



EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB

THE ROADRUNNER

October, 1942

The October Meeting

The first fall meeting of the Club will be held Monday, October 5, at 8:00 p.m. in the regular meeting place, Room 504 Mills Bldg. Chief purpose of the meeting is a reunion of the members. President Tom M. Kirksey has been asked to discuss some of the bird experiences in northern New Mexico during the past summer. Members should be prepared to tell of any birding since the last meeting. This will be the President's last meeting for the duration, and he asks that all members make a special effort to attend.

The May Field Meeting

Mr. Arthur F. Halloran, Manager of the San Andres National Wildlife Refuge, gave a most interesting address at the April meeting of the Club. When he invited the group and its guests to take a field trip in lieu of a regular May meeting, his invitation was enthusiastically accepted. Some of the group went to Ash Springs on May 2 and camped overnight, while others joined them next morning. Ash Springs is at the base of the San Andres Mountains in the Refuge area.

The Alamogordo Highway from Las Cruces was followed about six miles north of Las Cruces, where a left turn was made on the road to the Jornada del Muerte Experiment Station (Dept. of Agri.). This station is also headquarters for the Refuge. A patrolman led the party over the remaining thirteen miles of rough chaparral country to Ash Springs, which is on the east side of a canyon. The road ends there, at an altitude of 5,700 feet.

This region is in the Upper Sonoran Life Zone. Blooming ash trees overhung this spot, which is the source of several springs. Nearby desert mesas and hillsides were covered with barrel cactus, yucca, ocotillo, century plant, and prickly pear. In pleasant contrast many mountain canyons were green with pinyon, live oak, juniper, and ash. Hackberry, poison sumac, wild gooseberry, and bear grass grew in thick profusion. Hundreds of wild flowers added color to the scene.

Bird life was quite abundant and during the chilly hours of early morning the air was filled with music. The following birds were observed on the trip by various members of the group:

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| Turkey Vulture, 4 | Cactus Woodpecker |
| Black Vulture (en route) | Ash-throated Flycatcher |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | Western Flycatcher |
| W. Red-tail | Olive-sided Flycatcher |
| Swainson's Hawk | Desert Horned Lark, flocks |
| Golden Eagle, 3 | Violet-green Swallow, numerous |
| Prairie Falcon (en route) | Tree Swallow |
| Desert Sparrow Hawk | Cliff Swallow (ssp.?) |
| Scaled Quail | Long-crested Jay, a flock |
| Mearns' Quail (Harper) | Woodhouse's Jay, a flock |
| W. Mourning Dove, several | American Magpie |
| White-winged Dove (Kirksey) | White-necked Raven (en route) |
| Nuttall's Poor-will, 2 called all night near camp | Verdin |
| Western Nighthawk, 2 (en route) | Lead-colored Bush-tit |
| White-throated Swift, numerous | W. House Wren |
| Black-chinned Hummingbird, several | Baird's Bewick Wren |
| Coste's Hummingbird (observed at great length and very close range by McBee, Allen, Sanchez, and Kirksey) | Rock Wren |
| Broad-tailed Hummingbird, many (found 3 occupied nests) | Western Mockingbird |
| | Crissal's Thrasher |
| | Audubon's Hermit Thrush (Keufer) |
| | Grey-checked Thrush |
| | Townsend's Solitaire |
| | Western Gnatcatcher |

Plumbeous Gnatcatcher
 Ashy Ruby-crowned Kinglet, several
 White-rumped Shrike, (en route)
 Arizona Vireo
 Least Vireo
 Plumbeous Vireo
 W. Warbling Vireo
 Rky. Mtn. Orange-crowned Warbler
 Virginia's Warbler
 Yellow Warbler (ssp.?)
 Audubon's Warbler
 Black-throated Gray Warbler
 Townsend's Warbler
 Long-tailed Chat
 Pileolated Warbler, a flock
 Western Meadowlark
 Yellow-headed Blackbird (en route)
 Red-wing (ssp.?) (en route)
 Scott's Oriole (en route)
 Bullock's Oriole
 Rky. Mtn. Song Sparrow

Great-tailed Grackle (en route)
 Cowbird (ssp.?) (at Jornada)
 Western Tanager
 Arizona Pyrrhuloxia
 Rky. Mtn. Grosbeak
 Cassin's Purple Finch
 House Finch
 Arkansas Goldfinch
 Canyon Towhee
 Lark Bunting, flocks (en route)
 W. Vesper Sparrow
 Scott's Sparrow
 W. Field Sparrow (song heard by
 McBee and Kirksey)
 Desert Sparrow
 Red-backed Junco
 Montana Junco
 W. Chipping Sparrow
 Brewer's Sparrow
 White-crowned Sparrow
 Gambel's Sparrow

En route home the group stopped at the Halloran's home at the Jornada for a delightful supper.

For many and many a day the club members will be exclaiming, "Remember the day at Ash Springs!"

(The writer thanks Mrs. Lena McBee for the use of her excellent notes in compiling this paper.)

Mrs. J. Owen Allen

Albino Meadowlark Found

An albino Meadowlark, just learning to fly, was captured at Ord, Nebraska, July 9, 1942. It was pure white except for a yellow breast, was fully feathered, and had red eyes. It lived for three days after its capture, and was subsequently mounted for the University Museum at Lincoln. Contributed by Mrs. Marguerite Wright.

The Dipper's Nest in Hondo Canyon

When I reached Taos, New Mexico, on June 25th, 1942, it seemed a matter of some urgency that I visit the Dipper's nest very soon lest the young might have flown. It had been found the week before by Mrs. McBee and the Kirkseys. Accordingly we prepared that same evening to take a picnic supper to Hondo Canyon, where we cooked and ate on the bank of the stream across from the nest.

The young birds were still there tho they had been photographed and banded by Tom Kirksey the week before, and nothing further was expected of them unless it was to wait until I could see them. This they very obligingly did.

The nest, a globular affair made of moss with the opening on the side, was well lodged on a shelf of rock about three feet above the rushing water. Near it, some eight feet away, was another similar but older nest, not in-use.

Three yawning mouths with yellow bills were visible in the doorway of the nest, and sometimes a fourth could be seen dimly within. When Tom banded the young birds, he found five, but the whole family was never seen in the entrance at once, and there must have been a frequent shifting of position so that all five could be fed. The parent birds always remained outside and fed them through the door.

I have never heard young birds with such loud voices. When the adult bird approached, they began a shrill shrieking, similar to the scream of a hawk, which could be heard for a long distance above the roar and dash of the mountain torrent. The parents fed them industriously as we watched, flying up or down stream out of sight to get food. They returned about every five minutes.

The photographing and banding of these nestlings was no small feat, for they could not be reached from the cliff on which the nest was built, and Tom, obliged to stand nearly waist-deep in the rushing water, could not keep his footing in the icy current without clinging to the rocks.

Two days later the young birds were still there, but on June 30th Mrs. McBee found only two being fed at the nest. The other three were at various distances down the canyon, and were fed, still shrieking, by the parents. On July 2nd the nest was empty. Tom later found the empty nest of another pair of Dippers farther down the canyon, and brought it away with him.

Mary Belle Keefer

Taos and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of New Mexico

Forty miles north of Santa Fe the Rio Grande emerges from a gorge which has cut deeply through the mesaland of Taos County from north to south, dividing the county roughly in half. Going up the side of this deep, rocky gorge, one emerges on a high mesa of vast extent, ranging in elevation from seven to eight thousand feet, with lofty mountains as a background to the north and east.

On this mesa lies the village of Taos, at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the southernmost range of the Rockies. Directly behind Taos stands Wheeler Peak, with its bald, snowy summit reaching 13,300 feet. Unlike the mountains of the El Paso region, the Sangre de Cristos are covered with heavy vegetation; in fact the Carson National Forest includes nearly all of the range within its boundaries.

The Taos mesa is true sage land of the Upper Sonoran Zone, with its prairie dogs and sandy soil, shading into the pinyon and juniper type on the lower mountain slopes. This belt soon gives way to the true Transition type characterized by yellow pine and the chipmunk and Abert (tassel-eared) squirrel.

As one follows up a canyon stream, the Canadian Life Zone is marked by the sudden beginning of the aspen groves, and the spruces, firs, and beavers.

The Hudsonian Zone, which reaches to the limit of trees, is less definite in extent, and more easily recognized by its avifauna than by its dendrology.

The Arctic-Alpine Zone is that which lies above "timberline" on the highest peaks, and is characterized by sparse growth and dwarf alpine flowers.

Here in this rich and unusual land of life zones, Mrs. Lena McBee, my wife, and I spent three months in the summer of 1942, looking at and for birds. The following list of our findings has been made by Mrs. McBee from her notes:

Eagle Nest Lake and Moreno Valley -

Green-winged Teal, Baldpate (young, Aug. 11, on Black Lakes), Cinnamon Teal, Gadwall, Coot (young, Aug. 11, on Black Lakes)

In the Air -

Turkey Vulture, W. Red-tail, Ferruginous Rough-leg, Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, Prairie Falcon, Duck Hawk, Marsh Hawk, Desert Sparrow Hawk. (The last four over sage and farm lands)

In Sage Fields -

Scaled Quail, Horned Lark, American Raven, Magpie, Sage Thrasher, of which a nest of eggs was found, Sage Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow, W. Chipping Sparrow, W. Grasshopper Sparrow.

In Irrigated Ranch Land -

Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper (with young), Wilson's Snipe, Flammulated Screech Owl, W. Belted Kingfisher, Batchelder's Woodpecker, Arkansas and Cassin's Kingbirds, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Say's Phoebe, of which a nest with young was found, Hammond's Flycatcher (probably), Horned Lark, Barn Swallow, Am. Magpie, W. House Wren, W. Winter Wren (after breeding time), Sage Thrasher, W. Warbling Vireo, W. Yellow Warbler, Catbird, Macgillivray's Warbler, of which a nest with young was found, Western Meadowlark, Red-wing, Yellow-headed (rarely), and Brewer's Blackbirds, Cowbird, Bullock's Oriole (nesting), Western Tanager, Rky. Mtn. Grosbeak, W. Blue Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting (nesting), Cassin's Purple Finch (nesting), Pine Siskin, Arkansas Goldfinch, Green-tailed, Spurred, and Canyon Towhees, Lark Bunting (migrant), and various sparrows, as the Savannah, W. Lark, Scott's (nesting), Clay-colored, Rky. Mtn. Song, and Lincoln's.

In Forests of Juniper and Pinyon -

Dusky Grouse (after breeding time), Band-tailed Pigeon, Western Gnatcatcher, Lead-colored Bush-tit, Grey-headed Junco, Green-tailed and Spurred Towhees, Magpie, Macgillivray's and Rky. Mtn. Orange-crowned Warblers.

In Forests of Pine, Spruce, and Fir -

W. Red-tail, Golden Eagle, Western Goshawk (?), Clarke's Nutcracker, Long-crowned Jay, Long-tailed and Mountain Chickadees (both nesting), Band-tailed Pigeon, Red-naped Sapsucker, Natalie's Sapsucker, Red-shafted Flicker, White-breasted Woodpecker, W. Wood Pewee, Western Flycatcher, Western Martin, Rky. Mtn., Red-breasted, and Black-eared Nuthatches, W. House Wren, Townsend's Solitaire, Audubon's Hermit Thrush, Grey-checked Thrush, Ashy Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Virginia's, Grace's, Audubon's Warblers, Black-throated Grey Warbler, Pileolated Warbler, Western Tanager, Plumbeous and W. Warbling Vireos, Pine Siskin, Rky. Mtn. Pine Grosbeak, Bandirc's Crossbill, Dipper, Red-backed Junco.

Ubiquitous -

Western Crow, Mountain and Chestnut-backed Bluebirds (both nesting)

Violet-green Swallow, White-throated Sparrow, W. Nighthawk, Nuttall's Poor-will, Rky. Mtn. Evening Grosbeak, Woodhouse's Jay, Pinyon Jay, Broad-tailed and Rufous Hummingbirds, Red-shafted Flicker, W. Mourning Dove.

It was interesting to note that perhaps the commonest bird in that region throughout the summer, and particularly after nesting time, was the Evening Grosbeak. The writer has been told that this area is the national center of abundance for the species.

Outstanding among our bird records for the summer was the finding of a nest with eggs of the Rufous Hummingbird. So far as can be determined, this is the first breeding record for the state. Also therecord of the Flammulated Screech Owl, described in another article in this issue.

Strangely, we were unable to find a single Canada Jay, though it is supposed to be common in the Hudsonian Zone in these mountains.

Tom M. Kirksey

BUDDHA

Some definite personalities have a way of blending themselves into their environment. So it was with Buddha. While she was with us in Taos this past summer, she became an integral part of the family. (We gave her feminine characteristics arbitrarily) Pedro found her in the alfalfa field one evening and brought her to us when he came to work next morning, caliming it was a baby big horned owl. Buddha was a soft, tiny bundle of nearly adult Flammulated Screech Owl. Her most coquet-tish features were the long eyelashes and big dark eyes.

Buddha dominated the household. Each member did not fail to return with grasshoppers if he or she went outside. Buddha had a perch on top of a partition near the front door, which she calimed. After an excursion on silent wings about the room she returned to the very same spot without a hair breadth change in position or location. The rest of the family was not purely nocturnal, so we fed Buddha by day. Often she would hold a piece of grasshopper in one claw while she dozed between morsels.

Far from camera-shy, Buddha posed for her portrait on a lantern, a milk bottle, and the mantel. She enjoyed riding on our shoulders, and perched easily on our fingers. Her last evening she sat on my lap as I wrote a letter. Now I wonder if her attachment to me was affection or ill-health. She had been a little "dopey" in the early evening of this, her second day with us. She died in the night; we don't know why; maybe too many grasshoppers, or maybe she had been injured before we got her. Of all the pets that three adults could have, I should say that the passing of this rare and charming bird grieved us most.

Reference to Mrs. Bailey's book, The Birds of New Mexico, indicates the following facts about this bird:

Length, 6.5-7 inches, toes entirely naked, ear-tufts short and nearly invisible. Dichromatic, having red and gray phases (ours was gray), but the peculiar pattern holding in both forms. Facial disc, sometimes whole head, rusty brown, white stripe over eye. Breast light tinged with rusty brown horizontal stripes. Wings longer than tail, when folded. Eyes brown. There are only two dark-eyed owls, the Barn Owl and the present species, in the Southwest.

The bird is rare throughout its range, which lies mostly in the mountains south of the United States. The nearest state record to ours was at Santa Fe some years ago. Its home is on high plateaus up to 10,000 feet. The bird has a peculiar habit of blinking its eyes, one at a time.

Mrs. Jane L. Kirksey

We have lost Dr. I. M. Epstein to the Navy Medical Department. Dr. Brown W. Randel has been commissioned in the Army Medical Corps, and has gone. Tom Kirksey has received an Aviation Cadet appointment to the Army Air Corps Photographic School, and will be leaving shortly.

The United States Navy still wants to buy or borrow Zeiss and Bausch & Lomb binoculars of certain dimensions. If you have them, do your part. The war requires more binoculars than can be furnished by the makers.