

October, 1968

2709 S. Fairfield, Amarillo, Texas 79103

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A BUDDING PHOTOGRAPHER:

Those present at the September meeting of the Society were very much surprised and pleased at the color slides of birds and animals shown by Steve Fiedler. Steve, whose first attempt this is, is to be congratulated on his fine work and encouraged to continue in a pursuit that will give him and many others pleasure and reward.

BIRD NOTES:

Barn Swallow - an estimated 750 to 1000 congregated at the lower end of Buffalo Lake on 9/29. Most were on the ground and a large number were immature birds. (KS).

Sanderling - one at Buffalo Lake 9/14 (KS).

Northern Phalarope - this has been an extraordinary Fall insofar as this species is concerned. As reported in the last NEWSLETTER the first reports began coming in during late August, observers seeing it at Buffalo Lake and on prairie playas. KS reports seeing them at Buffalo Lake thru September with 27 seen on 9/22 and 14 on both 9/28 and 29. In talking to the refuge people, he was told that photographs had been taken of them from the blind erected on the "flats" by one of their members. This individual "used to laugh at bird watchers" but had ceased to do so as he became more and more involved in taking pictures of the many varieties of shorebirds that he identified at the lake this fall.

Long-billed Curlew - a flock of 40-50 passed hurriedly over KS as he was kicking the brush in Redpoll Cove on 9/29. They weren't much above tree-top high and could be heard chuckling noisily and occasionally emitting a loud "cur-lee".

Golden Plover - seen on Tradewinds Playa 9/28 (Rena Ross & Peggy Acord), and one at Buffalo Lake on the same day (KS). The latter bird was feeding in the company of a Black-bellied Plover and the contrast in the two species could be seen as they moved about and flew. Another at Buffalo Lake 10/6 (KS).

Black-throated Grey Warbler - one at Memorial Cemetary 9/22 (PA).

Philadelphia Vireo - one at Buffalo Lake 9/28 (KS).

Magnolia Warbler - one along the Canadian River upstream from Boys Ranch 9/29 (KS).

Scrub Jay - several reports of them from around town, particularly from the I. D. Acord's back yard.

Black-throated Blue Warbler - a male and a female at Buffalo Lake 10/6 (KS).

White Pelican - two at Buffalo Lake 10/11 (Peggy Acord & Rena Ross). The numbers of shorebirds of all kinds seen this day were greater than either can recall having seen in this locality before. Though rainfall has been generally good in the Panhandle this year and torrential rains fell during the latter part of August, Buffalo Lake itself, along with its watershed, has received little of it. As a consequence, the lake is lower than it has been in many years, with a resulting extension in area of exposed mud flats. The migrating shorebirds are attracted to such prime feeding grounds and have been coming in in large numbers for extended stays before continuing south.

Mockingbird - KS' candidate for a rare bird. Though they seem to be in normal numbers

within the city, a sharp reduction was noted in the Palo Duro Canyon and they are almost nonexistent at Buffalo Lake.

WILDLIFE ARTIST:

The recent showing of the works of our own B. James Jokerst at the Panhandle Savings & Loan building in Wolflin Village was a source of great interest and delight to those of us who saw it. Jim is a self-taught artist who has interpreted various aspects of the outdoors and its wildlife by the use of several mediums. Authentic in detail (a pen and ink drawing of a wonderfully alert ground squirrel standing in a patch of grama grass), delicate in perception (a red-phase Screech Owl staring inquiringly and curiously at its observer as though it too found the encounter one of disbelief), and evoking the presence of drama lurking always in wildlife (a beautifully colored pastel of a deer family on the alert and ready to bound away), we look forward to seeing more of Jim's work.

NORTH AMERICAN NEST RECORD CARD PROGRAM:

As of this writing, members have turned in 52 cards covering 22 species of nesting birds. These include the Barn Swallow, Mourning Dove, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Red-headed Woodpecker, Swainson's Hawk, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Golden Eagle, Rough-winged Swallow, Blue Jay, House Finch, Mockingbird, Bewick's Wren, Blue-winged Teal, Pintail, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Mississippi Kite, Bullock's Oriole, Lark Sparrow, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Great Horned Owl, and Ferruginous Hawk. The first Mourning Dove nest found was on March 22 and it contained one egg, and the last nest on Sept. 7 with two young in it. If any of you have cards which have not been turned in please do so as soon as possible so that all may be forwarded to the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology promptly.

JUST SPARROWS:

Autumn, I suppose, becomes authentic with the return of the sparrows. The shorebirds are no sooner gone in June than they return in July, but the sparrows are different. While we have them with us the year around, it involves, by and large, an exchange of species. Outside of the Palo Duro Canyon, where the Rugous-crowned and Black-throated Sparrows are non-migratory, there is a complete swap between the summer sparrows and the winter sparrows. You begin to notice this movement and exchange in late August and all through September. First, there is a trickle of Savannahs that move through in mid-August, soon followed by small flocks of Chipping and Clay-colored. These two latter species grow in volume all through September so that by early October their numbers can seem legion. While this southward sweep is taking place, you begin to be aware that the summer sparrows are getting scarcer so that by the end of September the Lark, Cassin, and Grasshopper Sparrows are gone. Also coming in while these are leaving is the Vesper. Driving down a dusty road at Buffalo Lake one day you will notice one, two, or three of these sparrows jump up from the ground in front of you and fly low and rapidly ahead. Sometimes they will

urge forward and appear as though they will stand in the road only to continue on, and at other times they will veer to either side of the moving car only to eventually move back to a flight path that continues sending them down the road ahead of you. This can keep up for a quarter of a mile or more, the birds moving in an undulating flight with tails flickering and showing the white feathers.

The sparrows that really spend all winter with us are the last to arrive. These are the Song, Lincoln's, White-crowned, White-throated, Tree, Field, Harris^a, and the three juncos, Oregon, Slate-colored and Grey-headed. The Song and the Lincoln's pretty well occupy the same kinds of habitat - brush, thickets and dense stands of tall grasses - but some years there hardly seems to be a Lincoln's around while you can always count on the Song's being there. On many a cold and dreary winter's day has he warmed my heart, hopping reluctantly to the top of a brush pile to give me a loud scolding for interrupting his solitude. You wonder why he and his fellows that are usually nearby don't gather together into flocks, but it must be his nature to keep to himself. Sometimes you will see several together, but it isn't a cohesive bond, they are only visiting.

The A. O. U. Check List names five sub-species of the White-crowned Sparrow. Outside of the type species, which is probably the most ubiquitous sparrow in our midst, the only sub-species we are supposed to get is Zonotrichia leucophrys gambellii, or Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow. This is the one the books say can be distinguished "by the white eye-stripe which starts from the bill instead of the eye". Back in my early days of birding it was my habit to record these fairly frequently, even when I didn't see them, whereas nowadays I'm not really sure I ever do see them. Only a humble birder who has been made to seem a fool many times will understand that sentence.

The Oregon Junco is another sparrow you want to keep a cool head over. Junco oreganus is divided into eight races which intergrade with one another where their ranges meet. To one who is reduced to calling all Oregon Juncos just that it is nice to hear what an expert says on the subject. Aldon H. Miller says: "I know of no one who dares claim ability to identify as to subspecies a living, fidgeting Oregon Junco that he may be banding. Identified specimens readily available for comparison can increase a person's accuracy in such a situation, but, even then, many errors will be made. . . . The most detailed study of specimens of some of these races enables one to identify with accuracy only about eighty per cent of wintering birds. Obviously, birds of all these races should be designated merely as Oregon Juncos." In case you are wondering why it is spelled Junco Oreganus instead of Oregonus, J. K. Townsend (1837), who described Fringilla oregana, spelled "Oregon" with an "a", in common use at that time, and this spelling is retained.

The rest of our sparrows are of irregular passage - the Brewers, Bairds, Fox - or have been recorded a very few times - the Swamp, Sage, and Golden-crowned. The Bairds is the real bird of mystery. We are right

in its migratory pathway yet it is seldom recorded by us. Possibly, it is more plentiful than we think and we simply misidentify it or overlook it altogether. John Lane says: "This is a neat little bird, with a prim little bib of radial lines on its upper breast, buffy patches on its cheek and neck, and an ochraceous stripe running through its crown. But identification is difficult, for none of these marks is clearly definable at any distance." To complicate matters he goes on to say: "A. bairdii strongly resembles A. savannarum and other closely allied genera. . . . In my experience, the ochraceous patches on Baird's sparrow's head and neck are not apparent, even through good glasses, unless the bird is at close range. At greater distances a back view shows a slim, dark bird, and when it turns to face the observer, the shining, grey front resembles that of a pale Savannah sparrow, which as a general rule looks much darker.

"Like the Grasshopper Sparrow, the other member of the genus, Baird's sparrow has a flat-headed silhouette which aids in identification. The low, hurried flight across the grass and sudden pitch to earth is another good mark, though not an infallible one." Good Grief! I wonder how many of my very pale Savannahs were actually Baird's? This is enough to destroy one's peace of mind forever.

LETTING YOUR EDITOR KNOW:

Your Editor earnestly solicits articles from members on their experiences and observations of birds. This material should be in his hands by the second Saturday of each month. This is necessary so that the Newsletter can be typed up that week-end and mailed to the members the week prior to the regularly scheduled monthly meeting which is the third Monday of each month.

PROGRAM FOR OCTOBER:

As announced at the first of the year, our program for the October meeting will be The Shore Birds an illustrated talk by Peggy Acord. Be prepared with questions and be willing to share your own experiences with this fascinating family of birds.

MAGPIE HUNTING:

A field trip to a ranch in the vicinity of Texline has been tentatively scheduled for early November. The purpose of this trip is to look for the Black-billed Magpie which has never been recorded in the Texas Panhandle. It is found in northeastern New Mexico and the panhandle of Oklahoma, but it has never been reported in this part of Texas. When a firm OK has been received, we will notify members of the details of the trip.

CALENDAR:

- Oct. 21 - Monthly Society meeting at the Garden Center at 7:30 p. m.
- November - Field trip to Texline - date to be announced.
- Nov. 18 - Monthly Society meeting.