

## SPARROWS JOIN EXODUS FROM CITY LIFE

By AUSTIN L. RAND  
CURATOR OF BIRDS

THE FLIGHT of city dwellers to the suburbs has been going on long enough for sociologists to write accounts of its influence on the social structure of the nation, for builders to devise a prefabricated house that takes little more time to put up than to have a well-built martin house made and installed, and for economists to view with alarm the tax situation in the cities.

House sparrows have changed, too. They used to be concentrated in the cities. This was so noticeable that old ecology textbooks used the sparrow as an example of an animal whose population density correlated directly with the density of human population. But it's no longer true.

For the last few years I've been noting the situation in Chicago. On Michigan Avenue, on the edge of Grant Park, and on the South Side where the buildings are spaced out a little there are sparrows. But they've gone from the heart of Chicago. I've seen none in the Loop. There are pigeons, yes. On Van Buren Street and about the La Salle Street Station there are scores of them. Sometimes the flocks number a hundred or more. Sometimes I see them looking for scraps in the alleys, sometimes they're getting a good feed of grain that some kind-hearted birdlover has poured out for them (I've wondered what influence the proximity of the Grain Exchange of the Board of Trade may have on this), and sometimes they're cadging peanuts from the passengers at the elevated stations. There's evidently food in plenty for pigeons, but it doesn't suit the sparrows.

### THE AUTO DID IT

The motor car has made suburban living possible. It has made feasible supermarkets, drive-in theatres, and homes remote from public transportation. I know people who work in the city who drive 10 or 15 miles to get to their morning train that takes them cityward.

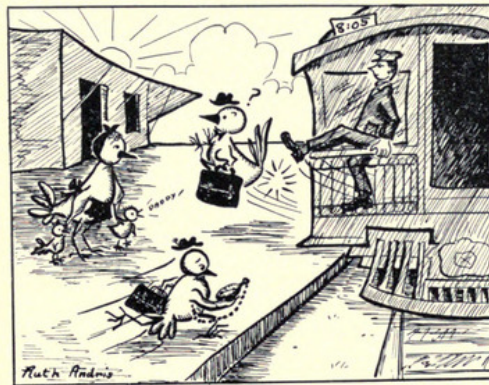
It was likewise the motor vehicle that caused the shift in the sparrow population out of the city. But the factors at work reflect a different aspect of the change. Before motor transport, horse-drawn vehicles were the standard transportation in the city. Where there were horses there was waste grain in abundance, and it supported a dense sparrow population in the centers of cities. With the replacement of horses by motors, the sparrows' food supply disappeared, and the sparrows disappeared or became scarce in the cities.

There are lots of sparrows in the suburbs, visiting bird feeding-stations and picking up scraps, but for real sparrow concentration one must go a little farther out where people are raising pigs and feeding them well on a

special ground-grain diet. About such feed lots I've seen hundreds of sparrows in a winter afternoon. The wheat fields in late summer are rich feeding grounds, too, and also we find sparrows spreading out during the summer even to the picnic grounds on the Lake Michigan beaches. But with winter they must withdraw to the feed lots in order to survive.

### CORRELATE WITH HOGS

The ecology textbooks will have to revise their correlations about house sparrows. They will have to write that after the introduction of the house sparrow into North



America and before the widespread introduction of the automobile into our culture, the sparrows' population density varied directly with the density of one kind of domestic animal, the horse. With the wide use of motor cars, the sparrows' population density suffered a shift, and now it correlates with the density of another domestic animal, the hog.

In reading over the above I realize that I may have given the impression that the suburban sparrow commutes, catching the 8:05 each morning for the city and returning, weary, on the 6:10. This is not so. There may be slight seasonal shifts and a greater concentration of sparrows about food lots and villages in the winter, but the suburban sparrows are suburban twenty-four hours a day.

### STAFF NOTES

**John R. Millar**, Deputy Director, will be a speaker on "Careers in Museum Work" on a program to be given Saturday, May 14, at 3 P.M. over WBBM-TV . . . **Dr. Theodore Just**, Chief Curator of Botany, recently conducted a seminar for the department of botany at the University of Illinois in Urbana . . . **Dr. B. E. Dahlgren**, Curator Emeritus of Botany, has returned from Cuba where he has been continuing the collecting and study of palms . . . **Loren P. Woods**, Curator of Fishes, recently lectured on cave fishes at the annual convention of the National Speleological Society held at Natural Bridge, Virginia.

## EL SALVADOR BIRD BOOK BY MUSEUM WRITERS

El Salvador has just attained the distinction of being the only Central American country with a guidebook to its bird life. The generally increasing interest in science found expression in El Salvador in 1950 with the establishment of a research station, Instituto Tropical de Investigaciones Cientificas de la Universidad de El Salvador. In support of this new research project, Chicago Natural History Museum sent several members of its scientific staff to carry on investigations there. They were Dr. Sharat K. Roy, Chief Curator of Geology, who is now in El Salvador again investigating volcanoes; the late Dr. Norman C. Fasset, of the University of Wisconsin, who was sponsored by the Museum in a study of aquatic plants; and Dr. Austin L. Rand, Curator of Birds, accompanied by Stanley Rand, who studied birds.

One of the early fruits of the co-operation is the bird guide, in Spanish, entitled *Manual de las Aves de El Salvador*, by Curator Rand and Melvin A. Traylor, Research Associate in Birds, which was published recently by Universidad de El Salvador. The basic research in El Salvador had, of course, already been done by A. J. van Rossem and was published in 1938 by the Museum in a volume for the specialist. This new *Manual*, which carries the work one stage further, was prepared for the general reading-public of El Salvador.

The *Manual*, arranged in systematic order, provides keys for the identification of members of each bird family. Under each form is a description, a paragraph about the young, and notes on identification and range—all of this the work of Traylor. A summary of each bird's life-history and finally a word-sketch of the bird in its habitat based on van Rossem, other literature, and first-hand experience in the field are by Curator Rand. The manuscript was translated from English into Spanish in San Salvador. The illustrations, by Douglas E. Tibbitts, Museum Staff Illustrator, are reproduced from Associate Curator Emmet R. Blake's *Birds of Mexico*. The book, which was printed by offset lithography, is bound in paper (308 pages, 7½ by 9¾ inches).

### "Highlights Tours" Offered Daily

Free guide-lecture tours are offered daily except Sundays under the title "Highlights of the Exhibits." These tours are designed to give a general idea of the entire Museum and its scope of activities. They begin at 2 P.M. on Monday through Friday and at 2:30 P.M. on Saturday.

Special tours on subjects within the range of the Museum exhibits are available Mondays through Fridays by advance request.





Rand, Austin Loomer. 1955. "Sparrows Join Exodus From City Life." *Bulletin* 26(5), 5-5.

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