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Western Tanager



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Western Tanager

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SOME CONCLUSIONS REGARDING PREDATION

Leonard S. Hall

One morning as we stood in the yard, we heard a squeaking sound. Looking around I saw Mike and Tiger each holding a tiny cottontail rabbit in his mouth. At command, each dog laid down its baby rabbit entirely unharmed; whereupon we sent the setters indoors while we looked for and discovered the nest almost underneath our feet. There was still one young bunny tucked snugly away in the ball of grass and fur. After we had returned the two unharmed youngsters, we fashioned a guard of chicken wire above the nest to keep the dogs away but with an opening through which the mother rabbit could go in and out.

This set me to thinking about the ability of the cottontail, as well as of some other seemingly helpless species, to survive under the severest sort of pressure from the so-called predators. Here in our yard was a wonderful example of how this small mammal which furnishes food for so many others, has adapted itself to keep the race of rabbits going. Here on the farm cottontails get one big break, in that they are not preyed upon by man. Yet there are plenty of other predators: foxes, hawks, owls, an occasional blacksnake big enough to swallow the small rabbits, cats and dogs. But the rabbit has been living with all of these for hundreds, if not thousands, of years and managing to survive. I am convinced that the limiting factor on the rabbit population is the use we make of our land.

It seems that in the whole field of wildlife few subjects are less understood - or perhaps it would be better to say, more misunderstood - than predation. The main reason for this is our propensity to judge all living creatures as good or bad according to some use we wish to make of them - or according to purely human standards which actually cannot apply to animals. We forget that for eons longer than man has inhabited the earth, life has followed patterns which we call predation and without which life could not exist.

It might be said that the only harmful predator is the one which preys on his fellow creatures for sport or profit. The horned owl which pounces on the rabbit is no more of a predator than the gourmet who pounces on his filet mignon. Both are interested in eating to sustain life, though the gourmet undoubtedly wastes more food than the owl.

A great deal of research has been done in this field of predation by wildlife biologists and from their research it is possible to draw some interesting conclusions. One is that the animal which is preyed upon actually does adapt itself through the centuries for survival. Another is that availability is the factor which determines which animal shall be preyed upon by others. Thus, as long as field mice are present in great abundance, they are used as food by most of the small carnivorous birds and animals. The same is true of certain insects and fishes, of rabbits and even of large mammals

in the game field of Africa
and the Arctic wastes.

Another conclusion
which must be drawn is
that predation, other than
by man, is seldom a factor
in limiting the population

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THE WESTERN TANAGER

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THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

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"To promote the study and protection
of birds and other wildlife, plants,
soil and water."

MEMBERSHIP

Joint with the National Audubon Society,
includes subscription to Audubon Maga-
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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

December, as the word denotes, was
the 10th month in the Julian Calendar.
With the reform in the calendar it was
pushed along to 12th place, but carried
the name right along with it. The 25th
of December was reckoned as the winter
solstice, when the sun seemed to reach
a standing place for a moment before
starting its swing in a longer arc,
farther north at both ends: longer
days and more warmth in them.

As the Gospels nowhere mention the
date of Christ's birth, the Church
Fathers decreed December 25th, already
celebrated as the Nativity of the Sun,
should be known as Christ's birth date,
exhorting the brethren "not to cele-
brate that solemn day like the heathen,
on account of the sun, but in honor of
Him who made the sun."

This is a season of warmth and
friendliness, a desire to live less
to one's self, more for others, -not
only family and friends, but mankind
generally. The green Christmas tree is
a symbol of the ever-recurring life of
nature and the outgoing of the human
spirit.

At our Annual Party, we have it as
a Tree for the Birds, with gifts of
food for those living around Audubon
House.

Join with us all in this Christmas
Party at Plummer Park, December 8, at
1:30. There will be music, entertain-
ment and refreshments. Meet with old
friends and make new ones. For our new
members, this is a splendid chance for
us to get acquainted with each other.

"A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO US ALL, MY
DEARS!"

Grace Harvard Phillips

Two new members for our Executive Board:
Mrs. Ida Kizler is now our Chairman in
charge of sales and will be at meetings
with a supply of check lists and other
of our publications and Audubon Material.
Mrs. Caroline Daugherty will take charge
of Thursday Field Trips, a position she
filled splendidly for fourteen years. We
are very happy that she can again plan
and lead our trips.

If any member moves, will you please let
the Editor have your new address.

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WHAT'S GONE ON IN THE SOCIETY

Olive Alvey, Historian

Field Trip of October 19 to Marineland of the Pacific. In spite of the dark and chilly day we had a wonderful time watching the fish and mammals in this unusual setting. Dr. Howard Hill, professor of marine biology at U. S. C. and Director of the marine section of the County Museum was our very efficient guide. The endearing and cheerful-faced porpoises performed tricks and made great leaps from the tank for fish. Five dignified little Humbolt penguins did no tricks but enjoyed their lunch of little fish. In another tank the performing seals attracted large and enthusiastic audiences, but no one in the audiences applauded the show more vigorously than the actors themselves, which is a sight to see. A most fascinating feature of this marine display is the big oval tank, the largest fish bowl in the world. In it live all sorts of fish, of various sizes, colors and shapes. An interesting fact is that most of the men working at Marineland are skin divers who once speared fish for sport; now their sport is to bring them back alive.

Field Trip of October 23 to Mount Pinos. One of the largest groups this year met at Frazier Park and proceeded from there up Mt. Pinos, some 60 members of the Society and guests.

The bird all wanted to see - the California Condor - did not disappoint us. Condors were seen at six different times, and several times flew extremely low over the campground. Every one present had excellent views of this vanishing species.

The usual mountain birds were also recorded, the most interesting being the Nutcracker, Solitaire, Ruby and Golden Crowned Kinglets and Cassin Finches.

The leader was Herb Clarke.

"Study Class of October 27 at Plummer Park. Mr. Robert Blackstone gave a most interesting talk, "Somebody is doing something about the weather." Mr. Blackstone makes charts for the U. S. Weather Bureau and is an observer also. Before the daily weather forecast is made much accurate observation and charting has to be done by many people. We have now a

better understanding of those little weather maps in the papers each day. We saw pictures of the steps taken daily in order to tell the story. Reports are made from stations all over the country and from the islands of the Pacific, from ships at sea, from planes from the army and navy and from many unpaid observers. This data is charted, the predictions are made, then sent by teletype to aviation companies, news-papers, agriculturists and the general public. Some observations are made by eye, but most are made with delicate instruments. Conditions reported are temperature, air pressure, visibility, humidity, clouds and wind.

We asked Mr. Blackstone why hurricanes are named for girls and not numbered. He said men name them, -men would rather talk about girls. We just wondered.

Don Tomas Parker gave an account of the whooping crane.

Mrs. Nurtha Dunn gave a list of birds to be on the lookout for this coming month. In her list are winter visitors that might be "life birds" for some of us; such as the Fulvous Tree Duck seen in 1953 at Playa Del Rey, the American Golden-eye in the Back Bay the following year, or the Old Squaw at Malibu.

Afternoon Meeting at Exposition Park Community House on November 3.

The program was Nesting of the Golden and Bald Eagles in Southern California. The moving pictures and narration were by Mr. James Fassera, President of the Pasadena Audubon Society. Mr. Fassera made the pictures from a blind hung by ropes over the side of a cliff, from narrow ledges to which he was lowered by a rope, or dangling on a rope on the side of a precipice. He thus recorded the intimate life of these young eagles.

There are few bald or golden eagles in California, they are becoming so scarce that the time may come in the not distant future when to see our national bird we will have to go to a museum.

Eagles do not always mate for life. They live to be at least 30 years old. The nests are of sticks and leaves on cliff ledges. The young are fed on rabbits, squirrels, other rodents and small mammals.

REGARDING PREDATORS (Continued
from first page)

of any species. Almost always it is the environment - the amount of food, cover and range, as well as the pressure from other species that use these same resources, which determine how many quail or rabbits or deer or raccoons can be supported on a given area of land.

Predation research also brings definite knowledge of the food habits of many creatures we persecute as predators. Thus the broad-winged hawks are rodent hawks. For example the Red-tailed Hawk eats 53% rodents, 10% insects, rabbits and squirrels make 10%, and the remainder of its diet is made up of small birds, frogs, reptiles and other things. Of the falcons, with long pointed wings, our only common one is the Sparrow Hawk. Its diet is over 63% insects, with 20% rodents and a very small amount of small birds and other things. The Sharpshinned and Coopers Hawks do eat a fair amount of poultry and game and small birds, but they also take many rodents. Thus, the whole family of hawks might be called "flying mouse traps" and are worthy of complete protection.

(This article is one that Mr. Hall, one of the Audubon Screen Tour lecturers, wrote for his nature column in a St. Louis paper and is used by permission.)

TRAVELS OF BANDED DUCKS AND GEESE

In *Outdoor California*, published by the State Department of Fish and Game in the June issue was a report that 9 ducks and geese banded on the American west coast have been recovered in Siberia. Some were recovered three months after banding, while others had been at liberty for three years. There were 5 pintails, 3 snow geese and one black brant. For some time California waterfowl technicians have believed that some of the waterfowl that spend the winter here are migrants from breeding grounds in Siberia. Most of the birds recovered were from along the coast across the Bering Sea from Alaska, but 3 pintails were from the deep interior, 1,200 miles from Alaska. The airline distance from Los Banos, where some were banded, to the deepest point of penetration in Siberia is 4,500 miles. The bands were sent to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service by the Soviet Government.

UNUSUAL, TO SAY THE LEAST
Olive Alvey

Did you ever see a big fat pigeon bathing in a roasting pan in the midst of down-town traffic? That unusual sight is to be seen at the intersection of Olympic Boulevard and Figueroa Street on a concrete island beside the bus stop. As I alighted from the bus there, I stopped in amazement to see the pan of water with the bird bathing in it. Another pigeon was perched on the edge of the pan waiting its turn. A couple of others, recently bathed, reclined on the ground, sunning themselves and preening. Besides these there must have been a couple of dozen others just sitting around, not in the least disturbed by the traffic swirling in all directions beside them. Oh! I forgot - not far from the roasting pan were two large glass bottles filled with water, evidently put there to replenish the bath water.

THE RIGHTS OF WILD THINGS

The next step, before we can consider ourselves truly civilized, is the recognition of the rights of creatures other than man. I do not mean that the lesser creatures should be permitted by man to endanger his life or menace his food supply, but that other forms of life, the flowers, trees, birds and mammals find life good, and that where their welfare does not conflict with the welfare of man, they also have a right to life and the pursuit of happiness, each in its own way.

Such rights have been recognized by great souls; Thoreau, John Muir and John Burroughs respected the lives of creatures less powerful than themselves and entered into a sympathetic enjoyment of their companionship.

Elbert Benjamin

Mrs. Kay Hardt reports that recently a lady, a stranger to her, phoned to say, "I killed a bird today and want to know if it was a good or bad bird." From the description, Mrs. Hardt was sure the bird was a red-shafted flicker. She told the lady the bird was a "good one" and also that killing it was against the law. The lady said she never knew any bird was protected by law!

CONSERVATION NOTES

Robert Blackstone

Welcome news to conservationists was the item under a Denver November 1 date-line - many of you must have read it - announcing that the U. S. Senators and Representatives of Colorado, Utah, New Mexico and Wyoming had agreed in a closed meeting "not to reinsert Echo Park Dam in any form" into the Upper Colorado Storage Project. They are now convinced that approval of this project cannot be won over the opposition of conservationists. Thus Dinosaur is saved, but more important even than that, is the precedent established against such invasions of our national park system.

Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay has refused to accede to the Army's request for 10,700 acres of the Wichita Mountain National Wildlife Refuge, stating that he is "unalterably opposed" to the transfer. In a letter received from his office a few days ago it is said, "We hope that through discussions now under way with the Army it will be possible to meet the basic needs of the Fort Sill expansion program without impairing the integrity of the Wichita Refuge." Mr. McKay's stand may force the White House to decide the issue. The President should know that the conservationists of America stand behind Mr. McKay in his defense of the Refuge. If you have the urge to write him a letter telling him so, don't suppress it.

THE ALERT, publication of the Conservation Information Service, reports that the Interim Committee on Beaches and Parks of the Committee on Conservation, Planning and Public Works of our State Assembly toured San Jacinto State Park on horseback on October 24th and held hearings in Idyllwild and Palm Springs in order to get the facts regarding the tramway issue. These hearings were held as a result of interest throughout the state in the repeal of the Winter Park Authority Act. The group will report their findings and conclusions to the Conservation Committee, which will submit its report to the legislature, probably in March, 1957. This is encouraging news indeed.

The Audubon Society has, of course, been working for many years for better protection for birds of prey. A number

of us in the Los Angeles Audubon Society feel that it is now time to unite with other branches in California and to enlist the aid of other conservation organizations in a campaign to have our state laws changed to afford complete protection to our hawks and owls. Laws protecting birds of prey are almost impossible to enforce where some are protected and others are not. At present the duck hawk, sharp-shinned and Cooper hawks and the great-horned owl are not protected in this state and may be destroyed at any time. The groundwork is now being laid for the campaign. I will keep you informed on future developments and tell you how you can help.

OBSERVATIONS

WOOD IBIS: At the sanctuary at Oceanside, October 7, K. Hardt.

QUAIL, VALLEY: 17 in yard at Eagle Rock to date, Ruby Curry.

JAEGER, PARASITIC: Seen at Venice Beach chasing Elegant Terns. Mrs. Clara Splitter reports that her daughter, Norma said, "I'm sick of Jaegers, I've seen so many of them."

GULL, BONAPARTE: Venice Beach, October Clara Splitter.

DOVE, CHINESE: Seen for the first time at Palos Verdes on November 1, Charlotte McBride.

ROADRUNNER: In yard at Eagle Rock for two weeks in early October. Seen to kill two Brown Towhees, Eileen Creech.

OWL, GREAT HORNED: Two in large oak tree in Sunland through September and early October, Caroline Daugherty.

HUMMINGBIRD, CALLIOPE: In Mt. Washington area of Los Angeles, October 6-8, Elizabeth Fulton.

WOODPECKER, WHITEHEADED: Eagle Rock, on pole in yard, October 5, E. Creech; Sunland, November 3, C. Daugherty; CALIFORNIA, November 1 in Palos Verdes, the first time one has been seen in this area, C. McBride.

NUTCRACKER, CLARK: Palos Verdes, November 1, C. McBride; Sunland, November 3, C. Daugherty.

ROBINS: Many in Van Nuys to date, May Wait; in Sunland everywhere, in small flocks, C. Daugherty.

"There was no reasoning or intelligence involved. The curlew was merely responding in the age-old pattern of his race, to the changing cycle of physiological controls within him. As days shortened, the decreasing sunlight reduced the activity of the bird's pituitary glands. The pituitary secretion was the trigger that kept the reproductive glands pouring sex hormones into the blood stream, and as the production of sex hormones decreased the bird's aggressive mating urge disappeared and the migrating urge replaced it. It was entirely a physiological process. The curlew didn't know that winter was coming again to the Arctic and that insect eaters must starve if they remained. He knew only that once again an irresistible inner force was pressing him to move."

From "Last of the Curlews" by
Fred Bodsworth.

TO THE GULL

Silver wings against the blue,
There are times I envy you --
Dipping, skimming, sailing round
While I must travel on the ground.
No human pilot has such skill,
No human pilot ever will
Fly like you --
God's own small airships
Of the blue.

Evelyn Carter Pierre

THE NEED FOR WILDERNESS AREAS

It is characteristic of wilderness to impress its visitors with their relationship to other forms of life, and to afford those who linger an intimation of the interdependence of all life. In the wilderness it is thus possible to sense our human membership in the whole community life of the earth.

We forget that we can continue only as long as other men, other animals and other forms of life also keep on doing things. We live only as members of a community.

From an article by Howard Zohnser in the National Parks Magazine of October - December, 1955.

"IF WINTER COMES,....."

This ice-bound Winter morning,
The round white sun hangs low,
The trees and all the bushes
Wear ragged coats of snow;
But chilling winds turn balmy,
They almost hint of spring;
For, while knee-deep in winter,
I heard a cardinal sing.

This little poem is by Miss Mary H. Beam a blind lady in Upper Sandusky, Ohio, who does all her birding by ear. We have published several of her verses in other years.

DECEMBER PROGRAM

EVENING MEETING, Tuesday, December 6, in Long Hall, Plummer Park at 8 P.M. Jim Clements, Herb Clarke and Jim Huffman will lead a discussion on Censuses. Plans for the Christmas Count will be made. Bird skins, especially of winter visitants and possible strays will be available for study.

CHRISTMAS PARTY, Thursday, December 8, from 1:30 to 4 in Fiesta Hall, Plummer Park. Mrs. Paul Dodds and her Committee will be in charge of refreshments. Mrs. Alma Stultz and Mrs. Ida Kisler will have Audubon material, -stationery, cards, books, etc. for sale. There will be an appropriate program. An opportunity for a social time, visiting with friends old and new. Bring gifts of food for the Birds' Christmas Tree. Take West Hollywood Bus on Santa Monica Blvd. to Fuller Avenue.

FIELD TRIP, Saturday, December 10 to Cabrillo Beach. Meet at 8:45 at end of No. 6 bus line, 116th and Vermont. Birding along the way at Sloughs and at Cabrillo Beach. Bring your lunch.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, Monday, December 26. If you can go out with a group or observe about your home, write or call Jim Huffman, 2912 Manhattan Avenue, Manhattan Beach, Frontier 2-7124.