



EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB

THE ROADRUNNER

Editor, Marguerite Wright

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Let's not let this war hysteria
swing our lives too far off normal.
A day or an hour spent watching our
feathered friends will work wonders
toward restoring balance and sane
thinking.

MAY MEETING

The El Paso Bird Study Club and its guests met at the home of Mrs. H.D. Slater, 516 Prospect Avenue, Monday, May 31, 1943, at 7:30 P.M. Following a delightful hour in the garden, the club assembled to hear Dr. Anton Berkmann, Head of the Biology Department of the College of Mines, talk on "The Birds' Contribution to Man's Economic Good." An informal discussion followed.

OCTOBER MEETING

The Club and its friends will meet on Wednesday, October 20, at 7:30 P.M. at Mrs. Slater's home, 516 Prospect Avenue. A play will be presented by a group of Austin High School girls under the direction of Mrs. Lydia Stark. Mrs. Jane Leonis Kirksey, a club member now residing in Fresno, California, will be present, to give an account of her birding experiences during the past year.

NEWS OF CLUB MEMBERS

Mrs. Louise Wilmarth, now visiting in California, should be able to give us news of the birds of California when she returns.

Mrs. Marguerite Wright reports watching large numbers of Anna's Hummingbirds feeding on the Dorothy May Tucker Bird Sanctuary in Modjeska Canyon, east of Santa Ana, California.

Mrs. Elsie McElroy Slater who, with a guest, Miss Mary E. Harper, spent some time in Cloudcroft this summer, reports that the Pine Siskins were everywhere.

Interesting news gleaned from Mrs. Lena McBee's notes include seeing a Roadrunner in Memorial Park. In McKelligon's Canyon, on October 4, 1943, a Roadrunner, a Broad-Tailed Hummingbird and the Black-chinned Sparrow. The latter is a new species in this area.

Mrs. D.H. Baber, who is still in Southwestern General Hospital, writes that she is enjoying her copies of THE ROADRUNNER, which a friend reads to her.

The last issue of Mrs. Lovie May Whittaker's account of her two tame Pyrrhuloxias appears in this issue. The birds were a year old this summer.

LIFE WITH CHICA

(Continued from the May issue)

By Lovie May Whittaker

On January 28, when Chica was in her sixth month, we spiked an old Orchard Oriole's nest into a branch and placed it in a sunny window, just to see what would happen. As with any new object brought into the room, she was instantly investigating. The Desert Sparrow also took notice and together they jumped in and out, tugging at its materials. Apparently it had no meaning for them, was just something new to tear into; and this they did with a will that had the last shred down within a week.

In late February, I thought she showed increasing sign of maturation. For one thing, her bill, which was at first dark horn, and then later a vivid ivory, was now beginning to turn yellow. This color was especially noticeable below the nares and along the edges of the upper mandible. By the third week in March she habitually was seized with a restlessness just before daylight and would boat back and forth in the cage and call excitedly. Now her bill was a rich waxy yellow, almost identical in color with Pico's larger bill.

The handsome Pico, whom we had hoped might find Chica attractive, refused her attentions and preserved an attitude of regal disdain, until at last she gave up trying to interest him. The only times he showed any regard for her were when they were separated; then he would call to her in another room, giving a melodious, rich whistle in a slow and ontreating manner, "Who-oo-it-tew, who-oo-it-tew, who-oo-it-tew", he would whistle and whistle. Chica answered with questioning chips.

By May 15, Chica's increasing tendency to pull at threads and at my hair aroused our speculations. She was gathering billsfull of anything that would come loose and placing them here and there, seeming to forget them as soon as she put them down. On May 17 she began carrying string and stems to a support in the middle of a curtain rod. These promptly fell through to the floor; she picked them up again and again, never seeming to sense the futility of the performance.

Late the same afternoon I found her crouched down on the support body paralleling the wall with only her tail and head showing above the curtain. She had not come toward me when I entered and that was unusual. I approached; no change, no friendly chips. I got a chair and reached up to take her on my fingers; but no, she puffed out her feathers, ruffed her crest and forehead, opened her bill and made a sort of hissing sound and refused to budge. Putting my hand closer, I got a nip--the only one I'd ever had except once when she was being examined after a slight injury. Now her whole attitude was belligerent. I backed down and she immediately flew to another place. Curious to see what she was protecting up there, I reached up again and she flew toward me, again showing fight. I spoke to her gently and with coaxing got her on my finger. There behind the curtain was wedged one long little twig. A feeling of pity came over me at this obvious struggle between instinct and learning. Clearly she did not want me to disturb that place, yet she trusted me enough to get on my hand.

Remembering the nest that had entertained her earlier, I put another in the window branch. A Scott's Oriole's this time. Chica perched on my shoulder as it was being fixed, then she dropped down to its edge and looked it over; turning her head from side to side and tilting her tail slowly up and down. She picked at a fiber or two tentatively and hopped in. More pulling and tucking of loose ends as she stood stiff-legged in the nest. But soon, to my surprise, she nestled down into the deep bowl and began shaping it by breasting herself against the side with a quivering motion and turning slowly after each thrust to press against a new section. Her wings also brought pressure; for she pushed with her breast, she lifted out her bent wings so that the "shoulders" were in a curving line with the breast and the wing-tips crossed at a sharp angle over her rump. I could not see her feet, but there came a scratching sound as if they were climbing the concave wall, and she rose in the nest with each breathing and subsided again before turning in place.

There were three periods of nest-shaping during the first half hour. Between times she prodded and pulled at the rim or jumped out to survey the work. T times she crouched in the nest quietly, tail and bill just over the brim, as if very contented. Many times daily for the next two weeks she was at the nest. We put out short lengths of string, yarn and thread; some of these she worked into the nest. However, in a short time it was apparent that she was tearing out more material than she replaced, and by the time we were ready to take her back to the Big Bend and the freedom of hot mesquite thickets, the nest was a shambles.

To all of this Pico was a cold spectator. He gave scant notice to Chica's maternal manifestations and he never put bill to the nest. Once or twice, when Chica was on it, we caught him singing from a twig just above, and our hopes rose. He was giving his "what-cheer what-cheer what-cheer" and "chee-pou chee-pou chee-pou" whistles. (This last the Mexicans along the border interpret "chevo chevo chevo" and so call the bird. Not a very fitting name for such an elegant fellow). But we were soon forced to admit that their mutual indifference had not abated. Pico's song seemed to have a quality of longing in it, perhaps a longing for the old familiar haunts to which he was shortly returned. Or it may have been merely the sunshine which drew him to sing there. Whatever it was, it certainly was not love in bloom.

THE BIRDS OF TAOS

The author has made three trips to the Taos area in the last three years: April 10 to 13, 1941, in a party led by the late Tom Miller Kirksey; June 1 to Sept. 1, 1942, with Mr. and Mrs. and Mr. Tom M. Kirksey; and July 16 to Aug. 18, with Mr. and Mrs. John Whittaker of Las Vegas, N.M. (Mrs. Whittaker writes the Pyrrhuloxia series now running in THE ROADRUNNER). Headquarters from which our trips were made was the cabin site of the Kirkseys, twelve miles

northwest of Taos and about two miles from Arroyoseco, N.M. ~~The cabin stands~~ at an altitude of 8000 feet above the point where the Rio Hondo emerges from the Carson National Forest, after a precipitous race downward from Wheeler Peak and Twining, to dally through Valdez Valley and Arroyo Hondo and form a junction with the Rio Grande seven miles to the southwest. There is a sheer drop of 400 feet from the cabin site to the Hondo, a cliff covered with oak scrub and small evergreen. The Canyon floor is dotted with tiny farmhouses, which converge into the sleepy Taoseno village of Valdez. This bottom has much willow and cottonwood and box elder, which outline the river and acequias.

A favorite spot for observing birds was the valley spring from which the cabin draws its supply of drinking water, near the forest entrance. The forest here, like the Sacramentos in the Cloudercft area, is a region of yellow pine, fir, and balsam, with a narrow fringe of deciduous growth along the watercourses. Within, we observed a pair of nesting Ousels in the June of '42; and at the spring, nests of Rocky Mountain Song Sparrow and MacGillivray's Warbler. In '43 the Whittakers discovered a trail leading from the spring up the Cañada del Agua. In this canyon we found, in early August, small flocks of warblers gathering for migration--Grace's, Rocky Mountain Orange-Crowned, Virginia's, Audubon's and Black-throated Gray; and with them, twittering fall residents, such as Mountain Chickadees, Rocky Mountain Brown Creepers, White-breasted, Red-breasted, and Pygmy Nuthatches, Longcrested and Woodhouse Jays, Lead-colored Bush-tits and the Western Gnatcatchers. There were also Dusky Grouse, Clarke's Nutcrackers, Rocky Mountain Hairy, and Red-shafted Woodpeckers, Red-naped and Natalio's Sapsuckers, and American Ravens. A Rufous Hummingbird was noted farther up and a single White-throated Swift; and at the crest, almost a mile skyward from the cabin, Mrs. Whittaker flushed a pair of Nuttall's Poorwills from the trail.

In the Valdez Canyon itself, as late as August 5, a Broad-tailed Hummingbird's nest was found, containing one young and an egg. Lazuli Buntings were still musical in the canyon. Warbling Vireos and MacGillivray's Warblers fed flown young, and so did Audubon's Hermit Thrushes; Yellow Warblers and Song Sparrows sang desultory snatches; An immature Cooper's Hawk protested our presence with many a "cuck-cuck", and the Red-naped Sapsuckers, with "Ya-Ya's". At a pool were a pair of Western House Wrens, a spotted Sandpiper, and a Belted Kingfisher. Above us soared Western Nighthawks and Violet-Green Swallows. Evening Grosbeaks called from marginal trees.

In following the steep trail up the canyon rim to the cabin, we flushed up Spurred and Green-tailed Towhees, Western Mourning Doves, a western Tanager and Sage Thrashers with their families, along with Sparrows gathering for flight--a flock of Western Chipping, Brewer's, and Clay-colored.

Through our Spanish-speaking neighbors on the mesa have orchards, the cabin site itself has only native vegetation along the irrigation ditches: a tangle of alder, box-elder, wild plum, wild gooseberry, choke-cherry, and an occasional clump of black willow. These afford food and coverage sufficient for both the farmland bird residents and the lateral migrants from surrounding piñon and sagebrush areas. A list recorded by Tom at the cabin, August 14, 1942 is typical of the bird populace on the mesa. It contains 39 species, and 249 individuals, and represents an area of one square mile. The list follows:

3 Desert Sparrow Hawk	2 Chestnut-backed Bluebird
1 Turkey Vulture	1 Warbling Vireo
50 Band-tailed Pigeons	1 Audubon's Warbler
1 W. Nighthawk(50 here yesterday)	2 Rocky Mt. Black-headed Grosbeak
5 Mourning Dove	8 Rocky Mt. Evening Grosbeak
1 Rufous Hummer	2 W. Tanager
2 Red-naped Sapsucker	3 Lazuli Bunting
11 W. Crows (40 here yesterday)	7 Green-tailed Towhee
2 American Raven	2 Spurred Towhee
1 Woodhouse's Jay	100 English Sparrow
3 Barn Swallow	2 Cassin's Purple Finch
1 Violet-green Swallow	23 Pine Siskins
1 Hammond's Flycatcher	15 Ark. Goldfinch
1 Western Flycatcher	3 Lincoln's Sparrow
1 Long-tailed Chickadee	2 W. Grasshopper Sparrow
2 W. House Wren	9 W. Chipping Sparrow
2 Sage Thrasher	7 W. Vesper Sparrow
7 Mt. Bluebird(70 near Seco, 10 days back)	2 Rocky Mt. Song Sparrow

A year later, lured by a chorus of dawn song, I covered the same territory. Among the interesting visitors who were feeding on the choke-cherries, I counted five Piñon Jays, four Black-headed Grosbeaks(a family), eight Western Tanagers, at least a dozen Green-tailed Towhees and as many Spurred Towhees, a family of Song Sparrows, twenty Chipping Sparrows, a family of MacGillivray's Warblers and one of Warbling Vireos. The Mountain Bluebirds were congregating in a meadow near with Red-winged and Brewer's Blackbirds along with numerous small groups of American Magpies.

Lena McBee