

EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB



THE ROADRUNNER

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LENA MCBEE, EDITOR

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THE SUMMER BREEZE
(Editor)

The breeze is in the shagbarks
Where the silver squirrel springs.
It combs the laurel covert
Where the hooded warbler sings.

Hark! it bears the dove's soft cooing,
The woodthrush's starry call,
And the whippoorwill's quaint clamor
As dusk begins to fall.

RECENT MEETINGS

Dr. Telford H. Work presented the final number of last season's Audubon Screen Tours, April 16. Daring assiduity had gone into the making of the film, "Bits of Land Along the Coast", and Dr. Work's scholarly comment on it greatly pleased his audience.

On the morning of May 12, a group of bird students met at the Country Club for a bird walk. High wind kept the list down to fourteen birds, none exceptional. Calls of cowbird, meadowlark, Bullock's oriole and house finch were noted, along with songs of the mockingbird.

May 30, on Sunday afternoon a group of bird and garden club members heard an enthusiastic address by George Burrows, Assistant Manager of the Kerrville Nature Camp. To show us what the activities of this new Texas camp might embrace, color films were exhibited of the Audubon Nature Camp of Hog Island, Maine.

The regular monthly meeting of the El Paso Bird Study Club convened Tuesday, September 7, at 7:30 P.M. in the College of Mines Museum. The speaker of the evening, W. S. Strain, Curator, talked about the growth of the museum, and afterward conducted a tour through the ornithological room and the rooms that house the new Peak collection of animal heads, skins, tusks and horns. Two beautiful specimens of the ivory-billed woodpecker in this collection appeal to bird students in particular.

THE NEXT MEETING

A walk to Ascarate Park has been planned for Sunday morning, October 3. Participants should meet at the entrance to the park at 6:45 A.M. There should be some late migrants there, in addition to the nesting population.

COMING AUDUBON TOURS

Favoring the West Side conservationists, the El Paso High School will be host this season to the Audubon Screen Tours. As usual, the Public Schools of the city will be co-sponsors with the El Paso Bird Study Club in offering the tours to the public. The following program has been submitted:

Monday, October 25
Karl H. Maslowski
OUR HERITAGE IN THE ROCKIES

Wednesday, December 8
William Ferguson
THIS CURIOUS WORLD IN NATURE

Monday, February 21
Carl W. Bucheister
WILD LIFE DOWN EAST

Wednesday, March 16
Allan D. Cruickshank
TRAILS FOR THE MILLIONS

Friday, April 22
Rev. George M. Link
ALLURING ALASKA

ALL TOURS AT 7:30 P.M.

EL PASO HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM

NEW MEMBERS

Mrs. C. E. Locke of Mesilla, New Mexico, is a new member.

*By oversight, the last issue of THE ROADRUNNER was numbered 28. It was the 27th issue. This one is properly numbered 28 for your files.

WITH OUR CORRESPONDENTS

George Burrows, who was the Assistant Director last summer of the Audubon Nature Camp at Kerrville, Texas, writes us to "round up some nature lovers for next summer's camp and bring them down".

Mrs. Campbell Lochmiller writes about birding in the Big Bend last summer following a trip to El Paso. Most of her spirited letter follows:

"We took the long way home through the Davis Mountains, Big Bend National Park, and San Antonio. Most persons following us would have considered us extremely off balance. Seeing a bird on a fence, telephone wire, or in the field, we would stop, turn around, study him, write down his markings, look him up furiously and become ecstatic when we were sure "in our minds" of an identification, and very disturbed when we were not. We traversed many ravines along the highway, and had a most enjoyable trip.

"In addition to the birds we saw in the El Paso Park, many of which we saw again, we saw killdeer by the hundreds in an irrigated field and yellow-headed and Brewer's blackbirds by the hundreds at a cotton gin and feeding lot. We saw common ones, such as crows, grackles, and a couple of Paisano's; also sparrow hawk and the red-tailed and many mountain bluebirds, which never ceased to thrill me.

"From Alpine to the park and within the park, to our own satisfaction, we identified the following for certain: Mountain blue bird, horned lark, loggerhead shrike, canyon towhee, spotted towhee, turkey vulture, desert sparrow, pyrrhuloxia, golden eagle and flicker. With a question mark, we identified the following: Vermillion flycatcher, long-tailed chat, California jay, white-crowned sparrow, mountain chickadee, canyon wren, catbird, brown thrasher, mocker, cardinal, and cactus wren.

"In Del Rio and west from there, we saw loggerhead shrike, great-tailed grackle, scissor-tailed flycatcher, Bewick's wren, and plain titmouse."

"Little white egrets" with green legs and bills have often puzzled observers on field trips along the levee here. Snowy egrets, as every one knows, have black legs and bills with yellow feet. Dr. Harry C. Oberholser clears up the matter in a recent letter. He says:

"The white egret-like birds with greenish legs and bills are without doubt the immature little blue herons that range northward after the breeding season. At close range you might be able to see the slaty colored markings, which are sometimes inconspicuous."

In the July number of the Audubon Field Notes Magazine appears the first report from the newly-added Southwest Region, which includes Arizona, New Mexico, a bit of Southwestern Utah and a corner of Southwestern Texas. The region is reported by Gale Monson, Manager of the Havasu National Wild Life Refuge. He writes to thank the El Paso Bird Study Club for data contributed to this report. General Meyer's report on nesting birds (See page 3) was especially mentioned in his letter of appreciation.

OUTSTANDING SUMMER RECORDS

Tommy Conway heard whip-poor-wills at Carey's Trail Camp near Cloudcroft this summer.

Fred Andreson was one of a group of Boy Scouts who saw a painted red-start's nest at a camp near Silver City, N. M., in June. Fred reports four eggs when they first found the nest at the foot of a cliff and four young in it when they last visited it.

A golden-crowned kinglet was seen by Mrs. Allen and Mrs. McBee at Ruidoso, August 19, along the North Fork of the Ruidoso in the Indian Reservation. This constitutes our second record for the golden-crowned in the Sacramento Mountains. The first was made by Lieutenant and Mrs. A. E. Eynon in June, 1945.

J. Owen Allen and his mother observed a pair of Lucy's warblers feeding young in a tree-hole nest at Radium Springs, New Mexico, in June. This is our first nesting record of Lucy's so far east of its Arizona habitat and so near El Paso.

Continued observations of the Cassin's sparrow in the Jornada Refuge were made June 21 by George McClelland Bradt and Mrs. McBee in the hope of establishing a nesting record. About 15 birds were seen and songs were generally heard, but no nest was found. A desert sparrow's nest with eggs was seen.

Mrs. Harriet McGuire had a number of birds in her garden at La Mesa, August 27, among them a Grinnell's waterthrush.

Mrs. Louise Wilmarth reports a family of black terns in winter plumage near Canutillo, New Mexico, August 12. About sixteen of these graceful "sea swallows" were noted at the refuge by Miss Keefer and others, September 11.

W. W. Wimberly reports an interesting bit of observation, Sept. 11, in a bit of marsh near Zaragoso, Texas. Three immature soras and a family of Florida gallinules, adults and three immature, were feeding there. He watched an encounter between a blue-winged teal and a gallinule, in which the teal was driven away.

YOUTHFUL WRITER CONTRIBUTES

Another of our youthful members breaks into print in this issue, with an article on "Birding".

BIRDING

I first became interested in birding when I was in the Boy Scouts. In order to get a Merit Badge in bird study I had to be able to find forty species of birds in their natural surroundings. That seemed an impossibility because I didn't realize that there are so many species of birds in this part of the country. In the past I had taken many outings and could not remember seeing many birds. But seeing is believing. I remember the first birding trip I took with the El Paso Bird Study Club. It was at Ascarate Lake. It was early on a Saturday morning and as we approached the lake we saw a great many ducks taking off. On the lake we saw some gadwall, pintail, greater and lesser scaup, shovelers, and a few cinnamon teal. At least that was what I was told but they were all just ducks to me. We also saw coots, a comorant and a great blue heron. Since then I have seen a few pelicans there, some gulls, and some blue and green-winged teal. This will give you an idea of some of the birds you may find at Ascarate Lake.

Birding is a great deal easier than it seems; and if you try you can learn to recognize birds by their call. As you get better you will recognize them also by the way they fly. Some good places near-by for birding are McKelligon's Canyon, Ascarate Lake, Memorial Park and the river levees. If you want a farther trip, you ought to visit Hueco Tanks.

Through the Audubon Society screen tours I have learned much of bird life in the United States. The tours have been very educational. Not only are they about birds but they are about nature in general. The first tour of the 1947-48 season, "Our Living Earth", was mostly about soil conservation. But it also gave a magnificent study of birds and flowers.

The second tour gave a good idea of birds you see every day around your home. Mrs. Laurel Reynolds took most of the pictures in her back yard as the birds fed and took baths or merely sat sunning themselves. The third tour I did not see but I am sure it proved as interesting as the rest of the Audubon Screen Tours are.

The fourth tour this year, "Happy Valley", was also a picture in technicolor, and the colors of the autumn trees were so realistic and vivid that I felt as if I were there myself. The fifth picture is still to come and no doubt it will be as good, as well as interesting, as the rest have been.

I think if you take up birding enthusiastically you will find a good way to have fun while working.

--Gale Grose

NESTS FOUND TO MAY 15

by

Major General G. Ralph Meyer

Hawk--

Western Redtail, 1 with downy young, Orogrande, May 4

Swainson's, 3, May 1 to 4, Orogrande

Desert Sparrow Hawk, 3

1 with 5 fresh eggs, May 11

1 with downy young, May 15

1 with 1 egg, May 15

Coot- 1 with 8 eggs, partly incubated, Anthony, May 12

Killdeer- 3

1 with fresh eggs, April 3

1 with 4 eggs, April 15

1 with 5 eggs, April 20

1 with 7 eggs, April 21

Black-necked Stilt- 1 with 3 fresh eggs, May 15

Mourning Dove- 6; 1 with 3 partly incubated eggs, May 12, Vado

Roadrunner- 4

1 with 3 eggs, April 3

1 with 4 eggs, April 15

1 with 5 eggs, April 20

1 with 7 eggs, April 21

Western Horned Owl- 1, April 6, with fresh eggs, Orogrande

Cactus Woodpecker- 5, May 7

Ash-throated Flycatcher- 4 nests being built, May 7

Say's Phoebe- 3, May 4, all at Orogrande

Verdin- 6; first nest with eggs, April 26

Crissal Thrasher- 10

1 with 2 eggs, March 28 (first one)

1 with 2 partially incubated eggs, April 6 (last one)

(Some with nearly full-grown young as early as April 8)

White-rumped Shrike- 2

1 with 3 eggs, March 24 (later abandoned)

1 with 6 fresh eggs, April 5

Red-backed Junco

1 with 4 fresh eggs at Cloudcroft (Alt., 8,000 ft.)

MUSEUM RECEIVES GIFT

A gift of bird skins belonging to her late husband, Tom M. Kirksey, was made recently to the Museum by Jane Loomis Kirksey. She has also added a collection of Tom's personal papers, scrapbooks, and magazines of value to bird students to those already stored with the club. These will become the property of the Ornithological Room of the Museum as soon as the proper library facilities are provided.

A TRIP THROUGH THE ROCKIES

by
The Editor

Two non-birding but self-denying friends asked me to go along in their car last summer on a two weeks' trip to the Yellowstone National Park and other scenic wonderlands of the Rockies. We should be gone two weeks, setting out from El Paso June 28 at daybreak and returning on July 11, 1948. I might get in a little birding on the trip, they promised. What follows is an account of the cursory but delightful birding that ensued.

June 28: Between El Paso and Santa Fe, a few summer residents came into view: Turkey vulture, mourning dove, western kingbird, house finch, sparrow hawk. We had noon lunch under the cottonwoods beside Highway 85, somewhere between Santa Fe and Taos, to the music of robin, long-tailed chat, yellow warbler, and redwing. Arrived at Taos, we found time for an hour with birds around the Indian Pueblo: Mourning dove, western nighthawk, violet-green swallow, magpie (empty nests in shrubbery overhead), Woodhouse's jay, mountain bluebird, robin, white-rumped shrike, warbling vireo, yellow warbler, long-tailed chat, western meadowlark, lazuli bunting, house finch, spurred towhee, western grasshopper, chipping and vesper sparrows. Clouds obscured the sun about 5:00 P.M., but a thin stream of song trickled through the dusk for some time afterward.

June 29: At 6:30 A.M., we set forth through Taos Canyon to Raton. Birds are hard to see in wooded areas and landscape engrosses the mind. Vultures soared, but never an eagle darkened Eagle Lake. A Lewis' woodpecker in Cimarron Canyon, a few wood pewee, violet-green swallow, western crow; and near Trinidad (Colorado) a horned owl, ash-throated flycatcher, robin, warbling vireo, house wren, lark-bunting--these were all. At Walsenburg (where we had a flat) cliff swallows were flitting about a barn. A sparrowhawk, clashing with a meadowlark, was driven out of bounds by it.

Just north of Walsenburg we ate noon lunch at a roadside picnic table. Barn swallows were there, and a pair of house wrens; a robin, feeding young in the nest, a yellow warbler, an orchard oriole, a pair of eastern kingbirds, and house finches. Bronzed grackle and magpie appeared near Colorado Springs. By 5:00 P.M., we were exploring "The Garden of the Gods". And in their fashion, the birds were exploring too. We discerned a flicker, long crested jays, magpies, a black-headed grosbeak, a green-tailed towhee, and several Virginia's warblers, in the low bushes that fringe the garish rock formations.

There was a steak dinner at picnic grounds along Clear Creek between 6:00 and 8:00 P.M. followed by a drive past the Pillars of Hercules to transcendent Seven Falls. Long-crested jays and violet-green swallows were seen up there; and along Clear Creek, house wren, flicker, and robin.

June 30: Already in danger of scenic indigestion, we left Colorado Springs at 6:30 A.M., for Denver, Boulder, and Estes Park. We came through Big Thompson Canyon from south to north, a picturesque drive but apparently birdless. Where timber grew dwarfed as we followed the descent of the river, we came upon a farm house and a flock of Brewer's blackbirds. The canyon drive joined the highway near Lake Loveland. At the junction were cherry trees hung with red fruit; and a flock of songbirds, most inveigling, filled the river bottom with song. Flicker, wood pewee, eastern kingbird, catbird and American redstart, lazuli bunting, Bullock's oriole and yellow warbler and American goldfinch made their contribution to the chorus, while we ate our belated noon lunch beside the highway.

From Denver to Boulder we had seen red-winged and yellow-headed blackbirds together in swampy places, and we continued to see both kinds through Wyoming.

July 1: There is a good deal of road between Cheyenne and Lander, going northwest across Wyoming, and it was partly blotted out by rain. At Medicine Bow there were horned lark, purple finch, and lark bunting; also, wood pewee and yellow warbler. By noon we came to the crossing of the North Platte, between Walcott and Sinclair. Driving off the highway here, we spread lunch under the trees by the river. A house wren chortled and fed young in the nest near-by, and a yellow warbler carried a beakfull of worm into the willows. Besides, there were violet-green swallow, martin, magpie, Bewick's wren, robin, catbird, warbling vireo, a pair of orioles that may have been Baltimore, accepted by us as Bullock's. There was considerable song here too. From here to Lander, where we slept, there were only blackbirds noted.

(To be continued)

JUNIOR ROADRUNNER

By Marguerite Wright

THE COOT

The Pool lay cool and quiet under the morning sun. Here and there water plants grew under the surface, or spread their flowers to the light. Half way down the long, shallow pond, great clumps of tules stretched toward the blue sky.

Anita and Carol crept toward the lower end of the water. "It's just a little bit farther," whispered Anita. "The Bird Lady asked us to look for ducks."

A few minutes later Carol said softly, "Oh, look! Five, seven, nine little black ducks. Watch them stand on their heads to feed."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Anita as she stood up. "Those are not ducks; they are coots. Some people call them mud hens. Let's sit under the little cottonwood and watch them. Aren't they cute, the way they bob their heads as they swim? Do you see their white bills?"

"Why, they are white, and pointed, too; not broad and flat like a duck's bill. They seem to start at the top of their heads, don't they?"

"It looks that way, doesn't it? But I think there is a bald spot or a sort of shield on the forehead. Now look at those swimming away from us."

Carol looked carefully. "My goodness!" she exclaimed, "the whole under side of the tail is white."

"Mother says that, and the white bill, are the 'trade mark' of the coot. I guess that helps the hunter, so he will not waste a shot. Coots are not good to eat, you know. Listen, I hear someone coming."

"Yoo-hoo," called the Bird Lady softly as she slid down the bank and joined the girls in the shade. "Have you seen anything interesting?"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Carol. "We heard some beautiful bird songs, and saw some of the singers. But there was nothing on The Pool except those pretty little white-billed birds."

"Do you know what they are Carol?" the Bird Lady asked.

"I do now, because Anita told me. I thought they were ducks, because they are about the size of teal, and they point their tails toward the sky when they hunt for food beneath the surface, just like ducks. But I won't be fooled next time. I'll look for the white bill and the white 'tail light'," laughed Carol.

"Anita is a good teacher, isn't she? I am sure that white 'tail light' helps the babies follow where the parents lead, just as a fawn follows the white flag of the white-tailed deer when she flees from danger. It is sometimes quite shadowy where the parents make their nests."

"Oh, I wish we could find a coot nest. I've looked and looked, but never found one," Anita sighed.

"They are hard to find. The coots make their nests in water lanes bordered by reeds or rushes or tules, with the stems often bending to form a roof overhead."

"So that is why I had no luck! I always searched in the tules where they grow up to the bank," exclaimed Anita. "But how does the mother keep the eggs from getting wet? Does she build a raft for the nest?"

"No, she piles and weaves reeds and grasses on the bottom of the pond until she has a platform above the surface of the water. Then she uses more grasses and tules to make a nest on the platform. She lays from seven to sixteen eggs. They are cream-colored with dark 'freckles' all over them."

"How clever she must be!" exclaimed Carol. "Did you ever see a baby coot?"

"Yes, once," replied the Bird Lady. "One time I was lucky enough to find a nest in a drainage ditch in the lower valley. I watched a coot hurry into a little blind water tunnel in the tules. When she did not return, I decided she had gone to a nest. I slid into the water and parted the tules until I found it. I came back every morning for two weeks to watch.

"A coot lays one egg every day, and they hatch in the same order. The babies are the funniest little things I ever saw. They are black above and almost white

underneath, and have bright red bills. The heads look quite bald, and there is a fringe of long orange hairs sticking out here and there. The father seems to take care of the little ones while the mother stays with the unhatched eggs."

"Well, imagine that!" Anita said. "What kind of feet do they have? Are they webbed like those of ducks and geese?"

"No, their toes are trimmed with 'scallops', or lobes, which serve them as well as webs--perhaps better, as they can walk and run on the ground. Their legs and feet are yellowish-green. We seldom see the color, as they stay in the water most of the time. They use those feet to fight with. I have seen two coots 'sit on their tails' in the water and battle with their feet and bills. And they swim and skitter, too."

"What do you mean, 'skitter'," both girls wanted to know.

"It is what they do when they make a quick get-away. Watch and I will show you." The Bird Lady untied her scarf. Then she suddenly stood up and waved it.

The three birds which were still near-by lifted their wings and fluttered away, pattering the surface of the water, kicking it foamy. As they neared the tules, they rose in the air, flew over, and dropped to the water on the other side.

"Well!" laughed Carol, "I've learned a new word. 'Skittering!' It looked like a new dance step they were practicing, using the surface of the water for a dance floor."

"Now that was a clever thing to say, wasn't it, Anita? Do you know what coots eat?" asked the Bird Lady.

Anita thought a moment. "Yes," she answered. "They eat the tender shoots of water plants, and a few insects. They are not a help to man, but neither do they do any harm. I love to watch them."

"I think the hunter likes them," the Bird Lady said. "When he sets up a blind, the ducks are very suspicious. But the coots are curious, and lack fear, so they swim up to investigate. The ducks see that the coots are not harmed, and maybe are getting something to eat, so they follow, and BANG, Mr. Hunter has duck for Sunday dinner."

Anita laughed. "Then we can say the hunter calls the coot a mud hen, but uses it for a cat's paw!" she said.

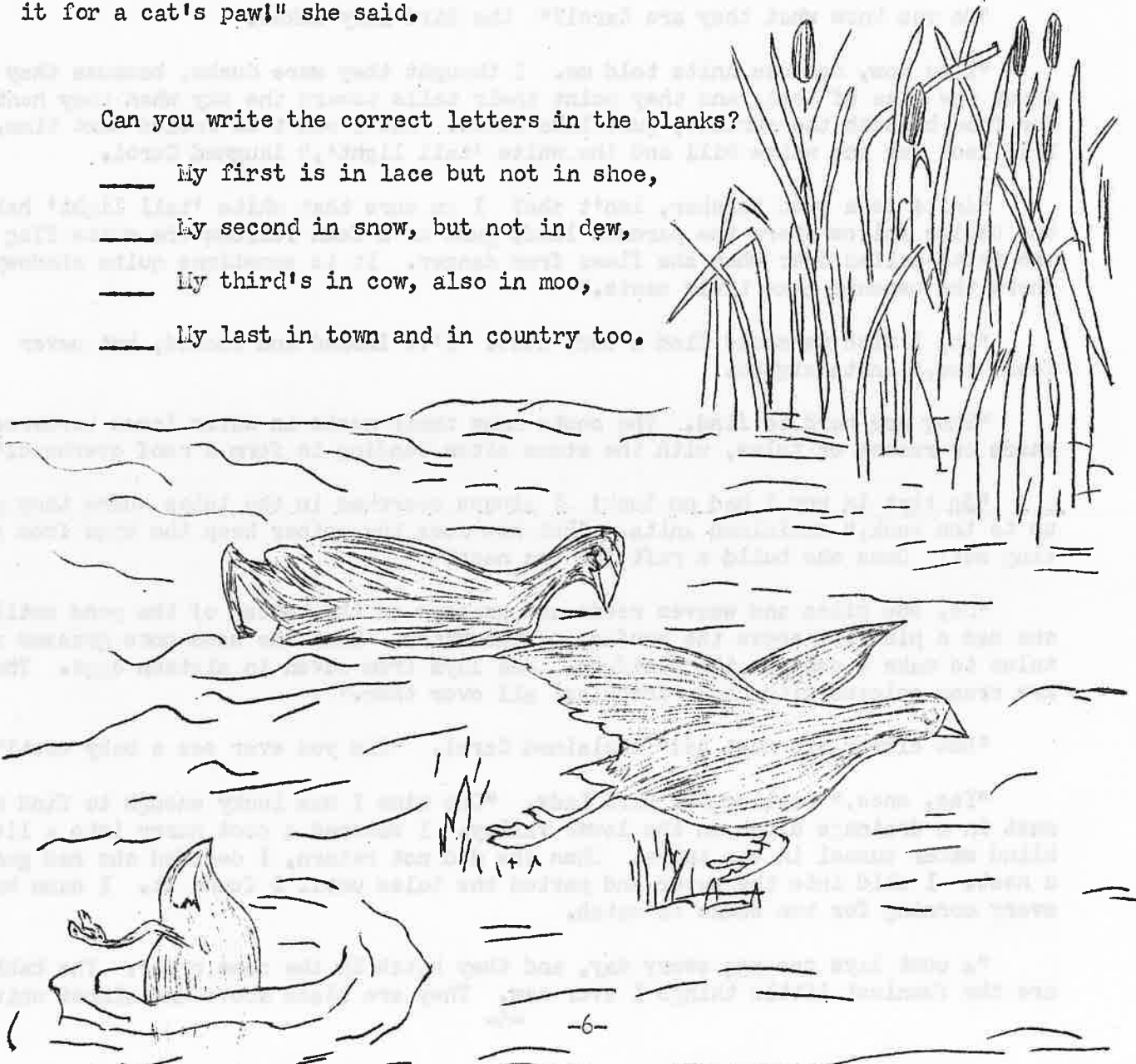
Can you write the correct letters in the blanks?

___ My first is in lace but not in shoe,

___ My second in snow, but not in dew,

___ My third's in cow, also in moo,

___ My last in town and in country too.



THE KINGBIRD

The Lamar family and Anita Martin stood by the fence of the American Airport, watching the airplanes come in and take off. Tommy jumped up and down with excitement as a tiny speck appeared in the eastern sky.

"There it comes, and right on time," he said. "Wake up, Carlos. Here comes the plane that will take us to Arizona. What are you rubbering at, anyway?"

"The plane has to be serviced here, Son," said Mr. Lamar quietly.

Carlos turned. "I've been watching those six kingbirds on the telephone wire. Aren't they pretty, Anita? The young ones are just beginning to catch their own food, but the parents are still bringing them insects. I think that must be the nest they hatched from, on the cross-arms of the telephone pole."

Anita looked at the gray birds. Two of them darted out with cries of "Kee'-ah, Kee-kee', Kee'-ah," swooped, and returned with insects in their bills. She noticed their white throats and gray breasts. The rest of the under parts and the lining of the wings were bright yellow.

They act like flycatchers," he said. "but those back East were black and white."

"So they are, but the kingbirds of the West are gray and yellow. Do you notice how straight they perch?" Carlos asked.

"Just like good children at dinner," laughed Anita.

"All flycatchers sit like that," Carlos went on. "They dart out from their perch, catch the insect they have 'spotted' and return to the same perch and wait for another juicy bite to go winging by."

"Don't you suppose they are afraid of all the planes that come zooming in here?" asked Tommy.

"I don't believe kingbirds are afraid of anything. I have seen them chase hawks and crows away from their neighborhood. They probably think those planes are big friendly birds."

"They do a lot of chattering, don't they?" Anita said. "Do kingbirds sing, Carlos?"

"No, they are not songbirds, but they are pretty, and are very graceful in the air. And they are a great help to man. Each one eats hundreds of insects every day. They come in the spring, build their nests and rear their babies. These, in turn, catch more insects. In the fall they get together in large flocks, and fly away to the South, where they help our Latin-American neighbors by catching their little winged pests."

"When it is time to come north again, each spring, do they come only to El Paso and the Valley?" Tommy asked.

"Oh, no, they are found in all parts of the West. You and I will see kingbirds in Arizona, Tommy. There was a family in a tree just outside my window last time I was at the Dude Ranch."

"Oh, please tell us about the, Carlos," begged Anita.

"They were not a bit afraid of us or the horses or cars, though we rode past many times a day. It was easy to find the nest, as the parents came so often with food. The second day after we arrived at the ranch, the babies climbed out of the nest and perched on the edge. That nest looked like a neat little hat trimmed with four gray and yellow pom-poms."

"The fourth day of our visit the babies fluttered to a telephone wire near-by. Three sat huddled together, and the fourth, which seemed stronger than his mates, about four inches away. I noticed that he received far more than his share of the insects the parents brought. Those birds woke me before daylight every morning I was there."

"How did they do that, old sleepyhead?" laughed Tommy. "Did they tap on the window, or ring the door-bell?"

"Neither," smiled Carlos. "You see, the moon was almost as bright as day in the desert after midnight. Each morning, just before daylight, that tree full of kingbirds started the most terrible racket. Their cackling reminded me of a bunch of frightened hens. 'Put, put, trite', put, put, trite', tree, tree, a-treet', they screamed, over and over for about ten minutes. Then suddenly every sound ceased."

"Do you suppose something disturbed them?" asked Anita.

"I doubt it," Carlos went on. "Perhaps they were supposed to wake the cook. He always got up and started breakfast. Perhaps the babies were hungry, and they were calling the sun to get up, so they could see to find some insects. Or perhaps the birds were just having fun with me, knowing I would come outside to investigate. I wanted to see if all six birds were giving that 'moonlight serenade' or if all those notes came from two throats."

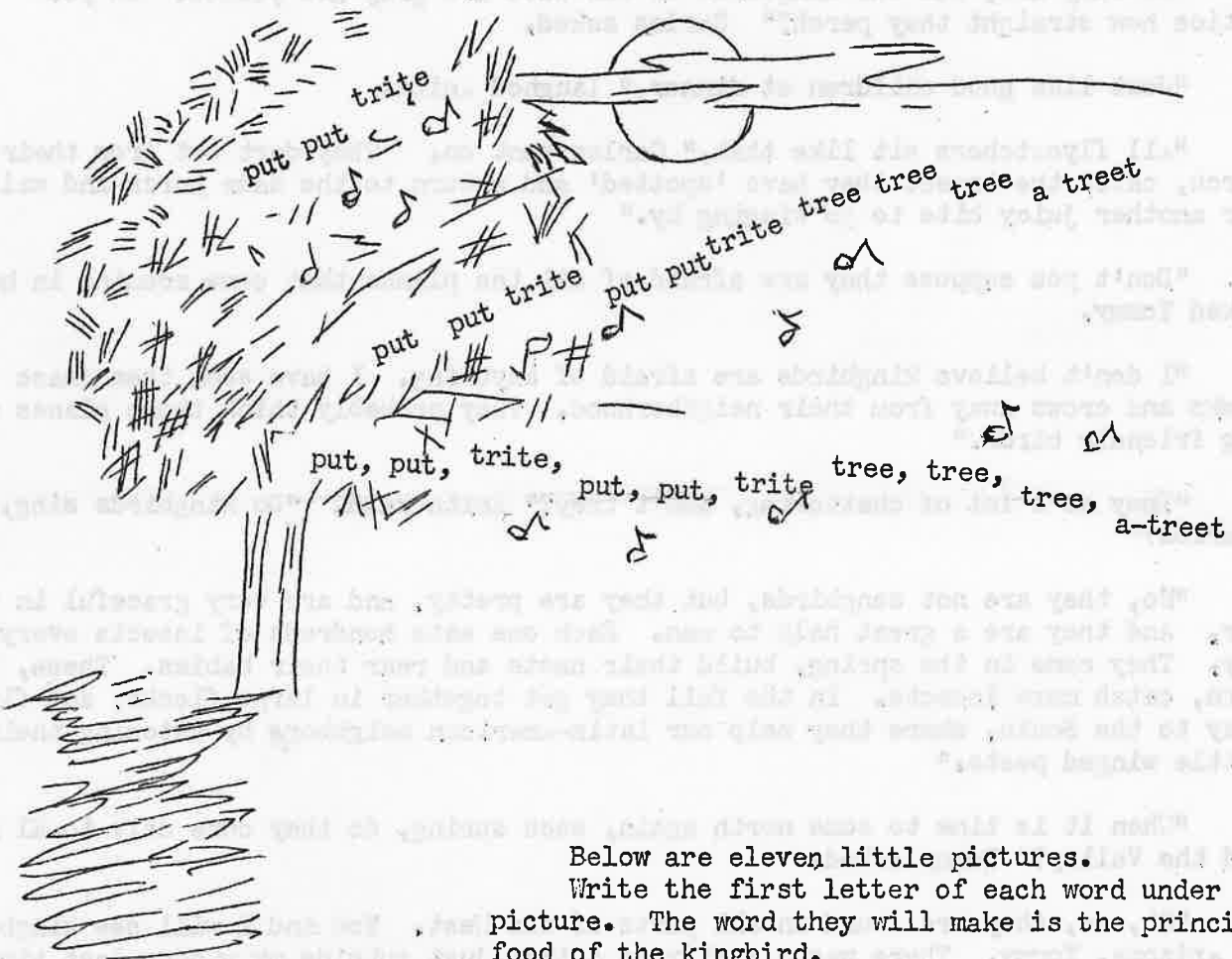
"Did you ever find out?" Anita asked.

"No, I never did," her cousin answered. "And I never saw any of the babies try to catch a bug for himself. When I left, they had been away from the nest six days, but four were still huddled on that wire, like beads on a string."

The loud speaker interrupted, "Flight seven-o-three for Tucson and Phoenix, now loading at gate three, will depart in five minutes."

"At last!" Tommy shouted. "Come on, Pop. Come on, Carlos. At last I am going to fly! Just watch us take off, Mr. Kingbird."

But Mr. Kingbird did not hear. He was busy catching a fat grasshopper.



Below are eleven little pictures.
Write the first letter of each word under the picture. The word they will make is the principal food of the kingbird.

