

T H E

# Western Tanager



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## BATTLE OF THE BILLION-DOLLAR BUZZARD

Ray A. Kersh

It is interesting to note that a hand full of gawky vultures have won a battle against the world's most powerful industrialists where some geologists say a billion dollars worth of oil was involved.

According to an article which appeared recently in the Long Beach Press Telegram, by Douglas Nelson Rhodes, a western oil magnate stamped angrily out of an office in the U. S. Department of the Interior building, Washington, D. C., and was met by reporters who asked about the results of his conference with the Secretary of the Interior.

"There's at least a hundred million dollars worth of oil under the land!" he stormed. "All the birds in the world aren't worth that much money, let alone a flock of maggot-ridden, moth-eaten buzzards!"

The government conservationists did not agree with the outraged tycoon and fought one of the strangest battles in court history. The North American or California Condor (*gymnogyps californianus*), numbering a scant 60 surviving aerial giants, bested the oil industry's legal eagles in a three-year fight thru the courts, congress and the halls of the United Nations.

The oil men were forbidden to explore the 35,200 acre Ventura County nesting site.

The now-vanishing California Condor has a wingspread of nearly 11 feet, a body up to 55 inches high and weighs about 30 pounds at maturity. Concern for survival of these feathered giants has been felt in ornithological circles since 1913 when a census disclosed fewer than 200 surviving birds on the continent. In 1949 the total had been reduced to but 30 nesting pairs. Strictly a monogamous bird, the Condor produced only one four-inch-long egg every two years and this is often infertile. Moreover, even if successfully hatched, the chick remains helpless for a year or more and must depend upon its parents for food and warmth. If unduly disturbed, the parents will abandon their young and leave the chick to die of starvation.

This captain of nature's cleanup squad is exclusively a carrion eater. Though his hooked beak is a powerful combination meat-ax, knife and fork tool that can rip thru cowhide like tissue-paper, the Condor has no predatory claws, thus preventing him from emulating the eagle, which can carry off prey to eat in the nest at leisure. Condors have to dine wherever they find food. They will gorge themselves until they are too heavy to take off, which puts them at the mercy of coyotes, mountain lions and -- most of all -- men, few of whom can resist bagging this largest of birds, though Condors, like every other vulture, could hardly be regarded as elegant provender for a gourmet's table.

Though clumsy as a cow when grounded, once the Condor is airborne he becomes a marvel of aerodynamic engineering; so much so that aviation engineers have studied his flight characteristics for decades. To date, man's attempt to duplicate the Condor's flight has been weak, inefficient imitations.

(continued on Page 35)

THE WESTERN TANAGER  
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Editor Emeritus.....George T. Hastings  
Editor.....Mrs. Fern Shelford  
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THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY  
Organized 1910.....Incorporated 1951  
"To promote the study and protection of  
birds and other wildlife, plants, soil  
and water."

MEMBERSHIP  
Joint with National Audubon Society in-  
cludes subscription to Audubon Magazine.  
Regular \$5; Sustaining \$10; Active \$25;  
Supporting \$50; Student \$2.

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AUDUBON HOUSE  
Wednesday.....2-4 p.m.  
Thursday.....2-4 p.m.  
Saturday.....2-4 p.m.  
1st Tuesday.....7:30-8 p.m.  
4th Thursday (Members only)....1-4 p.m.  
Groups by appointment.....POplar 1-7635

Johnson on "Pursuit of Knowledge", "He  
that enlarges his curiosity after the  
works of Nature, multiplies the inlets of  
happiness; therefore, we should cherish  
order in pursuit of useful knowledge and  
remember that a blighted spring makes a  
barren year and that the vernal flowers,  
however beautiful and gay, are only in-  
tended by nature as preparatives to autumnal  
fruit."

(Found in "The California Mountaineer",  
Vol. 1, No. 1, -p. 18, San Francisco, 1861)

#### THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I wish to thank the members for  
their response to our Screen Tours. For  
some time it looked as though we would  
have to give them up this coming season.  
However, it was decided that we would  
just have one "Tour" instead of two as  
do the other Societies on the coast.

It was a hard decision to make, for  
no matter which one was dropped, there  
were those who would be left out. It  
was finally decided that the Saturday  
afternoon "Tour" was the one to be  
dropped.

On Saturday, January 12th, such a  
large group came out, and so many from  
a distance (this in spite of a pouring  
rain) that it was decided that we would  
continue with both Screen Tours this  
coming season. In this event we will  
continue to need your support.

Thanks to all who have made these  
Screen Tours a success. Special thanks  
are due to Bessie Pope for her work as  
Chairman in making this possible, and to  
all who have worked with her.

Charlotte McBride,

We are happy to report a fine re-  
sponse to our request for articles at  
Audubon House. Mr. Bill Hood has offered  
to make a chest for our shell collection  
and Mr. Hiram Beebe has agreed to give  
\$10 to pay for the material. Mrs. Alva  
Graham of South Pasadena has given us  
two bookcases and Arnold Small has offer-  
ed us another one.

Please continue the good work. We  
hope that Santa brought some member a new  
vacuum cleaner and that she remembered  
our request and saved the old one, if in  
good condition, for Audubon House.

We have in the deep freeze a dove  
which we would like in our bird exhibit,  
but we need someone to mount it for us  
or to donate the necessary \$12 to have it  
done. Anyone doing this for us will have  
his name on the name plate as donor.

Marian Wilson, Curator

## FEATHERS - HOW THEY DEVELOP

When the embryo bird, developing in the egg is about one-third formed, little cone shaped papillae form on the parts of the skin where feathers are to be. In the case of the chick embryo this is about the seventh day of incubation. The bases of these projections sink down into the skin forming little pits, the follicles. The projection grows out and the material inside divides towards the tip into many fine sections which will be the barbules of the down feather, the outer layer of the projection forms a covering sheath which splits to allow the down to spread out. In precocial birds (those which are covered with down when hatched) the down feathers are fully formed before hatching, in other birds they develop several days after the bird is out of the egg. Down feathers completely cover the young precocial bird though they only grow from the feather tracts. Later new feathers grow from the follicles, pushing the down feathers off. At first the new feathers, pin feathers, are enclosed in thin sheaths, these split at the end and the feather gradually emerges. When fully formed the living material inside the quill is absorbed leaving the feather as a lifeless structure. At the time of moulting new feathers start to form in the bottom of the follicles. The number of follicles formed on the embryo bird do not increase and the papillae retain the power of forming new feathers indefinitely, very much as hairs continue to grow from the base or root. Growth in the feather is not continuous as in hairs, a feather grows, the papilla has a resting period, moulting time comes, the feather falls out and a new one grows. Growth of the new feather after moulting is very rapid once it begins, in the domestic fowl it may be for the longer feathers as much as a quarter of an inch a day.

As to how feathers first developed no one knows, but zoologists are sure that as birds developed from reptiles, feathers developed from scales. Gerhard Heilmann in his "The Origin of Birds" describes and pictures an imaginary Proavian, a creature like a small slender lizard that lived in trees

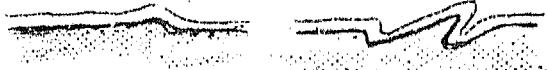
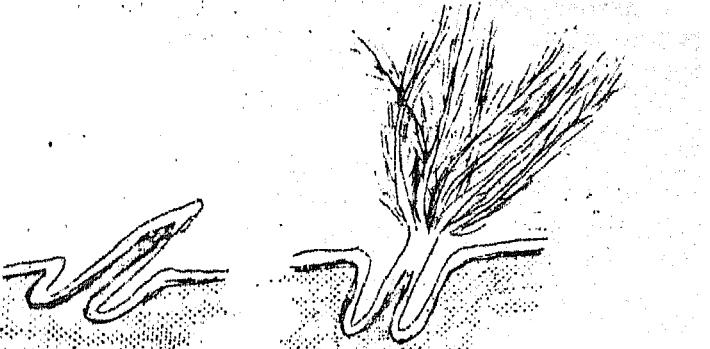
and leaped from branch to branch. Friction of the air stimulated scales on the side of the arms and legs to grow long to form a broad surface that made gliding easier. Then the air friction caused these long scales to become frayed on the edges. Gradually over the centuries these frayed scales became more and more deeply frayed till at last they were feathers. Developing first on the arms to form wings and on the sides of the long tail they gradually spread over the whole body.

This is of course purely imaginary and I confess quite beyond my power of imagination. Structures so complex, so beautifully adapted to their functions it seems must have been developed according to a plan, not by accident.

George T. Hastings.

As autumn approaches each year, the main moult of birds takes place. The breeding season is over. Plumage frayed while feeding and caring for the nestlings is replaced. All the migrants of fall ride south on fresh and unworn pinions. Birds that remain in the north develop not only new feathers but more feathers than they possessed in summer. Because it lacks life a feather has no power of growth. It cannot repair or renew itself. If it becomes worn, frayed or broken it must be shed and replaced entirely. This is the function of moulting time. All birds moult at least once a year, a few three times a year and most twice a year.

(From "Autumn Across America" by Edwin Way Teale.)



OBSERVATIONS  
Caroline D. Daugherty

The best remedy for office tiredness for a "birder" is a good birding trip - so my first stop: HANSEN DAM LAKE - Jan. 13th. Few people were there and no boating. A nice picture greeted me - several boys throwing bread scraps high in the air to be caught by hungry Ring-billed Gulls. Coots scattered over the water. Back in a cove on the lake were the ducks: 2 Gadwall, 4 Red-heads, 3 Buffle-heads, many Ruddy. Small flights of Pintail were coming in to land on the smaller lakes in the willows. Gadwall and Red-head and Buffle-head were seldom found around here but after a good rain these uncommon species surprise us. The Buffle-heads, 2 males-1 female, were beautiful little ducks, the males looking like tiny ducks sitting in white life preservers floating around. As I started to leave Hansen, looked up to see a Golden Eagle sailing high overhead from the mountains, now in sunshine, now in cloud shadow.

Drove up Little Tujunga Canyon to Sand Canyon which opens out on the Soledad Canyon Highway. Back a short way in Sand Canyon are old vineyards- and there were hundreds of Robins, Western Bluebirds with a few Mountain Bluebirds among them, House Finch and Lark Sparrows perched along the telephone wires. I have never seen so many of these several species congregated in a small area - the wires looked like ropes of birds from pole to pole. Every so often numbers of all species would fly down to feed among the old grapevines or go gleaning across the wet fields...then suddenly the whole field seemed to rise up in flight of mixed colors. A beautiful sight especially the two bluebird blues. A pair of Ravens flew across the fields and the Gambel Sparrows and Oregon Juncos were everywhere, also Audubon's Warblers.

Now, I had forgotten all about my tiredness and reluctantly turned homeward. Jan. 14, in Soledad Canyon, May Wait found 3 Roadrunners, and May says they nearly always find one or more when driving through.

Audubon Center Sanctuary reports a

great number of birds there but many of the water birds will be found on Legg Lake, close by, because the small lake in the channel has been released into the San Gabriel River.

Mr. Otis Wade, a member of the Society, has made a recent gift of four books to the library at Audubon House in Plummer Park.

Familiar Birds of the Pac. Southwest  
...Florence Van Vechten Dickey  
How to Study Birds  
...Herbert Keightley Job  
Bird Gossip  
...Harriette Wilbur  
The Warblers of North America  
...Frank M. Chapman

All members are invited to make use of their privilege to borrow these and other books at the library. Since books are available to the entire membership they are an especially welcome contribution and as new additions are made to the library members will be kept advised.

Helen Sandmeyer, Librarian

BOOKS SUITABLE FOR DONATION TO AUDUBON SOCIETY LIBRARY

American Water & Game Birds	
Austin L. Rand.....	\$11.50
The Animal Kingdom	
(2 volumes)	
Wonders of the Bird World	
Helen G. Cruickshank.....	2.50
North American Birds of Prey	
Alexander Sprunt, Jr.....	5.00
An Introduction to Ornithology	
George J. Wallace.....	8.00
The Singing Wilderness	
Sigurd F. Olson.....	4.00
Seeing America's Wildlife in our National Refuges	
Devereux Butcher.....	5.00
Living Mammals of the World	
Ivan Sanderson.....	9.95
The Web of Life	
John H. Storer.....	3.00
How Animals Move	
James Gray.....	3.00
How to Attract the Birds	
Robert S. Lemmon.....	1.75

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## BATTLE OF THE BUZZARD - continued

Geologists insist that they could kill quietly and oil companies offered to spend any amount necessary to transfer the birds to a less valuable sanctuary, but the conservationists remained adamant. "Any trespassing within a half mile of a Condor nest may doom the chicks," they declared, "and as to moving them, it wouldn't work. They would either come right back or fail to adjust themselves to a new environment and die. If we are really going to have wildlife conservation, let it begin here!"

And so the feathered giants may now soar undisturbed on motionless wings and look down on an empire's ransom that they alone can call Home Sweet Home.

(From Avicultural Bulletin, Jan., 1957)

## CONSERVATION NOTES

By Robert Blackstone

At long last the tide appears to be turning in the battle to preserve Mt. San Jacinto State Park as a primitive area. At its meeting in Sacramento December 21st, the State Park Commission decided to deny the request of the Winter Park Authority for a second five-year extension of its contract with the Commission, which therefore expired as of December 31, 1956.

The future of Mt. San Jacinto State Park as a primitive area is, however, by no means assured; the Winter Park Authority has every intention still of building a tramway, and has so stated. It is necessary that the Winter Park Authority Act of 1945 be repealed; legislation to accomplish this is being presented by the Citizens Group of Idyllwild through Assemblyman Ernest Geddes and several co-sponsors.

Alternative, and seemingly equally suitable sites are available for a tramway in this area, which would not, however, violate either the State Park or the adjoining Forest Service wild areas. The Authority would doubtless have to acquire the land at its own, rather than the public's expense, though.

Legislation protecting the state parks from this kind of commercialism, and re-affirming the aim of establishment of a

"comprehensive system of natural parks" would also be desirable.

Following the recent disastrous fires in Southern California; Rep. Clair Engle, Red Bluff, came out with a statement highly critical of the U. S. Forest Service's "management and the competency of its fire control methods." He accused the Service of permitting its lands "to grow up into impenetrable and highly inflammable piles of brush just begging to catch on fire." Rep. Engle has ordered a Congressional investigation and has announced that hearings will probably be held in Los Angeles during the Lincoln's Birthday recess of the House before a sub-committee of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, of which he is chairman.

It appears very much as though Rep. Engle had been waiting for an opportunity to do a little ax-grinding; he himself said, "No Forest Service land is involved in the (then) current Malibu fire; but I think it makes such an investigation 'timely'." It seems to me that the Forest Service deserves our support on this issue; I believe that whatever inadequacies there may be in its fire-fighting methods will be found to be mostly due to lack of sufficient funds appropriated for that purpose.

One of the chief concerns of the Forest Service is the protection of our watershed; replacement of the natural cover of 'chaparral' with some other type of cover, such as grass, or "controlled brush burning," as Rep. Engle advocates, would not provide us with an adequate watershed. In addition, these practices would deprive many species of birds, animals and other creatures of their preferred habitat. So I urge you to write to Rep. Engle right away in defense of the Forest Service.

"Minerals and wilderness may both be classed as non-renewable natural resources. Once materials are taken out of the ground they are gone forever. Once wilderness is destroyed by commercial development of various kinds, it can never be restored." (C. Edward Graves - "Conservation on the March.")

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT - Los Angeles 1956

The Annual Christmas Bird Count in Los Angeles was held on Sunday, December 23rd, 1956, lasting from dawn until after dark (searching for owls). There were 65 participants in 25 parties. The final count showed 147 species observed and approximately 31,000 individuals. The number of individuals was slightly below that of last year, but the only great variation in the number of individuals was in the Brown Towhees, the number counted being twice that of last year.

Some of the interesting birds observed were: Chukar Partridge, Harris Hawk, Swainson Hawk, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Tolmie Warbler, Green-tailed Towhee and Slate-colored Junco.

The day was clear and sunny, with light winds in the afternoon and with excellent visibility.

After the count about 25 observers met for dinner at the Ontra Cafeteria for a preliminary check and discussion of the count.

Tom Goodman

**NATURE MAGAZINES WANTED.** Mrs. Mary Hood is assembling a collection of Nature pictures and articles. For this she needs any copies you plan to discard of such magazines as Audubon, Arizona Highways, Natural History, Desert, Pacific Discovery, Sunset, Westways, etc.

Magazines may be left on the porch at 138 South Wilton Drive, or if you have several years, Mrs. Hood will arrange to pick them up, in which case please phone HO 3-0974.

The WESTERN TANAGER is published for the benefit of its members, to keep them informed of the activities of our Society. Why not share your nature experiences by sending contributions to the editor. The deadline for copy is the 15th of each month.

When you move please send in your new address promptly.

Calls and messages for the President may be left with Bessie Pope - WE 4-5946.

## A WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Mr. Henry G. Abadie  
3821 Gundry Avenue, Long Beach 7  
Mr. Donald L. Adams  
705 - 26th Street, Manhattan Beach  
Miss Margie Cameron  
2522 Verbena Drive, Hollywood 28  
Miss Helen Wells Frahm  
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Dr. Park C. Scott  
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Mr. DeBoyd L. Smith  
3759 Albury Avenue, Long Beach 8  
Mr. Oliver E. Smith  
2631 Lake View Terr., Los Angeles 39  
Miss Lucy Starling  
1752 No. Serrano, Hollywood 27  
Mr. Neil K. Tilton  
11232 Homedale Street, Los Angeles 49

**STRANGE COMPANIONS** - A New Zealand Muttonbird (or Petrel) disappears into its burrow - followed by a ferocious looking Tuatara Lizard. What happens? Nothing. Inside the burrow the bird and the lizard nest side by side, peacefully sharing their duplex apartment. This is the customary housing arrangement of these oddly matched roommates. The petrel digs the burrow and allows the Tuatara to move in and even share its food.

**MINIATURE MUFFINS** - The common Mediterranean Ant chews seeds to make a kind of dough which is rolled into tiny muffins. These are taken above ground and baked in the sun. Then they are stored in the ants' underground larder.

**A REMINDER** - Audubon Convention at Asilomar, April 13-16.

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1st Vice-President...Mr. Herbert Clarke  
2nd Vice-President...Mrs. Paul D. Dodds  
Treasurer.....Miss Esther Johnson  
Historian.....Mrs. Olive Alvey  
Register of Members.....Miss Marjorie J. Moody, 1380 Veteran Ave., Los Angeles 24

25441 Crescent Lane, Los Altos, Calif.  
Exec. Sec'y....Miss Elizabeth Patterson  
Record. Sec'y.....Miss Dorothy Goddard  
Curator.....Mrs. Russell E. Wilson

CALENDAR FOR FEBRUARY 1957

February 5, TUESDAY EVENING MEETING, at 8:00 p.m. in Long Hall, Plummer Park,  
7377 Santa Monica Blvd. Symposium on Water Birds.  
Chairman, Dudley Ross

February 9, SATURDAY FIELD TRIP to Hansen Dam Lake. Meet at 9:00 a.m. Go north on  
San Fernando Road or Glen Oaks Blvd. Turn right on Osborne to Hansen  
Dam and Foothill Blvd. Bring lunch and binoculars.  
Leader, Ethel Craig

February 14, EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING, Thursday, 7:30 p.m., 912 Victoria Avenue.

February 19, SCREEN TOUR, "Between the Tides" by Robert Hermes. Virgil Jr. High  
School, 152 No. Vermont - 7:45 p.m. At John Burroughs Jr. High School,  
600 So. McCadden Place - 2:00 p.m., Saturday, February 16.

February 21, THURSDAY FIELD TRIP to Audubon Center (San Gabriel River Wildlife Sanc-  
tuary) 600 North Durfee Road, old entrance. Meet at entrance at 9:00  
a.m. Go out San Bernardino Freeway to Rosemead. Turn right on signal  
to San Gabriel Blvd. Turn left on signal at San Gabriel Blvd. which be-  
comes Durfee Road. Members driving who are able to accommodate passen-  
gers, please communicate with Miss Edna Burt, 703-1/2 West 113th St.,  
L.A. 44 - Plymouth 5-1044. Members desiring transportation arrange with  
Miss Burt. Trip will be cancelled in case of rain.

Leader, Nurtha Dunn

February 23, FIELD TRIP to Buena Vista Lake, the Carrizo Plain and Morro Bay.

& 24, Group will meet at 9:00 a.m., Saturday, February 23rd, at the town of  
Maricopa in Kern County in front of the high school at the east edge of  
Maricopa. Maricopa is reached by U.S. High 99 and State Road 33. Group  
will spend Saturday night in the vicinity of Morro Bay. Camping facili-  
ties are available at Morro Bay and there are motels at several nearby  
towns. Birds which may be seen on the trip include Sandhill Crane,  
LeConte's Thrasher, Sage Thrasher, Chukar Partridge, Ferruginous Hawk,  
Swainson's Hawk, Golden Eagle, wintering ducks and geese, Shore birds  
and alcids.

Leader, Jim Huffman, FRontier 2-7124

February 28, THURSDAY STUDY CLASS, 10:00-11:00 a.m. in Long Hall, Plummer Park,  
7377 Santa Monica Blvd. Speaker will be Theodore Payne, for 53 years a  
well-known seedsman and nurseryman. As a landscape architect he has  
planned many gardens and estates along the coast. As a specialist in  
native plants and shrubs Mr. Payne is best known; he has cultivated and  
introduced more than 400 kinds of California natives, is an authority on  
eucalyptus trees, of which there are 650 varieties, most of these growing  
here in their adopted home as well as in their native Australia. There  
will be a talk by a member of the Audubon Society on the birds that like  
eucalyptus trees.

Chairman, Olive Alvey