

Diary of a Bird Watcher



Friday, July 16

We cooked our hamburgers outdoors on the charcoal grill. While we were eating, a flock of bushtits came into a nearby tree. We love these little birds that have been frequenting our place more than usual lately. I guess there is a charm in all this things. These are very small, all gray in color and are about half tail. They come in flocks of 20 or so, flit en masse into a tree, work over all its branches for insects, eggs or larvae, and then fly on to the next, looking almost like leaves blown by a wind. This is one of the pleasures of eating outdoors. You feel a companionship with friends like these.

Sunday, July 30

I glanced a little at an "Audubon Field Notes" that had come while I was away. I found one item that interested me. It says "skylarks have fared very well at Victoria, and are apparently at the peak number since their introduction 50 years ago." It is interesting to note one introduction that has worked well. As far as I know this is the only place on the continent where skylarks have become established. There used to be some in Portland around the turn of the century but they had evidently disappeared by the time I began my bird watching. Some time I hope to go to Victoria and see and hear the skylarks sing the song which has been written about them enthusiastically by Wordsworth, Shelley and others.

Speaking of bird importations, I was reading in a sports magazine in a doctor's office about successful game bird introductions and others that might be tried. I guess the most successful of all is the ring necked (often called Chinese) pheasant. They don't all come from China. They may be a best to farmers at times. In fact, they ate up half the corn seed planted in our little home garden. For all that they are beautiful birds and although I don't hunt I have eaten them with pleasure when they have been given to our family. So we have something to compensate for the unfortunate introduction of the house (English) sparrow and the starling. The former are much less numerous now than they were in the day of horse drawn vehicles, but the starlings are still increasing and spreading over the country.

Monday, July 31

One time when a small flowering peach tree died on our place we left it standing as a perching place for birds. It is used quite often by hummingbirds, flycatchers and others. Today I had a sprinkler going there and an ash-throated flycatcher stayed in the spray quite a while, fluffing out its feathers and letting the drops get in. A pair of orioles had evidently been there too because they were in another tree preening themselves.

Sprinklers are just one of many benefits people have given to birds. Much is made of the species that have been reduced or wiped out by man. It is only fair to mention the others that have greatly increased with the coming of people. Cliff swallows used to be hard put to find cliffs to put their nests on in areas where cliffs are scarce. Now any farmer's barn can be plastered with their nests, and I am sure they have increased. Barn swallows now seem to nest under almost every bridge. I am sure they didn't have so many available places before. Robins love lawns. Their number seems to be greater in cities than elsewhere. House finches (lupines), the little sparrow-like birds with red on the head and above the tail, seem to love civilization and the corners of buildings that provide nesting sites. I have heard them singing downtown near the Mail Tribune and elsewhere.

Then there are wires. They make wonderful perching places for kingbirds and sparrow hawks and singing meadowlarks. All our artificial ponds and lakes are well accepted by many water birds. Consider also the many berry producing shrubs planted by people as ornamentals, irrigated fields and pastures for blackbirds and meadowlarks, and shade trees for warblers and orioles. All this without mentioning bird houses that people put up and the widespread feeding of birds in winter. On the whole, I think people are good for birds.

Bridge, July 31

I go to have been few places lately where birds could be observed away from home. I am too lazy to get up early in the morning. The regular morning hours I am too busy. The afternoons are too hot and the evenings busy. It makes no difference. There are always birds to be seen at home and I can think about the ones I will see on our vacation in August.—T.M.

Mathes Installed DAY Commander

Lester Mathes, Central Point, was installed as commander of Jackson county chapter of the Disabled American Veterans at ceremonies Friday night in the Red Cross building here. Mathes succeeded George W. Simmons, Medford, who was appointed adjutant.

Charles Poteet, Klamath Falls, senior vice commander of the department of Oregon, served as installing officer during the ceremony.

Other officers installed are Trevel Turpin, Medford, senior vice commander; Gene Bauman, Medford, junior vice commander; James R. Lillie, Medford, chaplain; Clayton Camp White, sergeant-at-arms; Carl Knutson, treasurer; and Ed Diden, Jacksonville, George Tucker and George Nelson, both of Medford, all executive committeemen.

Appointed officers installed during the meeting in addition to those were Jerry Bianconi, Central Point, service officer; Ed Branchfield, Medford, judge advocate; and John Snider, Camp White, officer of the day.

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