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Birds of Fallen Leaf Lake Region

by F. M. Jencks

At the head of Fallen Leaf Lake early in the morning of June 12, 1930, as I sat concealed on a rocky ledge above the water, a bird of a curious shape moved out from the shore. It was a mother American Merganser carrying some of her brood on her back and pulling others that held on behind. The bird barge moved slowly, the mother croaking and looking particularly anxious on account of the hair-like feathers that stood off from her head.

As they crossed the mouth of Glen Alpine Creek, a second female landed in the water close by and swam toward them. The mother turned on her two or three times to keep her at a distance. She deposited her brood on a log, rested a few moments, and then plunged unencumbered to the attack, though her children jumped in after her. At this moment a pair dropped down, the male very handsome in his brilliant white plumage. The sight of a second female more fortunate than herself seemed to fill the single bird's breast with bitterness. She arose from the water and began to fly wildly about in great circles, half over the water and half over the trees.

The place where these Mergansers were seen is half way between Fallen Leaf Lodge and the Housekeeping Camp. Here in a quarter mile along the Lake forty species of birds can be seen or heard in June and July. Nearly seventy species can be found in the Fallen Leaf Lake Region. Many more could be added to the list if the adjoining meadows and marshes at the head of Lake Tahoe were included. What some of these birds are can be found in two articles in the "Condor": "A List of the Land Birds of Placerville-Lake Tahoe Stage Road," by Chester Barlow, with supplementary notes by W. W. Price, November, 1901; and "Six Weeks in the High Sierras in Nesting Time," by Milton S. Ray, March, 1918.

My observations the past three summers have been confined almost entirely to the mountainous region into which most of the hiking is done from Fallen Leaf Lake. This territory extends from the Lake at an altitude of 6300 feet south-westerly to the Crystal Range, including Pyramid Peak, at 10,000 feet elevation. It comprises the whole of Glen Alpine, in which there are eight lakes tributary to Fallen Leaf Lake, and also Desolation Valley and Lake of the Woods, which form the head-waters of the South Fork of the American River. Its best known peak, besides Pyramid, is Mount Tallac.

In the Housekeeping Camp, located in a coniferous forest on the cool west slope of the lateral moraine facing Mount Tallac, Western Golden-crowned Kinglets and Evening Grosbeaks are very much at home. Though the Grosbeaks are strikingly colored, their chicken-like peeping becomes a little tiresome. In 1928 the Grosbeaks were especially numerous until July 12, when they disappeared completely. The Kinglets, whose busily happy song I never tire of, are difficult to see. The whole month of June, 1928, I suffered from a lame neck as day after day I peered up into dark trees, sometimes seeing a bird, but never any color, until one fine morning a bird exposed his crown to the sun just above my porch, and I knew who my singing benefactor was.

During June in the early morning the edge of the forest rings with bird song, the Olive-sided Flycatcher, the Robin, the Western Tanager, the Black-headed Grosbeak and the Fox Sparrow taking the leading roles. The Tanager and the Fox Sparrow are appreciated especially because they sing throughout the day. Although the Fox Sparrow is by far the better singer, the Tanager's call note, "prit-it," is to me as delightful as almost any song. The Poorwill's note, endlessly repeated, is heard many nights.

Two of the birds in the more open woods toward the Lodge have surprising nesting habits. Wood Pewees as they incubate, sit open-mouthed in the hot sun, as they persist in building their nests in dead trees. The nest is hard to see but if the tree and a bird are watched as they get together, the nest is easily discovered.

In the alders about Glen Alpine Creek are many Warbling Vireos, whose nests I have found in three cases by simply searching out the singing bird, thus finding bird and nest together. The singing bird on the nest may be a female, for in one case the only tree close by contained another bird that was singing at the same time. Is it possible that squirrels and Jays do not find nests that are so loudly and persistently advertised?

One bird is very methodical in trying to conceal its home. A Red-breasted Sapsucker had a hole in a dead fir not far from my cabin. Invariably, before going to the nest, the bird would rest for five counts at a particular spot on a tree above my porch.

It is perhaps the birds that are found altogether or chiefly in the higher altitudes that give one the greatest delight, though perhaps one appreciates them more because one does not see them so often. Among such birds are the Williamson Sapsucker, the Clarke Nutcracker, the Townsend Solitaire, the Hermit Thrush, the Mountain Bluebird, the Ruby-crowned Kinglet, the Cassin Purple Finch, the Sierra Nevada Rosy Finch, the White-crowned Sparrow and the Pine Grosbeak. These have a pretty general distribution at high levels, three excepted. The Sierra Nevada Rosy Finches are found only above the timber line near the snow. The Mountain Bluebirds are seen on the broad backs of Pyramid and Tallac, though outside the region they are found also on the short cut between Myers and Fallen Leaf at only 6300 feet. Pine Grosbeaks were last summer on the north side of Lake of the Woods at the log cabin there. Feeding on the ground near my cot when I awoke one morning was a gorgeous rose-colored bird talking most musically, and on a small fir close by was his mate, with a crown of rich yellow. This pair was at the same place on two later occasions, but I was disappointed not to see any young.

Other birds seen only at particular places are Spotted Sandpipers that undoubtedly nest on the lakes of Desolation Valley; Dippers that nest on Glen Alpine Creek below Modjeska Falls; House Wrens that make their homes under the eaves of the buildings at the Lodge; and the one Song Sparrow of the region that sings at Lilly Lake.

My observations were made during June and July for the past three years. Noteworthy birds that I have seen only once are a Common Loon on Fallen Leaf Lake on June 7, 1930, a Goshawk above the short trail to Tallac on July 24, 1930, and an Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker below Grass Lake in 1928. Other single records include the Sharp-shinned, Red-tailed and Desert Sparrow Hawks; Hammond Flycatcher, Western Bluebird and Hermit Warbler.

Other birds not mentioned above, most of them seen or heard daily, were as follows:

White Pelican; Sierra Grouse; Mountain Quail; California Gull; Nighthawk; Rufous* and Calliope Hummingbirds; Kingfisher; Hairy and White-headed Woodpeckers; Red-shafted Flicker; Tree Swallow; Crested Jay; Mountain Chickadee; Slender-billed and Red-breasted Nuthatches; Creeper; Rock Wren*; Olive-backed Thrush; Cassin Vireo; Calaveras, Lutescent,* Yellow, Audubon,

Tolmie and Pileolated Warblers; Pine Siskin*; Green-tailed Towhee; Sierra Junco; Chipping Sparrow.*

*Species not seen in the immediate vicinity of the Lodge or Camp.



Field Trip: An extra field trip was taken on Sunday, the 3rd, to St. Marys (Cashion), our first visit to this locality since May 1928. The day was quite warm but not too warm for the comfort and pleasure of the twenty-three members and four guests who were present.

St. Marys Station now takes the place of Cashion Station and is about one-half mile west of the old location. The old ranch house has been completely razed. The barn is still standing and Cliff Swallows were here in numbers. Razing the house has not discouraged the House Wrens which were always present. A pair had a nest in a hole in an elder tree near where the house formerly stood. Green-backed Goldfinches were nesting in another nearby tree. A pair of Ash-throated Flycatchers had a full-grown family out of the nest.

Upon arriving at the row of eucalyptus trees along the highway, the old-time chorus of mixed bird songs greeted us. Here the songs or notes of the Purple Finch, Linnet, Bullock Oriole, Brewer Blackbird, Allen Hummingbird, Green-backed and Lawrence Goldfinches, House Sparrow, Brown Towhee, Western Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo and California Woodpecker were heard. Some of the species were nesting; others were probably attracted by the insects which came to feed upon the eucalyptus blossoms. This situation is in part an answer to the question so often asked, "Which birds have adopted the eucalyptus tree?"

Farther along in the oaks Slender-billed Nuthatches were present. At frequent intervals a Nuttall Woodpecker announced his presence and permitted himself to be closely observed. The nesting hole of a pair of these woodpeckers was so conveniently located that the party had a splendid opportunity to watch the parents feed the young. In this case the male fed the young twice as often as the female.

Nests of the following eighteen species were found: Red-shafted Flicker, California and Nuttall Woodpeckers, Black Phoebe, Rough-winged and Cliff Swallows, California Jay, Plain Titmouse, Bush-tit, House Wren, Warbling Vireo, Yellow Warbler, Red-winged Blackbird, Bullock Oriole, Brewer Blackbird, Purple Finch, Linnet and Green-backed Goldfinch.

A total list of fifty-two species was noted as follows:

Great Blue Heron	Rough-winged Swallow	Tolmie Warbler
Turkey Vulture	Cliff Swallow	Pileolated Warbler
Red-tailed Hawk	Steller Jay	Meadowlark
Sparrow Hawk	California Jay	Red-winged Blackbird
California Quail	Plain Titmouse	Bullock Oriole
Killdeer	Bush-tit	Brewer Blackbird
Mourning Dove	Slender-billed Nuthatch	Western Tanager
White-throated Swift	Wren-tit	Black-headed Grosbeak
Allen Hummingbird	House Wren	Lazuli Bunting
Kingfisher	Bewick Wren	House Sparrow
Red-shafted Flicker	Russet-backed Thrush	Purple Finch
California Woodpecker	Western Bluebird	Linnet
Downy Woodpecker	Warbling Vireo	Green-backed Goldfinch
Nuttall Woodpecker	Cassin Vireo	Lawrence Goldfinch
Ash-throated Flycatcher	Hutton Vireo	Spotted Towhee
Black Phoebe	Lutescent Warbler	Brown Towhee
Western Flycatcher	Yellow Warbler	Song Sparrow
Wood Pewee		

C. A. Bryant, Historian.

Audubon Notes

June Meeting will be held on Thursday, the 11th, at 8 p. m., room 19, 2nd floor, Ferry Building.

The speaker of the evening will be Mrs. M. E. Davidson, Assistant Curator of Birds and Mammals, California Academy of Sciences, who will speak on the subject "Hummingbirds." The lecture will be illustrated.



June Field Trip will be taken Sunday, the 14th, starting from Ross, and going to Alpine Lake by way of Phoenix Lake, Shaver Grade and the old Bolinas Road to Alpine Lake, returning through Bon Tempe Meadow to Lake Lagunitas and down the Fish Gulch Road past Phoenix Lake to the picnic place where supper will be eaten. Purchase round-trip tickets to Ross, 60c. Take Sausalito Ferry at 8:15 a. m. Bring food for two meals. Leaders, Mrs. A. B. Stephens and Mr. Arthur Myer.



May Meeting: The 171st regular meeting was held May 14th, in room 19, Ferry Building, with forty members and guests present. President Brighton C. Cain presiding.

The following were elected to membership:

Dr. H. A. Hess, the Misses Bernice Kautz and Mary K. Murphy, all of San Francisco.

Field observations were reported as follows:

Chas. Bryant: April 26th, Ross, eight pairs of singing Black-throated Gray Warblers.

Mrs. A. B. Stephens: May 8th and 9th, Chain of Lakes, Golden Gate Park, three Spotted Sandpipers.

Harold Swanton: May 2nd, Bolinas Lagoon, Purple Martins, Red-throated Loon in breeding plumage, Spotted Sandpiper.

Brighton Cain read a letter received from Dr. Harold C. Bryant from which we quote: "Congratulations on the fine advance made by A. A. of P. as evidenced by your annual report. Keep up the good work. My best to you and your organization. Tell my friends I will be in Yosemite June 21-July 8."

The speaker of the evening, Mr. Thomas T. McCabe, gave a very interesting talk on the "Birds of British Columbia" and showed some slides of the country.



Book Notice: "The Island of Penguins," by Cherry Kearton. To the naturalist, the Island of Penguins is the eighth wonder of the world. From the description by the author one assumes it to be Dassen Island, which lies about forty miles northwest of Cape Town, and is the place whence the people of that city import their penguin eggs. The author, Cherry Kearton, is considered to be one of the best known naturalist-adventurers and photograph hunters in the world and in this book, he gives us a wonderful account of these penguins, their habits, romances, perils, adventures and idiosyncracies. In short, it is an account of the tragic-comedy of penguin life, unequalled in nature for sheer humor and human interest. The book is illustrated with seventy-seven photographs. (Robert M. McBride and Company, New York, \$3.00.)

Audubon Association of the Pacific For the Study and the Protection of Birds

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