

Diary of a Bird Watcher



Wednesday, Aug. 20

We are still at San Clemente in our southern California vacation. A friend of my son had given me the name of a college boy who was reputed to be quite an expert on birds. I hunted him up and soon found the reputation was well deserved. I asked him whether he would ever have time to go out with me. He said, "How about now?" I said "Fine," so off we went.

He said there were some fine birding places up on the marine base. He knew where there was a nest of a white tailed kite and this sounded wonderful to me, because this is a bird I had never seen and most wanted to see. We drove as far as we could and then hiked. He hiked barefooted even though we went through some poison oak. We flushed several barn owls and some red-shouldered hawks. We glimpsed a kite. When we reached the nest tree he climbed up to it and reported three young birds. Then we hiked out of the canyon into the open and obtained some fine views of three or four kites, both flying and perching. They are magnificent hawks, beautifully decked out in gray, white and black, and very large and graceful. As an added bonus for our trip we flushed a long-eared owl and saw some rufous-crowned sparrows. The latter are very unspectacular, but, like the kites, I had never seen them before.

Thursday, Aug. 21

In the morning we went down to the Maxton Brown bird sanctuary near Carlsbad. We were looking for Wood Ibises which we did not see. However, we did see a good many shore and water birds. New ones to us for this year were least sandpipers, long-billed dowitchers, Wilson's phalaropes and one marbled godwit. The more beautiful birds we saw, though, were the snowy egrets, avocets and black-necked stilts.

In the afternoon I took off by myself for the Salton Sea. I was anxious to look for some of the birds over there and get a glimpse of the Imperial Valley, but did not want to subject my family to the intense heat I expected. I found it an interesting drive across the coast mountains, then even more interesting in the desert region on the other side. Where I stopped to eat the lunch I had brought along, in one of the higher desert valleys, I found a flock of quail just like the kind we have at home. A little lower down I found more quail but these were the somewhat similar Gambel's quail of the desert.

I drove off the road and stopped for the night as it began to get dark. I just spread a blanket on the sand and lay down on it. Even with my light, summer clothing, I needed no cover all night long. As I had enjoyed a beautiful sunset so I now enjoyed the first quarter moon and then the late night sky all studded with stars. However, I heard no night birds nor other wild life.

Friday, Aug. 22

I got up and started on toward the Salton Sea, just as the dawn began to break at 5:20. I wasted time going into Brawley for my breakfast, but the good meal came handy. On my way out to the national wild life refuge at Salton Sea I had good luck. At one stop I saw a little ground dove and a gila woodpecker, both desert type birds. A little further on I finally saw my first roadrunner. This is indeed an interesting bird. I was surprised to find it standing so still I thought at first it might be stuffed. I could see how it could well take care of lizards and snakes with its stout bill.

I got to the refuge headquarters just before 8. I was amazed to find how intensely hot the sun was already, especially since it was only 7 sun time. There were large numbers of birds on the edge of the sea and many others in fields where water was standing for irrigation. Two that I had only read of in books before were the large fulvous tree ducks and the white faced ibis. I started home by 9:30 and was glad to begin to get out of the heat, but it continued pretty warm until I got near the top of the coast mountains. I counted the trip a most interesting 24 hours.

Sunday, Aug. 24

Today we started our slow trip home, but only went as far as Los Angeles, where we stopped to see relatives.

Monday, Aug. 25

Today we heard a mockingbird sing for the first time as we were loading the car to leave L.A. We drove over to Marineland, but I looked for birds while my wife and boy went through it. I saw my first brown pelicans. Then we drove on up the coast as far as Malibu Beach for the night.

Tuesday, Aug. 26

Today we took another short leg of our trip, getting as far as Santa Barbara. Here we stopped to see the mission, the botanical gardens and take a swim in the ocean. On the way up we saw a great concentration of shore and water birds in one place and picked out several long-billed curlews among them. In the botanical gardens we saw a little Hutton's vireo. They are supposed to be in Oregon, but I have never been able to see one there. I think they are much commoner among the California live oaks.—T.M.

Three Vehicles Involved in Crash

Two pick-up trucks and an automobile collided at East Ninth st. and South Central ave. Friday morning, spilling gasoline on the street but causing no injuries, according to Medford police.

One truck, operated by Charles Marlow Whelden, 60, of Covina, Calif., overturned, police said. The second pick-up, driven by Larry Wayne McDonald, 20, of route 2, box 203A, Central Point, and the third vehicle, driven by Ewell Cleveland Phillips, 39, of 1549 South Ivy st., both sustained front-end damage, police reported.

City firemen were called to flush the gasoline from the street. Police cited McDonald for having no driver's license in his possession.

Local Team Wins Red Ribbon in Fair Judging

A team composed of Randy Bradshaw and Lucile Lowry of Medford won a red ribbon in the 4-H rabbit judging contest at the Oregon State Fair in Salem last week.

A team from Polk county won top honors in the contest, in which teams from 12 counties participated.

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