

Seasons of a Bird Watcher



FALL
According to one way of figuring, winter doesn't begin until the shortest day, which is pretty close to Christmas. That ought to be good enough for us because we just don't have much winter here any time. At the moment of this writing there isn't even any appreciable snow on the higher mountains around us. This isn't because the weather has been unusually warm but because it has been so sunny dry.

Dryness has been the keynote of the autumn season. On walks in the hills we have often seen great cracks in the ground. It will take a good many heavy rains and snows to even begin to soak up this ground and replenish the moisture on which all vegetation depends.

Obviously, it has been a poor season for ducks. I'm told there have been many over in the Klamath basin, but in our valley many of the ponds on which they would normally rest are just about completely dry. Their problem has been further complicated by the fact that our numerous cold nights have put ice on a good many of the smaller and quieter ponds.

I think the drought is also the explanation of the most noteworthy observation I have about bird life this autumn. It is the number of snipes that have been feeding on people's lawns. I've had more phone calls about this than anything else in the bird line. As soon as people begin to tell about a bird "with a big long bill" I know what is coming.

Snipes are usually found in swampy places or along the edges of ponds and ditches. They sometimes feed, too, in irrigated pastures. Now the pastures are dry and some of the swamps are dried up. So, I assume they took to feeding on lawns where sprinkling kept the ground soft. One of the observers who had seen them said he saw that they were catching earthworms. Although their long bill may make them seem awkward, or at least unusual, I think they are attractive birds with their striped backs and interesting ways. I enjoy watching their twisting flight, too. We had one, and sometimes two, on our lawn quite constantly for a while, and I had more chance to watch them than ever before.

Otherwise we have had about the usual number and varieties of birds on our home place. Juncos have been fewer than usual; with no snow in the mountains I imagine they have been staying on higher ground. I got so tired of having the jays eat all the suet out of my feeder that I hung it from a two foot wire. The extra swing keeps the jays off most of the time. The house sparrows don't hang thick on it the way they used to, either. The only trouble is the other birds don't like it as well, either. It is available to them, though, if they are hungry enough to do a little swinging. I have seen song sparrows, golden crowned sparrows, titmice and Audubon's warblers taking suet from it.

Now Christmas is almost here and, besides all the usual things, this means for bird watchers the annual Christmas count. In fact we have already had a meeting of a group of birding people to make plans for the count, which will be one of many throughout the nation. Our territory is the same 15 diameter circle that we have generally used in recent years. Its center is south of Camp White. It includes all of Medford, touches Jacksonville, reaches into the hills above the Old Military rd., takes in Gold Rey dam, both Table Rocks, Eagle Point, Gardiner Reservoir and Roxy Anne. The date of our count is set for Tuesday, Dec. 29. Our object on that day is to try to identify as many birds as we can within that circle. We will have to work hard to surpass the 84 species we found last year.

In fact, we would like to ask for some help from our friends. The only owl we had last year was a burrowing owl. Does anybody know of a barn within our territory where barn owls roost? Or of a wooded area where great horned owls are regularly found? We would certainly like to find some more owls.

Of course, we would also like to know of any unusual birds wintering within our territory. Last year we knew of an Anna's hummingbird in Ashland, a California mockingbird in Sam's valley and an orange crowned warbler in Phoenix. We'd certainly like to find some rare avis like that in our area. Call me at SP 2-8860 if you have any information to give to us.

We would also be glad to know of any one who knows enough about birds to join in our count. The more we have working the more thoroughly we can cover our territory. The more completely and accurately we can list the birds of the area, the more scientific value the count has.—T.M.

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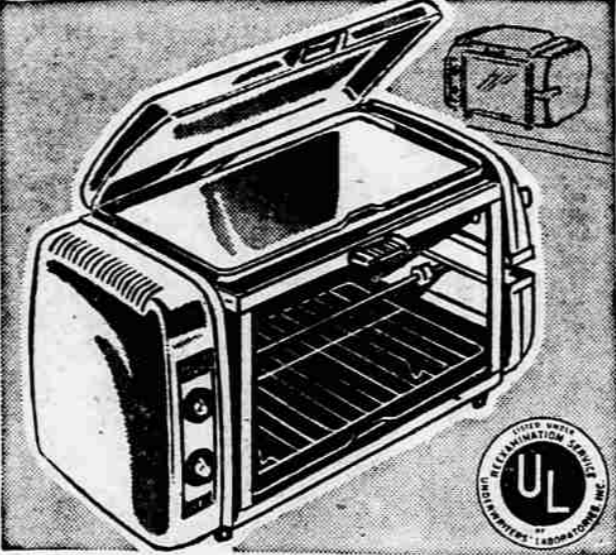
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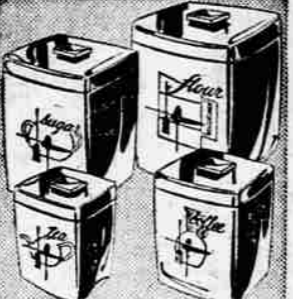
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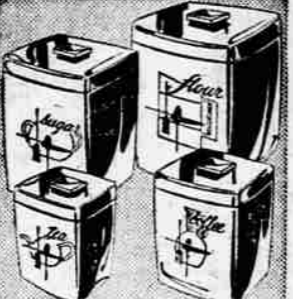
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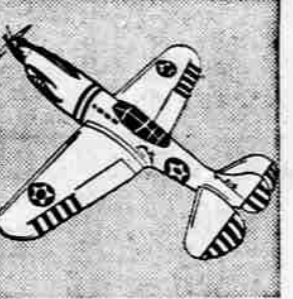
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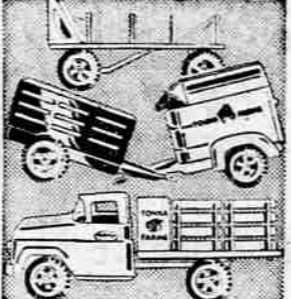
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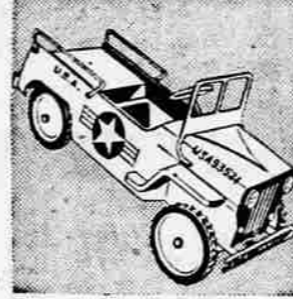
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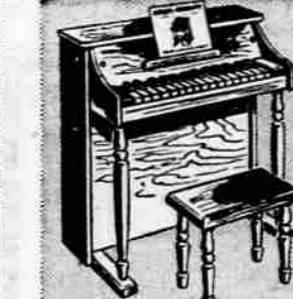
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