

The Western Tanager

VOLUME 37 1970-71 NUMBER 5 JANUARY

A Cold Christmas Count

By Dennis Coskren

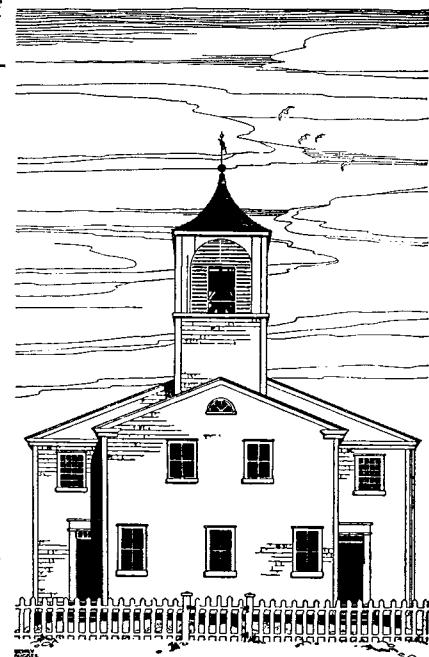
Morning of December 21, 1969, begins for me at 7:00 a.m. with the jarring jingle of the alarm clock. I arise only a little less reluctantly than usual; today is to be the day of the Newburyport Christmas Count. Usually the count is jinxed with bad weather (at least in my half-dozen-plus years of participation), but this time we seem to be favored. The sky, ten minutes before sunrise, is a cloudless light blue; the air is calm at a temperature of 16°F; and several inches of recent snow cover the ground. By sunrise my brother, Mike, and I are fast-breaking with hot cream of wheat. Then, on with boots, ski pants, and parka over the chinos, wool shirt and sweater, and thermal underwear. Scarves, two layers of mittens, and hats were held in reserve. By 7:30 we were headed northeast over the Merrimac River on Interstate 495, carrying binoculars, a telescope, notebook, and field guides. Encapsulated in our warm metal box with the strains of Handel's "The Messiah" coming from the radio (courtesy WCRB), we are enjoying our brief separation from the frosty air outside, where the Merrimac is giving off misty vapors and each sewer has a steamy plume.

At about 8:00 we arrive at the Newburyport yacht club, my usual starting point. The Merrimac, widening to form Newburyport harbor here just before flowing into the Atlantic, is usually excellent for ducks, but only a few are now seen riding on the high tide among the drifting ice floes. But suddenly a shorebird flies through the binocular field—rapid, all-dark back and wings, long bill, moderate size—snipe! An auspicious beginning.

Cheered, we start to work southeastward along the shore towards the Plum Island bridge. We check the mud flats by the clam shacks at Joppa Flats, but small flocks of gulls prove to be all Herring. At Newburyport airport there is a little snow-free ground with a couple of dozen small birds. Most of them are Horned Larks, but among them are two Snow Buntings and a Lapland Longspur. We hope for more such birds at Plum Bush a bit further on, where there are often patches of wind-swept bare ground, sheltering hedges, and seed-supplying weeds. We are lucky, and many birds are visible: half a dozen Song Sparrows, a flock of Horned Larks, a couple of Longspurs. Then among the Song Sparrows we spot a large, pale, streaked sparrow—Ipswich Sparrow. In a brush pile there appears a Savannah Sparrow. Another Ipswich, another Savannah, and a Tree Sparrow. Pleased with the results so far, we go on to Plum Island bridge, the eastern limit of my assigned territory. The marsh is in

front of us as we scan north and south. Tufts of Spartina grass break the monotony of drifted snow and shattered ice, but there are no Snowy Owls. Mike, searching for owls, manages to find a Short-eared Owl, like a giant moth over the snow. Then to the north, at the edge of the open water far in the distance, we see a large flock of Black Ducks; we turn the scope on them and estimate about 4,000. A couple of Mallards are with the flock. We also see a small flock of Goldeneye and more Song Sparrows, but still no Snowy Owl.

By 9:30 a.m. we are working our way back westward, towards Newburyport center. At a parking lot by Joppa Flats we stop to see what's there. As we scan, a Porsche pulls in next to us; it displays a "Ban DDT" sticker prominently on its bumper. Peter Alden, of Mexican birding fame, has joined us. The three of us check out the gull flocks—a Greater Black-backed, a Ring-billed, myriads of Herring Gulls, but no white-wings. We continue northwestward. At the clam shack we count 70 Greater Scaup. Then suddenly both Mike and Pete simultaneously catch sight of a Killdeer flying by us. Excellent! A moment later,

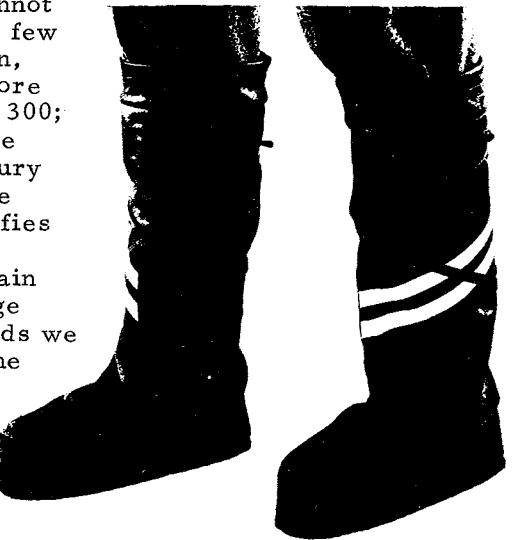


Mike reports an Iceland Gull headed northwest, but Pete and I cannot see it. We do manage to see what is presumably the same bird a few hundred feet beyond, at our next stop. The ducks finally are seen, but in smaller-than-usual numbers, from the coal yard on the shore of the harbor. Bufflehead are present in good numbers, perhaps 300; the Goldeneye, which should be there in comparable numbers, are down to 15. A flock of Oldsquaw drifts downstream by the Salisbury shore; we count 13. Pete, studying the Black Ducks far out in the harbor near Plum Island, calls out a Canvasback, and then identifies a Marsh Hawk over the frozen Salisbury marsh.

The upstream terminus of the territory to be searched, Chain Bridge, is reached by 11:00 a.m. From the bridge we see a large flock of Bonaparte's Gulls in the river downstream. Into the woods we plunge, walking through the ankle-deep snow under the pines to the east end of Chain Bridge Island. There we settle down to study the gulls as they move around. Most of them are on the water at any moment, but the downstream birds are constantly taking wing and landing at the upstream end of the flock. In effect, the gulls are on an endless conveyor belt in front of us. We are soon chilled squatting in the snow on the riverbank, but, like the fanatics we are, we persist. Somewhere in that flock, there is bound to be a Black-headed Gull or three, or perhaps even a Little Gull. Our patience (or insanity?) is rewarded at last by a glimpse of black under the primaries of one flying gull. We check the bill when it lands, and our Black-headed Gull is confirmed. Another possible Black-headed is seen, but we cannot confirm the second bird.

Meanwhile, three Common Mergansers have flown past, as well as several flocks of Golden-eye, or "whistlers"; the wings of the latter announce their arrival. We wait for more, and more appear. An accipiter darts past and lands in a bare tree a hundred feet away. We debate. Consensus: Sharp-shinned Hawk. Siskins go overhead, as we catch their distinctive "shree" note, and then a small Red Crossbill flock, again identified partly by call note. By this time noon has come and gone, and hunger is added to cold, so we break for lunch. On the way back we pause at a group of feeders, where the birds seem to have had the same idea. Several Starlings and House Sparrows, two Grackles, about 40 Cowbirds, a Junco, and a Fox Sparrow are immediately visible. The "cheer, cheer" of an Evening Grosbeak flock is heard, but a search yields a look at only one. Hungrier still by now, we return to the center of town and stop at a hamburger joint. The bill of fare is a hamburger, hot green pea soup, and discussion of birds and birding. Pete and I have a mutual interest in Mexican birding, so the conversation runs heavily to antbirds, macaws, and peculiar polysyllabic Indian-sounding place names, all of which seems somewhat incongruous in a frozen New England city.

By 1:00 p.m. we are back in the fresh air. The last area we had left seemed productive, so we return to the feeders and split up. On our reunion, Mike reports Chickadees, Nuthatches, and a Hairy Woodpecker, and I add Siskins, Goldfinches, and a Field Sparrow. Pete tops us with Tree Sparrows and a Barrow's Goldeneye, which proves to be the first ever for the count! We drive east a few blocks and stop by the entrance to a large estate. After a long walk between high hedges, we step onto a porch between large Greek temple columns and knock to ask permission to



wander over the grounds. The grandmotherly lady who answers also proves to be interested in birds, if only mildly so, and permission is rapidly forthcoming, as well as advice on where the birding might be best. We all head into the snowy woods and split up again. In an old orchard I see two Robins, and a small cedar grove yields a Downy Woodpecker, ten Chickadees, and five Golden-crowned Kinglets. Then I return to the shore of

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About the Author

Dennis Coskren's interest in birds can be traced back to maybe the third or fourth grade; however, it was then only an interest in reading about them. He says, "In November, 1955, at 2:00 p.m. on the 30th, I was given a \$1.00 Golden Guide to Birds, whereupon I identified, in order, a Rock Dove, a Black-capped Chickadee, and a Starling in my front yard. Since then, I've been a raving, foaming-at-the-mouth fanatic. I didn't meet another birder, though, until April, 1959, even though my home was in Essex County, Massachusetts, perhaps the birdingest area in the country; and even as late as the beginning of 1960, my life list hadn't passed 111. In that year, however, I took my first extended trip outside New England — 13,000 miles around the country. In that year my list zoomed to the stratospheric level of 294. Nineteen sixty-three found me going to graduate school at CalTech, in Pasadena, where I joined L.A. Audubon. For five years I studied and banded there — or maybe the order of my activities should be reversed. While in California I took advantage of my propinquity to the border, and my acquaintance with Latin American avifauna was begun. Since my departure from California, I have worked in Washington, D.C., for a year or so, discovering the abundant birdlife in the Delmarva region. Now I'm back in school again at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, still struggling to add a new species to my life list (it's getting difficult; the Pine-woods Sparrow is probably next on my list) or at least to my year list." It makes a good excuse to get out into the woods, anyway. ●

BINOCULARS FOR BIRDING

As every cartoonist knows, bird-watchers invariably use field glasses, or as they are now more commonly called, a pair of binoculars. They are used to see detail in a bird, especially at a distance. They consist of a pair of identical telescopes, one for each eye, mounted in a single frame, providing binocular vision to judge size and distance.

The first hand-held telescopes which appeared in the middle of the 17th century were very long because of the basically simple optical layout. Their magnification was fifteen to thirty times, requiring a length which made them hard to hold. Their field of view and brightness were too small to be of value for field work.

Folding of the optical path by mirrors is an obvious improvement in convenience of handling, were it not the case that mirrors reverse left and right and up and down. The resolution of these inversions, for two telescopes simultaneously, awaited the invention of the Porro prism in 1854, which made possible easily-held instruments with appreciable magnification, so that now binoculars are in wide-spread use.

The mechanical conveniences and optical requirements for bird-watching are somewhat specialized, different from those desirable for horse races, sailing, or hunting. In the field study of birds, the range at which the object may lie varies—we may wish to look at a large bird on the horizon or a small one nearby—and change range quickly. Speed of acquisition is essential, since the object to be viewed moves frequently and rapidly. In contrast with most other uses, the object to be viewed subtends only a very small angle of the field of view, in which high acuity is needed; but indirect vision, even at low acuity, is desirable to notice other activities which might take place in the general scene. In field work, binoculars are carried for long distances and time, in rain, snow, salt-spray, so that light weight, ruggedness and imperviousness are necessities. Often they are used at night as well.

Thus there are a number of specifications of binoculars important to a birder. The two most important parameters, on which a careful selection must be made, are magnification and object-lens diameter, written as a pair of numbers, e.g., 7 x 35, 8 x 30, 10 x 50.

The first number is the *magnification*, or *power* of the glasses. This is the ratio of the size of the image of an object on the retina, with and without binoculars. Obviously the greater the magnification the smaller the detail, or field marks, one can see, and the more remotely one can see them.

The *visual acuity* of good eyesight is such as to enable one to make out the eye-ring of a Vesper sparrow (4 hundredreth's of an inch) at 20 feet. With ten-power (10x) binoculars the eye-ring can be perceived at 200 feet.

High magnification is therefore desirable but only procured at the expense of length of optical path and weight of components, both of which cause difficulty in holding the glasses steady. Opera glasses are very light and short indeed, because they use the simplest of all optical systems. This however limits the magnification (without distortion, at a reasonable field) to 2-1/2x to 4x, which is too small for birding. Typical good glasses for birding, 10 x 50, weigh 37 ounces, and the 8 x 30 of the same manufacturer weighs 20 ounces.

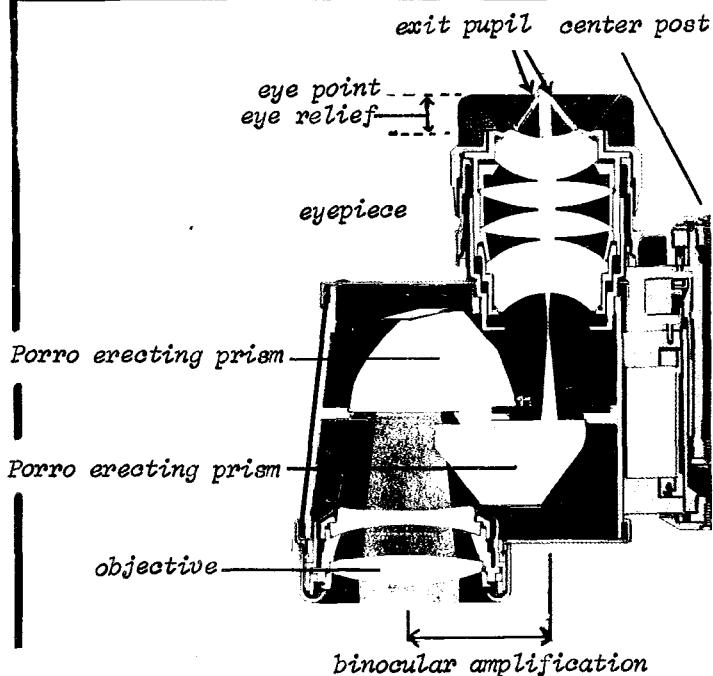
The maximum magnification of hand-held binoculars is 20x. Very good 15x binoculars are available, many people use 10x, and 8x, 7x, or 6x are common. The latter is not really good enough for serious field work for the average person.

For powers above 10x it is more efficient to carry a telescope. A good combination is a pair of 10x binoculars and a 20-60x lightweight 3-inch aperture telescope on a tripod, providing the magnification coverage at a

reasonable weight and tolerable degree of maneuverability.

Zoom telescopes and binoculars provide a continuous range of magnification, by the turn of an additional knob. This is convenient for birding, for by starting with the lowest magnification one obtains the greatest field of view, which eases the acquisition of the bird to be studied; and by turning the knob, the magnification

Continued on page four



!announcements!

NEW CONSTITUTION

The Executive Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Audubon Society at their meeting of December 3, 1970, approved a revision of the Society's Constitution. The changes were quite nominal, and resolved some minor issues that had arisen due to changing times.

A copy of the Constitution is available for inspection at the Audubon House, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Boulevard, Los Angeles, California. It will be presented to the membership for ratification and voted upon at the Annual Dinner Meeting, Robaire's Restaurant, 348 S. LaBrea, Los Angeles, Monday, January 11, 1971.

WE ARE NOW BEGINNING A NEW LEGISLATIVE SESSION IN SACRAMENTO AND WASHINGTON. FIND OUT WHO YOUR REPRESENTATIVES ARE NOW (League of Women Voters, Friends Committee on Legislation of California). LET THEM KNOW WHAT BILLS YOU WANT INTRODUCED OR SUPPORTED AND THAT HOW THEY VOTE ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES WILL DETERMINE WHETHER THEY ARE RE-ELECTED. KEEP YOUR OWN ENVIRONMENTAL SCOREBOARD. JOIN THE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE (you don't have to attend meetings, we just need help) AND HELP US KEEP ON TOP OF THE ISSUES.

FUR TRADE FUR BAN. The International Fur Trade Federation has strongly recommended a voluntary ban on trade in skins of five gravely endangered animals -- the La Plata Otter, giant otter, clouded leopard, tiger, and snow leopard. The IFTF has also recommended a temporary three year ban on leopard and cheetah skins. (Audubon Leader, Volume 11, Number 21)

Continued from page three

fication can be increased for more detail. The greatest magnification which is useful depends on atmospheric conditions, such as light level, contrast, and heat waves. Unfortunately, the zoom feature is only obtainable at the sacrifice of sharpness of image and brightness.

The largest binoculars ever made were for battleships of the Japanese Navy. These had 36" diameter objectives! How effective they were, no one knows, for every one of them now rests at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. *To be continued in the next issue*

In the Lower Souris (J. Clark Salyer) Refuge at Upham, North Dakota, there is a sign
"Point of Interest: LeConte's Sparrow."

Audubon House *Sales Department

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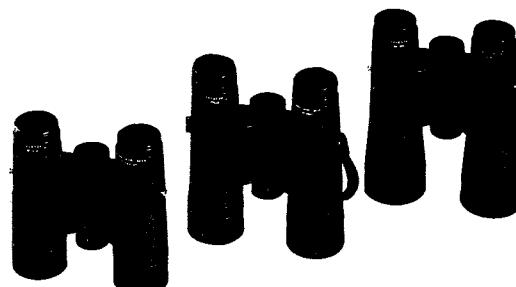
Basic - H will do all your household cleaning with no harmful effects to the environment, you, or your pocketbook. You can do your housework in half the time and with half the money.

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Besides helping the environment, all of the profits go to the society. Order now from Audubon House by phone, mail, or in person. For further information see the conservation article.

ARMY ENGINEERS protect EAGLES??

A news release all the more welcome because it comes to us from the Army Engineers announces the designation of the Eagle Roost Area of Fort Randall Dam in Nebraska as a registered national landmark. The 600-acre tract sustains one of the largest wintering concentrations of bald and golden eagles in the U.S. -- as many as 283 of these birds (predominately golden eagles) have been counted there. By closing the area to the public during the time the eagles use it, the Fort Randall staff has helped for many years in protecting the eagles. (Aud. Leader, Vol. 11, 22)



Los Angeles Audubon Society

Calendar

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



**Audubon
Bird Reports
874-1318**

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. 9 SATURDAY - FIELD TRIP - Lake Norco. Meet in Norco at 8:30 a.m. Take the San Bernardino Freeway to the Riverside-Corona (Norco) exit, then south on Milliken and Hamner to the intersection of Hamner and Norco Drive. An alternate route is via the Santa Ana and Riverside Freeways to Corona, then north to Norco via Hamner Avenue. Wintering ducks and other waterbirds - Wood Duck, Night Herons, European Widgeon, etc. Leader: Harold Baxter. Phone: 355-6300.

Jan. 11 MONDAY - ANNUAL DINNER - Robaire's, 348 South LaBrea. 6:30 p.m. -Social Hour, 7:00 p.m. -Dinner. Program on East African wildlife by Herb and Olga Clarke.

Jan. 23 SATURDAY - SUNDAY - FIELD TRIP - Salton Sea. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at Wister turn-off on Highway 111 (about 36 miles south of Mecca) north of Niland. Those wishing to camp Friday or Saturday night may do so at Finney Lake about 1 1/2 miles south of Calipatria. Enter at Ramer Lake and follow signs to Finney Lake. Bring firewood and water. For others there are good motels in Brawley. This is an excellent trip for wintering waterfowl and shorebirds. Leader: Larry Sansone. Phone: 870-6398.

Jan. 27 WEDNESDAY - CONSERVATION MEETING, Plummer Park, 8:00 p.m., Audubon House. Mrs. Kathryn Brooks, Chairman.

Feb. 4 THURSDAY - EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING, 8:00 p.m.

Feb. 9 TUESDAY - EVENING MEETING - Plummer Park, 8:00 p.m. Program: Dr. Charles T. Collins, Professor of Biology at Long Beach State College will present an illustrated program on birds of Trinidad. Dr. Collins is a world authority on Swifts.

Feb. 13 SATURDAY - FIELD TRIP - Terminal Island. Meet at the corner of Barracuda and Cannery Streets at 8:30 a.m. Take the Harbor Freeway to San Pedro and cross the harbor main channel via the Vincent Thomas Bridge. Take the first exit after the bridge to Ferry St. - left on Ferry to Terminal Way - right on Terminal Way to Barracuda - then left to Cannery. Meet in the large parking lot. This trip is a half day workshop on gull identification. Quite a lot of good birders have difficulty with the immature gulls. This is your chance, whether novice or expert, to learn about the identification of immature (and) adult) gulls. Leader: Jay Sheppard. Phone: 598-3955.

LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

The Western Tanager

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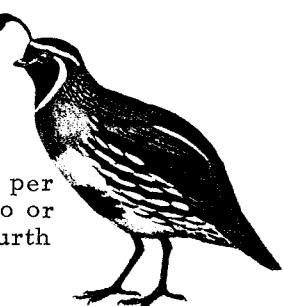
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audubon activities

EVENING MEETING, Nov. 10. Mr. Dan Fisher from the San Bernardino Audubon Society presented the highlights of his travels through Baja California, California, Arizona, Utah and the Northwest. He shared in words and slides many of his favorite bird and animal watching spots, with pictures of seldom visited places such as Malheur, Oregon, and Ruby Lake, Nevada. He urged conservation minded persons to use these areas so that they might be preserved not only for hunting but for the appreciation, and protection, of wildlife as well.

FIELD TRIP - Capistrano, Doheny Beach, Nov. 14. The seventeen birders who met at Doheny Beach State Park for the field trip on Saturday were rewarded with beautiful, sunny and warm, though windy, weather. The birding was better than expected along San Juan Creek and we spent some little time there. A good variety of shorebirds was seen. A soaring hawk, wearing jesses on its legs, and which none of us could identify, was subsequently identified as a SAVANNAH HAWK, a South American species.

We went on from here to Buena Vista Lagoon near Carlsbad, where several species of ducks and shorebirds were added to our list as well as CORMORANTS and WHITE PELICANS. We had lunch in Glen Park in Cardiff.

There was a disappointingly small number of birds on San Elijo Lagoon where we went after lunch, no doubt due to the wind. However, several species were added to our list, including a pair of FLAMINGOS. Most of us went from here to Quail Gardens, a San Diego County botanic garden, where we spent a pleasant hour, before heading home. Sixty-nine species of birds were recorded.

Bob Blackstone, leader.



PELAGIC TRIP—Coronado Islands and Sixty-Fathom Bank, November 21.

The California Field Ornithologists again launched a fine pelagic trip out of San Diego, first to the Coronado Islands, where numbers of California Sea-lions and Elephant Seals were barking. An American Oystercatcher was seen. This is the frazari race of Baja California, quite distinct in coloration from the Haemotopus palliatus p. of the East. In the open waters many Cassin's Auks flew as the boat approached. The seas were exceptionally calm and smooth, and the great moment of the day was circling a pair of Xantus' Murrelets who were too gorged to fly. They dove only to reappear a few yards away. Two other pairs were seen closely. The other noteworthy spectacle was the sighting of some fifty Pomerine Jaegers near the Sixty-mile Bank.

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THE BIRD LADY OF JAMAICA

by JOAN MILLS

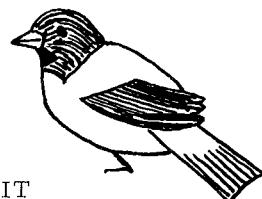
On a brief October trip to Montego Bay, Jamaica, my husband and I had time for a short visit with the famous "Bird Lady of Jamaica," Lisa Salmon. Trips to her house are listed in the Jamaican "Sunrise Tours Ltd." brochure as follows: "Tour 11: At 3:00 p.m. you can take a ride up on the hill... to the Bird Sanctuary. See the different kinds of wild birds and feed the famous hummingbird while resting on your finger." (At that, this may not prove to be as uncomfortable as "Black River Tour 1: This is a beautiful trip... to famous Black River, navigable for 21 miles, famous for alligators hunting.")

We two were the only ones on the tour that day. We were met at the gate by Miss Salmon who promptly informed us that we should have been there at 7:00 a.m. to see some marvelous bird (I've forgotten which one). Nevertheless, we were overwhelmed by the numbers of strange and beautiful birds including the Streamertail (hummingbird) which did indeed rest firmly on our fingers. The ground seethed with Ground Doves, and the trees were brilliant with Saffron Finches.

The very cordial Miss Salmon has great affection for her birds and seemed to recognize most of them individually. We watched warblers at the baths, and I remarked that I thought the Black-and-White was the most beautiful. "No it's not," she said, firmly. I think she was more in favor of the Black-throated Blue.

Altogether we saw: Turkey Vulture, White-crowned Pigeon, Ground Dove, Olive-throated Parakeet, Jamaican Mango (hummingbird), Red-billed Streamertail, Vervain Hummingbird, Loggerhead Kingbird, Northern Mockingbird, White-chinned Thrush, Black-and-White Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Bananaquit, Orangequit, Stripe-headed Tanager, Saffron Finch, Yellow-faced Grassquit, and Black-faced Grassquit.

We were so delighted with our visit that we stayed until dusk: a marvelous time with a remarkable lady.



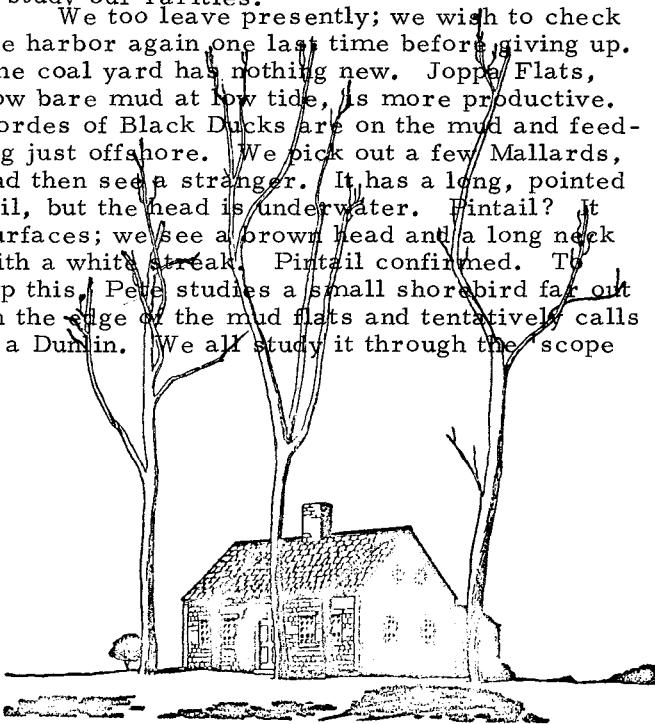
BLACK-FACED GRASSQUIT
Tiaris bicolor

COLD XMAS Cont

the Merrimac River, where the most noticeable sound is the crunching and grinding of the floating ice on the rocky shore of Carr's Island. As I stand on a rocky bluff overlooking this frigid landscape, an Iceland Gull flaps and circles its way slowly upstream—an appropriate bird for such a land of ice. On rejoining Mike and Pete, I find that they have seen all my birds, plus a few Tree Sparrows. As we leave, a flock of Evening Grosbeaks flies overhead.

Our next stop is the Riverside Dairy, where once upon a time I had seen my first Bald Eagle atop a tree by the river. We have no such luck this time, but we do see several ducks across the river by the Salisbury bank. Pete studies the ducks while I watch the weeds and beat the bushes (blackberry and sumac) for sparrows and finches. A quick report of a Pied-billed Grebe, then a Hooded Merganser, and I rapidly return. A Ruddy Duck appears, then another. A pair of scaup—could they be Lesser? The head is studied carefully on the male, and it looks sooty black. Pete momentarily sees a purplish glint as it turns, but we remain unsure. Our attention is diverted by a female Ring-necked Duck, which is rarely seen here, although it is regularly reported on the count. Another Pied-billed Grebe shows up, and then two more scaup. One of the males stretches a wing for a moment, and we look at a short wing stripe; Lesser Scaup it is! In the meantime, the flock of Bonaparte's Gulls from upriver passes piecemeal in front of us, and two of the gulls show the dark underwing of the Black-headed Gull; thus we confirm the presence of at least two. While we watch the river, Ruth Emery and the Argues, of Massachusetts Audubon, drive up to us. They had been covering a territory inland, and their luck had not been as good as ours, but they had managed to spot a Dickcissel. We fill them in on our sightings, both species and numbers, and they leave us to study our rarities.

We too leave presently; we wish to check the harbor again one last time before giving up. The coal yard has nothing new. Joppa Flats, now bare mud at low tide, is more productive. Hordes of Black Ducks are on the mud and feeding just offshore. We pick out a few Mallards, and then see a stranger. It has a long, pointed tail, but the head is underwater. Pintail? It surfaces; we see a brown head and a long neck with a white streak. Pintail confirmed. To top this, Pete studies a small shorebird far out on the edge of the mud flats and tentatively calls it a Dunlin. We all study it through the scope



and agree with the diagnosis. Our last stop by the harbor is at Plum Bush, for the third time; nothing new.

It is now getting late. The sun, low in the southwest, is veiled by clouds, the forerunner of an approaching snowstorm. We head inland to the Arctic wastes of the Newburyport Common Pastures. The sun set at 4:15, and the light rapidly faded. At last, we saw the spectral silhouette of a Short-eared Owl dropping into the snowy grass as the first stars appeared through the high clouds.

After this, our traditional last bird, we drive south to the reporting session, or tally-rally, at the Ipswich River Sanctuary of the Massachusetts Audubon Society. We turn in at the long treelined drive, park, and walk by moonlight to the renovated old barn for hot coffee and doughnuts by a large fire. The neighboring Cape Ann census reports first, and the species roll is called. An Eared Grebe, present at Bass Rocks in Gloucester for several winters, has been seen again. Boreal Chickadees are reported by one group; there is pleased satisfaction but no great surprise, since this has been an invasion year. In Rockport, a Yellow-breasted Chat is nosed out by a vagrant Varied Thrush for top bird of the count. All told, 109 or 110 species are recorded, a new count record.

The Newburyport count also surpasses all previous marks with a record 98 species. The biggest surprise is the absence of any Snowy Owls. Moreover, we have missed Great Horned and Screech Owls, alcids (Dovekie and Razorbill had been seen earlier in the month), and White-winged Crossbills (they should have been on Plum Island).

Mike and I attempt to correct the lack of owls; we spend half an hour wandering over the trails of the sanctuary, over the fields and through the forests by full moonlight. The air is calm and very cold; the snow crunches and squeaks underfoot, and rises in a powdery cloud when we pick at it. In the distance we can hear the far-off barking of dogs, sounding at times very much like owls.

We take back roads towards home, past homes brightly lit and Christmas-wreathed. Reluctant to give up, we try one last time to hear owls in the cold, snowy forest at Crooked Pond on the edge of the 15-mile-diameter count circle. By full moonlight we walk along the path; the moon and the snow cover make the visibility excellent. Every five minutes we stop to hoot, imitating Great Horned, Screech, Saw-whet, and Barred Owls. No answer. As we walk back, the sun reaches the Tropic of Capricorn just southeast of New Caledonia in the South Pacific and begins its journey northward once more.

Postscript—When we arrived at the car, parked on the shoulder of a dark, deserted woodland road, we found a reception committee. The local police evinced curiosity as to just what we were doing wandering through the dark woods, without even a light. It required quite a bit of fast explanation to convince them that we were indeed looking for owls, and were not engaged in some nefarious activity.



DECISION ON POINT MUGU on JANUARY 8, 1970

The fate of Point Mugu will be decided at the regularly scheduled meeting of the State Parks & Recreation Commission in Palm Springs, Jan. 8. If the commissioners approve the plan, Point Mugu will become the most expensive, intensively developed state recreation area in the U.S. It is estimated that the developed parts of this area will be more congested than the valley of Yosemite National Park has ever been on record-breaking summer days. Park Department officials admit these new recreation areas are being designed primarily for the upper twenty percent of the suburban middle class. Moreover, the planned recreation facilities will have a disastrous impact from a scientific, cultural, or scenic viewpoint. William Penn Mott Jr. admits, "We will be developing a recreation resource rather than preserving a scenic or scientific treasure." The Point Mugu project is merely the prototype for an entirely new kind of recreation area which the state plans to duplicate statewide by creating similar park areas near San Francisco, Sacramento, & Fresno.

The following State Park Commissioners will be delighted to hear from you! (The November Tanager, P. 7 has more information about development.)

Ian L. McMillan, Box 63, Shandon, Ca 93461
 Thomas M. Bonnicksen, 1316 Francisco St.,
 Berkely, Ca 94702
 Loren L. Lutz, D.D.S., 401 N. Garfield, Alhambra, Ca 91880
 Daniel D. Villanueva, KMEX TV, 721 N. Bronson, Hollywood, Ca 90038
 Leonard S. Thompson, 111 E. Lucard St., Taft, Ca 93268
 Clarice E. Gilchrist, 25 Sea View, Piedmont, Ca 94600
 Mrs. Leah F. McConnell, P.O. Box Af, Redding Ca 9600
 Lowell Berry, 1939 Harrison St., Suite 802, Oakland, Ca 94612
 Harry E. Sokolov, c/o 20th C. Fox, Box 900, Beverly Hills, Ca 90213

BAN ENZYME PRESOAKS & PHOSPHATES IN LAUNDRY DETERGENTS.

Government action and your buying power can help end pollution from detergents.

After investigating the problem of water pollution, Henry Reuss, chairman of a subcommittee of the House Committee on Government Operations, recommended a ban on phosphates in a report issued in April 1970. The detergent industry, needless to say, protested, and has made little effort, with the exception of a few, in removing or reducing phosphate content in cleansers. The evidence is overwhelmingly against the use of phosphates.

In the meantime, while waiting for government action in removing phosphate detergents from the shelves, the individual can do his part. Orders for Shaklee Products can be placed through Audubon House now. (See Sales Section)

TIMBER WOLVES THREATENED. National Audubon's North Midwest Representative Ed Brigham has congratulated Craig Rupp, Supervisor of Superior National Forest in Minnesota for prohibiting the hunting or trapping of timber wolves in all but one section of the Forest. Although the wolf is an endangered species, it is not protected under Minnesota law; in fact, one researcher was able to get his trap-injured wolf back only after he put up the "tourist sum" of \$100! Brigham expressed the hope that Mr. Rupp's temporary order would become permanent policy and that the wolf would get the protection it deserves. (Audubon Leader, Vol. 11, No. 21)

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CONSERVATION MEETING: January 27, 1971
 Meet at Great Hall, Plummer Park, 8:00 p.m.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRDS *continued*

are regular in winter at all these locations. One BALD EAGLE was reported at Upper Newport Bay, and one at the north end of Death Valley. At least two OSPREYS are wintering at Lake Cachuma (Richard Webster) and one or two Ospreys remained at Upper Newport Bay until early November. FERRUGINOUS HAWKS were widely found: two in the Antelope Valley and one near the south end of the Salton Sea where they are unusual (all recorded by Jon and Kim); and one at Pt. Mugu (not the same bird seen there in late September). The only ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK reported was a single bird near Tulare Lake in the San Joaquin Valley on November 16th (Philip Sayre and Ed Navojosky). Only one report of a PIGEON HAWK was received, except for the two October birds in Santa Barbara, and this one from the Antelope Valley on November 15th (Kim and Jon again). Shirley Wells' prennial PRAIRIE FALCON has returned to Palos Verdes for the third winter. She had the thrill of seeing it stoop, taking a Mourning Dove in full flight; turn it around, tucking in the wings as it did so and pull it up next to its own body, so that as the falcon flew over her, the two bodies appeared as one. No PEREGRINES have been reported this fall.

Miscellaneous observations in November included: an amazing total of 22 WOOD DUCKS on Lake Cachuma and our only report of a TROPICAL KINGBIRD this fall, both seen near Santa Barbara (Richard Webster); news of at least four BLUE GEESE and four STILT SAND-PIPERs at the south end of the Salton Sea (Jon and Kim); another sighting of an immature LITTLE BLUE HERON, this time at Seal Beach (Ernie Abeles); a WHITE-WINGED DOVE flying over the Santa Ana Freeway on Thanksgiving Day (Betty Jenner); several reports of SLATE-COLORED JUNCOS from the Santa Barbara to San Diego including seven in one large flock of Juncos on

the Yucca Valley Golf Course (Kim and Jon); a rainy Sunday, the 29th, put to good advantage by Bruce Broadbooks, who found four COMMON SCOTERS at Marina del Rey, and in a nearby flooded field an immature FRANKLIN'S GULL; several reports that a VERMILION FLYCATCHER was seen in Legg Lake Park near the north fence where one or two have wintered for several years; and a real shocker—a SPOTTED REDSHANK and a WHEATEAR—but don't head for the car yet, they were near Vancouver, B.C., and were new records even there.

With the Holidays and Christmas Counts out of the way, it's time to think of winter trips. For a weekend you can't beat DEATH VALLEY, as recommended last month, or the Salton Sea for ducks and geese by the tens of thousands. After mid-January all areas will be open for bird watchers and there's a chance to find the more elusive species take a Mourning Dove in full flight; turn it around, tucking in the wings as it did so and pull it up next to its own body, so that as the falcon flew over her, the two bodies appeared as one. No PEREGRINES have been reported this fall.

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Stilt Sandpipers, Blue Geese and possibly Lapland and McCown's Longspurs among the thousands of Horned Larks in the newly plowed and fertilized fields (this will try the patience of a saint). If you've always wanted to see a ROSY FINCH, but can't scale mountains at high altitudes, try the desert mountains east of the Sierras. The King - Adams expedition saw hundred of them right beside the road at West-gard Pass and in the Inyo Mts. at Thanksgiving time.

Closer to home an especially good spot is the riparian area below the lake in Fairmount Park, Riverside. This is the area where the Yellow-throated Vireo wintered last year, but even though it will probably not return, this is one of the best places for wintering warblers, vireos and possibly red-shouldered or Cooper's Hawks.

We can make 1971 the best birding year of all, if we spend our time in the field intelligently and enthusiastically.

Audubon Activities *continued*

FIELD TRIP - Ferndell, Griffith Park, Nov. 22. Thirty observers, many of them enjoying their first L.A. Audubon field trip, met at 8:00 a.m. at the Ferndell parking lot, the starting point of a pleasant walk up the canyon in ideal weather.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLETS, HERMIT THRUSHES, AUDUBON'S WARBLERS, GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROWS and several other species fed openly and were studied by all. A MYRTLE WARBLER appeared long enough for its identifying marks to be seen by many, but the YELLOW-THROAT was only glimpsed as it moved through some Cattails. PURPLE FINCHES were common, affording comparisons of plumage, shape, and call-note with the abundant HOUSE FINCHES. At one point four RED-TAILED HAWKS were seen gliding along the ridges.

Thirty-eight species were recorded during the walk, with an additional six, including a BROWN CREEPER far from its preferred habitat, being seen before the group assembled.

Kim Garrett, leader.

EVENING MEETING - Dec. 8 - Kinabalu, "a mountain you should climb," casually mentioned by a friend, sparked Jim Clements' interest. But when the friend showed him a rare, out-of-print book about Kinabalu, written by a mountaineering ornithologist and illustrated with beautifully colored plates, the lure was irresistible. The ensuing three-week trip Jim shared with us, from the scenes of the unbelievably crowded (and polluted) harbor of Hong Kong, to the lush, little-populated rain forest of the world's third largest island, to the fascinating Orangoutang refuge located in the eastern part of Borneo and where this endangered species is making a last stand.

Jim's great sense of humor and his story-telling ability gave the audience plenty of chuckles. His shots of Borneo's colorful birds and the delightful portraits of the Orangoutangs made this program especially enjoyable.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA Birds

"The Rains Came," as this is being written, thus ending one of Southern California's longest dry spells. The four to eight inches of rain we received in a 24-hour period were as gentle as could be expected for so large an amount, but the residents of the fire-ravaged sections would have taken half as much, to germinate the ground cover, if the choice had been theirs. For all other sections these ample, early rains gave promise of a green countryside and, by spring, an abundance of wild-flowers, seeds and insects for the birds.

January in Southern California may not seem like winter to those from colder sections of the country, but it's as much mid-winter as we are going to have and the birds know it. Our winter species vary widely from year to year depending upon climate and food supply in their mountain or northerly home territories. The water birds we can pretty well count on, but except for Audubon Warblers, Kinglets, and White-crowned Sparrows, most passerines are inconsistent. ROBINS and WAXWINGS were here in large numbers by November and many observers commented on the large number of FOX SPARROWS, PURPLE FINCHES and MOUNTAIN CHICKADEES in the lowlands. Even though RED-BREASTED NUTHATCHES (sometimes a conspicuous invasion species) were not much in evidence, WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCHES and BROWN CREEPERS were found in the lowlands where rough barked trees could be found. HERMIT THRUSHES were widely heard and, with a little patience and a lot of squeaking seen, but VARIED THRUSES were sparingly reported in November—one in Rolling Hills (Jan Muller), one at the Arboretum in Arcadia (Ross Goodrich), and one at Charlton Flats in the San Gabriel Mountains (Charlie Collins). Three EVENING GROSBEAKS (a one-winter-in-ten invader of the lowlands) were found by Rusty Scalf at Palos Verdes in mid-November, and nearby Shirley Wells reported a few GROSS-BILLS and PINE SISKINS. WHITE-THROATED remained at two local feeders through November, in Altadena (Lois Boylen) and near Point Fermin in San Pedro (Mary Johnson). NORTHERN SHRIKES, normally sparingly seen in the Great Basin area north of Lake Tahoe and Reno in winter, made unprecedented southerly penetrations with two sightings (possibly the same bird) in Death Valley—an immature at Furnace Creek Ranch on November 17th (DeSante and Levalli) with another at Mesquite Springs on the 26th (Mike San Miguel). Seven enthusiastic birders from L. A. A. S. (Kings, Adams, Kohn, Tarble and Stephenson) had NORTHERN SHRIKE, not Turkey on Thanksgiving Day, immature, at Tinnemaha Lake in the Owens Valley, and considered them-

selves the better for it. There were also WHISTLING SWANS. The rarest of the rare birds, however, was a single SNOW BUNTING found at Scotty's Castle on October 18th by Guy McCaskie for the first Southern California record.

Whenever one generalizes about anything as unpredictable as birds, he can expect to be challenged. In this case the generalization was about the scarcity of late vagrants and the challengers were the late vagrants themselves. Four reports of EASTERN PHOEBES this fall, with two found on one trip, was unprecedented (usually only a single bird is sighted every three or four winters). In addition to the September phoebe near Santa Barbara, one was found near Westmoreland on October 31st (Gene and Steve Cardiff), one was near Ramer Lake on the 26th and another at Morongo Valley the next day (both by Jon Dunn, Kim Garrett). The Cardiffs also found a BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER at Morongo and a PALM WARBLER at Thousand Palms on November 7th. On the same day Guy McCaskie saw a BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER in the heavy brush southwest of the Salton Sea. There is a delayed report of a MAGNOLIA WARBLER on October 16th, found by Rusty Scalf in his neighbor's Palos Verdes garden. The latest vagrant warbler to be reported was a VIRGINIA'S WARBLER found by Abigail King in her West Los Angeles yard on November 15th and seen again there on December 6th. By far the most unusual vagrant was a WHIP-POOR-WILL netted by Jean Craig on Pt. Loma, San Diego on November 14th. This is the first Whip-poor-will to be examined and measured in the hand on the West Coast. These measurements showed it to belong to the "Eastern" race, not to the larger Southwestern race which occurs in the mountains of Arizona and New Mexico, and sparingly in our San Jacinto Mountains (presumed, since these "Whips" answer taped calls of New Mexico birds). This is also the latest record for the entire West, although a late "Whip," taken in Arizona on November 4, 1952, also proved to be of the "Eastern" race.

Large Raptires received a good share of the birders' time in November. GOLDEN EAGLES were seen in the Antelope Valley, near Pt. Mugu, and on the Irvine Range in Orange County. They

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