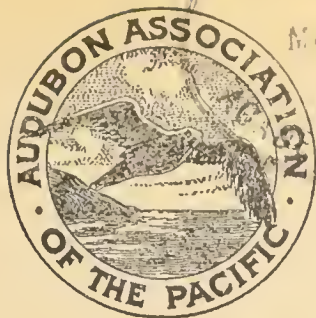


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Hunting For Cranes

It had always been one of my ambitions to see large numbers of cranes. With this thought in mind I asked one of the field men of the California Fish and Game Commission what my chances would be in the San Joaquin or Sacramento Valleys. He had just returned from the former place and reported a thousand more or less of these birds on ranches near Los Banos. After a series of foggy mornings, December 18, 1939, surprised us with a clear sunrise. Hastily Mrs. Enid Austin and myself left for the valley.

We did not tarry along the way because our one objective was to see cranes. We did, however, note very large flocks of pipits flying low over the fields, many sparrow hawks and shrikes sitting on the wires and marsh hawks cruising about. We stopped at the Los Banos Refuge to obtain additional information. On the ponds to the right of the road were small numbers of Gadwalls, Mallards, Pintails, Shovellers, Baldpates, Coots, a few California Blue Herons and American Egrets. We stopped the car to let five Florida Gallinules walk across the road while an American Bittern slowly walked along the side.

On the Delta Ranch, after opening and closing a number of gates, we came to the end of the road where we were supposed to find the cranes. We could hear them but they were too far away to see; however, finally four rose and flew toward us, a lovely sight. As the daylight was fast fading the color effects became more beautiful. From the sky came the calls of geese and soon flocks were passing overhead. On the way into this part of the ranch we had observed many red tailed hawks flying and perching in the trees. On returning over this same road in the twilight we heard Horned Owls calling and saw at least a dozen of these birds flying about. Several cock pheasants also came into sight.

It had been a pleasant bird experience but not satisfactory so far as cranes were concerned. One reason that we had seen so few cranes was that just before we drove to this distant part of the ranch where cranes feed, one of the ranchers had gone to the place and frightened them away, as these birds can do a lot of damage when feeding in planted fields. For the night we stayed at the Canal Farm Inn. Here in the old olive trees large flocks of Gambel Sparrows roost. They were giving short snatches of song even in the dark. Of course, the weather was very much on our minds. We were praying that the morning would be clear. At dawn there was a chorus of Gambel song which was a cheerful start. It was frosty but the visibility was fair. As we proceeded toward the delta region the fog was of the pea soup variety.

We experienced our first interesting sight on the refuge within a few yards of the road where some three hundred Lesser Snow Geese were preening and resting, uttering their low conversational notes. We were driving very slowly, always hoping that the sun, which we could see at intervals, would drive the fog away. It was tantalizing to watch the light come and go. We had to content ourselves with Gambel Sparrows, Audubon Warblers, Meadow Larks, Brewer Blackbirds, Black Phoebes, Flickers, and Savannah Sparrows. Occasionally we had to stop to let a flock of sheep pass. The farther we traveled the denser the fog be-

came. Finally we reached the Erreca Ranch. The whole setting was eery. Sounds came from the air and then gradually we could see flocks of Canada, White Fronted and Lesser Snow Geese like ghosts moving through the mist and finally alighting to feed. Just as our hopes would rise that it was getting lighter the wattery orb now high in the sky would entirely disappear.

We had now come to the place that had been most highly recommended to us. Yes, we could hear the rolling notes of cranes, but would we ever be able to see them? It was just past noon, and the days being short, unless fortune favored us we would not see the coveted birds. We were both straining our eyes looking in opposite directions when at 12:20 the fog became a thin veil and there stood cranes on both sides of the dirt road, some in a stubble field and others on plowed ground. In a few minutes the whole scene was bathed in sunshine. There were six Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis tabida*) and one Little Brown Crane (*Grus canadensis canadensis*) in one group. The light being perfect I planned to stalk these birds, so as to see them at closer range and also to see them take off. Cows were grazing near-by. I was wearing a brown coat and by walking on all fours, as it were, and proceeding very slowly and stopping occasionally to get a good look at the birds, I finally got close enough to see the bare spot on the head and the interesting loose plumes. All the while one or two had stood guard while the others were feeding. There was a small mound about three feet high in the field and I used this to screen myself from their view and get my last close-up of the birds. When my head appeared above the mound all necks were stretched up full length and at all angles. Then all faced into the wind so that there were six long necks and one short neck all parallel to each other. They gradually rose calling and circling into the sky. In watching flocks flying we noticed that the long lines of single file would soon be broken as birds from the rear would gain on the front ones and the line would reform with a change of leaders. Again they would turn and form a single line one deep either flying toward or away from us. In either case the bodies would be foreshortened and the heads and feet hardly noticeable, only the moving wings would be conspicuous and the birds would appear like the wavy edge of a cloud, hence difficult to see in the distance.

While I was approaching the seven birds previously mentioned and keeping myself close to the ground, I was fascinated by the sight and the swishing sound of wings of thousands of Horned Larks and Pipits that swept over, in front and in back of me.

What a lunch place! While refreshing ourselves we were watching cranes feeding. With necks down they look like sheep grazing. To add to our pleasure several of the birds went through some of their dance steps which are part of courting behavior. As we were enjoying the warm sunshine, seeing the soft blue sky, the line of bare blue grey willows lining the slough and the rows upon rows of straw colored tumble weeds it strongly impressed itself upon us, that all this beauty with its abundant wild life, was just one hundred fifty miles distant from our homes.

On returning through the same country which had only two hours before been almost invisible in the fog, we were amazed to count some five hundred cranes standing and feeding on the dark ground along the fence. We were now more than satisfied. As we left the ranch, on the opposite side of the road, we discovered another flock of about one hundred. I feel certain that most of the birds seen were Sandhill Cranes. It will be interesting to go back to this region in the early spring and see whether or not the Sandhills have left and the Little Brown Cranes have arrived. From information that I have been able to gather it seems that the Little Brown Cranes winter farther south.

Certainly birding is a sport with all the element of chance that one may desire. After one knows the right time of year and the right place to observe birds, fog might hide all, or some disturbance might make the birds change feeding grounds. A few minutes one way or another may make for success or failure. Nothing I can write will convey the sounds and sights we enjoyed on that two-day trip.

February Field Trip

The February field trip was taken to the campus of the University of California, Berkeley, on the 11th. The day was perfect. The group divided into three sections: the first going to the top of the ridge above Strawberry Canyon and working downward, and the other two sections covering the campus surrounding the university buildings. The three groups came together for luncheon at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur H. Myer, who again very generously served coffee and cakes.

After a delightful social hour and a half most of the party finished the day at the Aquatic Park, where a number of water birds were observed. The outstanding item of interest was that of seeing four pairs of Bush-tits building nests in different stages of construction, one each in an olive tree, a red-flowering eucalyptus, a taxodium and an oak. February proved to be a far more interesting time of year to visit the campus than December. A total of forty-three species were seen.

The list of twenty-three species, with their approximate number of individuals seen on the campus is as follows:

Red-tailed Hawk 1	Bush-tit 16+	Pine Siskin heard
Sparrow Hawk 1	Robin 62+	Green-backed Goldfinch 5
Quail 2	Hermit Thrush 8	San Francisco Towhee 2
Anna Hummingbird 4	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 8+	Brown Towhee 8
Red-shafted Flicker 1	Cedar Waxwing 20+	Junco 14+
Black Phoebe 1	Audubon Warbler 6	White-Crowned Sparrow
California Jay 3	Townsend Warbler 1	26+
Titmouse 1	Purple Finch 5	Song Sparrow 4

Twenty-one species were seen in Strawberry Canyon as follows:

Cooper Hawk 1	Titmouse 15	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Red-tailed Hawk 4	Bush-tit 30	Audubon Warbler
Quail 10	Wren-tit 5	San Francisco Towhee 3
Anna Hummingbird 3	Thrasher 1	Junco 30
Red-shafted Flicker 8	Robin	Golden-crowned Sparrow 1
Willow Woodpecker 2	Varied Thrush 4	Fox Sparrow 5
Crested Jay 1	Hermit Thrush	Song Sparrow

Twelve species seen at the Aquatic Park as follows:

Eared Grebe 6	Scaup	Ruddy Duck 25+
Pied-billed Grebe 4	American Golden-eye 1	Killdeer 3
American Egret 1	White-winged Scoter 1	Ring-billed Gull 6
Mallard 1 female	Surf Scoter 2	Bonaparte Gull several

Twenty-three members attended as follows: Messrs. and Mesdames Dunshee, Millard, Myer, Stephens; Mrs. Kelly; Misses Blake, Cohen, MacIver, McConnell, Paroni, Perdue, Rinehart, Roscoe, Sterne; Messrs. Davis, Greenhood, Holmes, Kirker, Pike and fourteen guests.

Laura A. Stephens, Historian.



Audubon Notes

March Meeting: The regular meeting will be held on Thursday, the 14th, at 8 p.m., Ferry Building.

The speaker of the evening will be Dr. Paul T. Wilson, Professor of Natural Sciences, Marin Junior College, who will give an illustrated talk on "Wild-life in Sequoia National Park."

Members may bring guests.



March Field Trip will be taken on Sunday, the 17th, to East Bay Regional

Park, back of Berkeley. Members take the Shattuck Avenue line of the Inter-urban from the San Francisco Terminal at 8:51 a.m. to Berkeley Station. Then take the Spruce Street No. 67 bus to the Reservoir at the top of the hills (end of bus line). Luncheon will be eaten near the CCC camp where fire-place may be used.



April Field Trip: A special trip will be taken by a chartered Greyline bus to

the beautiful country back of Livermore. The price of the trip will not be over \$1.30. Members wishing to go on this trip must make reservations by March 17th so we may know what capacity bus to order. A deposit of \$1.00 must be made at the time of signing up for the trip. Either send in your deposit to Miss Francis J. Blake, 1505 Holly Street, Berkeley, or see her at the March meeting or field trip.



February Meeting: The 270th regular meeting was held on the 8th in the Ferry Building, with twenty-five members and guests present. President B. K. Dunshee presided.

Mrs. Thelma J. Heynen of Larkspur, and Miss J. Patricia McCarthy of San Rafael were elected to membership.

Mrs. C. A. Rossier, a member since 1920, died February 12, 1940.

The speaker of the evening, Mr. F. H. Test of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, gave a very interest-

ing talk on "The Nature and Development of Plumage Coloration in the Flickers," and illustrated his talk with specimens of birds and blackboard drawings.



Observations: Gordon Bolander: Twin Peaks, Calaveras Warbler, February 4th.

Mrs. Courtright: In Mrs. Thos. Kent's garden, Shady Lane, Ross, two White-throated Sparrows, February 4th.

Mrs. Dutton: Stow Lake, Golden Gate Park, Wood Duck, February 8th.

Mrs. Kelly: At Mrs. Tillotson's feeding tray in Berkeley, Calaveras Warbler, January 19, 21, 23; Bay Farm Island, 15 Avocets, two Black Turnstones, January 28th, in Mrs. Scott's garden, Alameda, the Bushtits were feeding young, February 7th.

Harold Kirker: Phoenix Lake, Ross, three Hooded Mergansers, January 27th and 29th; Manzanita, Snowy Egret, 27th; Ross, two Red-breasted Sapsucker, two Willow Woodpeckers and many Varied Thrushes, 29th; Tomales Bay, White-tailed Kite, Inverness, Western Flycatcher, February 17th.

Carl Smith: San Andreas Road, Roadrunner, Western Kingbird, February 18th.

Mrs. Stephens: Golden Gate Park, Allen Hummingbird, February 3rd.

Audubon Association of the Pacific

Organized January 25, 1917

For the Study and the Protection of Birds

- President.....Mr. B. K. Dunshee....Room 714, 245 Market St., San Francisco
- Corresponding Secretary.....Mr. Joseph J. Webb.....519 California St., San Francisco
- Treasurer.....Mrs. A. B. Stephens.....1695 Filbert St., San Francisco

Monthly meeting second Thursday, 8 P. M., Ferry Building.

Address Bulletin correspondence to Mrs. A. B. Stephens, Editor, 1695 Filbert St., San Francisco.

Membership dues, payable January 1st, \$3.00 per year.

Student memberships, \$1.50 per year.

Life memberships, \$50.00.

Members are responsible for dues until written notice of resignation is received by Treasurer.