



# 1923

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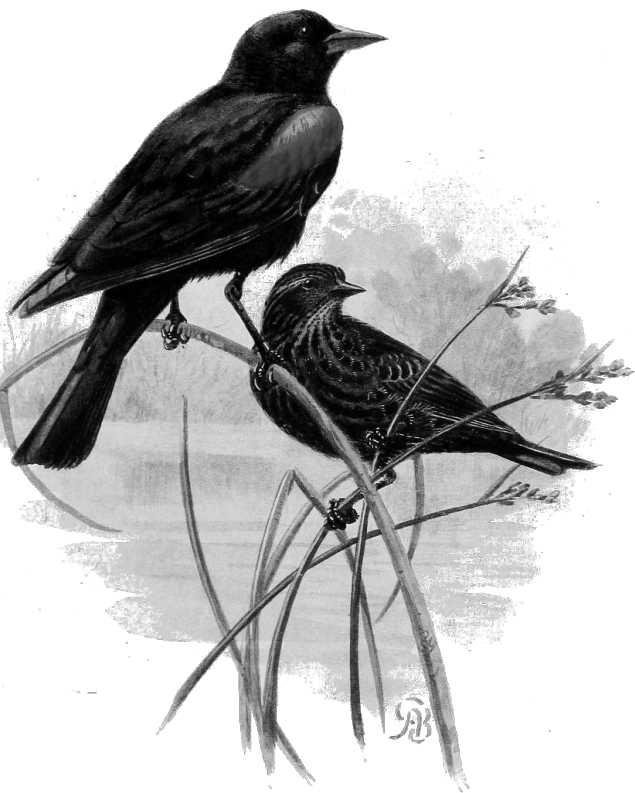
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january



THANK God for Wonder! What is it but a pleased interest in the unfolding panorama of life? We consider it the special attribute of childhood, because life is new to the child; but woe to us when we cease to wonder! It is a sign that we have ceased to live. For in the last analysis, Wonder is Worship—a recognition of the presence of God and ecstatic joy thereat.

I bring a chance acquaintance to view my collection of eggs. He glances patronizingly at the painted ovals, murmurs, "I see," when I point out an example of protective harmony, and stifles a yawn when I discourse upon the niceties of hummingbird architecture. He isn't interested. What I have proposed for common ground he cannot accept as such. His thoughts are elsewhere. He does not wonder! Another gazes with delight upon the unfolded treasures, gives little shrieks of appreciation at each successive burst of color, and marvels ecstatically over the exquisite traceries of the Oriole. He is manifestly interested in that which interests me. I have given him pleasure. He wonders, and is by so much more my friend.



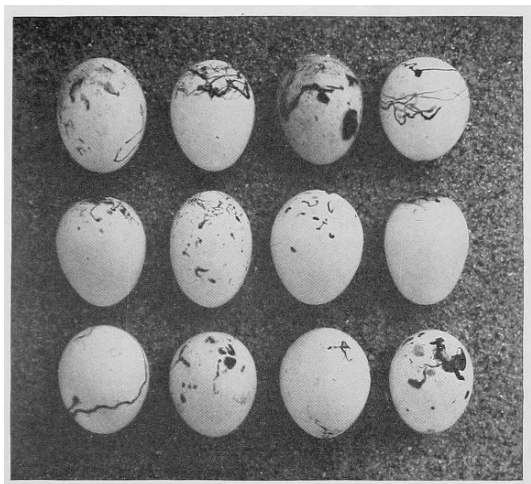
SUMMER silences the birds so gradually, and we ourselves have become so much absorbed in business during the prosy days of September, that we have almost forgotten the choruses of springtime, and have come to accept our uncheered lot as part of the established order of things. But on a nippy October morning, as we are bending over some dull task, there comes a sound which brings us to our feet. We hasten to the window, throw up the sash and lean out into the cool, fresh air, while a Meadowlark rehearses, all at a sitting, the melodies of the year's youth. It all comes back to us with a rush; the smell of lush grasses, the splendor of apple blossoms, the courage of lengthening days, the ecstasies of courtship—all these are recalled by the lark-song. It is as though this forethoughted soul had caught the music of a May day, just at its prime, in a crystal vase, and was now pouring out the imprisoned sound in a gurgling, golden flood. What cheer! What heartening! Yea; what rejuvenation it brings! Wine of youth! Splashes of color and gay delight!

It is impossible not to rhapsodize over the Meadowlark. He is a rhapsodist himself. Born of the soil and lost in its embraces for such time as it pleases him, he yet quits his lowly station ever and again, mounts some fence-post or tree-top, and publishes to the world an unquenchable gladness in things-as-they-are. If at sunrise, then the gleams of the early ray flash resplendent from his golden breastplate,—this high-priest of morning; and all Nature echoes his joyous blast: "Thank God for sunshine!" Or if the rain begins to fall, who so quickly grateful for its refreshment as this optimist of the ground, this prophet of good cheer! There is even an added note of exultation in his voice as he shouts: "Thank God for rain!" And who like him can sing farewell to parting day! Piercing sweet from the meadows come the last offerings of day's daysmen, peal and counterpeal from rival friendly throats, unfailling, unfaltering, unsubdued: "It is good to live. It is good to rest. Thank God for the day now done!"



Allen Brooks -

And it goes without saying that we cannot regard this bird as lawful game. Its flesh is undoubtedly a delicacy, but so is human flesh. We exempt the horse from slaughter not because its flesh is unfit for food—it is really very *sapid*—but because the animal has endeared itself to our race by generations of faithful service. We place the horse in another category, that of animal friend. And the human race, the best of it, has some time since discovered compunctions about eating its friends. Make friends with this bonny bird, the Meadowlark, and you will be ashamed thenceforth to even discuss assassination. Fricassee of *prima donna*! Voice of morning *en brochette*! Bird-of-merry-cheer on toast! Faugh! And yet that sort of thing passed muster a generation ago—does yet in the darker parts of Europe!

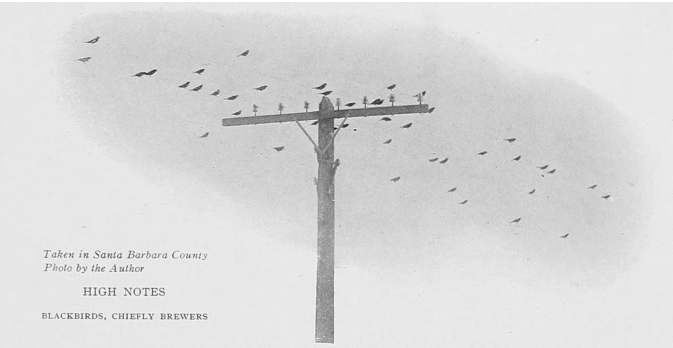


*Taken in Merced County*

BIRDS AND RUSHES

*Photo by the Author*

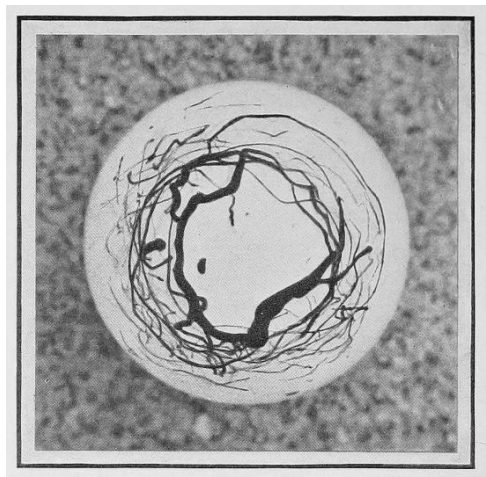


A black and white photograph of a tall wooden utility pole with a cross-arm. Numerous blackbirds are perched on the pole and its cross-arm. Many more blackbirds are in flight, scattered across the sky around the pole. The background is a hazy, light-colored sky.

*Taken in Santa Barbara County*  
*Photo by the Author*

HIGH NOTES

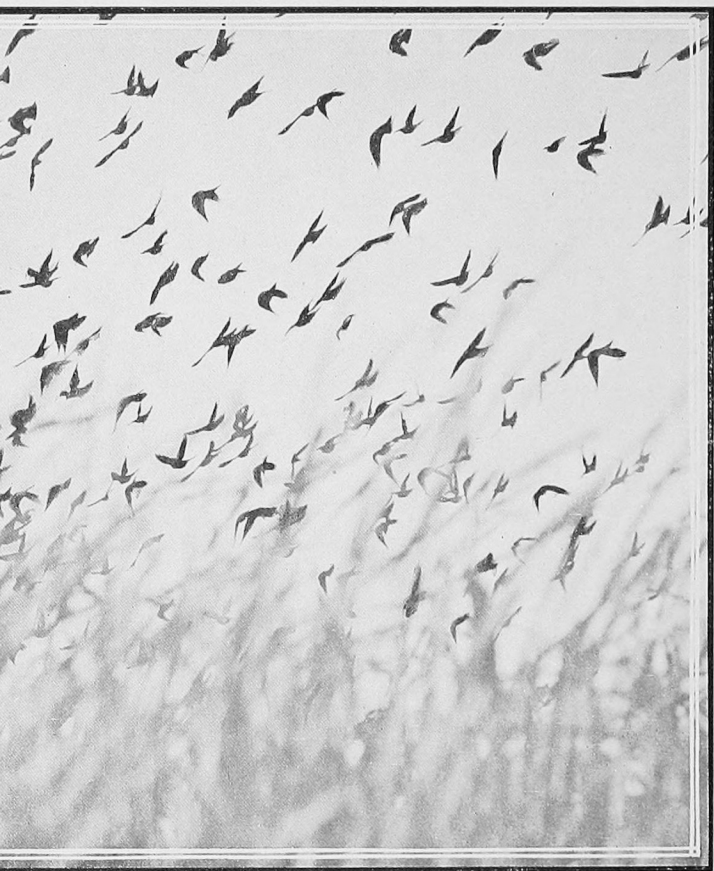
BLACKBIRDS, CHIEFLY BREWERS





*Taken in Merced County*

A TEMPEST OF



OF BLACKBIRDS

*Photo by the Author*

HERE IS another of those rascals in feathers who keep one alternately grumbling and admiring. As an abstract proposition one would not stake a *sou marquee* on the virtue of a Magpie; but taken in the concrete, with a sly wink and a saucy tilt of the tail, one will rise to his feet, excitedly shouting, "Go it, Jackity," and place all his earnings on this pie-bald steed in the race for avian honors. It is impossible to exaggerate this curious contradiction in Magpie nature, and in our resulting attitude towards it. It is much the same with the mischievous small boy. He has surpassed the bounds of legitimate naughtiness, and we take him on the parental knee for well-deserved correction. But the saucy culprit manages to steal a roguish glance at us,—a glance which challenges the remembrance of our own boyish pranks, and bids us ask what difference it will make twenty years after; and it is all off with discipline for that occasion.

The Magpie is indisputably a wretch, a miscreant, a cunning thief, a heartless marauder, a brigand bold—Oh, call him what you will! But, withal, he is such a picturesque villain, that as often as you are stirred with righteous indignation and impelled to punitive slaughter, you fall to wondering if your commission as avenger is properly countersigned, and—shirk the task outright.



But oh, how sweet is the smell of returning moisture! and how grateful the flick of tiny raindrops on the face! All nature is "swelling visibly" with sap and satisfaction, and life begins over again in joyous earnest. The Meadowlarks exult, of course, and the lordly males chuckle, "I told you so," to their doubting mates. Bush-Tits lisp with treble emphasis, and, if it be early spring, the Robins go dashing about excitedly, packing their Alaska trunks, and bidding their friends good-bye. But it is the California Jay, the "Blue Jay," whose ear-splitting voice has most notably revived. We can almost forgive him all his mischief for the hearty, saucy stridor of his rain-wet tones.

But—but—mischief, thy name is Blue Jay.





It is well known that the gentleman burglar takes a conscientious pride in the safety and welfare of his own home. Nothing shall molest *his* dear ones. The jay becomes secretive and silent as the time for nest-building approaches. The nest is well concealed in a dense thicket of fir saplings, or else set at various heights in the larger fir trees. If one but looks at it before the complement of eggs is laid, the locality is deserted forthwith. If, however, the enterprise is irretrievably launched, the birds take care not to be seen in the vicinity of their nest, unless they are certain of its discovery, in which case they call heaven and earth to witness that the man is a monster of iniquity, and that he is plotting against the innocent. The youngsters, too, quickly learn to assume the attitude of affronted innocence. At an age when most bird-babies would make a silent get-away under cover of the parental defense, young Steller Jays will turn to and berate the stranger in common with their parents, with all the virtuous zeal of ordained elders.

Mischief and the "Blue Jay" are synonymous. Alert, restless, saucy, inquisitive, and provoking, yet always interesting, this handsome brigand keeps his human critics in a perpetual see-saw between wrath and admiration. As a sprightly piece of Nature, the Steller Jay is an unqualified success. As the hero-subject of a guessing contest he is without a peer, for one never knows what he is doing until he has done it, and none may predict what he will do next.

CALIFORNIA is the land of unfailing contrasts. Hot or cold, wet or dry, green or brown, low or high, you may order what you will (so you order your own movements to correspond), and lo, it is yours within the hour. But most striking of all Californian contrasts, is that ever recurring one between civilization and the wilderness. Does your soul abhor crowds, then escape to the wilderness forthwith and find solace. On a New Year's Day, when Pasadena was threatening to celebrate its annual Festival of Roses, the writer with a nature-loving companion fled to the hills, and at the very moment when the customary queen was being crowned amid the huzzas of a perspiring and dishevelled populace some seven miles away, we were ogling a band of deer as they picked their way daintily over the steep slopes of chaparral.







*Photo by Donald R. Dickey*

#### BABY ALL ALONE!

The winter residence of this species is probably quite as definitely localized as is that of the breeding season. I have watched birds month after month at Los Colibris which I felt reasonably sure must be the same. This is shaky "science," but the author offers no apologies for the lack of shot-gun testimony. One may take toll of the migrant hosts on occasion—some are bound to fall by the wayside anyhow—and there will be no vacancies to reproach us; but *resident* birds become in so far forth *personalized*, that we hesitate to disarrange the established order of things. The shot-gun is all too rude a questioner. The bird himself could tell us if we would only learn his language.

All images and text are excerpted from “Birds of California: a complete, scientific and popular account of the 580 species and subspecies of birds found in the state” by William Leon Dawson, published in 1923, except the cover image, which appears in a 1923 edition of “Birds of America” by T. Gilbert Pearson. Both volumes are available on the Internet Archive.

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