

SANTA CLARA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

April, 1949

LAST AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR for this season, entitled "Alluring Alaska," will be presented next Thursday evening, April 7, at 8 o'clock in the Montgomery Theatre, San Jose Civic Auditorium. This motion picture program will portray in color the wildlife of the still primitive area of Alaska. The advance notices promise unusual sequences of wolves, bears, and deer, all set in majestic mountain scenery; and fine shots of flower-filled meadows, wilderness forests, and deep snows above timberline. Rev. George M. Link, who will show the pictures, is urging "intelligent protection and wise use" of the tremendous natural resources of Alaska. Father Link, one of the leading amateur naturalists in the middle western states, has very successfully applied his love of wildlife and the out-of-doors in general, to his extensive boy guidance work, especially to his "Trail Rangers of America" program for boys.

Tickets will be sold at the Montgomery Theatre on the night of the performance: general admission, 75c; students and children, 60c.

THE FIRST OF THE TWO FIELD TRIPS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL will be taken next Sunday, April 10, to the O'Connell cattle ranch, in the foothills northeast of Morgan Hill; and in the afternoon to the Silver Creek Hills. On our Calendar for this year, this trip was scheduled for "both birds and wild flowers." Mrs. Grace Brubaker, who will lead the trip Sunday, is hoping that the wild flower display, usual at this time of the year on the Silver Creek Hills, will not be late this year. Meet in San Jose at the usual place, corner of E. San Carlos and Fifth Streets, at 8 o'clock. Palo Alto members who can take passengers and those who want transportation, meet at the S. P. Depot in Palo Alto at 7:15 a.m. Bring picnic lunch. From the San Jose meeting place the party will drive out King Road to Evergreen and then follow the San Felipe Road to the O'Connell Ranch.

The second field trip scheduled for April is the overnight trip to the Pinnacles National Monument, April 23 and 24. Notices giving details will be mailed later this month.

B. Neil Dickinson, Pres. - 1135 Crane St., Menlo Park
Emily Smith, Corr. Sec. - 387 Glen Una Dr., Los Gatos

JANUARY 16 FIELD TRIP REPORT. In the announcement of the field trip to Alum Rock Park and Alviso, I expressed the hope that the party would have "the opportunity of seeing the sharp-tailed sparrow," which had been reported seen recently--December 27--at Alviso. Believe it or not, when the field trip day came, every member of the party saw the sharp-tailed sparrow! Seeing a bird at Alviso which, according to all the books, should have been wintering somewhere along the South Atlantic or Gulf coast, was an ornithological thrill and deserves most of the space allotted to this field trip report.

To begin at the beginning, this sharp-tailed sparrow was first spotted by David Cutler, a member of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Society of Pennsylvania, who was visiting in San Jose at Christmas time.

Before he left San Jose, Mr. Cutler led two Audubon Society members to the spot where he had seen the bird, but the bird was not seen. Fortified with Mr. Cutler's careful description of the bird's appearance and behavior and with colored pictures of the bird, the two members again went to Alviso, but their search was unsuccessful. From the literature we knew that the Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrow, which nests east of the Rockies in the prairie marshes of Canada and as far south as the Dakotas, had been recorded three times in California. Two birds were collected at Milpitas—May 6, 1891 and January 31, 1896—and two birds were observed by Howard Cogswell near Venice in Los Angeles County, at various times between January 16 and February 12, 1944.

On the day of our field trip the sky was clear, but all morning in the Alum Rock Park area a strong cold wind blew incessantly. After lunch most of the party of eighteen, in spite of the wind, went on to Alviso. At the dike where Mr. Cutler had seen the sharp-tailed sparrow, we divided into groups and combed the Salicornia and the tall Spartina grass along by the dike and beside the road. We flushed song sparrows, Savannah sparrows, marsh wrens, yellow-throats, a clapper rail; and much to my surprise a Virginia rail sprang out from under my feet. Finally a different sparrow darted out of a shrub. Every one held his breath until it alighted on a slender weed stem, for Mrs. Nielsen's scrutiny. "Hold everything! Yes, it is a sharp-tailed sparrow!" And she was right! It was a beautiful sparrow, richly colored with dull orange on face and side of breast. As the groups closed in to get a better view, it flew a short way to cover; and as we tried to get closer, it moved from bush to bush ahead of us. Eventually it was herded under a shrub on top of the dike, where every one had a good chance to observe it—Miss Emily even saw the sharply pointed tail feathers which give the bird its name.

It is fifty-three years since the sharp-tailed sparrow was recorded in our area, and no doubt we would have overlooked it this year if an Easterner, who knew the bird, had not started us looking for it. Now we must discover whether it is more than just a "rare straggler" in our marshes.

Summary of birds recorded during the day. In the Alum Rock Park area: Cooper's hawk, 2; red-tailed hawk, 3; golden eagle, 2; sparrow hawk, 2; Cal. quail, 36; killdeer, 8; band-tailed pigeon, 8; red-shafted flicker, 5; Cal. woodpecker, 3; hairy woodpecker, 1; downy woodpecker, 1; black phoebe, 1; Steller's jay, 3; Cal. jay, 5; yellow-billed magpie, 2 (Penitencia Creek, near Noble Rd.); crow, 3; chestnut-backed chickadee, 30; plain titmouse, 2; bush-tit, 27; wren-tit, 4; Bewick's wren, 1; canyon wren, 1; mockingbird, 2; robin, 189; varied thrush, 19; hermit thrush, 11; ruby-crowned kinglet, 3; American pipit, 21; Hutton's vireo, 1; Audubon's warbler, 3; Western meadowlark, 15; purple finch, 4; house finch, 12; pine siskin, 4; Ark. goldfinch, 54; spotted towhee, 4; brown towhee, 10; Ore. junco, 11; white-crowned sparrow, 38; golden-crowned sparrow, 13; fox sparrow, 1; song sparrow, 3.

At Alviso, during our search for the sharp-tailed sparrow (first dike east of church on Los Esteros Road): American egret, 8 (Zanker Rd.); American pintail, 16; cinnamon teal, 4; shoveller, 2; white-tailed kite, 2 (Zanker Rd.); marsh hawk, 2; ring-necked pheasant, 3; clapper rail, 1; Virginia rail, 1; American coot, 2; least sandpiper, 8; avocet, 21; white-throated swift, 2 (with violet-green swallows); violet-green swallow, 3; marsh wren, 6; American pipit, 3; yellow-throat, 3; Savannah sparrow, 24; sharp-tailed sparrow, 1; song sparrow, 6.

James G. Peterson, leader