



# EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB

# THE ROADRUNNER

PUBLISHED BY THE EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB  
LENA MCBEE, EDITOR NO. 28 APRIL-MAY, 1948  
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## THE BLACKBIRD

The nightingale has a lyre of gold,  
The lark's is a clarion call,  
And the blackbird plays but a boxwood flute,  
But I love him best of all.

--William Ernest Henley

## RECENT MEETING

At a business meeting held February 27 at Mrs. Louise Wilmarth's home the club voted to bring the Audubon Screen Tours to El Paso for the third season. Mrs. G. W. Young and her committee arranged to pack and ship our donation of clothing to CARE. To spread the burden of club projects over an increasing membership circle, several changes were initiated on this occasion or later. These will be given in detail on another page.

The March meeting consisted of a walk to Ascarate Park, in which about twenty members participated. Visitors included Mr. and Mrs. Campbell Loughmiller of Dallas. Seven kinds of duck were seen, including scaup. Other birds noted were Treganza's heron, pied-billed grebe, coot, killdeer, belted kingfisher, white-necked raven, Woodhouse's jay, robin, shrike, red-wing, Gambel's sparrow and song sparrow.

## THE NEXT MEETING

Before the date of the next Audubon Screen Tour, a call meeting will be convened, time and place of which is yet to be decided. All members will be duly notified.

## AUDUBON SCREEN TOURS

Tom and Arlene Hadley delighted a large audience on the rainy evening of February 24 by their beautiful lecture-tour, "Happy Valley". One who attended tells us that scarlet maple leaves still go drifting down her limpid lake of memory and that the Hiawatha Country is evermore hers because of this hour's presentation.

One more tour remains to be seen this season. On April 16, 1948, Dr. Telford H. Work will show "Bits of Land Along the Coast". Come out for an hour of high adventure among sea lions and coastal birds.

## NEW MEMBERS

Miss Carrie Seddon is a new member. Miss Winnie Valverde of Charcas, Mexico, is now on our mailing list, by courtesy of Mrs. Caroline Tyler Bartlett of La Mesa, who again sends five dollars and best wishes for the Club's success. Mrs. Elyn Shaw of La Mesa requests us to send her THE ROADRUNNER for one year.

## WHISTLERS' ASSEMBLY

When Principal W. W. Wimberly invited his fellow bird-club members to attend the assembly at Austin High School last Friday, he offered as stage attraction Dr. Earnest Nickel, superb whistler of Walt Disney fame. House finches in the rafters of the auditorium joined voluntarily in the performance, with as much apparent pleasure in the whistling as was felt by the hundreds of human listeners seated below.

## WITH OUR CORRESPONDENTS

Announcement has been received of the marriage of Miss Emily Barlow, former secretary of the club, to James Allen Perry.

From Miss Sarah Durkee comes a year's subscription to THE BULLETIN, publication of the Massachusetts Audubon Society. The one number thus far received is both informative and exhilarating. Sarah has recently become a member of the Boston Audubon Society.

Dr. Oberholser writes: "I am no longer with the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, but am devoting my efforts entirely to writing and other personal scientific work. Also, I should appreciate having THE ROADRUNNER sent to my new address" (2933 Berkshire Road, Cleveland Heights, Cleveland 18, Ohio).

Dr. Allen R. Phillips writes to acknowledge receipt of back copies of THE ROADRUNNER. He says, in part: "Already I see some very interesting reports, such as the extraordinary occurrence of Pygmy Nuthatches at El Paso."

On the subject of our Bank Swallow Colony on the Refuge, Dr. Phillips writes: "Another thing that surprises me is the nesting of bank swallows in El Paso. They are only transients in Arizona."

Dr. Clayton G. Rudd writes from Minneapolis: "It was a real pleasure to receive THE ROADRUNNER and membership card to your club. The night it arrived, two members of the St. Paul's Bird Club were at our home, and we all enjoyed reading it together. It is a real publication! None of the Twin City Clubs has anything like it and it caused a lot of comment."

Dr. Rudd's question about the sparrow hawk and the answer are given in the following article.

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#### THE LITTLE SPARROW HAWK

My own family is very much interested in the little falcon sparverius--the little sparrow hawk. Any information about its number or distribution in Texas would be very acceptable. We are fortunate that in our fall home in Jackson's Hole, Wyoming they are very numerous and we have been able to study them closely. We captured a pair 2 years ago, brought them back to Minnesota where we set them free. After staying around the yard for 3 weeks they migrated south with the other birds to return early last spring and nest close by on Minnehaha Creek. They knew us and the house at once and would call and drop down within a few feet of our outstretched hands but could never perch on our fingers again. We are interested to know if their numbers increase in your area with the fall migration from the north. We are studying their change from juvenal plumage to adult plumage and are thoroughly enjoying the study.

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#### SPARROW HAWK IN EL PASO

With the exception of two Aprils, no decided increase has been noted in the sparrow population. It would seem that they do not frequent the flyways near by at migration time.

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#### ECHOES OF NOTES FROM TUCSON

Dr. Allan R. Phillips who compiled the "Field Check List of Birds--Tucson Region, Arizona" comments on the article "Notes from Tucson" which appeared in the February-March 1948 issue of THE ROADRUNNER. Concerning the Tucson check list, he writes, "It is a list of species--sub-species not given ordinarily. The next check list on which the A. O. U. Committee is now at work, will provide common names for all full species of North American birds. Until then, it is very difficult to decide what to call them."

Corrections due to a difference in nomenclature (in the "Notes from Tucson" article) should include the omission of the yellow-bellied sapsucker; as the red-naped, a sub-species of the above, is the one commonly found in both El Paso and Tucson. Likewise omit the northern nighthawk, of which species Dr. Phillips says, "The usual (breeding) race is the Western Night hawk." Similarly the slate-colored junco is represented by several sub-species in El Paso. The Tucson sub-species, red-eyed, was omitted, because of a printer's error when the cowbird was referred to. Botteri's sparrow was inadvertently omitted in naming the new birds that El Pasoans may see in Tucson.

--Ruby Allen

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CHAIRMAN: Mrs. J. Owen Allen, 4319 Hueco Street, 5-7542

CORRESPONDING SECRETARY: Mrs. J. C. Wilmarth, 600 Upson Avenue, 2-4314

TREASURER: Miss Mary Belle Keefer, 3027 Federal Street, 5-2583

In commenting on his well known system for the identification of birds Roger Tory Peterson says, "It was that pioneer, Ernest Thompson Seton, who first tried the idea of pattern diagrams as a method of teaching bird identification.

"Those of us who have read Seton's 'Two Little Savages' remember how the young hero, Yan, discovered that different ducks had blotches or streaks that were their own labels or identification tags. He decided that if he could put their labels or 'uniforms' down on paper, he would know these same ducks as soon as he saw them at a distance on the water.

"It was on this idea that my 'Field Guide to the Birds' was based."



## EL PASO BIRD STUDY CLUB

# THE ROADRUNNER

PUBLISHED BY THE BIRD STUDY CLUB OF EL PASO

The El Paso Bird Study Club invites anyone who is interested in bird life to join the club and participate in its activities. If you wish to join, visit the membership table at the back of the room or send a check of one dollar for a year's membership to Miss Mary Belle Keefer, 3027 Federal Street, El Paso.

THE ROADRUNNER, official club bulletin, is included in the membership fee. It publishes interesting findings of birders here and elsewhere, records the activities of the club, and carries timely articles. It includes a supplement, "The Junior Roadrunner", which is used by the El Paso Public Schools.

Club activities, besides publishing the bulletin, include sponsoring the Tom M. Kirksey Memorial at the College of Mines and adding to the May Bailey Jackman Memorial at the Public Library.

The El Paso High School will be host to the Audubon Screen Tours for the coming year. We express our appreciation of the hospitality and whole-hearted cooperation that Austin High School has shown us in the past two years and our thanks to El Paso High for extending these courtesies to us for the 1948-1949 season. The tours will again be sponsored by the El Paso Public Schools and the El Paso Bird Study Club.

The National Audubon Society deserves the whole-hearted cooperation of everyone interested in out-of-door life. This non-profit organization strives to "preserve American wild-life for the betterment of human welfare". The five-dollar membership fee includes the excellent "Audubon Magazine".

The El Paso Garden Club is to be commended for assisting in the establishment of an Audubon Nature Camp at Kerrville, a high section of Texas which possesses an interesting variety of plants and animals. Adults who are interested in nature will find this non-profit camp most enjoyable and instructive.

### NEW COMMITTEES AT WORK

Mrs. J. Owen Allen, Chairman, has appointed the following committees:

Miss Mary Belle Keefer, Bird Walks; Mrs. Lena McBee, Editor of THE ROADRUNNER, assisted by Mrs. Harriet McGuire and Mrs. Marion Jones; Mrs. Marguerite Wright, Junior Roadrunner Editor; Mrs. George Young, Program; Mrs. Stella McClure, Membership; General G. Ralph Meyer, Conservation; Mrs. Louise Wilmarth, Publicity; Mrs. John K. Rose, Tickets; Mrs. Alice Beebe, Lecture Arrangements; Gale Grose, Projectionist; W. W. Wimberly, Museum; Charles R. Loomis, Legal Consultant. Senior Advisors of Junior Audubon Clubs, Grace Rose and Jennie Camp; Junior Advisors, Diane Quigley and Ernest Melancon.

### FIELD NOTES

General G. Ralph Meyer sends in an unusually early record for the Arkansas kingbird, which he saw near El Paso February 22.

The earliest record we have thus far for the tree swallow was made February 29, when four members of the club saw these swallows along the levee near Anthony. Seen at the same time were violet-green and several brown-backed swallows. All were there in greater numbers by March 8, and five white-throated swifts were counted in the air above the levee.

Mary Belle Keefer was the first to discover a flock of 30 singing Lawrence's goldfinches along the levee March 8. A second flock, of 50 or more, was seen later in the day, some twelve miles north of El Paso. We have only two previous records of this black-faced goldfinch.

Comments have been received on the abundance of mountain bluebirds seen around El Paso this winter. Chestnut-backed bluebirds are here too, but are fewer in number than the mountain bluebirds this year.

### THE ROADRUNNER

"To this strange, comical, amazing bird--this trade-mark of the Southwest from which we write, this publication is dedicated. Certainly no denizen of this area is more typical or familiar."

—Tom Miller Kirksey (From the first issue of THE ROADRUNNER—January, 1942)

## A WONDERFUL BIRD IS THE PELICAN!

At both ends of the Panama Canal one of the most common sea birds is the Brown Pelican. He may be seen resting solemnly on spar buoys and piling, diving from heights of twenty to thirty feet into a school of fish, or flying in line, column or echelon formations of three to twenty birds close to the surface of the water. But in whatever activity you may see him he never fails to be interesting. While quite common on the Atlantic side he is abundant on the Pacific side, where he nests in colonies of considerable size in the Pearl Islands as well as on some of the islands closer to the mainland.

Of all the birds I know the Pelican seems to be possessed of the greatest pompous dignity. He perches on a piling and with his head drawn <sup>back</sup> between his shoulders and his huge pouched beak resting on the curve of his neck <sup>the</sup> eyes you with calm disdain as you near his perch. He seems never to be in a hurry and is rarely surprised into sudden movement. All his actions are deliberate and, measured by some standards, many are clumsy. But when the tide is changing and several pelicans are cruising at about thirty feet above the water looking for schools of fish he is keenly alert and can turn in a flash to pounce on some fish which has caught his discerning eye. It is an extremely interesting sight to see several birds feeding thus for each, as he strikes the water, makes a great splash. In diving they hold the wings about halfway open during the descent and I was never able to tell whether or not they closed them completely as they entered the water.

Sometimes the dive is shallow but not infrequently they go completely under the surface. Rarely do they fail to capture the prize for which they dive. Watch an individual pelican in his dive then keep your glasses on him when he comes to the surface. The skinpouch forming the floor of the lower mandible is distended with water and whatever his prey may be. He rests on the water a few seconds while the water is ejected from the pouch. Then he tosses his head, pointing the bill upward, and swallows his prize. Then invariably he waggles his ducklike tail from side to side rapidly several times and prepares to take off to repeat the performance.

Often during the winter season one of the small gulls or terns will alight on the back or head of the pelican as soon as he comes to the surface of the water after his dive. The uninvited guest helps himself to any scraps which may be gleaned.

There have been cases in which the pelican caught a fish too big or too pugnacious for the bird to handle. On one occasion a pelican fishing near a pier on which several of us were fishing seemed to be in great difficulty with what he had captured. He was unable to raise his head and we knew something was wrong. One of us using a casting rod threw a line over the struggling bird and succeeded in bringing him to the shore where we could get hold of him. His bill was heavy with a large fish. He did not fight as we pried his bill open. In his pouch was a four pound red snapper. The fish had fastened his teeth in a fold of the pelican's pouch and could neither be ejected nor swallowed. We removed the fish and released the pelican who moved away still with all his dignity.

It is obvious that the impact when the pelican hits the water from a height of thirty feet must be great. But nature has prepared him for the blow. Under the skin of the breast are many air sacs connected by passages to the bird's lungs. Whether he actually does it or not we cannot tell, but a pelican is capable of taking a deep breath and filling these air sacs with air to give him a pneumatic cushion to absorb the shock of the blow.

When flying in formation pelicans usually remain close to the water, two to fifteen feet above the surface. They fly ponderously with rather slow wing beats. At a distance they look like a formation of low flying planes. On one occasion during the war one of our anti-aircraft observation stations reported several planes flying low over the water. Though the men who made the report insisted that they had not mistaken pelicans for aircraft I always felt certain that they had. On another occasion a radar followed what appeared to be a formation of planes approaching the canal low over the sea in heavy low hanging clouds. When they finally came in sight the formation consisted of about twenty pelicans.

As they fly along in their formation the leader will, at intervals, hold his wings still and glide. When he does this each of the other birds in turn will do the same, resuming the beat of its wings only when the leader gives the signal.

Nesting is normally in colonies, many pairs nesting in the same general area. Sometimes two or more pairs may nest in the same tree. The nest is a rude platform of twigs and branches about 16 to 18 inches in diameter. The lining of the nest usually consists of green leaves from the tree in which the nest is built. The eggs are white usually much discolored. They measure about 3 inches by 1.95 inches, about the size of the egg of a domestic turkey or goose. I had no opportunity to observe the action of young or the care given them by the parents.

But however you observe him, the Brown Pelican is an interesting bird and adds much to the color of the bird life in Panama along the shore line and over the sea off the coast.

—Major General G. Ralph Meyer

# JUNIOR ROADRUNNER

By Marguerite Wright

## TWO EGRETS

Anita Martin was speaking into the telephone. "Carol," she said to her friend, "the Bird Lady has invited us to drive up the river to the pool tomorrow morning. Would you like to go?"

"Indeed I would!" Carol Gray answered. "I have not been out of town this spring. And to go with the Bird Lady! I'll be ready, and have a lunch packed."

The next morning, the Bird Lady turned off the highway onto the river levee. The girls had begun to write a bird list. "English sparrows and house finches and three yellow-headed blackbirds," Carol murmured as she wrote.

"Two meadowlarks and about a hundred red-wings," Anita continued, "but not a robin or a junco."

"They have gone back to the mountains for the summer," the Bird Lady told them, "but there is a Texas nighthawk, and I am sure we will see the swallows. Do I see a large white bird at the edge of the water far ahead?"

"Oh, yes, I see it now. Is it a heron?" Carol asked.

"It belongs to the heron family. We have two white herons here. They are called egrets. The American egret is almost as large as the great blue heron. The smaller one, with a crest, is the snowy egret."

"All herons have long necks and legs. They wade in shallow water looking for fish and frogs," the Bird Lady went on. "The American egret has a long, sharp yellow bill. The little snowy egret has a black bill. Both have black legs, but the snowy has golden slippers."

"I will park the car, and we will try to walk closer. I wonder which of you has the sharper eyes."

Soon the three were slipping quietly through the brush near the water. "He walks very slowly, then he stands still and looks straight ahead," whispered Anita.

"I should think the fish would be afraid of his legs," Carol said.

"Maybe they think they are just old dead sticks," Anita thought.

The bird's head darted to the water and came up with a fish. He gave it a little toss into the air, caught it, and swallowed it, head first. Then he flapped his great wings, rose into the air, and flew up the river. His long neck was curved into an S, and his long legs dangled beyond the short tail.

"I saw its feet; they were black, like its legs!" exclaimed Carol. "No golden slippers. And it is very large, so it is the American egret."

"Good girl!" said the Bird Lady. "Shall we walk around the next curve and see if there are any more herons? We may see the snowy."

The three walked on. Once in a while one whistled softly, to call attention to a bird in bush or tree. Killdeers cried from a sand bar. A marsh hawk aeroplaned to a cottonwood.

"Sh!" warned the Bird Lady. "There they are."

Three snowy egrets were running about in the shallow water at the far end of the sand bar. Heads dipped and rose and dipped again. "They must have found a school of minnows," whispered Anita. "Look, one is taking off. See, he has golden slippers, all right! Do they nest here?"

"Yes, they do," answered the Bird Lady. "I found a rookery, as a nesting colony is called, one July. There were about twenty nests, from six to ten feet above the ground, in a thicket of tamarix, or salt cedar trees. The nests were made of sticks, with no soft lining. In some we saw three to five blue eggs. Some contained ugly, helpless babies. Some were empty, but the young were clinging to limbs nearby, watching the sky for a parent with a fish. One lost his balance and fell. He would have starved if I had not put him back on a nest, as the parents do not descend to the ground, even to recover a fish that has dropped."

The three started back toward the car. "We will drive on to the pool to see if there are any ducks about, and eat our lunch. We will drive back by the Country Club bridge. When we get back to town, we will go past my house and look at the pictures I took of the rookery. I have two or three broken egg shells that had fallen or been thrown from the nests."

"Those silly looking yellow feet, dangling from little snowy's black legs!" laughed Carol, and began to sing:

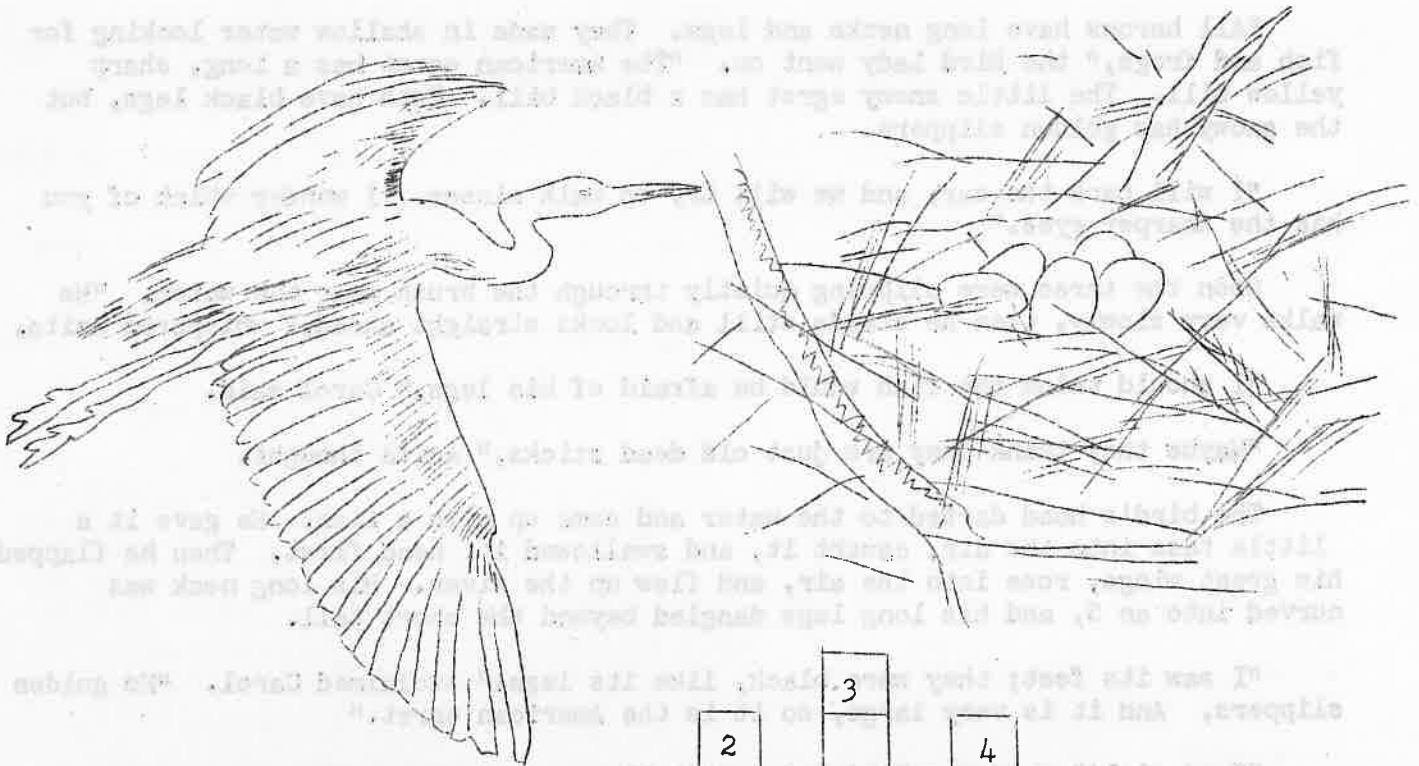
"Snowy's golden slippers, Snowy's golden slippers,  
 Snowy's slippers that he likes to wear,  
 'Cause they look so neat.  
 Snowy's golden slippers, Snowy's golden slippers,  
 Snowy's slippers that he likes to wear  
 Upon his big, big feet."

Which Egret?

#1 American Egret (length, 41 inches)      #2 Snowy Egret (length, 24 inches)

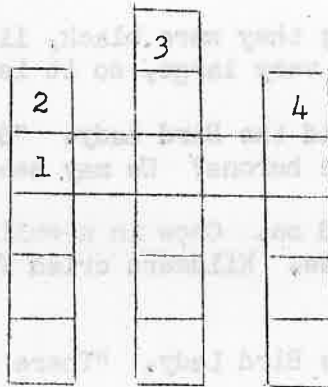
Write 1 or 2 in the blanks.

- The \_\_\_\_\_ wears golden slippers.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ is about the size of the great blue heron.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ has a black bill.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ have white feathers.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ has a yellow bill.



Put words in the squares:

- A family of long-legged wading birds.
- Something for the feet.
- Two white herons.
- The small white heron.



Can you read these sentences?

- WHITEHERONSARECALLEDEGRETS.
- EGRETSWADEINTHESHALLOWWATER.
- EGRETSHAVELONGBLACKLEGS.
- THEYHAVEBEAUTIFULPLUMESINTHENESTINGSEASON.
- THEYEATFISHANDFROGSANDWATERSNAKES.
- THEYMAKENESTSOFSTICKSINTREES.
- EGRETSLAYBLUEEGGS.

The Bird Lady drove her car to the side of the road. Turning to the girls, she said: "Let's each take a drink of water before we start. We may want to watch the pool for some time, and the sun is getting hot. We must not talk, and we must move as quietly as possible. Ducks have good ears, and they fly at the least fright. Ready?"

She led the way toward the wood. Carol and Anita followed. Once they paused to look into a mourning dove's nest. They crept from bush to tree, being careful to keep out of sight of the pool. When they came to a ditch, they slid down the bank and followed the winding bed almost to the water's edge. There they knelt in the sand, behind a screen of mesquite.

On the water were nine ducks, swimming about and talking to one another, some softly, some with a loud quack-quacking. First one head, then another, would go under the water. Tails pointed skyward as yellow bills grubbed in the mud at the bottom of the pool.

Six of the ducks had shiny green heads. Each wore a white ring about his neck, and had a lovely violet wing patch edged with white. The others were brown. Each brown feather was edged with buff.

One of the brown ducks suddenly stopped talking and swam away from the others. Far up the pool she went, then disappeared in some reeds. A large collie dog trotted down to the water for a drink. With a quick kick of webbed feet, the eight ducks gave a spring into the air. They flew in a wide circle, and came to rest on the water at the lower end of the pool.

"Well!" exclaimed Anita. "I never have been so close to a wild duck before in my life."

"Nor I," said Carol. "That is because the Bird Lady showed us how to slip up so quietly, wasn't it? The ducks did not know we were spying."

"Ducks are very easily frightened," said the Bird Lady. "Do you know what kind you saw?"

"I think those with the green heads were mallards," Anita said, "but I cannot guess what the brown ones were."

"Let me show you a folder of duck pictures." The Bird Lady spread the brightly colored prints on the sand. "Now here is the mallard, as Anita said. He is the only kind of duck with a green head and white neck ring. What is this beside him?"

"Oh, oh, that is Mrs. Mallard. Those were all mallards. Why does such a beautiful bird pick such a plain wife?"

"I think I can tell you, Carol," the Bird Lady said. "Mrs. Mallard makes her nest on the ground, in a bunch of grass or reeds. There are many enemies about, which would like to eat her or her eggs. She does all the work of hatching and caring for her babies. If she had bright colored feathers like the male, she wouldn't have much chance, would she?"

"No, something would catch her, sure," Carol answered. "Why did one female swim off by herself? The ducks were all talking a lot. Do you suppose someone hurt her feelings?"

"No, I think not," the Bird Lady laughed. "I think she was stealing away to her nest. If you girls will go back to the car and fetch our lunch, I will try to find it. I think that shady spot under the big cottonwood would be nice for a picnic."

After lunch the Bird Lady led the girls to the nest. It was about the size of a hat, made of grass, and lined with soft, downy feathers. Nine large, greenish-white eggs were partly covered with down from Mrs. Mallard's breast.

"How I'd love to see the babies!" exclaimed Anita. "Do you think we could come back?"

"I will mark it on my calendar," said the Bird Lady. "Five weeks from today should be just about right. It takes four weeks for a duck egg to hatch, and I do not believe Mrs. Mallard has started to sit yet. Would you like to come too, Carol?"

"Oh, yes, I should love to!" exclaimed Carol. "Thank you for asking me today. I must tell Daddy how those green-headed mallards chattered. He is always laughing about how much I talk."

"You shouldn't mention those loud quacks, because it is the female who makes the noise. The males have soft voices."

"Oh, dear, then I will just tell him about the nest and how they hunt bugs and seeds and roots in the mud."

"Anyway, you and Anita did a fine job of keeping quiet this morning," the Bird Lady told them as they started homeward.

TRUE - FALSE

1. Mallard ducks nest in a tree.
2. The female has a green head.
3. The male wears a white collar.
4. Both have violet wing patches.
5. The female lines her nest with down.
6. The male keeps the eggs warm.
7. A mallard lays only five speckled eggs.
8. The female talks louder than the male.

One word does not belong with the rest. Cross it out.

- |             |      |       |              |
|-------------|------|-------|--------------|
| 1. duck     | dog  | water | quack        |
| 2. nest     | bird | car   | fly          |
| 3. feathers | bill | wings | lunch        |
| 4. air      | bugs | seeds | grasshoppers |
| 5. coyote   | pool | fox   | skunk        |

1. green
2. violet (wing patches)
3. tail fan, neck ring, and edge of patches, white
4. body, grayish-brown
5. bill, yellow
6. feet, orange

