

# THE WREN-TIT

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## NEST-PROTECTIVE REACTIONS OF THE BLACK-NECKED STILT

That peculiar combination of marshes and alkaline desert stretches in the vicinity of Los Baños has provided for an association of birds as distinctive and peculiar as the region they inhabit. Of these birds none is more noticeable than the Black-necked Stilt. And but a few moments of observation will serve to point out that the conspicuousness of the Stilt, its clamorous cries, its amazing behavior, are all directed to one end—the protection of nest or young.

Like plovers, the Black-necked Stilt deserts its nest upon the distant approach of an intruder. And again like the plovers, this first reaction, this abandonment, will be accompanied by no sound from the incubating bird.



Photograph by Gayle Pickwell.

### NEST OF BLACK-NECKED STILT

The eggs of the Stilt are, of course, very protectively marked and their colors serve as protection.

Should the intruder continue to approach, the behavior of the Stilt will take on a totally different aspect. Now it gets into the air and flies toward the invading object the while it shrieks "quit, quit, quit." Killdeers may give a similar reaction if they have young, but the Stilts do it when they are still incubating. This is one phase of a distraction display.

The third reaction of the Stilt is a distress simulation. Nearly every bird which exhibits distress simulation has a distinctive method in its ex-

pression. The Stilt is no exception. If the intruder is too near the eggs, it stands on its preposterously long legs and beats its wings up and down in a persistent and determined "I'm about to die" manner. This is again a distraction display, a display to distract from the nest the enemy that threatens. In its expression the Stilt reaches the pinnacle of all nest-protective behaviors.

GAYLE PICKWELL.

### THE PASSING OF THE BOATHOUSE

In one of the old sloughs at Warm Springs, a slough that meanders through the salicornia marshes from the deeper waters of San Francisco Bay, a slough that carries reminiscences of bygone shipping dreams, there was mired an old boathouse. It was home to scores of Cliff Swallows and dozens of Barn Swallows, and even Black Phoebes and Linnets came to it to nest (see *The Wren-tit* for January, 1929). Classes of ornithology students and members of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society made yearly pilgrimages to count the amazing number of its bird inhabitants. Now it is gone.

Itinerant Mexican pea pickers, driven from their usual roadside camps, took up their abode on the fringe of the marshes. Hither and yon they scouted for firewood, discovered the abandoned boathouse and levelled it away, down to the mud which had long submerged its shallow keel.

Now some scores of Cliff Swallows and some dozens of Barn Swallows must find new home sites; and home sites in the marshes are few.

### FIRST 1931 DATES FOR SUMMER RESIDENTS AND MIGRANTS IN SANTA CLARA VALLEY

These dates, put down in chronological order, have been gathered, for the most part, from the journals of Miss Gladys Record (G. R.), Miss Emily Smith (E. S.), and Dr. Gayle B. Pickwell (G. B. P.).

Allen Hummingbird. 1, Feb. 7, Los Gatos, E. S.; common, Feb. 22, Los Gatos, E. S.

Turkey Vulture. 1, Feb. 22, Los Gatos, E. S.; 3 pairs, Mar. 21, Silver Cr. Hills, Audubon Society.

Lutescent Warbler. 1, Feb. 28, Woodwardia, E. S.; common, Mar. 8, Los Gatos, E. S.

Violet-green Swallow. Many, Mar. 9, Los Gatos, E. S.

Western Mourning Dove. 1, Mar. 13, Los Gatos, E. S.

Lawrence Goldfinch. Several, Mar. 14, Los Altos, Yvonne Champreux; pair, Mar. 21, San Felipe Hills, E. S.

Pileolated Warbler. 1, Mar. 17, Los Gatos, E. S.; several, Mar. 31, Uvas Canyon, E. S.

Western Flycatcher. 1, Mar. 19, Los Gatos, E. S.; common, Mar. 28, Los Gatos, E. S.

Western Warbling Vireo. 1, Mar. 19, Los Gatos, E. S.; common, Mar. 28, Los Gatos, E. S.; several, Mar. 27, San Jose, G. B. P.

Cliff Swallow. Many, Mar. 21, Silver Cr. Hills, Audubon Society.

Bullock Oriole. 1, Mar. 27, Los Gatos, E. S.; 1, Apr. 4, San Jose, G. B. P.

Barn Swallow. Several, Mar. 28, Los Gatos, E. S.

Western House Wren. 1, Mar. 28, Guadalupe Mine, E. S.; common, Apr. 6, Los Gatos, G. R.

Anthony Green Heron. 1, Apr. 1, San Jose State College Campus, G. B. P.

Western Grasshopper Sparrow. 1, Apr. 1, Mt. Hamilton foothills, G. B. P.

Blackheaded Grosbeak. 1, Apr. 3, Los Gatos, E. S.; common, Apr. 15, Los Gatos, E. S.; 1, Apr. 5, San Jose, G. B. P.

Yellow Warbler. 1, Apr. 6, San Jose, G. B. P.; 1, Apr. 8, Los Gatos, E. S.; common, Apr. 14, San Jose, E. S.

Cassin Vireo. 1, Apr. 8, Los Gatos, E. S.

Texas Nighthawk. 2 pairs, Apr. 10, Coyote Cr. south of San Jose, E. S.

Western Kingbird. 1, Apr. 11, Silver Cr. Hills, G. B. P.

Ash-throated Flycatcher. 1, Apr. 11, Silver Cr. Hills, G. B. P.

Western Chipping Sparrow. 2, Apr. 11, Los Gatos, E. S.

Russet-backed Thrush. 1, Apr. 12, Los Gatos, G. R.

Western Wood Pewee. 1, Apr. 16, Alum Rock Park, G. B. P.; 1, Apr. 21, San Jose, G. B. P.; 1, Apr. 20, Los Gatos, E. S.; common, Apr. 27, Los Gatos, E. S.

Rough-winged Swallow. Pair, Apr. 16, Alum Rock Park, G. B. P.  
 Lazuli Bunting. 1, Apr. 16, Alum Rock Park, G. B. P.  
 Olive-sided Flycatcher. 1, Apr. 18, Los Gatos, G. R.  
 Long-tailed Chat. 2 or 3, Apr. 19, San Jose, Henry G. Hill.  
 Western Tanager. 1, Apr. 28, Los Gatos, E. S.

#### SOME LAST DATES FOR WINTER VISITORS

In the journals from which we gleaned the "first dates" we find a few "last dates" for winter visitors in our valley.

Varied Thrush. 1, Mar. 26, Los Gatos, E. S.  
 Hermit Thrush. 1, Mar. 21, Silver Cr. Hills, Audubon Society; 1, Mar. 31, Uvas Canyon, E. S.  
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Several, Mar. 31, Uvas Canyon, E. S.  
 Audubon Warbler. Several, Apr. 11, Los Gatos, E. S.  
 Western Savannah Sparrow. Numerous, Mar. 21, Silver Cr. Hills, Audubon Society; many, Apr. 11, Silver Cr. Hills, G. B. P.  
 Western Robin. Large flocks, Mar. 27, Los Gatos, E. S.; small flock, Apr. 17, Los Gatos, E. S.  
 Golden-crowned Sparrow. Small flock, Apr. 17, Los Gatos, E. S.; several, Apr. 21, San Jose, G. B. P.  
 White-crowned Sparrow. Small flock, Apr. 14, Los Gatos, E. S.; several, Apr. 21, San Jose, G. B. P.  
 Pipit. Many, Apr. 25, Dumbarton Bridge, Audubon Society.  
 Cedar Waxwing. Flocks common throughout April in Los Gatos and San Jose, E. S. and G. B. P.

#### REPORTS OF REGULAR MONTHLY MEETINGS

The February meeting of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society was held on the 16th, President Pickwell presiding and twenty-six members present. In response to a letter from Dr. Raymond Hall, the society went on record as opposed to the ten-year program for the eradication of predatory animals by federal agencies, as defeating the cause of conservation.

Mr. John Price, as speaker of the evening, presented some of the results of his study of California Quail on the Stanford Campus, showing that Quail during the winter form definite flocks and remain in definite territories, with little interchange of individuals; and that in the spring, although there is some changing from one flock to another and not infrequent nesting outside the winter range, still about half of the flock continue to roost in the usual trees.

At the March meeting, on the 16th, there was a large attendance to hear Dr. Joseph Grinnell discuss "Changing Conditions of Bird Life." After a statement of the requirements of birds and a brief discussion of their very narrow range of adaptation in these requirements, Dr. Grinnell, with telling illustrations, carefully developed his thesis that man-wrought processes, such as cultivation of the land and reforestation, wipe out existing bird "niches" and create new ones, thereby bringing about changes in bird population. In conclusion Dr. Grinnell argued that without the provision of suitable niches bird life can not be successfully encouraged.

#### FIELD TRIP REPORTS

February 21 fifteen members of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, under the leadership of Dr. Pickwell, drove out to the Almaden Mines and on up the canyon to Twin Creeks. Many stops were made all along the way and there were a few short walks afield. The day was cloudless and mild, with almost no wind. Of the forty species of birds listed a pair of apparently mated Water Ouzels near Twin Creeks were the most intriguing.

Birds observed along the Almaden Rd. (paved road that skirts the now unseasonably dry Guadalupe Cr. and runs between orchards, vineyards, and fields with scattered oaks): Desert Sparrow Hawk, 8; Killdeer, several; Western Mourning Dove, 1; Anna Hummingbird, 2; Red-shafted Flicker, 4; California Woodpecker, several; Red-breasted Sapsucker, 1; California

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Horned Lark, pair; California Jay, 2; Western Crow, 1; Plain Titmouse, 5; Bush-tit, pair; Bewick Wren, 2; Western Robin, 3 large flocks; Hermit Thrush, 1; Western Bluebird, several; Pipit, 6; Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 1; California Shrike, 1; Hutton Vireo, 1; Audubon Warbler, several; Western Meadowlark, many; Brewer Blackbird, several small flocks; California Purple Finch, 2; California Linnet, several; Green-backed Goldfinch, large flock; Spotted Towhee, 3; Brown Towhee, 2; Oregon Junco, small flock; Golden-crowned Sparrow, several; White-crowned Sparrow, large flock; Song Sparrow, 3.

In the Almaden Canyon (a narrow, north-south canyon of the permanent Alamitos Cr., with chaparral on the slopes above and also some grassland and scattered oaks): Western Red-tailed Hawk, 2; Desert Sparrow Hawk, 1; Anna Hummingbird, 2; Red-shafted Flicker, 7; Black Phoebe, 3; Coast Steller Jay, 1; California Jay, 5; Chestnut-backed Chickadee, small flock; Plain Titmouse, 3; Bush-tit, scattered pairs and 3 small flocks; Wren-tit, 3; Water Ouzel, pair; Bewick Wren, 1; Western Robin, flock of 100; Hermit Thrush, 2; Western Bluebird, 11; Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 6; Hutton Vireo, 7; Audubon Warbler, 12; Brewer Blackbird, flock of 20; California Purple Finch, 3; California Linnet, several; Pine Siskin, Willow Goldfinch, and Green-backed Goldfinch, mixed flock of 50; Spotted Towhee, 6; Oregon Junco, 2 large flocks; White-crowned Sparrow, 2 large flocks; Song Sparrow, 7.

**March 21** six members of the society under the leadership of Dr. Charles Piper Smith spent the morning exploring the Silver Creek Hills. The day began in a fog, but before mid-morning the sky was clear and the air mild. The Hills are low and rolling; rough in places with disintegrating serpentine rock, but grass-covered for the most part and given over to grazing. In the depressions oaks and brush provide retreats for birds.

Forty-one species of birds were listed. A medley of bird songs in one small oak grove showed a mingling of both summer and winter visitors with resident birds: Lutescent and Audubon Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Junco, Hutton Vireo, Bewick Wren, Titmouse, and Green-backed Goldfinch, all singing with gusto.

Birds observed along the King Road, approaching the Hills (a paved road that borders an aviation field and then passes between orchards and neglected weedy fields): Red-shafted Flicker, 1; California Horned Lark, pair; Pipit, 8; Western Meadowlark, many; Red-winged Blackbird, 30; Brewer Blackbird, several pairs and small groups; California Linnet, many; Savannah Sparrow, many; Western Lark Sparrow, 1; White-crowned Sparrow, many.

On Silver Creek Hills: Turkey Vulture, 4; Western Red-tailed Hawk, 2; Desert Sparrow Hawk, 1; Killdeer, 1; Western Mourning Dove, 2; Anna Hummingbird, 1; Red-shafted Flicker, 11; California Woodpecker, 1; Nuttall Woodpecker, 1; California Horned Lark, several scattered pairs; Violet-green Swallow, 3; Cliff Swallow, 2 colonies; California Jay, 2; Yellow-billed Magpie, 14; Western Crow, 6; Plain Titmouse, 8; Bush-tit, 2 pairs; Slender-billed Nuthatch, 1; Wren-tit, 1; Bewick Wren, 6; Rock Wren, 5; Western Robin, 50; Hermit Thrush, 1; Western Bluebird, 8; Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 6; Pipit, large flock; Hutton Vireo, 3; Lutescent Warbler, 3; Audubon Warbler, 9; Western Meadowlark, many; California Linnet, many; Green-backed Goldfinch, 12; Spotted Towhee, 2; Brown Towhee, 4; Western Lark Sparrow, many; Oregon Junco, 2 flocks; Golden-crowned Sparrow, 2; White-crowned Sparrow, small flock.

### SANTA CLARA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

President.....Dr. Gayle B. Pickwell, State Teachers College, San Jose, Cal.  
Secretary.....Miss Emily Smith, Route 1, Box 93, Los Gatos, Cal.  
Treasurer.....Miss Gladys Record, 44 Fairview Plaza, Los Gatos, Cal.

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Editor, Dr. Gayle B. Pickwell

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