

Los Angeles Audubon Society

# The Western Tanager

VOLUME 38 · 1971-72 · N° 8 APRIL



## Sewage Pond Birding

by BOB WITZEMAN

Now that the sewage ponds in Phoenix and Tucson have been for the most part closed to collecting, we feel it is timely to discuss some of the aspects of bird watching at these outstanding facilities. Some of the most exciting discoveries of last year's fall-spring migration at the sewage ponds included: horned grebe, oliveaceous cormorant, parasitic jaeger, white-winged and surf scoters, red-breasted merganser, Sabine's Heerman's, Bonaparte's, and herring gulls, short-billed dowitcher, golden plover, and sanderling. Fortunately these were observed by many Maricopa Audubon Society members. It is a fortunate fact of bird behavior that the birds will stop to rest or feed at these ponds for a few or even many days. Tucsonian colleagues connected to our telephone grapevine saw many of these unexpected species just as we drove to the Tucson sewage ponds and saw many of theirs.

Most shorebirds such as the golden plovers, black-bellied plovers, willets, sanderlings, dunlin, stilt and solitary sandpipers, the peeps, godwits, snowy plovers and phalaropes are all fairly stable in their southward push, and almost without exception will stay a few days to enjoy the excellent dietary fare of worms, invertebrates and insects which the sewage beds and ponds provide. Some frustrating exceptions stand out. On two occasions last September and October white-rumped sandpipers visited Tucson. None of the Phoenix birders were able to see them on either occasion before their hasty departure.

Terns, gulls, the pelicaniformes (boobies, pelicans, frigate birds), whimbrels and long-billed curlews are a challenge to our membership's bird alert network. Many of these may be post-breeding wanderers. The large bodies of water at the sewage ponds only momentarily attract them and they will quickly discover the fishing is not to their liking. Oftentimes we find certain gulls will base their operations at neighboring fishing lakes such as Bartlett Lake

and Lake Pleasant and from these they will grace us with an occasional brief courtesy call. The curlews and whimbrels are seen less often at the ponds and when they do appear they express their preference for the grassy fields and upland areas adjacent to the ponds.

Historically speaking the Phoenix municipal sewage ponds in their present form are only eleven years old. Prior to this time many of the shorebirds would have simply flown over our area and headed for the west coast of Mexico. Practically all of the shorebirds, gulls, and terns seen in Phoenix are found in good supply at Puerto Penasco, Sonora, in migration or as winter residents. Before the construction of the Salt River Project, and its many dams, the sandbars and drying backwaters along the Salt, Verde, and Gila Rivers must have presented some suitable habitat for this type of wildlife.

The Water and Sewers Department of the City of Phoenix has become tolerant to the comings and goings of bird-watchers at their ponds and sludge beds over the past eleven years. The department has provided certain members with keys to the locked gates of the ponds, duplicates may be obtained from me or other officers of the Society. Seldom do aromatic considerations discourage the frequency of visits of the serious bird-watcher to the sewage ponds. Actually, these are not sewage ponds for by the time the effluent enters the supernatant ponds, stabilization ponds or sludge-drying beds, the sewage has undergone primary treatment. The traditional raw sewage odors are only present in the vicinity of the digesters and sedimentation aerators which are removed from our theatre of operation. Clem Titzck claims that the secondary effluent smells like bouillon but most of us don't share Clem's optimistic interpretation.

Private industry has been the principal offender of the esthetic enjoyment of the pond's environment. Mallin Brothers Foundry just west of the ponds has in the past belched out vast amounts of foul smelling black smoke over the neighborhood when it melted down non-

This article is reproduced from the publication of the Maricopa (Arizona) Audubon Society, "The Roadrunner" by kind permission of the author and editor.

degreased engine blocks. After warnings from the County Air Pollution Control Board, the situation has improved. More recently an animal rendering plant has been constructed next to Mallin Brothers. The owners have built four sewage ponds of their own design. When a west wind blows, an indescribably offensive odor challenges the bird-watcher. Recently, on complaint of residents in the area, the Board of Health has given them thirty days to improve their technology.

Insects of all types except mosquitoes abound at the sewage ponds and for the bird's sake we are glad. Nonetheless, a fly on some part of the face can take all the fun out of telling that stilt sandpiper from a yellowlegs or a dowitcher. Or we may ask ourselves under the hot sun and with flies buzzing whether to take the time to satisfy ourselves that we really see a semipalmated instead of a western sandpiper even though we would never dare to report the semipalmated sight record. The phalaropes, black terns, swallows and Vaux's swifts have found this insect life a magnetic attraction. Last fall's parasitic jaeger, out of place though it seemed in the desert, spent several weeks bugging off the surface in phalarope-like fashion. To the delight of the grebes and other fish eating species, the stocking of gambusia ostensibly for mosquito larvae control was a fortunate event.

Mosquitoes are the one insect seldom seen in eleven years of birding the ponds and effluent channels which flow downstream along the Salt River Bed. The mosquito has been used as the scapegoat by a number of organizations such as local irrigation districts, the Soil Conservation Service and other agencies, all who need excuses to channelize and remove phreatophytes wherever excellent wildlife habitat begins to develop.

A number of common sense rules should be observed by the beginner at the sewage ponds. All locked gates should be locked behind you when entering or exiting. Gates are kept locked at night and on weekends. The gate on the west stabilization pond at 35th Avenue is always kept locked. Never leave a padlock on a gate in unlocked position as vandals may steal it. And lastly never drive over a hose which is pumping effluent. The city fathers don't like their pumps ruined.

We need volunteers for more than once a day coverage of these ponds during migratory peaks. For example, the olivaceous cormorant and the two Caspian terns stayed only a half day this fall. Even if the volunteer did not feel sufficiently informed to make the correct field identification he could have alerted a more experienced member to the fact a cormorant or tern were present.

In recent years the Phoenix sewage ponds have produced two new additions to Arizona's list of avifauna. In 1966 Bob Norton found the ruddy turnstone and Bonnie Burch this year discovered wandering tattler. It is a real satisfaction to Audubon members throughout the state to know they are now able to see such exciting birds at the ponds without fear that they will be shot.

Now that these unique desert wildlife resources have been made sanctuaries by commission regulation, we hope that all will continue to enjoy and respect them for the great opportunity which they afford.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Although Bob Witzeman and his wife may have observed a few birds on their honeymoon in Estes Park in 1954, they remained in the "bird lover" category until after their move from Ohio to Arizona thirteen years ago. With Arizona's year around birdwatching weather and its proximity to Mexico's exciting avifauna, it was difficult to suppress the birding urge. The Witzemans have both served as field trip chairmen with the Maricopa Audubon Society. At present Bob is Vice President of this chapter. Both are fully addicted "listers" in the American Birding Association tradition and were it not for certain of the responsibilities and essentials of life like raising the family and taking care of a medical practice they would be shooting for a membership in the "600" club.

The Author extends a welcome to the Phoenix sewage ponds from the Maricopa Audubon Society to any Los Angeles birder.



# BINOCULARS FOR BIRDING part 8

## Stereoscopic Vision

Another feature of binoculars (not to be found in some new lightweight types) is *binocular amplification*. The eyes in the head of a man are separated at the interpupillary distance, which varies with individuals from 55 to 75 millimeters (average, 65 mm). When both eyes are focussed on the same object, because they are somewhat separated, and are viewing the object from different angles, the actual scenes projected on the two retinas are slightly different. The difference is detected by the brain and provides the experience of a visual third dimension, allowing a human to estimate distance of the object, and hence to be able to judge size.

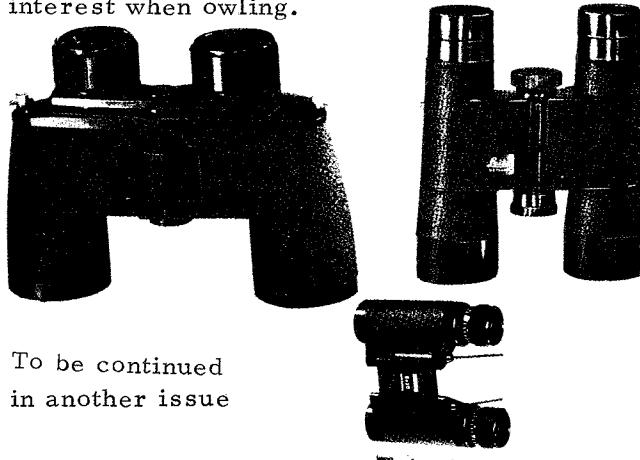
The further away the object the smaller the differences between the images in the two eyes. The minimum detectable parallax is 30 seconds of arc—the angle subtended by two points one inch apart at a distance of 500 feet—on one thousandth of an inch apart at normal reading distance. (The quality of excellent printing is due to a sharp transition from black to white in a distance of one thousandth of an inch.)

Five hundred feet is the limit at which stereoscopic impression, i. e., the appreciation of three dimensions, is possible with the unaided eye. Now the objectives of most bin-

oculars are separated at twice the interpupillary distance, so that three-dimensionality is accentuated at all distances, and appreciable as far as 1000 feet.

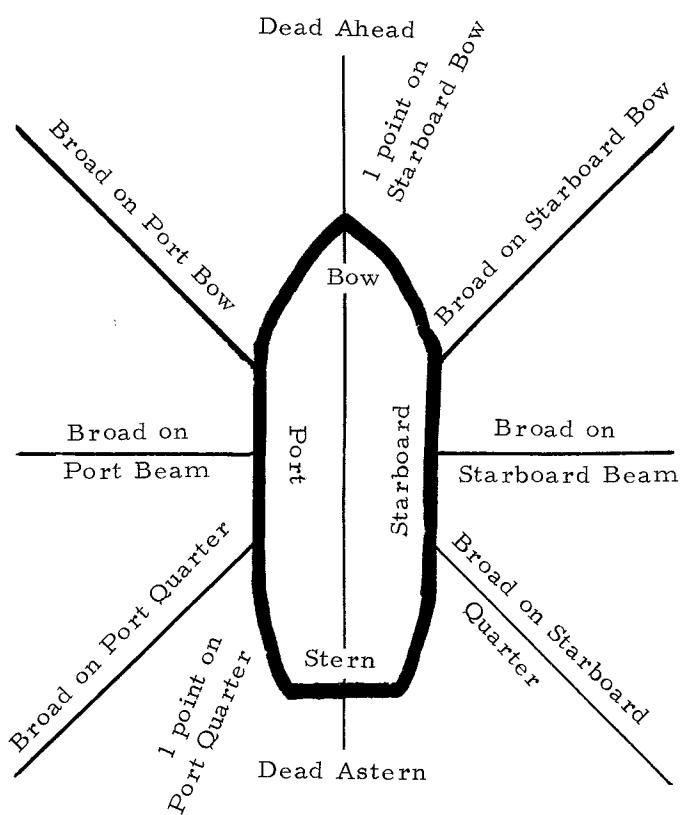
In 1964 lightweight direct-vision binoculars were put on the market which do not provide the enhanced space perception afforded by an effective increase in interpupillary distance.

Another curious amplification provided by binoculars is the apparent visibility of objects in the dark. The threshold of visibility, that is the light level at which objects can be seen, is considerably lower with binocular than with monocular vision, a factor of some interest when owlng.



To be continued  
in another issue

## GIVING DIRECTIONS ON BOARD



With the greatly extended number of pelagic trips made by birders it is time for them to use the conventional navigational terms in giving directions.

The *starboard* side of a vessel is always the same, whichever way the observer is facing. It is on his right hand when facing forward. The other is the *port* side.

At right angles to the forward-aft direction is the *starboard beam* on the one hand, the *port beam* on the other. An object may be sighted *broad* on the starboard (or port) beam.

A finer definition of the direction is obtained by giving the direction in terms of *points*, a point having a value of approximately 11 degrees. Thus four points is 45° or halfway between the direction looking over the bow and the beam, or the beam and the stern, and these directions are called *broad on the starboard bow*, or *broad on the starboard quarter* (similarly for port side).

Finer calls are rarely needed, although *one point on the starboard bow*, etc., are obviously useful for a sighting not exactly dead ahead.



# environment besieged

by

Kathryn Brooks

The NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST POISONING OF WILDLIFE (c/o 13 Columbus Avenue, San Francisco, Ca 94111 at 415 398-8948) needs support. They commend President Nixon's Executive Order against the killing of predators on federal lands, but wish "additional measures to ensure the safety of our wildlife species. . . 1. STRONG LAWS against individuals possessing 1080 (or Sodium Fluoroacetate), Thallium, Strychnine, and Cyanide Coyote Getters--except, of course, strictly licensed users in industry, where every precaution should be taken that they are held accountable for the use of chemical compounds in their industries only. 2. STRONG SAFEGUARDS--so that Agricultural Commissioners do not all of a sudden see a 'need' to broadcast 1080-treated grain or other insidious stable poisons, which act just as strongly to the detriment of our wildlife species as the poison-bait-stations, now outlawed from our public lands--as this would be a change in name only: from 'predacides' to 'rodenticides'. 3. STRONG SAFEGUARDS against the misuse of the exceptional circumstances, under which the outlawed poisoning programs could be resumed in some locations. . . President Nixon's Executive Order provides for phasing-out of Federal Programs, thus shifting 'predator control' to the state level. We can only guess at what this will mean for wildlife species in such notorious states as Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Montana, New Mexico, Texas, etc."

Legislation implementing the Presidents' order was introduced by Rep. Garmatz on February 16, H.R. 13152. Repealing the present law is going to be a battle. In order to get federal funds under a grant program to the states, the states could not use poison, and could only use funds appropriated by their legislature. This is an attempt to get away from the "cooperators" (the ranchers themselves) which contribute a large part of the money spent on predator control. Stiff fines for violation are set up, but the plan is not perfect. What if the states decide to ignore the federal funds and continue with their own program?

## Additional Bills in Sacramento 1972

AB 469-Would require licensing of professional foresters who work in California and privately own forest lands. Z'berg, to Assembly Natural Resources and Conservation Committee.

SB 280-Would authorize the state Department of Health, rather than the Department of Agriculture, to adopt regulations on the use of pesticides. Petris, to Senate Health & Welfare Com.

SB 341-Would order state agencies to buy biodegradable products if the price is no more than 2% higher than the nonbiodegradable type. Gregorio, to Senate Gov't Operations Committee.

AB 580-Would authorize state Air Resources Board or any control district to require owner or operator of emission source to take reasonable action for control of emission. Schabarum, to Assembly Environmental Quality Committee.

AB 608-Would include portion of state tide and submerged lands in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties among areas that may not be leased for oil and gas purposes except under certain conditions. Moretti, Assembly Planning & Land Use Committee.

SB 382-Would require automakers to file quarterly reports with the state Air Resources Board on progress in meeting federal hydrocarbon emission standards. Petris, to Senate Transportation Committee.

SB 393-Would require the state Water Resources Control Board to adopt a state policy for solid waste management; would create the state Solid Waste Management and Resources Recovery Advisory Council. Grunsky, to Senate Gov't Operations Committee.

SB 391-Would exempt returnable containers from sales and uses taxes and impose such taxes on nonreturnable containers. Burgener, to Senate Revenue and Taxation Committee.

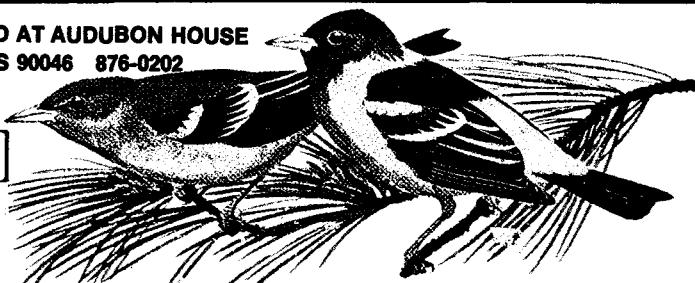
# Los Angeles Audubon Society

# 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**



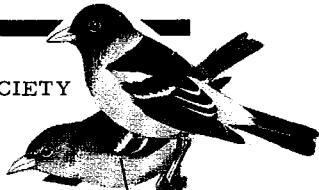
- Apr. 6 THURSDAY - EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING - 8 p.m., Audubon House.
- Apr. 8 SATURDAY - CHANTRY FLAT & SANTA ANITA CANYON. Meet at 8 a.m. at the end of Santa Anita Canyon Road. Take San Bernardino Freeway to Rosemead Blvd., north on Rosemead to Foothill Blvd., east on Foothill to Santa Anita Ave., then north to the end of Santa Anita Rd. Be prepared to hike down to the canyon stream and upstream to the falls to see resident Dippers and early spring migrants. Harold Baxter, 355-6300, leader.
- Apr. 11 TUESDAY - EVENING MEETING - 8 p.m., Plummer Park. "From Kikuyus to Boobos - Airborne Safari through East Africa" - slides and inimitable commentary by Jim Clements.
- Apr. 17 MONDAY - BIG Sycamore CANYON - Meet at 9 a.m. at entrance to Big Sycamore State Park. We shall also bird LaJolla Canyon, assisting in the bird census for the Pt. Mugu Citizens' Committee. The trip will be led by a member of the committee who will explain the Citizens' Committee role in the planning for the Pt. Mugu Park - Joan Mills, CR5-4821
- Apr. 23 SUNDAY - ARROYO SECO - ALTADENA. Meet at 7:30 a.m. Take Pasadena Freeway to north end, continuing north on Arroyo Parkway to Walnut St., west to Fair Oaks, north a short half block to Lincoln, left (45° northwest) to Ventura St., left (west) on Ventura St. to the parking lot overlooking the Arroyo Seco. Ellen Stephenson, 794-1764, leader.
- Apr. 29 SATURDAY-SUNDAY - MORONGO VALLEY. Meet between 7 and 8 a.m. in Covington Park, Morongo Valley.
- 30 Take Interstate 10 east from L.A. area to the Twenty-nine Palms Highway (State 62, 2.5 miles east of Whitewater). Go north approximately 10 miles. Excellent for migrants. Although this is a one-day trip, many stay over to bird Sunday in the Salton Sea area or in nearby Joshua Tree National Monument. There are dry camping facilities in the monument; be sure to bring water if you want to camp. There are motels in Twenty-nine Palms and Yucca Valley. George Venatta, 547-8291, leader Apr. 29; Jim Huffman, 545-1224, leader May 6.
- May 6 TUESDAY - EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING - 8 p.m., Audubon House.
- 7 & May 9 TUESDAY - EVENING MEETING - 8 p.m., Plummer Park. Herb and Olga Clarke will present "Australian Walkabout", a photographic record of the Los Angeles Audubon Society trip last November.
- May 27 SATURDAY - PELAGIC TRIP - VANTUNA, on-board at 5:30 a.m. Directions to Vantuna's berth will be sent with confirmation of reservations. Reservations are limited to 30 persons and will be accepted by mail only. Fare = \$12. Make check payable to the Los Angeles Audubon Society and send to: Joan Gabbard, 823 - 19th Street, Apt. D, Santa Monica, Calif. 90403. Gilbert King, leader.

Field Trip Information: The Los Angeles Audubon Society cannot be responsible for providing transportation on field trips. Bring binoculars and lunch on all trips. Please, no pets and no collecting. On weekend trips the leader is only responsible for the first day. Participants are expected to arrange their own schedules on the second.

LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

## The Western Tanager

Official Publication of the  
LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY  
7377 Santa Monica Boulevard  
Los Angeles, Calif. 90046



EDITOR - GILBERT W. KING  
Assistant Editors - Donald Adams  
- Hanna Stadler  
- Caroline Adams  
Field Notes - Shumway Suffel  
Conservation - Kathryn Brooks  
Mailing Supervision - Hans Hjorth

Subscription to The Western Tanager \$3.50 per annum. The Western Tanager is mailed two or three days before the first of the month, fourth class. First-class mailing, \$1.00 extra.

# audubon activities



## BIRDING Course



Beginning in late April I will be offering an eight week course dealing with the problems of bird identification. This course is designed for the enthusiastic birder who is interested in learning some of the finer aspects of identification that one cannot always glean from the field guides. I have tried to organize the course so that birders at all stages of "development" should benefit. There are two prerequisites, however--- you must be an enthusiastic birder (i.e., field trips should mean more to you than another social event) and you should be reasonably familiar with the birds of the Los Angeles area.

The following is a brief course outline:

- a) Identification problems - How to tell the gulls, fall warblers, shorebirds, etc. apart, regardless of plumage or age; even the experts have trouble with these groups, and careful identification in the field can be a real science.
- b) What birds to expect where and when - For instance, have you ever offhandedly reported a Western Gull from the San Fernando Valley (assuming you thought it was worth reporting) and learned later that there are no authenticated records from the valley? Do you know which common breeding birds are never found in California in the winter and which ones are to be expected occasionally?
- c) Bird songs and calls - How to read sonograms (see the introduction in Robbins) and remember how to tell two similar songs or calls apart after studying the sonograms and listening to a tape. Also, for the more enthusiastic, lessons in how to distinguish many fall warblers by their chip notes alone.
- d) Note taking - Since everyone's interests in birds differ, this section is more personal in design. Everyone, from the window watcher to the professional, can keep valuable notes on his observations. Keeping a record of the birds you see is worthwhile, even if it's just so you can read over them at a future date and relive your birding experiences. It is always impossible to take an accurate description of an unusual bird several days after you have seen it, so note-taking in the field can be very beneficial.
- e) Self-help quizzes - slide shows, in the field testing, etc. These are for practice only and for you to test your own advancement. There may be some kind of formal recognition for satisfactorily completing the course, but this has not been worked out yet

## Sales Audubon House Department

The burst of the spring wildflower season is always a welcome to the outdoor hiker and naturalist. We would like to remind you that the sales department carries a variety of western and California wild flower books, fourteen to be exact, so do come in and take a look.

We have added to our collection of children's books a series of eight different environmental books on the West. Each one contains many large colored pictures as well as easy to read descriptions covering all living things in the world of nature.

With the returning and migrating hummingbirds to be on the lookout for, we have just received some new "Hummy Bars" that hold 8 ozs. of nectar. They sell for \$2.95 apiece and the oriole cups, which we have too, can be interchanged. For those of you who haven't yet found an easy way to carry all your birding gear, let us recommend again the field guide carrier that either attaches to your belt or is available with an adjustable shoulder strap. It holds two field guides, up to 15 cartons of 35 mm film or your lunch. A perfect gift!

"A FIRST GUIDE TO SOUTH AFRICAN BIRDS" by Leonare Gill is very reasonably priced and being revised recently is up-to-date on the latest information. For those fortunate people to be traveling in that direction, it is well worth owning.

If you have the following books and no longer have use for them, please call Olga Clarke, 249-5537.

"DISTRIBUTION OF THE BIRDS OF CALIFORNIA" by Grinnel/Miller

"BIRDS OF BURMA AND BIRDS OF BORNEO" by Smythies

"BIRDS OF THAILAND" by Leakagul

"BIRDS OF MALAYSIAN PENINSULA" Glenister

I will take no more than 20 people in a class and no fewer than eight. If there is a large enough response, I will offer two courses, one more advanced than the other. We will meet one night each week for about two hours. There will be six half-day field trips on Saturdays or Sundays. The details concerning the times and places for field trips, and the place of our first meeting have not been worked out yet, but the meeting place will be centrally located in Los Angeles.

The cost of the course is \$20 per person. The course will be offered on a semi-permanent basis if the response warrants its continuance.

For more information, write Lee Jones, Department of Zoology, UCLA, Los Angeles, Ca90024.



# environment besieged



by  
Kathryn Brooks



AB 681-Would set up a statewide environmental quality board as a permanent elective board with several regional environmental quality boards. Z'berg, to Assembly Natural Resource and Conservation Committee.

AB 806-Would establish right of any citizen to sue to protect the environment. Z'berg, to Assembly Judiciary Committee.

AB 776-Would encourage research for methods other than poisoning for controlling mammals which cause damage. Dunlap, to Assembly Natural Resources and Conservation Committee.

HOORAY for the Army Corps of Engineers for their refusal to grant a dredging permit in Morro Bay, apparently as a result of the Department of the Interior's environmental impact report of a launch ramp and dredged channel in a salt-marsh area development in an estuarine area being a threat to the regional ecosystem.

"There is not one of us here today who has not heard the words 'ecology' and 'environment'. These two words have had so much effect on our civilization that they have almost brought us to a standstill." Excerpt from a speech of William Gianelli, Director, California Department of Water Resources, entitled "Public Works Projects and the Environment", presented to the American Rights of Way Association, Aug. 11, 1971, reprinted in The Little Blue Book THE WISDOM OF CHAIRMAN BILL, printed by The Mother Lode Chapter of the Sierra Club.

CALIFORNIA COASTAL ALLIANCE INITIATIVE TO SAVE THE COASTLINE AVAILABLE AT AUDUBON HOUSE. Public support of this initiative--a condensed version of AB200/SB 100, the Sieroty-Grunsky coastline protection measures--will help to force the legislators in Sacramento to act! HELP US PRECINCT TOO.

Support a NATIONAL URBAN PARK IN THE SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS. The mountains are a refuge for wildlife, a valuable watershed, a major fresh air source, and a potential park for the city. Unless many letters of support inundate Washington D. C., the bill introduced by Bell, Teague, and Goldwater may die.

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

950 THIRD AVENUE

NEW YORK, N. Y. 10022

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT February 23, 1972

Mr. Herbert Clarke, President  
Los Angeles Audubon Society  
2027 El Arbolita Drive  
Glendale, California 91208

Dear Mr. Clarke:

It is a real pleasure to thank you and the Los Angeles Audubon Society for its generous gift of \$1,500 to our Condor Fund! On behalf of the Directors and Officers of the Society I wish personally to express our appreciation.

Perhaps our concerted efforts can save the condor. In a way that magnificent bird is a kind of symbol of our goals, just as the egret was at the launching of Audubon's history.

Many thanks!

Sincerely,

Elvis J. Stahr  
President

If you see condors, please send your reports to us at: 1190 East Ojai Avenue, Ojai, California 93023. Include your name and address, and all information you have on date seen, time of day, numbers, ages of birds, and what they were doing.

Thank you for any help you can offer.

Sanford R. Wilbur, Wildlife Biologist,  
U. S. Department of the Interior.

Audubon House has a map, reproduced from the *Los Angeles Times* of January 19, 1972, reflecting the court-ordered district boundaries for the 1972 elections.

Superimposed are the names of those we believe to be the "incumbents" in the new districts, based largely on former district boundaries as well as on news accounts. (However, the Office of the Registrar of Voters could not confirm or correct these.)

Some district numbers have changed. The 37th District is a new one, to be filled in November.

In order to write to your Congressman you may wish to write to Audubon House for this information.

# AUDUBON ACTIVITIES

PELAGIC TRIP, FEBRUARY 26, SAN PEDRO TO SANTA BARBARA ISLAND. - led by Arnold Small. The "Vantuna" headed for Santa Barbara Island through a light fog. A few Pomerine Jaegers, one in excellent plumage, and only three Pink-footed Shearwaters were seen. Fulmars were seen very clearly, and one Cassin's Auklet. Twelve pairs of Xantus' Murrelets were followed close to the boat. Although one pair seemed to have a chocolate coloring, and the black descended well below the eye, the lack of the shoulder extension would not indicate a Craveri's Murrelet. (See also the discussion of the September 4 Pelagic trip in "The Western Tanager" Number 3 October of this year.)

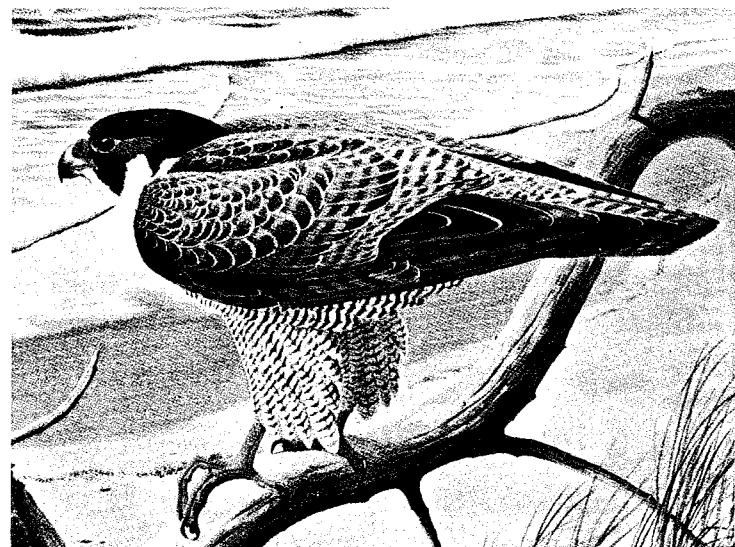


Specimens of the three murrelets, selected to show characteristic plumage differences:  
A. *Endomychura hypoleuca hypoleuca*; B. *Endomychura hypoleuca scrippsi* (type); C. *Endomychura craveri* (showing maximum extension of dark collar). Reprinted from "The Condor"

FIELD TRIP - Newport Bay, Feb. 12. Bird density in Newport Bay and the San Joaquin Marsh area, visited in the afternoon, was relatively low, and some of the usual winter species were not seen. However, the weather was perfect Southern California, and there were excellent opportunities for leisurely examining and comparing the various shorebird species. Several visitors from the east were amazed at the ease of viewing Sora and Clapper Rails, and a Virginia Rail was seen in the marsh. Sixty-two species were noted. Freeman Tatum, leader.

## BIRDING TOURS

The Los Angeles Audubon will not sponsor a birding tour this year. Los Angeles Audubon will sponsor a birding tour to Southeast Asia in 1973. Further information will appear in forthcoming issues of The Tanager.



FIELD TRIP, FEBRUARY 19-20—MORRO BAY. The spectacular sighting of this trip was of both the male and female Peregrine Falcon. The smaller size of the tercel, or male, relative to the falcon, or female, was quite apparent. (The word "tercel" or "tiercel" means one-third less.) Whether this nesting site is re-occupied by the bird which nested here a few years ago, or by a new pair is not known.

Two remarkable instances of this persistency may be noticed. The nest of a Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) on Avasaxa—a hill in Finland somewhat celebrated as one of the most southern points whence the midnight sun may be seen—is mentioned by the French astronomer Maupertuis as having been observed by him in the year 1736. In 1799 it was rediscovered by Skjoldebrand and Acerbi. In 1853 Wolley found it tenanted, and from enquiries he made of the neighbours it was evident that such had yearly been the case so far as any one could remember, and so it was in 1855 as the writer can testify.

*Encyclopaedia Britannica, Ninth Edition*



## AUDUBON HOUSE ANNOUNCES

A copy of the constitution of the Los Angeles Audubon Society, Inc. is posted on the bulletin board, should any member wish to study it.

The House files are low on certain back issues of the Western Tanager. If anyone has copies of the following numbers and would be willing to donate them, they would be greatly appreciated.

Vol. 36	January 1970	No. 6
Vol. 37	September 1970	No. 1
Vol. 37	April 1971	No. 8

The office is in need of a volunteer on Fridays. Some typing ability essential. Please call Audubon House on Thursdays or Fridays between ten and three, or call Abigail King at 476-5121 any evening.

# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

## Birds

Continued from page ten

Olga and Herb Clarke and Jim Huffman recommend the middle breakwater at Marina del Rey as the place to take visiting birders, particularly if their name is Keith. On Feb. 25th while escorting Stuart Keith of the American Museum of Natural History, Jim spied a rare RED-NECKED GREBE from the breakwater, and on March 4th in the company of Allan Keith, also an Eastern birder, they spotted a young male HARLEQUIN DUCK at the same place. These are our only reports of either species in 1972. These breakwaters are the easiest place to find three rockbirds often desired by Eastern birders - Black Turnstones, Surfbirds and Wandering Tattlers.

Additional reports of OLDSQUAWS make this one of our best winters for this rare and delightful little sea duck: a pair inside Newport Harbor on March 5th (Hank Brodkin) and two females at the Huntington Beach Pier on Feb. 15th (S. S.) were obviously not the same twosomes, but either group may have been the same ducks seen just off Newport Beach on Jan. 2nd; a single male at the new Lake Castaic on Feb. 13th (Hank B.) was one of the very few inland records in California. Rusty Scalf saw eight FULMARS FEEDING IN THE SURF AT NIGHT (8 p. m.) just off Redondo Beach, which seems noteworthy for these normally diurnal pelagic birds.

A day on the Carrizo Plains in late February yielded eleven species of raptors, including GOLDEN and BALD EAGLES, PRAIRIE FALCONS and a PIGEON HAWK, and ROUGH-LEGGED and FERRUGINOUS HAWKS for the Clarkes, Arnold Small and Stuart Keith in late February. With the coastal plain being increasingly urbanized, this section and the Antelope Valley are now our best areas for

birds of prey. Our only report this winter, and possibly only the second Southern California sighting of a NORTHERN SHRIKE comes from Jon Dunn who found one in the Leona Valley, west of Lancaster on Feb. 12th.

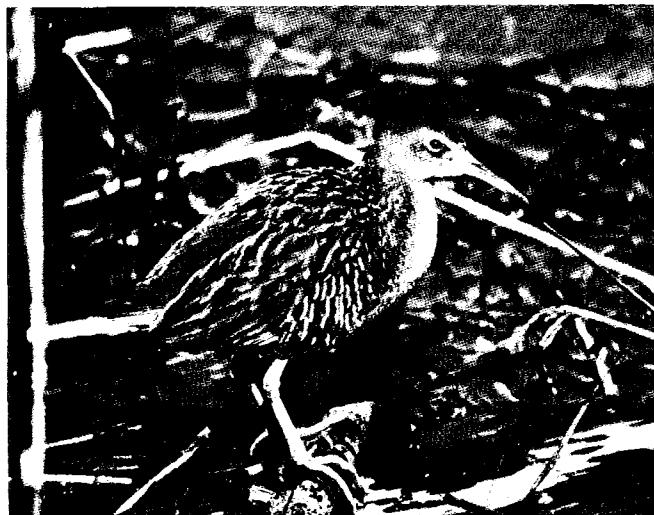
Grace Nixon reports that POORWILLS are awake in the Palos Verdes hills (as of early March and further that she has been seeing them on warm nights during January and February. This would seem to indicate that their winter hibernation can be interrupted if nights are warm and suitable for feeding. On the other side of the P. V. hills, Shirley Wells reports both ANNA'S and ALLEN'S HUMMERS have hatched their first broods in February. More surprising however, is a report by Justin Ruse of a DOWNTY WOODPECKER with three young out of the nest on Feb. 21st in Griffith Park. This is extremely early - maybe she's trying to beat the impending drought.

Last spring we mentioned the case of a BARN SWALLOW netted in Morongo Valley, which was already banded (they are seldom caught or banded as adults) and promised a later report. This bird was banded by Alan Craig who has banded at Morongo in the past, at Benton's Crossing, north of Bishop in the Owen's Valley, in April of 1966 as an adult. This means that this Barn Swallow was a minimum of six years old - a ripe old age for a small bird with hazardous feeding habits.

And so it's time for "over and out," not necessarily a "sign off" in this case, but more literally - the dull birding days of early spring are OVER and it's time to be OUT in the field. Almost anywhere is good in migration time, but the desert oases - Morongo, Borrego, Death Valley etc. are best.

CLAPPER RAIL. 600 mm, camera on tripod, F8.0, 1/125 sec. Taken at a distance of 30 feet with no blind. Normally well camouflaged, this bird is made to stand out by the defocussing, due to the small depth of focus of the 600 mm lens, of the lines in the background, which have the same structure as those on the bird's plumage.

Photograph by Herb Clarke





# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA Birds



# Shumway Suffel

In the midst of the worst winter drought in history, with virtually no rain from late December until at least mid-March (normally the height of our rainy season), we must consider the effects this will have on the birds unless we have unexpected and ample rains before May 1st. With the annual grasses and flowers already withering on the hillsides and plains, we can expect very few insects and a poor seed crop. The shrubs and trees, too, cannot be expected to produce much in the way of seeds, nuts or acorns without adequate water. Our rain-fed streams and ponds also will either dry completely or shrivel to mere trickles by late summer. Fortunately there is a ray of hope, as ample rains are far from unknown in late March and April. While this picture of scant water and food indicate a poor nesting season, low survival rates, and a hurried migration, all of which is tragic for the birds, it may, superficially at least, improve the bird watching. Every oasis outside the urban areas with a tiny pond, a trickle of water, or a permanent bird bath will be crowded with migrant and resident birds. We suburbanites, however, with our imported water supply and our lawns, gardens, ornamental trees, and city oriented birds will probably notice little change. How different from the early days of this century - no wells gone dry, no waterless fire hydrants - but a tragedy for the country birds none-the-less. Any one want to join me in a rain dance?

With a rather dull winter season now a thing of the past, it is time to comment on a few conspicuous "no-shows": EUROPEAN WIDGEON - none reported in Southern California (usually a few, sometimes as many as six locally).

COMMON SCOTERS - only one report (usually one or two in most large flocks of scoters).

REDDISH EGRET - no reports for almost two years (usually one or two most winters).

GLAUCOUS GULL - no reports (usually one or two in the immense flocks of scavenging gulls).

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH - a few in the fall, but no winter reports (usually a few, sometimes quite common even nesting sparsely).

RED CROSSBILL - no reports (very irregular, but a few some winters, one record of recent nesting).

HARRIS' SPARROW - no local reports, but several in Death Valley and one at Finney Lake, Imperial County (usually one or two local reports each winter).

The earliest migrants and summer residents - mostly swallows and hummingbirds - started drifting through in mid-February, but the main tide of migration does not hit until mid-April. So, most of our reports during March will be of first spring sightings - the first Kingbirds, Vireos, Warblers, Orioles and Grosbeaks are almost sure to be reported in March.

Sometimes it's difficult to distinguish the first spring migrants from wintering birds. Our two LARK BUNTINGS are a case in point. The one found on the football field during the Rose Bowl Game on January 1st has remained in that area until at least mid-March and is obviously a wintering bird. Incidentally, it is rapidly assuming summer plumage - all black with white wing patches (Jean Brandt). On Feb. 15th Shirley Wells found another LARK BUNTING at the South Coast Botanic Gardens which also remained into early March. If we had not known of the first case and other instances where a few Lark Buntings have wintered locally in recent years, we might assume that the latter bird was a very early spring migrant. Then there was a WESTERN TANAGER which called persistently and was very conspicuous in my neighborhood on March 2nd and 3rd, but was not heard before or after those dates. There are many records of tanagers wintering in our area, but I feel certain this noisy bird did not winter near home. Still more unusual was the report of a YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT at the Arcadia Arboretum on Feb. 22nd (Ray Robinson). There are almost no winter records of this secretive but vociferous large warbler, and it could not be found the next day, so we really can't say whether it had wintered nearby, or was a very early migrant. Abigail King brings us late news of one WARBLING VIREO on March 10th, and then of two the next day in the canyon near her West Los Angeles home. These are almost certainly early migrants as they seldom winter here, but the CASSIN'S KING-BIRD, which she found at the same time, might have wintered in Southern California.

February's "bird of the month" was an adult male FRIGATEBIRD (all black with a red throat pouch) seen by members of the Tucson Audubon Society at the north end of the Salton Sea on the 26th. This sighting is rather embarrassing for many of us who bird the Sea regularly, but neglect the north end in the winter. There were still thousands of SNOW GESE, two BLUE GEESE and hundreds of CANADAS on the refuges at the south end of the Sea in late February, but they were decreasing rapidly as the migratory urge took over. Nearby, at Heise Springs, California's first PYRRHULOXIA and a rare BROWN THRASHER could still be found by persistent searchers.

