



EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB

# THE ROADRUNNER

Editor, Marguerite Wright

April, 1944

## ROBIN IN MY TRELLED VINE

Robin in my trellised vine  
Yearly builds to deft design  
Nest of clay and grasses fine.

Quite another way she ends:  
Anxious, to and fro she wends,  
No more melody up-sends.

She commences on this wise:  
To the maple's top she flies,  
Sings her heart out to the skies.

In with food she tolls to flit;  
Out with waste, unsavory bit--  
Beak where Song was wont to sit!

If she paused to reason why,  
Birdies in my vine would die  
Ere they had sung from maple high.

Lena Griffin McBea

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## MARCH MEETING

The Bird Study Club held its March meeting at the home of Mrs. H. D. Slater at 7:30 P. M., Monday, March 6th. Mrs. Slater gave a very interesting talk on Spring Flowers of Mt. Franklin, supplemented by a display of the various specimens, one of the loveliest of which was the anemone. A nature film in color, shown by Mrs. Wimberly, added to our appreciation of Texas flora and fauna and avifauna. The meeting was preceded by a walk in Mrs. Slater's garden by members and friends of the Club.

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A speaker is being procured for the next meeting, the time of which will depend on the date of his acceptance.

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New members added to the Club are Mrs. C. F. Bantin and Mrs. Maude Zilm  
Regards.

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## NEW RECORDS

Lieutenant and Mrs. Eynon reported a pair of Hooded Mergansers at Cement Lake December 5, 1942, and thus established our first record here. Observers have since seen them twice at Ascarate Lake. They, with Miss Keefer, reported 50 Starlings seen January 9 near Ascarate Lake.

Mrs. J. Owen Allen and Mrs. Eynon found Inca Doves on Fresno Drive, Lower Valley, on March 29; one pair was building a nest.

On March 26, Mrs. Lena McBea discovered a Roadrunner's nest containing one egg at the Randell Bird Preserve near the Country Club bridge.

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Club members have enjoyed an excellent article on "The Western Horned Owl" by George McClellan Bradt in THE DESERT, with an extraordinary photograph of the bird on the front cover. The January issue of this magazine carried an illustrated article by the same author on the Roadrunner.

Sergeant Bradt has an article on Nesting Records in this issue of The Roadrunner.

An assignment to Fort Bliss had so many ornithological possibilities for bird students making their first trip to the Southwest that my wife and I eagerly looked forward to our new post. Armed with Peterson's Western Guide and active field experience back East, we hardly took time to settle before going a-birding, and journeying afield on as many weekends as possible since then, we have seen over one hundred species in and about El Paso country. Of these, over forty species have been life birds for us.

We are now, perhaps, sufficiently long in residence hereabouts to make some comparisons between birding in the New York City region during this portion of the year and the El Paso region at the same time.

One question usually asked by ornithologists coming into a new region for the first time is a quantitative one. Though phrased in many ways, it generally deals with the "expectancy" of bird-life in the region. In other words, how many species may be seen in let us say an hour afield and how many individuals? How do these figures compare with regions well known? Although we have made no deliberate attempts to check the answer to this question as applies to the El Paso region, the answer has become evident in a general way. We have found that the normal expectancy both in species and individuals is slightly less in the El Paso area than around New York. This may appear as a surprise to some, but the latter region actually possesses a much greater variety of habitats and consequently attracts a greater variety of species. Despite the fact that this region is much the southerly of the two, neither the variety nor the number of wintering birds has appeared as great to us this year as we are used to seeing in our home region. Once winter set in in earnest was this particularly true. We, of course, understand that this has not been a normal "Sun Bowl" winter!

Aside from the above generalizations, other things we have noticed and compared with our home bailiwick might be of interest. The abundance hereabouts of the Marsh Hawk and its wide choice of habitat has impressed us. We have seen this species in every part of the region--mountains, desert, or river valley from land. Back home this species is confined to the coastal marshes and fresh water marshes inland.

Aside from the two bona fide habitats it occurs only as an occasional migrant. It would seem that the species has shown great powers of adaptation to all kinds of habitat in this part of our country. The Duck migration of the late winter and early spring has been in contrast to what we might have expected. Coming from a countryside well bespeckled with lakes, ponds and marshes, we have been delighted by the wide variety of ducks passing up the Rio Grande Valley, of necessity restricted in their migration to the river itself and to such man-made bodies of water as Ascarate Park Lake and Cement Lake. The former lake provides a splendid opportunity for water fowl study at comparatively close range. On April 2, 1944 we obtained the following list at Ascarate; Gadwall, 6; Baldpate, 75; Pintail, 6; Green-winged Teal, 120; Cinnamon Teal, 3; Shoveller, 50; Canvas-back, 4; Lesser Scaup 40; Ruddy Duck, 15; and American Merganser, 8. The number of Gadwall and Shoveller to be seen in a season would delight any eastern bird student.

We are hawk enthusiasts. Back home we were wont to spend many hours during the spring and fall hawk migrations watching their progress atop such Alleghany ridges as the famous Hawk Mt. Sanctuary in Pennsylvania is located on. Local wintering hawk has already been referred to above. On practically all trips afield, we have found the Red-tail (never missed on Upper Valley trips), the Sparrow Hawk and the Sharp-shinned.

Though plenty of medium growth deciduous timber remains, some of it quite extensive, Great Horned Owls in the region around New York occur only in the old, remote, climax woods furthest from civilization. We have been astonished on several occasions while afield in the Upper Valley to flush Horned Owls from "bosque", shade trees and other small often sparse growth.

The smaller land species have given us the majority of our "life" birds. Two wintering phoebes new to us, four new wrens, three new thrashers, two new bluebirds, two blackbirds, three towhees, three juncos, five sparrows--all new provided many exciting moments afield.

We have been able to extend the local list by discovering Eastern species, strays this far Southwest. In October, Mrs. Eynon discovered an American Redstart while birding in an El Paso park with Mrs. Allen. On November 21 at Ysleta, our wayside lunch was interrupted by the familiar figure of an Eastern Phoebe (some breed in New Mexico considerably northeast of here) appearing on a telephone wire before us. And on January 9, while driving with Miss Keefer, we were able to point out to her a flock of European Starlings associating with Great-tailed Grackles and White-necked Ravens in the Lower Valley, perhaps the forerunners of more of their kind to come as this vigorous, hardy bird pushes further west.

Our over-all impression of the El Paso region, despite some nostalgic longing for sea beaches and eastern woodlands, is that there is much offered here to all field ornithologists. It has much more than measured up to our expectations.

Lt. Alfred E. Eynon  
El Paso, Texas  
April 5, 1944

Woven like bits of bright-colored thread, here and there, into the legends of all peoples are birds.

According to the Lipan Apaches, kinds of birds came into being when a god, Killer of Enemies, seized the eagle and, tearing out its feathers, changed each one into a different kind of bird. Other Apaches have it that the birds originated in caves. There was no death, according to these Indians, until the raven decided to drop a pebble into the water, decreeing that if it sank there should be death. Appropriately the raven was first to lose his own son and to regret deeply his idle decision. Another legend of the Apaches is that at the time of the great flood the birds caused the waters to recede by singing.

In many lands birds are held sacred. The Apaches regard the eagle as a god and appoint an "eagle man" to represent the bird. Some pueblo Indian tribes dress themselves in feathered costumes and honor the bird with a special dance. While dire misfortune befalls anyone who kills such a bird, it is often desirable that the bird's spirit should be released at a time of festival or dire need. It is then sacrificed with great ceremony and sent as a messenger to the gods. Similar is the custom of the wren hunt held on Christmas in a number of European countries. The wren is hunted, killed and placed on a pole at the head of a procession which stops at houses along the way to ask for food or money. The ceremony ends with burial services in the church yard. The Acogchemem Indians of California have a like ceremony involving the vulture. A feast is held in its honor, after which it is sacrificed so that it will multiply on the earth. The Aines of Borneo regard great eagles and owls as sacred beings, put them in cages to bring blessings on their homes and sacrifice them when the need for communication with the gods arises.

Birds are regarded by the Malays as housing the souls of living mortals. They are fed with rice and encouraged to stay near lest death follow their departure. Indians of New Mexico have observed the two-way track of the readrunner. They have reasoned that such a track around the tent of the dead will confuse evil spirits who seek to enter. The Greeks believe that the life of an enchanter is held by three doves. The death of the first two doves causes illness in increasing degree and the death of the third the death of the enchanter. Buzzards are magicians in the sight of the Apaches.

Birds also serve as living good luck charms. Relatives of absent South African Nandi warriors always refer to them as "Birds", never by name, in order to avoid disaster. If a wild bird enters a Malayan home he is caught, rubbed with oil and released to carry all troubles away with him. The Greeks hold this same belief in regard to the swallow. Superstitious Southwesterners who have become lost follow the readrunner who they believe will lead them to a trail. The same bird is thought in Mexico to bring good luck when he crosses the trail from left to right--but bad luck if he crosses in the reverse direction. Feathers of this desert bird when tied to a cradle are reputed to bring good luck to the little papeose of New Mexico.

In various countries knowing your birds is believed to bring just as good health as does eating the doctor-banishing apple. In Mexico those afflicted with it may cure it by eating a roasted readrunner. Boils will likewise vanish if the bird is bled and eaten. Behemians cure fever by securing a young snipe from the nest at sunrise, keeping it for three days and then releasing it to take the malady away with it.

According to German tradition all cut hair should be destroyed lest a bird use it in its nest thereby causing a headache. In India the noisy Blue Jay is believed to bring tuberculosis.

"Birders" who find their faces well decorated with freckles upon returning from a hike might well be interested in an old Carpathian tale. These good folk believe that the afflicted person, upon seeing the first swallow of spring, has only to repeat a magic rhyme to transfer the freckles to the bird. Ancient Greek tradition says that gray hair may be changed to a jet black by merely rubbing the scalp with raven eggs.

The eagle's feathers, worn in a warbonnet, are supposed to endow the Indian with the strength and valor of the bird. Perhaps a bit of that feeling still persists when we place a golden eagle atop our national banner. For the same reason certain Indians of California wear the feathers of the readrunner in their head-dress. Wizards of West Africa wondrously exchange a bit of blood with the owl or the vulture whom they wish to emulate. In India the blackbird is regarded as a valiant fellow. Those famous runners of Mexico, the Tarahumara Indians, hope to attain the speed and endurance of the readrunner by eating its flesh.

Turkish children are fed bird tongues to assist them in learning to talk. The Aine of Borneo eat water eusel hearts in hopes of becoming eloquent speakers. Rubbing the eyes with eagle gall is reputed by the Greeks to bring keen vision. They believe also that one may remain awake if he eats the flesh of the nightingale. In Northern India the power to see in the dark is believed to be intensified by eating an owl's eyeballs.

Sparrows the world over love grain. So the Saxons of Transylvania protect their fields by throwing a handful of grain to the birds before beginning to plant and by sowing imaginary grain upon the completion of their planting. Luxurious

## NESTING RECORDS

George McClellan Bradt

The following nesting dates for 16 birds of the El Paso area are offered in the hope that notes on additional species may be added by Bird Club members during the approaching nesting season.

If any members should discover occupied nest of particularly interesting species I will be glad to photograph them and give the Bird Club prints for further study.

Horned Owl: Nest with 3 almost fully feathered young, May 9, 1943, near Noria, N. M.

Sparrow Hawk: Nest with 4 eggs in pipe used for ridgepole, May 9, 1943 near Noria, N. M.

Burrowing Owl: Burrow with 2 adults and 9 partially feathered young, May 9, 1942 north of Ysleta. Burrow with 9 white babies, eyes still unopened, May 20, 1943 south of municipal airport.

Swainson Hawk: 3 eggs in nest near Cerro Alto, May 17, 1942. 3 eggs in nest near junction of Ysleta Road & U. S. # 62, May 31, 1942. Third nest with 1 egg, June 19, 1942, 10 miles east of Ft. Bliss.

White-rumped Shrike: 7 naked blind young in nest just off Hueco Tank Road. April 12, 1942.

Golden Eagle: Nest with 2 eggs, March 29, 1942, in Hueco Mts.

Black-necked Stilt: 4 eggs in nest on mud hilleck in Rio Grande opposite Ysleta, May 22, 1942.

Cactus Wren: 3 eggs April 12, 1942, 4 eggs May 8. Both nests in Ysleta area.

Mocking-bird: 4 nests in Cerro Alto area--4 eggs on May 8, 1942. 3 eggs and 1 young in 2nd, nest June 21. 3rd nest with 3 eggs and 1 young June 26. 4th nest with 3 eggs May 23, 1942.

White-necked Raven: 2 nests north of Ysleta--1 with 4 eggs on May 19, 1942 the other with 5 eggs on May 31.

Roadrunner: Nest with 6 eggs on April 31, 1942. 2nd nest with 2 eggs and 1 fully fledged young. Both nests north of Ysleta.

Palmer Thrasher: Nest with 4 eggs on June 21, 1942. 2nd nest with 4 eggs June 28; 3rd nest with several young June 26; and 4th with 1 egg on May 23, 1943. All in Cerro Alto area.

Arkansas Kingbird: Nest with 4 eggs near junction of Ysleta Road & U. S. 62, May 31, 1942. 2nd nest with 4 eggs east of Ft. Bliss on June 2, 1943.

Ash-throated Flycatcher: Nest with 1 fully fledged young in fence-post hole near Noria, N. M. June 6, 1943.

Scott Oriole: 2 naked, blind babies in nest on June 13, 1943. Noria, N. M.

March 27, 1944

## PROGRESS ON THE TOM M. KIRKSEY MEMORIAL

The club is beginning its work on the Tom M. Kirksey Memorial. A few mounted specimens have been turned over to the club by the taxidermist. When all are received, they will be placed with the remainder of the Kirksey collection in the College of Mines museum. A generous check has been received from Mrs. Thomas Miller of St. Louis, Tom's grandmother, who desires to aid the undertaking in every possible way.

## BIRDS IN LEGEND (con't from page 3)

plants are said to grow in Mexico if a roadrunner's body is placed beneath the roots. And in dry weather many an American farmer casts his eye toward the sky when the cuckoo or "rain crow" calls.

The roadrunner of Mexico is reputed to build a cactus corral around a rattlesnake and either to kill him or leave him to die by dashing himself against the spines.

From the time that was to the time that is, man's observations and superstitions about birds are woven into his legends; we, colored designs in the somber fabric of life.

Ruby Allen.