

EDITOR'S NOTE

Since this is the last issue of The Prairie Horned Lark for which we will serve as editors before moving to Lubbock, we wish to thank everyone who has contributed articles and information to the various numbers. It has been a pleasure to get out the newsletter. We have greatly enjoyed our association with the Texas Panhandle Audubon Society and wish it success in growth and in its activities in the years to come. --Galloways

THE VERDIN COMES TO THE PALO DURO

By Kenneth Seyffert

The first sight record of the Verdin in the Palo Duro Canyon State Park was made by Carroll Littlefield during our Christmas bird count on December 22, 1965. It was subsequently seen a number of times the following January after the discovery by several of our lady birders of its roosting nest in a Texas buckthorn, or jobjube, bush in the rear of the Sad Monkey Railroad Station. It is presumed to have been the same bird in each instance as the two sightings were made within a quarter mile of one another; although the Verdin is a wee mite, this is no great distance for it to travel, as it is quite wide ranging in its foraging habits.

After January, no other sighting was reported until I made one on Labor Day of 1966. This bird was quite a ways from the locality of the other's original point of observation as the single bird was seen downstream from the first water crossing and some two hundred yards northwest of the Buzzard Roost. The bird was moving about freely and covering considerable distances in its flights from tree to tree.

The next observation of the Verdin was made by myself on January 21 of this year. The sighting was made in the area of an intersecting line directly west of the Sad Monkey Railroad station and directly south of Triassic Peak. This time, however, there were two birds instead of one and both were calling loudly and moving about rapidly. The yellow on the head of one bird was rather dull, while that on the other one was brilliant and flame-like.

Since seeing the pair of birds together, I determined to keep the area under more intensive observation in the hopes of discovering them nesting. Repeated visits, however, failed to produce the desired results and it was quite by accident, as might be expected, that I eventually did find them in the process of nest building. On March 26 I had parked my car at the Sad Monkey Railroad station and had crossed the road east on my way to South Brushy Draw when I heard an unfamiliar bird call. I investigated the brushy area that lies back from the stream side and soon found the source of the call to be that of a Verdin. I watched the bird for some ten or fifteen minutes but as far as I could tell it was feeding only.

I went on my way and returned some two hours later by the same path of my outward trip. I walked along the trail leading from the stream and when I glanced up I saw two Verdins busily engaged in constructing a nest about eight feet up in the top of a thorn leafless Littleleaf Sumac. The nest at this

(continued next column)

MAY MEETING AND SUMMER RECESS

Jerry Mullican, superintendent at Palo Duro Canyon State Park, will speak at the May 15 meeting, 7:30 in the Garden Center, according to Kenneth Seyffert, Program Chairman.

Following tradition, the TPAS will have no summer meetings; the May meeting will be the last until September.

BIG DAY

The third annual Big Day was the biggest of them all, as 11 birders recorded 146 species in their yearly sunup to sundown effort to count the birds at parks, cemeteries, lakes, and other likely spots in Potter and Randall Counties, Sunday, May 7.

Participating were Peggy Acord, recorder; Margaret and Raymond Bailey, Vera Deason, Lucille Fiedler, Rona Ross, Kenneth Seyffert, Peggy Stack, and Esther Waddill. The Galloways got back from Nebraska in time to add the Red-shafted Flicker just before sundown.

Although a tally on numbers of each species of birds had not been compiled at press time, a list of species seen is attached.

BIRD NOTES

Birding has been spectacular for many TPAS'ers this past month, with a real surge of western birds making their appearance due to extreme westerly winds. Some of the best have been Gray Vireo, the first record in many years; unusual numbers of Cassin's Kingbirds; Hutton's Vireo, seen by one person only and not confirmed; twenty-two species of warblers, including the Virginia's, Black-throated Gray, Black-throated Green, Bay-breasted, Blackburnian, Blackpoll, and Prothonotary (a new local record); three species of Swifts seen on the Big Day; and Louisiana Waterthrush.

WELCOME

John Bandy is a new member of the National Audubon Society and the Texas Panhandle Audubon Society.

THE VERDIN COMES TO THE PALO DURO (continued) time was about one third completed and quite conspicuous. The following is a resume of my observations made at the nest site on this and each subsequent visit:

March 26: Over a fifteen minute interval, twelve visits were made to the nest with nesting material. The only material of large enough size for me to determine its nature was what appeared to be dead leaves of previous years' Littleleaf Sumac.

April 1: One adult was seen near the nest. No visit was made to the nest and it appeared far from finished.

April 4: As reported by Leo Galloway, both birds were again nest building. At one time they were observed in a nearby cottonwood tree. It was on this occasion that copulation took place. The eggs would be fertile!

April 8: One adult entered the nest with material and remained there eight minutes. During this time (continued next p.)

CALENDAR

May 15 - Monthly Society Meeting

THE VERDIN COMES TO THE PALO DURO (con't)
the other adult remained outside.

April 16: One bird was seen in the vicinity of the nest. Was the female inside it incubating? Bent says, "During the nesting season it is shy and retiring; perhaps we should say sly, rather than shy, for it slips away unobserved from its nest and keeps out of sight in the nearest thicket. . . . This is certainly very true of the bird at this time, and generally the presence of the bird could be detected only by a soft call it emitted.

April 23: Two adults were near the nest. One entered it at 9:20 a.m. and left it at 9:44 a.m.

April 27: The two adults made six visits to the nest in a thirty minute period. At times, food could be seen in their mouths. It is presumed that the eggs have hatched. While both adults were away from the nest, a female Brown-headed Cowbird lit on the top of the nest bush and looked nervously around. It then hopped down to the nest entrance at which time I clapped my hands and frightened it away. When this occurred, one of the adult Verdins popped up to the top of a distant juniper and looked around. When the female Cowbird was on the nest tree, the male was nearby giving his rippling song. The question arises, do Cowbirds parasitize a nest after the eggs have hatched or only before? Noting the presence of a nest, was the Cowbird only investigating? Meanwhile, down below, two cottontail rabbits "did gyre and gimble in the wabe."

April 30: One adult made one visit to the nest during a thirty minute period. After leaving the nest, it perched on the limb of a nearby juniper and remained there some twenty minutes, preening itself and just sitting. In the time preceding entering the nest, it engaged briefly in chasing a Bewick's Wren.

May 2: I arrived at the nest site at 10:00 a.m. sharp (D.S.T.). At 10:07 an adult bird left the nest. The following sequence then took place: one bird entered the nest at 10:22 and left at 10:30; one bird entered the nest at 10:40 and left at 10:48; one bird entered the nest at 10:53 and left at 11:00. When the nest was not occupied, both adults could be seen feeding in its immediate vicinity

Both birds engaged in a running battle with a Chipping Sparrow who finally departed after repeated attacks. When a female Brown-headed Cowbird lit on the top of a nearby juniper, it was routed immediately by one of the Verdins who launched itself in a direct flight from the nest bush. All of the foregoing is not, strictly speaking, absolutely and unqualifiedly accurate, as an unknown bird call and song, which turned out to be that of a Solitary Vireo (plumbeous form) drew me away from the nest site for some two minutes.

In addition to the birds that were chased, that is, the Bewick's Wren, Chipping Sparrow, and Brown-headed Cowbird, the following birds were seen in the nest bush or in the adjacent junipers and mesquitos: Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Cardinal (2), Audubon's Warbler, Common Bushtit, Mockingbird, and White-crowned Sparrow.

It is interesting to note that on April 1, another Verdin was observed by myself at the same location as the one seen the previous Labor Day. This makes three known Verdins in the Canyon and, with any luck, it appears we will soon have additions.

PLEASE NOTE: The field trip to local cemeteries scheduled for Saturday, May 15, has been cancelled.

TWO POEMS BY JOHN CIARDI

The Size of Song

Some rule of birds kills off the song
in any that begin to grow
much larger than a fist or so.
What happens as they move along
to power and size? Something goes wrong.
Bird music is the tremolo
of the tremulous. Birds let us know
the songsters never are the strong.

One stop more on the way of things
we find a second rule applies
to birds that grow to such a size
they lose, or start to lose, their wings:
they start to lose the very strings
of sound itself. Give up the skies:
you're left your weight. And your last ties
to anything that sings.

Gulls Land and Chase to Be

Spread back across the air, wings wide,
legs out, the wind delicately
dumped in balance, the gulls ride
down, down, hang, and, exactly,
touch, folding not quite at once
into their gangling weight, but
taking one step, two, wings still askance,
reluctantly, at last, shut,
twitch one look around,
and are aground.

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List of birds seen on the Big Day, May 7, 1967:

1/5/1967

Canada Goose	Violet-green Swallow
Mallard	Tree Swallow
Gadwall	Rough-winged Swallow
Pintail	Bank Swallow
Widgeon	Purple Martin
Shoveler	Blue Jay
Blue-winged Teal	Black-crested Titmouse
Cinnamon Teal	Verdin
Green-winged Teal	Common Bush-tit
Ruddy	House Wren
Turkey Vulture	Bowick's Wren
Mississippi Kite	Rock Wren
Cooper's Hawk	Canyon Wren
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Long-billed Marsh Wren
Marsh Hawk	Mockingbird
Red-tail	Catbird
Swainson's Hawk	Brown Thrasher
Broad-winged Hawk	Robin
Sparrow Hawk	Hermit Thrush
Scaled Quail	Swainson's Thrush
Bob White	Veery
Ring-necked Pheasant	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Little Blue Heron	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Black-crowned Night Heron	Cedar Waxwing
Green Heron	Loggerhead Shrike
Coot	Starling
Avocet	Gray Vireo
Semipalmated Plover	Solitary Vireo
Snowy Plover	Warbling Vireo
Killdeer	Black-and-white Warbler
Greater Yellowlegs	Orange-crowned Warbler
Lesser Yellowlegs	Nashville Warbler
Baird's Sandpiper	Yellow Warbler
Least Sandpiper	Myrtle Warbler
Stilt Sandpiper	Audubon's Warbler
Black-necked Stilt	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Wilson's Phalarope	Blackpoll
Spotted Sandpiper	Northern Waterthrush
Sanderling	Yellowthroat
Semi-palmated Sandpiper	Wilson's Warbler
Ring-billed Gull	Redstart
Herring Gull	House Sparrow
Franklin's Gull	Western Meadowlark
Black Tern	Yellow-headed Blackbird
Mourning Dove	Red-wing
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Brewer's Blackbird
Roadrunner	Boat-tailed Grackle
Horned Owl	Common Grackle
Barn Owl	Brown-headed Cowbird
Burrowing Owl	Bullock's Oriole
Poor-will	Cardinal
Common Nighthawk	Black-headed Grosbeak
Black Swift	Evening Grosbeak
Chimney Swift	Blue Grosbeak
White-throated Swift	Lazuli Bunting
Kingfisher	Painted Bunting
Golden-fronted Woodpecker	House Finch
Ladder-backed Woodpecker	Pine Siskin
Red-shafted Flicker	Goldfinch
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	Rod Crossbill
Eastern Kingbird	Green-tailed Towhee
Western Kingbird	Rufous-sided Towhee
Cassin's Kingbird	Grasshopper Sparrow
Ash-throated Flycatcher	Lark Bunting
Say's Phoebe	Vesper Sparrow
Empidonax Flycatcher	Lark Sparrow
Western Wood Pewee	Rufous-crowned Sparrow
Olive-sided Flycatcher	Cassin's Sparrow
Horned Lark	Chipping Sparrow
Barn Swallow	Savannah Sparrow
Cliff Swallow	Clay-colored Sparrow
	White-crowned Sparrow

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