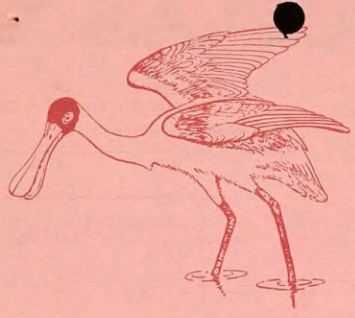

THE SPOONBILL

Volume IV No. 11

March 1956

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* HOUSE WREN *
* Like countless small, rather pretty women, *
* Jenny is a bundle of vivacity. Her husband *
* is a card. He has a new scheme every five *
* minutes, and together they work in ecstasy *
* and at cross purposes. He swings a stick *
* into place, she throws it away. This calls *
* for another song. The Wrens will build in *
* any container that's handy. *
* E. B. White - November 1955 Ford Times *
* *

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FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

March 17-18 Texas Ornithological Society Annual Meeting - Mo-Ranch, Hunt, Texas. Mo-Ranch is situated on a hillside overlooking the Guadalupe River. Besides a short business meeting the program will include illustrated talks, field trips, Saturday night banquet, announcement of the TOS "official bird", and other interesting features.

March 25 Sunday - Field Trip - Outdoor Nature Club - Spring's Parade of Wild Flowers (Time and place to be announced by Botany Group)

NOTICE

Because of so many other activities during March, the Ornithology Group will not have its regular monthly field trip.

SPECIAL NOTICE

April 11 The next regular meeting of the Ornithology Group will be held at 8:00 p.m. on Wednesday, April 11th at the Riveroaks Garden Forum, 2503 Westheimer. (Date was changed on account of conflicting with flower show).

An election of club officers will be held at this meeting and it is important that all members make an effort to be present. The program will consist of a repeat performance of the picture "Let's Go Birding."

The following members have been appointed to serve as a nominating committee. Anyone who wishes to express a choice is asked to call one or more of this group and make suggestions. DO IT NOW!

C. B. Gilman - Norma Oates - Mac Ramsey - Ella Wolfer

April 29 The 1956 SPRING BIRD ROUNDUP -UPPER GULF COAST AREA OF TEXAS will be held on Sunday, April 29th, under the leadership of Noel Perley. All O.G. members should plan to participate in this activity. Further details will appear in the April SPOONBILL.

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ORNITHOLOGY GROUP REPORTS

February 19 - Field Trip to Angleton-Freeport Area - (Noel Perley)

Overcast skies and drizzle in the early morning hours apparently had little or no effect on attendance for this trip, as no less than 20 birders were on hand by starting time (7:50). Armand Yramategui, our guide, was out to convince us that Brazoria County should be the site of next year's Outdoor Nature Club Christmas Bird Count, inasmuch as this area is not only less settled, but also offers more types of habitat than are to be found in the Houston area.

By the time we reached Angleton (8:30) it had begun to clear, and the rest of the day turned out to be ideal weather-wise (64-75°)

Just outside of Angleton (Old Angleton-Clute Road) we stopped to watch large numbers of Vesper sparrows. Our next stop produced a bald eagle and a pair of American bitterns, and, shortly thereafter (at the Angleton Hunting & Fishing Club), we saw two Vermilion flycatchers, a Pileolated warbler (?) common gallinule, yellowthroats, swamp sparrows, blue-winged teals, and fulvous tree ducks.

We left the Angleton Hunting & Fishing Club at 10:45 a.m., making several more stops enroute to Lake Jackson. One of these produced the Day's BIG FIND - a blackheaded grosbeak! We had stopped just north of Oyster Creek and were watching several kinds of woodpeckers when Sue Harris spotted this bird. The writer finally located it (his first record for Texas), followed by Edna Miner who confirmed it as a female blackheaded, an accidental winter visitant in this part of the State.

It was high noon by the time we reached Lake Jackson, our luncheon site. By this time our list included some 67 species, seen along 57 miles of roadway. At the picnic grounds we added the Western meadowlark and goldfinch, then, just after leaving the area (1:30), we saw an Anhinga, canvasbacks, baldpates and gadwalls.

Nearing Bryan Beach, south of Freeport, we spotted our second bald eagle for the day, along with our first common egrets - except for one seen in the morning by Edna Miner. (No Snowies were recorded during the entire field trip). We also saw a flock of white pelicans in a lake just behind the beach.

A ruddy turnstone (rare winter resident) was the biggest find at Bryan Beach, although we also saw countless numbers of lesser scaup offshore, both flying and feeding. By the time we left the beach (3:55 p.m. - 79 mi. registered) we had run our list up to 87 species.

We then worked the Surfside Beach area (SE of Freeport), adding the ferruginous and white-tailed hawks and snipe. The final total (6 p.m.) for the group was a very impressive 94 species (81 for this writer - his all-time high for a winter day's birding). Mileage: 107 by car, 3-1/4 on foot.

As for making the Angleton-Freeport area the site of next year's Christmas Count, the results of our exploratory field trip seem to fully justify the plan. All of the 94 species were recorded within a 15-mile circular area, by but one party after 9 a.m., missing therefore, the two most fruitful birding hours of the day. Thus, with fairly thorough coverage of this area, a count total of 150 species or better is well within the realm of possibility.

Here is the list of those who participated in the field trip: Carl Aiken, Jerry Baker, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Daniel, Vic Emanuel, Mr. and Mrs. Clayton Gilman, Sue Harris, Mrs. Jesse Haver, Carrie Holcomb, Darris Massingill, Edna Miner, Jimmy Murray, Norma Oates, Noel Perley, Larry Semander, Thelma Smith, Leota Stilwell, Ruth Stamm, and Armand Yramategui.

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February 25th - Outdoor Nature Club Field Trip to Sandhill Crane area - J.Murray

Meeting at Westheimer and Post Oak Road, a party of 28 youngsters and grown-ups, in nine cars got off to a start at 9:20 a.m. in a cloud of dust (not our own) and proceeded west on Westheimer Road.

Near the Addicks Dam we sighted a rare species, the Ferruginous hawk, and a little later the fairly common Caracara. Just after passing Clodine we turned off the main road into the Cinco Ranch, where we were granted permission to explore their property in search of our objective, the sandhill crane. By the side of the road in a few small ponds, several ducks were seen, mallards, pintails and shovelers, and shortly thereafter we were rewarded with our first sight of sandhill cranes, a small flock of 12 to 15 and rather distant. While viewing them through our binoculars a cry of pain was heard and after an investigation a snake was found with a small frog in its mouth, and both were captured.

Next, the leader in a mad dash to locate a comfort station, flew right by a large group of cranes, but not so with the other cars, all of which stopped to view the flocks of cranes before proceeding on west of Fulshear to the Brazos River bridge where all ate lunch on the grass beside the highway.

It was here that the Golden Fronted Woodpecker put in his appearance, an accidental visitor, this proved to be quite a find as far as the birders in the group were concerned.

After leaving our luncheon site we retraced our steps toward Houston and again stopped on the roadway for another good look at several large flocks of sandhill cranes feeding in the fields, on both sides of the highway.

We then turned north on a gravel road towards Katy, where we found a flock of ring-billed gulls closely following several tractors plowing a field in order to get whatever grubs and insects the plows brought up. A little farther along the road a large flight of snow geese was sighted and we watched them alight in a nearby field, noting a few white-fronted and blue geese among them.

At this point we decided to start homeward and as the last two cars started to return they noted in a nearby field a number of birds which turned out to be golden plover, a migratory bird, its arrival in this area, at this early date rather unusual. So with a total species count of 54 and a trip of 70 miles we called it a day.

CLEARING HOUSE

February 5 - Vermilion flycatcher and bald eagle reported at lake near Arcola by Vic Emanuel in addition to approximately 2000 ducks including, blue-winged teal, mallards, shovelers and pintails.
A large concentration of Myrtle warblers was found south of Houston by Leota Stilwell and Norma Oates. The warblers were thick along the roadside, in the fields and pastures feeding on insects in the grass.

February 11 -Ring-necked duck seen at close range in the Hermann Park Lake by Noel Perley.

February 12- Peregrine falcon seen soaring over Addicks Dam area by Jerry Baker, Darris Massingill and N.Oates.
500 sandhill cranes soaring in the sky and a large flock of snow, blue, and white-fronted geese reported in the Katy area by Thelma Smith, Carrie Holcomb and Ruth Stamm.

February 15- Savannah, field and Lincoln's sparrows and one slate-colored Junco seen in the field at the corner of Bellaire and Buffalo Speedway by Vic Emanuel.

February 15- Four purple martins seen flying over West University Place (near Rice Stadium) by Noel Perley.

February 19- Male and female scarlet tanager reported by Francis MacMahon at his home, 335 Terrace Drive.

February 26- Blue goose seen in Hermann Park Lake, Houston by Noel Perley (bird may not be feral, however).

February 27- A western meadowlark was heard singing in a pasture on Westheimer Road by Leota Stilwell and N.Oates.

February 27 About 200 plus cedar waxwings reported by Josiephine Wilkin in her neighborhood for the first time this season.

March 3 - Sycamore warbler and fox sparrow seen at Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary by Joe Heiser, Jr.

March 4 - Hundreds of chipping and field sparrows and 6 slate-colored Juncos found near Coldspring by Vic Emanuel, also solitary vireo and white-eyed vireo reported at Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary.

Purple Martins

Feb. [redacted] 14 Mrs. J. W. Johnson reported martins at 502 Del Norte Street; and on [redacted] Feb. 19th martin "scouts" were looking over a new and larger martin house at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Frels, 1518 Caywood Lane.

Golden Plover - Early Spring Migrant

On February 25th returning from an Outdoor Nature Club field trip to the sandhill crane territory, several plover feeding in a plowed field (along with killdeer, water pipits and ringed-bill gulls) were identified as golden plover by a number of club members, including Edna Miner, Jimmy Murray, Carl Aiken and Carrie Holcomb. On the following day (Feb. 26) fifteen or twenty golden plover were found in the same general vicinity by Leota Stilwell and Norma Oates. The latter group was spotted in a cow pasture with killdeer, robins and cowbirds. In Galveston, on March 4th, numerous golden plover were seen scattered in the pastures along "S" Road by Dr. Lucille Robey, Leota Stilwell and Thelma Smith.

Prairie Chickens

A flock of 12 to 14 prairie chickens was seen in a field in the Katy area by Ruth Moorman on February 19th. These birds were near the highway and one male was heard booming. On the morning of March 3rd, the birds were found in the same location by Ruth Moorman and Norma Oates. They were about 125' from the highway in an old rice field, the rice stubble six to eight inches high giving them good cover. Several males in the flock gave their long-drawn-out booming calls, and the orange air sacs on each side of their heads showed conspicuously in the morning sunlight.

It is thought that these prairie chickens may be remnants of a flock which, until two years ago, was located east of Houston near San Jacinto Battlegrounds. The locations are approximately 50 miles apart. This supposition is supported by the fact that the rice stubble must be a new booming ground for the birds this season, as it was probably a cultivated rice field last year and unsuitable for courtship display.

Wilson's (Pileolated) Warbler

On February 18, Edna Miner, Leota Stilwell, Ruth Moorman, N.Oates and Theo Thompson, on a birding expedition to property owned by Dr. and Mrs. B. D. Thompson on the San Bernard River, were surprised to find a Wilson's warbler feeding in a wild plum tree. The warbler was in adult breeding plumage with black cap, yellow underparts and olive green back and wings. It was observed in good light, at close range, and was either eating parts of the plum blossom or was finding small insects or other food inside the flower.

Robins

During the winter season there has been an abundance of robins in this region. On December 10th Arlie McKay reported 2200 robins in the Cove area. December 14th a large concentration was reported by Charlotte Reindl near the Lynchburg Ferry and on January 8th Carrie Holcomb noted many hundreds in the Hyde Park area. Armand Yramategui had flocks of hungry robins feeding in the Camphor trees in his yard on January 23-24. However, the heaviest concentration appeared on February 4th near the home of Mr. A. S. Manis, 2512 McDuffie. Mr. Manis estimated 40,000 robins crowding around Camphor trees back of his home. The ground was covered with birds and the roofs of houses and garages near the Camphor trees were a solid mass of robins. A Chinaberry tree in the vicinity also drew a crowd of hungry robins. Recent rains left the ground soggy and for the first week in February robins were seen everywhere - they were standing in school yards, parks and on lawns; outside the city they were feeding in pastures and fields. The number diminished somewhat during the balance of February although on March 1st there were still many robins in the area.

Purple Finches

Unusual for Houston was the large number of purple finches wintering here. Shown on our check-list as "uncommon winter residents" - this year flocks of 40 to 50 birds were often reported in the residential sections of Houston as well as in the city parks and rural wooded areas. In the Cove area Arlie McKay saw his first purple finch on December 10, he reported two on December 23, three on December 24 and fifteen on December 25th. In the Houston area the first finches were reported by Mabel Kaiser, 2359 South Shepherd Drive, who saw them in her yard on December 11th. On December 17th Steve Williams noticed purple finch at his home 2732 University Blvd. and on the same date a female purple finch was spotted on Miller Road by Leota Stilwell and Ruth Moorman.

On January 1, 1956, purple finches were seen at the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary by Luta Buchanan and J. M. Heiser, Jr. On the same day Mr. McKay reported purple finch in the Cove area; he also reported two on January 8th, and five on January 22nd. Carl Aiken saw a flock of around 30 purple finches in his neighborhood in West University Place on January 21, and on the following day (Jan.22) a flock of around 40 were feeding in the Chinese Tallow trees at the home of Armand Yramategui. Leota Stilwell reported several finches in her neighborhood from January 28th thru the month of February. Your editor first observed this species on her street February 4th when approximately 25 were in Chinese Tallow trees and another 50 were in the top of Sycamore trees feeding on the seed balls that were still clinging in the trees. The birds were seen in these trees almost daily through February 18th. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Aldrich, 431 Knipp Road, reported a few purple finches in their yard during January but on the first of February a flock of 50 or more arrived and were there during the entire month enjoying sunflower seeds at the feeding tray.

In the northern section of Houston purple finch were noted early in February by Josiephine Wilkin and Charlotte Reindl. Fewer finches were reported from the residential districts during the latter part of February although on the February 19th O.G. field trip purple finches were found in a wooded section near Lake Jackson. On February 18th your editor found a flock feeding on the ground with white-throated sparrows in Hermann Park and at least 50 were seen at the same location on February 26th by Leota Stilwell.

Rufous Hummingbird

Mrs. J. H. Tabony, 3713 Gulf, reported a female rufous hummingbird in her yard almost every day for three weeks during December 1955, it was also there the first few days of January 1956.

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Birding Report by Armand Yramategui

On February 4th on a trip to Lake Surprise (located about 5 miles from Smith Point) 3 black-necked stilts were seen - first record for February. Mr. Barsch (Lake Surprise ranch manager) advised that these three birds had been seen in the area during December and January. Another early record was a flock of 25 female martins flying near the lake. Very few ducks were observed on the lake, and Mr. Barsch stated there had been a scarcity of ducks on Lake Surprise during the entire winter season.

On February 22 (One week earlier than all previous records), a pair of titmice began gathering nesting material. On February 27th, about thirty feet from the titmice nest, in a camphor tree just five feet from the ground a cardinal began building his nest.

March 5th, returning from Port Arthur along the coastal highway, five eared grebes were seen near Galveston. A scarcity of shore birds was noticed all along the coast on this trip. In fact, during the entire winter season there has been a marked decrease in the abundance of shore birds in this area - probably not more than 1/3 to 1/5 of the usual population.

MISCELLANEOUS CORRESPONDENCE

Miss Gladys V. Taylor, 401 E. Burress St., Houston 9, Texas

Jan. 30, * * * In the January SPOONBILL, there is a paragraph on cattle egrets * * * I wonder since it is not mentioned in this writeup, whether Peterson's article on the cattle egret in the August 1954 National Geographic magazine has been brought to the attention of the Ornithology Group. It is entitled "A New Bird Immigrant Arrives," and has nine illustrations, none in color, but at least they are pictures! They give a very good idea of the appearance of this bird, together with natural habitat, characteristic poses, especially two pictures where it is shown with cattle, and one with a hippo.

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Mrs. Winnie Hurst, Route 2, Clifton, Texas

During the January spell of ice and snow the birds came to us by the dozens -- at times we estimated 150 to 200 feeding close to the south side of the house which was protected by wide eaves - they seemed more thirsty than hungry - so we believe that many birds die of thirst during great snows (the robins ate snow for water). With the many slate-colored juncos were several pink-sided adults - they are nearly as colorful as robins. We always have dozens of Harris' sparrows but only one white-throated and fox sparrow. Before the snow we had two olive-backed thrushes and at least two Hermits. They came in with the robins. A pair of flickers, one red-shafted and one yellow-shafted are here - the same pair as last winter. The red-shafted roosts every night under the eaves of the front porch, the yellow-shafted at the barn. We see many mountain bluebirds in winter. The eastern bluebirds are now fussing over the houses Minor had made for them. We hear Western and eastern meadowlarks singing together. Great horned owls have been courting for the past six weeks and Bewick wrens and cardinals are singing their spring songs.

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OFF THE PRESS

They're "Branding" Butterflies Now

Mrs. Jack Hagar, national bird authority, and one of the first to identify the exotic cattle egret in Texas, took time out from her bird studies this past summer to help with this work. She banded fifty of the big, brown Monarch butterflies that are so common in the fall - 11 females and 39 males - and one of these was recently captured.

Dr. F. A. Urquhart, Director of the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology and Paleontology in Toronto, Ontario, who is directing the research, said: "Specimen No. G307, tagged by Mrs. Hagar, was recovered by R. K. Williams, of Harper, recently." Harper is in Gillespie County, just west of Fredericksburg, roughly 215 miles northwest of Rockport. However, these butterflies have been known to travel farther than that, for only last summer one of them completed a thousand-mile flight in 33 days.

AUDUBON MAGAZINE - Jan.-Feb. 1956

Walt Disney Received Audubon Metal

The National Audubon Society's bronze medal, is awarded from time to time to a man of eminence, who has rendered distinguished service to the cause of conservation. It was awarded to Walt Disney for the major part played by him in the world-wide increase in appreciation and understanding of nature as a result of his production of the True-life Adventure nature films. Some of his early Wildlife Short Subject Features were Seal Island, Beaver Valley, Nature's Half Acre, and his most recent feature length Adventures are, The Living Desert, Vanishing Prairie and African Lion.

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED - Feb. 20, 1956

"The Everglades: Bird Watcher's Paradise"

In a comprehensive and colorful visit to Florida's spectacular sanctuary, John O'Reilly introduces Barnie Parker, the Park's puckish ranger; David Goodnow presents eight pages of rare bird photographs in color; and Horace Sutton rounds up the tours to take in Florida with the Audubon Society.

HOUSTON PRESS - February 29, 1956

New Move to Protect Whooping Cranes

Ottawa, Feb. 29 - The rare whooping crane (28 of 'em) will soon be protected by law against low-flying aircraft, the Northern Affairs Department said today.

Effective April 1, no aircraft will be allowed to fly lower than 2000 feet over Wood Buffalo National Park, N.W.T., the spring and summer nesting grounds of the birds. No planes will be allowed to land in the area.

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We extend our deepest sympathy to Carrie Holcomb whose sister, Mrs. Thad W. Smith, died suddenly at her home in Frankston, Texas, on March 1, 1956

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BIRDING IN MEXICO - (Vic Emanuel)

On the morning of December 22nd, Armand Yramategui, Carl Aiken and I left Montemorelos, Mexico, on our way to take part in the Xilitla Christmas Count. As we drove southward through the arid country we saw white-necked ravens, Audubon's caracaras, roadrunners and black-throated (desert) sparrows.

On a river bank south of Ciudad Victoria we found our first Altamira orioles and Couch's kingbirds, but our first truly Mexican birds, a small flock of brown jays were seen just north of Mante. These are large noisy, brown birds with (according to E.K.) loud Pow-Pow and Pop-Pop sound effects. Along the highway we also saw Harris, red-tailed and gray hawks.

Our second night was spent at Valles where we joined our "Count" leader, Mr. Irby Davis and his wife. We also met two other members of our party, Mr. and Mrs. Whitney Eastman. Mr. Eastman is a conservationist from Missouri who helped raise money for the Wisconsin Audubon Camp.

About three miles south of Valles we stopped to cook breakfast and found our first real tropical birds - rose-throated becards, groove-billed anis, yellow-throated Euphonias, black-headed Saltator, Giraud's flycatcher and green jays. In addition we saw many stateside birds such as Wilson's warblers, black-throated green warblers, belted kingfishers and Vermilion flycatchers. Farther southward we identified Sharpe's seedeaters and a white-tailed kite.

Before reaching El Sol (a small town where we planned to make our headquarters) we turned off the main highway to follow for a short distance the little mountain road leading to Xilitla. We crossed, by way of a native ferry, one of the tributaries of the famous Rio Axtla (where five different species of kingfishers can be seen). This is a deep clear river and contains many fish, such as Cichlids (tropical version of sunperch). The banks are covered with dense stands of bamboo and lush tropical vegetation. From the ferry, the narrow gravel road climbs gradually up the side of the mountain, and on either side of the road along the steep slopes of the mountain, the Mexicans grow coffee. Because the coffee bush must have shade, a great many beautiful trees are left standing in the coffee fincas (plantations) and in the cool shade of one of these tropical trees draped with air plants (bromeliads) and vines, we fixed lunch while Armand hiked up the mountain in search of the fabulous Emerald Toucanet. Upon his return we learned he had found three toucanets feeding in a fruit tree, and after lunch we went to see them for ourselves. Even when you know these birds are in a tree, they are difficult to spot as their green coloring blends perfectly into the foliage, and their only movement is usually the turning of their head as they eat fruit. In this spot we also saw our first Oleaginous woodpecker, a brown woodpecker with a red nape.

First Day of Xilitla Count

The next morning we started the official Xilitla Christmas Bird Census. At the ferry we joined Edgar Kincaid and the Eastmans and saw yellow-cheeked parrots, masked Tityra, peppershrike and Gray's robins. Territories were then chosen - Edgar and the Eastmans took "Pauline's Jungle" a wooded section on the river above the ferry, while Armand, Carl and I covered "The Slope" (the territory along the road where we had seen the toucanets the day before). Unfortunately, because of lack of birders, no one covered the territory along the Axtla River on the first day. The six of us were called the "low-landers" as our area consisted of the valley and the lower slope of the mountain. Mr. and Mrs. Davis, Mr. and Mrs. Franks and Pauline James (Edinburg, Texas) covered the "highland" area around the little mountain town of Xilitla.

We proceeded at once to our birding area on the slope. The toucanets were not feeding in the fruit trees as on the previous day but we did see yellow-throated Euphonias, Brasher's warblers and a Lichtenstein woodpecker (a beautiful woodpecker with bright olive-green back, red nape, bronze wings and a barred green breast). As we followed an Indian path up the mountain, I left the trail to check on a small brownish bird and had wandered a considerable distance down the mountain when I spotted an unusual bird in a tree about 30 yards away. It was sitting motionless in plain view and when I saw the two long tail-feathers were shaped like miniature tennis rackets, I realized it was a blue-crowned motmot. For ten minutes I studied every detail of this fantastic bird. I saw its blue crown and green body, and even the red color of its eyes! I had always dreamed of seeing a motmot, and watching this bird at close range was the greatest birding thrill of my trip. Clambering back over the rocks, attempting to find the trail, I was suddenly startled by a roar of wings and saw a large grouse-like bird fly off. I later learned it was probably a Rufescent Tinamou, a bird that very few people have seen because of its habit of staying in thick brush and not flushing easily. After this experience I stumbled into some Mala Mujer (bad woman), a plant which causes painful swelling on contact with the skin.

Upon rejoining my party we saw Abbot's tanagers (tanager with a yellow patch on each wing) boat-billed flycatchers, Audubon's (black-headed) orioles, red-billed pigeons and Derby flycatchers. We followed the road up the slope toward

Xilitla, stopping to bird in several coffee fincas. Above the arch (a place where the road is cut through the rock of the mountain) we found the hard-to-see ferruginous pygmy owl sitting on a limb silhouetted against the sky. This is a sparrow-sized owl with imitation eyes on the back of his head to confuse his enemies. As we went back through the archway Armand spotted a Bat falcon perched on a distant tree. It was now getting dark and we returned to the ferry where we met the Eastmans and Edgar. Interesting birds they had seen included the beautiful crimson-collared grosbeak, green parakeets (we had seen hundreds flying over all day) a Guatemalan ivory-billed woodpecker, and ivory-billed woodhewer (resembles king-sized creeper) and many others. We went back to our cabins at El Sol to prepare for the next day.

Second Day of Count

Early the next morning we went to the ferry with the Eastmans and Edgar. The view of the Valley of the Montezuma River filled with fog was a beautiful sight as we drove along the mountain road in the cool morning. The Eastmans dropped us at the ferry and they went with Edgar to cover the Slope area. We were to follow the river from the ferry downstream to the bridge on Highway 85 (about 10 miles). This route is the roughest of the lowland areas. The country is rugged and each one must carry food and water for the whole day.

As we walked along the river we heard the call "cleo-crack-crack" which identifies the red-crowned parrot. About fifty of these beautiful birds flew into nearby bushes and we studied them at close range. We saw many birds along the clear blue Axtla, although there was a scarcity of water birds - we found only the green heron, spotted sandpiper and the common coot. Of the five kingfishers commonly found here, we saw only the Belted. At a wide place in the river we ate lunch while watching a brilliant Vermilion flycatcher, and close by many Abbot's tanagers were feeding with cedar waxwings in a wild fig tree. Along the river we also saw several Salvin's ant tanagers and Prevost Caciques - a grackle-like bird with a pale bill and pale eyes that inhabits the large bamboo clumps (sometimes ten feet in diameter). This is a shy bird and is difficult to see. Mexican grasquits were also seen in a field near the river.

After lunch we veered away from the river, crossing through the fields and woods to the highway. Here we found our first Squirrel Cuckoo. This unusual cuckoo is very large with a long tail and deep chestnut coloring. Near the highway bridge we searched unsuccessfully for a Jacana and kingfishers, but we did find two black phoebes here. On returning to our cabins we found that Bert Lindsay had arrived and was staying at El Sol. John Galley had also come and was staying at the San Antonio Hotel in Tamazunchale.

Third Day of Count

This was the last day of the official Xilitla Count, and after an early start we again went to the ferry. We dropped the Eastmans at the highway bridge as they were working the river route from the bridge to the ferry. John Galley, Bert Lindsay and Edgar Kincaid caught the bus at the ferry to ride up toward Xilitla and take the Slope area. Carl, Armand and I birded in the area known as Pauline's Jungle. A crow-like bird seen flying was identified by its rounded tail as a raven. (Ravens and crows are rare in this area). A falcon seen in the air harassing a vulture was more difficult to identify. It remained in the air for only a short time, then dashed back into the forest. We observed white on the throat and head, and a general dark appearance. I clearly saw rufous on the lower part of the abdomen and undertail coverts. Armand observed the dark area under the wing and after consulting several books and "Tropical Expert No. 3" (Edgar Kincaid) we were able to definitely identify it as an Aplomado Falcon. Earlier, near the river we had seen a female ringed kingfisher. This was my "most wanted" kingfisher and after missing it on the river route I had had little hope of seeing it. While eating lunch we listened to a chorus of about fifteen chachalacas on the mountain side and watched a beautiful Canivet Emerald hummingbird (like a glittering jewel) feeding on Mala Mujer blossoms. Late in the afternoon we climbed a nearby mountain to listen for the Rufescent Tinamou. We heard the incessent chattering of hundreds of green parakeets flying over but failed to hear the Tinamous. We clamored down the mountainside in the twilight and met the Slope party at the car. They had seen a flame-colored tanager, also twelve blue honeycreepers (both very good birds) and as we drove toward the ferry, the car lights flashed on a Paraque - our last new bird for the count.

Irby Davis and his wife, Pauline James, and Mr. and Mrs. Franks came down from Xilitla and all of us assembled to count the number of species - unofficial total was 168. This was the first time the count has ever been under 200. It was noted however, that birds, as well as butterflies and mammals, were generally scarce this year. I was the tally-keeper for our party which was a tiring job because of listing so many Sumichrast blackbirds, Giraud's flycatchers, parakeets, pigeons and Abbot's tanagers. But to me it was the best and most exciting bird count I have ever been on - even though it was a rough grind getting up early and hustling to find birds all day.

March 6, 1956 - Norma C. Oates, Editor

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