

## ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT:

At the November meeting members of the Society voted to make the annual Christmas bird count in the Palo Duro Canyon on Saturday, Dec. 30. The point of gathering will be at the first water crossing at 8:00 a. m. sharp. This day in the open always proves to be a rugged one, so come prepared for any kind of weather! Our high count of 62 species was made two years ago while last year we fell short at 61. All members who possibly can are urged to attend as it will require many alert people covering many miles to make this the highest count yet.

## LANDSAKES! IT'S A KITTIWAKE!:

On the morning of 11/28 Peggy Acord and Rena Ross made one of the most astounding bird discoveries of this area in quite some time. After careful and prolonged study, using a zoom scope, binoculars, and the unaided eye, they came to the conclusion that the bird was a Black-legged Kittiwake. From the account Peggy gave, it appeared to have been an immature bird, with the spot behind the eye, dark neck band, black legs, and black wing tips, and very slightly forked tail, the outer edges black. The bird was watched as it both swam and flew. A few weeks previously Rena had observed the same species on her trip to the west coast of Mexico. This is a more logical place in which to see the bird as it winters off the west coast from the Aleutians to Baja California. On the same date and at the same locality, they reported the Horned Grebe and a female Red-breasted Merganser, neither bird common to this area.

Since last reporting in this Newsletter, birding has continued good. On 11/17 Peggy Acord and Katherine Whipple journeyed to Buffalo Lake where they reported all four grebes (Western 1, Horned 2, Eared 20+, Pied-billed 1), a Long-eared Owl, 5 Common Goldeneyes, a Grey-headed Junco as well as the Oregon and Slate-colored, 50+ Tree Sparrows, 40+ Song Sparrows, 3 Lincoln's Sparrows, 2 White-throated Sparrows, both Kinglets, and a pair of Mourning Doves.

No report of a hawk migration was turned in this year. However, on 11/22, on a run south of Memorial Cemetery, Peggy Acord reported 5 Rough-legged Hawks, 5 Marsh Hawks, 2 Ferruginous Hawks, 4 Sparrow Hawks, 1 immature Golden Eagle, 1 Red-tailed Hawk, and one unidentified hawk.

Kenneth Seyffert reported the Common Loon on Buffalo Lake once again 11/19, and on 11/23 two late Say's Phoebes at Buffalo Lake. Horned Grebes persist in cropping up as he saw 3 on Buffalo Lake 12/2.

## SOME OBSERVATIONS ON BIRD LIFE IN THE TEXAS PANHANDLE ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS AGO:

On Saturday, August 9, 1845, Lt. J. W. Abert left Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River, located about seven miles east of the present La Junta, Colo., "to take command of the party detached for the survey of Purgatory creek, the waters of

the Canadian and False Washita". On Sept. 5 he had crossed into Texas northeast of Nara Visa, N. M. where he observed "antelopes are abundant, and, as usual, the prairie is covered with shore larks", which we now call Horned Larks. "We saw them in abundance on the plains during the whole of our journey....To-night we made our beds under the canopy of the starry heavens, which shone so luminously that there was more pleasure in tracing the various constellations than in endeavoring to sleep. Every one must be struck with the extraordinary brightness of a prairie sky, due to the singular purity of the atmosphere. This property of the atmosphere is also exemplified by the manner in which meat can be cured, merely by drying it in the sun, and by the absence of dews."

On Sunday, Sept. 7, he observed: "Our road today was everywhere beautified by luxuriant profusion of plum trees and grape vines, and our disappointment was great on finding the fruit had been taken by the Indians who had recently passed....In the neighborhood of our camp we found several coveys of quail".

On Sept. 9 the party was at a point just east of the present Tascosa, at which place it was noted: "We have the wild turkey in abundance in the neighborhood of our camp, and, as they persisted in retaining possession of their accustomed roosts, our men had a fine opportunity of trying their skill in shooting them."

The next day, "at an early hour in the morning we were on our way, and soon leaving the bottom, entered a more desolate country than we had hitherto seen. The high and dry table lands were covered with but a few scattered plants, and were altogether desert-like.

The cacti and mesquite were most abundant....Whilst riding over a sandy waste we noticed a most delicious fragrance, which was to us, travelling on this wild desert, more sweet than blossoming orange groves or eastern bowers of roses, such as perfume the famed valley of Cashmere. All this sweetness arose from an unattractive little aster....which, growing in the barren sand, seemed intended to counteract by pleasant sensations, the disagreeable effect of the burning reflections produced by the soil upon which it grew."

That night the party camped at a point on the river approximately 12 miles north of Amarillo, where, "upon going into the river to bathe, I found the depth to be two feet, the current rapid, and so muddy that I durst not immerse myself in its waters, which were of a deep red color."

On Sept. 14 the group "flushed a large covey of quails" just before crossing the river a little north-northeast of Borger. Here "we noticed large flocks of the green-winged 'teal', and the brant, 'anas bernicla' and Canadian Goose, 'anas Canadensis'.... Wild turkeys were very abundant, and our people killed great numbers of them." The next morning, "looking around upon the hill tops...., we noticed singular objects, which, cutting against the clear sky, appeared large

ough for Indians, but on closer scrutiny proved to be a drove of turkeys, which always leave their roosts at early dawn."

By Sept. 16 they had left the Canadian River and had struck White Deer Creek about noon east of the present town of Alhambra. "Here we observed great numbers of the night-hawk, 'caprimulgus Americanus', which were darting around us in all directions, frequently passing within our reach, while the plover, 'charadrius vociferous', along the bed of the stream, was ever and anon sending up his lone melancholy cry of 'kill-deer'."

On Sept. 20 they left the North Fork of the Red River to return to the Canadian and in the south central part of Wheeler County they noted "the meadow lark, the shore lark, and several king birds, 'Muscapa tyrannus'--the first we recollected to have seen." The next day "we found great quantities of the poke weed...the berries of which afford abundant food for the many varieties of birds frequenting this region, particularly the turtle dove, 'Columba Carolinensis', which we saw in great numbers. We noticed, too, a singular fly-catcher, 'Muscapa milvulus', remarkable for their great agility in darting about, which singular movement is greatly facilitated by its long forked tail. The quail and the prairie-chicken, 'Tetrax cupido', started from beneath our feet."

That night they encamped on Sweetwater Creek northeast of Wheeler "near a large grove of oak trees, which had evidently formed the nightly resting place of a large flock of turkeys, the ground strewn with feathers, and in many places marked with their scratchings and tracks. We got a great number of these valuable birds, which was a grateful change in the fare to which we had been accustomed for so many days past....Some turkey buzzards, 'Cathartes aura', had taken possession of a grove of dead timber, and were quietly making preparations for night, when some of our party, mistaking them for wild turkeys, sallied forth with desperate intent. They, however, were so fortunate as to frighten away the birds, which doubtless saved them a disagreeable adventure with these carrion eaters...."

The party continued seeing "immense" numbers of turkeys as they journeyed down the Canadian and by Sept. 26 they were well into Roger Mills County, Okla. where "at one place we found a large flock of prairie-chickens, which were so unaccustomed to the effect of fire-arms, that we killed a number before they attempted to fly."

The foregoing was extracted from the Panhandle Plains Historical Review for 1941 and those interested in pursuing this account further will find the report rewarding.

#### THE PALO DURO CANYON IN EARLY DECEMBER:

After receiving several favorable comments from interested readers on the list of birds seen at Buffalo Lake and published in last month's Newsletter, your Editor gives the following list showing what you can possibly see in the Palo Duro Canyon State Park. These birds were seen on the morning of 12/3 between 3:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m., and were in the area of the first

water crossing, including the camp grounds on both sides of the road, and extending south to where a dry draw bisects the stream from the west. This area comprises about 40 or 50 acres:

Golden Eagle (1 flying low overhead); Sparrow Hawk (2); Bobwhite (23); Scaled Quail (36); Killdeer (1); Belted Kingfisher (1); Yellow-shafted Flicker (1); Red-shafted Flicker (5); Golden-fronted Woodpecker (4); Verdin (1); Common Bushtit (55); Bewick's Wren (3); Canyon Wren (1); Mockingbird (2); Robin (2); Mountain Bluebird (4); Golden-crowned Kinglet (7); Ruby-crowned Kinglet (1); Cardinal (5); American Goldfinch (2); Rufous-sided Towhee (2); Brown Towhee (2); Rufous-crowned Sparrow (5); Slate-colored Junco (5); Oregon Junco (29); Tree Sparrow (1); Field Sparrow (1); White-crowned Sparrow (3); Song Sparrow (8).

#### PROGRAM FOR THE JANUARY MEETING:

Your program chairman is very happy to announce that arrangements have been made for the showing of the Sierra Club's film THE GRAND CANYON on Monday night at 7:30 at the Colonial Cafeteria. This is the occasion on which the Society holds its annual dinner, installs its new officers, and looks back over the preceding year's events. With the showing of this 26 minute film in sound and full color a pleasant evening can be expected and all members are urged to bring guests to share it with us.

The Sierra Club, undoubtedly the most militant conservation organization in the land, "has produced a film that has the artistry, purpose and technical excellence of the club's Exhibit Format Series of books. THE GRAND CANYON photography is superb---revealing a place that hardly anyone knows well enough. Martin Litton's knowledge of the Canyon's secret places is hard to match, and his ability to run the river and a camera simultaneously can never be matched safely. THE GRAND CANYON shows movingly and convincingly that the Canyon is a universe in itself, and that a living river is vital to keeping the Canyon alive. The film makes it beautifully clear that a little 93-mile reservoir, far down though it might be in a mile-deep canyon, would be one of the greatest mistakes this nation could make.

'What do you think of when you think of the Grand Canyon?' the film asks. To most people the Grand Canyon is a spectacle seen only from the rim. But as Joseph Wood Krutch wrote: 'The Canyon is at least two things besides spectacle. It is a biological unit and the most revealing single page of earth's history anywhere open on the face of the globe.'

No matter what you knew or thought about the Grand Canyon before, after the 26 minutes of exquisite color, text and music are over, your understanding of the Canyon is bound to be enlarged. If you have already seen the Grand Canyon, this film will stir your memories of it; if you have not, it will spur your desires to see it for yourself."

#### CALENDAR:

Dec. 30: Annual Christmas Bird Count  
Palo Duro Canyon State Park  
Jan. 15: Annual Society dinner - Colonial Cafeteria. Showing of the film THE GRAND CANYON.