



EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB

THE ROADRUNNER

PUBLISHED BY THE BIRD STUDY CLUB OF EL PASO, TEXAS

LENA McBee, Chairman

November, 1945

IN MEMORIAM

BABER

Belated intelligence has reached us of Mrs. Alta Baber's death, May 5, 1945. She was an esteemed and ardent member of the club. A friend who attended her at the hospital speaks of reading her the issues of THE ROADRUNNER, to the end of her illness. The interment was in East Texas.

MILLER

A friend and benefactor of the club, Mrs. Thomas D. Miller, departed this life, Nov. 13, 1945. The maternal grandmother of the late Tom M. Kirksey, she was advising and aiding financially, to the last, in erection of a memorial to her beloved grandson at the El Paso Centennial Museum.

THE OCTOBER MEETING

The club met at Mrs. H. D. Slater's home, October 8, 1945. Setting aside the program planned, the club devoted itself to the business of committee reports and to planning for the course of lectures soon to be presented by General G. Ralph Meyer. The time was set for the evenings of October 29, November 5, and November 12; and the place, the College of Mines.

Officers were elected as follows: Chairman, Mrs. Lena McBee; Vice-Chairman, Mrs. J. Owen Allen; Corresponding Secretary, Mrs. Louise Wilmarth; and Recording Secretary and Treasurer, Miss Emily Barlow.

On October 3, the committee in charge of arrangements for the proposed series of lectures on Bird Life, met at the home of Mrs. H. D. Slater. Major General G. Ralph Meyer outlined the content of his lectures. Mrs. J. Owen Allen presided at the meeting.

THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the El Paso Bird Study Club will be held at the Museum Lecture Room of the College of Mines, beginning at 7:30 P.M., December 5, 1945. Dues will be collected and new members presented at the business meeting. Plans will be made for the Christmas Bird Count.

At 8:00 P.M. Dr. A. L. Hershey, Associate Biologist of the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, will show a short film on the golden eagle. This will be followed by a talk on "The Birds' World of Tomorrow."

NEW MEMBERS

New club members are Mr. Royal Jackman, Mrs. Sinia L. Rutland, Mrs. John G. Melton, Mrs. H. Harriet McGuire, and Mrs. C. V. Light.

GENERAL MEYER - STUDENT OF BIRDS

General G. Ralph Meyer, whose account of an unusual nesting ground appears in this issue, recently concluded a series of lectures on "BIRD LIFE" before a responsive audience at the College of Mines. Thirty-five of his own bird paintings were used as background for his talks, with two cases of birds' eggs. These had been selected from his large collection, which are destined to become the property of the Smithsonian Institute.

General Meyer plans to settle here when he retires from the Army. He hopes to make an intensive study of bird life along the Rio Grande from El Paso to the Eloquent Butte Dam. He is convinced that the vast Southwest, which is comparatively unexplored ornithologically, holds much that is of interest to science.

NEWS OF FOLKS

Mrs. Ethel Wiggs, whose work in organizing Junior Audubon groups wherever she taught was outstanding, has moved to California.

Major I. M. Epstein, first President of the El Paso Bird Study Club, is now a civilian in medical practice here. We await with interest his account of birding in Europe.

MY FIRST SUMMER'S BIRDING

My new-found interest in birds is the result of being assigned last Spring to teach the Low Third grade, in which a unit of El Paso Birds is required. How grateful I am to Mrs. Lena McBee and Mrs. Marguerite Wright for their enthusiastic presentation of the material in our teaching aids! As a consequence, the door to a new world opened for me.

I have been birding seven times in the vicinity of El Paso, in company with Mrs. J. Owen Allen and others; and three times independently in the Ruidoso Area. All trips were made during the summer months. In the two following lists of birds, a total of eighty, I have given the number of times I saw each species. I omitted from the Ruidoso list any that I had previously named on the El Paso list. Ruidoso is 135 miles north of El Paso, in the Sacramentos, at an altitude of about 7,000 feet.

Vicinity of El Paso: Treganza's heron, 3; American egret, 3; snowy egret, 2; green heron 4; black-crown night heron, 1; American bittern, 2; mallard, 1; New Mexico duck, 1; green-winged teal, 1; turkey vulture, 3; marsh hawk, 1; desert sparrow hawk, 1; Texas bob white, 1; Gambel's quail, 3; American coot, 3; killdeer, 3; spotted sandpiper, 1; greater yellow-legs, 1; least sandpiper, 1; western sandpiper, 1; avocet, 3; western mourning dove, 1; Inca dove, 1; California cuckoo, 1; road-runner, 2; Texas nighthawk, 1; black-chinned hummingbird, 4; rufous hummingbird, 1; red-shafted flicker, 3; cactus woodpecker, 1; Arkansas kingbird, 7; ash-throated flycatcher, 1; black phoebe, 3; Say's phoebe, 1; little flycatcher, 1; western woodpecker, 2; bank swallow, 1; barn swallow, 5; northern cliff swallow, 1; Lesser cliff swallow, 1; long-crested jay, 1; white-necked raven, 1; Arizona verdin, 1; western mockingbird, 6; white-rumped shrike, 5; western yellow-throat, 1; long-tailed chat, 3; pileolated warbler, 1; western meadowlark, 6; yellow-headed blackbird, 2; Nevada redwing, 6; orchard oriole, 1; Bullock's oriole, 1; great-tailed grackle, 2; cowbird, 1; western tanager, 1; Cooper's tanager, 1; western blue grosbeak, 5; English sparrow, 7; house finch, 7; canyon towhee, 1; lark bunting, 1; western lark sparrow, 1; desert sparrow, 1; western chipping sparrow, 1.

Vicinity of Ruidoso: Violet-green swallow, 3; barn swallow, 1; purple martin, 3; mountain bluebird, 3; mountain chickadee, 1; Rocky Mountain nuthatch, 1; black-eared nuthatch, 1; western house wren, 1; western robin, 3; Audubon's warbler, 3; Grace's warbler, 3; Brewer's blackbird, 1; Arkansas goldfinch, 3; red-backed junco, 1;

However, names and numbers do not tell the complete story. The pride I felt, on my initial trip, in being the first to locate an orchard oriole (a fourth record here for it); the satisfaction in finally seeing the elusive yellow-throat, whose song I had already learned well; the chagrin in failing to identify a faithful twilight visitor at Ruidoso; the delight in watching the graceful flights of hundreds of swallows over the river; all these experiences have filled a need for a hobby -- a hobby that is different and fascinating.

Of universal interest to bird students is Emily Barlow.

Of universal interest to bird students is this item from the current NEWS-WEEK: Died; Dr. Frank M. Chapman, 81, leading American ornithologist; in New York, November 15. Associated for more than fifty years with the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Chapman was the first to display birds in their natural habitats, a practice later adopted by many museums.

AUDUBON'S HERMIT THRUSHES HERE AGAIN

Visiting Ascarate Park after the recent cold snap, Mary E. Harper and Major George Burrows reported seeing several hermit thrushes and a goodly assortment of ducks.

768 species of birds are known to live on the continent of North America.

AN UNUSUAL NESTING GROUND

Among the many islands and islets of the Gallapagos is a small extinct volcano known as "Daphne Major." It is roughly circular in shape with a diameter of 300 yards. The crater is in the approximate center of the island, the highest point of the crater lip, about 400 feet above sea-level, being on the western and the lowest on the eastern side. The crater floor is level volcanic sand and is about 200 feet below the highest point and 100 feet below the lowest point of the crater lip. The crater walls are precipitous except on the eastern side, where it is possible to make your way from the lip to the floor. The islet slopes from the crater edge in all directions toward the water, ending in abrupt cliffs ranging from 10 to 50 feet in height. These cliffs are rough, jagged lava. The slopes are covered with lava rocks and boulders among which grow some bushes and grass. There are some bushes and small trees on ledges on the inside walls and on the more gentle slopes of the inside of the crater.

The floor of the crater is the exclusive nesting ground for the Blue-footed Booby (*Sula nebouxii*). This floor, roughly circular, is about 50 yards in diameter, and there were probably thirty nests at the time of my visit in November, 1944. Reports from officers who have visited the crater at various times throughout the year indicate that there are always some birds nesting there.

The boobies seemed to be not at all disturbed by our presence. They would remain on the eggs or brooding the young until we were standing over them. Occasionally I would have to move the incubating bird off the eggs with my foot.

There were eggs in varying stages of incubation and young from just out of the shell to half-grown. In most cases there were two eggs, but I did not see a single nest with two young. When first laid, the eggs are greenish blue with a thin chalky film dimming the color. As incubation progresses, this film becomes more opaque and finally obscures all color. The brooding birds seemed not to notice the change when eggs were removed and stones of approximately the same size were put in place. The nest was merely a depression in the sand surrounded by a ring of guano discharged by the incubating bird. As a matter of fact, the sand of the entire crater floor was well cemented with guano deposited through the years.

Leaving the floor of the crater, we explored the rim where we found the Brewster's Booby (*Sula Brewsteri*) nesting to the exclusion of *nebouxii*. Much the same condition as to nests, eggs, and behavior of incubating birds existed here as among the blue-footed species. The eggs were somewhat larger and less elongated but they had the same ground color and the same chalky film cover.

I had been told that the Red-billed Tropic Bird (*Phaethon aethereus*) nested in crevices between and under the rocks on the outer slopes of the crater. One member of the party began searching for them and in a few minutes called me to a nest. The bird was on and was screeching at the intrusion. I reached into the crevice and captured the bird and found the one strikingly beautiful egg which she had been incubating. The bird's plumage is a barred black and white which is unusually handsome. Having found where to look for the nests, I had no difficulty in finding several more. One contained a young bird which was covered with a smoky grey down and most attractive. As soon as I came near a nesting site, the incubating bird would start screeching, so it was easy to find the nests.

My time was limited and I had to return to the boat which had brought me to the island. We skirted the cliff-like shore and on the ledges found the nests and eggs of the Fork-tailed Gull (*Creagrus furcatus*). One nest was on a narrow shelf not more than four feet above the water. Even a moderate sea would have broken over that shelf and must have washed the egg away. The bird is more tern than gull-like in appearance, and the egg closely resembles that of a Royal Tern. The nest was merely a few pieces of wook stems and a bit of grass on the lava shelf.

I did not have time to skirt the entire islet or I would undoubtedly have found several nests of this gull. I had been told that the Oystercatcher also nested on the island, but I did not hear of any beach which would have been a suitable nesting ground.

I spent about two hours on the little islet and left with the full intention of returning for a longer stay in a few months. But when I returned to Panama, two days later, I found that I was to be sent back to the States for duty at Fort Bliss.

Gen. G. Ralph Meyer

WITH OUR CORRESPONDENCE

Dr. Harry C. Oberholser, from Cleveland Museum of Natural History:

"I am wondering if it would be too much trouble to you to make me a list of all the numbers of THE ROADRUNNER that have been issued, so that I may check my file to see if there are any missing, since, of course, I wish to cite the articles in all these numbers in my Texas bibliography ... I am making a final check-up on my Texas manuscript and the publications relating thereto."

Arthur F. Halloran, Yuma, Arizona, Refuge Manager for KOFA AND PRIETA GAME RANGES, IMPERIAL NATIONAL WILD LIFE REFUGE:

"At present the Yuma office of which the writer is the manager administers the four refuges in Arizona under active management of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

WINTER BIRDS OF EL PASO

A list of winter birds of this area was published in the late Tom M. Kirksey's first issue of THE ROADRUNNER, January, 1942. Findings of our Bird Study Club of El Paso has modified the list somewhat, so that it seems desirable to present it here, stressing the species commonly seen and limiting the area to the immediate vicinity of El Paso, at the altitude of about 3,700 feet.

Records of the loon are few, though two have been taken here.

Of the four grebes recorded, the pied-billed is the only common one. Unlike the others, it has no white in the wing.

The white pelican has been observed here in November.

A cormorant was seen on Cement Lake in December, 1943.

Of the four herons found here in winter, the great blue, (Treganza's), and the black-crowned night heron are the most common. American and showy egrets are observed frequently. Least and American bitterns are less conspicuous and seldom recorded.

Canada and Show geese are reported oftener than the blue and the white-fronted.

Of ducks seen along the river in winter, mallards and the New Mexico black are commonest. Gadwall, baldpates, pintail, Green-winged teal, shovellers and American mergansers are numerous. Redheads and canvas-backs are seen infrequently, but lesser scaup, hooded merganser and buffle-head are rare.

Among the hawks, Swainson's, marsh hawk, red-tailed hawk and the desert sparrow hawks are unusually listed. The two rough-legs, prairie falcon, Cooper's and the sharp-shinned are occasionally seen. There are single dates recorded for Richardson's merlin and the aplomado falcon. Turkey vultures are numerous where food is plentiful; and golden eagles soar and feed near the base of the mountains. One or more winter records for the bald eagle and the osprey have been obtained.

Scaled and Gambel's quail and Texas Bob-White are all-year residents; and the ring-necked pheasants are too, in favored localities.

American coot are abundant, but the Florida gallinule is less so.

A flock of five sand-hill cranes was recorded one January in the Country Club district.

Of the rails, the Sora is seen occasionally along irrigation ditches.

Kildeer are listed on almost all field trips. Sometimes we flush up a small flock of Wilson's snipe along the mud flats. Both the greater and the lesser yellow-legs are seen now and then along the river. Flocks of "peeps" that veer and settle shinglingly are likely to be made up of western, least and semi-palmated sandpipers. A small flock of long-billed dowitchers was reported once in December.

Gulls seen here in winter are likely to be the ring-necked. There is one December record for the black tern. (Edited from records of the club.)

To be concluded.

Arthur F. Halloran, Yuma, Arizona, Refuge Manager for KOFA AND PRIETA GAME RANGES, IMPERIAL NATIONAL WILD LIFE REFUGE and HAVASU LAKE NATIONAL WILD LIFE REFUGE:

"At present the Yuma office of which the writer is the manager, administers the four refuges in Arizona under active management of the Fish and Wildlife Service. The two game ranges cover approximately 1½ million acres and were established to help restore the Mexican Bighorn, the same type of sheep as found on the San Andres refuge in New Mexico.

The two river refuges were established as wintering areas for waterfowl on the eastern edge of the Pacific flyway.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mr. Halloran will be recalled as the first administrator of our local refuge, and as an occasional speaker at meetings of the club while he was in charge of the San Andreas National Wile Life Refuge. San Andreas is now managed by Cecil A. Kennedy, recent successor to Charles A. Keefer, who has been transferred to the San Antonio Area.

C. GIDDEN, AMERICAN CONSULATE, Belize, British Honduras:

"Keeping the promise I made on the train trip, I enclose an Ordinance which lists the principal animals and birds found in British Honduras."

"EDITOR'S NOTE: Among the birds listed in this article are these species, known to nest in the United States and Canada:

Hang nests (orioles), owls, finches and buntings, warblers, mockingbirds, swallows and martins, cuckoos, eagles and hawks, trogons, night jars (goatsuckers), ibises, herons and egrets, gulls and terns, grebes and turkeys. Less familiar names are these: Chatterers, puff-birds, motmots, tinamous, blue patridge and red-foot patridge.