

SANTA CLARA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

15
November, 1949
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A SECOND NOVEMBER FIELD TRIP will be taken this next Sunday, Nov. 27, to Hall's Valley and Smith Creek, with Beatrice and George Nielsen as leaders. Hall's Valley is on the way to Mt. Hamilton, about twelve miles from San Jose; and Smith Creek is only a short way beyond Hall's Valley. In the Valley there will be a walk of about one mile along a trail through brush, to visit a small reservoir. The meeting place for the trip will be the corner of East San Carlos and Fifth Streets in San Jose, and the time eight o'clock. Bring lunch.

NEW MEMBERS. The Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society welcomes as new members: from Menlo Park, Mrs. Elizabeth M. Deaton, Mrs. Grace Pole, and Mrs. Herbert C. Wittgenstein; from Los Gatos, Mrs. Mildred Foreman, Miss Wilma E. Harris, Mrs. Arthur H. Jones, and Mrs. Nellie Weaver; and from Santa Clara, Mrs. William McCormick.

B. Neil Dickinson, Pres. - 554 Oak Park Way, Redwood City
Emily Smith, Corr. Sec. - Box 387, Glen Una Dr., Los Gatos

OCTOBER 30 FIELD TRIP REPORT. Some twenty of us were up early that Sunday morning, to meet at Tiny's in Los Banos for breakfast at eight o'clock. At nine o'clock we were at the entrance gate to the Los Banos Bird and Game Refuge where Mr. Roy Wattenbarger, manager of the Refuge, met us and took charge of our trip. We were very pleasantly surprised when several members of the Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society joined us; and then Mr. McHenry, Park Naturalist in Yosemite National Park, and Mrs. McHenry; and finally about twenty members of the Modesto Wildlife Conservation Society, which has recently become an affiliate of the National Audubon Society. We had all come to see the great concentration of waterfowl in the Los Banos Refuge during the duck hunting season. The weather was made for us—clear, warm, and no wind—and it was a big, enthusiastic group which Mr. Wattenbarger guided through the 3,000-acre refuge.

Following his plan of a year ago when we visited the refuge, Mr. Wattenbarger led us first to a small pond where many ducks and other water birds were loafing. Here there was no danger of frightening the wild fowl out of the refuge. Using Henri Hill's telescope and a 'scope brought by Mr. Schenck, we got excellent views of eared grebe, double-crested cormorant, baldpate ("widgeon" to the duck hunter), green-winged teal, shoveller ("spoonbill"), ring-necked duck, canvas-back, ruddy duck, white-fronted goose, snow goose. When a flock of about twenty Canada geese flew over the pond, Mr. Wattenbarger said they were the first he had seen this season. The white-fronted goose is the first to arrive in the refuge, then the snow goose, and last the Canada goose. Around the margin of the pond we found three members of the Heron Family. A bittern flushed just as we arrived, and later we saw a great blue heron and an American egret. The most conspicuous land bird here was the red-winged blackbird. When several of us went over to a dense growth of cattails to investigate the noise which was coming from it, a dark cloud of blackbirds rose into the air.

We birded quietly at the small pond until after eleven o'clock, well after the shooting outside the boundaries of the refuge had subsided.

Then our guide and mentor led us to a very large pond where the concentration of waterfowl was astounding. The surface of the pond was so covered with ducks that we could not see the water, as we approached the pond, because of the ducks! As we drove slowly the length of the long pond, swarms of ducks, one after another, took to the air with a roar of wing beat. And yet there were still vast numbers of waterfowl on the pond, while we ate our lunches under willows at one end. Many which had left were returning and others were covering nearby ponds. We soon discovered, among many snow geese at one end of the pond, three whistling swans, one of them pure white and the other two showing the gray of juvenile birds. Most of the ducks on the pond were mallards and baldpates, but there were many shovellers, canvas-backs, and pintails (pintails predominated last week, Mr. Wattenbarger said). In response to our questions, Mr. Wattenbarger told us something of the history of the Los Banos Refuge, the first of its kind in California, and of its present aims to grow enough water grass in the ponds to attract ducks away from rice fields. Water grass, he said, is preferred by ducks, and also has the advantage of maturing earlier than the rice, is ready when the ducks arrive from the north.

While Mr. Wartenbarger was talking we could hear the rolling, trumpeting call of sandhill cranes; and so our next objective was the "crane area," a flat, level field near one end of the refuge. Luck was with us. First we saw a small squadron of cranes come sailing majestically overhead, and then we discovered the many cranes standing tall and wary in the grass. As we drove slowly past them they sprang into the air, flapping their great wings and calling alarm. It was a thrilling sight, but we regretted the alarm; and so we were glad when we looked back and saw many cranes settling again in the field.

The great flocks of snow geese and white-fronted geese, the vast numbers of ducks, the thrilling cranes, absorbed so much of our attention that we rather neglected the shore birds on the muddy margins of the ponds and the land birds in the fields and in the willows bordering the ponds, as our following list of birds for the trip will show:

Eared grebe	Ring-necked duck	Least sandpiper
Double-crested cormorant	Canvas-back	Dowitcher
Great blue heron	Ruddy duck	Avocet
American egret	Turkey vulture	California gull?
Snowy egret	Cooper's hawk	Red-shafted flicker
American bittern	Red-tailed hawk	Black phoebe
Whistling swan	Marsh hawk	Long-billed marsh wren
Canada goose	Pigeon hawk	American pipit
White-fronted goose	Ring-necked pheasant	Audubon's warbler
Snow goose	Sandhill crane	Western meadowlark
Mallard	Sora rail	Yellow-headed blackbird
Baldpate	Florida gallinule	Red-wing
American pintail	American coot	Tricolored red-wing
Green-winged teal	Killdeer	Savannah sparrow
Shoveller	Greater yellow-legs	Song sparrow

We are grateful to Mr. Wattenbarger for the privilege of seeing the great congregation of waterfowl in the refuge he manages, and also for the opportunity to learn more about the work of the California Fish and Game to help provide suitable wintering grounds for waterfowl.

Clyde and Agnes Prusman