

THE WREN-TIT

Bulletin of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

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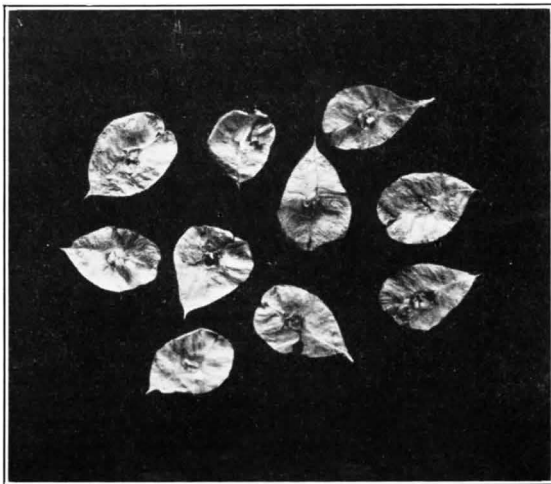
No. 2

Finches and Elms

Early settlers in San Jose and its vicinity brought with them their beloved Elm, and now in the city in two or three places and especially on the State Teachers College Campus there are some magnificent lanes of this great tree. The Elm does nothing half-heartedly, whether it be beauty of lacy arches against the sky or mighty reach of wide-flung branches. So too it produces its winged seeds almost over night in green masses so extensive that the tree seems fully leaved weeks before a leaf appears—produces its seeds, hold them for upwards of a month to mature them, then floats them off before the leaves come on.

Somehow the western finches, whose forbears knew no elms, have learned that elm seeds fit well in finches' bill-of-fare. Now Waxwings eat them too, Robins also it seems and even a Western Bluebird was noted dissecting the seed from its encircling wings. This note however is concerned chiefly with the finches.

The Willow Goldfinch is rarely observed in the city whether in summer or in winter at any other time, but almost before the red blossoms of the elm had changed their red for green one was heard above them saying "perchick,



Elm Seed Wings with Central Seed Eaten
by Finches

perchick-ick." From that day (March 6) to April 22 there has been an uninterrupted chorus of their notes. Green-backed Goldfinches intermingled with them too but family cares thin them out as March advances into April.

Scattered California Linnets desert their homesites, now established, to partake of Elm seeds; House Sparrows with first broods raised join them. California Purple Finches and Siskins, like Willow Goldfinches still unconcerned with summer home and family cares, spend long hours high in the tops. Of all of these the Siskins and the Willow Goldfinches predominate in number and in voices.

So far as observed all eat the seeds the same. With bill tip the center is nipped out in part or wholly so and the rifled wing is left to float to earth.

The constant murmur of voices overhead comes to seem like a part of the atmosphere intangible, evanescent, except that now and then a Willow Goldfinch, in newly acquired breeding dress, comes to earth for dew drops or fallen seeds. Then too an attentive ear will discern the Purple Finch as he smoothly rolls his whisper song while, louder, the Linnets turn theirs over with many a jolt and jar. The Greenback Goldfinch now and then says "cheer," the Siskin sucks in a breath with wheezing denunciation and splits his high-pitched note of "chee-eek," and the Willow, friendly little gossip, adds "sweet, sweet, sweet, oh sweet, my dear."

GAYLE PICKWELL.

SOME SEASONAL NOTES

Santa Clara Valley has been visited this spring with more frosty nights, one after the other, than are normally expected in March and April. Although the prune trees blossomed on time, the oaks and sycamores were a little late; and seemingly the coming of the Lutescent Warblers and Warbling Vireos was delayed a few days, for it was not until the third week in March that the Warblers were commonly observed, and not before the first of April that the Vireos sang persistently. First records for the Lutescent Warbler are March 9 and 13, coincident with the blossoming of the Black Oak, and for the Warbling Vireo March 25 and 30, when the Black Oak was in full, glossy leaf. Nesting records however do not indicate that the birds are waiting for warmer weather. February 20 a pair of Bushtits had begun their nest; and April 6 a California Jay was incubating five eggs, and there were six eggs in a California Shrike's nest.

The morning chorus at this season is a strange medley, with the songs of both winter visitants and summer residents mingled with those of all-year-round residents. The song of the Golden-crowned Sparrow was not inconspicuous in the chorus this morning, April 17, and there were several Audubon Warblers singing softly. Lingered Western Robins are caroling a little, suggesting the possibility that some will remain to nest. Gambel White-crowned Sparrows were reported unusually numerous the first week in April, indicating a concentrated movement at that time. The winter visitants for the most part however are slipping away unnoticed, while the summer residents are announcing their arrival with song. The first Bullock Oriole, a male in full plumage, was observed singing a whisper song March 30. April 6 a Western House Wren, a Western Flycatcher, a Western Kingbird (collected near Palo Alto by Fred Rettig), and Western Chipping Sparrows were here; and in two localities Bank Swallows were observed. Violet-green Swallows were seen three weeks earlier, and Barn Swallows and Cliff Swallows two weeks earlier. Several Black headed Grosbeaks had arrived April 11. April 15 the quick song of the Western Yellow Warbler was distinguished in the hub-bub of twittering song which comes from the Elms these days on the San Jose State Teachers College campus, where large

flocks of Willow Goldfinches and Pine Siskins are feeding on the ripening seeds.

Dr. Smith has located 22 nests this season, representing 12 species of birds. April 6 he found, in addition to the nests of the California Jay and Shrike, nests of the Desert Sparrow Hawk, Yellow-billed Magpie, Western Mourning Dove, and California Road-runner, all with complete sets of eggs. April 13 the Ornithology Class of the Teachers College found a Black Phoebe's nest with 4 eggs and a San Francisco Red-winged Blackbird's nest with 4 eggs.

These few seasonal notes were gathered from the journals kept by Dr. Charles Piper Smith, Dr. Pickwell, and the writer, and from the record of the March field trip of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society.

EMILY SMITH.

REPORTS OF PAST MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPS

The regular January meeting of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society was held in room 39 of the San Jose State Teachers College. After the business of the evening had been dispensed with, the usual reports of bird observations were given by the members. The reports chiefly concerned the actions of migratory birds. Mr. Donald McLean, a member of the Division of Fish and Game of California, was the speaker of the evening. He gave an exceedingly interesting lecture from personal observations on the bird life of Arizona, which is similar to ours in some species, but in others more bold in song and more gorgeous in color. Mr. McLean stressed the marked differentiation of the bird life from the Lower Sonoran to the Hudsonian zones, so strikingly presented by the conditions of southern Arizona.

At the February meeting, Dr. Charles Piper Smith gave a lecture on "Birds Observed From a Transcontinental Train." On a rail journey from Southern California to Florida, from Florida to New England and back to San Jose through Central United States, Dr. Smith kept a precise list of species and numbers in so far as they could be determined from the car. This, supplemented with several side trips afoot, gave material for an interesting presentation of the sequence of birds from West to East, from South to North.

The lecture for the March meeting of the Audubon Society was given by the President, Dr. Gayle B. Pickwell. His topic was "Reactions and Growth of the Barn Owl and the White-tailed Kite." A careful study has been made of the pair of Barn Owls that have nested for a number of years in the tower of the State Teachers' College. A record had been made of the growth in size and weight, in development of fear and response to it. Dr. Pickwell had also taken the opportunity to make a study of the White-tailed Kite, a bird fast approaching its zero hour and now occurring in numbers in very few places outside of Santa Clara Valley.

The field trips of the season were under the leadership of Miss Emily Smith, Dr. Charles Piper Smith, and Dr. Gayle B. Pickwell. Automobiles were used as usual in order to cover a larger territory, but frequent stops were made for short trips on foot.

The January 26th trip was via Cupertino, Loyola Corners, the home of Mr. E. G. McCutcheon in Los Altos, and back by La Honda Road. The day started cloudy and cool, but later it cleared and remained so until evening. The list: White-tailed Kite; Western Red-tailed Hawk; Desert Sparrow Hawk; California Quail; Western Mourning Dove; Anna Hummingbird; Willow Woodpecker; Nuttall Woodpecker; California Woodpecker; Monterey Red-shafted Flicker; California Horned Lark; Coast Stellar Jay; California Jay; Plain Titmouse; Wren-tit; Sonoma California Thrasher; Hermit

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Thrush; Varied Thrush; Western Robin; Western Bluebird; Ruby-crowned Kinglet; American Pipit; Cedar Waxwing; California Shrike; Audubon Warbler; Western Meadow Lark; California Brewer Blackbird; California Linnet; California Purple Finch; Green-backed Goldfinch; Pine Siskin; Spotted Towhee; Brown Towhee; Fox Sparrow; Oregon Junco; Gambel Sparrow; Golden-crowned Sparrow; Song Sparrow; Chestnut-backed Chickadee; Bewick Wren (probably Vigors); forty species.

February 23, the members went over the territory west and south of Los Gatos. The day was clear but windy. The list: Sharp-shinned Hawk; Western Red-tailed Hawk; American Rough-legged Hawk; Desert Sparrow Hawk; California Quail; American Coot; Band-tailed Pigeon; Anna Hummingbird; Western Belted Kingfisher; Monterey Red-shafted Flicker; Black Phoebe; Coast Stellar Jay; California Jay; Plain Titmouse; Chestnut-backed Chickadee; Pacific Coast Bush-tit; Wren-tit; Hermit Thrush; Western Robin; Western Bluebird; Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Cedar Waxwing; Audubon Warbler; Western Meadowlark; California Brewer Blackbird; California Linnet; Green-backed Goldfinch; Spotted Towhee; Brown Towhee; Oregon Junco; Gambel Sparrow; Golden-crowned Sparrow; Song Sparrow; 33 species.

The third trip on March 23 was very extensive, including a brief stop at the Alviso salt marshes, then to San Andreas and Crystal Springs Lakes and home by Searsville Lake. The day was cold but clear, with a stiff north wind blowing, making bird observations difficult. The list: Pied-billed Grebe; California Great Blue Heron; American Bittern (?); Pintail Duck; Lesser Scaup Duck; Turkey Vulture; White-tailed Kite; Sharp-shinned Hawk; Western Red-tailed Hawk; Marsh Hawk; Desert Sparrow Hawk; California Quail; Ring-necked Pheasant; California Clapper Rail; American Coot; Killdeer; Greater Yellowlegs; Western Sandpiper; Western Gull; California Gull; Western Mourning Dove; White-throated Swift; Anna Hummingbird; Rufous Hummingbird; Western Belted Kingfisher; Monterey Red-shafted Flicker; California Woodpecker; Nuttall Woodpecker; Black Phoebe; Northern Violet-green Swallow; Barn Swallow; Coast Stellar Jay; California Jay; Chestnut-backed Chickadee; Plain Titmouse; Pacific Coast Bush-tit; Slender-billed Nuthatch; Wren-tit; Bewick Wren (probably Vigors); Western Mockingbird; Sonoma California Thrasher; Western Robin; Varied Thrush; Hermit Thrush; Western Bluebird; American Pipit; Cedar Waxwing; California Shrike; Hutton Vireo; Audubon Warbler; Western Meadowlark; Red-winged Blackbird; California Brewer Blackbird; California Linnet; Pine Siskin; Willow Goldfinch; Green-backed Goldfinch; Spotted Towhee; Brown Towhee; Savannah Sparrow; Bell Sparrow; Oregon Junco; Golden-crowned Sparrow; Gambel Sparrow; Nuttall Sparrow; Song Sparrow; 66 species.

BARBARA NORRIS, Recording Secretary.

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