

# The Western Tanager

VOLUME 37 1970-71 NUMBER 4 DECEMBER

## Christmas Census Counts

By Sandy Wohlgemuth

**S**ometime this year between December 20 and January 2 some 15,000 people in the United States and Canada will pick one day in their locality and count all the birds they see. How come? Because in this era of vanishing countryside and disappearing habitat, it seems like a good idea to know how the birds are doing. This enormous, ambitious census is undertaken by National Audubon in collaboration with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It provides ornithologists with valuable data concerning fluctuation of populations, expansion or restriction of range, the status of endangered species—and much more. For example, it will be interesting to follow the progress of our House Finch, recently introduced into the northeast, as reflected in the Christmas Bird Count; or to trace the remarkable dispersion of the Cattle Egret from Africa to South America to Florida, and finally to California.

It all started in 1900 (a nice convenient date) when Frank Chapman suggested a census as a game or sport: counting birds rather than gunning them down. Since then every year through peace, war and depression the counts roll on with more birders participating each

year. A 15-mile diameter circle is selected as the site of a count and all available hands are poured into it in the most strategic areas to get the maximum number and variety of birds. The legitimate hours are dawn to dusk but eager-beavers take midnight to midnight to scoop up owls. No count may be less than eight hours except in arctic areas or on pelagic counts. Identification may be made by ear as well as eye; with owls, of course, the ear is the more potent weapon. The use of the same circle each year is demanded to allow for evaluation of changes. The Christmas Count reveals that some years are outstanding for Robins while in other years these birds are few and far between. In 1963 many of us experienced the explosive invasion of Red-breasted Nuthatches. One of the enduring charms of birding is expecting the unexpected. A not-unexpected sobering aspect of the Christmas Count in the future will be the contrasting curves of a-bundance of Starlings and Brown Pelicans.

There were 25 counts in the original census 70 years ago and the record was set in 1968 with 853. (Figures on last year's count are not available yet but the trend is ever onward and upward.) When you think of 853 circles with a 15-mile diameter scattered around North American and Hawaii—that's a lot of ground covered: about 150,000 square miles, give or take a few acres. The warmer states would be expected to bring out most of the birders, and Texas did have the largest number of counts in 1968 with 55. But the states where winter is really winter were hardly backward: New York was second in counts with 50 and Wisconsin and Ontario had a startling 35. (California which in fact is not a nature-loving state had only 46.)

California, Texas, and Florida are the places to be, of course, if you're looking for a wide variety of birds. In 1968 there were 22 counts that had 150 or more species. Of these, California had 10, Florida 7, and Texas 4. Cocoa, Florida, organized by Alan Cruikshank had the highest species counts most years until San Diego took such an enormous leap forward under the leadership of Alan Craig and Guy McCaskie. In 1967, San Diego broke the equivalent of the 4-minute mile with 209 species. A peculiar irony of that record tally is the fact that they were unable to come up with a single Common Crow! The following year they managed to find



3 Crows to boost their total to 217 and last year they reached the incredible number of 224 species. (No information available at this writing on the Crow population in 1969.)

The counts are usually organized by local Audubon societies and other bird and nature clubs. In many rural areas only two or three people will do a count. In 1967, in Peshtigo, Wisconsin, Harold Lindberg spent 10 hours alone covering 143 miles (one mile on foot) in -20 to 3 degree temperature, found 19 species, 412 individual birds. In that same year in Aklavik, Northwest Territories, two hardy souls spent 4-1/2 hours (1-1/2 on foot, 3-1/2 hours by motor toboggan) in blowing snow with all water frozen to get 3 Willow Ptarmigans and 32 Common Ravens and nothing else! In more populated areas, where a lot of people are available, it is best, of course, to have as many parties of observers as possible so that most of the habitats are explored. In a well-organized count the observers are encouraged to stake out their area in advance to take note of any unusual birds there so that on the Big Day, if Fortune smiles, they will not be missed. If Fortune frowns, however, there is still the consolation prize: that good bird may be included in a special section of the report as "Seen in area count period, not on count day." Unusual birds should be verified by at least two competent observers and a separate report submitted giving specific field points, power of binoculars or scope, distance from bird and length of time seen.

Intriguing as a rare bird may be, the real bread-and-butter of a Christmas Count is an accurate census of the common birds in the area. The goal is to demonstrate whether indigenous birds are increasing, decreasing or holding their own. So the observer counting in his back yard or the park around the corner is right up there with the lucky adventurer bagging a rare one.

All this raw information is funneled into Audubon Field Notes, a bimonthly published by National Audubon and "devoted to field investigations in ornithology." One 400-page issue a

year is devoted entirely to the Christmas Count. (A year's subscription is \$5; the Christmas Count issue alone is \$3.) Because printing costs are high each participant of a count is asked to contribute \$1.00. But counting is a lot of fun AND you get your name immortalized in Field Notes.

Browsing through Field Notes can be an esoteric entertainment. Where else could one learn that in 1968 2,700,000 Common Grackles and 12,300,000 Red-winged Blackbirds were seen in Little Rock, Arkansas? All in a little circle 15 miles in diameter! How did they manage to see the other 72 species with all those icterids? In the same year 89 Barn Owls were seen in Sacramento, 8225 Avocets at the Salton Sea, 14,000 Surf Scoters in San Diego, and the only Hepatic Tanager in North America at the Hillcrest Golf Course in Los Angeles.

To give you a taste of a representative Christmas Count report, here are some excerpts from the Lakeville-Sharon, Connecticut, count. First the latitude and longitude of the towns included in the circle. Then, "deciduous woods 25%, fields and pastures 40%, swamps and marshes 10%, farmlands, orchards and gardens 15%, towns and villages 10%." (Fairly makes one's mouth water, doesn't it?) Continuing, "6 a.m. to 5 p.m. clear; temp -2 to 30 degrees; no wind; 12-15 inches snow cover, most fresh-water lakes frozen. 76 observers; 31 in 11 parties, 45 at feeders. Total party hours, 275 (30 on foot, 47 by car, 198 at feeders); total party miles, 381 (21 on foot, 360 by car)." They had a total of 56 species and about 14,868 individuals. Very impressive. And every one of the 76 observers—including the 45 feeder-watchers—was listed! Birds of unusual interest are printed in bold-face type in the reports. In Lakeville-Sharon that year one of the two noteworthy birds was the Killdeer!

The first Los Angeles Christmas Bird Census was made in 1915 by the Los Angeles Audubon Society. The 121 species that came out of it led the nation. Unfortunately, someone seemed to be a little over-eager as reports came in from Los Angeles Harbor, Eagle Rock, Sunset Beach and the San Fernando Valley, among others. It took a couple of years before we worked out the 15-mile diameter circle concept.

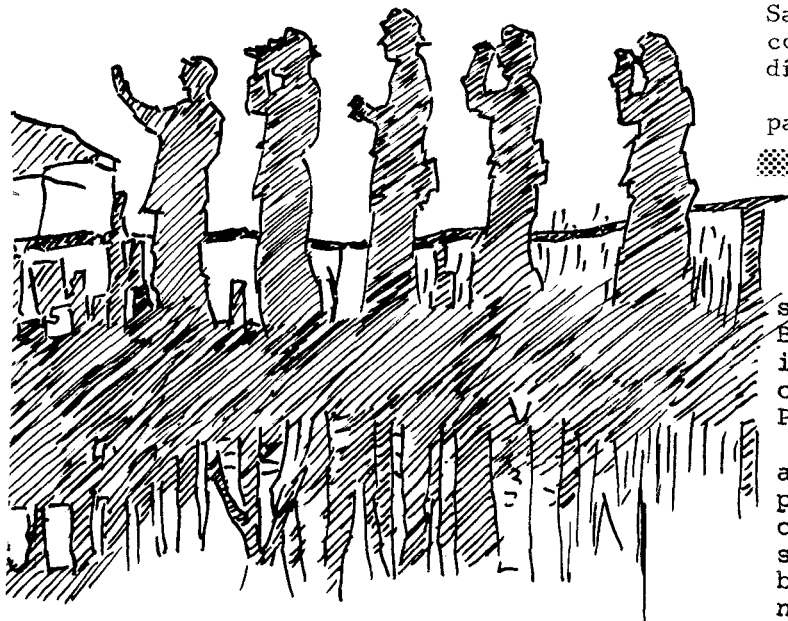
In 1922 a group of eight ladies covered the city parks and submitted a plaintive report: "The birds

*Continued on page three*

## About the Author .....

Sandy Wohlgenuth was born and raised in that stereotypically hilarious borough of New York City: Brooklyn. Man and boy, he showed not the slightest interest in birds, having only vague recollections of English sparrows in his backyard and pigeons in Prospect Park.

He became involved with birds about seven years ago when a bold Western Tanager ate a shoe-string potato an arms-length away from him at a Buckhorn campground picnic table. He has never been the same since. He considers himself only a third-echelon birder, making up for his inadequacies with inordinate persistence and enthusiasm.



# POINT REYES BIRD OBSERVATORY

**There** is only one bird observatory in California; and in fact there is only one in the United States that operates all year round. This is Point Reyes Bird Observatory, located on the south end of Point Reyes National Seashore four miles north of Bolinas and fifteen miles northwest of the Golden Gate Bridge (address: Mesa Road, Bolinas, California 94924; telephone 415 868-1221).

*Continued from page two*

in Griffith Park were few in number owing to the noise and shooting of a movie company making pictures. "I don't know if the ladies had transportation or not, but there must have been a couple of birds in another part of the park. (Brush Canyon?)

After some spotty years, Los Angeles Audubon got down to serious business in 1937 when the center of the circle was put at LaCienega and Airdrome Crossing. This was subsequently moved slightly to LaCienega and Pico where it has remained ever since. This gives us a spread that includes a big chunk of the Santa Monica mountains, Civic Center, Inglewood, portions of the beach, Westwood, Griffith Park, and acres and acres of concrete. Our official area breakdown reads: city and residential 32%, parks and cemeteries 15%, chaparral 20%, wooded 12%, reservoirs 9%, ocean shore 11%, open country 1%. ("open country"?)

In recent years, in addition to our own Los Angeles count, L.A. Audubon members have conducted two full-fledged counts on different days: the Malibu-Topanga count led by Joan Mills and the Palos Verdes count under Shirley Wells. Both have been highly successful; in 1968, Palos Verdes made the magic 22 list with 151 species.

So there you are. Look at the Christmas Count as another delectable field trip, one you're permitted to enjoy only once a year, one not to be missed. Most of us have some very special spot we treasure as our own "personal" birding area. Why not decide now really to cover it thoroughly on that one Count Day during Christmas week. Mark it on your calendar (December 27), call me or drop me a line and we'll reserve that place for you. If you haven't any particular area in mind, let me know and we'll find a niche for you. Hurry, Hurry, Hurry! Choice sites are going fast. You don't have to be a Roger Tory Peterson to participate. (By the way, he's listed alphabetically in Audubon Field Notes along with 44 other observers at Old Lyme, Conn.) If, like Hamlet, you know a hawk from a handsaw, you're for us. The more the merrier. Sandy Wohlgemuth, 19354 Calvert St., Reseda, Calif. 91335, 344-8531 \*

PRBO is a delightful place to visit, particularly during the fall or spring migration. There are regular demonstrations of netting, trapping, and banding of birds with a talk about migration, purposes of banding, etc. The Observatory serves as an educational resource for the San Francisco Bay area and accommodates over a thousand school students a month during migration.

The Observatory was founded in 1965 by members of the Western Bird Banding Association to study the birds of the Point Reyes area and to provide a training and research center for amateur and professional ornithologists. This it has done, and much more. It still welcomes people who know little about birds, and turns them into capable and highly trained bird students. At the same time, numerous graduate students and teachers are using PRBO facilities to pursue their studies. The emphasis has remained fairly evenly divided between work involving banding of birds and research depending on field observation. The intent of most Observatory studies is to further conservation through basic ecological research.

From an original membership of 258 in 1965, PRBO has grown to 900 members in 1970. This very rapid growth has been reflected in a staff increase from one part-time biologist to four full-time biologists and numerous volunteers. We feel that this growth reflects needs by both the public and the scientific community. One of these needs is for an organization that deals with basic research in ecology and conservation and at the same time has an independent voice uninfluenced by political pressures—a voice that "tells it like it is". Organizations such as the Sierra Club and Audubon Societies carry the battle to the public and politicians but do little basic research themselves. Point Reyes Bird Observatory provides the fuel with which such organizations can build the fires of conservation. Another function of the Observatory is to provide a bridge between the layman and the professional, thus aiding the non-professionals in making valuable contributions to our knowledge.

In its few years of existence Point Reyes Bird Observatory has carried out numerous research studies in Marin County and on the Farallon Islands. During 1970 it will coordinate a statewide study of migration movements, manning a dozen stations in various parts of the state. Its five-year study of Limantour Estero in Point Reyes National Seashore exemplifies much of its purpose. The National Park Service requested help to determine the best use for the area. Our study made it clear that any major

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HEADQUARTERS, LIBRARY AND NATURE MUSEUM LOCATED AT AUDUBON HOUSE  
PLUMMER PARK, 7377 SANTA MONICA BLVD., LOS ANGELES 90046 876-0202

Mrs. Abigail King, Executive Secretary  
700 Halliday Avenue  
Los Angeles, California 90049



1970		December					1970
SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THUR.	FRI.	SAT.	
6	7	1	2	3	4	5	
13	14	8	9	10	11	12	
20	21	15	16	17	18	19	
27	28	22	23	24	25	26	
		29	30	31			

- Nov. 22 SUNDAY - FIELD TRIP, Griffith Park. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in parking lot in Fern Dell (Western Avenue entrance to the park). This is a close-in, half day field trip which we feel should be especially attractive to neophyte birders. Leader: to be announced.
- Nov. 25 WEDNESDAY - CONSERVATION MEETING, Plummer Park, 8:00 p.m., Audubon House. Mrs. Kathryn Brooks, Chairman.
- Dec. 3 THURSDAY - EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING, 8:00 p.m.
- Dec. 8 TUESDAY - EVENING MEETING, Plummer Park, 8:00 p.m. Program: "Kinabalu" which shows the wildlife and birds of Borneo, presented by Jim Clements and illustrated with color slides.
- Dec. 12-13 SATURDAY-SUNDAY - FIELD TRIP, Carrizo Plain. Meet at 8:30 a.m. in Maricopa at the junction of US 399 and State 166. Besides Sandhill Cranes this trip usually produces LeConte's Thrashers, Ferruginous Hawks, Golden Eagles, Mountain Plovers and more. Those planning to stay at California Valley Lodge should write or call for reservations: California Valley, CA 93453 or phone (805) 475-2272. Leader: to be announced.
- Dec. 27 SUNDAY - L. A. AUDUBON SOCIETY CHRISTMAS COUNT. Sandy Wohlgemuth, Chairman. Phone: 344-8531.
- Jan. 7 THURSDAY - EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING, 8:00 p.m.
- Jan. 11 MONDAY - ANNUAL DINNER - Robaire's, 348 South La Brea. 6:30 p.m. - Social Hour, 7:00 p.m. - Dinner. Program presented by Herbert Clarke on East African wildlife.

*conservation meetings  
every fourth Wednesday*

EXCEPT DECEMBER

**Audubon  
Bird Reports  
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LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

**The Western Tanager**

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## audubon · western regional

BY KATHRYN BROOKS

The Audubon Western Regional Office in Sacramento hosted a workshop for the leaders of the Audubon Chapters in the 12 western states, on October 24, 1970. My husband, Eric, and I were indeed privileged to represent the Los Angeles Audubon Society.

The morning session included a warm welcome from Paul Howard, our Western Regional Representative. Noting that the AUDUBON SOCIETY IS A CONSERVATION & EDUCATION SOCIETY, he then turned the program over to Mr. Rudolph J. H. Schafer, Consultant, Conservation Education, California State Department of Education.

Mr. Schafer commented that because there is little coverage in magazines on how to solve our environmental problems, and because public knowledge is vague, that there is a real challenge to education to give the public the ability to solve the problems. He encourages a "conservation conscience" among students, a program throughout the grades that encourages each child to relate to his environment directly, how his activities affect the environment. He explained the need to understand and teach in the schools 1) what can & cannot be done with technology, 2) the social processes involved in how to solve them, 3) the economic problems--how your money affects the environment. He then briefly traced the progress towards a real conservation program in the schools, starting with the hearings in 1966. One thing was evident from his discussion; the process of improving the conservation program in the schools is a slow one.

Mr. William M. Kier, Consultant, Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildlife addressed the topic Conservation Legislation. I was quite pleased to hear his outspoken, frank discussion of the processes involved in moving an environmental bill towards becoming a law. I was delighted when he picked SB 128, Senator Beilenson's bill to protect endangered species, to follow through from its initiation by Beilenson's staff man to its final enactment as law. (November 1970 Western Tanager, for details.) Mr. Kier explained the need for "eternal vigilance" in getting the bill passed through the various committees and said that Senator Beilenson was an excellent man for pursuing these matters. Mr. Kier carefully pointed out that if you

are planning to introduce environmental legislation, that it is important to pick your sponsor wisely. Some assemblymen and senators will introduce a bill for you and then expect your organization to do all the leg-work, the taking of committee members to lunch, the search for counter arguments and evidence, etc. In these instances, the introduction of the bill becomes a political press release! He had nothing but praise for Senator Beilenson, a man who carefully considers proposed legislation before sponsoring it, and then follows through with it.

Dr. Elvis J. Stahr, President of the National Audubon Society, presented "The Outlook for the N.A.S." I was very impressed with his talk and pleased that a man of his competence and frankness represented and directed the National Audubon Society. Dr. Stahr commented that the Audubon Society HAS NEVER BEEN MORE NEEDED AND MORE ACTIVE. He feels that the outlook for solving our environmental problems is not bright, but that we have performed a valuable function in calling attention to the issues. We must continue to point to the effects of pollution and ecological disasters; we must not be deterred by those who argue that if you haven't the solution, you can't complain. The Audubon Society does not have the resources or staff to perform the necessary research. He stressed that individual efforts towards cleaning our environment are important, but also that we must band together to go after those making group decisions. The chapters are very important in this respect, but must be careful to not endanger our tax-exempt status. We have a responsibility to maintain our sanctuaries, and serve a greater function in encouraging individual letters to legislators, rather than maintaining lobbyists. We have an important advisory capacity, also, and he mentioned Roland Clement having advisory capacity on the Army Corp of Engineers Commission as an example.

With little time remaining, we tried to discuss the major priority objectives. Many problems were mentioned, but it was impossible to narrow the field at that time.

To conclude, we felt the conference informative and interesting, and would have liked more time to discuss the issues. \*



#### N.Y. UPHOLDS STATE 'ENDANGERED SPECIES' LAW.

New York State's Court of Appeals has upheld the state's new law to protect endangered species, the Mason Act, sponsored by Assemblyman Edwyn E. Mason. The law, which prohibits importation and sale in New York of alligator and crocodilian skins, and the furs of the leopard, tiger, cheetah, polar bear and others, was challenged by a shoe concern, the A. E. Nettleton Co. (October Western Tanager). The shoe people won a stay in a lower court, but the state appealed and the law was upheld. (Audubon Leader, Vol. II, No. 19)

WONDERING WHAT TO GIVE YOUR FRIENDS THIS CHRISTMAS? What better way to give, than a subscription to the magazines of (or membership in) the following organizations.

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY, 1130 Fifth Avenue,  
New York 10028

SIERRA CLUB, 1050 Mills Tower, 220 Bush Street,  
San Francisco, Ca 94104

COUNCIL for PLANNING and CONSERVATION,  
Box 228, Beverly Hills, 90213

CALIFORNIA TOMORROW, 681 Market Street,  
San Francisco 94105

ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE FUND, Room 9, P.O.  
Bldg., P.O. Drawer 740, Stony Brook, N.Y. 11790

THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY, 729 15th Street, N.W.,  
Washington D.C. 20005

#### PCL PRESS RELEASE: A DOZEN MURDERS SOLVED!!

There was much talk and activity in 1970, "The Year of the Environment", with few legislative solutions to our pollution crisis. The Planning and Conservation League has made a valiant attempt to inform the public about the voting records of their California Assemblymen and Senators. Over 300 environmental measures were introduced in the California Legislature. Only a handful of major bills became law. PCL's 24 dedicated and non-partisan members attended over 150 committee hearings on environmental legislation in Sacramento. Their findings were released on October 6, 1970; a copy can be obtained by writing to: PCL, 909 12th Street, Sacramento 95814. Of course, one can find criticism of the analysis, but we applaud their efforts and encourage a more extensive study, with an analysis based on more environmental bills, in 1971. There is, indeed, a need for such a publication, as recently released, that tells what assemblymen and senators are killing our environmental bills.

help-please  
call Kathryn at 479-0830  
in the evenings to  
volunteer FOR

typing . . . mailing . . . running errands . . .  
participating in telephone alert chain . . . print-  
ing or duplicating ecology resource materials for  
distribution . . . speaking . . . writing letters  
. . . carrying petitions . . . distributing materi-  
als at fairs and conferences . . . making posters  
. . . drawing cartoons & sketches for "Western  
Tanager". . . attending hearings . . . analyzing  
federal, state, & local legislation which affects  
our environment (in general) and birding (in parti-  
cular) . . . directing subcommittee activities. . .

#### SECRETARY HICKEL STANDS FIRM ON JETPORT ISSUE

The training strip still remains in the Big Cypress Swamp just above Everglades National Park, at the site of the proposed jetport, and real estate developers are still hopefully ditching and draining the surrounding Big Cypress. Members of the Everglades Coalition, including National Audubon, met recently with Interior Secretary Hickel. He repeated his firm opposition to a jetport at the site and said he had no intention of letting the search for a new site drag on and on while developers ditched and drained. Conservationists at the meeting pressed for public ownership to protect a substantial part of the Big Cypress. (Aud. Leader, Vol. II, No. 19)

#### SOCIETY REBUFFED in law suit to PROTECT WHOOPERS

The National Audubon Society's suit to halt the shell-dredging in San Antonio Bay that is destroying winter feeding grounds of the whooping crane has been dismissed. The decision, in U.S. District Court in the Southern District of Texas, involved the Society's legal "standing" to bring such a suit and other technical points, rather than any ruling on the effects of the shell-dredging on the shallow waters near the Aransas Nat'l Wildlife Refuge, where the cranes winter, and the nearby National Audubon sanctuaries which, in effect, are extensions of the federal preserve. The Society has not yet decided whether to appeal to a higher federal court, start a new action in a state court, or seek further administrative review.



#### PROPOSED OPEN-PIT MINE IN VENTURA COUNTY

The L.A. Audubon Society urges support of the following petition issued by the Los Padres Chapter, Sierra Club.

"U.S. Gypsum Co. is applying for a permit to mine phosphates in an area of 2500 acres in Los Padres National Forest between Highway 33 and Pine Mountain Summit Road, northwest of Ojai. This operation will continue for 40 to 50 years. They plan a series of pits up to 900 feet wide and 400 feet deep. In conjunction with the mining operation they are planning a processing plant. Twenty-ton trucks will move 2,000 tons of material a day from pit to plant (100 trips, plus an equal number from plant to pit). Noise and air pollution from this operation alone will be severe. Gypsum mining could be carried on concurrently or following termination of phosphate mining. Air pollution then would be intolerable.

The proposed mine and plant would lie within the Sespe Creek watershed. While U.S. Gypsum has said that the plant will not discharge pollutants, the possibility of accidents cannot be ruled out. Sulphuric and hydrochloric acids are used in processing.

The whole ecology of the area would be seriously affected. The massive earth moving will destroy not only the present plant life, but result in loss of feeding grounds for the wildlife of the area (deer, mountain lions, coyotes, foxes, raccoons, birds, etc.). Their water holes will be ruined.

The three existing campsites, the trail, the springs and water supply would, for all practical purposes, be destroyed. All recreational values of the area would be lost, making it impossible to carry through plans leading toward establishment of a wilderness area in the adjoining Pine Mountain area (which is considered to be de facto wilderness). With increasing population pressures the need for more recreational and wilderness areas is becoming acute.

The operation will result in greatly increased traffic on Highway 33. Sixty to seventy 20-ton trucks per day will be carrying in sulphur and hydrochloric acid and carrying out phosphoric acid and other products produced by the plant. Add to this cars carrying 70 workmen back and forth each day. Highway 33 is not built for this traffic. Inevitably the highway would need to be widened, repairs would be frequent--and you, the taxpayer, will foot the bill.

Increases in people, cars and trucks inevitably lead to greatly increased fire danger in brushy areas such as this.

Phosphate is at present not in short supply in the United States. Twenty percent of the phosphates produced in the United States are being exported. New sources of the material are being located."

Of course, we are particularly concerned about the California Condor, as increased activities in the area pose a serious threat to his survival. It is my understanding, from a conversation with John Borneman, Audubon Condor Naturalist, that we need a change in the Mining laws which have been on the books since the 1800's, which allow these activities to continue as a threat.

**HELP SAVE POINT MUGU RECREATION AREA:** For up-to-date information, contact:

Bill Weiler, ECAUSE, Box 301, Pacific Palisades 90272  
(Phone 454-8957)

Ed Mercurios, UCLA Zoology Department, Los Angeles, Ca 90024 (Home phone: 451-1236)

**BUMPER STICKERS AVAILABLE AT AUDUBON HOUSE.**

#### NEW YORK STATE BANS DDT AND RESTRICTS OTHERS. DR. STAHR SAYS NEW CODE "BEST IN NATION."

New York State will ban DDT and nine other pest icides, effective January 1, 1971, and at the same time will impose stiff limitations on the sale, purchase, and use of about 60 others. The regulations were authorized under the State's Environmental Conservation Law, which was enacted this year, and were drawn up by the new Department of Environmental Conservation. (National Audubon's Executive Vice President, Charles H. Callison, is a member of the Governor's advisory board for that department, and Vice President Roland Clement testified at the hearings at which the new regulations were proposed and discussed.) Banned outright will be DDT, Bandane, BHC, Endrin, Mercury compounds, Selenites and Selenates, Sodium Fluoracetate (1080), Strobane, Toxaphene and DDD, TDE. The other 60 can be used only under permit, and only for specified uses. As Dr. Stahr said in his wire to Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, "all states should follow New York's example." A copy of the code can be obtained from the Department of Environmental Conservation, 50 Wolf Road, Albany, N.Y., 12201. (From Audubon Leader, Volume II, Number 19 published by National Audubon Society for its Chapters and Affiliates.)



# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRDS

# continued

BLACKBURNIAN, BLACK-THROATED BLUE and PALM WARBLERS. Again this shows that intensive birding will produce good birds anywhere along our coast in the fall.

Several people have commented on the large number of accipiters seen in late October, and this confirmed my feeling that Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks were present in unusual numbers. Large raptors are having a difficult time finding suitable habitat and an adequate food supply in our increasingly urbanized area. A very early FERRUGINOUS HAWK was at Pt. Mugu on September 24th (Jon Atwood) and in October an immature GOLDEN EAGLE was in the same area (Sandy Wohlgemuth and Ernie Abeles). At Upper Newport Bay an immature BALD EAGLE and an OSPREY were seen through October by many L. A. A. S. birders who marvelled at the vast numbers of ducks and shorebirds which are concentrated there.

The sighting of an adult HARRIS' HAWK near Pt. Mugu by Ernie Abeles brings up the subject of "escapees" again, and an interesting communication from Richard Hilton. He writes about a CARACARA which spent two months last summer at Paradise Cove in Malibu, where it became quite a nuisance begging for handouts, catching hummingbirds at feeders, and tearing out the rubber stripping around view-windows. Attempts were made to catch the bird, but it proved elusive and may very well have moved up the coast to be sighted near the Ventura Marina in late August.

Not all pelagic trips are as exciting as the ones off San Diego in September or off Monterey in early October, but usually they do have at least one redeeming feature. This was true of the trip to the Channel Islands from Port Hueneme

on October 24th. We spent a day at sea under ideal conditions without sighting a single shear-water or petrel, but we did find a few CASSIN'S AUKLETS, two ROYAL TERNS, one RED PHALAROPE, twenty BLACK OYSTERCATCHERS, and the bird of the day, an AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER. It was sighted on the south side of Anacapa Island at the same place where one was discovered by the Santa Barbara A. S. in May of 1964, and seen again by the L. A. A. S. pelagic trip a year later. It seems probable that we re-discovered the same individual after more than five years, as Oystercatchers are notably long lived (20 to 30 years in Europe) and very local. This is only the third record for California since 1910.

The morning of October 17th at Furnace Creek Ranch in Death Valley was one three local birders will not soon forget. Starting at dawn with two CHESTNUT-COLLARED LONGSPURS we found three TREE SPARROWS (unprecedented), two HARRIS' and one WHITE-THROATED SPARROW, a LAPLAND LONGSPUR, an INDIGO BUNTING, a VERMILION FLYCATCHER, a YELLOW-SHAFTED FLICKER and many others, only slightly less rare, for a total of ninety species. Furnace Creek will furnish good birding through the winter, but the wooded area above Scotty's Castle, and the lake at Saratoga Springs should not be overlooked.

Perhaps the Salton Sea had best be left until late January after hunting season, but the coastal lagoons and bays are crowded with ducks, shorebirds, gulls and divers, while your favorite park will have an interesting variety of winter birds. So, a little birding now will pay big dividends at Christmas-Count time. \*

## prbo continued

development of the estero would be an ecological disaster. As a result the Park Service has greatly modified its original plans. The Limantour study not only pointed out the importance of this habitat, but also laid the groundwork for comparative studies in habitat utilization by shorebirds. The latter aspect is now being partially supported by the National Science Foundation and by the California Department of Fish and Game.

The Observatory has set up a station on the Farallon Islands. These islands, just thirty miles off the Golden Gate, support the main seabird nesting colony on the Pacific Coast and are important as a stopping place for migrant land birds. In 1967 twenty-nine species of warblers were recorded in two days, and in 1969 the Observatory added five species to the California list (White-eyed Vireo, Field Sparrow, Cassin's Sparrow, Baird's Sparrow, and Yellow-throated Warbler). The Observatory is now being called upon to protect as well as study the Farallones. The U. S. Coast Guard, which has protected the islands from vandals since 1909, is automating

its station on Southeast Farallon and withdrawing its men. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which will take over control of the islands, does not have funds to establish a caretaker there. San Francisco conservationists feel that a full-time surveillance is essential; and because of its present investment in the islands, will be available to researchers. A recent trip organized by the Observatory indicated that, if research space is available, studies would be initiated not only on all aspects of ornithology but also on insects, introduced land mammals, marine mammals, marine invertebrates, and even on excavated bones of sea mammals now extinct on the island.

Point Reyes Bird Observatory has always depended on private contributions. Special contracts with various state and federal agencies enable us to carry out specific work, but our core program is maintained by the members. We need your moral and financial support. Our headquarters near Bolinas is open year round, and we would welcome your visit any time. \*



# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA Birds

Shumway Suffel

**THE** highlight of December, for a birder, may not be Christmas itself, but instead may be his particular "Christmas Count" or "Counts." This is a little hard for unenlightened mortals to understand, but for us it's an annual chance to cooperate with other friendly birders in a comprehensive bird population survey of our area. Statistics derived from these counts are in no sense absolute, but they do indicate where species can be found and in what numbers, with the relative numbers from year to year indicating population trends which may be important. A little preparation for the "count" can be enjoyable and worthwhile. Plan to cover your favorite birding area before "count" day to locate the spots which flocks or individual birds prefer, and to "pin down" anything unusual. Then arrange with the count leader to cover that area on "count" day.

Late September and early October lived up to expectations as the most exciting time of the year to be afield, but it apparently was an early season for migrants, and particularly for vagrants. Since vagrants, by definition, are lost birds, we usually expect them to straggle through our area for some time after the regular west coast migrants have come and gone, but this year there were very few small vagrants after mid-October. The Craigs on Pt. Loma banded a TENNESSEE WARBLER on October 21st and a BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER a few days later. Shirley Wells at Palos Verdes, not to be outdone, banded both a TENNESSEE WARBLER and a BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER on November 3rd and managed to vote and to bird most of the morning as well. Not all the late warblers were banded, however, as Abigail King and Jean Brandt found a LUCY'S WARBLER at Tapia Park on October 21st, while Jon Dunn and Kim Garrett report a PARULA WARBLER at Morongo Valley on the 18th. Earlier in the month Rusty Scalf found a NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH foraging along the edge of the shallow end, which is all that remains of Harbor Lake,



Perhaps the best bird in October was the SHARP-TAILED SPARROW (Nelson's race) seen by the Kings and the Tatums at Upper Newport Bay on October 17th. Gilbert King furnished a convincing description made in the field of this rare and secretive sparrow, which has not been seen locally for several years. Had it not been for an extreme high tide, it is unlikely that this mouse-like bird would have left the cover of the dense marsh vegetation. Also at Upper Newport Bay a BLACK RAIL

was reported on September 20th. This was a life bird for Jim Huffman, but for Olga Clarke it was her second sighting this year. Less fortunate birders are likely to see one in a lifetime.

Most winter birds were present in good numbers by late October, which is a little early. Betty Jenner and Shirley Wells, among others, mentioned large numbers of SPARROWS and PURPLE FINCHES present in the lowlands in early November. CEDAR WAXWINGS, WHITE-CROWNED SPARROWS and CHIPPING SPARROWS and JUNCOS were found in large flocks. With the OREGON JUNCOS were quite a few GRAY-HEADED JUNCOS (normally only a handful are seen each winter): Willard Skiles had one at his Malibu feeder for over two weeks; there were two together below San Diego (Dave deSante and Bob Cooper) with a third one on near-by Pt. Loma; and in the mountains one was at Charlton Flats (Richard Bradley) and another was in the James Reserve, San Jacinto Mts. (Lee Jones). Strangely enough, only two SLATE-COLORED JUNCOS were reported — one at Tapia Park (Ernie Abeles), and one at Mt. View Cemetery in Altadena. "Slate-colored" are usually more common than "Gray-headed." Kim Garrett found a WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKER near the large reservoir in the Hollywood Hills on October 22nd. There are very few records of this typically mountain bird in the lowlands. On the other side of the hills, Kim found a female HOODED MERGANSER on the settling ponds of the Los Angeles River. A few LEWIS'S WOODPECKERS are found locally nearly every winter, but this may be a good year with one seen at Lower Chilao (Ellen Stephenson) and another at Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley.

The first 1970 report of a FRANKLIN'S GULL along the coast was of an immature at Malibu Lagoon on October 26th by Ed Navajowsky. Two more were found on November 4th — one at Upper Newport Bay and another at Bolsa Chica. They apparently were moving through fast, as none of these three could be found a few days later. The seldom seen, nocturnal, LONG-EARED OWL was found in the extensive riparian growth on the west side of the Hansen Dam basin by Hank Brodtkin on November 1st.

Reports from Jon Atwood and Richard Webster in Santa Barbara indicate that they are finding just as good birds there as others are here or in San Diego. They give us our only 1970 reports of an EASTERN PHOEBE and of not one but two PIGEON HAWKS. In addition they found a RED-EYED VIREO, seven TENNESSEE WARBLERS, six BLACKPOLL WARBLERS, and single

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