



THE SPOONBILL

Volume IV No. 4

August 1955

 * "One of the nicest ways to get away from the *
 * razzmatazz of our hurried generation is to *
 * get out where the birds are, and study their *
 * ways. Peace will come to your soul." *
 * RAYMOND CARLSON *
 * Arizona Highways *

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FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

August 20 - Saturday afternoon field trip to Galveston Island.

Meet in Galveston, 2:00 p.m. at the Humble filling station on the corner of Broadway (Hwy. 75) and 61st Street. The territory covered will include marshes, ponds and lakes in the western section of the island. This trip is especially recommended for beginners as it will provide a good opportunity to study the summer residents of Galveston Island as well as early fall migrants. A late picnic supper on the beach is planned and some may want to go for a cool swim in the gulf.

For further information or for transportation to Galveston, call Mrs. Chas. F. (Jerry) Baker at WA-1-2644, who will act as leader on this outing.

ORNITHOLOGY GROUP REPORTS

July 9 - Picnic at the Haver's Place

The Botany Group invited all members of the Outdoor Nature Club and their friends to an outing at the Haver's place near Westfield on Saturday afternoon July 9th. During the afternoon the guests followed a marked nature trail and attempted to name the 58 kinds of trees and 15 types of vines numbered along the trail. There were 38 additional plants - wildflowers, grasses and vines - that had not previously been identified. Many of these were classified and named before the afternoon was over. Birds identified while following the nature trail included - crested flycatcher, summer tanager, red-headed woodpecker, white-eyed vireo, red-eyed vireo and orchard oriole.

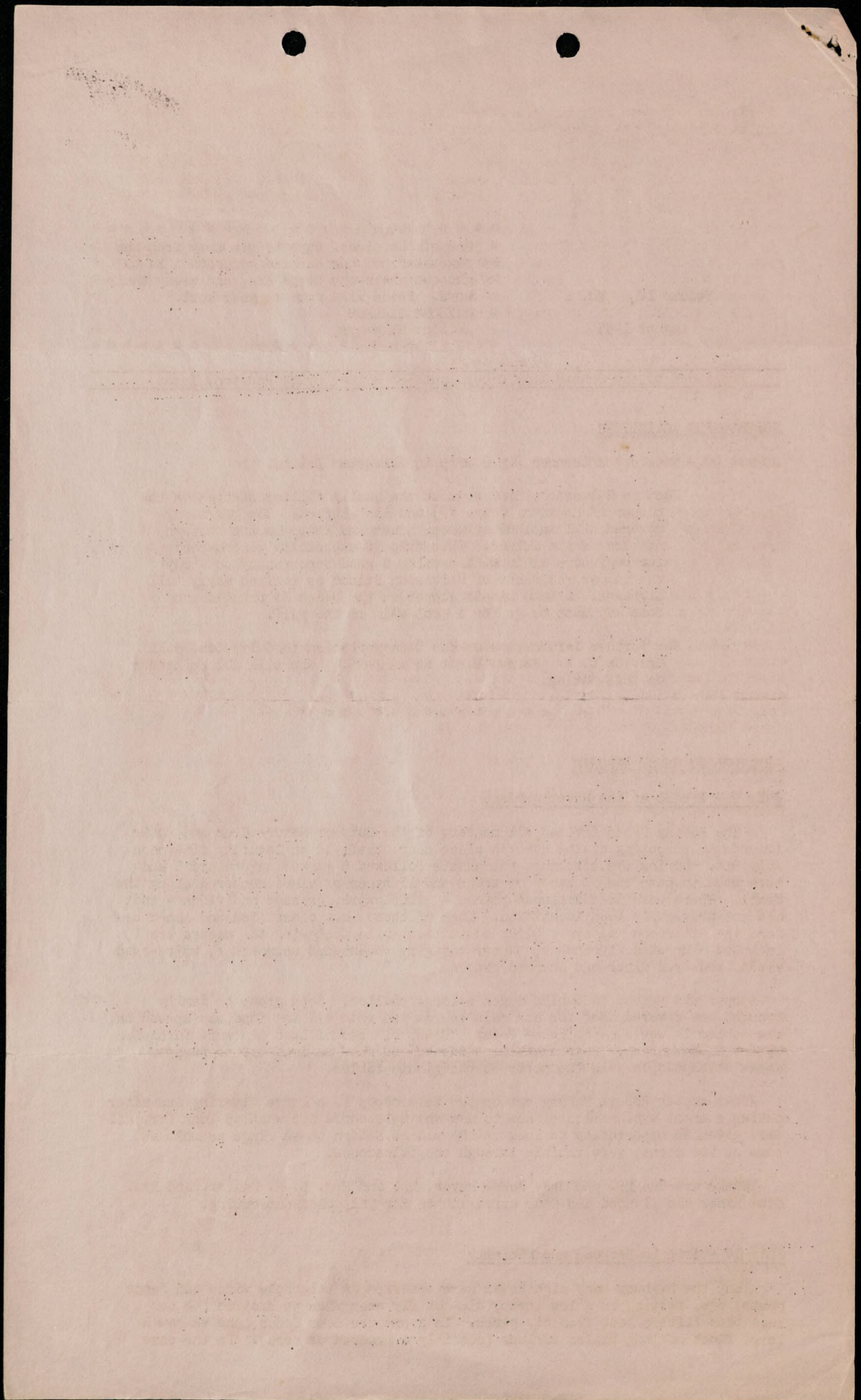
Supper was served on tables under a large shelter. Each group or family brought one covered dish for the main course and when all the food was spread on the tables it was a magnificent feast. Giant glasses of iced tea were furnished by the Botany Group. Some excitement was caused when an immature copperhead snake attempted to join the party at the picnic tables.

After supper Robert Tabony set up two telescopes in a large clearing and after making a short explanation of how to use the telescopes and what to look for, all were given an opportunity to look at the planet Saturn whose rings as well as some of its moons, were visible through the telescopes.

Thanks are due Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Haver, Mr. and Mrs. L. N. Dexter, and Mrs. Edna Miner who planned and made arrangements for this pleasant outing.

July 17 - Trip to Sargent and vicinity

Along the highway many nighthawks were observed on telephone wires and fence posts; one, resting on a low shrub, did not fly away when we stopped the car less than fifteen feet from his perch. In a pasture near Cedar Lane we saw a large flock of long-billed curlews (possibly a hundred or more). In the same



field were numerous laughing gulls and little blue herons. Some gulls were resting in flocks on the ground while others were flying over the fields probably feeding on grasshoppers or other insects.

Along the gulf-shore below Sargent two unidentified "peeps", two willets and about ten least terns were seen. A royal tern flew up and down the beach as we ate lunch and two laughing gulls came to search our picnic area for food scraps. In the dry sandy space back from the beach a least tern attempted to feed her young, but each time she flew in with food was surrounded by flocks of her greedy, but lazy relatives. The hungry youngster, already as large as his parent, finally gave up and flew away. A horned lark was also found in this area, and feeding in a small stagnant pool, we saw one Solitary sandpiper, a semipalmated sandpiper (apparently very early migrants) and a killdeer. (Carrie Holcomb, Ruth Stamm, Darris Massingill, Ruth Moorman, Leota Stilwell, Norma Oates)

July 31 - O.G. Field Trip (Norma Oates)

After drawing lots to establish the position of each person in our four boats, we loaded our gear and set off down Highland Bayou in search of birds. As this territory is popular with local fishermen, the birds are accustomed to boats of all types so did not become alarmed at our little string of dories, and even submitted gracefully when fifteen pairs of binoculars were turned their way.

In the marshes along the bayou we found clapper rails, least bitterns, great-blue herons (including some immatures) tri-colored herons, American and snowy egrets, and flitting over the tall marsh grasses were seaside sparrows. Crossing Jones Lake we followed a line of low islands where we saw several groups of reddish egrets. Some with up-raised wings were lurching about as they fed in the shallow water, while others stood motionless on the upper beaches.

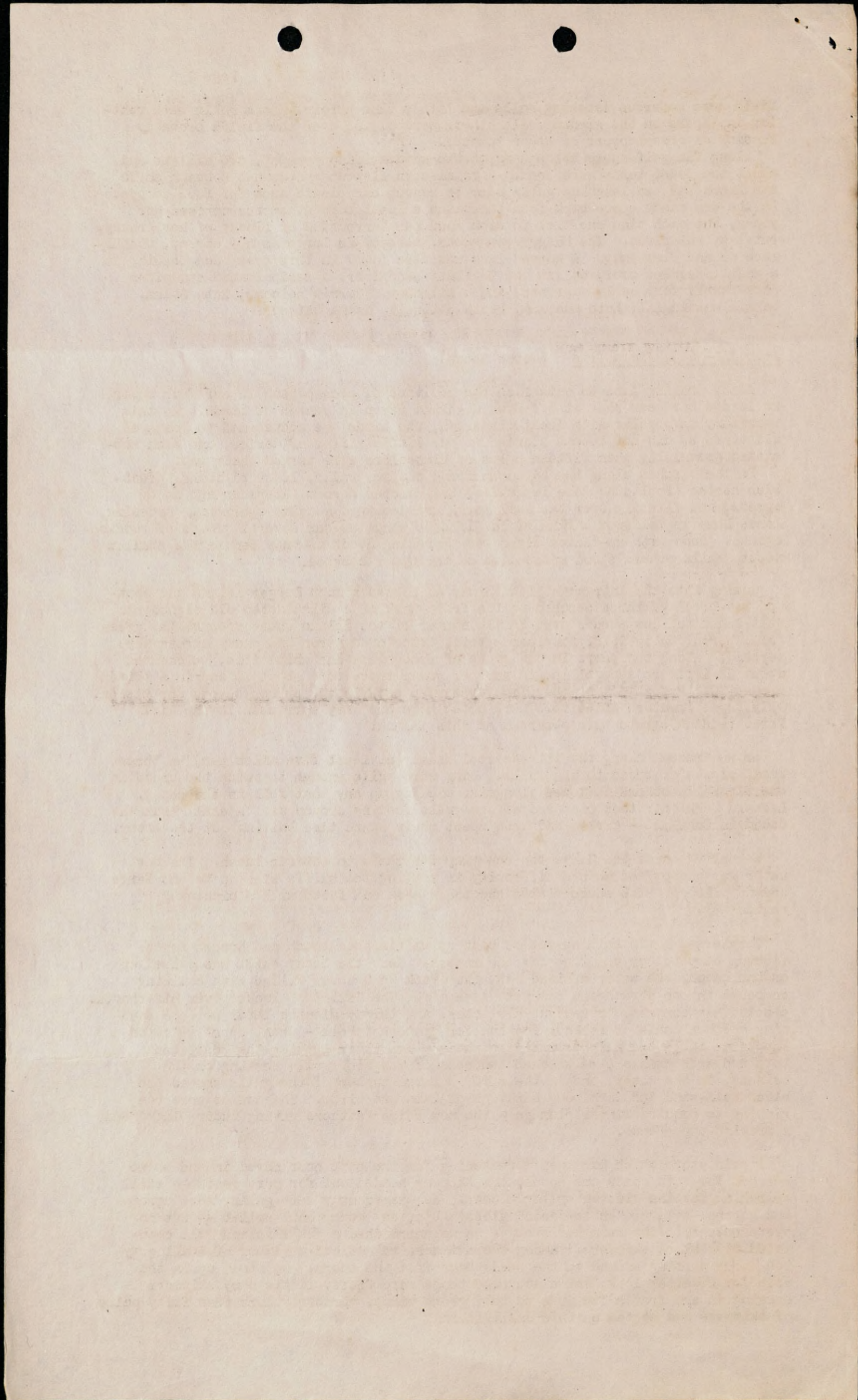
Coming into the intracoastal waterway we passed a much larger island and spotted two black vultures perched on the frame-work of a dilapidated old signboard. Salt cedar and low shrubs grew in the center of the island where spoonbills, great blue heron, white ibis, American egrets, tricolored heron and snowy egrets were perched. Along the shore in one group of spoonbills and white ibis, we counted about 38 immature spoonbills, in another group there were about 10 and in a third around 20. Probably many more immatures were back in the shrubs beyond our vision. Only three immature white ibis were noted here and they were seen in the air. Three reddish egrets were observed on this island.

As we "raced" along the intracoastal canal (at least five miles per) we threw small pieces of bread to the gulls. Many were agile enough to catch the bread in the air while others followed alongside picking up any that fell in the water. Leonard McWhirter took pictures of the gulls feeding around us. A small leak was found in Boat #2 -- Carrie and Ruth spent their spare time bailing out the water.

We pulled under the Galveston causeway for shade to eat our lunch. The bay water was choppy and we had difficulty in getting the skiffs tied up to the large cement pilings. The waves rocked the boats back and forth with a sickening regularity.

Carrie was again bailing out #2 boat as we finished lunch and headed for a fishing camp to buy gasoline for the motors. Here the leaky skiff was pulled up on the beach, the water drained out, the crack in the bow filled with caulking compound and we were again ready to take off. The "skipper" looked over his charts, checked his compass, "reved" up his motor, and thirty minutes later we were scanning another chain of islands looking for oystercatchers - when, oops! we're on a sandbar! While the skipper waded in the shallow water getting the boats back into a deeper channel, we watched hundreds of laughing gulls resting on the islands, in the water, and in the air. A large number of the gulls showed the black tail-band and dark body markings of immature birds. The adults were beginning to acquire winter plumage - the new white feathers giving their black heads a grayish appearance.

A rain storm which had been threatening for the past hour moved in and as we reached for rain coats and hoods, the skipper headed out for more reefs -- still searching for the elusive oystercatcher. We passed many more gulls, more egrets and herons, several "white-faced" glossy ibis, an occasional willet -- but no oystercatcher. The rain had stopped as we approached a small island well populated with black skimmers. Among the skimmers we noticed a number of small grayish birds darting around in the weeds back from the shore. We stood up in the boat for a better look, and discovered these were fluffy little baby skimmers ranging in age from a few days to half grown birds. Probably more than fifty pairs of skimmers had nested on this small island.



At this point we consulted our watches and decided we could spend no more time looking for that evasive creature, the American Oystercatcher, so we reluctantly headed back toward Highland Bayou and home port.

Those who attended this high adventure in bird-finding were Carrie Holcomb, Ruth Stamm, Mr. and Mrs. C. B. Gilman, Carl Aiken, Lloyd Lambert, Vic Emanuel, Josiephine Wilkin, Leonard McWhirter, Jimmy Murray, Ella Wolfer, Leota Stilwell, Norma Oates, Jerry Baker, and the skipper, Mac Ramsey.

* * * * *

CLEARING HOUSE

- July 9 - Eastern kingbirds were seen gathering on telephone wires and fences, several dozen birds within 100 yards, just north of Wharton by Armand Yramategui
- July 10 - Prothonotary warbler, blue grosbeaks, painted and Indigo buntings seen along Miller Road by Ruth Moorman and Leota Stilwell
- July 15 - First migrating Ruby-throated hummingbirds (three) seen in Houston (A.Y.)
- July 20 - Five wood ibis, adult and immature green herons, painted and Indigo Buntings seen near Juliff by Mrs. Jerry Baker and Darris Massingill
- July 24 - Many immature little blue herons and immature white ibis seen at lake on Miller Road by Ruth Stamm and Carrie Holcomb

Purple Martins

On July 9 groups of 8 to 20 birds were seen on telephone wires in the northwest part of Harris County by N.Oates, L.Stilwell and R.Moorman. Mrs. Jerry Baker saw a large number of Martins gathering on wires in East Houston on July 4th and again on July 23 saw about 40 back of her home. On July 4th Darris Massingill noticed many Martins flying over the Lombardy area (East Houston); none were seen in this area on July 11.

To date no reports have been received of large concentrations of Martins in the eastern part of Houston similar to those observed during the first two weeks of July in 1954.

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MISCELLANEOUS CORRESPONDENCE

Carrie Holcomb - 1008 Missouri

"At Rockport on July 3, 1955, Ruth Stamm, Clara Matthes, Edna Matthes and I had the good fortune to be with Connie Hagar when she sighted the first two Wood Ibis of the season. Probably the most interesting bird of the trip was an immature Painted Bunting practicing his song in a tree beside the road. He was not disturbed by us, but intent on his song. It was our observation, verified by Mrs. Hagar that Willets have had a good year. They were numerous around Rockport."

Don Melstrom, P.O.Box 211, Torrance, Calif.

"I am transferring from Houston to my company's plant at Torrance, Calif. (between Los Angeles and Long Beach). I sincerely hope that any of the Houston "birders" who happen out Los Angeles way will look me up. Until I become permanently settled, my address will be c/o Shell Chemical Corp. P.O.Box 211, Torrance, Calif."

Edna Miner (on vacation)

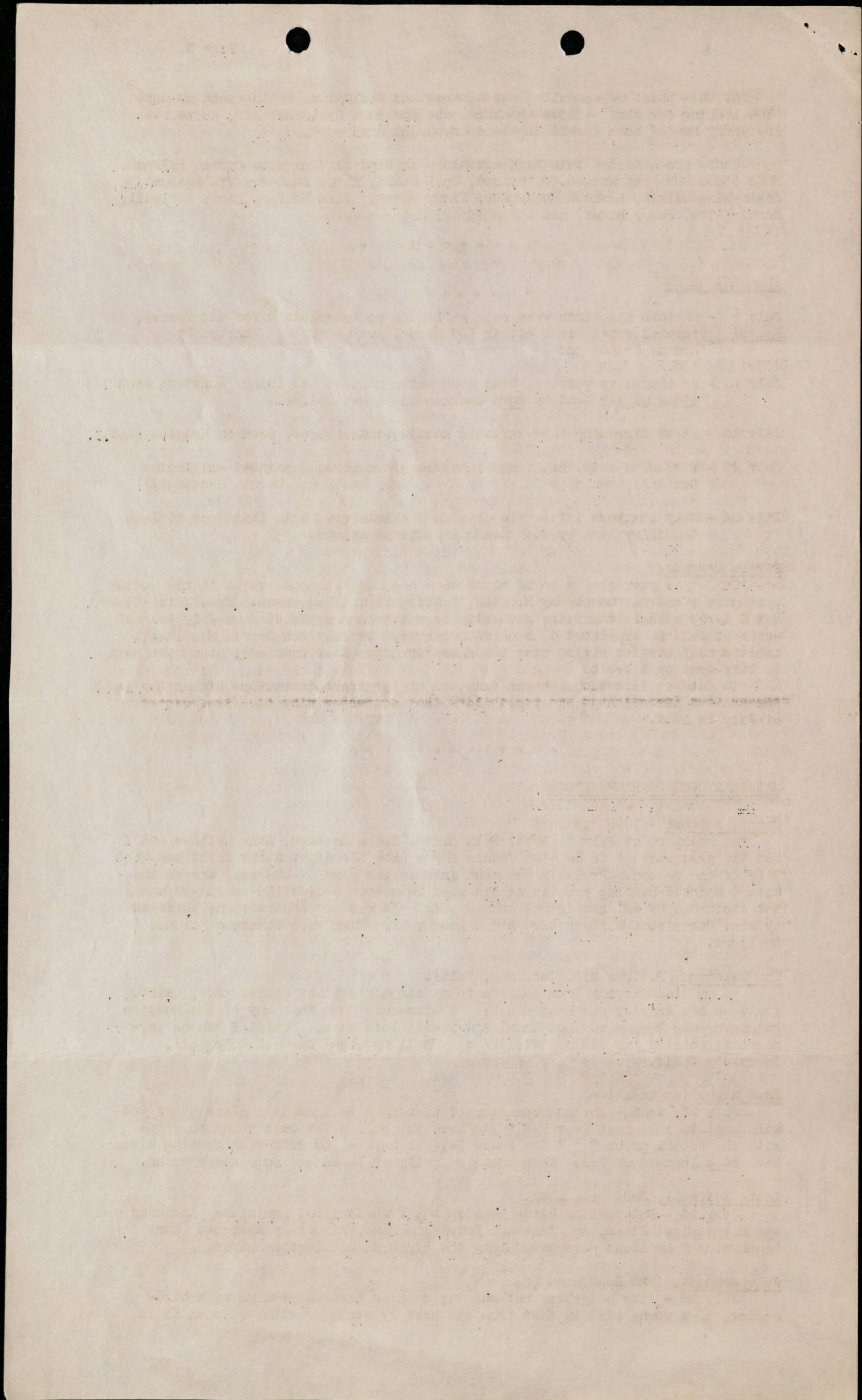
July 23, 1955 - The Audubon Camp of Wisconsin -- This is a place where you will want to come next year * * * I'm here for only a few days going on trips with the botany group * * * You would love it here - 120 different nesting birds have been located so far. We watched a family of loons and some sedge wrens."

Leota Stilwell, 3009 Rive Blvd.

July 24 - Interesting birds seen in St. Francisville, Louisiana, included two Mississippi Kites, an immature Broadwing Hawk, Pinewoods sparrow. Many Rough-winged swallows were seen along the highway on telephone wires.

Jule Schmidt, 1723 Esperanza St.

July 25 - "The neighbors out our way seem to have adopted me as a bird-doctor, if a young bird is cast from its nest by storm or other reasons it is



brought to me for care, so far it has been my good fortune to save and release a young jay and Mocker * * * Several days ago I answered a knock on the front door and there stood a little girl of six or eight years holding a carton and asked if I took care of little birds. The bird was an immature Mourning dove, old enough to be on its own but someone had shot it with an air-rifle. Thus far the young bird is doing nicely, it now eats and drinks of its own, and it may not be too many days before it can be given its freedom."

Winnie Hurst

Mr. Jule Schmidt advises that "another letter from the Hursts, indicates Winnie is following her doctor's orders and showing improvement right along."

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OFF THE PRESS

ELECTRICAL WORLD - June 20, 1955

Utilities Ally against Woodpeckers

"Four large utility companies have formed an alliance against the pileated woodpecker, a bird dedicated to reducing utility poles in the wooded, mountainous parts of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. This bird has defeated every strategem devised by the utilities to date, is increasing in numbers, and broadening its hostilities.

"When earnestly pecking a utility pole, the bird's hard, chisel-like bill leaves a sawdust deposit large enough to fill one or even more bushel baskets. Usually it continues its hacking until the pole sways under the weight of its high-tension lines. Replacing poles in untraveled areas is expensive, and the work on energized lines is difficult and hazardous. Apparently no wood pole is immune.

"Untreated chestnut poles were the first victims of the woodpeckers' attacks. It was at first believed that the birds bored into the poles in search of food, such as termites, black ants, and woodworms. But the woodpeckers persisted after full-length creosoted yellow pine poles replaced the chestnut ones.

"Chemical analysis of damaged pole sections left PP&L officials further puzzled. No insect life did or could exist in the pressure-treated yellow pine. The company then investigated the possibility that conductor vibration transmitted through the pole produced there the effects of termites and insects that drew the birds. This theory was exploded by the finding of severely damaged poles before conductors had been strung.

"The birds ignored old poles left standing and the holed sections of old poles lashed to new ones. They concentrated on the new ones. Tacking red flannel and metal flashers to new poles preserved them briefly, apparently until the birds assured themselves these devices were harmless.

"Although the woodpeckers' activities were confined to a small area during 1943 through 1946, it became apparent to PP&L that damage to poles was steadily increasing. The company asked the Pennsylvania State Games Commission for a special permit to shoot the birds. But the commission's director of field management advised that granting such a permit was beyond its authority as woodpeckers are protected by both state conservation laws and federal regulations. * * * In 1953 a game commission field man and a PP&L representative jointly investigated various sections where damage was heavy. * * * Thus the Utilities Wood Pole Research Grant was established at the university (Pennsylvania State) * * *."

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VIRGINIA WILDLIFE - July 1955

Our National Bird Needs Protection

"Since its beginning, the National Audubon Society has carried on vigorous campaigns to protect threatened species of wildlife. This year the Society is conducting a nationwide inventory of bald eagles in the hope of securing data which will be a valuable guide to future action.

"Though our national bird emblem, the bald eagle, is not actually in danger of extinction, its population has been decimated by illegal shooting and alteration of its habitat. For example, Charles L. Broley found that in four Florida counties in which he had banded bald eagles for many years, only 10 nests raised young this year in comparison to 74 nests that raised young in 1945. Unless effective action can be taken to stem the decrease of our national bird, we may be faced before long with the ironic prospect of being represented heraldically by an extinct species, warns the National Audubon Society."



HOUSTON PRESS - July 13, 1955

Whooping Cranes Hatch 4 Young 'Uns

"Ottawa, July 13 -- A bunch of the cranes were whooping it up in the remote muskeg flats of Wood Buffalo Park today. They were celebrating four blessed events which may bring their flock back from the brink of extinction.

"Wildlife and bird conservationists of North America heard their biggest news in decades when W.W.Muir, chief of the Canadian Wildlife Service, announced two separate nesting pairs of whooping cranes, with two young ones in each nest had been found. There were only 21 of the big, graceful white cranes known to be left in the world before the discovery."

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HOUSTON POST - July 24, 1955

Fowl Play

"How did two mallard ducks throw a \$100,000,000 Chicago construction project off schedule?

"By nesting in the area that was to be cleared for a water-filtration plant. When workmen refused to disturb nests, blueprints were altered."

* * * * *
* Don't forget to send the Editor highlights*
* of your vacation trips - also lists and *
* dates of fall migrants - or other news *
* of birds and birders. *
* * * * *

VACATION REPORTS

Touring Old Mexico - by Josiephine Wilkin

On this trip I tried being exactly what the permit to travel Old Mexico said "Turista," as I dabbled only slightly in two of my "vices" - birdwatching and photography.

On June 17, at 7 a.m. we crossed the border at Reynosa. Along the road to Montemorelos I saw my first "lifer", the Great Black Hawk. As we passed through Cd. Victoria, I noted the time, for within the hour I was to see an orange-colored bridge with a cold drink stand nearby. Here I was supposed to stop and do some birding. However, I saw so many orange-colored bridges with cold-drink stands that I was utterly confused and stopped at none of them.

Arriving in Mexico City Saturday night, we engaged a guide who also relieved us of the task of driving. Sunday morning, after church and a hearty breakfast we were off to visit Alfonso Alvarez (Brahman's friend). He and his cousin, Christina, went with us to Chapultepec Castle (now a beautiful historical museum). After a late lunch at Alfonso's home, we went to the bullfight. I was completely surprised for I found this very exciting and enjoyed it tremendously. I was very quick in learning when to shout "Ole" like a native.

A visit to the "Desert of the Lions" where I had hoped to look for birds proved too cold and the trees too high for me to do much birding. Of all the places I visited in Mexico City proper, the Botanical Gardens in Chapultepec Park was the best for birding. At least the birds there were the most obliging to a hopeful birdwatcher with high heels and stockings.

As we were re-visiting Mexico City, we were ready to hit the road after a four day stay. We traveled south, taking the toll road into the mountains. Within a short time, far below us we saw the city of Cuernavaca (Alt. 5,084). From here we went to Taxco, a charming little hill-town clinging lichen-like to the side of the Guerrero Mts. with winding cobblestone streets and red roofs. Our guide led us to the most interesting places the town had to offer, including the silver factory where I purchased another silver necklace and earrings.

The drive from Taxco to Acapulco is very beautiful as well as interesting. It not only offers lovely mountain scenery with flowering trees but also Zopilote canyon with giant organ pipes (cactus) growing on the edges of the cliffs. Dropping down into a valley, we observed our first coconut trees, some leaning like those pictured in the movies of the tropics. Again we were in the mountains and suddenly I was greeted with one of the most breath-taking sights I have ever seen. Below us was sky-blue water surrounded in what I would call a semi-circle effect



by green tropical mountains with hotels and homes clinging to the mountainside as they drop down to the water--Acapulco. This is truly one of Mexico's most beautiful places. As we neared the beach, I noticed a Frigate bird high over the bay. For years this bird was on my most-wanted list, and this year I have seen five of them. I saw quite a few birds here, but my bird-thrill of the trip was seeing two Jacanas (most-wanted list). I do believe Brahman thought I had "flipped my lid." Finding the Jacanas was an accident due to the misguided directions we received from the natives in our search for Laguna Tres Pales. The guide operating a glass-bottom boat told of seeing Boat-billed herons at Laguna de Coyuca with various state-side birds, but I did not make this trip. Of course, we did make the short trip to Pie de Cuesta, famous for its glorious sunsets and the lighting effect the sunset displays on the high waves of the Pacific as they break with tremendous force on the beach. This is a "must" on the tourist agenda while in Acapulco. It was not until the second visit to see this awe-inspiring spectacle that I noted the evening flight of the Common Egrets and Cormorants as they flew to their roost far out in Laguna de Coyuca.

On our return trip (north), outside of Taxco we took the road to Toluca and west on Hy. 15 towards Guadalajara. At Km. 133.4 we took a branch road to the bottom of the valley and the resort hotel, San Jose Purua, which is in a tropical setting on the banks of the Tuxpan River. The swimming pool here is fed by hot springs which are widely known for their medicinal properties. Back on the highway again, we climbed deeper and deeper into the majestic wooded mountains, and before long reached the lookout point known as "Mil Cumbres" (thousand peaks), situated in the Atzimba National Park at almost 10,000 feet above sea level. From this point the highway takes one to the Valley of Guayangarco, only to climb again along the side of Mt. Garnica, one of the major peaks of the Ozumatlan range. We stopped here to view the Stellar's jay and Yellow-eyed juncos. Somewhere in the forest a bird with a beautiful thrush-like song (?) was singing.

An overnight stay at the Fenix Hotel in Zamora was a delightful experience. Here, too, the water for the swimming pool is said to be "good for what ails you." A Canyon Wren that sang on my balcony had its home in an annex the hotel is building. I don't think he will have to move anytime soon as I saw only three men working on this three-story building. Since our return home, a friend that visited the hotel in 1948 said they were working on the annex at that time.

While Brahman was driving, a Rough-winged Swallow (baby) was hit by the car. We thought at first its neck was broken, but apparently it was only suffering from shock. I held it cupped in my hands (mites and all) for at least an hour before we (the bird and I) thought he was able to take care of himself. I released him on the outskirts of Guadalajara.

At Chapala, we stopped at the hotel for lunch which featured the most delectable fish it has ever been my pleasure to taste (white-fish from Lake Chapala). Back-tracking towards Guadalajara, we took a side road to the Falls of Juanacatlan. With the exception of Niagara, these falls are the largest in North America. This is a great body of water, 400 feet wide, plunging fiercely over a precipice to the bottom of the barranca 85 feet below. We were fortunate in visiting this spot after some good rains as it was quite impressive.

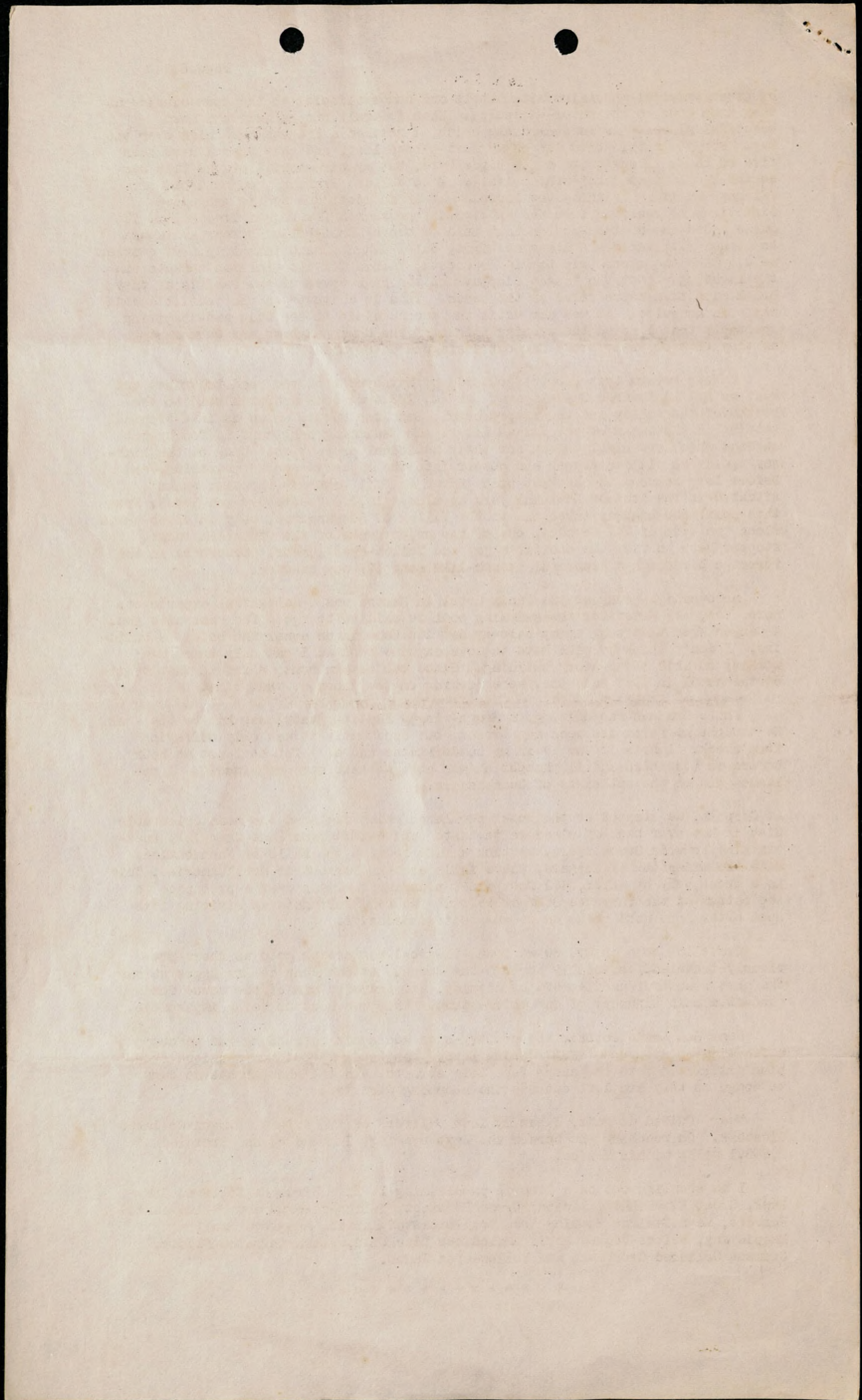
Traveling home on Hy. 80 we found the road was not as good as those previously traveled, especially through the towns. At San Juan de las Lagos we saw the most beautiful needlecraft on display, and traveled one of the worse roads (and it a main highway) of our entire trip. This was next to being impassable.

Near San Louis Potosi, the country-side was again refreshing and we stopped a few minutes at a beautiful fishing lake. San Louis Potosi has a unique shopping district. Here the shops face tile streets, and the shopper has no cars to dodge as they are left outside the shopping district.

Near Ciudad de Maiz, I saw my last "lifer" of the trip a Crimson Collared Grosbeak. On reaching the border the next evening, I noted we had traveled 2,949.1 miles within Mexico.

I am crawling out on a limb in proclaiming 15 life birds as follows: Gray Hawk, Great Black Hawk, Jacana, Green Parakeet, Yellow-cheeked and Yellow-headed Parrots, Magnificent Hummingbird, Gray-breasted Martin, Mangrove Swallow, Magpie Jay, Rufous-backed Robin, Melodious Blackbird, Black-throated Oriole, Crimson Collared Grosbeak, and Yellow-eyed Junco.

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AUDUBON FIELD NOTES - April 1955

Fifty-fifth Christmas Bird Count

"Twenty years ago 170 counts produced only 5 lists of 100 or more species. Ten years later 282 yielded but 6 over 100. In contrast, the current 516 reports offered 44 lists above the 100 mark! This year San Diego, Calif., won top honors with 175 species -- the largest list ever produced on a Christmas Bird Count in the United States. This was accomplished not only because of the blessing of an area rich bird potential, but also, because forty-three competent observers, well-organized, followed carefully-laid plans. In addition, 'A great deal of field work was carried out in spotting birds and scouting territories as far in advance as mid-November.'

"The following areas reported 150 or more species:

San Diego, Calif.	175
Cocoa, Fla.	167
Wilmington, N.C.	163
Sabine National Wildlife Refuge, La.	156
Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, Tex.	154
Los Angeles, Calif.	154
Cape May, N. J.	151
Ocean City, Md.	150
St. Marks, Fla.	150

(Note:- Houston's official 1955 Christmas Bird Count was listed as 146 species. Special credit was given to Noel Pettingill (compiler) for "excellent details submitted for all unusual observations.")

DID YOU KNOW

A canary makes more noise than a gorilla! That's hard to believe, but both voices have been tested by a sound meter. The meter gave the canary a "score" of 77. The gorilla scored only 73.

The Starling can imitate the songs and calls of many kinds of birds, including the Mockingbird. Some say it can even imitate a dog's bark.

OFFICERS OF ORNITHOLOGY GROUP

Chairman - Mr. James (Jimmy) F. Murray, 6032 Glen Cove

Vice-chairman - Field Trips - Miss Leota Stilwell, 3009 Rice Blvd.

Secretary-Treasurer - Miss Mabel Cline, 5218 Lamar

Editor - Mrs. Norma Oates, 5908 Charlotte St.

If you have not already renewed your 1955-56 membership in the Ornithology Group, please send \$1.00 with your name, address and new telephone number to Mrs. Chas. F. Baker, 6430 Jefferson, Houston 3, Texas. (Mrs. Baker is substituting for our secretary-treasurer Mabel Cline who is on vacation)

I am enclosing \$1.00 for membership in the Ornithology Group:-

Name _____

Address _____

New Telephone Number _____

August 4, 1955

Outdoor Nature Club
(Ornithology Group)
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