

THE WREN-TIT

Bulletin of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

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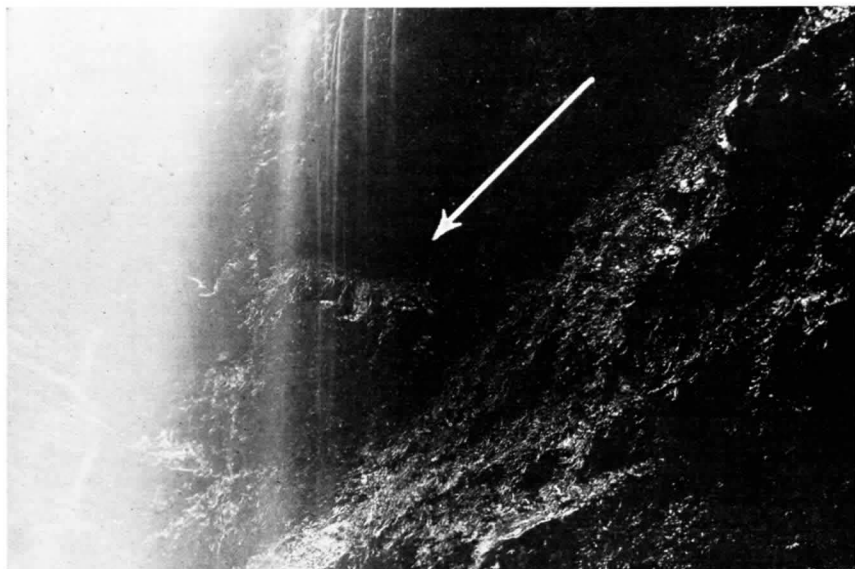
San Jose, California, January, 1931

No. 1

NIGHT LODGINGS OF TWO BLACK SWIFTS

The Black Swift is a sky-roving, sky-loving bird. Its other name, Cloud Swift, was given to it because of the belief that only with the clouds did it come near to the earth. High in the sky, often to the limit of sight, it darts and skims with its fellows, streaking an intricate pattern against the blue. All day long, seemingly, these Swifts are on the wing, snapping up aerial insects or sporting with each other. Where do such aeronauts spend the night? Do they moor themselves to some high crag that pierces the sky?

One night last summer two Black Swifts slept behind a waterfall in a



Photograph by Gayle Pickwell.

UNOCCUPIED NEST IN NICHE BEHIND WATERFALL, USED AS NIGHT LODGINGS BY BLACK SWIFTS.

deep canyon where redwoods grow. Just before dawn my flashlight revealed them resting side by side on a thick, mossy mat* in a little niche in the rock wall, curtained by falling water. They had left the far reaches of the sky to spend the night within four close walls! Mysterious birds indeed!

My flashlight disturbed one of the birds. It stretched a long wing, and finally tumbled off the mat and backed out of the niche. Fluttering, it scrambled up the wet wall and halted a few feet above the niche. Soon the other followed it. As soon as faint light slipped into the dark canyon, both birds dropped from the wall and flew out from behind the curtain. Round and round in front of the falls they sped; then up against the falling water, one after the other. Near the brink they hovered a moment, seeming to drink or take a shower. Then down they swept, and again flew round and round. After several repetitions of this, they darted up through the tall redwoods and were again in their domain, the sky.

EMILY SMITH.

*Unoccupied nest of 1927. See "Black Swifts Nesting behind a Waterfall," by Emily Smith: The Condor, vol. 30, 1928, pp. 136-138.

SOME EARLY WINTER NOTES

Santa Clara Valley did not receive during November, December, and January the abundant rains it so much needed. The days were sunny for the most part, and frequently frosty in the early morning. Weather conditions were very little different from those of last year, and again Robins, Varied Thrushes, and Cedar Waxwings came tardily into the Valley. Not until January were large flocks of Robins seen in the orchards; and it was after Christmas before Cedar Waxwings and Varied Thrushes were frequently noted. But the less erratic winter visitors that came early—Pipits, White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows, Audubon Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Hermit Thrushes—were seen during these months in normal numbers.

Most of the few notes at hand have to do with dates when birds were heard singing. Dr. Pickwell reports that a Brown Towhee sang near his home in San Jose December 7, and regularly after the middle of January; a Song Sparrow daily from January 4 on; and a Bewick Wren January 16. January 23 he heard a Mockingbird in his garden. The next day members of our Audubon Society on a field trip listened to a Mockingbird giving a fine performance in East San Jose.

Several records of singing birds were made on that field trip: Anna Hummingbird, Red-shafted Flicker, Plain Titmouse, Wren-tit, Bewick Wren, California Thrasher, Hutton Vireo, Western Meadowlark, Red-winged and Brewer Blackbirds, Purple Finch, Linnet, Green-backed Goldfinch, and Lark Sparrow. Only one Golden-crowned Sparrow was heard singing. The Zonotrichias, so full of song on their arrival in late September, became more and more quiet after the advent of November. The influx of Robins in January was accompanied by some carolling, especially when the sun was breaking through a light rain.

Miss Gladys Record reports singing of a Bewick Wren as early as November 21, Hutton Vireo December 29, and Oregon Junco January 13. From all reports the Hutton Vireo seems to be unusually common in the Valley this winter. An item of especial interest in Miss Record's notes is the return of "Flakie," a Junco with distinguishing white feathers on its crown, to her feeding tray for the fifth winter.

Very few unusual records have been reported. Two Golden-crowned Kinglets were seen by Miss Record in a flock of Chestnut-backed Chickadees just outside her window January 25, at Los Gatos. Dr. Charles Piper Smith reports a flock of about thirty Ring-necked Ducks on Howell Lakes December 13. An Eared Grebe, two Ruddy Ducks, and many Coots were their companions. Near the lakes on November 4 Miss Record and Miss Emily Smith were surprised to observe twenty or more Willow Goldfinches high in a red-wood picking seeds out of the opening cones.

Another surprise came as a result of counting Clapper Rails while crossing Dumbarton Bridge December 29. Forty-seven of them! Mrs. Adelaide Perry, Mrs. Miram Bracelin, and Miss Smith checked each other as they counted. The birds were all on the exposed, muddy sides of sloughs paralleling the Palo Alto approach to the bridge proper.

With February upon us we are looking now for the nests of our resident Bush-tits and Anna Hummingbirds, and for the arrival from the south of Allen Hummingbirds and Lutescent Warblers.

REPORTS OF REGULAR MONTHLY MEETINGS

The November meeting was held on the 17th, President Gayle Pickwell presiding and forty-six members and guests present. The following new members were elected: Mrs. Evelyn Nelson, Miss Vina Lewis, Miss Alice Baldwin, and Mr. James Peterson. The speaker of the evening, Dr. Alden Miller, of the University of California, presented to the society some of the very interesting results of his studies of the behavior of the Loggerhead Shrike, carried on both in the field and in the laboratory. At the end of his talk he introduced one of his caged shrikes, and staged a most interesting show by offering it a small mouse. The shrike successfully impaled it and proved that a passerine bird can have raptorial food habits.

The December meeting was held on the 15th, Vice-president Karl Hazeltine presiding and twenty-two members and guests present. Dr. Charles Piper Smith in a talk on "Getting Acquainted with European Birds" related his interesting experiences identifying 108 bird species in Europe last summer. Dr. Smith illustrated his talk with film slides prepared from excellent photographs he had taken of plates in bird books bought in Germany.

The January meeting was held on the 19th, President Gayle Pickwell pre-

siding and thirty-six members and guests present. As field observations Dr. Charles Piper Smith reported a flock of at least 40 White-throated Swifts in Alum Rock Canyon, January 14; also a Canyon Wren, and a singing Hutton Vireo. Mr. James Peterson told about the birds that had come to his feeding tray, especially an Audubon Warbler that ate pop-corn off a Christmas-tree string. Mr. Rollo Beck, as speaker of the evening, related his unusual experiences while on a trip around the Horn, which included visits to the Galapagos and Falkland Islands, and during a prolonged collecting trip to New Guinea and the South Sea Islands. He illustrated his talk with colored lantern slides prepared from the remarkable photographs he took on these trips.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

November 22 seventeen members of the society drove out into the always delightful Uvas Valley, going by way of the Almaden and McKean Roads. The day was clear and mild, with gentle west winds. Forty-three species of birds were listed, but numbers of individuals were small. Of special interest weretwo Mountain Bluebirds, one demonstrating within a few feet of us how a grasshopper should be eaten.

Birds observed along Almaden Rd. (summer-dry Guadalupe Cr., orchards and vineyards, cultivated fields): Desert Sparrow Hawk, 1; California Quail, 4; Killdeer, flock of 25; Red-shafted Flicker, 6; California Woodpecker, 5; California Horned Lark, 1, singing; Plain Titmouse, 5; Western Robin, flock of 50; Western Bluebird, flock of 10; Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 6; California Shrike, 1; Audubon Warbler, 12; Western Meadowlark, flock of 50, and 2 smaller flocks; Brewer Blackbird, flock of 75; California Linnet, small flocks; Willow Goldfinch, several; Green-backed Goldfinch, several; Brown Towhee, several; Savannah Sparrow, 2; Western Lark Sparrow, small flock; Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows, several mixed flocks.

Along McKean Rd. (permanent Alamitos and Llagas Creeks, orchards, pastureland with scattered oaks): Western Red-tailed Hawk, 1; Desert Sparrow Hawk, 2 together; Western Mourning Dove, flock of 32; Say Phoebe, 3; Yellow-billed Magpie, 4; Western Bluebird, 2; Mountain Bluebird, 2; Pipit, flock of 30; Audubon Warbler, several; Western Meadowlark, several; California Linnet, several; Willow Goldfinch, 5; Green-backed Goldfinch, 8.

In Uvas Valley near Croy Rd. (permanent Uvas Cr., grassy fields, oak groves): Western Red-tailed Hawk, 1; Sharp-shinned Hawk, 1; Red-shafted Flicker, 7; California Woodpecker, many; Red-breasted Sapsucker, 1; Black Phoebe, 1; California Jay, several; Yellow-billed Magpie, 2; Western Crow, 16; Chestnut-backed Chickadee, 2; Plain Titmouse, 4; Slender-billed Nuthatch, 4; California Thrasher, 1; Western Robin, 1; Western Bluebird, 6; Varied Thrush, 1; Hermit Thrush, 3; Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 3; Hutton Vireo, 1; Audubon Warbler, several; Western Meadowlark, several; Red-winged Blackbird, several in flock of Brewers; Brewer Blackbird, flock of 100; California Linnet, many; Green-backed Goldfinch, several; Spotted Towhee, 2; Brown Towhee, 2; Western Lark Sparrow, flock of 75; Oregon Junco, several small flocks.

December 20 a Christmas Bird Census was taken by eight members (report sent to Bird-Lore). The party went by automobiles to the Alviso salt marshes, then over the Calaveras-Sierra Road, and finally, just at sunset, into Alum Rock Canyon. The day was unusually clear, but a strong, piercingly cold north wind was probably responsible for the small numbers of birds encountered. Sixty-one species were represented in the count. The unusual find was an albino Horned Lark, flashing all-white among its fellows. But four White-tailed Kites furnished the real thrill, two of them hovering with tail spread like a white fan.

Birds observed along San Jose-Alviso Rd. (weedy roadside ditches, orchards, truck gardens, meadows): White-tailed Kite, 4; Western Red-tailed Hawk, 1; Desert Sparrow Hawk, 1; Killdeer, 8; Black Phoebe, 1; Pipit, flock of 60; California Shrike, 3; Western Meadowlark, 33; Brewer Blackbird, flock of 20; California Linnet, 9; Willow Goldfinch, 3; White-crowned Sparrow, 4 flocks; Song Sparrow, 4.

On Alviso salt marshes (mud flats and extensive areas of salt grasses and salicornia): California Great Blue Heron, 3; Pintail Duck, 30; Marsh Hawk, 2; Desert Sparrow Hawk, 3; California Clapper Rail, 1; Coot, 1, dead; Snowy Plover, 2; Killdeer, 10; Black-bellied Plover, 24; Hudsonian Curlew, 1; Greater Yellow-legs, 3; Least Sandpiper, about 800; Red-backed Sandpiper, about 100; Western Sandpiper, about 500; California Gull, 12;

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Bonaparte Gull, 6; Western Belted Kingfisher, 1; Pipit, 8; California Shrike, 1; Yellow-throat, 1; Western Meadowlark, 3; Savannah Sparrow, 6; Song Sparrow, 1.

Along Calaveras-Sierra Rd., through Los Buellis Hills (hilly pastureland, small groves of trees in depressions, a few farmhouses): Sharp-shinned Hawk, 2; Western Red-tailed Hawk, 4; Desert Sparrow Hawk, 5; Western Mourning Dove, 5; Anna Hummingbird, 1; Red-shafted Flicker, 10; California Woodpecker, 8; Lewis Woodpecker, 1; Black Phoebe, 2; California Horned Lark, flock of about 100; California Jay, 8; Western Crow, flock of 60; Plain Titmouse, 6; Bush-tit, 2 flocks; Slender-billed Nuthatch, 3; Rock Wren, 3; Varied Thrush, 1; Hermit Thrush, 1; Western Bluebird, 24; Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 5; Pipit, 2 large flocks; California Shrike, 3; Hutton Vireo, 1; Audubon Warbler, 16; Western Meadowlark, 10; California Purple Finch, 1; California Linnet, 60; Green-backed Goldfinch, flock of 40; Brown Towhee, 2; Savannah Sparrow, 8; Western Lark Sparrow, 2 small flocks; Fox Sparrow, 2; Oregon Junco, 2 small flocks; Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows, mixed flock of about 200; Song Sparrow, 5.

In Alum Rock Park (permanent canyon stream): White-throated Swift, 8; Red-shafted Flicker, 1; Say Phoebe, 1; Black Phoebe, 1; Wren-tit, 3; Dotten Canyon Wren, 1; Hermit Thrush, 7; Spotted Towhee, 2; Song Sparrow, 1.

January 24 nine members of the society drove out to Alum Rock Canyon, and walked up Sycamore Canyon Road for about two miles. The day was clear and mild, with an imperceptible north wind. Of the forty-seven species listed, the Pigmy Owl was the most unexpected. The little fellow, in a bush on the brushy south-facing slope of the Canyon, was being mobbed, in traditional fashion, by Bush-tits, Kinglets, and Titmice. But, as always in Alum Rock Canyon, it was the White-throated Swifts that most quickened the enthusiasm. There were at least fifty of them, speeding zigzag, in exciting concourse high above the canyon walls. These birds seem to be resident, for we have records for almost every month in the year.

Birds observed near San Jose Country Club (roadside pines, scattered houses with gardens, fields): Desert Sparrow Hawk, 2; Anna Hummingbird, 1; Red-shafted Flicker, 1; California Woodpecker, 3; Downy Woodpecker, 1; Plain Titmouse, 1; Bush-tit, small flock; Western Mockingbird, 1; Western Bluebird, 1; Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 3; Pipit, several; California Shrike, 1; Audubon Warbler, several; Western Meadowlark, 3; Red-winged Blackbird, 1; Brewer Blackbird, 3; California Purple Finch, 1; California Linnet, several; Green-backed Goldfinch, several; Western Lark Sparrow, 1.

Along Penitencia Cr. in Alum Rock Park (permanent canyon stream): Red-shafted Flicker, 2; California Woodpecker, 4; Stellar Jay, 2; Plain Titmouse, 2; Bewick Wren, 1; Dotted Canyon Wren, 1; Western Robin, 1; Varied Thrush, 2; Hermit Thrush, 3; Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 2; Audubon Warbler, 9; Oregon Junco, 10; Song Sparrow, 1.

Along Sycamore Canyon Rd. (steep south-facing wall of canyon, with sagebrush and Digger pine on more exposed portions and oaks in sheltered bends): Western Red-tailed Hawk, 2; Golden Eagle, 1; Pigmy Owl, 1; White-throated Swift, 50; Anna Hummingbird, 1; Red-shafted Flicker, 7; Hairy Woodpecker, 1; Nuttall Woodpecker, 3; Say Phoebe, 1; Steller Jay, 5; California Jay, 4; Chestnut-backed Chickadee, 10; Plain Titmouse, 5; Bush-tit, 2 flocks; Slender-billed Nuthatch, 1; Wren-tit, 8; Bewick Wren, 6; California Thrasher, 7; Hermit Thrush, 6; Western Bluebird, 3; Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 14; Hutton Vireo, 8; Audubon Warbler, 9; California Purple Finch, 1; Spotted Towhee, 2; Brown Towhee, 2; Fox Sparrow, 1; Rufous-crowned Sparrow, 1; Oregon Junco, 6; Golden-crowned Sparrow, 15; White-crowned Sparrow, 1.

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