

THE WREN-TIT

Bulletin of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Vol. 1

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No. 1

An Unusual Nesting Site of Cliff and Barn Swallows

It is probable that the proximity of reliable sources of mud, of which the Cliff Swallow needs so large a quantity, and Barn Swallows but slightly less, has much to do with unusual locations of their nests. One of the most interesting of all such nestings is an old boathouse, abandoned, rotting and mired in the mud of an ancient canal at the head of San Francisco Bay near Warm Springs. This house, not over thirty feet long, ten feet wide and eight feet above low tide has been seized upon by Barn Swallows and Cliff Swallows alike. Isolated, with its nests at times but three or four feet above the lazy but protective tides, with mud enough about it for an infinity of nests, the boat house has an unmatched appeal.

Dr. Chas. Piper Smith reports that he has found Black Phoebes and House Finches occupying the old house with the swallows and a House Finch had used an old Barn Swallow nest in 1928 (April 21), but the swallows are the major occupants. In 1928, on April 6, Barn Swallows had begun nests. Ten Cliff Swallow nests were being built April 21. On May 19 there were eighteen occupied Barn Swallow nests and thirteen Cliff Swallow nests all of which were probably occupied though this could be proved for only three.

A strange house boat party indeed, where Barn Swallow cups are placed side by side and Cliff Swallow jugs are on rotting walls with the swinging tide but a few feet below!

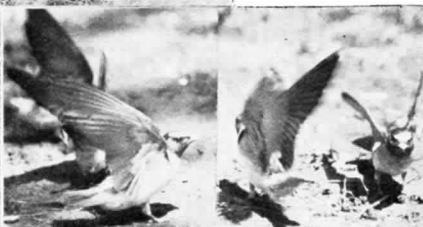
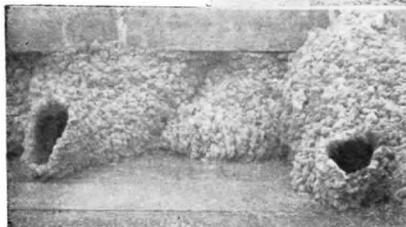
GAYLE PICKWELL.

Old Boat-house
in marsh at
Warm Springs
(right).



Nests of Cliff
Swallows on
boat-house (be-
low).

Cliff Swallows
about to gather
mud for nests
(below).



INTRODUCING THE WREN-TIT

In this number of The Wren-tit the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society presents its initial bulletin, and so follows the lead of sister organizations in California. It lays no claim to originality; rather it is glad to pattern its sheetlet after the Bulletins of the Audubon Association of the Pacific and the California Audubon Society. Like The Gull and The Phainopepla, The Wren-tit shall be a calendar of events, past and forecast, in so far as they concern the local society; and also like them it shall lay its chief claim to existence in its carefully noted and recorded observations of birds in its vicinity. These observations will take the form of field trip lists, seasonal notes, breeding records, and unusual occurrences in the bird population. Other topics of wider interest relating to birds it shall not ignore, but birds of Santa Clara Valley shall constitute its chief concern.

The Wren-tit begins as a quarterly, but its sponsors hope that as interest increases and material accumulates it may become a bi-monthly. For the present the Society hopes for its sheetlet a small measure of that distinctiveness, that sprightliness, that inquisitiveness that is characteristic of the Wren-tit. And it is hoped that with the little bulletin may go a bit of the atmosphere of chaparral-covered slopes where ricochets the Wren-tit's "tit-tit-tit-tit-trrrr."

SOME SEASONAL NOTES

Observers all agree there have been many more birds in Santa Clara Valley this season than there were during the fall months of last year. Many of the summer residents lingered on after their usual time of departure. Black-headed Grosbeaks, Western Tanagers, and Lutescent Warblers were seen eating grapes in a vineyard near Los Gatos September 15. A beautiful male Tanager with scarlet head was observed in the same vineyard as late as October 13. By the middle of October the winter visitants had increased very noticeably the bird population of the whole valley. Cedar Waxwings came unusually early. Dr. Pickwell reported seeing a flock at Stanford University October 6. During the last two months flocks have been observed very frequently in San Jose, many observers reporting the devastating inroads that the Waxwings have been making on berry bushes and persimmon trees. Very large flocks of Robins are in the orchards. Hermit Thrushes are here also in unusual numbers. There have been many reports of hearing both Robins and Thrushes singing whisper songs; also a few reports of hearing Fox Sparrows singing a little. Miss Florence Morrow reports that she often sees Varied Thrushes at Loyola, the first one having been seen October 24. Two Townsend Warblers were seen almost every day between November 19 and December 15 on the State Teachers College Campus. Interesting records of rarer visitants include a report by Miss Emily Smith of a Townsend Solitaire in a pine tree near Los Gatos October 16. On November 10 Dr. Charles Piper Smith noted a Vesper Sparrow near Milpitas. Mr. Elmo Stevenson reports the finding of a dead White-throated Sparrow in San Jose November 12.

JANUARY CALENDAR

JANUARY MEETING of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society will be held Monday evening, January 21, at 7:30 o'clock in the San Jose State Teachers College, Room 39.

Mr. Donald D. McLean will be the speaker of the evening, taking as his subject: "Experiences with Birds in Arizona."

JANUARY FIELD TRIP will be taken Saturday, January 26, to Mission San Jose and Calaveras Lake. The party will meet on San Carlos St. at 5th St. at 8 o'clock. Bring lunch. Chairman of Field Trips Committee: Miss Florence Morrow, State Teachers College.

REPORTS OF PAST MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPS

THE REGULAR MONTHLY MEETINGS of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society are being held this year in the San Jose State Teachers College in Room 37. At the October meeting Dr. Charles Piper Smith, as speaker of the evening, presented an original field key for the identification of shore birds in the San Francisco Bay Region. Dr. Smith discussed the problems involved in making a key of field characteristics, and urged the members to use the key to determine its usefulness.

At the meeting held November 19 Mr. Sidney S. S. Stansell showed many of his remarkable bird pictures, and related his interesting experiences in obtaining the photographs.

December 17 Dr. Gayle B. Pickwell presented as the topic of the evening: Reactions of Parent Birds in Nest Protection and Reactions of Young in Self Protection. Following a brief summary of the entire field of parental solicitude, its origin, evolution, and present manifestation in birds, the discussion was developed about that phase of solicitude which is concerned with the protection of nest and nest contents. Instincts for nest protection, Dr. Pickwell stated, consist of "crying and calling, distraction display, physical combat, distress or crippled-bird display, and finally that most amazing and highly developed of all, protection by abandonment and concealment." The interactions of the last two were discussed for Killdeer, Horned Lark, and others which present both instincts.

In discussing reactions of young birds, Dr. Pickwell said that not all young birds have highly developed instincts for self protection other than those of flight; that only those that are ground inhabiting present striking characteristics in this direction. Here was presented the acquisition of discrimination and fear in nestlings; the development of the crouch-concealment or "freeze" in the young of Sandpipers, Killdeer, and Horned Larks; and the development of intimidation display or bluff on the part of young Raptures. Upwards of a hundred excellent lantern slides from original photographs were used to illustrate the lecture.

THREE FIELD TRIPS have been conducted this season under the leadership of Dr. Gayle B. Pickwell and Dr. Charles Piper Smith. On each trip automobiles were used, but there were numerous stops and short excursions afoot.

October 27 twenty-four members visited Uvas Valley, skirting the Almaden Hills on the way. The day was clear and mild. 52 species were identified, but space allows listing only the following: Sharp-shinned and Cooper Hawks; Prairie Falcon; Western Belted Kingfisher; Red-breasted Sapsucker; Say and Black Phoebe; California Horned Lark; Yellow-billed Magpie; Western Crow; Slender-billed Nuthatch; Brown Creeper (subsp. ?); Wren-tit; Western Mockingbird; Hermit and Varied Thrushes; Western Robin; Western Bluebird; Western Ruby-crowned Kinglet; American Pipit; Cedar Waxwing; California Hutton Vireo; Audubon Warbler; Pine Siskin; Western Savannah and Western Lark Sparrows; Gambel and Nuttall White-crowned Sparrow; Golden-crowned Sparrow.

November 24 fifteen members went over the Santa Cruz Mountains by

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way of the Bodfish Canyon Road, and on through Watsonville to Moss Landing on the Monterey Bay shore. The day was again clear and mild. The list for the day totaled 57 species: Western and Eared Grebes; California Brown Pelican; Great Blue Heron; White-winged and Surf Scoters; Sharp-shinned, Western Red-tailed, Marsh, and Desert Sparrow Hawks; California Quail; Killdeer; Western Willet; Greater Yellow-legs; Red-backed Sandpiper; Western Sandpiper; Marbled Godwit; Western, California, and Bonaparte Gulls; California Murre (dead); Western Belted Kingfisher; Willow, Nuttall, and California Woodpeckers; Red-shafted Flicker; Say and Black Phoebes; California Jay; Western Crow; Plain Titmouse; Chestnut-backed Chickadee; Bushtit; Slender-billed and Pigmy Nuthatches; Western Winter Wren; Western Robin; Western Bluebird; Western Ruby-crowned Kinglet; American Pipit; Cedar Waxwing; California Shrike; Audubon and Townsend Warblers; Western Meadowlark; Brewer Blackbird; California Purple Finch; California Linnet; Willow and Green-backed Goldfinches; Pine Siskin; Brown Towhee; Western Savannah Sparrow; Junco; Gambel and Nuttall White-crowned Sparrows; Golden-crowned Sparrow.

On the December field trip a Christmas Bird Census was taken. Since the report reached the editor of Bird-Lore too late for inclusion, it is given here. San Jose, California (State Teachers College Campus to salt-water marshes at Alviso; grassy and slightly wooded hills near Milpitas; and back by way of Berryessa). Dec. 22; 8 A. M. to 5 P. M. Clear; wind northwest, light; temp. minimum 29, maximum 54; patches of hoar frost in shady places all day. Thirty-three miles by automobile covering territory with diameter of about nine miles. Seven observers together, members of Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society. Western Gull, 40; California Gull, 9; Great Blue Heron, 1; Black-crowned Night Heron, 2; California Clapper Rail, 2; Virginia Rail, 1; small Sandpipers (mixed flocks of Least and Western Sandpipers), 500; Red-backed Dunlin, 3; Greater Yellowlegs, 2; Western Willet, 3; Killdeer, 11; California Quail, 2; Ring-necked Pheasant, 4; White-tailed Kite, 2; Marsh Hawk, 3; Sharp-shinned Hawk, 1; Cooper Hawk, 1; Western Red-tailed Hawk, 3; Desert Sparrow Hawk, 8; American Barn Owl, 1 (dead); Western Belted Kingfisher, 1; Cabanis Hairy Woodpecker, 1; Nuttall Woodpecker, 1; Northern Red-breasted Sapsucker, 1; Red-shafted Flicker, 16; Anna Hummingbird, 1; Say Phoebe, 3; Black Phoebe, 4; California Horned Lark, 200; Yellow-billed Magpie, 1; Stellar Jay, 1; California Jay, 3; Western Meadowlark, 40; California Brewer Blackbird, 16; California Linnet, 60; Willow Goldfinch, 12; Green-backed Goldfinch, 23; Western Savannah Sparrow, 50; Gambel White-crowned Sparrow, 200; Golden-crowned Sparrow, 100; Junco (*Junco oreganus* subsp.), 14; Santa Cruz Song Sparrow, 14; Salt Marsh Song Sparrow, 2; Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca* subsp.), 2; Spotted Towhee, 1; Brown Towhee, 8; Cedar Waxwing, 60; California Shrike, 5; California Hutton Vireo, 1; Audubon Warbler, 12; Yellow-throat, 2; American Pipit, 100; Northern Rock Wren, 2; Vigors Bewick Wren, 2; Marsh Wren, 5; Slender-billed Nuthatch, 2; California Plain Titmouse, 3; Chestnut-backed Chickadee, 2; Bushtit, 32; Western Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 5; Hermit Thrush, 3; Western Robin, 72; Coast Varied Thrush, 1; Western Bluebird, 26; Total, 65 species, about 1719 individuals. Dr. Gayle B. Pickwell, Dr. Charles Piper Smith, Dr. Annie Anderson, Mrs. Hannah Crall, Miss Laura Watt, Miss Gladys Record, Miss Emily Smith.

EMILY SMITH, Secretary.

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