

BIRDS HIS HOBBY

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NOTED FINANCIER HAS RARE SPECIMENS

By Louise Funston Shields

WHEN the distinguished financier, Frank A. Vanderbilt, bought the great Palos Verdes ranch some years ago, he had in the back of his mind the idea of becoming a Californian. Business interests kept him elsewhere most of the time, but he found, or took, time to pay many a visit to his vast sea-girl holding, thoroughly enjoying every moment spent in a rambling bungalow built for just such vacations. In the meantime the hill and mesa and coast acres of the ranch were being converted into a splendid community of homes, stretching from the heights above San Pedro almost to Redondo Beach. Now the famous New Yorker is about to realize a dream of years and settle down as neighbor to the folk who have built so many beautiful homes on the one-time ranch domain. For years landscapers have been engaged in preparing the site for the wonderful home in which he expects to spend the rest of his life, and construction of which will ere many months have been completed.

That Mr. Vanderbilt is now dyed-in-the-wool Californian is amply attested by the fact that he, like other adopted sons of the Golden West who have means and leisure, has taken unto himself a hobby. They all do it. With one, it may be subtropical fruits; with another, rare flowers; the breeding of fine stock may be still another's absorbing activity. Mr. Vanderbilt's is wild birds, and he has been so interested in these that he has gone ahead with his avian plans without waiting to get really "located."

To add rare imported species to the wild bird life of his adopted State—that is the former banking wizard's main thought. As a first step in this plan, he has recently set at liberty scores of Chinese golden pheasants, European ring-neck pheasants, "white turkeys," shimmering quail and other varieties, the product of his aviary to date. It is just a "starter," he declares. He prohibits shooting anywhere on his Palos Verdes holdings and has called upon motorists and residents in the areas which the birds may visit to co-operate in this effort by making to add another and beautiful attraction to California. He counts upon help from Audubon societies and other organizations of bird lovers for the protection of wild species, both native and imported.

"Our pheasants and other powerful-winged birds had been living in cages," he told me, "but I could not bear to see them beating their wings against the wire. The emancipation proclamation followed. Some of the freed birds have chosen to remain near their birthplace and continue to come around for a hand-out. I have seen others many miles from Palos Verdes district. I hope their new neighbors will protect them."

He admits that his interest in birds does not go back very far. He has no story to tell about a boyhood passion for wild life. The vacations on his ranch, it seems, gave him time to acquire a greater love of nature. He thought it would be interesting to have birds about the place, and realized that in California's climate many kinds would flourish. Friends in other parts of

the world learned that he was collecting rare specimens and began sending him pairs. Then the hobby was born. Now he has a collector employed to obtain "natives" in other lands. The latter will soon be back at the ranch with some unusual ones from Australia.

"I expect to keep some of the birds in the aviary for their own protection," he said, "but those able to take care of themselves in this section I am setting free. I must trust to the appreciation of the public. I want particularly to emphasize that I am not engaged in stocking a game preserve for the sport of hunters. I want to have a place where song birds, insect destroyers and birds with bright plumage may nest and live in safety. We have already extended winter hospitality on our duck pond to wild waders and have fed wild quail through the cold months. Nothing would make us happier than to turn all of our 15,000 acres on the Palos Verdes into a great bird sanctuary."

Meets Young Scientists

Members of a school Audubon club in Los Angeles county, who are doing their best to protect the wild birds in their own vicinity, became acquainted with the birds of the aviary on Palos Verdes Ranch in a recent afternoon visit.

Mr. Vanderbilt had invited the young scientists and he escorted them personally through the corridors of the wire-netting bird-houses, explaining character traits which he studies daily.

"Our visitors showed the spirit of a seasoned ornithologist," said their host. "They imbued their roles and refrained from quick, jerky movements out of respect for the shyness of feathered creatures brought from remote brush, field and jungle."

The young bird-protectors, it seemed, exclaimed longest over a pair of crested blue pigeons and their 2-weeks-old fledgling. They liked parakeets, cockatoos, love-birds and macaws, all belonging to the parrot family. The graceful swans, the sweet-voiced balfal from India, the brilliant orange-headed whistlers, the melodious European robin, the mischievous Australian magpie, "Maggie," all came in for admiration. The adjutant stork from India with its prominent bill and sandy fringe of hair was promptly named "Uncle Bin." Amusement greeted the trumpeter bird when it threw back his head, gulped deeply and made a gurgling sound like the slow emptying of a bottle. The youngsters also saw a sight that scientists have gone to Africa in vain to see—the prouddings of an African crowned crane before his mate.

The day I visited the aviary Mr. Trumpeter was most sociable. He strutted along beside Mr. Vanderbilt with as much dignity as if he were a part of the Fifth Avenue Sunday morning church parade. He be-

Scores of pheasants born and bred in Mr. Vanderbilt's aviary have been released in regions where they will, for the former New Yorker believes that such birds added to the wild life of his adopted State will contribute greatly to California's attraction. The silver beauty pictured at the right hardly knew what to do when he suddenly found himself free. In the center is an adjutant stork from India, named, for reasons obvious, "Uncle Bin." At the left, Mr. Vanderbilt's youngest son, John, shows how easy it is to win the confidence of the wee songsters of the aviary.



Mr. and Mrs. Frank A. Vanderbilt on the edge of the pool they have provided for waterfowl on their Palos Verdes estate. They are counting over their domesticated mallards to see if any more wild strangers have come to live on the place, as several have in the past.

came jealous of attentions paid a young pheasant that joined the line of march and offered to fight him. Acting like a naughty child resisting discipline, he finally yielded to a gentle push from his master's walking stick and returned to his own compartment. Appearing to feel no disgrace in his banishment, he strolled along with us, although separated from us by the wire netting.

Needs Are Studied

Each bird in the aviary receives as careful consideration as do pupils in the most modern of schools. Tastes and preferences for food, tendencies to physical ailments and their correction; needs for exercise and bathing; incentives to song, play, and work in nest building and insect hunting are studied and recorded. The keeper of the aviary gives each new arrival the food recommended by the bird dealer; but upon any indication that the bird is not thriving, he varies the diet until he discovers the combination producing the best results.

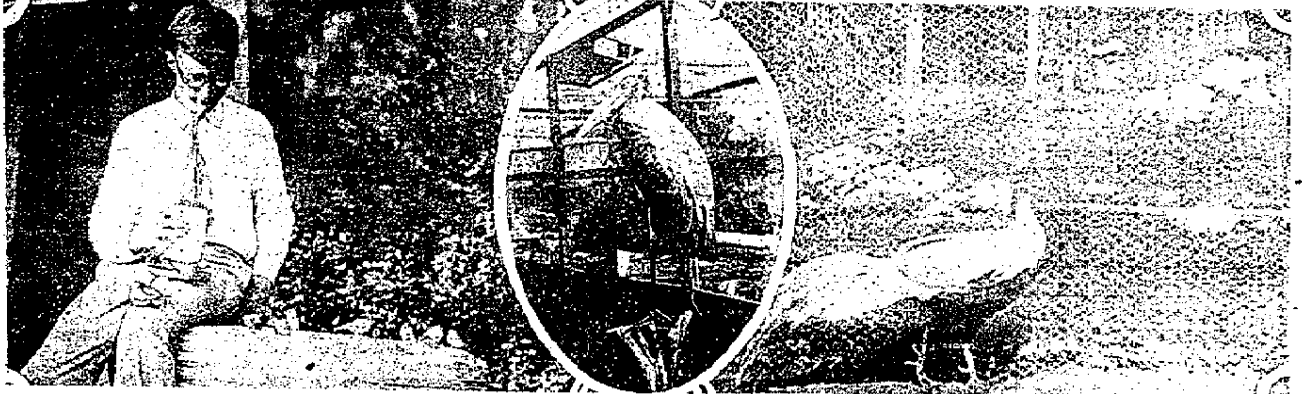
For instance, the dealer who sent the

Blue Mountain lories had for several months fed them an exclusive diet of seeds. He knew these lories were accustomed to feed upon the Eucalyptus blossoms pollen in their Australian home, but because of the difficulty of obtaining such blossoms, he had fed the seeds. The lories arrived at the Palos Verdes aviary, thin and weakened. Their feathers had lost their gloss. The keeper, knowing that the birds are difficult to rear in captivity, introduced fruit and toasted bread soaked with condensed milk or honey into their rations. Knowing the lories are a pest to grape growers in Australia, he gave them an abundance of grapes. They showed immediate improvement and their plumage now has a brilliant sheen.

The English nightingale, despite predictions that it could not live in the United States, is thriving in its orange-tree thicket removed from the path of most visitors, and it enjoys a carefully arranged diet of boiled eggs, spiders, woodlice, grubs, and two kinds of rations bought from a dealer—ant eggs and mocking bird food.

Each of the orange-headed starlings is privileged to eat two oranges a day, a banana, mackerel bird food, a bit of hamburger steak, brown bread, and all the insects he can find on the scrubbery of the compartment which he shares with other starlings and his weaver bird cousin. When offered raisin-nut bread, it

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discarded the nuts and fruit and ate only the bread.

Many of the smaller birds live on fruit exclusively. Among these are the turico and the bulbul. The canaries in their huge, shrub-grown house of wire netting receive fruit in addition to seeds from their glass-topped star feeder.

One would almost believe Mr. Vanderlip knows bird language the way the orange-crested cockatoo swelled its neck ruff, the love birds caressed each other, the paradise whydah sailed its streamer of feathers and other birds displayed their individual tricks and charms as he identified them by name for me.

"Birds so friendly as these," he said, "might trust a stranger who would take advantage of their confidence if they were at liberty. Until such a day as all of our Californians and tourists cultivate as great courtesy toward birds as do the members of the Audubon clubs, it will be safer to keep the defenseless species inside the aviary.

"To hasten the day of better understanding the club members and others are helping their acquaintances to understand that most birds, through destruction of insect pests, are of value to agriculture. Bird lovers are also awakening the public to the beauty in color and song which birds add to the countryside.

"In the meantime I expect to release birds of many species adapted to caring for themselves. I will hope to hear that they are bringing pleasure to others."