie Falcon and three species of woodpeckers.

Ruth McCune, Historian

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CHRISTMAS PARTIES

For many years our only regular December meeting has been the Christmas Party. This year it will be held on Thursday, December 6, at 2 o'clock in Fiesta Hall, Plummer Park. There will be a short interesting program including Christmas music, followed by a social period, with refreshments served by the committee in charge. Come and have a good time.

For the first time we will have an evening party, at 7:30, December 14, at the home of Miss Marjorie Walther, 10361 Lemaine Ave., San Fernando. Lemaine is between Devonshire and Chatsworth, east of Sepulveda. There are two large Cedars in front of the house. If planning to go, please notify Mrs. McNary, 1007-1/2 Marion Dr., Glendale 5, or phone Mrs. Walther, Empire 12910 - in the evening.