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FRIENDLY OREGON BIRDS WINTERING IN THE SOUTH

by

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We have been visiting some of our Oregon bird friends that like to fly South to spend the winter. Wrens, swallows, hummingbirds, and others prefer Oregon as a home to raise their children, but do not like to stay North in winter. They prefer the sunny South where it is more comfortable to sleep and easier to get a living. It is the same with people who seem to like milder weather in winter for the benefit of their health, and in war time food is really a problem.

Along the southern highways we saw more blackbirds than any other species. The Brewer blackbirds seemed to follow the human thoroughfares for their own flyways, as we saw them along the roads and railroad lines all the way down. As we came into the dryer, treeless regions we saw great companies of them flocking in at evening to fairly cover the tops of the tall, high-powered electric towers that happened to parallel the road. They swished in and settled down, never brushing a wing against a demoniac wire which would have meant a sizzling death, and which might furnish a safeguard against a bigger bird of wider wing-spread.

Like the airplane beacons, these were cold, high beds open to the high winds of heaven and enemies like hawks and owls. There was no warmth in those wires and no sheltering leaves to hide them. Perhaps it was a psychological bolstering of their faith in numbers. Or perhaps there was a physical vibration in the wires that made a humming sound that was soothing to them. Whatever it was, there they perched in a black cloud serene and unafraid.

All along the roads these Brewer blackbirds seemed quite wild. They were as much afraid of a camera as a gun. However, when we visited Westlake Park in Los Angeles, they were the tamest birds we saw. They liked to walk on the lawns and lie on the grass in the sun. They followed people about to see if they had some food. When Irene sat on the grass, dozens of them surrounded her because they spied her paper bag which had some bits of bread in it. Never be-

fore had we seen such friendly blackbirds. One of these was a partial albino because it had some white feathers on both wings. While at home we had seen a blackbird that had looked very much like this one. It would have been interesting to find out whether this was our albino that had flown South. We took a colored picture of him for identification.

While motoring along, we have always noticed some queer things about migrant birds that are hard to analyze. One of the best bird sanctuaries in northern California is the Sacramento Refuge which was established for the protection of ducks and geese on their way South. In motoring around the lakes in that region, we saw thousands of ducks and geese, but they were as wild as in an open shooting ground. It was impossible to get within a hundred yards of any of them, because if they see a person approaching or riding in a car, away they all go like bombers zooming into the air. Of course, there are certain places outside of this reservation where birds are shot, but no guns are ever allowed in here. It may take many years, however, for them to learn that this is a protected area. The ducks seem to understand more clearly that there is not as much danger in a city park where there are so many people, as in a reservation where few people are allowed.

Lake Merritt Park in the center of Oakland is a region where for many years the city has furnished food for the ducks, geese, and coots. Also many people come in and bring food, and the wild ducks become as tame as chickens on a farm. It may be that the helping hand that furnishes food to birds is the quickest way of gaining their confidence. When you hold wheat in your hand, many of the black coots, geese, and different kinds of wild ducks come right up to take it from your fingers. Outside of this Park, however, they would not let you get near them.

The coots or mud-hens are even less suspicious than the ducks. They ^{not} have never been shot ^{as much} and they seem to know that hunters prefer ducks, as many think coots are not good to eat. This bird is ^{easily} ~~readily~~ recognized because of the whitish bill and the black head that moves backward and forward as it swims along. When it takes wing, it patters its feet on the water for quite a distance like an airplane that rolls on its tires.