

T H E

LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

PLUMMER PARK

7377 SANTA MONICA BLVD.

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Western Tanager

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"MILLIONS" OF DUCKS AND GEESE

By Jim Huffman

If you have never had twenty or thirty thousand Snow Geese rise like a cloud in front of you, you have yet to experience one of the great thrills of birding. This thrill can be had by anyone who visits the great waterfowl refuges of the west coast during certain of the winter months. My son Jim and I had our first such experience last fall at the great refuges north of Sacramento. We had in previous years visited the Federal Refuge at the south end of Salton Sea. However, that area does not afford such good opportunities for observing birds at close range, since so many of them spend much of the daylight period on the sea itself.

The week of Thanksgiving that we had chosen to visit the waterfowl refuges of the Sacramento area promised to be an excellent time to observe large numbers of birds. It was during the hunting season and a time when the birds seek protection in the refuges. Also, the season had been a very dry one and watering holes were scarce outside of the refuges.

One State and three Federal waterfowl areas are located north of Sacramento in or near an area known as the Butte Sink, a low section of land that catches the overflow from the Sacramento and several smaller rivers. The area derives its name from the group of hills, or buttes, that rear above the flat surrounding country.

The headquarters for the Federal refuges which come under the Department of the Interior, is at Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge, located along Route 99W about six miles south of Willows, Calif. This, the largest of the three refuges in this area, comprising about 11,000 acres, presents the best opportunities for observing the waterfowl due to its excellent road system.

The Colusa Refuge, about 4,000 acres, and the Sutter Refuge, about 2,600 acres, are administered from the Sacramento Refuge. Large numbers of birds can be seen at all these areas but roads and facilities at Colusa and Sutter are limited. The State Refuge in the Butte Sink area which is administered by the Department of Fish and Game is the 6,700 acre Gray Lodge Waterfowl Management Area. This interesting area is a few miles east of Gridley, Calif. just off Route 99E.

It could be said that the waterfowl refuges serve to protect the waterfowl and the farmer from each other. Intensified agricultural development has reduced the natural feeding areas of the Sacramento valley region. The birds therefore turn to agricultural crops, rice in particular, which is a major crop in this region. In order to prevent depredation of their crops the farmers, at one time, had to resort to systematic harassment and shooting of the vast flocks of birds. One of the principle functions of the waterfowl refuges is to provide an adequate supply of food until the threatened crops are harvested. Consequently, a large agricultural program is carried on within the refuges.

The Sacramento Refuge near Willows is at present under the direction of our good friend Ed O'Neil, who formerly directed the Salton Sea refuge. There, everything possible is done to help visitors. Conditions are ideal for either observing or taking pictures. During the day large flocks of ducks and geese loiter near the roads and one can approach by car within a few yards behind the borders of marsh grasses.

(continued on Page 33)

THE WESTERN TANAGER

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 Editor.....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 - \$6.50, Husband & wife - \$10.,
 Sustaining - \$12.50, Sustaining-Husband
 & wife - \$20., Active - \$25., Support-
 ing - \$50., Contributing -\$100., Life -
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 Thursday and Saturday - 2-4 p.m., 3rd
 Wednesday - 7:30-8 p.m.; 4th Thursday,
 (members only) 9-10 a.m. - 1-4 p.m.
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- HO 3-9336

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I was mildly astonished recently
 when a not-so-young woman friend of ours
 told me that she was surprised I should
 be interested in birds, or as she put it,
 that I should "care what happened to the
 little birds". I gathered that she
 thought such an interest was more appro-
 priate to elderly ladies.

I tried to explain that my interest
 was in conservation in a broader sense
 rather than merely the welfare of "little
 birds", and that this stemmed from my
 conviction that nature is a valuable, if
 not indispensable part of human experi-
 ence. However, I don't think I got my
 meaning across.

Many of my friends, of course, are
 interested in nature in general and birds
 in particular. There are men as well as
 women among them; they are of all ages
 and belong to a variety of professions.
 In short, I should be hard put to type
 them; the one thing they all have in
 common is their interest in birds. Most
 of them prefer not to be referred to as
 "bird lovers". Indeed, one good friend
 of mine has a positive aversion to being
 so called.

This lady's remark made me realize
 that there are certainly some people,
 and perhaps quite a number, who are in-
 terested in birds, not as a part of the
 great pageant of nature, but as objects
 of solicitude and even pity. Birds seem
 to evoke this sentimental attitude more
 than any other creatures.

Those who share this viewpoint dis-
 play a lack of understanding of nature.
 A greater measure of this would bring
 them to the realization that birds and
 other creatures do not need our pity,
 and that they are perfectly capable of
 taking care of themselves if we can only
 save enough of the earth's surface from
 being "developed" to provide them with
 needed habitat.

Robert E. Blackstone

Ducks and Geese (continued)

The numbers of birds that can be seen in these refuges is amazing. A census taken by airplane at the Sacramento refuge during the time we were there showed the following approximate numbers: Snow Geese, 200,000; White-fronted Geese 25,000; Cackling Geese, 25,000; Ducks (mainly Pintail and Am. Widgeon), 1,650,000. These figures do not include birds at the Colusa and Sutter refuges. Some of the single flocks of Snow Geese that we approached to within a few yards I judged to contain well over 20,000 individuals. These very large flocks were mostly Snows with a few intermingled White-front, Cackling and Lesser Canada Geese. By very diligent searching we were able to locate a few Ross Geese amongst the Snows. This was very difficult, since the most noticeable difference between these two is in the head, and all the birds were apt to be sleeping with their heads tucked in. We had to startle them a little and then look at as many heads as possible before they relaxed again. Flocks of Ross Geese are not usually seen at Sacramento, however, about 12,000 of the approximately 13,000 remaining in existence can be seen together later in the season at the Merced Refuge.

Geese and ducks are not the only wonderful sights to be seen at the Sacramento Refuge. We saw scores of American Bitterns. They flew up in groups of five and six from alongside the road as we passed in the car. Common and Snowy Egrets and Great Blue, Green and Black-crowned Night Herons were present in large numbers. We counted some 50 White Pelicans and over a dozen Whistling Swans.

An unusual feature of the farm areas in the vicinity was the presence of numbers of Short-eared Owls. Wherever we drove we saw them hawking in the fields. We counted nine in all, three at once in a single meadow. Other common birds in this region are the Starlings and Yellow-billed Magpie. Large numbers of Red-tailed Hawks are always present in the refuges, possibly attracted by the numbers of waterfowl that have been injured by gunners and thus become easy prey.

We enjoyed some very good birding with our good friend Bill Anderson at

his headquarters, the Gray Lodge State Refuge near Gridley. While containing great flocks of waterfowl the Gray Lodge Refuge does not offer such good opportunities for close observation or photography. The roads are on dikes raised above the marshes and resting areas; and concealed approach to the birds is difficult. The areas surrounding the lodge offer good birding, however. In the fields immediately to the south of the refuge we found 500 or more Sandhill Cranes, and in nearby orchards were scattered flocks of Lewis's Woodpeckers.

For those who like their birds in great quantities, we know of no better place to visit than the refuges of the Sacramento region in the months from October through January. You will find the management very cordial and anxious to help you see or photograph the birds.

F L A S H! Asilomar Reservations.

GOING-GOING but NOT QUITE GONE. - a few spaces remain, so send in or write TODAY for YOUR reservation to National Audubon Society, 2426 Bancroft Way, Berkeley 4. March 21 to 24 will be DAYS to remember at the AUDUBON CONVENTION.

While tourists are ordinarily encouraged to visit the desert regions of Southern California during the winter months, the recent arrival of a flock of about 100 Starlings has failed to arouse the normal amount of enthusiasm. The birds arrived in the Coachella Valley recently and have made their headquarters at the Coachella Valley Feedyards.

This report has been verified by County Agricultural Commissioner Robert M. Howie who has two specimens in cold storage at his Riverside office. He hopes that they will prove to be only winter visitors and that they will go elsewhere to nest, but their arrival has aroused considerable anxiety on the part of farmers and others in this agricultural region.

--W. Scott Lewis.

BIRDING IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

By Arnold Small

Except for the brief severe storm of early January one would hardly suspect that winter was upon us. Warm, mild weather prevailed in the southland throughout most of the latter part of December and during most of January. Indeed, air temperatures during December averaged higher than ever before recorded in the history of the weather bureau. Rainfall totals for the Los Angeles Basin amounted to about one-sixth of normal and totalled only about 2 inches on the average for lowland areas. Heat and drought combined to make this winter one of the worst fire seasons as the Malibu fire of late November claimed some 20,000 acres of chaparral, while the great San Juan Capistrano fire of mid-December charred more than 66,000 acres in Orange County. In addition, the Topanga, Big Rock, and Beverly Glen-Benedict Canyon fires of early January added to the awful toll of destruction. The severe storm which followed close upon the heels of these fires resulted in floods and mudslides which further compounded the damage to the watershed. Strangely enough, the influx of northern seabirds continued during this warm period and did not seem to be accelerated by the storm of early January. This would lead one to believe that factors other than weather were in operation to influence the distribution of these seabirds.

Thousands of combined Loons (mostly Red-throated with smaller numbers of Arctic, and very few Common), Grebes, Cormorants, Brown Pelicans, Gulls (including thousands of Heerman's and Bonaparte's) congregated between Santa Monica and Malibu to gorge on the tiny baitfish which were driven to the surface by large schools of mackerel and bonita. There were good numbers of alcide to be found up and down the coast, just offshore. Ancient and Marbled Murrelets, Common Murres, and a few Pigeon Guillemots were seen between Playa del Rey and Malibu during early January. Offshore, Black-legged Kittiwakes were numerous during December and January with as many as 77 counted flying past Point Dume on January 10 (Ben King, Jr-C.D. Fisher).

Most of the migrating Fulmars were likewise seen at Point Dume, but were unrecorded after late December. (Note: Point Dume, an excellent place for observing seabirds in migration, may be reached by driving along U. S. 101 west of Malibu and turning left at the Realty Office about 1/2 mile beyond the entrance to Paradise Cove - follow the road out to the point). Between 950-1000 Manx Shearwaters were counted December 23 as they swarmed after tiny surfacing baitfish just beyond the breakers at Will Rogers State Beach. A large number were also seen from Ballona Creek breakwater December 28 by Christmas bird-counters there.

Three Pomarine and 7 Parasitic Jaegers were seen January 2 between West Channel Drive and Santa Monica (Ed). Common Scoters were more numerous than I can recall - small groups (mostly females) were seen from Newport to Point Mugu.

The Rock Sandpipers were not found at the Ballona Creek jetty after December 28 (happily they remained just long enough to be included in the Los Angeles Christmas count). One and probably two Black Rails were present at a small marsh (between the herb garden and the coach-house) in the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum at Arcadia from early September until at least December 14 (W.D. Quattlebaum) and were seen by many people from that area. During a very high tide January 10 more than 200 Clapper Rails and a dozen Soras were counted in the flooded Salicornia marshes near Seal Beach. This phenomenon rarely encountered, affords an excellent opportunity to study Rails. These high tides will continue until March and perusal of Tide Tables and careful timing of trips to the coast should result in exceptional experiences with Rails, and is a rare chance to observe the seldom-seen Black Rail.

Of the land birds, many reports were received of transients and summer visitants lingering through the mild winter. Many commented on the lack of Robins and the relatively small flocks of Cedar Waxwings. (Note: the Rare-Bird Alert is in final stages of revision. If you wish to be included in this plan, please phone me, Arnold Small, VE 7-2272).

CONSERVATION
By Otis Wade

One of the longest winter droughts on record finally came to an end the first week in January but not before several terrible fires, conservations's worst enemy, had left thousands of acres of mountain and valleys in ashes. Over one hundred homes and other structures were destroyed, but fortunately only one or two human lives were lost. The loss of wildlife is beyond calculation. Rabbits and deer, their fur in flames, had to be shot down by the score by sheriffs especially assigned to that task. The burning animals were, of course, just so many torches further spreading the flames, and they would not have survived their burns anyway, so that it became an act of mercy as well as of necessity.

A curious phenomenon which was reported to us by one of the sheriffs was that of birds congregating in large flocks in trees or large clumps of bushes in the path of the fire. Then, as the flames got closer, they would all fly into the air as if on a given signal and dash headlong into the inferno. We must sadly know that unlike the fabled Phoenix they are not destined to arise from their ashes. Nor are the denuded hillsides destined to be quickly covered with sumac and oak. How much all the ground cover means was well demonstrated when the first rain, which was exceptionally heavy and violent, resulted in mud and boulder run-off in the burned areas causing considerable damage to homes and highways.

As reported in our last Tanager the Los Angeles City Council voted 9 to 1 to reject the application of the Consolidated Rock Products Company for the rezoning of the Big Tujunga Wash as a gravel district. This clears the way for converting this area into a recreation reservation for education and scientific conservation uses. There must be action by the County Supervisors to approve the Master Plan for Recreation Areas in Los Angeles County, which will include the Big Tujunga Basin, and amongst other things, there must be a report by the City Appraiser of the cost of acquiring this site.

During the past months representatives of the Los Angeles Audubon, the San Fernando Valley Audubon and the National Audubon Societies have expressed the hope that the Big Tujunga Basin might be developed as an "Audubon Center", similar to that in El Monte, but with the difference that this is a desert-life area with different plants, birds, reptiles, and small animals, kept in balance by predatory animals coming from adjacent Angeles National Forest.

The NATURE CONSERVANCY Group are holding an organization meeting on February 19, at 7:30 p.m. Room 250 in the auditorium of the General Petroleum Bldg. 612 South Flower St. No admission charge. Program will be panel speakers on conservation and nature movies. This is not just a social group but an active one. Guests welcome.

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

Mr. Charles Brown,
8480 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles, Cal.
Mrs. Edward L. Dunn,
2238 S. Sepulveda Blvd., L. A. 64
Mr. George Purvalic,
2501 Virginia Ave., Santa Monica, Cal.
Mr. Arvin Schmid,
1224-1/2 S. Westgate Ave., L. A. 25

NOMINATING COMMITTEE NAMED

In accordance with this society's by-laws, a Committee on Nomination of Officers has been named. Its members are: Mr. R. W. Julian, chairman, Mr. Otis Wade and Miss Bessie Pope. They will prepare a slate of officers for the coming year, and this will be submitted at our regular meetings in April. This Committee will welcome any suggestions from members; anyone wishing to make recommendations may contact anyone of the three members named above.

A REMINDER to attend the SCREEN TOUR on February 3 and 7. See Calendar Sheet for more information.

AUDUBON HOUSE

We are happy to report that the four volumes of the delux edition of BIRDS OF CALIFORNIA by Dawson have been located. They will be placed on the reference shelves of the library.

Mrs. Paul Dodds (Delight) brought in a Mockingbird and donated the funds to have it mounted. Mr. Beck who does the mounting has several of the birds needed for the exhibit, among them a Bullock's Oriole (replacement), female Audubon's Warbler, Spotted Towhee, Brewer Blackbird (male). Anyone wishing to contribute to this project may do so by sending a check, made out to the Los Angeles Audubon Society, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., L. A. 46, or by placing the money in the fund box at Audubon House.

We were surprised to find a Hooded Oriole bathing in the bird bath at Audubon House in December along with our winter visitors the Gambel Sparrows and Audubon's Warblers. We haven't seen the Hermit Thrush as yet this fall and winter but perhaps he comes when there is no one there to observe him. Our Scrub Jays are very bold and land on our feed tray before we can get seeds on it. All the birds are enjoying the seeds, raisins, peanut hearts and other gifts brought to the Christmas party.

Our Sales Department now has stationery, bird calls and Whooping Crane post cards. A new supply of decals, emblems, pins and buttons will soon be available.

The Leadership Training Chairman, Mrs. Mary Hood, is working with Camp Fire Girls on their two-year program of nature study. The facilities of Audubon House have been offered to their leaders, groups of girls and individuals. Our library is listed as a reference library for youth groups.

---Marian Wilson.

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About 70 members attended the Sixth Annual Meeting of Audubon Branches and Affiliates at the First Christian Church in Santa Ana on January 17, 1959, The Sea & Sage Branch acting as hosts. Bill Goodall opened the meeting with remarks and introductions, then groups were assigned to separate rooms to discuss Bulletins, Junior Clubs, Programs and Field Trips, Conservation and Sanctuaries, Screen Tours and Constitution and Membership.

After lunch there were reports by the committee chairmen, by D. Bruce Murray, new Director of Screen Tours and once again Bill Goodall took over the closing session of the meeting.

At a recent meeting of the Los Angeles City Park & Recreation Department Walter Leimert, pioneer realtor and developer, suggested that southern California's fast disappearing wild flowers be perpetuated in municipal parks. He proposed that the movement utilize the talents and experience of Theodore Payne, 87, nurseryman who has devoted a lifetime to the study of wild flowers and the collection of specimens and seeds. Fred W. Roewekamp, Superintendent of Park Development pointed out that the 1700 acre Hansen Dam Park could provide ideal climate and terrain for a wildflower perpetuation program. Specimens of wild flowers are displayed in many Los Angeles municipal parks.

A Remington Arms Company news release quotes an authority as saying that unmolested game birds have been computed to fly at the following rates: Doves and Plovers - 34 mph, Quail and many ducks at 41 mph, Canada Geese - 48 mph, Red-head Ducks 82 mph and Canvas-backs at 94. When alarmed they can undoubtedly achieve greater speeds for short distances.

Let's all attend the next three SCREEN TOURS - not only for our own education and enjoyment but bring a friend and help boost this years attendance to the highest ever.

LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

President Mr. Robert E. Blackstone, 10363 Calvin Ave., Los Angeles 25 . . .
Registrar of Members . . Miss Iola R. Moore, 278 Bronwood Ave., Los Angeles 49 . .

CALENDAR FOR FEBRUARY 1959

February 3, SCREEN TOUR - Tuesday Evening at Virgil Jr. High School, 152 No. Vermont
February 7, 7:45 p.m. and Saturday Afternoon - 2:00 p.m. at John Burroughs Jr. High
School, 600 So. McCadden Pl. Subject: "Waterway Wildlife" by Leonard
Hall. A colorful panorama of wild creatures harbored and nurtured by a
mid-western watershed. Spectacular photography and effective sound
recordings of waterway dwellers.

February 10, TUESDAY EVENING MEETING - 8:00 p.m. sharp at Great Hall, Plummer Park,
7377 Santa Monica Blvd. Subject: "The Galapagos Islands 100 Years
After Darwin". Speaker - Dr. John S. Garth of the Allan Hancock Founda-
tion, University of Southern California. This will be one of the most
outstanding programs presented by the Los Angeles Audubon Society.

Note: Our Annual Dinner Meeting will be held June 9, 1959 at the Cafe
de Paris in Hollywood. An outstanding program will be presented by
Dr. Tilden W. Roberts, formerly advisor to the Walt Disney True Life
Adventure series. Some of his films are photographic "firsts". Make
your plans to attend now, and look for further announcements and remind-
ers in the Tanager at which time reservation blanks will be available.

--Arnold Small, Chairman

February 12, EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING, Thursday, 7:30 p.m. at 10363 Calvin Ave.

February 14, SATURDAY FIELD TRIP to Hansen Dam. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the parking lot.
Go north on San Fernando Road or Glen Oaks Blvd., turn right on Osborn
to Foothill Blvd. Bring lunch and binoculars.

Ethel Craig, Leader.

February 19, THURSDAY FIELD TRIP to Descanso Gardens, 1418 Descanso Drive, La Canada
and to L. A. State and County Arboretum, 301 No. Baldwin Ave., Arcadia.
Bus will leave Grand Ave. entrance to Biltmore Hotel between 5th & 6th
Sts. at 9:00 a.m. sharp. Fare \$2.00. Please have exact change. Lunch
at Arcadia City Park. Arboretum from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. We need 25
people on this trip. Make reservations 1 week in advance.

Edna Burt, Leader, PL 5-1044

February 21 & 22 SUNDAY FIELD TRIP will be to Buena Vista Lake, Taft and Carrizo Plain
(Saturday) and Morro Bay (Sunday). This trip is excellent for Sandhill
Cranes, Golden Eagles, Waterfowl, LeConte's Thrasher, White Pelicans
and Black Brant. The group will meet at 9:00 a.m. Saturday, February
21 at the junction of California State Highway 166, 33 and U. S. 399 in
Maricopa.

Jim Huffman, Leader.

February 26, THURSDAY MORNING MEETING at Great Hall in Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica
Blvd. 9:45 a.m. A special attraction will be a film on the Whooping
Crane of great interest to all bird-lovers. A well known pair, Chris
and Jo and their two youngsters were featured on a U. S. postage stamp
last year. Another film will be Walt Disney's "Water Birds" which is
one of his best. Some of the sequences were done here in MacArthur Park
by two of our own members, Mr. Paul Lindau and his daughter Virginia.

Olive Alvey, Chairman