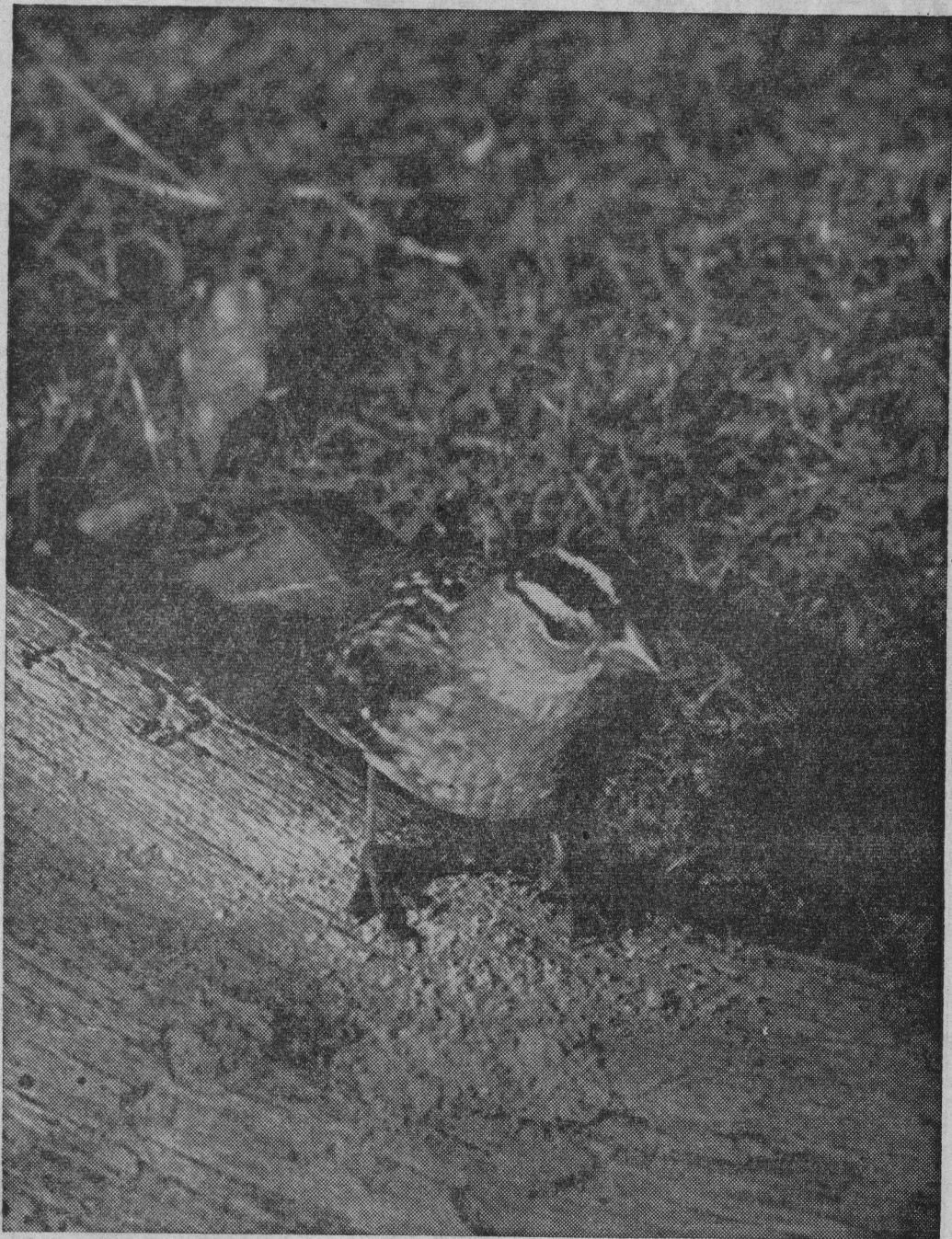


12-30-56

White-Crowned Sparrow Is Pleasant



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little feathered creature its usual beneficial visits to homeowners. It eats insects and garden pests mainly.

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Along The Trail

by

ken legg

No need to tell some of you what our subject is, since many people know the white-crowned sparrow as well as they know their own backyard. But, those serious students of birds may want to know that there are four different kinds of white-crowns.

I have known for some time that some of our white-crowns are migratory, while others are not. But I've never taken the time to make a special study of it.

They nested at Point Lobos when I was there, hopped around the approaching automobiles in the parking lots looking for a handout, and perched in the tops of short bushes and sang. The visitors fed them, both at the car and on the picnic tables and were paid in clear, ringing, whistled songs which often went into the night. In other words, white-crowns were permanent residents.

I came to Santa Cruz, and at the north end of West Cliff drive where the lupines were thickest I found white-crowns vying with song sparrows for that part of the ocean side with its canopy of dense plants and abundant supply of insects. In this place they were also permanent residents.

But with the coming of fall, down from the north, came other white-crowns, birds that were not seen in central California in summer, and which had nested as far north as Canada. Some of these newcomers had yellow (or partly yellow) bills like the summering ones, while others had pink or flesh colored bills.

Two migratory races were represented, the Puget Sound sparrow with the yellowish bill, and the Gambel's sparrow with the pinkish. The one which had lived

in central California continuously was the Nuttall's sparrow. As if this were not enough to thoroughly confuse the issue, we were told that the white-crown which breeds in the high mountains may be seen in central California in winter. This one differs from the other races in having the white eye-stripe start from the eye instead of from the bill. Experts, who know their songs well, are fortunate for they can identify the races by their notes.

Many of you will notice that these crowned sparrows appear in your yards sometimes in October. They will stay around all winter, gradually disappearing in March. While they are present, they will be seen hopping about on lawns; often in the rain, and picking at the grass for food. With them may be their companions from a little farther north, the golden-crowned sparrow.

The two "crowned" sparrows offer the best subject for bird banders as most are migratory. They come south in fall and go north in spring. From one end of the state to the other they are welcomed with feeding trays filled with good things to eat.

Every year thousands of these birds are trapped and banded by ornithologists trying to learn more about their habits. They are banded in Humboldt county, Benecia, Berkeley, Los Gatos, Santa Cruz, Monterey, Pasadena and dozens of places in between.

Records of the time and place of banding are kept on file in the government research refuge near Washington, D.C. All returns from year to year must be recorded by the bander and in this way we often learn the longevity of certain individuals.

I have found nests of the resident race in many situations. The lupine is favored where it is found because of its dense foliage that screens the nest from the eyes of predators, and its low crotches which seem to be made for white-crown nests.

At Point Lobos I found them in pines and in wild lilac. All of those found at Santa Cruz were near the end of West Cliff drive and were in lupines. Here in Humboldt county two nests in a thicket of mint were practically upon the ground, while all the others had been elevated.

White-crowns feed upon both insects and plants. In early spring the flowers and green parts of tender plants are taken; during nesting time and in the early fall,

their food consists mainly of insects.

Over an entire season their habits may place them in the beneficial class. In spring they ate my radishes, just coming through the ground. They were flocking then and many were concentrated in my garden. I gave them the radishes, knowing that they would soon disperse and begin to collect insects from my garden to feed their nestlings.

When August came I saw them catching grasshoppers among the beans and thought "they are paying me for my radishes". Now, in December, I see no white-crowns. Maybe they have gone to Santa Cruz to spend the winter.

'Happy Birthday' Feature Marks Twentieth Year

Laura Rawson

January, 1957, marks the 20th birthday of the Sentinel's daily feature, "Happy Birthday", which the writer started the first day of January, 1937, when on the staff of the Sentinel, at the suggestion of Fred McPherson Jr. It began as an experiment, since publisher McPherson said, "It may not last more than a week, for readers may not care for it."

No one knew, least of all the editor of the feature, how it would turn out, for I knew no one who was born on the first day of January. But to my surprise my next door neighbor was born in Italy on the first day of the year, and he had an interesting little story.

The first month 331 names were entered on the birthday list and within the year 1937, a total of 1307 names had been added.

Every state in the union, the Hawaiian Islands and nearly every country in the world is represented. Ages have ranged from one month to 100 years and more. Christmas day has the record of having more babies distributed by Father Stork, with the Fourth of July a close second.

I retired from the Sentinel employment in June, 1949, and my successors at the society desk have kindly contributed the birthday greetings. During the last year more than 6000 names were used.

No special effort is made by the Sentinel to obtain names, but they have been mailed in or telephoned to add to the birthday list.

The birthday book is kept at the society desk, and the attendants would appreciate it if and when you read a name which should not be on the list you would tell them. Death has taken a heavy toll as the years pass.

More birthday cakes have been baked and more greeting cards sent because of the friendly greeting. Many happy reunions have followed and courtesies been extended because readers have seen names of friends whose natal days had slipped their memory. But best of all, it is much more satisfactory to write little human interest stories about people while they are living, and can read them, than in writing the most flowery obituaries.

In the early years of the birthday list I called upon several celebrating their 100th birthday, and obtained interesting little stories. A number born in the old country could not find their birthplaces now, due to this war-torn world.

May I wish all a Happy New Year, just as I did in my first "Happy Birthday" to you list January, 1937.

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