



EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB

THE ROADRUNNER

PUBLISHED BY THE EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB

LENA MCBEE, CHAIRMAN

NUMBER 23

APRIL-MAY, 1947

Subscription Rates, 50 cents a year

NOSTALGIA

Hummingbird, in Yucatan,
Tell me when you first began,
With the quickening of the year,
To remember gardens here.
Did some southern scent recall
Honeysuckle on a wall?
Or did tangled tropic bowers,
Call to mind our friendly flowers?
Fairy, did you then take wing
Knowing here it would be Spring?

—Phyllis Fairfield

AUDUBON SCREEN TOURS

The regular March meeting consisted of Alan D. Cruickshank's "South Along the Suwannee", fourth Audubon Screen Tour, which was presented on March 10, at Austin Junior High School. Alligators, turtles, frogs, birds, insects and flowers along the entire length of the river were shown.

Karl H. Maslowsky's "Arizona Adventure", which was given in the same auditorium, provided an interesting meeting on April 15th. Among the Arizona birds shown, many were common to El Paso; such as the desert sparrow, road-runner, Fuertes' red-tailed hawk, cañon towhee, house finch and Gamble's quail.

The series of Audubon Screen Tours which has just been completed was presented to El Paso by the Bird Study Club and the El Paso Public Schools. These co-sponsors wish to thank every individual who helped to make the tours successful in the very first season that that they had been booked in the Southwest. We bespeak for this civic enterprise your most enthusiastic support for another year. A wide variety of experiences has been ours--roaming with Pettingill through tropical Mexico; listening to Bert Harwell's inimitable songs from sea to high sierra; floating along the beautiful Suwannee River with Cruickshank; wandering the night with Howard Cleaves and home again to Arizona with Karl H. Maslowsky. We are glad to have worked with the National Audubon Society in its program for wildlife conservation. To conserve wildlife is to build a more beautiful Southwest and to leave to coming generations a land which we can well point to with pride when we say, "This is America."

A BIRD WALK

The next meeting will consist of a bird walk on Saturday, April 19.

Guides will meet interested persons at the entrance to Ascarate Park at the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 9:00 A.M. This field trip should prove to be most profitable, as spring migration through El Paso is at its height; in fact ducks and geese have already gone through. Down the levee are flocks of ibis, avocets, egrets and various sandpipers. In the city parks are to be seen vireos, warblers, flycatchers and thrushes.

(Editor's Note: By mistake, this announcement appeared in the February-March number of THE ROADRUNNER.)

NEW MEMBERS

Misses Ann Wilmarth, Elizabeth Kelly and Diane Quigley; Mesdames John K. Rose and R. A. Sumner and Messrs. Fred Andresen, J. Owen Allen III and Ernest Melancon and Major General G. Ralph Meyer are El Pasoans who have recently joined the Club. Miss Mary Orr of Reserve, New Mexico, is also a new member.

JACKMAN MEMORIAL

In memory of the late May Bailey Jackman, charter member of the Club, it was planned to increase the reference material on Southwestern birds in the El Paso Public Library. THE AUDUBON MAGAZINE was recently presented by the Club as a part of this memorial. In a note of thanks, Helen Seymour Farrington, librarian, writes: "The bird lectures have aroused much interest in bird study. The magazine will be in constant use."

A TRIP TO ASH SPRINGS

If you follow the highway which goes from Las Cruces through the San Augustine Pass to Alamogordo, you may notice a small gravel road which cuts through the desert to the left. This dusty washboard leads to the 7,000 acres of the Jornado Wildlife Refuge and high among the canyons to Ash Springs. The lovely, desolate spot is 5,700 feet high among rocks that drip with moss and fern. The ground sparkles with the bright green of wild columbine leaves. That was the destination of four members of the bird club on the crisp dry Sunday of March sixteenth.

We left El Paso around 7:30 A.M. and as the road curved close to the river a beautiful Treganza's blue heron flew up. Further on several coots were swimming leisurely under the early morning sun. On telephone wires and fences balanced an occasional white-rumped shrike, and a few meadowlarks sang from the fields. As we neared Canutillo, a pyrrhuloxia was singing on top of a mesquite bush. This regal bird seemed to be in the best spirits and allowed us to take a good look at him before he flew to a bush further away. After he had flown we observed two cactus wrens building their nest in the mesquite. We drove on past sleepy adobe houses and warm brown fields. Now and then a sparrow hawk would circle in front of us and disappear. Several mourning doves flew up from the roadside. Approaching Las Cruces we passed a tree with a flock of yellow-headed blackbirds. We turned around, and as we drove back, the sun caught their yellow heads turning them into sparkling gold. They had grouped themselves as though expecting to be used in a design for a tapestry. This flock was the most spectacular thing that we saw on our trip.

Leaving the highway a few miles out of Las Cruces, we drove into a group of horned larks. These birds flew away quickly, small silver streaks above the reddish-tan desert. We saw flocks of horned larks throughout the refuge. After much bumping we finally reached the Jornado Experiment Station, where the trees were filled with happily singing Brewer's sparrows. The road turned and we headed directly toward the mountains for a short distance. The strata was very plain, some of it running straight across the top of a ridge, other layers slanting to one side or the other. Some of the distant mountains looked like stage scenery, their fronts being rocky and barren; their backs appearing as though they had been hollowed out. We stopped and watched a flock of two hundred or more lark buntings still in winter plumage. The road was going up all of the time and finally it turned into not much more than a goat path. At the crest of the hill a pair of road-runners were looking the country over. As we came nearer one darted into the underbrush, but the other ran ahead of the car swinging his tail from side to side, before he too started cross-country. As we looked below we could see the cup in the valley, warm and dusty in the sun. To our left we heard a cañon towhee call, and then we saw him sitting on top of a cat's claw. We heard several more around Ash Springs later.

At last we were there. We left the car near a juniper tree and started out, binoculars in hand. We heard rock wrens call from the slope above us. Later we heard three verdins and saw their nests. As we wandered down the canyon we saw a spurred towhee and several Gambel's sparrows feeding close by. We sat down a moment to enjoy the clear pools of water and the warm sunlight. As we talked a purple finch came to drink. Two Bewick's wrens were examining a hole in an ash tree, and in the live oaks half a dozen ruby-crowned kinglets fed. As we started up the canyon again two Townsend's solitaires flew to a dead branch at the left. Desert sparrows sang and flitted all about us.

As we left the canyon, we saw a few Shufeldt's juncos scratching at the side of the road. As the road winds down, the Cloudcroft mountains are visible through great gaps in the canyons. Through these you look down on the mysterious bowl which holds the white sands and the blue, almost vaporous mountains along the far rim.

The station seemed deserted as we came back through it, with the exception of two Say's phoebes swinging up into the air and then settling again on the corral gate. This side of Las Cruces two red-shafted flickers darted across the road.

We took the road which runs along the levee home. While it is dustier and longer, the water birds make up for the inconvenience. Forty ducks were seen; among them being mallard, gadwall, baldpate, one pintail drake, green-winged teal, one cinnamon teal, shovellers and a pair of buffle-head. As we rode along, a marsh hawk or two flew up and a Swainson's. In the marshes near Canutillo several waders wandered about in search of food. These were identified as Wilson's snipe, yellow-legs and a few sandpipers. Killdeer flew along the river and we were about to leave when a song sparrow made its appearance. We saw a few more Treganza's heron making five in all, and a few house finches.

We were back in El Paso around 6:30 P.M., dusty, hungry, tired; but very happy. We had not seen as many birds as we had hoped but we concluded that the buffle-heads and the yellow-headed blackbirds alone would have made the trip worth while.

--Ann Wilmarth

A VISIT TO HUECO TANKS

Our party of three visited Hueco Tanks in the morning of March 2. The temperature was 51° and there was little or no wind until the afternoon on the return trip.

To create a background for the non-Texan reader here is a brief description of the Tanks. They are located thirty miles from El Paso, twenty miles out the Carlsbad turnpike and ten miles across the desert. A volcanic eruption many millions of years ago forced through the level desert floor a group of abrupt cliffs 100 to 500 feet in height, a mile in length and a half mile in width. They are arranged in three natural amphitheatres which usually contain shallow water; hence the name tanks. On the walls are Indian pictographs, and on the banks are pot holes worn by a prehistoric river and utilized by the Indians as crucibles.

A signpost in the area says, "This is one of the most historic spots in the Southwest for it was a famous watering place for Indians and emigrants. Near here on many occasions the Apaches challenged the right of white man to pass through and disturb their country. Here was a station of the southern overland mail between St. Louis and San Francisco from 1858-1861."

The Tanks are therefore interesting to the historian, anthropologist and geologist. The botanist too, for on March 2 the region was carpeted with dry seed pods of many kinds and in the crevices under the rocks were ferns which the expert of our party classified as *bommeria*, *woodsia* and *cheilanthes*.

But it was the birds which this group came to observe. On the ride out we had seen, feeding beside the road, a flock of lark buntings still in their brown winter plumage but a few showing the white wing patches of summer. With them were a few beautiful western meadowlarks. There was an occasional white-rumped shrike and, soaring above us, a white-necked raven.

At the tanks a convention of sparrows was feeding on the mud flats; the sage sparrow with its single dark breast spot; the song sparrow, but which of the twenty sub-species I do not know; the Savannah so like the song sparrow but its pink legs and forked tail helping to distinguish it; the Gambel's, here as everywhere in this region; the Brewer's and western chipping so much alike except that the chipping has a rufous crown with distinct white eye stripe below, while the Brewer's has a finely streaked crown; and, most satisfactory to the beginner, the desert sparrow with its conspicuous jet black throat patch, white under parts, and white stripe above the eye. Three of these handsome birds were drinking in a trough leading from the tank.

The wren family was represented by the rock and cañon wrens. The latter persistently sang the scale for us and one, its white throat and breast in conspicuous contrast with its dark reddish-brown belly, played a game of "now you see me, now you don't" with the desert sparrow on the cliff above us.

The juncos were represented by 15 pink-sided, a red-backed and a flock of Oregon, which the experts divided into 60 Shufeldt's and 30 Montana. The black head of the Oregon is the distinguishing field mark and the names of the other two are sufficiently descriptive.

There are two towhees: the cañon towhee, the brown one with the rufous crown and obscure central throat patch; and the spurred, easily identified by the rows of white spots on back and wings.

A Say's phoebe constantly darting over the water proclaimed its membership in the flycatcher family. This flycatcher has a rusty breast, brownish back and black tail.

Soaring over the tanks were a turkey vulture; an accipiter, probably a Cooper's, and a marsh hawk; and on the way home over the desert, a red-tailed hawk.

The Woodhouse's jay or the Texas representative of California jay, the 3 red-shafted flickers, 9 ruby-crowned kinglets, 3 verdins, 2 robins, a road-runner, a killdeer, 7 house finches, possibly a Cassin's purple finch and the chestnut-backed bluebirds were other old friends that we met on this most interesting early spring outing.

—Sarah Durkee

TO AN ORIOLE

At some glad moment was it Nature's choice
To dower a scrap of sunset with a voice?
Or did some orange tulip flaked with black,
In some forgotten garden, ages back
Yearning toward heaven until its wish was heard,
Desire unspeakably to be a bird?

—Fred F. Bradley

BIRD WALK IN NEW GUINEA
George Burrows

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is the third chapter of the article by the same name appearing in the March-April and May-June, 1946, issues of THE ROADRUNNER.

Eager to get into the forest, I pushed on hurriedly across the plateau. Already the sun was dazzlingly bright. My shirt felt hot against my moist skin. The grass, now waist high, now only ankle high, rustled softly as I walked. I was thinking how different the cane grass is down along the river; it grows eight to ten feet high, the thick leafy tops meet overhead making it quite dark. A tiny Quail whirled into the sunlight a few feet ahead of me looking much like a little Bob-White. The body was only about five inches long, but because of its chunky shape, it gave the impression of being larger. Yet which of the New Guinea Quails was it? There were no distinctive field marks. The male Pigmy Quail is easily recognized by a pretty pattern of black and white on its face and throat, but the female looks much like the Spotted Button-Quail; both are mottled brown, black and buff above, lighter below. Noticing that the back looked darker and more gray than brown, I realized that I had made a rare find. This was the elusive Spotted Button-Quail that few field naturalists are fortunate enough to see.

The secretive Button-Quail are particularly interesting because of the unusual fact that the female "rules the roost". She is larger and more brightly colored than her mate. The hen-pecked male takes care of the household duties of incubation while his gadabout spouse goes courting with some other Caspar Milquetoast. The female lays several sets of eggs, each to be attended by a different male. Shocking!

I thought I heard an Owl hooting off in the darkness of the tall timber. The "hoo, hoo, hoo" was faint and mellowed by distance. Strange that an Owl would be calling during the brilliance of equatorial daylight. I stopped to listen. Then I realized that I had been deceived - the note was soft and deep, but very near. I moved cautiously forward, alert for some movement in the grass or island of brush ahead. "There it is!" A great black bird, large as a crow, was cleverly balancing on the bending cane like a Red-Wing Blackbird. It seemed to have no marks at all - just black, with a slightly brownish cast. Its tail was amazing, probably once and a half the length of its body. In spite of its very small round wings, the bird flew and maneuvered with skill among the thicket growth. There was something reminiscent of the Pileated Woodpecker in the way this large creature moved - furtively, silently, gracefully among the tangle. Its beak was small, blunt and shining black. The upper mandible was much thicker than the lower and curved down abruptly. It was an attractive bill, with song bird characteristics. As the bird fed among the grass and brush, two to five feet from the ground, it would occasionally emit that haunting, ventriloquistic "hoo, hoo". Its tail was not graduated enough to be a Magpie, and there was no white. It must have been a Coucal, a large handsome relative of the Cuckoo.

The gentle morning breeze whispered over the grass. A loud, unfamiliar call made me turn. Conspicuously perched atop the highest branch of a dead tree in the clearing below was a dark bluish bird about the size of a Jay. Its most striking feature was a bright red parrotlike bill, but this was no Parakeet. As I watched through field glasses, it darted after an insect and returned to its place. While it flew, I detected a light blue roundish patch about the size of a silver dollar on its wings. The Dollar Bird! A new bird for my list! It is one of the Broad-Billed Rollers, being less Crowlike than its common European cousin. The family name comes from a peculiar trait of tumbling, or rolling, in a spectacular display flight during the mating season.

From my vantage point I looked out upon a tropical landscape. Across the valley Sattleburg Mountain rose by rounded stages. Here and there exotic flat-topped gum trees and queer kapoks with their right-angle branches regularly spaced stood frail above the jungle. Every imaginable tint of green was blended in the pattern of the forest, from the dark shades of the bread fruit and laurels through the variegated figs, palms, mahogonies to the pale yellow-green of banana trees. My eyes moved down the slope. Nearly smothered by the crowding green was the fingernail of coral sand called Scarlet Beach, and beyond was the Bismarck Sea.

Many people have tried to describe the colors of a tropical sea. While I stood there enthralled, I realized how incomplete words are. As with the crystalline blues and greens of a transparent aquamarine, there was no edge to a color; but this was more than a jewel glistening in the sun. It was as though I were looking into the water, not at it. There was depth and mystery in those cool blending shades of delicate green and deep rich blue. A glowing brightness in the tints seemed to emanate from far within, not like a reflection. Little waves were shimmering lazily, as though suspended. For a long time I stood - then turned toward the forest wall. (To be concluded.)

"Is everyone here?" asked the Bird Lady as several children hopped gaily off the Country Club Bus.

"My seven are here," answered Miss Day.

"All of mine, too," said Miss Smith.

"Fifteen boys and girls," counted the Bird Lady, "and a lovely spring morning. That is a perfect beginning for a bird walk. We will see several kinds of birds if we walk quietly, and do not talk. I see three pairs of field glasses. That is fine!"

"Let us divide into groups. Four will walk with Carlos and Miss Day. Five will stay close to Miss Smith. The rest will come with me. Is everyone ready? Then let's go!" The Bird Lady led the way up the country road.

So many pairs of bright eyes were sure to see many bird friends. From field and tree came bird calls and songs. The Bird Lady and the teachers were kept busy writing the names of birds the children found. Often they paused to watch, and to answer questions.

Finally the group came to the bridge over the river. "We will rest here, and watch the water birds," said the Bird Lady. "If we come back in a month, there will be many swallows' nests under this bridge."

"Do swallows go South every winter?" asked Rosita.

"Yes, Rosita," answered the Bird Lady, "but you know there are many birds which live here all the time. I hope to show you an old friend of mine. It is a road-runner."

"A road-runner!" exclaimed several children.

"Yes. Do you see that long row of bushes at the turn of the road? When we get there we will sit as quietly as possible and pretend to be bushes, too. If we are lucky, perhaps Mr. Road-runner will come walking along."

Silently the groups walked. Without a whisper, each child found a place to sit, making himself as small as possible. How quietly they waited, eyes searching right and left!

Just when Jimmy felt that he could not sit still another minute, a large bird stepped from between two bushes. A lizard was sunning itself on a flat rock. Quick as a wink the bird snatched the lizard in its strong bill.

The bird beat the lizard two or three times against the ground. Then it lifted its head and began to swallow the creature, head first. It stretched its neck and shook its head. Then it started up the road, the lizard's tail still hanging from its mouth.

When it was almost out of sight, a car came around the curve ahead. The bird turned and came back toward the children. As the car drew nearer, the bird stretched his neck and tail out in a straight line with his back, and began to run. How it did run! Just as it passed the watching children it threw its tail straight up, turned off the road, and disappeared in the pasture behind them.

Carol Gray jumped to her feet. "Whew! What a race," she exclaimed. "Now I know why he is called a road-runner."

"So do I! So do I!" called the others as they jumped about and stretched tired arms and legs. Miss Day brushed a worm off her neck and a spider web out of Miss Smith's hair.

"Tell us all about him, please, somebody," begged Tommy.

"First," said the Bird Lady, "how much did you learn for yourselves?"

"He was almost two feet long," said Carlos.

"His eye was yellow, and he had a stiff crest," Sam had noticed.

"He was brown on top and white underneath, and had lots of dark stripes and spots all over him," Anita added.

"He could move his crest, and his tail went up and down like a pump handle," Rosita laughed.

"When he raised his tail, I could see white 'thumb marks' like the picture of a cuckoo," said John Anderson.

[illegible]

"This bird is sometimes called the 'ground cuckoo'," the Bird Lady told the children. "He is also called 'chaparral cock', and 'cock-of-the-desert'."

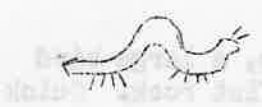
"Down in Mexico, I think he is called 'paisano!'," said Pedro.

spring I found their nest. It had white eggs in it."

"Now I think we must turn back toward the bus route. I have a paper here for each of you, so that you will always remember our lucky day and our Mr. Road-runner."

This is the paper the Bird Lady gave each child:

A black and white line drawing of a branch with several leaves. A small, dark, oval-shaped insect is perched on one of the leaves. The drawing is simple and appears to be a sketch or a reproduction of a sketch.



A collection of line drawings of various animals and insects. The drawings include a lizard in the top left, a snake in the top right, a mouse in the bottom left, a butterfly in the center, a beetle in the middle right, a spider in the top center, a cicada in the middle right, and a snail in the bottom right. The drawings are simple line art, suitable for coloring.

THE WESTERN MOURNING DOVE

The Martin's old gray car rolled down the country road. From the back seat Anita and her friend Carol looked at the beautiful farms. Patches of alfalfa were a deep, rich green. Field after field of smooth brown earth lay ready for the cotton seeds to be planted.

The cottonwood trees all had on new Easter dresses. Apple orchards were wearing clouds of sweet-smelling pink blossoms. The long, lacy fingers of weeping willow were trying to touch the water in the canals.

"Are you girls beginning to get hungry?" inquired Mr. Martin. "I know a nice grassy place with trees and running water. Does that sound like a good place for our picnic?"

"Oh, that will be wonderful!" both girls spoke at once.

When the car stopped, everyone helped with the lunch. Soon everything was ready. How good the food tasted! Sandwiches and boiled eggs disappeared. Lemonade and cookies tasted wonderful after the long ride. Carol paused with a second piece of cake halfway to her mouth.

"Anita," she said. "Look right over your father's head, on the second branch. What do you see?"

Anita looked and looked. "Oh, I see it. A nest with a brown bird sitting on it. What round, bright eyes it has! Do you see it, Mother?"

"Yes. I think it is a western mourning dove. Her mate should be near."

"Here he comes, now," Mr. Martin told them. "Listen."

With a loud whistling sound, another brown bird flew to the ground. He spread his tail wide to act as an air-brake as he landed.

"He makes that whistling sound with his wings," Mr. Martin told them. "When you hear that again, you will know there is a mourning dove flying by."

"Notice how dark his bill is. There are black spots on his back and wings, too. What color would you call his underparts?" Mrs. Martin asked.

"Fawn color, I think," Anita answered, "but it looks pink, too."

"The feet and legs are deep pink," Carol noticed. "See how he bobs his head at every step. Does he have a song, Mr. Martin?"

"No, just a call. I think I can talk to him. Do you want me to try?"

Mr. Martin put his folded hands to his lips and blew softly. "Oh-ah, Cooo, cooo, coo."

The mourning dove stopped, turned its head, and answered. "Who-ah, Whooo, whooo, who," the girls thought it said.

Mr. Martin blew again. This time Carol thought it answered, "You-ah, Youoo, youoo, you."

"How sad he sounds!" Anita said.

"That is why we call him a mourning dove. But it is just his soft love call to his mate. He keeps calling so she will know he is near. Let's go look at her nest," and Mr. Martin swung his daughter to his shoulder. He walked close to the sitting mother.

With a rush and a whir of wings the bird flew to the ground. Anita fell to the grass. "Oh," she cried, "she frightened me! Oh, look, Carol, she has hurt herself! Oh, the poor little thing!"

The bird flopped about on the ground, beating the dust with one wing. The girls ran to pick her up. But just as they reached her, the bird fluttered a few steps away. The girls followed, trying again and again, but could not catch her. Finally she flew to a near-by tree where she sat watching.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha," laughed Mr. Martin. "Why didn't you catch her and mend her broken wing? She played a good joke on you, didn't she?"

Carol grinned, "I guess we did look silly. But what a clever way to get us away from her nest! May I look at it while she is away, please?"

From her perch on Mr. Martin's shoulder, Carol looked at the loose pile of twigs. "What a flimsy nest!" she exclaimed. "Any hard wind would blow it down. There are two pure white eggs in it. Will she lay any more?"

"No, Carol. The mother seems never to lay any more. There would not be room for more babies, because they stay in the nest until they are almost as large as the mother. I have seen Mrs. Mourning Dove trying to keep her babies warm, when they were so large that their heads and tails stuck out on either side of her wings."

"Does the father bird help with the work?" Anita questioned.

"Oh, yes. He is a very devoted husband. He carries the sticks for his wife to build the nest with. He takes his turn at keeping the eggs warm. He helps feed the babies, and stays with them while Mrs. Mourning Dove goes to feed and drink."

"Tell the girls why the law protects the mourning dove," Mrs. Martin requested.

"These birds are a great help to us because they feed almost entirely on weed seeds. They are considered a game bird, so the law says hunters may not shoot them except during a few weeks each fall."

Mr. Martin began to put things back in the car. Soon they were ready to start. "Do you suppose Mr. Mourning Dove would tell us 'Good-by', Father?" Anita asked. "I wish we could tell him what a lovely time we have had and how much we enjoyed meeting his wife."

"I will tell him," her father said. He cupped his hands and blew several times.

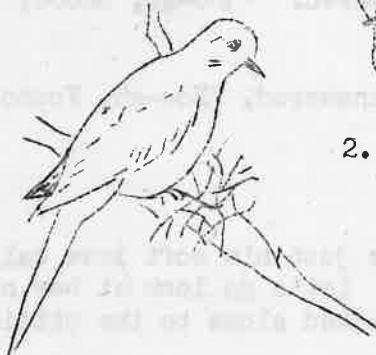
The Dove whistled down to the ground. "Oh-ah, cooo, cooo, coo," he answered softly, "Oh-ah, cooo, cooo, coo."

The Western Mourning Dove Family

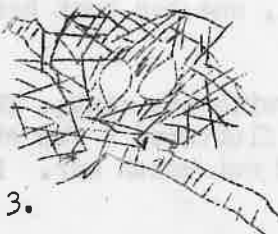
A. Match the pictures and the sentences.
Write the right number in the blank.



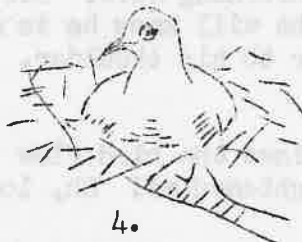
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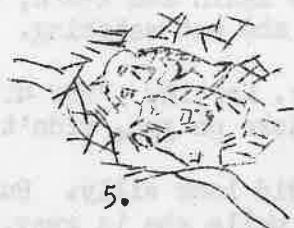
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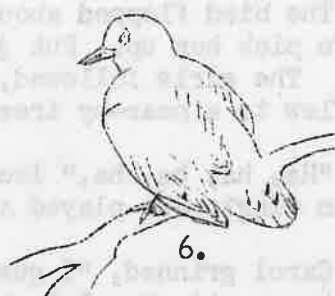
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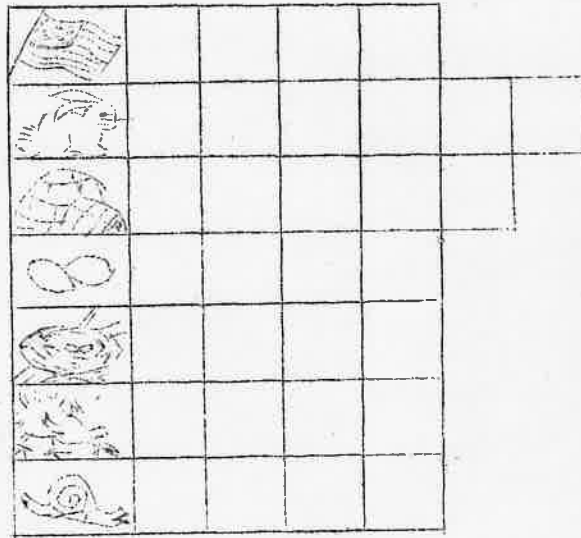
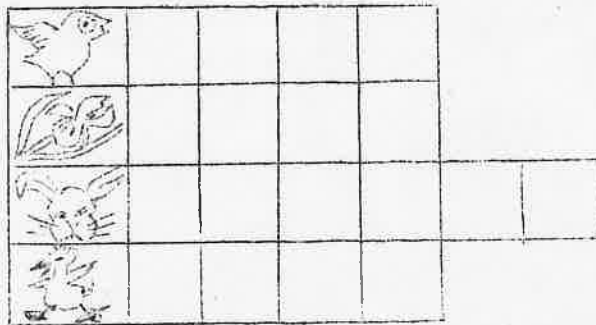
6.



7.

- _____ One baby is out of the nest.
- _____ There are two white eggs in the nest.
- _____ The father bird brings twigs for the nest.
- _____ The mother feeds the other baby.
- _____ Two babies hatch from the eggs.
- _____ The doves bill and coo.
- _____ Mrs. Mourning Dove keeps the eggs warm.

- B. Write the name of each picture in the squares which follow.
Make the first letter a capital. What do the capital letters spell?



- B. Baby (or Bird)
Iris
Rabbit
Duck
Flag
Rabbit
Igloo
Eggs
Nest
Duck
Snail

4
1
5
7
2
3
6

Key: A.