

April 20, 1958

# Along The Trail

by

ken legg

It will be ten years in spring since I arrived at Big Sur. Nothing was known of the plants and birds, and the creature which prompted my interest in birds wasn't the black-headed grosbeak.

But before I begin on the bird let me tell you about the place. When April comes to the small valley of the park and all the deciduous trees are beginning to put on new leaves, the river is flowing clear and full over the rocks, and up on the sage-covered slopes the Anna hummingbirds are buzzing and diving above the blossoms of black sage, there comes a noisy, quite conspicuous individual who will perch in the top of the tallest sycamore and sing all day long.

My first spring at Big Sur he nearly drove me frantic, for I would see him and hear him every day but didn't know who he was. Numerous inquiries got me nothing. I recall the faith with which I approached the local postmistress. She was a professional botanist who had lived in the country all her life and knew every plant found there. In desperation I sought her out and described my unknown singer. She knew nothing, absolutely nothing, about birds — I don't think she even knew the right name of the jay that hopped about her office door every day.

I had no glasses with which to bring him closer and he always picked the highest perch in the tallest sycamore from which to deliver his messages. The breakdown finally came after I had

watched him fly for about the thousandth time. My identification came without assistance, but when it had finally been decided that a black-headed grosbeak was responsible for the songs, he never gave me trouble again.

They have visited me at other parks and the minute they opened their mouths and began to sing I knew grosbeaks had come. My most recent, full scale experience (other than an occasional sighting), with grosbeaks happened along Soquel Creek where in spring many of these birds sing and build nests. Dense nettle patches, vine-hung shrubbery and plant tangles make up the understory beneath tall alders and cottonwoods. In such a place we found a nest only six feet up in a vine covered sapling. The nest held four pale blue eggs spotted with brown, and an incubating female.

The black-headed grosbeak is common throughout California in deciduous growth, chiefly along streams. I seem to envision him in two types of places — the stream-side places like Soquel Creek and the Big Sur river, and the deciduous oak country. But then again, I suppose a stream is probably nearby in all cases.

Grosbeaks are large chunky finches with heavy bills. The males of our most common species have black heads, chestnut colored napes, sides and rumps, black and white stripes and spots best seen when the bird is flying, and under parts of rich orange-brown.

But, for all its traits he is best known as an indefatigable singer. No writer has failed to make especial mention of his singing ability. One says "then from high in an oak — he will whistle a rhapsody, so tender, so pure, so full of joy that it seems a floodtide of love let loose in music". Another sums his vocal prowess up this way "the return in April of the black-headed grosbeak at once fills great spaces that have been silent with sweet and penetrating melody."

As I again remember him in the black oaks and beside the streams near Chew's Ridge I am inclined to say he tosses his songs out across the valley with uninhibited abandon; he seems to be so care-free and gay, given only to singing and food searching. Indeed it is known that he commonly breaks into song in the middle of a worm meal which he is taking from some leaf.

I also knew a nest in a live oak where the reckless male sat on the nest and sang to his heart's content and to his undoing, in the end, for a stellar jay came down and ate up his eggs.

Black-headed grosbeaks will pass through and near Santa Cruz by the hundreds in April, and, with western tanagers, will be seen all along the road from Santa Cruz to Big Basin.

In the American-financed oil fields in Sumatra, workers have to use snow tires and chains to get their trucks over the muddy roads.

## PUBLIC NOTICE

### NOTICE OF SALE OF REAL PROPERTY No. 15, 058

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

In the Matter of the Estate of COSETTE E. SPENCER, also known as E. C. SPENCER, also known as COSETTA SPENCER, also known as COSETTE SPENCER, also known as E. COSETTE SPENCER, Deceased.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT CHARLES H. JOHNSON, Administrator of the Estate of Cosette E. Spencer, also known as E. C. Spencer, also known as Cosetta Spencer, also known as Cosette Spencer, deceased, will sell at private sale to the highest bidder for cash, and subject to confirmation by said Superior Court, on or after the hour of 10:00 o'clock A.M. on the 22nd day of April, 1958, at the law offices of J. FRANK MURPHY and EUGENE J. ADAMS, at 1522 Pacific Avenue, in the City of Santa Cruz, State of California, all the right, title, interest and estate of the said decedent at the time of her death, and all the right, title and interest that said estate has, by operation of law or otherwise acquired other than or in addition to that of the said decedent at the time of her death, in and to that certain real property particularly described as follows:

SITUATE in the City of Santa Cruz, County of Santa Cruz, State of California, and described as follows:

BEING LOT 11, as the same is shown and designated on that certain map entitled "REYNOLD'S ADDITION TO SANTA CRUZ", filed for record on April 29, 1891 in Volume 7 of Maps at Page 12, Santa Cruz County Records.

Bids or offers are invited for said property and must be in writing and will be received at the law offices of J. FRANK MURPHY and EUGENE J. ADAMS, 1522 Pacific Avenue, Santa Cruz, California, attorneys for said Administrator, or may be filed

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