

M&O
Serials
QL 671
.G84

CALIFORNIA
LIBRARY

NOV 2 - 1942

THE
MONTHLY



RECEIVED
THE GULL
BULLETIN

VOLUME 24

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, NOVEMBER, 1942

NUMBER 11

LET'S GO TO SEE THE SHEARWATERS

Have all the readers of THE GULL had the thrilling adventure of seeing the flight of the Sooty Shearwaters (*Puffinus griseus*)? Those who have not surely long to, and those who have are undoubtedly eager to repeat the experience. Since binoculars along the coastline are taboo, tires are wearing thin, and long trips are unpatriotic, it has occurred to me that you would like to take a memory trip with me to Pt. Reyes and Drake's Bay, Marin County, and have a quiet vicarious thrill.

In the third week of September last year, Mrs. James T. Allen, bird student and enthusiast of Berkeley, reported that during the week she had seen a flock of Sooty Shearwaters off Pt. Reyes. This was all the bait needed by that omnivorous nature-lover, Ric Reynolds. He announced that he was going and gave us the opportunity of accompanying him. Our daughter Ariel, Dorothy Sheldon, and I decided that we would take a chance, and will be forever glad that we did.

We left Piedmont early in the morning September 28th, ferrying to Marin County by way of Richmond. Our first goal was Pt. Reyes, as that was the location mentioned by Mrs. Allen. Just before arriving at the parking space at Pt. Reyes Lighthouse Station, our adventures began. We were met by a reception committee of one black and white mammal with its tail in the air — otherwise known as skunk. Dorothy Sheldon and I were delighted to be so greeted, but were not photographically excited because we had no idea the committee would remain within range of our cameras long enough to pay us to set them up. Ric, as usual, erupted from the car first, then Ariel right behind him. They went close (but not too close) to our friend, and found him quite unperturbed by their presence. Lots of poise! He knew he was safe. Then the shouting began.

Were we interested in nature photography or were we not? Why didn't we get out our cameras? Why did it take us so long to set them up? Hurry, hurry, he won't stay much longer! The importance of this opportunity finally penetrated our consciousness. Dorothy and I unlocked the rear of the car, got out the cameras, and set them on tripods. I was ready first. (I was later told that it had taken me exactly twenty minutes. If this is true, I bow my head in shame — but perhaps it only seemed like twenty minutes.) I crept over toward the source of the critical remarks and the cause of the excitement. There was the beautiful black and white kitty still there, tail still elevated. I pressed the shutter, exposing about a foot of film, and our hero began to move. And he moved towards me! Ric shouted to me to stay back or I might regret it. Another dilemma — art or self-protection? Instinctively, I chose the latter. The charming creature kept advancing until he found a culvert a few feet away from me. Into it he went — and that was that!

I reported the sad news to Dorothy, who was just about ready by this time. We decided we would keep our cameras set up so that in the future we would not have to be the targets of so many uncomplimentary remarks, but not resisting the opportunity to observe before dismissing the incident from

our minds that if anybody else could do better at photographing skunks and things, let him go right ahead and do it, and if somebody had not been so afraid of a timid little animal it would not have gone down the hole and we would have gotten some good pictures (maybe).

This made the score about even, so we parked the car and walked to the point. It was too early for the gate to be unlocked, so we decided to go on to Drake's Bay, have our picnic lunch, and then see what Nature had in store for us.

Nature had plenty. We had not long to wait after our luncheon until we began to notice an enormous flock of dark birds flying over the water, barely close enough for us to observe through the field glasses. It did not require much brilliant deduction for us to conclude that they were the Sooty Shearwaters that we had hoped to see. We watched them at this distance for about half an hour, then noticed that they were coming close enough to be seen without binoculars. Perhaps we would have an opportunity to photograph the flight! Dorothy and I dashed for our cameras (the skunk episode being fresh in our minds). We set them up and waited. The birds, a hundred-thousand-more-or-less-strong, were slowly moving shoreward, making circular flights. According to our principle, that a distant shot is better than no shot at all, we began taking pictures of the flight at about five hundred feet. We had no way of being certain that the flock would come closer if we stayed in that spot for a week. After our return, I asked Ric to give me his version of the flight, which I offer in lieu of kodachrome.

"The flight passed us flying southward at about five hundred feet from the shore. Because there was a rather chilly on-shore breeze, Dorothy and Laurel went back to the car, but Ariel and I stayed on the beach watching the birds through the binoculars. Soon the large flock which had moved south returned and began to settle on the water, just about opposite where we were sitting. The birds, as they would settle into this great raft which was forming, seemed for the most part to be busy preening. While the raft was still forming, five brown pelicans flew past between the shore and the mass of shearwaters. Suddenly one of the pelicans wheeled in his flight and made one of his curious corkscrew dives. This was the signal for the shearwaters. They erupted like a cloud of smoke from a great oil fire and started feeding again upon the school of fish which moved towards the shore. The shearwaters in the rear would come up to the point where the fishing was going on, dive down with a splash, move out to the side, and then take up their position again in the advancing column. Above and to the sides of this mass of wheeling, diving, and fluttering birds there were others which were flying more or less in a circular manner, keeping close to the area where the birds were diving after the fish. In the fringe of this swarm there were a few gulls and pelicans. Just as the sun was going down over the horizon, the column came to a point beyond the line where the first waves began to break, less than seventy-five feet from where we were sitting. Then the sun went down. The fish seemed to disappear, and the birds moved off-shore to form another raft."

Soon after Dorothy and I had returned to the car and were putting our cameras away, Ric sent Ariel to tell us that the birds were coming closer and we had better try it again. We hurried to the beach, set up our cameras and took some shots of the birds at various distances, the closest being about two hundred feet. We did not dream that they would come closer. We knew our film was just about gone, so we photographed the flight at that distance until our film was all exposed. I had no more film along, but Dorothy had more in the car. Ric dashed to the car for it. Then, with the shearwaters performing their antics not more than seventy-five feet away from us for a period of about twenty minutes, Dorothy struggled with putting the film in her Ciné Special. All her fingers suddenly became thumbs, and she did not get it properly placed until the birds had flown. Ric suffered a complete nervous breakdown during those minutes, and I felt sick with regret that I had not brought more film because even though burning also with buck (or bird) fever I could have loaded my magazine camera in less than a minute. Like the little boy who recently wrote me that he "was learning about birds and he hoped

he would learn", I am learning about film (the hard way) and I hope I learn!

The Sooty Shearwaters have come again this fall. They have gorged themselves on the small fish which our waters have provided. They have wheeled and circled over the surf and their under wings have sparkled in the sunset light. We know that it is so. We know too that this world madness will pass and we shall be able to go again to the seashore without restriction to drink in the beauty of the shearwater flight and have the fun of trying to record the scene in kodachrome. In the meantime, we can see it in our memory pictures, and share our experience with you.

—Laurel Reynolds, Piedmont, California

✦—✦—✦

OCTOBER FIELD TRIP

After an interim of several years, Mills College and the vicinity were again visited on October 11th under the competent leadership of Mr. Donald Brock, who knows this locality well. The morning was overcast after the heavy rain of the previous day, but by the afternoon it had cleared up, greatly to the satisfaction of the birds and ourselves.

During the morning stroll through the campus, we were able to observe several species at close range. Some of the group, including members of long-standing, expressed the wish that they might tarry in the spots where birding seemed to offer the best opportunities to study the behavior of the feathered creatures. This is a phase of our activities which I believe should be developed in the months to come. Our travels may be restricted, but there are still a number of places close at hand that are particularly favorable for detailed observations. It is interesting to watch the actions of the Hermit Thrush (*Hylocichla guttata*) as it lifts its "reddish brown tail, often at the same time nervously opening and closing its wings" (Hoffmann). Contrast the stolid, unemotional Brown Towhee (*Pipilo crissalis*) who allows nothing to disturb the even tenor of his ways; or note the sallies of the Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*) from a near-by perch in quest of a choice morsel for Sunday dinner.

When the grounds of Mills College had been explored, we took an old road towards Leona Heights. Here we spotted and identified an albino Townsend Warbler (*Dendroica townsend*) in the midst of several other warblers. After lunch, the majority of the group scrambled up a slippery, narrow trail to the top of the canyon where they were rewarded by a superb view of the bay area. We also had an opportunity to study the flight of the termites, stimulated to leave their ground positions by the sun's warmth after the heavy rain of the previous night, and to note the eager manner in which they were devoured by the sparrows and others. Mrs. Kelly gave some very interesting data regarding this insect, and also pointed out some of the characteristic geological formations of the region.

The 33 species that were identified are listed below:

Brewer Blackbird	Western Belted	Hermit Thrush
Bush-tit	Kingfisher	Plain Titmouse
House Finch	Ruby-crowend Kinglet	Brown Towhee
Red-shafted Flicker	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Spotted Towhee
Green-backed Goldfinch	Slender-billed Nuthatch	Bewick Wren
Cooper Hawk	Black Phoebe	Hutton Vireo
Western Red-tailed Hawk	Pine Siskin	Orange-crowned Warbler
Desert Sparrow Hawk	Fox Sparrow	Audubon Warbler
Anna Hummingbird	Golden-crowned	Townsend Warbler
California Jay	Sparrow	(albino)
Crested Jay	Gambel Sparrow	Downy Woodpecker
Junco	Song Sparrow	Wren-tit

Members attending were: Mesdames Austin, Kelly and Wallace; Misses Fay, Kirk, MacIver, Paroni, Roscoe, Stanton, Sterne and Werner; Messrs. Kelham, Myer, Wolff. We were also very pleased to have six guests with us on the trip.

—Ivander MacIver, Historian

OBSERVATIONS

The following observations have been reported:

Golden-crowned Sparrow, El Sobrante, Contra Costa Co., Sept. 13, Walter W. Bradley.

Golden-crowned Sparrow, Sept. 18, Lewis Woodpecker, Oct. 3, Napa, Joseph J. Webb.

Two Townsend Warblers, Sept. 30, Berkeley Campus, Mrs. T. Eric Reynolds.

8 Surf Birds, one Greater Yellow-legs, 2000-plus Sooty Shearwaters, Sept. 19, Cliff House, San Francisco; 20-plus Lewis Woodpeckers, Oct. 4, Strawberry Canyon, Berkeley; one Virginia Rail, August 28, Oakland; Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Sept. 28, Piedmont Park; Audubon Warbler, Sept. 15, Piedmont Park; American Egret, Sept. 27, one male Shoveller, 402 Baldplates, 1706 Pintails, and 56 Ruddy Ducks, Oct. 4, Lake Merritt, Oakland. In 1941 at about the same date 1128 Pintails. All by Warren Fischer.

8 Avocets, Oct. 7, Alameda; Mockingbird, Alaska Yellow Warbler, Sept. 23, Berkeley Campus, Junea W. Kelly.



AUDUBON NOTES

November Meeting: The regular meeting will be held on Thursday, the 12th, at 8 p.m., in the Assembly Room, San Francisco Public Library, Larkin and McAllister Streets, San Francisco, with seventy-five members and guests present.

Mr. Harry Borland, Eastman Kodak Company photographer, will show colored motion pictures of birds of the Pacific Coast. Members may bring guests.



November Field Trip, which is the twenty-fifth anniversary field trip, will be taken on Sunday, the 15th, to Mount Diablo in Contra Costa County. Members will meet at 9 a.m., at 40th and Broadway, Oakland. The Key System "C" train (Piedmont — 40th Street line) leaves San Francisco Terminal at 8:23 a.m.; arrives 40th and Broadway, Oakland, at 8:50 a.m. The caravan will form here and proceed out Broadway and through the tunnel, where a stop will be made at the East Portal to allow Berkeley cars to join us. Mr. Bradley, Mr. Webb, and Mrs. Kelly will be our leaders. This promises to be a memorable expedition, and all members are urged



October Meeting: The 301st regular meeting was held on the 8th in the Assembly Room of the San Francisco Public Library, President Mrs. Harold C. Austin presiding.

Dr. Robert T. Orr, Assistant Curator of Birds and Mammals of the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, gave a most instructive lecture on "Birds of the Santa Cruz Mountains". His slides showed the various habitats. Dr. Orr explained the plant associations as well as the soil, climatic conditions, and topography that makes possible these particular plant communities. When people first begin studying birds they are so interested in identifying the species and in adding new ones to their life list that they fail to take the broader view of an ecologist. Dr. Orr, through the presentation of his subject, showed how a person can use his knowledge of species in a never ending study of local conditions.

The following were elected to membership: Miss Susannah L. Leffler, Mr. George T. Kilham, San Francisco, Mr. Frank A. Scott, Walnut Creek, and Mrs. John S. Service, Berkeley.

Audubon Association of the Pacific

Organized January 25, 1917

For the Study and the Protection of Birds

President.....	Mrs. Harold C. Austin.....	541 Boulevard Way, Piedmont
Corresponding Secretary.....	Mr. Joseph J. Webb.....	519 California St., San Francisco
Treasurer.....	Miss Ivander MacIver.....	2414 Telegraph Ave., Berkeley
Editor.....	Mrs. T. Eric Reynolds.....	140 Estates Drive, Piedmont

Monthly meeting second Thursday, 8 p.m.

Assembly Room, San Francisco Public Library, Larkin and McAllister Streets, 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.