



THE ROADRUNNER

PUBLISHED BY THE EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB

LENA McBEE, EDITOR

NUMBER 31

APRIL-MAY, 1949

THE HERALD CRANE

I cannot trace in the noonday glare
Thy regal flight, O crane!
From the leaping might of the fiery light
Mine eyes recoil in pain,
But on my ear, thine echoing cry
Falls like a bugle strain.

Hamlin Garland.

RECENT MEETINGS

With Carl W. Buchheister, a group of Bird Club members and Audubon Junior Club leaders enjoyed a bird walk and picnic dinner at the Country Club, February 20. Mr. Buchheister spoke to the group after dinner about the purposes of the National Audubon Society, of which he is the Vice President. It was gratifying to see a few chestnut-backed bluebirds on the golf course and a cedar waxwing or two. In the desert nearby were seen a few sage sparrows and a verdin. A small vanguard of bank swallows had returned to their cliff colony on the Rio Grande, establishing the earliest record, by a week, that we have for them thus far. Half a dozen tree swallows were noted above Canutillo and as many long-billed dowitchers. Besides these, some thirty species were noted on the trip.

A record crowd attended the Audubon Screen Tour, WILD LIFE DOWN EAST, which Carl W. Buchheister presented in the El Paso High School Auditorium on the evening of February 21. It was a sparkling representation of New England wildlife.

Wednesday, March 16, brought Allen D. Cruickshank to El Paso, in TRAILS FOR THE MILLIONS, which shows the wildlife of New York City and its environs. Few of our screen tour lectures have been more beautiful, or more varied in appeal.

The Bird Club held its regular February meeting at the Technical School Auditorium, Tuesday, February 1, at 7:30 P.M. George Burrows was the comentator for a film showing scenes from the Audubon Nature Camp at Kerrville, Texas, last summer. Questions asked at the end of the picture indicate a lively interest in the camp on the part of El Pasoans.

APRIL MEETINGS

Father Link's screen tour film and lecture "Alluring Alaska" concludes the season's series on April 22. (see p. 3.)

Bird walks for Junior and Senior groups complete the roster of April meetings. (see p. 3.)

A bird walk was enjoyed by the Audubon Junior Club at Ascarate Park on April 2, 1949. A marsh wren, a song sparrow, and an unusually early yellow-throat made interesting records. Among the less common ducks observed were blue-winged teal, cinnamon teal, redhead and ruddy.

NEW MEMBERS

Members recently added to the Bird Club are Judge Ballard Coldwell, Jennie Camp, Frances Camp, Mrs. W. R. Hindman, and Perry W. Ditch.

PERSONALITIES AT THE BIRD FOUNTAIN
(Harriet McGuire)

Animals have always reminded people of other people. The fables prove it. But birds have human characteristics, too, as anyone who watches them will find.

Just see the robin! He slops over to the birdbath all loose-feathered and grumpy. If so much as a sparrow or junco remains when Robin wants a drink, he jumps about, testily making jabs at the smaller birds until the last one departs. Then he dawdles there, a sip now and then, not at all thirsty-acting. He is just an ill-mannered grouch.

Not so are the Mexican bluebirds. They are so friendly and considerate, drinking steadily together, making room for the late-comers. They may be crowded so closely that all space seems used. But if another bird, even a tiny white-crowned sparrow wants in, twenty bluebirds slide over. There is neighborly cooperation. They come in quietly, drink orderly, then calmly fly off.

The cedar waxwings sit straight and still in the ash tree. They look as if they have been placed there, and never expect to move again. Suddenly one starts for a drink; then all forty of them flutter over the bowl looking for all the world like a bouquet of winging birds. Only a handful drink; then they all fly back to the same place, once more sitting stiff and immobile. They go through this rite again and again. It must be a drill they are practicing, for many participate, but few drink. They are actors playing a part.

The Gambel's sparrows and juncos get along very well. They come for drinks or a bath. Two or three will be bathing while a half dozen do their drinking, getting splashed all the while. Some sit and meditate while others drink and leave as if they had much to do, and not a moment to lose. A pretty sight it is to see sparrows and juncos in with the bluebirds, all drinking. The bluebirds are such sweet folk.

Sometimes a couple of English sparrows start a bath together, then end it in a fight. They get very wet in the struggle. Two naughty boys couldn't be ruder.

The black phainopepla slips in like a shadow, takes a quick sip or two, and then goes as silently as he came. He often sits in the nearby honeysuckle waiting his turn at the fountain. He is an aloof sort of person. Once two came together but they acted as if they had never met.

The mocking bird decides that he is thirsty only when he sees the other birds enjoying their drinks. He doesn't have to peck them away, for they get out fast when they see him coming. Even without a bird in sight, he sits there, beligerantly looking about. He stays and stays long after he has had a drink. Sometimes we chase him away. He is the neighborhood bully, the beautiful scamp.

The blue grosbeak flies from bush to bush, hunting up and down the stems usually not more than two feet above the ground. He has a curious way of ascending the 5-foot level of the bird bowl. He leaves the jasmine and flies obliquely past the water, landing on the honeysuckle at the fence. He stays aslant (one foot higher on the vine than the other), darts back again past the fountain, and comes to rest atop the spirea, gaining a little altitude. Past the fountain he goes again -- this time reaching the lowest branch of an ailanthus. After a careful survey he alights on one of the supports of the bowl. After a short stay on the iron rod, aslant as usual, he flutters to the water above. He is a brilliant blue streak as he flies through the sunlight, a lively bird minding his own business.

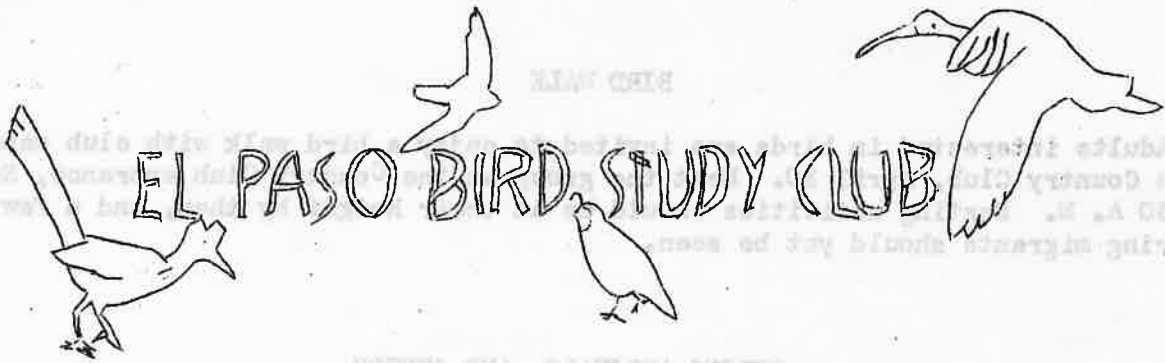
Some Cooper's tanagers nested in the yard. Every afternoon about 5 a female came for her bath. She always had a distinctive bath talk, so we could time her. She bathed long and energetically day after day all summer. No one intruded while she was there. She was so large that she quite filled the bowl. After thoroughly drenching herself, she flew to the ash tree where she straightened every feather before going on her way again.

Many of the birds must drink from the chicken pans. At any rate, they are not seen at the fountain. Nuthatches and brown creepers go down and up, respectively, the ash tree but never show their manners at the bowl. Towhees were busily scratching through the brown leaves but didn't seem to want a drink. The redbreasted housefinches need washing more than drinking. At any time, almost, they were splashing or being chased away by the robins or mockingbirds.

The doves are always interesting, drinking in pairs like horses at a trough. The redwinged blackbirds sit high in the trees to do their o - ka leee singing, but must drink in the drainage canals where they nest.

Thirsty winter and early spring birds are seen more often than the summer residents. After the irrigation starts, water is everywhere, but the bird bath and fountain has its customers all year.

We sit quietly behind the porch screens watching the little fellows of the feathered world. We all agree that birds have human characteristics, or should we say man has bird manners? We even supply them with man-invented conversations to make a talkie out of the ever-changing bird pictures.



EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB

THE ROADRUNNER

PUBLISHED BY THE BIRD STUDY CLUB OF EL PASO

Alluring Alaska

The Rev. George M. Link of the Trail Rangers, of the Scouts, of Notre Dame and Western Reserve is aptly called today's successor to Marquette, Loyola and the rest. He will lead you through undreamed-of wonders as you explore with him that last frontier of ours, Alluring Alaska.

Next Season's Screen Tours

The Audubon Screen Tours will be presented here for the fourth consecutive season by the El Paso Bird Study Club, the El Paso Public Schools, and the National Audubon Society.

The screen tours bring to El Paso the finest natural history lecturers, who personally present the best in all-color outdoor motion pictures on a variety of wildlife subjects. These programs are presented in the interest of wildlife protection, wise use of natural resources and conservation education.

The following is a tentative program for the coming year:

- Oct. 24 -- Bert Harwell: Canada West
- Dec. 5 -- Alice and Harold Allen: Sounds of the Sageland
- Jan. 21 -- Walter J. Breckenridge: Paul Bunyan Country
- Feb. 22 -- Howard Cleaves: Animals Unaware
- Apr. 22 -- Alexander Sprunt: From Coast to Coast

El Paso High School will continue to be host to these screen tours. All programs will begin at 7:30 p.m. Season tickets will be \$1.75 for adults and 75¢ for students.

EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB IN ACTION

1. Assisted by the Public Schools of El Paso, the club brings the AUDUBON SCREEN TOURS, and publishes a mimeographed quarterly, THE ROADRUNNER.
2. It compiles a checklist of local birds.
3. It takes an annual Christmas census of local birds for the National Audubon Society.
4. It makes reports to THE SEASON, which is published by the National Audubon Society and the Fish and Wildlife Service.
5. It assists in the organization of Audubon Junior Clubs in El Paso and vicinity.
6. It assists youth groups, such as Boy Scouts, in studying birds.
7. It sponsors the ornithological collection at the College of Mines.
8. It maintains the Jackman Memorial collection in the Research Department of the Public Library
9. It furnishes leaders for adult and junior bird walks.

Joint your local club and assist in its program. Fill out the blank below and give it to the treasurer at the membership table, or mail it to her.

Miss Mary Belle Keefer, Treasurer
El Paso Bird Study Club
3027 Federal Street, El Paso, Texas

I enclose \$1.00 for a year's membership (Roadrunner included) in the El Paso Bird Study Club.

Your name _____

Street _____ City _____ State _____

BIRD WALK

Adults interested in birds are invited to enjoy a bird walk with club members at the Country Club, April 30. Meet the group at the Country Club entrance, Saturday at 7:30 A. M. Nesting activities should be at their height by then, and a few lingering migrants should yet be seen.

SPRING ARRIVALS, AND OTHERS

By the time March gives way to April, changes in our bird population are in evidence. Changes are retarded this year because of a cool, inhospitable spring season. A few are noted here.

As early as February 20, club members saw bank swallows at the site of their yearly nesting colony. A few tree swallows were also seen; and by March, both barn swallow and violet-green swallow had arrived. White-throated swifts were seen at Hueco Tanks, March 6.

A flock or two of long-billed dowitchers were seen at Canutillo through March, and on March 1, Miss Keefer saw a few snow geese at Picacho Dam. Among the "Peeps" now to be seen along the river are the least, western, and semi-palmated sandpipers. Mrs. Conway and her Boy Scouts saw avocets, March 28, and a solitary black-necked stilt was noted about the same time. Flocks of pipits are commonly seen along the levee, with lark bunting and a few horned lark. Migrant flocks of meadowlark fly up, and their song is delightful.

Bluebirds did not remain with us this winter. They must have gone through, unobserved, along with many of our common sparrows and towhees, in search of warmer latitudes. All are now returning, both mountain and chestnut-backed bluebirds, having been lately seen. The number of towhees, sparrows, and Audubon's warblers, still small, is obviously increasing. A few sparrows that were abundant through the winter are still here, among these the Gambel's Brewer's, Baird's, sage, and song sparrows.

Mr. and Mrs. George Burrows observed a nesting golden eagle at Hueco Tanks, March 6. Known to nest there before the war, but missed since then, this eagle was regarded as a boon.

Unusual finds this spring follow: A pair of golden-crowned kinglets were seen in Memorial Park by Miss Keefer, March 13; an albino English sparrow was seen for one afternoon at 3813 Memphis Street, in a normally marked flock; a large flock of house finches that fed along the levee included two individuals marked with yellow, instead of red.

WITH OUR CORRESPONDENTS

Marie Schneider sends a letter of thanks from Germany, to acknowledge a CARE package, sent by the Bird Club. We quote:

"Before yesterday I returned from the Russian Zone, where I spent my holidays, and found here in Ludwigsburg the gift from America. It is very difficult to tell in English my feelings, seeing this big package from you.....I cannot tell what I like best of your parcel.....It is as if you had suspected that I was sorry that I had not a warm coat, but now I feel like a queen with this wonderful coat from you. And the red costume and the blue blouse and skirt, both are right for my figure, and I am so happy for your generosity....."

"Since the last years I am working by Dr. Schuz, who is nearly in Germany the best ornithologist.....In May, 1948, I had a fine trip to Radolfzell where we have our Vogelwarte. At this time we had a great meeting under the manage of Dr. Schuz. Besides the very interesting speeches of well-known ornithologists, we made fine out-door observations. We saw the red-crested pochard (*Netta rufina*), the common heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Montagu's harrier and Hen Harrier a.s.o.; first of my life, I saw the Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*). Very nice was a visitation of a *Larus ridibundus* colony. Now here in Ludwigsburg we bring the Great Tit (*parus major*) with colored bands for ecological studies. Last summer I helped to band barn-owls (*Tyto alba*) on church towers."

JUNIOR ROADRUNNER

By Marguerite Wright

THE BULLOCK ORIOLE

A long row of cottonwoods bordered the valley highway. Two bicycles leaned against the trunk of one great tree, while their riders sprawled in its shade. Across the road a brimming irrigation ditch supplied life-giving water to a thirsty market garden.

Carlos Lamar ran his fingers through his damp red curls and turned on one elbow to watch his younger brother. Tommy, his yellow head cradled on his arm, was tickling a fat beetle with a blade of grass. From the corner of his eye he caught a flash of color. Softly he whistled.

"Look over your head, to the right," he said.

Careful to make no quick movement, Carlos eased his head back on his folded sweater and raised his eyes to the spot Tommy was watching. On the tip of a branch a beautiful bird was swinging. The boys could see the long black throat patch and line through the eye against the bright orange of the cheeks and breast. The tail was lined with yellow. He uttered a loud piping note, followed by the clear, sweet song of the Bullock oriole. Nearby the female was working on her nest.

"What a break!" murmured Carlos, reaching for his binoculars. I have often looked at one of those hammocks and wondered how a bird could do such a perfect job of weaving. They must be wonderful architects."

The male darted away. Mrs. Oriole did not pause in her work.

"She is not nearly so pretty as her mate. Greenish gray above with yellowish white underparts. She has two white wing bars, while the male's wings are black and white. She seems to be making the nest entirely of horse hair. Watch her use her sharp bill to push a loop through, then hop inside to pull it tight and push the end out again." Carlos handed the glasses to Tommy.

"I can see her through the mesh. There isn't any bottom in the nest yet. Why doesn't she go on through the tube instead of turning around to pop out of the top? Do you suppose she will make it any longer before she weaves the bottom? Will she get it finished today, do you suppose?"

"I don't know the answer to half your questions, Tommy. I think she will add another inch or so before she closes the bottom. Did you ever look at the oriole nests the bird lady has in her collection? One weighs less than a half ounce. One is nine inches long and about five inches in diameter. The prettiest one is made of human hair."

"Wherever did the birds get the material?" Tommy asked in surprise.

"The nest was hanging in a tree on the grounds of an Indian school in New Mexico. The Indian girls have long, black hair, and they like to sit out in the sun to comb it. I suppose the birds found the hairs on the lawn. Here comes the male again with more material, and we'd better get going, too."

The boys dusted their clothes and mounted their bicycles.

The next nest they spied was made of courser material. "This must be her first nest," Carlos thought. "It isn't very well woven. The Bird Lady says the oriole does not inherit the ability to build skillfully, and often the first nests are so poorly anchored that they fall or are blown down. There is a bird on the branch above. Take a good look and tell me what you see."

Tommy peered through the glasses. "It looks like a female, except that it has a black throat patch. You look."

"It is a young male, about a year old. He has not got his adult plumage yet. He won't until his second year. Let's ride to the end of this row of trees."

"Good idea. Maybe we can find another pair."

They had ridden only a few rods when another oriole flashed across the road and perched so they could see his back. The crown of his head, neck, and back were a gleaming black, as were the center and edge of the tail.

"The nest must be near," Carlos whispered.

"I see it!" Tommy lifted the binoculars. "This one is finished and the female is sitting on the eggs, or maybe laying one. Do you suppose we could peek inside if she leaves soon? It isn't half as high as the other one."

"No, Tommy. Orioles are careful to build well out of the reach of enemies. Even if we had a ladder, there is nothing to lean it against. And those slender branches would not support the weight of a cat, much less a fatty like you."

"I wouldn't want to disturb the nest or frighten the birds. The farmers like them, don't they?"

"Yes, because they are so pretty and because they feed on insects from their gardens and orchards. Everyone is glad to see them return from their winter in Mexico and Central America."

"The wind is coming up," Tommy exclaimed. "Look at that cradle swing! Do you suppose it will have a wreck? Those are slender twigs it is hanging from."

"The babies seem to like the swaying motion the nests have with each breath of wind. This mother does not seem disturbed. It would take a howling blast to blow it down, I imagine."

"I'll bet Mother Goose was thinking of an oriole nest when she wrote:

'Rock-a-bye, baby, in a tree top...

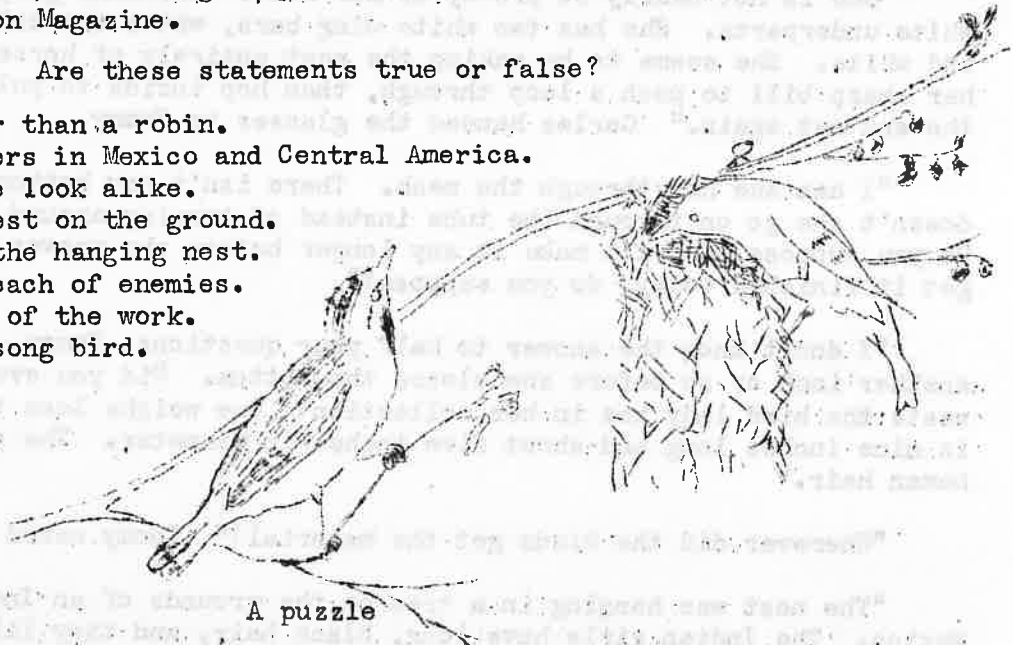
When the wind blows, the cradle will rock,'

But I do hope no boughs will break until after all the young are ready to fly, don't you, Carlos?"

Note to Teachers: You will find a good picture of the Bullock oriole in the January-February (1949) Audubon Magazine.

Are these statements true or false?

1. An oriole is larger than a robin.
2. It spends the winters in Mexico and Central America.
3. The male and female look alike.
4. They build their nest on the ground.
5. The female weaves the hanging nest.
6. It is out of the reach of enemies.
7. The male does most of the work.
8. He is a beautiful song bird.



A puzzle

- O - He eats insects from garden and _____.
- R - The cradle will _____ in the wind.
- I - One nest was nine _____ long.
- O - The female wove the material in and _____.
- L - She had _____ to be skillful by experience.
- E - She was making the nest _____ of horse hair.

Write the first letter of each word represented and you will have a common name for the oriole.



Key:
 1. false - true - false - false
 2. orchard - rock - inches - out - true - true - false - true
 3. Hang - nest - learn - entirely

"Oh, Anita!" exclaimed Carol. "There was a jet-black bird on the telephone wire. It had a crest. Do you know what it could have been?"

"Oh, dear, no. I didn't see it. How large was it?"

"Not quite as long as a redwing, and thinner. There was not a bit of color on it. Even the bill and feet were black."

The Martin car was speeding through farm lands and towns of the Mesilla Valley. Fields of tiny cotton plants and waving alfalfa stretched on either side. To the right the pipes of the Organ Mountains touched the cloudless sky. Finally the valley narrowed. Grazing land and bosque flew past.

"Mr. Martin, please stop!" called Carol. "I want to look at that black bird on the wire at the left."

Mr. Martin pulled the car off the pavement. "Why, it is a phainopepla," he said. "I have seen them through California and down in Texas. Take a look through my binoculars, Carol."

"How beautiful!" Carol murmured. "You look now, Anita. Do you see that bright red eye? And look at that perky crest."

"Phainopepla means 'Shining Robe'," Mrs. Martin remembered. "Do you think that it is a good name for this bird?"

"If you both have had a good look, we will be rolling along," Mr. Martin said. "We should be at Radium Springs by twelve."

As his foot pressed the starter, the phainopepla spread its wings and flew away. "Well, look at that!" exclaimed Anita. "There was a large white patch on each wing. The white didn't show when it was perched on the wire."

"It would not look well for a bird dressed in a 'shining robe' to have patches showing, would it?" giggled Carol.

All too soon the car left the highway, crossed a bridge, and stopped in front of the hotel. The Bird Lady hurried out to greet her friends. When she turned to the girls, they told her of the phainopepla.

"Wonderful," she smiled. "After lunch I shall show you a phainopepla's nest. It is just a short way up the river."

"There's a phainopepla," the Bird Lady said that afternoon. "Look at the tip of the dead branch on the second tree from the fence."

"But that bird isn't a glossy black. It is a dirty brown, or brownish gray," Carol protested. "It does have a crest, however."

The bird darted out from its perch, snapped up a flying insect, and returned to the same twig.

"It acts like a flycatcher," observed Anita. "And I didn't see any white wing patches when it flew, either."

"What excellent birders you girls are!" exclaimed the Bird Lady. "This is the female phainopepla. Except for her trim shape and her crest, she does not resemble the male. We notice her less often, because she is not conspicuous. These birds do not really belong to the flycatcher family, but because they catch their food on the wing, just as the flycatchers do, they are often called silky flycatchers. Her nest is right under that bunch of mistletoe in the mesquite at the left."

"I see it," whispered Carol. "And there is a black head and crest sticking up and a long black tail. Why, it is the male phainopepla! Whatever is he doing on that nest?"

The Bird Lady smiled. "I watched this nest being built. And do you know who did it? The gentleman who is keeping the eggs warm! He chose the site, and brought the twigs and fibers. He tied the materials together with hair and bits of spider web. He would sit on the platform and twist and turn to shape the nest, and often singing as he worked. He lined it down from last year's seed pods."

"Where was Mrs. Phainopepla?" asked Anita.

"Oh, she came now and then to inspect the work, but I never saw her place as much as one twig. Sometimes she scolded him with a harsh 'Scrat' note. But most of the time she was not to be seen. I imagine she was away sightseeing, or visiting her friends. When the nest was complete, she laid the eggs. Now they share the duty of keeping them warm. When they hatch, both parents will feed the young."

The female flew away, bobbing along with a zig-zag, irregular flight, as phainopeplas have short wings. When she returned, she circled, then dropped down beside the nest. Her mate was off and away in a flash.

"I wonder if he has gone to get a drink," Anita said to herself. "Look, here he comes back with his wing patches shining."

The bird settled on the very twig his wife had used in watching for insects. With a flip of his tail, he uttered a clear, beautiful note.

He sounds like a robin," Anita commented.

It was a low warbling song, full of notes jumbled together, the tones as musical as a flute. His crest was tilted forward. The sun shone on his slender, gleaming body, giving it a greenish sheen.

"Now come," the Bird Lady invited when the song was ended. "I can show you some babies already out of the nest. They are two weeks old, but not strong enough to fly yet." She stopped in a little thicket.

Three babies were huddled on the thorny branches of a mesquite. "Oh, aren't they the sweetest little things," crowed Anita. "They look exactly like their mother, even to the crests."

"Except that they have very short tails, like all baby birds," noticed Carol.

Mrs. Phainopepla flew in with an insect which she pushed into the open mouth of one of the babies. The others noisily scolded for their share. The male darted up with a grasshopper.

"Do they eat anything besides bugs?" one of the girls asked.

"They are fond of berries like mistletoe, juniper and mulberries. In some sections of the West they eat elderberries and pepper berries.

"What a wonderful experience," Mrs. Martin sighed, looking back at the first phainopepla, still perched on the dead twig. "Such dignity and charm and grace. And what a lovely song he sang for us. I shall never forget the aristocratic phainopepla and his black velvet robe."

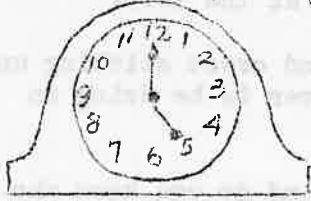


(a) Fill the blanks with four-letter words:
 The male phainopepla
 is the only black _____ with a crest.
 catches insects on the _____.
 has a white patch on each _____.
 likes to do the work of his _____.
 has short wings and a long _____.
 sings a low sweet _____.
 builds a saucer-shaped _____.
 has a black bill and _____.
 has two bright red _____.

(b) Find words in the story which are the opposites of those in the list below:

- | | |
|----------|-------------|
| 1. white | 6. straight |
| 2. plump | 7. regular |
| 3. dull | 8. weak |
| 4. clean | 9. right |
| 5. short | 10. praise |

(c) Write down the names of the objects pictured above the line. Then cross out the letters which spell the objects below the line. The letters that are left spell something you see on the phainopepla.



(a) bird, wing, mate, tall, song, nest, feet, eyes, robe.
 (b) 1. black, 2. slim (slender), 3. bright (shining, glossy, flashing, gleaming)
 4. dirty, 5. long, 6. zig-zag, 7. irregular, 8. strong, 9. left, 10. scold
 (c) c(lock) r(ace) E(den) s(tar) t(horn)