

A Few Recollections of the Beginning of the Colorado Bird Club

By Margaret E. Pritchett

(Probably written in 1960)

The Colorado Bird Club was started January 27th, 1935, when some students in Mr. Robert J. Niedrach's Denver University Extension Class in Ornithology wished to continue their interest in bird study in a group or club where the necessary preliminaries were accomplished to form an incorporated organization here in Denver in this State of Colorado.

Mr. Niedrach oversaw our beginning and continued to be our guide and counsellor for several years after which we gradually learned to function more by ourselves.

Mrs. Helena K. Wosnuk, one of the class, was also taking a college course in administrative work and welcomed actual experience in a project for her class, so she agreed to initiate whatever was necessary to get a club started and I helped as her secretary to call a meeting at this museum for the purpose of organizing the club.

Every person there helped to decide on its aims and activities till we were a full-fledged group for the study of birds sponsoring their protection. We named ourselves the Colorado Bird Club and were duly incorporated in this state.

It was hard for people to remember her name, Wosnuk, so in due time Mrs. Helena K. Wosnuk and her husband had their name changed to "Huron."

Another member of the group changed her name from Mary Kirsher to Mrs. Crow when she married Mr. Arthur H. Crow about this time.

In the early life of the Colorado Bird Club some outstanding events were numbers of field trips led by Mr. Niedrach, such as:

The one on the plains northeast of Parker when Mr. Robert Rockwell and Mr. Niedrach were looking for the young of the Long-billed Curlew, which our Mrs. Crow was the one to first find. The photo in their book: *Birds of Denver and Mountain Parks* on p. 74, which shows 2 baby curlew, we think are being held in Robina Storrie and Ruth Wheeler's hands. The picture was taken on this trip. Mrs. Crow and Mr. Rockwell were attending to their cars and were delayed in starting with the rest of the party to look for these curlew. When they were trying to catch up, Mrs. Crow said: "I am going over to the left to be in a different territory." So you can imagine how excited she was when she spotted one baby curlew and called to Mr. Rockwell. He came back overjoyed by her find because he had been looking for the young of the Long-billed Curlew in Colorado for forty years, he said, and this was the first one he had seen. Another baby curlew was located and caught and two were photographed by both Mr. Rockwell and Mr. Niedrach.

Another outstanding trip was to the Elk Creek Ranch when so many cars of people went. This was then the home of Catherine Hurlbutt and her parents. Numbers of field trips to the Castlewood Dam area and Daniels Park region were particularly enjoyed by us as was our visit to Mrs. Ortman's country home, which was almost a bird sanctuary. The group went to the "Ten Sleep Ranch" for Annual Picnics several seasons. Then there was a trip to the Colorado University Campus at Boulder to see the nest of the Redstart, a new discovery in the state at that time by Mr. Niedrach.

On that trip to Boulder the club wished to surprise Mr. Niedrach with the gift of a round ashtray made of bronze, with its center handle the figure of an eagle with outstretched wings. Given with it were these sentiments expressed, sentiments which his former students have continued to feel, I am sure, down the years to this day.

"We want to thank you Mr. Niedrach, for leading our trip today. We always feel grateful to you for what you have done to make the out-of-doors more meaningful and more wonderful to many of us.

"We are glad you have had the patience to teach us many interesting things about Nature and especially about birds and their habitat.

"By the inspiration of your enthusiasm, great interest, and keen observation of everything in life you have instilled in all your students a love for the wonders and beauties of the far-reaching open spaces, which no amount of book study alone could do, and so we thank you most sincerely."

Mr. Horace Gardener Smith, affectionately called "Dad Smith" by some of his friends, is an Ornithologist of many years in the Denver area. He used to go with us frequently on various field trips where he never failed to be interested in the observation and study of birds. He is still living and was 94 last March.

During these 25 years the Colorado Bird Club has appreciated the use of this Bird Room at the Colorado Museum of Natural History for its meeting place. It is also grateful for the use of a projector here in showing pictures on the screen.

It was indeed a kind gesture when Dr. Bailey had made for the club the portable book case which wheels in and out of the left closet and holds the club's Loan Library of a few books and magazines and the three framed documents which have to do with the club's incorporation, the certificate from the state of Colorado in 1935; as well as the Charter list of members. This last is ornamented at the top with a circular watercolor painting of the Colorado State Bird, the Lark Bunting, flying above a yucca plant on the prairie. This Colorado Bird Club insignia, which is not copied in black and white on letterheads and membership cards was made by a young artist who made the painted background for the Duck-billed Dinosaur display in the Museum. ¹

Mrs. Lillian Hunt gave the club its first book for the Loan Library. It is "Hawks of North America" by May.

Think it was in 1937 when the club purchased a "Flexograph" for the corresponding secretary's use at that time to mimeograph notices.

¹ The artist's name was Charles Tribble.

A memorable evening for the Colorado Bird Club members during its early life was the time Mr. Edward Hellstern, an ardent bird lover and benefactor of birds residing in Fort Morgan, brought Howard Rollin from Weldona, Colorado to speak before the group and show some of his bird paintings.

The bird club has been much enriched for that contact with this fine artist by his cordiality for bird students who visit his dry-land ranch ever since; and his contribution of bird notes from that area to the monthly bulletin now issued by Don Thatcher; and the very much appreciated and enjoyed paintings in watercolor sent to the Colorado Bird Club as Christmas cards each year.

When Mrs. Barbara Corning was here in Colorado for a short time from her home in Maine, she saw some of Mr. Rollin's paintings sent to the club, so she asked him to make several postage-size watercolor views of special Colorado Birds which could be used by teachers to interest grade school children in the protection of birds. These posters were to be in the care of the Colorado Bird Club. She said her chief interest in life was in bird protection.

Later I received communication from her which said: "I have been an admirer of the postcards sent out by you for the bird club and I wonder if you will consider making me a booklet using the club's Flexograph Duplication Machine, illustrating it, and making me 100 copies. I am president of the Federation of Garden Clubs in the State of Maine and wish to stress bird protection in it. So, I agreed to try to do it. This was a pleasant experience for me and a lot of work!

During the war years we kept in touch with some of the young men who were called to the Army Training Camps after being associated with the bird club.

Catherine Hurlbutt has been wonderful to express the club's views on conservation of bird life through much correspondence nationally and state-wide whenever occasion offered. I wish to thank her especially for her outstanding work.

Those of us who have been members of the club longest hope that the people who attend the meetings now and who go on field trips will continue to derive the same inspiration and keen pleasure which the first members always enjoyed through their earnest observation and faithful pursuit of Nature's wonders in the out-of-doors, particularly in the study of birds.

We all hope, I am sure, that the next span in the history of the Colorado Bird Club will bring on-going interest to produce further observations for scientific data in the records of Colorado Ornithology.

Margaret Pritchett,
first recording secretary for the Colorado Bird Club,
January 27, 1935