



# EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB

## THE ROADRUNNER

PUBLISHED BY THE BIRD STUDY CLUB OF EL PASO

Marguerite Wright, Chairman

May, 1945

Subscription Rates, 40 cents a year

To a House Finch

Rollicking brown little sparrow, You warble ever so madly  
Gaily bespattered with red, Of bright summer days to be,  
Perched in the tip of a tamarix, You sing of the nest you are  
green planning  
With a bright blue sky overhead. To build in the tamarix tree.

Ruby Allen

### THE FEBRUARY MEETING

At the February meeting, held in Mrs. Slater's home, Dr. Berkman spoke of the relation of the conservation program to the increase of bird life in certain areas of Texas. Major George Burrows spoke informally of the birds of New Zealand. Mr. Strain showed a sketch of the habitat case for Mesa birds, to be installed at Mines as a part of the Tom Miller Kirksey Memorial. Judge Loomis reported on habitat cases which he had seen at the Teachers' College Museum at Fresno, California. It was a pleasure to have Dr. Brown Randel present, after serving as Major at Base Hospital Air Base, Lake Charles, Louisiana.

### THE NEXT MEETING

There will be a meeting of the club at the home of Mrs. H. D. Slater 516 Prospect Avenue, Monday, May 21, at 7:30 P.M. After a brief business session, a program of bird song records will be played. The records are loaned by Fred Cornelius.

### CAPTAIN COFFEE BANDS SWIFTS

Captain B. F. Coffee, who was a January visitor to the Mesilla National Wild Life Refuge, has sent Miss Mary Belle Keefer a copy of THE MIGRANT for September, 1944, an issue devoted to the chimney swift. His article is entitled "Winter Home of the Chimney Swift Discovered in Peru." After twelve years of speculating about where some 35,000 swifts that were banded near Nashville, Tennessee, go for the winter, Captain Coffee has been apprised by the Fish and Wildlife Commission that five of his banded birds were killed on the River Yanavaco in Peru in December, 1943. Eight other swifts that were killed there at the same time, had been banded in various eastern states and in Ontario, Canada. Returns show that one swift has taken the 3,000-mile trip to Peru at least seven times.

### NEWS OF FOLKS

Major I. M. Epstein, one of our charter members, is in charge of a group of German hospitals near Marseilles, France.

Major George Burrows expects to return to El Paso by the first of June, when we hope to hear him talk again of New Zealand birds.

Lieutenant A. E. Eynon is at a replacement center somewhere in Italy. Mrs. Eynon is in Clinton, New Jersey.

Lieutenant and Mrs. F. N. Hamerstrom, research and field workers for the University of Michigan before they came to El Paso, are continuing their work here in spare hours. Mrs. Hamerstrom is giving the club valuable assistance in preparing skins for the Tom M. Kirksey Memorial.

Colonel Guy Kirksey has written the club an encouraging letter and enclosed a check for the Memorial in honor of his son.



Mrs. C.T. Bartlett, who moved from her girlhood home in Philadelphia to the Mesilla Valley of New Mexico in 1908, has been a lifelong lover of birds and an ardent champion of their protection. Her home, located one mile south of La Mesa, is filled with rare heirlooms and antiques. The two-acre grounds are a veritable bird heaven. Cottonwoods, Italian cypress, chinaberry, box elder, locust, arbor vitae, apricots and pecan trees offer food and shelter. Jasmine, honeysuckle and English ivy clamor over walls and trellises. Pool and bird bath are surrounded by flowers and shrubbery such as roses, yucca, garrambulla and paracantha. The grounds are enclosed by rock walls and privet and tamarix hedges. An article by Mrs. Bartlett as follows:

#### BIRD PROTECTION

I disclaim the right to the title of ornithologist, as I have never done any research or discovered a new variety, but I am a lover of birds. If by word or act I can interest others in their esthetic or economic value or prevent their destruction, I shall be thankful indeed.

Ethically, their mysterious power of flight causes us to ponder on some great influence beyond our vision; their song uplifts our souls and gives us hope and strength and "that glorious thrill and glow" which makes us less earth-bound. I pity the person who is not made happier by the song of a robin, more thoughtful by the meadow-lark, or reverential by the thrush. Their music is an esthetic delight to the ear, as are their graceful movements and beautiful plumage to the eye. Most of the poets and many musicians have written of birds, and artists have painted them.

The economic aspect of birds is so vast as to require volumes to do it justice. The Biological survey and experiment stations in many of our states devote their skill to investigating the economy of bird life. They take several hundred birds of one kind and examine the contents of their stomachs, thereby settling beyond the shadow of a doubt the question of their food. Many birds which were once condemned are now known to be the farmers' best friends. Investigation condemns only about six birds of this country.

It seems unfortunate that such charming and useful creatures should need defense. There are men who like to shoot, regardless of time or season, and boys who destroy countless numbers of birds with BB guns and "nigger shooters".

Some suggestions follow for protecting our birds: Our parks and play-grounds might have coverts for the birds, corners wired off and left wild. We might put up bird houses with openings too small for the English sparrow or bird houses suspended by wires. We should furnish a plentiful supply of fresh water for drinking and bathing. It is quite possible to have birds in cities. The old, old civilized Europe has not exterminated them; I recall seeing thrushes in the heat of Dublin.

We should try to prevent the destruction of natural growths of shrubbery and plants along our ditches and drainage canals. Surely the root systems tend to lessen erosion. The ruthless slashing and burning so prevalent in the El Paso area is not only unsightly, but it leaves the birds little shelter and a scarcity of nesting places.

Caroline McKee Bartlett

Below is listed a few of the birds Mrs. Bartlett has noticed in the years she has lived in the Mesilla Valley. Many of them nest in her yard or eat at her feeding table. Several return year after year to spend the summer under her protection. A pair of roadrunners have been permanent tenants for eighteen years. One mocker comes at her call and eats from the dish with her dog.

Western red-tailed hawk, Swainson's hawk, marsh hawk, desert sparrow hawk, Gambel's quail, killdeer, Western mourning dove, roadrunner, barn owl, burrowing owl, Nuttall's poor-will, Texas night-hawk, black-chinned humming bird, calliope humming bird, red-shafted flicker, rednaped sap-sucker, Williamson's sapsucker, cactus woodpecker, Arkansas kingbird, black phoebe, Western fly-catcher, horned lark, Mexican cliff swallow, long-crested jay, Woodhouse's jay, Rocky mountain jay, white-breasted nut-hatch, Western house wren, Western mockingbird, Crissal thrasher, chestnut-backed bluebird, mountain bluebird, cedar waxwing, white-rumped shrike, Cassin's vireo, Virginia warbler, pilcolated warbler, Western meadowlark, red-winged blackbird, Schott's oriole, orchard oriole, Bullock's oriole, Brewer's blackbird, great-tailed grackle, western tanager, Cooper's tanager, Arizona pyrrhuloxia, rose-breasted grosbeak, western blue grosbeak, English sparrow, house finch, Arkansas goldfinch, green-tailed towhee, spurred towhee, pink-sided junco, red-backed junco, gray-headed junco, western chipping sparrow, clay-colored sparrow, white-crowned sparrow, Gambel's sparrow.

## SOME BIRDS OF MEXICO

In the course of a visit made to Mexico in July and August of 1944, the writer managed to see a few of the birds of Mexico-City, Taxco, and Acapulco. Something may well be said about the difficulty of studying birds in a strange country, one in which the tourist is regarded as singular, even when he does not carry field glasses or turn aside from the designated walks or driveways. To do these odd things is to court dubious or unfavorable attention. One is thankful to see even the obvious birds under the circumstances. However, the Museum of Natural History in Mexico City affords opportunity to check field notes with mounted specimens. Quotation marks in this account enclose Spanish common names of birds seen; and scientific names are also those given on the labels.

A good many species seen on the trip are identical or closely associated with those north of the Rio Grande. Four doves, for instance- the Inca, the white-winged, the ground, and the mourning dove- were common to city parks visited; so are the Brewer's blackbird and the Great-tailed grackle, the English sparrow and the house finch. Hardly less common are the goldfinch, the brown towhee, and the yellow warbler. Black and turkey vultures are seen generally; and rice fields are lyrical with redwing songs.

Canyon wrens were scanning the red-tiled roofs and the plaster of terraced buildings in Taxco for wrenlets need to subsist on. Brown towhees fed their flown young in the shrubbery. A pair of blue grosbeaks enlivened the grounds with song. Goldfinch and tree swallow twittered aloft. Down in Acapulco on the Pacific coast, cardinals sang through the morning hours. In Chapultepec Park, one heard or saw vermilion flycatchers and wood pewees, robins, black-headed grosbeaks, chickadees and a surprising number of song sparrows and Bewick's wrens.

New birds identified on the trip were few, but exhilarating. There was a Mexican motmot or "Bobo"; a thick-billed parrot family of one or two; a thrush, the "Sensontle", that resembles Townsend's solitaire; the white-eared hummingbird and a brown-and-green one called "Esmeralda"; a squirrel-cuckoo or "Vaquero"; a rufous-pale robin, or "Primavera"; and Quail or "Bolenchaca."

The motmot (*Momotus mexicanus*) was identified at Rancho Telva in Taxco. At dusk it flew up from a cornfield, where it appeared to be feeding on the ground, and alighted in the fork of a shrub that grew at the edge of a timbered ravine. It was a brown-headed bird of robin-size or larger, with a patch of black extending back through the eyes from the heavy black bill; grass-green back and wings; a breast of emerald green, shot through with blue, having a black pendant of feathers from the center; a ragged, nervous tail, mostly swinging in the shadow of the shrub. When, on one occasion, he took flight across the wooded ravine, the long, forked tail was emphasized. In the museum, the motmot is placed between the kingfishers and the nighthawks. It is said to nest, like the former, at the end of a cavity that it digs in a vertical bank. Specimens revealed the long tail feathers bare of barbs almost to the tips.

Richest, among my memories of Taxco, is that of a song of a thrush that poured a flood of rich melody from somewhere and filled all the terraces with sound which, when it ceased, left silence that was in no way broken by the hum of talk and laughter. After much searching for there was no guessing the location of the singer- the bird was found, caged, on a hotel veranda. They called it a sensontle. It was a gray thrush, with a short black bill, short wings, long tail that was bordered with white on the sides, a white eye-ring, a curve of white at the base of the upper mandible, and a chin that was almost white. A few brownish streaks on the gray breast might indicate that the singer was an immature bird. No spots were evident in the wings. In this respect he differs from the Townsend's solitaire; and in the song, which far exceeds that of the latter, both in tonal quality and in variety. Later, I heard the song in the open at Chapultepec Castle, and saw the bird in flight; and again, from the court of a business block in the city. Here they told me again that it was a "sensontle."

Ten days in Acapulco yielded many birds, with American common names yet to be found for most of them. Acapulco has approximately the latitude of Rangoon (17 degree s North) and the longitude of Uvalde, Texas (1000. degrees West). The older part of the town was built at sea level, on a crescent surrounding the bay; but new Acapulco is capped by a meteorological station, 500 feet above the city and the sea. Native jungle, alternating with lawns and orchards of tropical fruit trees, affords friendly environment for many types of birds.

Small flocks of white ibis or pink flamingo flew across the peninsula in v-formation. A pair or two of brown pelicans fished around the pier of Hotel Moramar. Hummingbirds were numerous along the jungle paths, but only two were positively identified. The



"Esmeralda", (*Saucerothia beryllia motus mexicanus*) is green of head, breast, and back, with a gray throat and under-tail coverts. Wings, tail, and bill are rufous brown. There is no eye marking; and the sexes are alike. It was seen wherever field trips led.

The squirrel Cuckoo, a tawny and gray bird of roadrunner-length, surprised me on Meteorological Hill one morning, in level, silent flight across the jungle path. The tail, measuring half his length, had the cuckoo thumb-marks of white (grey) underneath. A flight of five thick-billed parrots, who rose, chattering, near the path and flew rapidly from view, afforded another thrill. Quail calls came up from the underbrush; and presently two were flushed. They were of mottled brown and tan, with crests that stood up like those of the scaled quail, which are of about the same size as these "Bolenchaca."

There was a wren that sang all day long in Acapulco. It was larger than the Carolina wren, but marked similarly. "Po-teet'-it, Po-teet'-it" was the common phrasing of his cheerful song. Derby Flycatchers were noisy and handsome and frequent in occurrence. There was one of the Ash-throated species down there too. Cardinals were numerous. There was a lively buff-and black bunting (?) that sang from telephone wire perch, much as does the indigo or the lazuli bunting, and was about as commonly seen as these are in their habitat.

On a memorable trip to Pie de la Questa, one of the out-lying beaches of Acapulco, we saw wood ibises, American herons, and a pair of green herons, the latter feeding flown young along the laguna shore. An anhinga was fishing in the laguna, and a brown-backed swallow was skimming over it. Several Acapulco nighthawks, very tawny, were feeding above the fields. There were flocks of incas and grackles and Brewer's blackbirds. Black Vultures were very numerous.

Three Audubon's caracara were seen from the bus on the return trip to Taxco. All were within about forty miles of Acapulco. One of these was devouring something in the road; the others were perched near by. Chapultapac Boske was the locale visited in Mexico City; and of the three mornings spent there, two were cut short by showers. Among the robins that fed on the sward was a pair of rufous-pallid "Primavera" (*Turdus rufus-pallidus*). Breast and back were alike rufous. The flight-feathers, head, and belly were of blue-gray hue. The bill was nearly white, the iris brown, the feet light-brown. A buffy eye-ring, not marked, and the characteristic robin of our own land.

Three pairs of veeries were feeding and singing in the Park, at least one of the pairs feeding young concealed near the walk. A flock of bright-hued, short-billed birds appeared to be building nests in pendant clusters of usnea-like moss that draped the boughs of a dead tree near the path. Males were egg-yolk yellow beneath, and females, lemon yellow; all had patches of blue on the head. They worked much as weaver birds do in captivity. The "Esmeralda" poised his green-and-brown length before my face one brief moment and flew on. From a tree above a caretaker's home near the castle came the unforgettable sone of the "Sensontle."

Lena McBee.