



EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB

THE ROADRUNNER

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LENA MCBEE, EDITOR

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THE DEPARTURE OF THE CUCKOO

So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,
From the wet field, through the vext garden trees,
Come with the vollying rain and tossing breeze:
"The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I!"

Matthew Arnold

RECENT MEETINGS

Since the 31st ROADRUNNER appeared the Bird Study Club has held the following meetings:

A Bird Walk at the Country Club grounds, April 30, for adult members. Phainopepla, Arkansas kingbirds, mockingbirds and Bullock's orioles were in evidence there. Diane Quigley listed a single grey-headed junco. Members who went on to the Canutillo Pool listed newly arrived spotted and white-rumped sandpipers, a flock of 18 Wilson's phalaropes, olive-sided flycatcher and a Cooper's nanager, Audubon's hermit thrush, a white-crowned sparrow or two and enough kinds to total 49.

The September meeting was held in the Texas Western College (formerly College of Mines) Museum at 7:30 p.m., September 12. Mrs. Harry Conway, a guest speaker, told of a trip through the Rockies, listing birds seen. Miss Jennie Camp, club member who attended the Audubon Camp at Kerrville, Texas, gave an account of the camp as she saw it. A camp scholarship, conferred jointly upon Miss Camp by the Garden Clubs of Texas and the Bird Study Club of El Paso was, in part, a recognition of her good work in sponsoring the Junior Audubon Clubs in the city schools.

OCTOBER MEETING

Bert Harwell, a gifted naturalist, photographer, and bird-song imitator, was even better than usual when he presented the opening number of the fourth Audubon Screen Tour season at 7:30 p.m., October 18, in the El Paso High School auditorium. The audience appeared more than usually enthusiastic over his never-to-be-forgotten "Canada West".

COMING MEETINGS

The El Paso Bird Study Club will meet on Monday, November 7 at 7:30 p.m., at the Texas Centennial Museum of Texas Western College. The meetings have been changed from the first Monday to the first Tuesday to suit the growing demand by student organizations for the museum rooms on Tuesday, the former date.

Col. M.H. Thomlinson, Curator of the Texas Centennial Museum at Texas Western College, will give a talk on "The Ornithological Collection". This subject is of vital interest to every club member and friend of the museum.

Since the December meeting will consist of an Audubon Screen Tour, it has been decided to dispose of all necessary business at the November meeting. Officers for the coming year will be elected. Nominating Committee will consist of Mrs. Lena McBee, Miss Grace Rose, and W.W. Wimberly. All members whose dues expire before the end of the year are asked to pay dues at this meeting.

Miss Mary Belle Keefer, Bird Walk Chairman, announces that a walk will be conducted for adults soon. The time and place will be publicized later.

NEW MEMBERS

Added to the Club since the last ROADRUNNER was issued are Mrs. Ollie Place, Mrs. Dorothy Marvil, and Mrs. C. Scott Carson.

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENTS

Dr. Olin Sewell Pettingill (you will recall him as our very first Audubon Screen Tours lecturer) writes from Northfield, Massachusetts:

"I wish to thank you for the excellent material which you sent me."

Chandler S. Robbins, Division of Wildlife Service, writes:

"Receipt is acknowledged of your report on the migration of birds for the past season."

Dr. Harry C. Oberholser writes from Cleveland Heights, Cleveland, Ohio:

"Of the true Western Grebe, there is no record for western Texas, unless this of yours refers to this species" (in the ROADRUNNER for December-January, 1946-47). "I should appreciate your clarification of this record, as it is important."

Mr. and Mrs. George McClellan Bradt, Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico:

"We have wandered through Sonora and Sinaloa to Nayarit. Lovely country, quite tropical with banana and coconut trees in profusion....We've been collecting insects and reptiles for the museum. You would love this state."

BEST FIND OF THE SEASON

The YOUNG ROAD-RUNNER REALLY HAS A CREST.

Mrs. Allen photographed a young road-runner, caught as he flew from the nest in Ascarate Park on June 8. He erected a considerable crest on being caught, and so settled a local controversy as to whether the editor of THE JUNIOR ROADRUNNER, Marguerite Wright, may correctly head her section with a crested young roadrunner.

The nest, built about six feet from the ground in a Russian olive, had been under observation for two weeks by members of the club, all of whom had agreed that no crest was observable on the nestlings until one was disturbed by the photographer.

UNUSUAL FINDS SINCE APRIL, 1949

The nests of the Texas nighthawk, described by General Meyer on page 4, are the first of that species recorded here. Other "firsts" in nests are of the painted bunting, found by J. Camp, F. Camp and L. McBee in Ascarate Park, June 17 (one egg); and one of the vermillion flycatcher, just being started, found by M.B. Keefer and L. McBee at Radium Springs May 23. (Both birds were at work on it.)

Another instance of a blue grosbeak's being victimized by a cowbird was added to our list when W.W. Wimberly found a blue grosbeak's nest that had contained four blue eggs the previous day, empty of all these and holding only a cowbird's speckled egg. This was at Ascarate Park, July 10.

In a flock of 300 yellow-headed blackbirds at Canutillo October 23, Miss Keefer saw one albino yellow-head, a creamy-hued bird all over.

Mr. and Mrs. George Burrows were visited for three days this summer by a gray-tailed cardinal (June 12-15). We have but two previous records of the gray-tailed cardinal in El Paso. It is the nesting cardinal of the Big Bend.

A white-winged dove was seen near Canutillo May 15, and a pair spent at least the time between May 23 and June 10 in Mrs. McGuire's garden near Anthony. They have nested sparingly in Las Cruces, but of late we have had to go as far as Radium Springs to see this dove.

A pair of Scott's orioles were singing in McKelligon's Canyon July 9, and a nest of the type this oriole builds was found in a yucca working with ants -- a

situation that tells of disaster to the nest, such as broken eggs or dead young.

Mrs. Harry R. Conway reported a crane (Sandhill?) on the levee near the Country Club bridge October 21. It has been several years since we have seen one here.

The first Harris' hawk reported here in the history of the Bird Club was seen on the levee near the Country Club bridge April 23 by Mrs. John K. Rose, Miss Keefer and Mrs. McBee.

Earliest recorded fall arrival was made by the white-breasted nuthatch and the western tanager when they appeared in Harriet McGuire's garden July 29. Earliest of the green-tailed towhee was made August 22 by Mrs. Allen and J. Camp.

Mrs. Andreson reported a female American redstart at Sunrise Acres September 1. This is one of six records for this locality.

September 5, an indigo bunting was studied closely by J. Camp, F. Camp, and L. McBee. It was in changing plumage, patches of blue and brown on the breast being the outstanding field mark. Our western buntings (the painted and the lazuli) have no blue on the breast.

Mrs. Marguerite Wright reports a black-and-white warbler on her lawn at La Mesa for three days, beginning about October 1. We have only three other records here of this eastern warbler.

A female pileolated warbler that Mrs. Allen saw feeding on her pyracantha berries October 19, stayed later here than any previously noted.

MESILLA WILD LIFE REFUGE LOST

It is with regret that we announce the abandonment of the Mesilla Valley National Wild Life Refuge. Federal and New Mexican authorities state that the refuge is too small to be administered without loss, that the arrival and departure of wildfowl is beset with hazard, and that an option to buy certain privately-owned contiguous tracts cannot be secured.

Admitting some of these disadvantages, the club still feels that the advantages of keeping the refuge would have far out-weighed them. So, it is with deep regret that we note the passing of the refuge that club members worked so long and diligently to secure. Among those who deserve special mention for this devotion are Miss Mary Belle Keefer and the late Tom Miller Kirksey. Few of us can ever traverse that 550-acre plot without wistful memories of the refuge that used to be.

Mrs. J. Owen Allen,
Chairman

FIELD TRIP TO FORT DAVIS (Mary Belle Keefer)

Mrs. McBee and the writer spent the weekend of October 15-16 in the Davis Mountains, 200 miles east of El Paso. The town of Fort Davis is a mile high and the neighboring peaks reach the heights of 7000 to 8000 feet. The MacDonald Observatory, which belongs to the University of Texas, is situated on Mt. Locke at an elevation of 6791. Part of the area is a state park and there are hard-surfaced roads throughout.

We spent most of our time in Limpia Canyon, in the vicinity of the Prude Guest Ranch. Here Limpia Creek, bordered by cottonwood, willow, and ash trees, flows between slopes thickly dotted with live oaks and, further up the canyon, with pinon and juniper.

The bird population was disappointingly small in point of the number of species seen, as the peak of the fall migration had passed; but there were large concentrations of sparrows feeding on the many weed seeds, clay-colored being most numerous, with fewer chipping and Brewer's. The black-crested titmouse was abundant and was the most interesting to me, as I had seen it but once before. A few Arkansas goldfinches were in evidence, some of the males having attained the all-black back. Some Cassin's kingbirds, western bluebirds, and Woodhouse's jays still lingered, as well as house and Bewick's wrens.

Between Mt. Locke and Kent, a pair of sage thrashers flitted into the highway and walked across it before our eyes. Our most exciting find, however, was a scissor-tailed flycatcher, five miles east of Van Horn, sitting on the wire fence along the highway.

We had hoped to see sandpipers, which we had heard were numerous along Limpia Creek, but they had gone and it was not until we reached the edge of El Paso County on the way back that we saw any waders or shore birds. Here were blue (Treganza's) herons, American egrets, snowys, and little blue herons on a sandbar in the river. There were eight or ten white-rumped sandpipers, with a couple of other species that Mrs. McBee identified as Baird's and western sandpipers.

NESTS OF THE TEXAS NIGHTHAWK
(General G. Ralph Meyer)

In roaming around the desert area I had frequently flushed the Texas Nighthawk and on one occasion, had found one young in downy plumage. But I had never found the nest of this bird; nor was I certain of the nesting dates. Study of the records in Bent's Life Histories indicated that eggs should be found in this vicinity about May 20.

I had always seen many nighthawks flying in the vicinity of the crossroads near the Country Club in the evening, and I surmised that they might nest fairly commonly between the main highway and the foothills. So on May 15, I made a trip to that section. In the desert back of the new drive-in theater near the crossroads, I flushed a pair of the birds but found no eggs. Cruising around over the desert, I flushed two or three more individuals but found no sign of nests.

On May 20 I returned to the same area and began zig-zagging across the desert. Finally I flushed a bird at about fifty feet and I spotted the point whence it flushed. It took a considerable amount of searching even then, but I finally found two eggs at a point about eight feet from where I had seen the bird rise. There was no nest. The two eggs lay on a patch of clean white sand about six inches square, the square being the only place clear of small stones which elsewhere covered the ground. The eggs were near, but not beneath, a small creosote bush.

I covered much of the desert without flushing any other birds, so I moved on up the road toward Canutillo and finding a road leading off into the foothills, turned up that for about a mile. I stopped where the arroyos were fairly deep and proceeded to cover some flat shelves of limited extent. I was rewarded at once by discerning two more eggs. This time the bird flushed when I was but twenty feet away and I could see the eggs. Again there was no nest. Here the ground was covered with reddish pebbles and stones and the eggs lay on the sand amongst the pebbles. A creosote bush grew nearby, but I would not say that the eggs were beneath the bush.

There were two more small benches nearby, which I covered without finding any more eggs, though I did flush a bird. I then moved on to the top of the mesa, which is quite extensive. I quartered back and forth over this area, covering a great deal of territory without finding anything. Then I flushed another bird and found one egg. I marked the location of this nest by landmarks for return later. I continued my search, but without further success.

On May 24, I returned to the third nest. I had no difficulty finding it, and the bird flushed when I was still one hundred feet away. There were two eggs, which I collected. They lay on the sand among the pebbles and were about six inches from the base of a creosote bush.

It seems rather like looking for a needle in a haystack to search for these eggs in the desert. Actually, it is not too difficult. If you come within fifty feet of the bird when incubation is not advanced the bird is quite likely to flush. I think this would not be true if incubation were well along. My procedure is to hike across a mesa or bench then come back across, some fifty feet or so from the first crossing, working back and forth until I have covered the desired area.

There was little or no difference in the coloring and marking of the eggs, regardless of their surroundings. The first set on clear sand, the second among reddish pebbles, and the third among white or grayish pebbles all look much alike.* I cannot see that the proximity of the creosote bushes had any bearing on the location of the nests. In the third nest the eggs were in shade in the mid-afternoon but, unless they had been moved, they must have been in bright sun during the morning hours. It would be interesting to visit one of these nests in both morning and afternoon, to see if the eggs are moved to remain in the shade. I doubt it.

JUNIOR AUDUBON NEWS
(Frances Camp)

The Winkler Audubon Junior Club has thus far enjoyed two Bird Walks. On October 1 thirty members went by bus to Ascarate Park, walked all the way around the lake, and saw these birds: A flicker, 3 big blue herons (one of which called for them, or at them), 5 coots, a pied-billed grebe, 2 gulls, a flock of 200 yellow-headed blackbirds (thrilling sight!), 10 snowy egrets in a willow tree, about 15 barn swallows, and several redwings. A blue grosbeak's nest of last summer, built in a shrub of salt cedar, greatly pleased the group.

On October 15, forty-five members went by bus to the Country Club and Rio Grande levee. This time they took lunches. They saw a cactus woodpecker, 3 flickers, 10 killdeer, several barn swallows, a large blue heron, a marsh hawk, chipping sparrows and a shrike. A dead pileolated warbler that they picked up gave considerable evidence of having fallen victim to the shrike. They picked up a dead chipping sparrow that had been shot by a B-B gun. They ate near the flock of meadowlarks, who sang for them and also gave the children a close-up view.

This club meets on Friday after school. Last week they painted red-winged blackbirds and saw two motion pictures: Camouflage in Nature, and Spiders. On or near the Winkler School campus have been Brewer's blackbirds, housefinches, and a rock wren. Junior advisers are Mary Olsen and Joan Phares, and senior advisers are Misses Jennie and Frances Camp.

* Except that the first is covered with finer markings than are the other two sets.

JUNIOR ROADRUNNER

By Marguerite Wright

THE ARIZONA HOODED ORIOLE

Carol knelt by the open window of her grandmother's California home. She counted 3 evergreen trees that were higher than the large two-story house. Some palm trees cast their shadow over the bamboo clumps, ferns, and flowering shrubs crowded close to the bird bath and fish pond. Between the sidewalk and the street stood a row of carob trees so large that each tree clasped the fingers of her sister trees.

The little girl listened to a soft, whistled song as she searched for the singer. The song ended and a flash of orange and black shot out into the morning sunlight.

Carol finished dressing and ran downstairs. "Grandmother!" she called, then followed her nose toward the smell of frying bacon. "Oh, Grandmother!" she repeated, throwing her arms about the tiny, white-haired woman standing by the stove. "What a beautiful place you have. And my room, looking down on that forest of ferns! I've never slept upstairs before in my whole life. What are the names of the palm trees? I saw 3 kinds of birds: 2 were singing. What were they, Grandmother?"

"Whoa, there!" laughed Mrs. Gray. "Slow down a bit and drink your orange juice. After breakfast I'll teach you the names of the trees and shrubs, but you will have to unpack your bird book to find the names of our birds."

It was 2 days later that Carol discovered the nest hanging from the underside of a leaf of the California fan palm. She ran to the gardener. "Please, Pedro," she begged, "get a ladder and let me peek into a nest."

The ladder was soon in place, but it was not tall enough.

"That fan needs cutting, for it is no longer green," Pedro said, looking up into the leaves. "Wait until I get the saw."

"There it is," he smiled as he lowered the huge palm leaf to the ground.

"Some orioles weave long hanging nests of hair. This is made of palm fiber. Do you think it is an oriole's nest, Pedro?"

The gardener shrugged. "Many times I have seen a yellow and black bird on this side of the house. The mate has orange instead of yellow, and sings in the early morning. Maybe they have another nest somewhere near."

"It should be lined with something soft, like cotton or wool," Carol said as her fingers began exploring the inside of the shallow cradle. "Oh, the poor little thing," she mourned. "There is a little dead bird inside. Help me, please, Pedro."

"Pobrecito," murmured the gardener as he reached for his knife. "It caught its head in a loop of the palm thread, and could not live. Many sad things happen to little wild things."

"He was all feathered out, and ready to fly, wasn't he?" Carol laid the little bird on her handkerchief, while Grandmother brought the bird book from the arbor.

"I am sure it is an oriole," Carol said as she looked for the word in the index. "Here are the pictures. All are orange and black, but only one has no black on the top of the head, like this baby. It says 'Arizona hooded oriole'. I remember, Carlos told us about seeing a pair in Arizona, at the Dude Ranch. He said they hung a nest under a protecting palm leaf. Do you think this is the right name, Grandmother?"

Mrs. Gray compared the picture with the dead baby bird. "I think so," she answered. "Here is the hood of yellow, and the black face, throat and wings."

"The book says the hooded oriole is the only one with the top of the head orange. I am going to look and look for the new nest, Pedro thinks it is nearby."

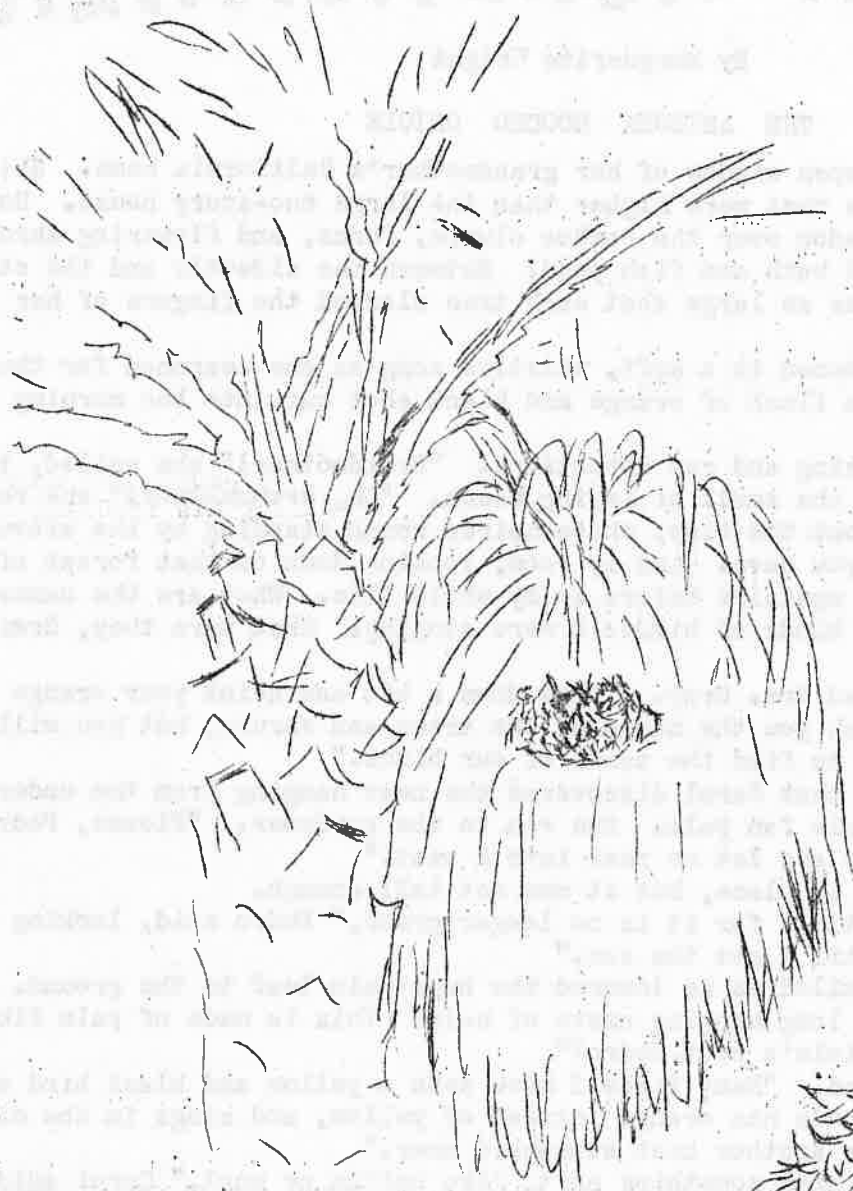
But it was not until several days later, when the parents began feeding the babies, that Carol spied the nest. Where do you suppose it was? It was hidden in a clump of fronds at the tip of an evergreen tree. Grandmother called this a "Monkey Puzzle" tree. What fun they had watching the old birds carry insects to the cradle, disappear inside for a moment and then dart away.

"Grandmother!" said Carol one day. "I've been timing the feeding program of our hooded orioles. How often do you suppose a parent flies in with an insect? They made 22 trips in one hour. Then for 15 minutes I did not see either the male or female. I suppose they were grabbing a bug or two for their own lunch. But soon they started the 'air lift' again."

On Carol's last day in California, she heard a scolding and calling. She ran to the window, to see two babies flutter from the nest to one of the carob trees. What a lot of fussing it took to coax the last one out. Then the three hopped and fluttered from branch to branch, calling shrilly every time a parent appeared with an insect.

The next morning Carol knelt by her window. Imagine her surprise to see the 5 orioles fly across the lawn together. "Goodbye, you beautiful things," she called. "Maybe I'll see some of you again next summer."

Note: The second nest may be seen at the El Paso Public Library.



At the end of each bare, prickly branch, grew a great bunch of stiff, green fronds. In one of these Carol discovered the second cradle.

The dying palm leaf had sheltered the first nest. The birds had hung the cradle by sewing through the tough fan with the fiber threads.



Carlos Lamar lay face down in the sand, his bare back exposed to the hot Texas sun. Tommy, his younger brother, sat gazing out over the waters of the Gulf, his arms clasped about his knees. Far out, a freighter trailed a gray ribbon of smoke. Two fishing boats, surrounded by a flock of screaming sea gulls, headed for the dock. On the shore, dozens of tiny sandpipers followed each receding wave, their long bills searching for tiny sea creatures. With each incoming wave, they turned tail and ran back up the wet sand.

Tommy prodded his brother with his bare toe. "Hi, Red, wake up! You are going to have a peach of a sunburn, lying there so long. Besides, I need help to identify these gulls. There must be a dozen kinds."

The tall boy sat up and rubbed his eyes. "Ho, hum", he yawned, "It always makes me sleepy to lie on the sand after a swim. What about the gulls?"

"Some are darker than others, and they are of different sizes."

"I have read that there are about 50 kinds of gulls, but I see only three kinds out there now. Young birds have darker plumage than adults. Every year they get lighter, changing coats with each season. That is why so many people are confused."

"Is there any way for me to learn?" asked Tommy, wrinkling his freckled face under the tow-colored thatch of hair which would not stay combed.

"Well, let me see. Over on the sandbar this side of the piling are some herring gulls. Notice that they are quite large. Their legs are flesh-colored and they have yellow bills. Their mantles are pearl-gray and the tips of their wings are black."

"What do you mean by mantle?"

"The mantle is the upper surface of the wings and the part of the back which separates them."

"Oh, I see. It looks like someone had pulled a gray paint brush right across each bird, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it does. Now here come three ring-billed gulls. They look very much like the herring gulls, but they are smaller and their legs are greenish-yellow."

The three gulls settled on the water, riding the waves as gracefully as they had circled and skimmed through the air. "I see why you call them ring-bills," the younger boy observed. "They have a black ring all around the bill, with the yellow showing at the base and tip of the bill."

"That's right. Do you know that gulls are scavengers? They help keep the beaches clean by eating garbage and dead fish. That great flock by the fishing boats is fighting over the scraps the fishermen are throwing into the water as they clean their catch. Inland gulls are a help to the farmers. They eat grasshoppers and mice. Sometime I'll tell you about the gulls that saved the crops in Utah from the black crickets."

"Look at those big birds....see, those awkward things trying to land on the old piling?"

"They are brown pelicans. Notice the white eyes, and their huge bills resting on their breasts. When they stand about, looking so serious and dignified, I always want to laugh."

"They are ridiculous, aren't they? Do you remember the big clown at the circus that we thought was so funny? I'll bet he got his idea from these birds. They have webbed feet like the gulls, but don't you think they need more tail to balance those big bills and pouches?"

"Maybe so, but they are wonderful swimmers, and beautifully graceful in flight. The big white pelican swims along and scoops up fish with that absurd bill. The pouch is a handy market basket in which to carry food to the young birds. Well, would you look at the pelican parade?"

A long line of great brown birds seemed to be playing 'follow the leader'. First, they flew with flapping wings; then they soared. Suddenly, they began flapping their wings at the very same time.

"Did you hear the leader say, 'One-two-three-sail'?" asked Tommy.

"No, and you didn't either," laughed Carlos. "I have never heard a pelican make any sound. I don't believe they have a voice. Oh! They have spotted a school of fish."

One after another, the pelicans half folded their wings and dived into the water with a splash. Up popped one with a fish in his bill. He pointed his bill straight up to let the water drain out. Then he flipped his head to get the fish head-down in position to swallow. Slurp! The bird promptly spread his wings and rose into the air to get into diving position again.

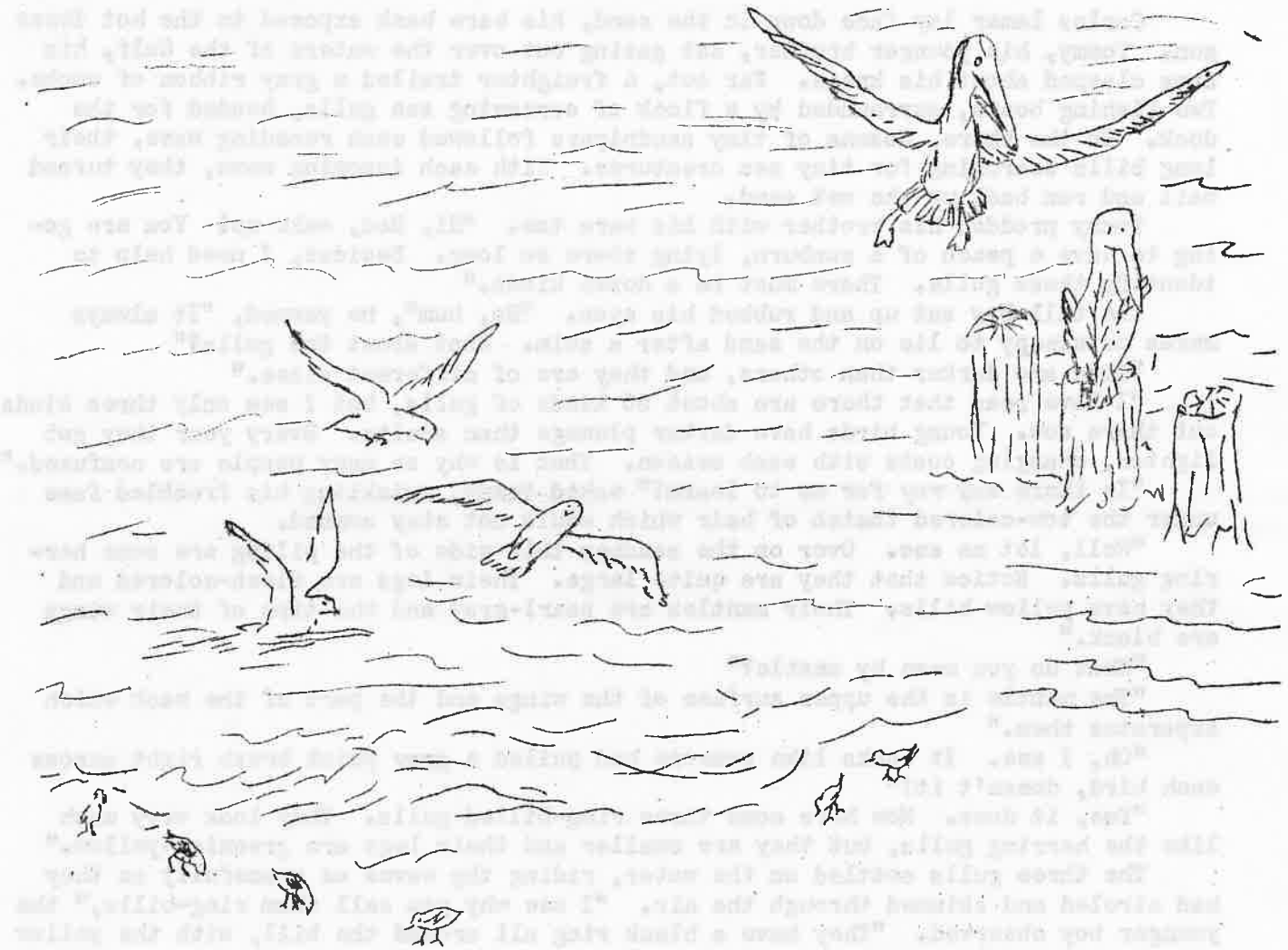
All around, other birds were doing exactly the same thing. How the water shot up into the air with each dive! A flock of dark-headed gulls came swooping down to join the pelicans.

"Are those young gulls?" asked Tommy.

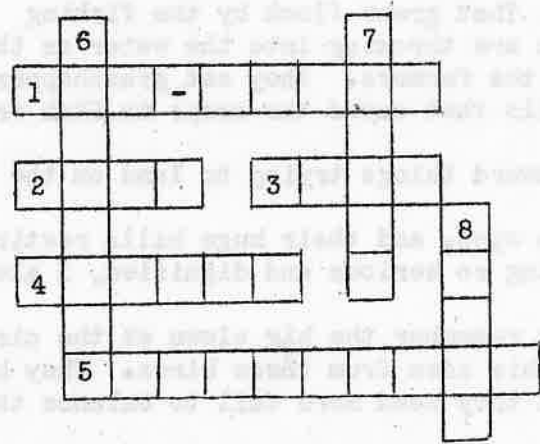
"No, they are laughing gulls. Hear the noise they are making? That is how they got their name. They have come to rob the pelicans."

Some of the gulls perched on the heads of the larger birds, some alighted on the huge bills, as the fishers came to the surface. One pelican opened his bill, and a gull snatched the fish. The robbed bird looked about stupidly, not understanding what had happened to his meal.

"Well, I've seen bandits in action," laughed Tommy. "But aren't the gulls mean to keep laughing? The look on the robbed pelican's face reminds me that I'm hungry, too. Come on, Red, Mother will be waiting for us."



Puzzle



1. The boys saw 3 kinds of _____.
 2. The pelicans dived for _____.
 3. What mother birds put in the nest:
_____.
 4. Gulls have a gray _____.
 5. Tiny birds feeding at the edge of the water: _____.
- Down -
6. Large birds that dived for fish:
_____.
 7. They are graceful in _____.
 8. The mantle of the herring gull is _____ gray.

Key:

1 sandpipers
2 e n
3 mantle t e
4 h p c
5 fish eggs
6 sea gulls
7 f d

Can you fill all the blanks? (Story on Page 5)

1. Carol went to visit her _____ in California.
2. The old house had _____ stories.
3. There were _____ huge evergreen trees in the side yard.
4. Carol found an oriole nest under the leaf of the California _____ palm.
5. Pedro cut the palm leaf with a _____.
6. Carol found a little dead _____ in the nest.
7. She found the second nest only after the old birds began to _____ the young.
8. The parents worked hard to bring enough _____ for the babies.
9. The Arizona _____ oriole has a lovely song.
10. He is the only oriole with the top of the head _____.