

# EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB

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# THE ROADRUNNER

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LENA MCBEE, CHAIRMAN

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### THE JANUARY MEETING

The club met at the El Paso Centennial Museum, January 15, 1946. Several visited the ornithological room before the hour for the program. A paper was read by Mrs. G. W. Young on the possible activities of a bird study club and a practical discussion followed. Mrs. J. Owen Allen gave an account of a snowy day's field trip in the vicinity of El Paso on January 13th. Her report served to introduce an informal discussion of our birds in January.

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### THE FEBRUARY MEETING

On the evening of February 19, the club met at the El Paso Centennial Museum. Audubon color films, "At Home with the Birds of Maine", were shown. Brief talks were given by some of the members on rare bird specimens in the museum. For these talks, specimens were brought from the ornithological room.

We are delighted to announce that Major General G. Ralph Meyer will lecture on "The Courtship and Nesting of Birds" at 7:30 p.m. on April 4 and 11 in the Chemistry Lecture Room at the College of Mines.

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### NEW MEMBERS

Miss Gertrude Higgins, Mrs. G. E. Moore, Fred Cornelius, and Private Nicholas Short are welcome new members of the club.

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### NEWS OF FOLKS

The return to El Paso of Mr. and Mrs. George McClellan Bradt is gratifying to those of us who enjoyed Sergeant Bradt's well-illustrated magazine articles on the bird life of the desert when they were with us before.

We are losing one of our active new members, Private Short, who has been ordered over-seas. His field work here has netted him a number of new birds for his life list. Among these he prizes the New Mexico duck, cinnamon teal, pigeon hawk, Arizona verdin and pyrrhuloxia, Arkansas goldfinch, pine siskin, Baird's and sage sparrows and the Rocky Mountain song sparrow. He was formerly a member of the St. Louis Bird Club.

Ernest Meyers of Stockton, California, spent a few days in El Paso on his way to Mexico to study the bird life of that country. He especially enjoyed making the acquaintance of the plumbeous gnatcatcher, red-backed junco, Cactus woodpecker, crissal thrasher, yellow-headed blackbird, and the Baird's, Brewer's, and clay-colored sparrows.

El Paso birders had the unusual experience of enjoying a field trip in the snow on January 13th, when they took out two visitors from Seattle, Washington. Ex-Commander Locke L. Mackenzie and a young ecologist, Mr. Earl Larrison, were right at home in that freak weather and greatly enjoyed rolling up a list of over fifty birds, gleaned in the National Mesilla Wild Life Refuge and the Indian Springs Canyon on eastern Mount Franklin. Accompanying the guests on this trip were Miss Mary Belle Keefer, Mrs. Lena McBee, Mrs. J. Owen Allen, Mr. and Mrs. W. W. Wimberly, Major General Ralph G. Meyer, and Major George Burrows.

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WITH OUR CORRESPONDENTS

We take a few extracts from a hearty thank-you letter to the club, written from New York by Locke L. Mackenzie:

"I had hardly left the city of Eagle Pass when I saw a white-faced glossy ibis flying over the snow. Near Rockport, a most interesting country, I saw a lot of Harris's hawks, Sennett's white-tails and Swainson's and one Mexican goshawk. I saw no Mexican hawks but sure did look.... I went over the Aransas Refuge and had the extraordinary good fortune to see three whooping cranes; also a lot of wild turkeys and several other fine things. I thought I'd get up a check-list of the entire trip, and I'll send you one when I do,"

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From Lieutenant A. E. Eynon, now languishing in Vienna because it is bad birding there, as compared with what he found in Salzburg last year, and alternately hoping to be back in the States by May, 1946, we have this account of his Christmas birding:

"On December 29th (I went back to Salzburg for a few days), I took a Christmas count and found twenty-six species in the Salzach Valley. There were several obvious misses, such as chaffinch, and no woodpeckers of three possible species. However, I got all six titmice and also surprises like the wren and herons.

"I awoke at seven, had a hasty breakfast, and in Robeson's jeep I started for Gaisberg; but half-way up, snow blocked the road, and I couldn't reach the accentor country. I figured that meant missing the crested and possibly the coal-tit too. Coming down, I headed for Anthering Swamp. By the time I got there the sun was out and the temperature was climbing rapidly. I left Anthering with seventeen species at 11:30 (including the heron, grebe and duck) and whizzed back to town."

(After lunch, the count was continued on foot for four hours covering six miles of the Salzach River Valley. The list follows.)

"Carrion crow, 38; jay, 2; siskin, 138; bullfinch, 4; yellow hammer, 2; tree creeper, 1; nuthatch, 4; great tit, 12; blue tit, 5; coal tit, 2; crested tit, 2; marsh tit, 14; long-tailed tit, 15; goldcrest, 7; blackbird, 2; wren, 1; dipper, 1; buzzard, 2; common heron, 2; mallard, 18; European teal, 22; little grebe, 1; black-headed gull, 229. Twenty-four species, 528 individuals."

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Miss Marie Beals, of the Audubon House, New York City, writes of her Christmas hunt for the ouzel in the San Bernardino Mountains of California. The letter is here given in full:

"Mrs. Ethel Richardson, who lives in the main house at the San Gabriel River Wildlife Sanctuary at El Monte, Cal., and with whom I am staying, took me on December 31st at 2:30 p.m. to the Santa Anita Canyon in the San Bernardino Mountains. This trip to the canyon to hunt for the water ouzel was our New Year's Eve celebration.

"It was a beautiful drive to the canyon's trail leading to the waterfalls, the abode of our dipper. We followed the tortuous course of the mountain stream. Where we parked our automobile there were several bushes and hopping in these shrubs and scolding us were my first wren-tits. They have glaring white eyes and long broad-tipped tails held at a slight angle above the body. They are native sons of California and birds of the chaparral.

"We started along the canyon footpath in quest of our bird. There were a number of individuals on this narrow trail. Some were returning from the waterfalls and others were on their way to the falls. Many, like ourselves, were hoofing it, some were riding horses or mules followed by burros laden with all kinds of supplies.

"At 4:30 p.m. we were still about three quarters of a mile from the headwaters, and as darkness comes quickly in the canyon, we decided to turn back. As we walked along, we stopped off and on to look at the plants but always kept one eye on the stream hoping to see the bird. I was looking at the mountain mahogany, *Cercocarpus betuloides*, when I heard a bird call. Across the canyon where the rocks were piled loosely along the steep side of the Santa Anita Canyon, a reddish-brown bird appeared for a moment over the edge of a boulder and then perched on top of it, bobbing vigorously and uttering a series of sharp protesting notes. I was looking at my first canon wren. The deep chestnut of the belly showed in marked contrast to the white breast. It kept slipping in and out of the rock crevices calling, tschee, tschee.

"Suddenly this canon wren flew to the base of a tree on our side of the canyon. I was hunting for it with my binoculars, when what should I see in my binocular field - a leaden-shape emerging from the water and perching itself on a jutting rock. There was my first water ouzel. My very first view. The bird was bobbing nervously and suddenly dove headlong into the clear mountain stream. After a few seconds it reappeared on a rock and began to pick off larvae clinging to the underside of the stones lining the stream. It fed in this manner for several minutes then flew upstream and disappeared in the crevice of a large boulder.

"Advancing and prancing and glancing and dancing,  
And dashing and flashing and splashing and clashing,  
And so never ending - - are my first water ouzel impressions."

"We had seen what we came after so we pushed on, uphill and down-hill, reaching the car at 5:30 p.m. The shades of night had fallen but we were a happy pair on this New Year's Eve.

"A happy new year to you.

Sincerely,  
Marie Beals (Signed)

"Was in El Paso on Christmas Day with Bert Harwell but we were only passing through in the Audubon station wagon. Hope to see you before long."

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BOY SCOUTS AND BIRDS  
W. W. Wimberly

Forty species, positively identified in the field; twenty birds of particular value to the farmer; ten that eat rats and mice; ten that eat fish; build two bird houses and two feeding stations, place them; birds usually seen in open fields, wooded areas, on rivers and lakes, or in high mountains; protect birds from unlawful slaughter--these are the requirements for the Boy Scout merit badge in BIRD STUDY, one of twenty-one merit badges required for the EAGLE BADGE, highest award in Scouting.

Most boys say the BIRD STUDY badge is the hardest to earn; why? Is it that the birds are in the country away from the city boys? Do the boys have access to suitable field glasses? Are trained counselors always available? Is it more exciting to "shoot" birds than to "observe" them?

The average Boy Scout, without some training or experience in bird study, knows no more than ten birds; hence, scouts need the help of an experienced bird counselor. The best months to observe the birds of El Paso County are March, April, May, and June; some 250 varieties are resident or migrants during these months. Some 200 are summer residents. Late fall and winter varieties will number about 100. There is no reason for not finding forty varieties in El Paso County during any season.

Boy Scouts are easily discouraged if they do not see twelve to twenty varieties of birds on their first hike. Counselors must avoid bird hikes on windy days or days when conditions for observation are not average. Avoid localities where house cats, dogs, or dense human population will discourage bird-life. The area near the Rio Grande River in the vicinity of Ysleta High School is probably the best general bird territory in El Paso County. Check Ascarate and Cement Lakes for ducks; check McKelligon's Canyon for desert birds; check dairy lots for blackbirds; check Country Club-Rio Grande River area and Ascarate Park for all varieties; check the Bird Reserve (river area above El Paso Electric plant) for general varieties.

Boy Scouts will see fifty per cent more birds if they hike in groups no larger than three to six boys with a counselor; the more field glasses, the more successful the hike. The order must be: noises and movements subdued. Birds are easily frightened. Every boy must have a note-book and pencil. Records must be made of all varieties which are positively identified. Scouts like to number their finds. Thirty to fifty words should be written on each bird which is completely checked. Scout notes should include the general color and markings, length, habitat, and such peculiarities as: extra long legs, swims, wades, long bill, flies high and far, call, nest, eating habits, seen in groups, all white, all black, long tail, catches insects in air, walks, hops, pecks on tree trunks, etc. Names can be connected with the descriptions at the end of the hike. Scouts will enjoy comparing notes with professional data in good bird books and guides.

Bird study counselors should make it a point to find the more common varieties, the kinds the scout has read about or heard his Dad or neighbor talk about. Scouts cannot comprehend the long names like black-crowned night heron, white-rumped shrike, red-shafted flicker, and American coot. They will do well to remember night herons, shrikes, flickers, and coots. Scouts should know that the coot's common name is "mud hen" and that the shrike is a "butcher bird".

El Paso scouts out on spring and early summer hikes should be certain to find the common birds of that season, such as: meadow larks, mockingbirds, red-winged blackbirds, crows, marsh hawks, doves, sparrow hawks, coots, shrikes, great blue herons, snowy egrets, stilts, avocets, killdeers, barn swallows, black phoebes, flickers, finches, and blue grosbeaks. Late summer and fall hikers should see: Gambel quail, cactus wrens, broadtailed hummingbird, Arkansas kingbirds, least sandpipers, turkey vultures, and green herons. In winter months, scouts should see: roadrunners, robins, shoveler, baldpate, and mallard ducks, Brewer's blackbirds, Gambel sparrows, and yellow-headed blackbirds. Each season, many more varieties await the faithful and observant scout who seeks the less common birds. Lucky is the Boy Scout who gets notes on: yellow-billed cuckoo, Woodhouse jay, verdin, spurred towhee, goldfinch, painted bunting, pyrrhuloxia, Scott's oriole, cedar waxwing, Maryland yellow-throat, black tern, ring-billed gull, Florida gallinule, bobwhite quail, golden eagle, black vulture, ruddy duck, canvasback duck, Canada Goose, or American egret.

Those adults who know birds can be a great service to Boy Scouts by showing them the birds. Scouts like to read about birds, but not too much reading! Scouts



like to hear bird stories, but not too many dull stories or "talk"! Boy Scouts like to go places and see things and really practice outdoor scouting. They like to get the job done in a hurry and rush on to some other exciting experience. Scouts will learn the essentials but will avoid the technicalities. Bird study counselors must teach primarily, the "common sense" and essential lessons of bird habits, identification, migration, and nesting, yet must be accurate and thorough in individual identification. Parents and scoutmasters of Boy Scouts expect the merit badge counselors to be fair, yet stern in checking any scout's bird list. Offer no favors, make no omissions! Short cuts are dangerous! Make bird study a definite part of the scout's training in citizenship. Scouts are interested in rare birds, but are not interested in long journeys to find them or extensive study of one unusual bird when the same time could be spent on ten or fifteen common birds, new to the scout.

Teachers should make collections and scrap books of bird pictures. El Paso teachers and bird counselors should show pictures of El Paso birds. Common eastern birds are confusing to El Paso pupils. The College of Mines Museum has started a good collection of El Paso's common birds. Some are already mounted in habitat cases.

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## BIRD WALK IN NEW GUINEA

Major George Burrows

The first gray light of dawn was making mysterious forms of the duffel in my tent as I dressed. I could see two or three mosquitoes near my head bumping, bumping, bumping relentlessly against the netting. Already the Cuckoos were breaking the sanctity of the moment with their loud calling. The mosquito bar felt cool and heavy with the dampness of the night as I reached out for my shoes and automatically gave them a precautionary shake to dislodge any investigating centipede or scorpion.

The Song River, full from the night rains, was singing contentedly to itself. I splashed the coffee-colored water on my face, and was thoroughly awake. What a day to be alive! The sky was bright across the Bismarck Sea. A lazy procession of small landing craft was butting its way through the silver-spangled water toward the shelter of Finchhaven a dozen miles below. Perhaps they were coming under cover of the passing darkness for repairs from the bitter fighting up the coast at Aitape and Wewac.

A large bird was flying across the bay. For a moment I thought I recognized an old friend, the Bald Eagle. Its entire head down to the shoulders was pure white and shining in the early light. The rest of the body was reddish brown. Feet and bill were yellow, but the beak, though hooked, was not heavy. Then I realized this was the White and Red Eagle-Kite. With its easy graceful flight, its eagle-like proportions and dark fingered wingtips, this hawk gave a false impression of size. It banked abruptly, with skill characteristic of its kind, and alighted on a surf-beaten coral rock. This fellow was scarcely as large as a Crow. It stood proudly erect, then, with unlabored flight, took off toward Angau.

There are few shore birds in New Guinea. As I turned my back on the ocean a flash of color caught my eye. Perched some thirty feet up in a strange prop-rooted pandanus was a large White-Collared Kingfisher. There was no mistaking its family, but this one was bigger and brighter than any I had seen before. The azure blue of its head, wings and back seemed to have a metallic brilliance. Its light breast was banded with rufous, and the over-sized head was interestingly marked.

The coastal plain here was narrow. Little hills rose abruptly almost from the water's edge and piled higher and higher like equatorial thunderheads as they extended inland. The area had been partially cleared for our camp, leaving scattered spindling trees with a mop of leaves at the top. A flock of Brush-Tongued Lories flying straight and fast like stream-lined Mourning Doves alighted noisily amidst the high foliage. Most every morning on their way from a roosting site somewhere to the south they would stop here to feed and gossip volubly among themselves. The name comes from the brush-like tongue they use in gathering nectar and soft fruits. With the aid of field glasses I could watch these acrobatic little Parrots, about the size of Bluebirds, walking along the branches or reaching head down for small berries. They appeared to be uniform bright green above and bright red below. Head and neck were ornamented with artistic lines and a black and yellow collar.

Every step up the muddy slope must be taken with care. I was stopped by a quick movement in the underbrush. Turning I saw a tiny bird like a small Wren, alert, perky, with an upturned tail; but instead of the usual drab brown, this one displayed the most striking color contrast in nature. It was jet black except for a large diamond shaped patch of pure white - black, the absence of all color, white, the combination of them all. In this fascinating land even the Wrens are gay. Perhaps this was the Australian Wren-Warbler that I have heard mentioned. It would seem an appropriate name.

The brown mud was drying rapidly over the white coral limestone as I climbed. The sun had risen suddenly as it does in the tropics, making the wet leaves sparkle. The naked limbs of a solitary tree were gold tracery against soft blue. Four Papuan

Mynas lit on the dead branches completing the picture with their splash of color. As it flies, this bird suggests a Red-Headed Woodpecker because of its black body, conspicuous white rump, flashing white wing patches, and color about the head. Actually it belongs to the Starling family. The stout bill and bare areas around the eyes are bright orange, legs and lower abdomen yellow. The bald spots, the grave deliberate manner, the stockiness, the slightly aquiline features and stooped appearance of the Myna give it an air of great wisdom. Mynas are kept as pets and taught to talk by the natives of Malay and Hawaii. There are many strange stories about this bird. The Malays call it the "Blood Bird", believing that it will die at the sight of blood. It is reported that in Hawaii the Mynas hold court sessions and mete out punishment, even the death penalty, to offending members of the flock.

There are several species of Starlings in New Guinea. One of them, the Colonial Starling, could easily be mistaken for a Weaver-Bird. Many people are surprised to learn that our common English Sparrow actually is not a Sparrow, but is a Weaver-Finch (Weaver-Bird). The nests of the Colonial Starling which I found in Finchhaven looked like the work of our American Weaver-Bird, the English Sparrow. There was about a dozen of these nests - cumbersome, loosely woven bunches of grass stuck precariously high out among the branches over a busy roadway. The Starlings themselves were dark, slim and much like small Cowbirds in appearance, but again like English Sparrows they were loquacious and constantly in motion, fluttering and jabbering about their rickety homes.

## THE HOUSE FINCH AND THE ENGLISH SPARROW

It was the last Friday afternoon in January. Anita Martin skipped home from school, her dancing feet keeping time to a little song. "Company's coming! Company's coming! Tommy is coming and Carlos is coming! Auntie Marie and dear Uncle Tom! Company's coming to town."

As she reached the last block she began to run. A muddy car was standing in the driveway, and Father was helping Uncle Tom Lamar carry the bags into the house. Inside everyone seemed to be talking at once.

Anita stared in surprise. "My goodness!" she exclaimed, "is it really you, Carlos? Why, you are nearly up to Auntie Marie's shoulder. And, Tommy! You and I were almost twins! Now look at you!"

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Carlos, "just how could cousins be twins? Anyway, look at your black curls and his straw-colored mop."

"Just dye our hair red like old Fire-top's, there," Tommy grinned at his brother. "Come on, Anita, and show us that playroom Aunt Mina wrote about."

Soon the three were seated before the fire, chatting happily. Carlos had chosen a chair near a window, where he could look out into the back yard.

"What a nice bird bath you have," he said. "I see two English sparrows."

"Each one of them has dozens of aunts and uncles and cousins," said Anita. Some evening I shall take you down town to the Plaza. After the sun is down, the bare trees make a lovely picture against the red western sky. In each tree dozens of fluffy English sparrows tuck their heads under their wings and go to sleep. They look like nut trees in fairyland."

"A hundred years ago there was not an English sparrow in America. Some men brought a few dozen over from England," Carlos told them. "They have spread all over this country. They are noisy and quarrelsome, and they eat thousands of dollars' worth of the farmer's grain every year."

"Look, Anita," interrupted Tommy. "Another sparrow is getting a drink. Isn't he pretty? What kind is he?"

"That is a house finch. Sometimes he is called a linnet. You have not met him before because he lives only in the West. Isn't he gay, with his pretty little head trimmed in red?"

"The red color goes quite a way down on his breast, doesn't it?" Tommy whispered. "And there is some more red just above his tail. You can see it when he moves his wings. Oh...listen."

The little bird had opened his bill and was filling the air with song.

"What a lovely welcome your pretty little house finch has given us!" exclaimed Carlos. "His music makes you think of soap bubbles rolling from a bubble pipe."

Anita laughed with delight. "I am so happy that you like him. Father says he sounds like sparkling water running over bright rocks. Mother thinks his song sounds like a spring breeze tripping along. Here comes his wife to get a drink."

"She looks just like Mr. House Finch except for his pretty red trimming, doesn't she? Do they nest here?" Tommy asked.

"The English sparrows and the house finches both live here the year 'round," answered Anita. "They are alike in many ways. They are the same size, with short, thick bills. Both like to live near people, and both are friendly and cheerful."

"How can I tell them apart?" Tommy wanted to know.

"I can show you, I think," answered his brother. "Look at that pair of English sparrows on the wall. See the black patch under Mr. English Sparrow's chin? That is his 'mark'. His wife has no stripes at all on her breast. That is her 'mark'. You will not forget the bright red trimming on the male house finch, or the brown stripes all over his wife. Do you know what kind of nests they build, Anita?"

"The English sparrow likes to build under the eaves. His nest is big and messy, lined with chicken feathers. You can see an old house finch's nest in that elm tree, and there are two more in the vines. They are small and neat."

"Will the house finches use their old nest this spring?"

"Perhaps. They may do a bit of spring house-cleaning and move right in, or they may build a new one. Often they take most of the straw and string from an old nest to build a new one. A friend of mine saw something funny last year."

"Tell us about it," demanded both boys at once.

"Jay Owen said a pair of these birds had started to build in a Chinese elm beside their house. Mr. House Finch spied a bit of string fastened to a trellis on the porch. He caught the end in his bill and tried to carry it to the nest. He flew in and out, time and again; but did not let go of his prize. He seemed much puzzled because the string held fast. Then he flew out as far as the string would reach and stayed there for several minutes, beating his wings. Jay Owen called him the 'Bird on the Flying Trapeze'. He finally cut the string and Mr. House Finch took it to his nest."

"I'd like to have seen that," smiled Tommy. "I wonder if his wife scolded him for being gone so long?"

"I don't think so," laughed Anita. "They are always polite, and never seem to quarrel and fuss like the English sparrows."

"You know a lot about birds, for a girl. How do you learn so much?"

"I use my eyes. My teacher, Miss Smith, knows a lot about birds, animals and insects. We have a Bird Study Club in the third grade, and we bring old nests and pictures to talk about. Oh, Carlos!" exclaimed Anita, "I was told to ask someone to talk to our club about the red-winged blackbird. Will you talk to us, Carlos, please?"

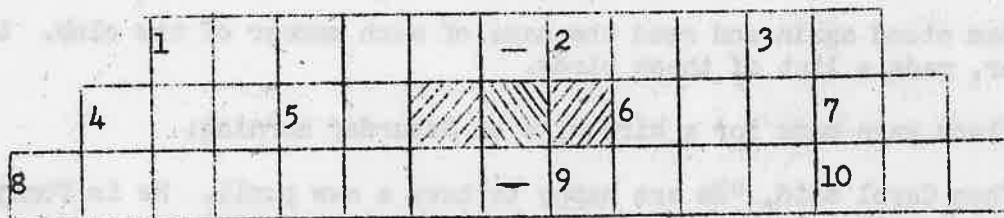
"Dinner!" called Mrs. Martin. "Hurry and get your hands washed."

Tommy hurried toward the bathroom.

"You will, won't you, please?" Anita asked again.

"We shall see," answered Carlos, as he followed Tommy from the room.

#### Four of the Birds That You Know



- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1. A building to live in.                       | 6. Sixth month, minus the E. |
| 2. What a fish swims with.                      | 7. Abbreviation of Company.  |
| 3. Something to sit in, minus what you breathe. | 8. A person born in England. |
| 4. To steal.                                    | 9. The mast of a ship.       |
| 5. Opposite of out.                             | 10. What you do with cars.   |

#### TO A HOUSEFINCH

Rollicking brown little sparrow  
Gaily be-spattered with red  
Perched in the tip of a tamarix green,  
With a bright blue sky overhead.

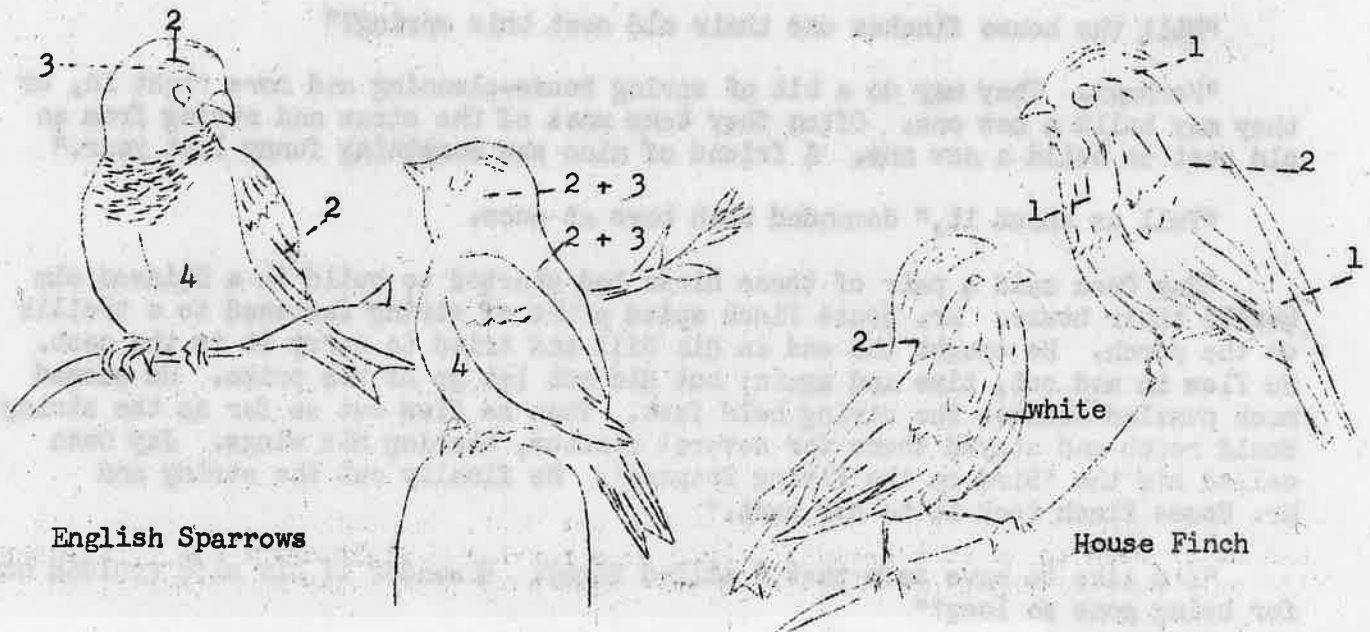
You warble ever so madly  
Of bright summer days to be,  
You sing of the nest you are planning  
To build in the tamarix tree.

—Ruby Allen

E	G	I	S	H	-	S	P	A	R	R	O	W
R	O	B	I	N	-	J	U	N	C	O		
H	O	U	S	E	-	F	I	N	C	H		

Key





1. Bright red
  2. Brown
  3. Gray
  4. Dirty whitish
- Brown stripes on the House Finch

Color Plate - House Finch - Bailey: "Birds of New Mexico", p. 690.

#### THE RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

It was Friday afternoon at Anita's school. Thirty third-grade boys and girls were watching Carol Gray, who stood in front of the class.

"This is the tenth meeting of the Bird Study Club," she said. "Sam will read the minutes of the last meeting."

Sam Burney stood and read what had happened at the last meeting.

"Are the minutes correct?" Carol asked. When no one spoke, she continued: "When your name is read, please answer with the name of a bird that you have seen since our last meeting."

Sam stood again and read the name of each member of the club. Miss Smith, the teacher, made a list of these birds.

Plans were made for a bird hike on Saturday morning.

Then Carol said, "We are happy to have a new pupil. He is Tommy Lamar, cousin of Anita Martin. He has moved here from New York."

Tommy stood up and said, "Thank you."

As soon as he was seated, Carol continued, "We hope that Tommy will join our club. Anita will now take charge of the meeting."

Anita walked to the front of the room. "Three people are going to talk to us. First, John Anderson will tell us about some bird visitors."

John stood and said to the class: "Last Saturday morning I was setting out some plants for my mother. I left a tub full of water, and went into the house for an apple. When I looked out of the window, the yard was filled with robins. Some were hopping on the grass. Two were pecking at some chinaberries, but I do not think they ate them. But most of the robins were drinking from the tub of water. It looked like the pie in 'Sing a Song of Sixpence'. I counted sixty-three in all. Yesterday many of them came back and stayed for about a half hour."

Anita stood and said, "Thank you, John. I wish we could have seen your 'robin pie'. Jimmy Day is going to tell us what he has learned about blackbirds."

Jimmy walked to the front of the room and read what he had written.

#### Our Three Blackbirds

There are three kinds of blackbirds to be seen here. The Brewer's is all shiny black, with a pale yellow eye. The yellow-headed blackbird is a bit larger



than the Brewer's, but not so large as the robin. He is black, with a bright yellow head, neck and 'bib'. There is a white patch in his wing. The blackbird that we see most often is called the red-wing. The red-wing wears a black suit with bright red shoulder patches.

"Blackbirds like to stay in large, noisy flocks near the water. They build their nests in the willows or in the cat-tails. They eat weed seeds, insects and some grain."

Again Anita stood by her chair. "Thank you, Jimmy. That was very good. This is my cousin, Carlos. He is a new pupil upstairs. His teacher has let him come down to tell us about red-wings."

Carlos looked into the smiling faces of the boys and girls. "I am glad to meet you. I shall tell you about a pair of red-wings that I saw last summer," he began.

"My father had to make a business trip out west. He took me with him, as I had never been in an airplane. I stayed at a ranch for eight days. There I found the only pair of red-wings that I had ever seen away from water and other black-birds.

"Mrs. Red-wing had built a nest of coarse grass in a large bush. She did all the work but Mr. Red-wing was never far away. He liked to sit on a fencepost at the corner of the garden, singing, \*'O-ka-lee, O-ka-lee' over and over.

"The day his wife laid her second egg there was a terrible fuss. When I went out, I found a broken blackbird's egg on the ground. There were two eggs in the nest. One was the blackbird's and one was a cowbird's egg. Cowbirds do not build nests. They lay their eggs in other birds' nests. The other birds hatch the eggs and feed the cowbird's babies.

"There was often war after that. The male red-wing would chase every other bird away. He did not seem to trust the English sparrows or the house finches or the cowbird. Only the mockingbirds could now visit the bushes where the blackbird had his nest.

"On two other days I found broken eggs under the nest. When I had to go home, the mother was sitting on one light blue blackbird's egg with black lines and dots and on one smaller blue-green cowbird's egg."

The children clapped happily when Carlos finished his story. A bell rang somewhere and everyone got ready to go home. Carol and Anita were the last two out.

"Thank you very much for asking your cousin to tell us a story," Carol said to her friend. "This was the best meeting we have had, wasn't it?"

Marguerite Wright

#### BLACKBIRD QUESTIONS

1. Where can we always find blackbirds?
2. How many kinds of blackbirds have we?
3. What do they eat?
4. Where do the red-wings build their nests?
5. What is the song of the red-wing?

#### ANSWERS

(Put the number of the right question in front of each answer.)

\*Another call often given by the red-wing is "konk-a-ree".

5  
7  
2  
1  
3  
:key

- Blackbirds eat insects, weed seeds, and some grain.
- Blackbirds can always be found in marshy ground, near a river or drainage ditch.
- We have three Blackbirds--the Brewer's, the Yellow-head and the Red-wing.
- Red-wings like to build in 'Tulies' or in willows.
- The Red-wing sings, \*'O-ka-ree, O-ka-ree, O-ka-ree."

See if you can write the names of our bird friends in the blanks.

\_\_\_\_\_ sings the live-long day,  
Makes us glad to have him stay.

Timid \_\_\_\_\_, softly talking,  
Flits away when I come walking.

Big red vest and coat of brown,  
 Pretty \_\_\_\_\_ comes to town.

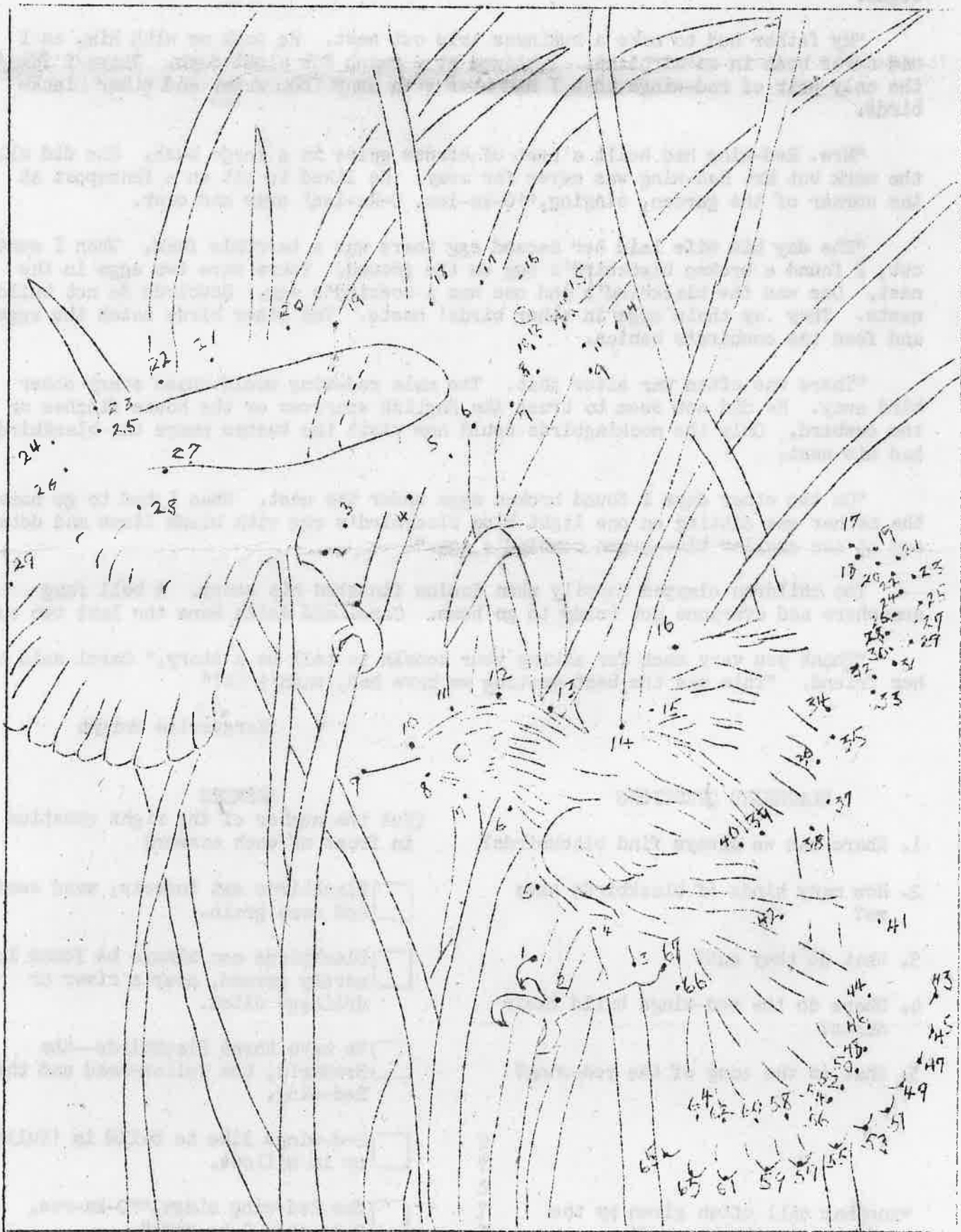
\_\_\_\_\_ is a lazy shirk,  
 Makes other mothers do her work.

All the \_\_\_\_\_s know  
 Where the cat-tails grow.

The \_\_\_\_\_, a quarrelsome thing  
 Came as a king and remained as a king.

English Sparrow  
 Red-wing  
 Cow Bird  
 Robin  
 Junco  
 House Finch

Key:



A. Mr. Blackbird

B. Mrs. Blackbird

Follow Color Plates in Research Department of Public Library; or teacher may order Audubon school leaflets and follow directions on them.