



# EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB

## THE ROADRUNNER

Editor, Marguerite Wright

May, 1943

### A-BIRDING WE SHALL GO

The rationed westerner finds the near-by places of yesterday to be the far-away places of today. But hobbies, as contributions to the National Morale, are not rationed. So a-bus and a-foot we shall go to rediscover the mesas and arroyas in our own back yard.

### APRIL MEETING

The El Paso Bird Study Club held a call meeting, April 17, 1943 at Mrs. Slater's home. The speaker of the evening was Arthur F. Halloran, Manager of the San Andreas National Wild Life Refuge. He listed the even Bird, the American Redstart, and the Rose-breasted Grosbeak among the unusual birds seen on the refuge. A lively discussion followed. This meeting followed a delightful hour in Mrs. Slater's garden.

### MAY MEETING

A regular meeting of the club and its friends will be held at Mrs. Slater's home, 516 Prospect Avenue, Monday, May 31, at 7:30 P. M. Dr. Anton Berkman, Head of Biology at the College of Mines, will address the group.

### CLUB NEWS

Major Brown W. Randel is stationed at the Base Hospital Air Base, Lake Charles, La.

Dr. and Mrs. I. M. Epstein are stationed at Alexandria, La., where he awaits over-seas assignment.

Mr. and Mrs. Arthur F. Halloran have a new assistant (aged six weeks) on the San Andreas National Wild Life Refuge.

Mrs. Beatrix Collinson, Librarian at William Beaumont Hospital, Ft. Bliss, writes: "THE ROADRUNNER is a happy choice of name for your Bulletin, and the contents of the various numbers you are so kind as to send here will prove of value in answering many questions of men from the East, West, North, and South of this land."

Mrs. Lovie Mae Whittaker, author of the Pyrrhuloxia series now appearing in this Bulletin, writes from Las Vegas that Black Swifts have been taken near that New Mexico city. Included in the list she sends are, also, White-throated Swifts, Ruddy Ducks, Virginia Rail, and Pigeon Hawk.

Maria V. Beals, Librarian, National Audubon Society, writes, in acknowledging the last issue of THE ROADRUNNER: "We at the Audubon House are very sorry to hear of the death of Tom Kirksey. We remember his visit to Audubon House some time ago, when he showed us some of his photographs."

Officers of the El Paso Bird Study Club for 1943 are: Pres., Marguerite Wright; Vice Pres., Mrs. J. Owen Allen; Sec-Treas., Lena McBeo.

LIFE WITH CHICA  
(continued from last issue)  
by Levie May Whittaker.

Nothing in the house was safe from Chica's heavy bill with its sharp cutting edges. With it she "fingered" any object that caught her attention and if she found it good, tried to bite out chunks. Cigarettes, pencils, papers, book jackets, flowers and even the paper on the wall came under that mutilating organ. Burnt matches were a delight and she whittled them to splinters or chewed the ends until they looked like old ladies' snuff dips. One morning we found her diligently shattering a bouquet of Texas Blue Bells when a blossom being rifled of its stamens came off and lodged on her upturned bill. She bumped around blindly, her head entirely hidden in the blue funnel. When she began to shake her head vigorously, the flower came off. She went over to it, picked it up and carefully dropped it over the edge of the table with something of the air of a spoiled child who kicks at an offending chair.

Another time we found her in the midst of chips from a small balsawood airplane and busy as a woodpecker making more chips. Sinking her bill into the soft wood seemed to give keen pleasure. She was passing each chip through her bill several times before letting it fall. I called to her. She gave a chup without looking and began to dance around the toy, wings half open, crest erect and wide-spread tail tipping up and down with each change of position. She hauled the plane about the floor, finally pulling it under a chair. There was mischief in the very tilt of her head. A Desert Sparrow and a convalescent Cow-bird boarding with us at the time were attracted by all this activity: but they gave only a few desultory pecks and moved away. She had the toy to herself and it lasted about two days. No tally was kept on the models she literally gnawed to bits; but the little boy of the house exploded more than once because she had one of his instead of her own.

Chica was a well-travelled Pyrrhuloxia by the time she was banded Number 35-211466 and freed at her old home. Taken to Houston while still a droopy-mouthed, stub-tailed baby, she was returned to the Big Bend at Christmastime, but the weather was raw and we were afraid to free her. So we carried her back, along with an adult male we called Pico. On these long trips across the state, we released Chica in the car, where she came to enjoy riding on the driver's shoulder. But her first reaction to this experience was definite. She was paralyzed with fright. With crest lifted until it actually tilted over her forehead, bill agape, body upstretched and feathers tightly pressed, she watched the strange world beyond the car with a far-focused bird-set. Each tall tree and passing car made her duck, and overhead bridge structures sent her diving to the floor not to come up again for several minutes. In time this urge to take cover was somewhat overcome--she merely dipped her head at these things. Birds flying or perched on fences always attracted her and she would fly from one side of the car to the other, following the flight of a dove across the road.

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A GIFT

Mrs. Caroline McKee Bartlet of La Mesa, N. M., has offered the El Paso Bird Study Club the use of her library of bird books and the complete files of BIRD LOR from 1900 to the present. This will be a most welcome addition to the proposed Tom Kirksey Miller Memorial Habitat Groups which the Club hopes to place in the College of Mines Museum.

## BEHAVIOR OF EL PASO'S WILD FLOWERS

### THE VIOLET

Quite as interesting as knowing what grows in El Paso, is finding out definitely what does not. You might call it behavior. Maeterlinck, after he wrote *THE BLUE BIRD*, brought out a little volume entitled *THE INTELLIGENCE OF FLOWERS*, in which he muses over the cleverness of mints, peas, orchids, corn, and other plants that have been studied by scientists to record their behavior. Certainly, flowers to an amazing extent choose, or adapt themselves to their environment; or, as with our own cactus, they find ways to outwit what might be an adverse or a handicapping fate, by ingenious engineering.

For an example of behavior, why does one never find violets on Mount Franklin? High places, plenty of them up our steep mountain canyons, have cool wet spots. Anemones, ferns, shining mosses, blue tradescantias, carry on happily, but never a violet. Hunt for twenty years, all kinds of seasons, and never find a one. And yet there couldn't be a friendlier flower to every man's doorstep in Virginia, creeping up as humbly as a lonesome pup to get closer to folks. In the crowded, nervous, dusty, quarreling city of Washington, up the hilly streets, wood violets bloom out of hard-trodden earth, to the very curb stones.

Twelve varieties of violets are listed for New Mexico--but mostly for the northern part--in mountains where they undoubtedly take cool, damp lodging. One is listed for Cloudcroft: the withe violet that blooms there from snow to snow and is so lovely and full of grace. Every Cloudcrofter know it and naturally calms it in our flora. So far, we cannot claim anything nearer--neither for Mt. Franklin, Hueco Pass, Carlsbad roadside, nor Soledad Canyon, all grand hunting places for botanists.

A long-stemmed, swaggering blue violet is found by seekers who hunt out of Kingston, New Mexico. The trails out of that town are florally interesting and rich in color and variety. But Kingston, like Cloudcroft, is a long way to go for a violet.

Besides being choosy down here, the violet is conspicuous as a free hybridizer, apparently having no family pride whatever. Taxonomists of high degree hesitate to name some that are found. Ezra Brainerd, a Vermont botanist, wrote a monograph on violets and has revised the lists for *GRAY'S BOTANY* and other text books and has been considered final authority. His work refers mostly to the Eastern states and is not complete for the Rocky Mountains and the far West; but he had his difficulty with the hybrids. We find the violet list in the New Mexico flora refusing to be final at one or two names. It is interesting in reading Brainerd's identifications to note some we have known or read about. There are several authentic yellow violets given. He lists Virginia's beloved "pansy violet" with its round leaf fringed out into threads and its wide-open flower with two dark velvet upper petals and three variously lilac-tinted lower ones. Virginia and Pennsylvania have a sister violet; and Georgia is allowed a violet with a political bias, the "confederate" violet. Some violets have hairy stems, some put out round leaves, some are heart shaped, one has oddly oblong, and several have truncated and divided leaves that are called halberd shaped. He lists the "English" double violet which most of us know as a tuft of romantically fragrant, frilly purple.

The fact that El Paso has one of the most beautiful violets, naturalized in everybody's garden, purple as a stained glass window, nodding as violets do in Shakespeare, and fragrant as anything Tennyson rhymed, entirely at home, insisting on being our violet, coming up in our gravel paths and between bricks--makes one wonder over Mt. Franklin's lack, all the more. The fact seems to have to be faced that El Paso, Mt. Franklin, Hueco Tanks, Carlsbad roadsides, and the Cornudas have been snubbed by this flower.

Another flower the botanist seeks and does not find on Mt. Franklin is the wild rose. Again look for twenty years and never come across one. Rose kindred, yes, a-plenty; True the leisurely botanist never gets to the top. For one thing, there is too much to see, climbing the trails. We are lucky if we reach two-thirds of the way up before it is time to turn back and get out of the mountain before dark comes. Those who do get to the top of the mountain ~~to see~~ big junipers and larger scrub oaks and high buckwheat of rich color and strange evening primroses, but no wild roses.

Twelve varieties altogether are listed for New Mexico--one for Mesilla Park vicinity--that is as near to us as any, and seems to be the same as Cloudcroft's wayside rose. One wild rose is listed for the Organs--one would like to find it. Several varieties are listed for the Sacramentos; none for our Mt. Franklin.

However, on the way up to Cloudcroft, from Mountain Park to below Scenic Point, blooms all summer one of the most wonderful wild roses in all the world. The bushes are high, high as a man, and in big clumps with up-standing stems, and they flower in three colors on a single bush: deep wine red, rich pink, and pale pink: and the flowers are as big as saucers and very golden in the hearts of them. The stems are handsomely leafy, and following the flowers have unusual hips, big as pecans, bronzed as chestnuts and spiny as gooseberries--spinier. Talking of behavior, this rose begins at a certain point on the way up and blooms up to the switch-back and below Scenic Point, and not one inch farther up. It is never found in Cloudcroft.

Cloudcroft's wild rose is low-growing, rather tangled in its branching, and has small delicate rosy flower of one shade of pink, and small scarlet, smooth fruits. A sweet poetical rose indeed, but very different from the superb cousin a little way down the mountain, down the same road.

Botanists say we may expect to find wild roses anywhere in our nearby high mountain reaches, but the El Paso botanist will look long, ere he finds one.

Elsie McElroy Slater

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Additional club members are Dr. Anton Berkman, Mrs. Caroline McKee Bartlett, Mrs. Louise Wilmarth, and Mrs. G.W. Young.

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A BIRD COUNT for our records, in lieu of the Christmas count, was made Jan. 15, in the vicinity of the Country Club, El Paso. 8:00A.M. to 3:30P.M. by Wright, Allen, Wilmarth, Keefer, and McBee.

Seen: 3 Treganza's Heron, 8 Mallard Duck; 3 Baldpates, 50 Green-winged teal, 1 Turkey Vulture, 1 Sharp-shinned Hawk, 1 Red-tailed Hawk, 4 Marsh Hawk, 4 Sparrow Hawk, 15 Scaled Quail, 10 Gambel's Quail, 1 Florida Gallinule, 2 American Coot, 2 Killdeer, 1 Barn Owl, 1 Long-eared Owl, 10 W. Mourning Dove, 4 Red-shafted Woodpecker, 2 W. House Wren, 2 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 5 American Pipit, 4 White-rumped Shrike, 20 W. Meadowlark, 3 Yellow-headed Blackbird, 200 Red-winged Blackbird, 25 Brewer's Blackbird, 4 Pyrrhuloxia, 10 House Finch, 50 English Sparrow, 18 Pine Siskin, 4 Pale Goldfinch, 6 Arkansas Goldfinch, 2 Green-tailed Towhee, 1 Savannah Sparrow, 1 Baird's Sparrow, 1 Scott's Sparrow (Mrs. Wright), 15 Shufeld's Junco, 15 Pink-sided Junco, 3 Western Chipping Sparrow, 5 Brewer's Sparrow, 10 Gambel's Sparrow, 25 Rocky Mt. Song Sparrow, 2 Merrill's Song Sparrow.

In this locality, we have seen these birds at approximately this time of year (Exact dates, Jan. 1 to 15 of 1936, 1938, and 1942):

Black-crowned Night Heron, American Bittern, Pied-billed Grebe, Gadwall, Pintail, Black and American Merganser Duck, Wilson's Snipe, Greater Yellowlegs, Western Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Western Horned Owl, Sandhill Crane, Black Phoebe, Say's Phoebe, Belted King-fisher, Cactus Woodpecker, Long-crested Jay, Crissal Thrasher, Western Robin, Chestnut-backed Bluebird, Mockingbird, Marsh Wren, Winter Wren, Audubon's Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Lark Bunting, Spurred Towhee, Lark Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Tree Sparrow. All these were missed at this time, Jan. 15, 1943.

To the list made Jan. 15, an observer added a few more species, Feb. 29, in the Country Club area. Additions are: Cooper's Hawk; Wilson's Snipe, Greater Yellowlegs, Roadrunner, Black Phoebe, Horned Lark, White-necked Raven, Sage Thrasher, Crissal Thrasher, Lark Bunting (flock in winter plumage), Lincoln's Sparrow, and W. Yellowthroat.

On March 10, three observers in this area made these further additions to the list: American and Snowy Egrets; Black-crowned Night, and Green Herons; Western Solitary Sandpiper; Sora Rail, Bank, Barn, Rough-winged, Cliff, and Violet-green Swallows; Hermit Thrush, Ash-throated Flycatcher, and Great-tailed Grackle. No Juncos were noted. Common summer residents, of course, were seen, such as Marsh Sparrow, and W. Red-tailed Hawks; Gambel's Quail; Killdeer; W. Meadowlark, White-rumped Shrike, White-necked Raven, Redwing, and W. Mourning Doves. Audubon's Warblers and Ruby-crowned Kinglets were still on hands. Music in short snatches was contributed by some of the sparrow tribe, notably White-crowned, Brewer's and Gambel's; and by the Redwings.