

1-5-58

Along The Trail

by

ken legg

My experiences with shrikes are rather limited, but I remember that one used to be seen out near the end of West Cliff drive. This is not surprising, for we find here a situation which the wintering shrike would require. In the same respect, we find that these requirements are similar to those of the sparrow hawk which is also found in the same place.

The shrike which spent the winter near Natural Bridges found a large expanse of open country traversed aerially by power lines. The ground, with its low vegetative cover of grass, and islands of lupine, produced his food and made it available from his perch upon the wires.

Shrikes are usually considered to be evil predatory things and they have not received the protection given to other small birds. This is due to two factors. First, it occasionally catches and kills a small songbird, and, secondly, it has a habit of hanging its prey upon a sharp object like a butcher hangs his meat. Because of this habit the shrike is commonly known as "Butcher bird."

I think the name, which suggests a cruel practice, is derived from pictures and tales found in books, for it is doubtful if the average citizen has ever actually witnessed this performance. As a matter of fact, it is doubtful if most observers would be able to identify the bird, for it has often been referred to as a mocking bird because of similar coloration.

A few years ago I found fledgling shrikes out of the nest, near Ano Nuevo island, and I assume they were raised there. The coun-

tryside around, was open fields where many swallows fed, and in a small willow tree beside a pond was a bulky nest of coarse material which I took to be the recently-departed home.

The brush-covered sand dunes of Sunset beach near Watsonville appear to be favorable shrike territory and it was there one day that I made an interesting find. Barbs of wire and thorn-bearing plants were lacking but the dead tips of some of the shrubs were wind-eroded and sharp. One of these wood tips bore the skeleton of a large Jerusalem cricket which had been neatly skewered.

Shrikes were in the vicinity. Because these large insects are a part of their food, and because it is unlikely this impalement resulted by accident, I assumed it to be the work of a shrike.

Many of the bird books, showing a victim stuck upon a thorn, fail to mention why this practice is common to shrikes. Close observation will reveal that like hawks and other birds of prey the bill is powerful, curved and adapted to killing. However, unlike hawks, which have powerful talons as well, the feet of shrikes are small and weak, and adaptable only to perching. Therefore, in order to hold, or pin down its meal while tearing it apart, it finds the thorn, barbed wire, or other sharp object to be useful as a fork.

Some naturalists also believe that this practice is indulged in for food storage. There may be some validity to this in the case of northern shrikes which may face food shortages in cold weather, but in coastal California where insects and small animals are available throughout the year, there seems to be little value to this act from the standpoint of storage.

Before we leave, a summary of our shrike friend near West Cliff drive may be of interest. Although he may on occasion capture and kill a small bird he subsists mainly upon mice, grasshoppers and crickets. He may have the general coloration of a mocking bird, but certainly doesn't act like the gifted singer. The shrike has a black mask across his face. The bill is hawklike. In flight he has a rapid almost-fluttering wing beat. He swoops upward to a perch, and in leaving drops rapidly downward instead of taking off in level flight.

His method of feeding is to stand immovable upon an elevated perch. Once his prey is spotted upon the ground he goes unerringly to that spot and usually captures what prompted him to leave his perch. In taking up winter residence overlooking the fields near Natural Bridges the shrike is competing with the resident sparrow hawks. It would appear, however, that there are sufficient mice for all.

**MINISTERIAL BREAKFAST
IS SET FOR TUESDAY**

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE OF SALE OF REAL AND PERSONAL PROPERTY AS A UNIT AT PRIVATE SALE No. 13,244

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

In the Matter of the Estate of ROSANA BOLES, Deceased.

Notice is hereby given that CORA O'DONALD, as Executrix of the Estate of Rosana Boles, Deceased, will sell at private sale, to the highest and best bidder, upon the terms and conditions hereafter mentioned, and subject to confirmation by the Superior Court, on the 16th day of January, 1958, at the hour of 10 o'clock A. M., or thereafter, within the time allowed by law, at the office of JAMES S. BOONE, Attorney, at 204 Church Street, Santa Cruz, California, all the right, title, interest and estate of said Rosana Boles, Deceased, at the time of her death, and all right, title and interest that said estate has acquired by operation of law, or otherwise, other than or in addition to, that of said Rosana Boles, Deceased, at the time of her death, in and to the real and personal property situate in the City of Santa Cruz, County of Santa Cruz, State of California, described as follows:

BEING Lots Numbered Three Hundred and Fifty-Two (352), Three Hundred and Fifty-Three (353) and Three Hundred and Fifty-Four (354) as the same are numbered and designated on the Map entitled "Garfield Park No. 1" filed in the office of the County Recorder of the County of Santa Cruz, State of California, June 7th, 1890.