

Along The Trail

by

ken legg

A few years ago I was acquainted with a wealthy woman who lived on 17-Mile drive in Carmel. She was an Audubon society member and was much concerned over the welfare of all bird species except one. She heaped as much hatred on the English sparrow as she did love on all the other species and employed in her war against them numerous traps in which she caught and killed English sparrows. She was a bird lover, but she didn't like English sparrows.

She then tried to encourage me to take part in her nefarious activities against the introduced "sparrow," asking me to take the traps and set them about the countryside, then executing those sparrows which I caught. I explained to her that to me a bird was a bird, and I was just as interested in one as in another. Some may be "prettier" or sing sweeter, but as far as their natural histories were concerned I could get just as excited over an English Sparrow as I could over a warbler or a bunting. We finally parted company over this point!

Then, not long ago one of the more widely circulated natural history magazines published a photograph of a male English sparrow. The editors said they knew that readers may wonder why — but in their more than 50 years of publication they had never received, in the thousands of bird pictures submitted, one of an English sparrow and they felt that it was somewhat of an honor to publish this "rare" photo.

If the present decline continues, the English sparrow may someday command a place of importance in the bird watchers program. I have at my feeder 30 juncos, but only one pair of English sparrows. At the office I have banded hundreds of golden-crowned sparrows, white crowned sparrows, song sparrows and juncos, but only one English sparrow.

The bird we know commonly as the English sparrow is not in reality a sparrow. It is more correctly referred to as a Weaver finch. However, the sparrow name was applied more than 100 years ago, has persisted, and will continue as the handle for this introduced species.

Eight pairs were introduced in the east in 1850. At first the birds were zealously guarded. Wealthy people prepared all sorts of expensive and intricate devices for the birds' comfort. In spite of all the care and attention lavished upon them, the first introductions of English sparrows were not successful and numerous other introductions were made.

By the '70s and '80s, they had become so numerous and were so scorned by their human hosts that mass slaughter was being used in attempting to exterminate them. The novelty of English sparrows nesting on estates had turned into a nightmare for bird lovers as they saw the young and eggs of bluebirds, swallows and wrens being thrown out of the nesting boxes by the "sparrows" and all attempts to bring back the now more desirable species met only with despair.

The plucky swallows and wrens fought and were a match for a pair of English sparrows, but when the sparrows marshalled their forces and ganged up on the native species they were forced to move on to other places and leave the nesting boxes to the gangsters of the bird world.

Man, now realizing his error in having introduced this foreign species, began to take a hand in the matter and those people who a few years before were having their servants coddling the sparrows were now instructing them to dig long trenches which were filled with grain. After weeks of feeding and when several thousand English sparrows had accumulated, the ditch was raked with shotgun fire and hundreds of birds were killed.

In spite of shooting, poisoning and destruction of their roosting and nesting places, the English sparrow population overran the country and became a major nuisance in cities and towns and farmyards. Their nests were built in vines, palms and buildings. Their prolific offspring made dirty messes of streets and buildings,

and even worse, they preempted the "nice" birds.

Man, with all his ingenious methods could not stop them. But unintentionally he is now bringing about their decline.

In Denver, once a center of the sparrow population, their numbers declined 33 per cent between 1907 and 1917. The rather startling decrease of the English sparrow population closely coincides with the increased use of motor vehicles and the vanishing of the horse.

Again, in Colorado, it was shown that enough tractors were in use to replace 16,000 horses. The motor driven vehicle has taken away one of the major food sources of the English sparrow many of which dined almost exclusively on the partially digested grain found in the droppings of the horse.

Perhaps there are still large concentrations of English sparrows in the country, but they are not where I have been the last few years. A small flock (15 or 20 birds) is kept alive by the grocer and the hardware dealer in Orick who feed them bread and grain. I see a few now and then in Eureka, but all the vehicles I see burn either diesel or gasoline, too, and the only residue of these "animals" will give the English sparrow a headache.

Do we have a vanishing race in the English sparrow in America? We do have a vanishing era, and as always it is interesting to look at the inter-relationships between the major issues and those smaller ones which are often obscured by the more obvious ones.

We may never know what all the effects of a changing civilization might be, either because we may not be around to see them, or because new changes will command our attention. If the English sparrow should become extinct in America it is apparent that it will be the result of changing environment, and not his inability to cope with natural causes.

SHOP IN THE GREATER SANTA CRUZ TRADING AREA

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE TO CREDITORS No. 15674

In the Superior Court of the State of California, in and for the County of Santa Cruz.

In the Matter of the Estate of JOSEPHINE M. OSMAN, also known as JOSEPHINE M. VANDIVER, Deceased.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN by the Undersigned, EDWIN VANDIVER, Executor of the Last Will and Testament and of the estate of Josephine M. Osman, also known as Josephine M. Vandiver, deceased, to the creditors of, and all persons having claims against the said deceased, or said estate, to file them, with the necessary vouchers, in the office of the Clerk of the above named Court (which said office is situate in the Court House in the City of Santa Cruz in said County and State), within six months after the first publication of this notice made on the 1st day of June, 1958, or present and exhibit them, with the necessary vouchers, within said period, to said Executor at the office of RAYMOND H. GOODRICH and JOSEPH C. DAVIS, Attorneys at Law, Farmers & Merchants National Bank Building, in the City of Santa Cruz, County of Santa Cruz, State of California, which said last named office, the undersigned selects as the place of business in all matters connected with said estate.

EDWIN VANDIVER,

Executor of the Last Will and Testament and of the Estate of said deceased.

DATED: May 29, 1958.

RAYMOND H. GOODRICH and

JOSEPH C. DAVIS,

Attorneys for said Executor
Farmers & Merchants National
Bank Bldg. Santa Cruz, California.
June 1, 8, 15, 22

NOTICE OF DISSOLUTION OF PARTNERSHIP

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the co-partnership heretofore existing between MARGARET L. RIORDAN and EDWIN WILLIAM WINNETT under the fictitious name and style of RIORDAN-WINNETT, 1376 Pacific Avenue, Santa Cruz, California, is now dissolved by mutual consent.

Edwin William Winnett of the City of Santa Cruz, County of Santa Cruz, State of California, has withdrawn from, and has ceased to be associated in the carrying on of said business, and Margaret Riordan of the City of Santa Cruz, County of Santa Cruz, State of California, will hereafter carry on said business, and is entitled to all of the assets of said business, and has assumed, and will pay all outstanding business obligations of Riordan-Winnett heretofore and hereafter incurred. Said co-partnership is dissolved as of June 4, 1958.

B. B. Snyder, Jr.
Attorney for Co-Partners
Santa Cruz, California.
June 8

FREE TO THE DEAF