

T H E

# Western



# Tanager

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BY THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY INC.

THE LOS ANGELES BRANCH OF THE  
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## A SOUTHERN ARIZONA BIRD QUEST

Ernest J. Willoughby

Eugene N. Anderson, Jr.

On June 20, 1959, we left Los Angeles and set out across Imperial Valley toward southern Arizona. Our purpose was to see as much of the southern Arizona avifauna as possible in about two weeks. This article is a summary of this trip and includes some of our experiences and what we learned which may be of interest to others who may plan a trip through the area.

Our travels took us first to Lordsburg, New Mexico, and then south to Cloverdale, an abandoned settlement remaining as a weatherbeaten road sign and a lone building near the border. After birding this area, we went to Guadalupe Canyon via the Douglas Road which leads from Cloverdale into Arizona to Douglas, a small city near the border. The road to Guadalupe Canyon connects with the Douglas Road on the Arizona side and leads one into the canyon practically on the international boundary at the Arizona-New Mexico state line. Having spent the night in Guadalupe Canyon, we traveled to Chiricahua National Monument, investigating side roads into the Chiricahua Mountains on the way. From here we made our way to Tucson, barded the city and nearby Saguaro National Monument, then west south again to Patagonia and the Sonoita Creek Valley. Our wandering then took us to Madera Canyon, and back to Tucson where our trip was ended prematurely by automobile trouble.

In the Colorado River Valley the birds begin to change. Anyone passing through the country has probably observed no birds since the Imperial Valley; but once in the Colorado River area, he will hear White-winged Doves calling everywhere, at least if he has come, as we did, in June. These doves, and their loud rolling voices, are the most noticeable and widely distributed birds of the south Arizona country.

From the Colorado on east, desert country continues, with very few birds, until near Tucson. Tucson is a low, wide, modern-looking city which has Inca Doves as door-yard birds. Along the brushy bank of the Santa Cruz River running through the city we found both Pyrrhuloxias and Cardinals. Around Tucson, a long level valley extends toward Mexico; on the low slopes above the head of this valley rise the huge saguaro cacti, whose holes contain numerous Gila Woodpeckers, Gilded Flickers, Mexican Crested (Wied's) Flycatchers, Purple Martins, and other items. Near Saguaro National Monument, we observed a much rarer bird - a Scarlet-headed Oriole, a Mexican bird somewhat similar to the Hooded Oriole.

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### THE WESTERN TANAGER

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South of Tucson, and a little east,  
 Madera Canyon - a famous bird spot -  
 cuts the Santa Rosa Mountains. Madera  
 is principally an oak-sycamore woodland  
 area, opening into mesquite and acacia  
 and grass country on the valley below  
 and into conifers at its upper end. In  
 the sycamores we found Whippoorwills,  
 Elf Owls, Painted Redstarts, Sulphur-  
 bellied Flycatchers, Arizona and Cal-  
 ifornia Woodpeckers, and various hum-  
 mingbirds - Rivoli, White-eared, Broad-  
 billed, especially around Mrs. Alexan-  
 der's feeders. Mrs. Alexander, who  
 welcomes the visits of birders, attracts  
 other birds to her feeders besides hum-  
 mers - Scott's, Hooded and Bullock's  
 Orioles; Red-eyed and Brown-headed Cow-  
 birds; Arizona Jays, Black-headed Gros-  
 beaks and others.

Between the ranges of southeast  
 Arizona are wide grasslands where spar-  
 rows live - Grasshopper Sparrows in the  
 pure stands, Rufous-winged in brushy  
 desert - and stream valleys. In one of  
 these latter, the Sonoita Creek valley,  
 we found such Mexican types as Black  
 and Grey Hawks, the Rose-throated Be-  
 card, Beardless and (very abundant)  
 Vermilion Flycatchers, and Olivaceous  
 Flycatcher, as well as such more wide-  
 ly distributed birds as the Ground  
 Dove and Yellow-breasted Chat (the lat-  
 ter is the dominant small bird of the  
 undergrowth of the valley). Camping  
 near the creek, we were in the inter-  
 esting if a bit touchy position of hav-  
 ing both Hog-nosed and Striped Skunks  
 raid our campsite's garbage cans, while  
 Elf Owls (common and very noisy) and  
 Poorwills called around us.

Mention should be made of some of  
 the mammals of southern Arizona, for  
 some of them, like some of the birds,  
 range across the border from Mexico  
 and are found in the United States  
 mainly in those areas near the border.  
 One of these southwestern mammals is  
 the aforementioned Hog-nosed Skunk  
 whose acquaintance we made in the So-  
 noita Creek valley. Late in the after-  
 noon as we stood near the roots of a  
 fallen tree in the dense creek-bottom  
 woodland, a large skunk with a white  
 back and tail emerged from under the  
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log, myopically pointed a naked, pink nose at us for a second, turned around and went back into its den under the tree. Later that night it, or one of its fellows, rummaged among the trash and leaves of the campsite in company with the ubiquitous Striped Skunks.

Also seen here were the Antelope Jack-rabbit, a huge, pale, long-legged rabbit with preposterous ears, and the Apache Fox Squirrel. Watch for Arizona Grey Squirrel (which we saw) and Coatiundi, Collared Peccary, Pronghorn, Hooded Skunk (all of which we did not see) and others.

The Chiricahua Mountains rise still farther east. In them we found various high-country birds - Zone-tailed Hawks, Hepatic Tanagers, Coppery-tailed Trogons, a Blue-throated Hummingbird, and the very common Black-headed Grosbeaks in the lower oaks and dry hillside country and Mexican Chickadees, Grace's Warblers, Painted Redstarts and Mexican Juncos in the higher pines. The grasslands around the base of the Chiricahuas contained many Scaled Quail, and we observed a Prairie Falcon and many Swainson's Hawks hunting over these grass valleys.

Perhaps the most exciting spot on the trip was the Guadalupe Canyon area. In addition to such ordinary birds as Bell Vireos, Blue Grosbeaks, Curve-billed Thrashers, and Cardinals, rarities such as the Whiskered Owl, which we observed by flashlight at very close range, and the Violet-crowned Hummingbird occur there, and two birds never recorded anywhere else in the United States, the Ridgway Whippoorwill (Caprimulgus ridgwayi) and Thickbilled Kingbird (Tyrannus crassirostris), have been found in the canyon (See Johnston, Richard F. and Hardy, John William. 1959. The Ridgway whip-poor-will and its associated avifauna in southwestern New Mexico. Condor, 61 : 206-209). We observed all of these. Note: Seymour Levy and other Arizona bird students are agitating for protection of Guadalupe Canyon,

which is at present being slowly devegetated by cattle. The area unquestionable is unique and the most exciting bird area in the United States that is now unprotected by the government, and certainly it needs some protection.

(To be concluded)

\* \* \* \* \*

#### AUDUBON HOUSE

Christmas came early this year at Audubon House. After the party on December 3rd the many gifts of seeds, raisins, suet and other tidbits were carried from Great Hall to Audubon House and carefully put away where they would be ready to spread on the feeding tray and the ground for the White-crowned Sparrows, Towhees, Mockingbirds and our one Hermit Thrush. The sunflower seeds are now being served to our friendly Jay from the hand of anyone who has the time to sit on the porch and give them out. On December 14 a Fox Sparrow joined the feast.

The birds were not the only ones to receive gifts this year. Mr. Otis Wade, Conservation and Sales Chairman, presented Headquarters with a fine Underwood typewriter which he was able to secure through the efforts of Mr. J. A. Johnson of the Underwood Corporation. This typewriter has elite type and a fine touch and is available to Board members and the Western Tanager staff at Headquarters.

Marion Wilson

#### TUESDAY EVENING MEETING JANUARY 12th

Despite the rather blustery weather about 30 members turned out for the Tuesday evening meeting on Jan. 12. A crisis developed when our motion picture projector was found to have a burned-out lamp, and the spare also turned out to be defective. However, Marion Wilson and Melba Blackstone volunteered to go out and look for a replacement while we went about our usual order of business. They returned with 2 new lamps and we were able to show the 2 films as planned, BIRDS OF THE MARSHES and WILDFOWL IN SLOW MOTION, excellent films, which all enjoyed.

Bob Blackstone

## BIRDING IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

By Arnold Small

The continued hot dry weather of late fall and early winter did not add interest to birding in this part of the country. Despite the advance of the season, typical "winter" birding was not experienced. Coastal birding, which at this time last year was superlative, was hardly worth the effort except for the scoters. Loons, for the most part, were scarce in Southern California waters, but Western Grebes appeared in good numbers during late October. Numbers of both Horned and Eared Grebes appeared down. A Brown Booby at San Diego in early December revived interest among birders down there. The early flights of Pintail were somewhat sparse, but by mid-December more than 25,000 ducks (about 50% Pintail, 25% Grey-winged Teal, 15% Shoveler, and 10% American Widgeon) could be found at Upper Newport Bay along with about 25 Canada Geese. At the Salton Sea refuges, numbers of waterfowl were some 25% below normal. We are in hopes that this will be remedied by storms in the north later in the winter, and is not the result of a poor duck-hatch in the prairie states and Canada. However, the summer drought in that region did result in smaller broods of waterfowl being brought off the breeding grounds with the result that hunting bag limits were somewhat reduced. Black Brant were to be found only on Mission Bay (about 1000) and none were seen at Pt. Mugu or at Morro Bay. A single Old Squaw appeared at Redondo Beach early in December (Richard Gehman) and remained for some time. Oddly enough, the fall flight of scoters was excellent. White-winged Scoters in some areas actually outnumbered the Surf Scoters while the flight of Common Scoters was phenomenal! As many as 100 could be seen in the waters between Will Rogers State Beach and Malibu, as well as others at Pt. Mugu and Seal Beach. A small number of White Pelicans were present in the Region. The shorebird flight was only fair, and due to the reduction in habitat for this group, the usual large concentrations were not found except at a few choice locations. The mild winter in the mountains no doubt kept robins from mov-

ing into the Southland in any numbers and only a few small flocks of Cedar Waxwings were noted by mid-December. Even the Horned Larks, which winter on the Carizzo Plains by the tens of thousands, numbered only a few hundred in early December while the Sandhill Cranes must have found water elsewhere as none were seen there in early December (although reported by Eben McMillan). It was reported that more than 11,000 had congregated near the Merced National Waterfowl Refuge in November. Several thousand Mountain Bluebirds were present in the dry Buena Vista Lakebed in November and smaller numbers, together with a few flocks of Mountain Plover, were in the plowed fields near El Toro at this time. Here also could be seen large flocks of Tricolored Blackbirds containing small numbers of Starlings and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Even White-crowned Sparrows and Golden-crowned Sparrows were down in numbers in mid-December.

\* \* \* \* \*

ELTHINA N. JOHNS

Ella Johns, our oldest member, passed away in Carmel last October 8 at the age of 102. Miss Johns was a one-time Treasurer of the L.A. Audubon Society. A quiet lady, who kept opinions to herself, she was a fine worker and a devoted member. She will be missed.

Hugh Weiser

ROBERT L. PYLE

The cost of printing his "Annotated Field List of Birds of Southern California," in an edition revised by Arnold Small is to be paid by Otis Wade. We are deeply grateful for this noble gesture and realize a new high mark in generosity has been set by Otis for the rest of us to shoot at. Best of birding and the longest life list ever to him.

Hugh Weiser

## SAW-WHET OWL AT BEACH

About 11 o'clock Sunday morning, January 10, the loud clamor of three scrub jays alerted Don and Caroline Adams of Manhattan Beach to the presence of a saw-whet owl (*aegolius acadicus*) in their garden. A light rain was falling and the wet little owl perched on a low branch of a pittosporum and blinked at the angry jays which kept flying at him scolding loudly while the other birds (white crowned sparrows, brown towhees, mockingbirds, and a curious flicker) protested more quietly from the surrounding trees.

After a half hour or so the saw-whet shook himself and flew from branch to branch, finally settling in a more protected area about 20 feet from the ground where he remained until dark looking like a model for the 1959 Audubon Christmas card.

About fifteen L. A. Audubon members were able to get a good view of this elusive bird, but two who arrived after dark were disappointed in not locating him even though a diligent search with a bright spot light was made. The saw-whet was last observed just at dusk preening himself energetically, probably in preparation for his take off.

C.A.

## HAMILTON NATURALISTS' CLUB

In a letter from Robert O. Elstone, President, our Society is requested to enter its photography in an International Exhibition of Nature Photography in April, 1960 being sponsored by Hamilton Naturalists' Club of Hamilton, Ontario. The purpose of this venture is to bring to the attention of the public the need of saving our few remaining natural beauty areas.

They hope to have photography from many parts of the world. Entry forms may be had by writing to Mr. John Giles, Exhibition Chairman, International Exhibition of Nature Photography, Hamilton Naturalists' Club, Main Post Office Box 384, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

\* \* \* \* \*

## SATURDAY, JAN. 9th FIELD TRIP

This was the most exclusive and briefest trip to date. Four optimistic birders showed up, Helen Bayne, Gudrun Pepke and the three Weisers. Rain was coming down steadily. An enthusiastic Austrian-American mushroom fancier showed them several luscious-looking varieties; but could not divert attention for long. After counting species of birds picking up seeds, bread crumbs and apple slices near the picnic area in Fern Dell of Griffith Park, the watchers beat a leisurely but determined retreat to drier quarters. Hardy birds at the picnic area were White-Crowned Sparrows, a Song Sparrow, an Audubon Warbler, a California Jay, Brown Towhees, House Finches and a California Thrasher.

Hugh Weiser

SUNDAY FIELD TRIP February 28th  
(Continued from Calendar for February)

Trip will be an ocean trip to observe wintering pelagic birds. The boat "The Emerald" will leave Joe Martin's Landing (next gate past California Yacht Anchorages) near the east end of 22nd in San Pedro at 6:00 A.M. This early departure we hope will enable us to go all the way to Santa Barbara Island. Liquid refreshments will be available aboard the boat, but you must bring your own breakfast and/or lunch. Cost per person will be \$6.00. Please send money for your reservations as soon as possible to William G. Lehmann, 27023 Shorewood Road, Rolling Hills, Calif. FRONTIER 7-2635. Leader - Bill Lehmann

## THE 22nd CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The annual Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday, December 27, 1959, starting at 4:00 A.M. and lasting until 5:00 P.M. 52 observers in 25 parties participated. Area was the same since 1937 -  $7\frac{1}{2}$  mile radius centering near Pico and La Cienega Blvds. Temperatures from 41 to 67 degrees, visibility exceptionally good all day. The final count showed a total of 140 species and about 21,622 individuals.

The complete list compiled by Hannah R. Walker is as follows:

Red-throated Loon 1; Horned Grebe 17; Pied-billed Grebe 14; Brown Pelican 5; Double-crested Cormorant 18; Green Heron (Anthony) 1; Common Egret 112; Canada Goose (cackling) 1; Mallard 24; Pintail 3; Eared Grebe 67; Western Grebe 688; Great Blue Heron 8; Snowy Egret 3; Black-crowned Night Heron 21; Cinnamon Teal 1; Wood Duck 1; Ring-necked Duck 1; Surf Scoter 860; Ruddy Duck 41; Common Merganser 3; Sharp-shinned Hawk 2; Red-tailed Hawk 34; Swainson's Hawk 1; Pigeon Hawk 1; Surfbird 35; Black Turnstone 23; Common Snipe 12; Whimbrel 4; Willet 498; Least Sandpiper 87; Marbled Godwit 72; Glaucous-winged Gull 4; Western Gull 37; California Gull 69; Mew Gull 14; Shoveler 7; Redhead 1; Lesser Scaup 654; White-winged Scoter 33; Common Scoter 61; Red-breasted Merganser 3; Turkey Vulture 1; White-tailed Kite 2; Cooper's Hawk 6; Marsh Hawk 4; Sparrow Hawk 34; California Quail 285; American Coot 478; Semipalmated Plover 38; Snowy Plover 20; Killdeer 181; Black-bellied Plover 75; Spotted Sandpiper 4; Greater Yellowlegs 10; Dunlin 3; Long-billed Dowitcher 28; Western Sandpiper 175; Sanderling 252; Herring Gull 6; Ring-billed Gull 885; Heermann's Gull 10; Band-tailed Pigeon 1; Mourning Dove 571; Ringed Turtle Dove 56; Barn Owl 1; Great Horned Owl 9; Burrowing Owl 2; White-throated Swift 233; Black-chinned Hummingbird 5; Red-shafted Flicker 146; Acorn Woodpecker 3; Hairy Woodpecker 3; Western Kingbird 1; Ash-throated Flycatcher 1; Black Phoebe 22; Western Flycatcher 1; Common Bushtit 376; Wrentit 271; Forster's Tern 27; Spotted Dove 109; Roadrunner 4; Long-eared Owl 5; Anna's Hummingbird 245; Belted Kingfisher 5; Downey Woodpecker 3; Nuttall's Woodpecker 6; Say's Phoebe 7; Violet-green Swallow 5; Scrub Jay 577; Common Crow 77; Mountain Chickadee 4; Plain Titmouse 53; Brown Creeper 3; House Wren 8; Bewick's Wren 32; Cactus Wren 1; Rock Wren 3; Robin 524; Hermit Thrush 94; Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 4; Water Pipit 77; Cedar Waxwing 260; Loggerhead Shrike 34; Orange-crowned Warbler 36; Hermit Warbler 1; Brewer's Blackbird 668; Cassin's Finch 4; Pine Siskin 2; Lesser Goldfinch 150; Rufous-sided Towhee 219; Savannah Sparrow 76; Long-billed Marsh Wren 1; Mockingbird 545; California Thrasher 79; Varied Thrush 1; Russet-backed Thrush 1; Western Bluebird 7; Ruby-crowned Kinglet 39; Hutton's Vireo 7; Audubon Warbler 2,434; Townsend's Warbler 1; House Sparrow 1,362; Western Meadowlark 102; Western Tanager 4; Purple Finch 2; House Finch 3,134; American Goldfinch 35; Brown Towhee 691; Lark Sparrow 53; Rufous-crowned Sparrow 3; Sage Sparrow 1; Oregon Junco 673; Golden-crowned Sparrow 76; Fox Sparrow 40; Slate-colored Junco 11; Chipping Sparrow 41; White-crowned Sparrow 964; Lincoln's Sparrow 1; Song Sparrow 111.

Those participating in the count were: Mr. and Mrs. Don Adams, Mr. and Mrs. Larry Bates, Clarence Beasley, Patrick Bennett, Robert E. Blackstone, John K. Blair, John Borneman, Theodore C. Broberg, J. Stanley Brody, Loring Dales, Miss Caroline Daugherty, Merritt S. Dunlap, David DuVal, Bob Gee, Ted Gee, A. Paul Harkin, George Hastings, Mrs. Harry Hoffman, Dr. George Huber, J. W. Huffman, Warren A. Hunt, Noel A. Johnson, Miss Nancy Kamberg, Dr. Bill Lehmann, Alan Meyerfeld, Mrs. Betty Meyerfeld, Miss Gudrun E. Pepke, Miss Clara E. Pflager, Miss Helen F. Reed, Mrs. Kathryn Robeson, David Robison, David Rolapp, Earl Rugraff, Mrs. Sara C. Schaeffer, Roscoe R. Schaffert, Miss Catherine D. Shaw, Miss Nellie Spencer, Miss Norma Splitter, Mr. and Mrs. Fred L. Starch, Otis Wade, Miss May Wait, Miss Hannah R. Walker, Ernest Wiloughby, Mr. and Mrs. Russ Wilson, Mr. and Mrs. Lindsay Workman, Miss Elsie Kennedy, Aaron Krieger.

Compiled by Miss Hannah Walker

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President: Mr. James W. Huffman 2912 Manhattan Ave., Manhattan Beach  
Registrar of Members: Mrs. Robert Sandmeyer 355 Elm St., Burbank

## CALENDAR FOR FEBRUARY, 1960

- February 6 SCREEN TOUR - LAND OF EARLY AUTUMN - Cleveland P. Grant, Saturday Afternoon 2:00 o'clock. John Burroughs Junior High School, 600 South McCadden Place, Los Angeles.
- February 9 TUESDAY EVENING MEETING - 8:00 P.M. in Great Hall, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd. The program feature will be "Adaptations for Life in the Desert - Reptiles, Birds, Mammals and Plants", a symposium, which we plan to present in a somewhat different manner that we hope you will enjoy. Robert E. Blackstone, Chairman
- February 11 EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING.
- February 13 FIELD TRIP TO IMPERIAL VALLEY. Led by Marion and Russ Wilson (instead of Ethel Craig). Those who wish to camp can go on Friday, February 12, and camp at Finney Lake with the Wilsons. Saturday morning will be spent birding the Finney and Raymer Lake area. In the afternoon we will bird the Salton Sea area and return to camp Saturday night, returning home Sunday. Those who do not camp can find motels in town nearby.
- February 18 THIRD THURSDAY FIELD TRIP to Los Angeles State and County Arboretum, 301 North Baldwin Ave., Arcadia, and to Descanso Gardens, 1418 Descanso Drive, La Canada. Bus will leave Biltmore Hotel, Grand Ave. entrance between 5th and 6th Sts at 8:30 A.M. sharp. Fare \$2.00. Please have exact change. Tram fare 10¢. Will be waiting for us at 9:30 A.M. 11:15 A.M. to Descanso Gardens where we will eat our lunch at their picnic tables. Visit gardens until 2:30 P.M. Make reservations Feb. 12 - 17th.
- Leader - Edna Burt - PL 5-1044
- February 23 SCREEN TOUR - THE SHANDON HILLS, John Taft, Tuesday Evening 7:45 Virgil Junior High School, 152 No. Vermont Avenue, Los Angeles.
- February 25 THURSDAY MORNING MEETING - Plummer Park, Long Hall, 10 to 12 o'clock. Mr. John Peebles will speak on "Parks". Slides will be shown. He is recreational director for city park system, a director of Fern Dell Museum and an authority on the subject. Mrs. Paul Dodds, a member of the program committee, will relate her experiences in birding on a recent trip to Florida. Olive Alvey
- February 28 SUNDAY FIELD TRIP - see Page 35 for details or phone HO 7-9495