

THE WREN-TIT

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The Family Relations of Birds

One of the most fascinating problems of bird study is that of family relations. Whether a pair of birds remain mated from year to year, whether birds nest in the same place more than once, and whether the young that are hatched remain in the same locality to nest the next year are interesting questions that bird banding is just beginning to answer.

A few results were obtained this year on the Stanford University Campus regarding the family relations of the Western Bluebird, the Plain Titmouse, and the Santa Cruz Chestnut-backed Chickadee. A few of these birds had been banded before 1928; but in that year eleven trap nest boxes were erected in oak trees on the Campus. A trap nest box has a hinged top and a shutter that closes the opening when the adult bird is inside, if the operator pulls a string. In this way a whole family of birds can be marked for identification.

Seven of these nest boxes were occupied in 1928. In all twenty-nine titmice, six chickadees, and two bluebirds were banded during the season. No old banded birds were recovered. Twenty-two more nest boxes were erected in time for the 1929 nesting season, and in all fifteen of the then thirty-one boxes were occupied by nesting birds.

Of the twenty-nine titmice banded in 1928 three were recaptured nesting in 1929. One, No. B42178, had been a nestling in 1928. In 1929 it had a nest of its own in one of the new nest boxes over half a mile distant from its former home. The other two titmice, Nos. B42207 and B42208, had been mated in 1928. The same pair were again mated in 1929 and were in the same nest box. This was a result we hardly expected.

But to our great surprise the same thing was found to be true in the case of the only pair of bluebirds banded in 1928. This pair, Nos. 616195 and 616216, again mated in 1929 and built their nest in the same nest box. In another case a young bluebird, No. 173829, was banded on the nest May 20, 1926, and found dead only one hundred yards away February 13, 1928, nearly two years later.

None of the six chickadees banded in 1928 was captured in 1929. However, one, No. A66873, of a pair which had been banded in 1927 nesting in a hole in the walls of a house was recaptured in 1929. It was nesting in one of our boxes about one hundred yards from its old nest of two years before. It had a new mate.

These above results are not enough to enable one to form any conclusions, but they show that the problem is one of interest and well worth much further study.

JOHN B. PRICE.

Mr. Price sends us word that recently the Biological Survey reported the recapture of two White-crowned Sparrows banded at Stanford University last winter. One bird banded by Fred Rettig January 26 was recaptured at Fort St. James, British Columbia, April 29, having flown twelve hundred miles; and the other by John Price April 12 was recaptured at Mukilteo, Washington, June 14.

SOME NESTING NOTES

The sight of a female Anna Hummingbird on vibrating wings collecting down from the ripe catkins of a willow beside the Penitencia Creek, and the glimpse of a California Thrasher flying across the lawn and up into a palm tree with an unwieldy twig in its beak, were only two of many challenges to nest hunting which came to the members of Dr. Pickwell's Ornithology Class at the San Jose State Teachers College this last spring.

We did not find Anna's cunningly concealed nest that first day in Alum Rock Canyon, but five weeks later, early in the morning of June 1, when we were again in the Canyon, we heard her hum by, and the quick eye of Miss Barbara Norris soon saw her sitting on her wee nest out on a slender willow branch that arched low over the creek. Not until a cautious hand within a foot of the nest had bent down the branch so that we all could see did she leave her nest. Within the dainty cup were one newly hatched nestling and one tiny white egg. The little bird had a short, unhumming-bird like bill and a very wide gape, showing, as Dr. Pickwell pointed out, its kinship with the Swifts. On subsequent visits to the nest another evidence of kinship to the Swifts in the form of a habit was noted. Like the young Black Swift observed in Big Basin the young Anna Hummingbird relieves its mother of the necessity of nest cleaning by backing up to the edge of the nest and ejecting the excreta well out over the side.

There is an unusual concentration of birds during the breeding season in Alum Rock Canyon, not only in number of individuals, but also in number of species. The always flowing Penitencia Creek is the only water for miles about; and within the narrow confines of the canyon a great variety of nesting sites is offered: steep rocky walls, sagebrush and chaparral slopes, groves of oaks, a thick fringe of alders and willows along the creek, coves of various descriptions. And so the White-throated Swift, the Rufous-crowned Sparrow, the Nuttall Woodpecker, the Russet-backed Thrush, all find suitable nesting sites in the Canyon. At least two pairs of Dotted Canyon Wrens raised families near the resort. May 30 Miss Ruth Schliecker observed parents lead off young from two nests within two hundred feet of each other. The first nest was deep in a crevice between rocks placed to embank a little-used road, and the other out of sight in under the partly exposed roots of a large sycamore that stands on the creek bank.

It was not necessary to go far afield to find unusual nests. Near the center of San Jose on the College Campus several interesting nests were found. May 15 a pair of Robins had finished a nest high up in an elm. Other Robins had stayed to nest in San Jose, for on May 21 a spotted young Robin out of its nest was being fed by a parent near the Campus. June 8 a female Lawrence Goldfinch was putting the finishing touches to her second nest at least fifty feet up in a Monterey Pine. The male cheerfully accompanied her as she flew back and forth, but did none of the work. The Pine Siskins which had had no mean part in the chorus of twittering songs in the fruiting elms on the Campus during April were watched with interest as they lingered long after the Willow Goldfinches had departed. The last Willow Goldfinch had gone May 2, but June 1 there were still several Pine Siskins feeding as if at home on the lawn where the elm seeds had fluttered down. The late lingering was explained by the finding of a Pine Siskin fledgling just out of its nest June 4.

Frequently during the winter a Western Mockingbird was seen on the Campus, and it was hoped there would be a nest in the spring; but it was not on the Campus that the nest was found. May 3 Wilbur Shelley located a new empty Mockingbird's nest six feet up in a prune tree just east of San Jose, and on a second visit, May 14, he found five eggs in it.

EMILY SMITH.

REPORTS OF PAST MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPS

THE REGULAR APRIL MEETING of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society was held the fifteenth in Room 39 of the San Jose State Teachers College, the president, Dr. Pickwell, presiding. After a brief business meeting and then the usual reports of bird observations during the month by members, Mr. Fred Rettig, the speaker of the evening, told of his experiences in trapping and banding birds on the Stanford University Campus and showed how bird banding is furnishing accurate information in regard to movements of individual birds. Dr. Pickwell closed the meeting with a brief review of some of the early beliefs about bird migrations.

The May meeting of the Society was held on the twentieth in Dr. Pickwell's laboratory, the president presiding. Instead of a formal lecture after the business meeting a very enjoyable symposium was held in which many members took part in describing and discussing observed bird activities of the season. Of special interest was Mr. Alton Alderman's report of the results of his study of the nest protection reactions of the Killdeer, showing that at the approach of danger the incubating bird's first instinct is to conceal its nest by quiet abandonment, but that this instinct is replaced by that of distress simulation if the dangerous object remains too long in the territory, or if it returns too soon after the bird is back on the nest.

The June meeting was held the seventeenth again in Dr. Pickwell's laboratory, Miss Emily Smith presiding in the absence of the president and vice-presidents. As part of the general discussion of bird observations for the month Miss Gladys Record showed several used nests which she had collected near her home in Los Gatos, and told of her interesting experiences observing the nesting habits of the Wren-tit, Russet-backed Thrush, Cassin Vireo, Song Sparrow, and Spotted Towhee. Mr. Sidney S. Stansell was the speaker of the evening, taking for his subject his experiences photographing birds during a recent trip through the San Joaquin Valley. After his talk Mr. Stansell laid his photographs out on the tables and the members lingered long after the usual hour of adjournment to examine and enjoy them.

BARBARA NORRIS, Recording Secretary.

THE APRIL FIELD TRIP was taken on the twentieth under the leadership of Dr. Pickwell, from San Jose to Milpitas, through the Arroyo de los Coches, over Los Buellis Hills, and down the Sierra Grade. The day was clear with a gentle north wind, warm in the Valley, but delightfully fresh and invigorating on the Hills. A perfect spring day and a variety of country representing several associations of plants and animals gave promise of many species of birds. The Arroyo, which contrary to its name is a foothill canyon with a small permanent stream, was alive with the songs of birds. So beset is the narrow canyon with willows, laurels, and oaks that hearing had to take the place of seeing. Here at one stop were heard a Vigers Wren, a Lazuli Bunting, Lutescent, Audubon, and Pileolated Warblers, several Warbling Vireos, and a Black-headed Grosbeak, all singing at once. A pair of Rufous-crowned Sparrows in a sagebrush patch started a nest hunt which ended in vain. A White-throated Swift was seen winging its way "like a propeller without a ship" over the hills that top Alum Rock Canyon on the north. Along the Sierra Road Horned Larks were numerous, many of them paired, singing, and in territory disputes. A nest containing three eggs was located.

There were in all 47 species of birds listed: Turkey Vulture; Western Red-tailed Hawk; Western Mourning Dove; White-throated Swift; Anna and Allen Hummingbirds; Western Kingbird; Black Phoebe; Western Flycatcher; California Horned Lark; Cliff Swallow; California Jay; Western Crow; Plain Titmouse; Rock, Vigers Bewick, and Western House Wrens;

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Western Robin; Western Bluebird; Pipit; Cedar Waxwing; California Shrike; Western Warbling Vireo; Lutescent Orange-crowned, California Yellow, Audubon, and Pileolated Warblers; San Francisco Red-winged Blackbird; Western Meadowlark; Bullock Oriole; Brewer Blackbird; Black-headed Grosbeak; Lazuli Bunting; California Purple Finch; California Linnet; Willow American and Green-backed Arkansas Goldfinches; Pine Siskin; San Francisco Spotted and San Francisco Brown Towhees; Western Savannah, Western Lark, Rufous-crowned, Western Chipping, White-crowned (subsp.?), Golden-crowned, and Santa Cruz Song Sparrows.

Because the May Field Trip was taken outside of Santa Clara Valley the report will be omitted here. The trip was taken to the Los Banos marshes in company with the Ornithology Class of the San Jose State Teachers College.

The June trip was taken on the twenty-second, in the midst of a heat wave, to Alum Rock Canyon under the leadership of Miss Emily Smith. The day began clear and hot with almost no wind, and before the day was over the official thermometer had read 101 degrees. Until noon the birds showed little effect of heat. A Long-tailed Chat was full of song and talk in the willows beside the creek; a pair of Rough-winged Swallows fed their young every five minutes or so, sometimes both coming to the nest hole at once; a pair of Rufous-crowned Sparrows on a sagebrush slope did not spare themselves in their anxiety about their fledglings that had just left the nest, feeding them and calling "dear, dear" persistently. Even after noon, although many of the birds were resting in shade with their bills open and their wings held out, there were still songs to be heard. Between two and three o'clock the following birds were heard singing over and over again: Mourning Dove, Wren-tit, Lutescent Warbler, House Wren, Junco, Vigors Wren, Green-backed Goldfinch, Spotted Towhee, Black-headed Grosbeak, and most surprising of all Russet-backed Thrush. The biggest surprise for the bird list was a beautiful male Western Tanager clinging to the side of a water tank drinking water dribbling out of a crack. Miss Barbara Norris reported having seen a pair in the same vicinity June 1 of this year.

In all there were 49 species of birds listed: Turkey Vulture; Western Red-tailed Hawk; Desert Sparrow Hawk; California Quail; Western Mourning Dove; White-throated Swift; Anna Hummingbird; Willow Downy, Nuttall, and California Woodpeckers; Red-shafted Flicker; Black Phoebe; Olive-sided Flycatcher; Western Wood Pewee; Western Flycatcher; Cliff, Violet-green, and Rough-winged Swallows; Coast Steller and California Jays; Plain Titmouse; Santa Cruz Chestnut-backed Chickadee; Coast Bush-tit; Slender-billed White-breasted Nuthatch; Intermediate Wren-tit; Vigors Bewick and Western House Wrens; California Thrasher; Russet-backed Thrush; Western Warbling and Cassin Solitary Vireos; Lutescent Orange-crowned and California Yellow Warblers; Long-tailed Yellow-breasted Chat; Pileolated Warbler; Bullock Oriole; Brewer Blackbird; Western Tanager; Black-headed Grosbeak; Lazuli Bunting; California Linnet; Green-backed Arkansas and Lawrence Goldfinches; San Francisco Spotted and San Francisco Brown Towhees; Rufous-crowned Sparrow; Point Pinos Oregon Junco; Santa Cruz Song Sparrow.

YVONNE CHAMPREUX.

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