

The Western Tanager

VOLUME 40, No. 4 December — January

71,000,000 BIRDS Sandy Wohlgemuth

Another Christmas approaches and, along with thoughts of sugarplums, the avid birder has visions of rare birds dancing in his head. So once again all over the United States and Canada thousands of birders (experts and novices alike) are sharpening their wits and licking their chops in anticipation of the biggest birding event of the year — the annual Christmas count. Since time immemorial — well, 1900, anyway — birdwatchers have selected a single day at the year-end holiday, deployed out within a 15-mile diameter circle and counted all the birds they could see. The uninitiated might ask: why do they do it? The answer is two-fold. First, to provide the National Audubon Society, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and other scientific groups with valuable data on birds to be used in mapping winter ranges, estimating fluctuations in populations, studying the effects of habitat changes and many more projects where voluminous computerized information on birds is valuable. Secondly, they do it because it's fun.

It can be fun just scrambling about for one day simply noticing the common birds you usually screen out as you bird: the Audubon's Warblers, for example, or the House Finches — birds that can be annoying when you're looking for a more exotic warbler or a Purple Finch. So you check them all and count them all and (if you've lived right) you might come up with a Townsend's Warbler or a Cassin's Finch — as we have on the last two counts. It can be fun covering the same area you counted last year and comparing your luck and skill. And it can even be fun getting up early on a cool December morning for a day of intensive birding and realizing that in a small way you're DOING something to help preserve the environment and open space. After last year's Los Angeles count the Department of Water and Power requested our count of Silver-lake reservoir for an Environmental Impact Report they were making. And for the past two years the Department of Parks and Recreation has asked us for our bird censuses in Griffith Park. So you see, everyone contributes: the intrepid voyagers beyond the breakwater at Marina Del Rey and the stalwart feeder-watchers in their backyards.

Christmas counts, nationwide, climb ever onward and upward. Each year seems to produce more participants, more count circles, more areas with species over 150, and more birds — 71,000,000 of them in 1972. Though accurate statistics is the proper goal of a Christmas count the irresistible lure of a high number of species is a powerful factor in this intriguing game we play. Last year Cocoa, Florida and Freeport, Texas had the highest species counts in the nation with 209. Since San Diego broke the 200-species barrier a few years ago there have been counts over that number every year. In 1950, "Audubon Field Notes" commented, "Once more, Harlingen, Texas, shattered the all-time record for number of species in the country; their new total of 172 is not likely to be broken anywhere else in this area." Famous last words: in 1971, Freeport, Texas, had the amazing total of 226 species! Last year there were 43 counts of 150 or over — a new high — with 16 of them in California alone. Our Los Angeles count of 158 was the second best in our history, exceeded only by the 1966 count of 165. Looking back it is hard to believe that between (con't on page 3)



ALASKA IN AUGUST by Herb Clarke

Although many people feel that August is not an ideal time of year to bird Alaska, circumstances would not allow us to go at any other time. All in all we did remarkably well in recording 137 species of birds, 85 varieties of wild flowers, and 21 kinds of mammals during our three weeks visit. 1973 was the year and the occasion was the Flying Carpet Tours of Orlando, Florida trip under Olga's and my leadership. Our group consisted of ten enthusiastic people from all over the lower 48, as they say in Alaska, and were from various professions, both active and retired, and included a geologist, several teachers, a chemist, and a factory manager. All shared a keen interest in natural history and most were avid photographers. Each evening we held a lively session discussing the day's activities.

Before going into detail on the birds and localities, here are some general impressions of our largest state: Bird species are not too numerous. Our daily list seldom ran more than 30 even with intensive effort. The great influx of visitors during the summer months swamps the available tourist facilities and



Horned Puffins on St. Paul Island, Pribilofs.

ALASKA IN AUGUST

(con't from page 1)

I recommend that anyone traveling to Alaska reconfirm every step of the way. Our lodging and travel arrangements were constantly being fouled up even though all were confirmed in writing far in advance. Among the places we visited, only Anchorage and Fairbanks offer a good selection of eating places and accommodations. Everywhere else options are nonexistent. However, there are many uncrowded campgrounds and other places to camp just about anywhere along the roads. Distances are vast and air travel is required to get to certain localities for some of the bird specialties. This, in addition to the high cost of everything having to be shipped in, makes traveling in Alaska very expensive. Weather is unpredictable and allowance must be made for possible diversion of flights. Fog, rain, and even snow can further reduce limited birding time.

Fortunately we encountered very few of the fabled Alaskan mosquitoes and luckily were seldom stopped or even slowed by the weather, but we were prepared for both possibilities.

After meeting in Anchorage, our first birding stop was Nome. Because of a last minute change in our itinerary, we could only spend the one day at Nome. There are a number of unpaved but good roads leading out of town passing through several different habitats. If possible, several days should be spent birding these areas. There is only one acceptable place to stay (Nugget Inn) and reservations are a must. We were advised by the airline that there was only a 40% chance of our landing at Nome due to local weather conditions. However, by the time we arrived the sky was beginning to clear and we enjoyed a beautiful day, one of the few they had there this summer. We spent our limited time along the coast on the road to Port Safety. Some of the interesting birds we recorded were Aleutian and Arctic Terns, Common Eider, Yellow Wagtail, Long-tailed Jaeger, Hudsonian Godwit, Lapland Longspur, and Glaucous Gull. Although some of the resident birds had moved out and none of the super specialties were present, we did well and the visiting birder to Alaska should include Nome in his planning.

St. Paul Island in the Pribilof group in the Bering Sea was our next stop. We stayed about four days. But if time is limited, it is possible to fly in one day and leave the next day and pick up most, if not all, the specialties. Using a school bus, our driver-guide was very cooperative, taking us wherever we wanted to go and allowing us to stop as often as we wished. The bird rookeries were a marvelous spectacle and the wild flowers were dazzling. We had a delightful time photographing, birding, and watching the Alaska fur seal which is abundant here. We also enjoyed the comical antics of a family of Arctic blue foxes, the major predator of the island. Accommodations at the St. Paul Hotel were fairly good and hearty meals were served family-style. Prices were high as would be expected in such an out-of-the-way place. Here again we were fortunate with the weather. Our plane was the first one in two weeks to land and although the sky never fully cleared, it was bright enough to photograph. Some special birds observed were Black-legged Kittiwakes, Snow Bunting, the large, dark race of the Gray-crowned Rosy Finch (the English Sparrow of St. Paul), Crested, Least and Parakeet Auklets, Horned and Tufted Puffins, Fulmar, Common and Thick-billed Murres, Harlequin Duck, Oldsquaw, Red-faced Cormorant, and Rock Sandpiper still in breeding plumage.



Mt. McKinley on a rare clear day.

From St. Paul we flew back to Anchorage, transferred planes, and after a night's stay in Fairbanks, continued on to Barrow. Birding opportunities are limited at Barrow as there are no roads leading out from town. If time is limited, Barrow could be eliminated because it is possible to pick up elsewhere most, if not all, of the local birds. We spent only one day there and felt that was sufficient. Again we were lucky and enjoyed a beautiful sunny day, the first the area had in quite some time. Some of the birds added to our list were Snowy Owl, King and Steller's Eiders, Bar-tailed Godwit, and Sabine's Gull. Near Point Barrow we enjoyed watching the streams of King and Common Eiders flying directly overhead, but it was a little disconcerting having near us, local residents constantly shooting at these ducks. This is one of the few ways the local Eskimos can procure meat easily as all food is very expensive in Barrow.

The next morning at Fairbanks we boarded the Alaska Railroad train to Mt. McKinley National Park. The four hour ride to the park was very pleasant. The vista dome cars enabled us to view the interesting countryside in comfort.

Mt. McKinley National Park is a must for even the most casual visitor to Alaska. The magnificent scenery, the large animals, the wild flowers, together with excellent birding combined to make this stay one of the highlights of our tour. Having our own vehicle with a driver-guide enabled us to explore points along the one road at our leisure. We could stop wherever and whenever we wanted to bird, photograph, or watch animals such as grizzly, dall sheep, fox, wolf, caribou, and moose. Weather was generally good but we did encounter some early season snow storms. Wheatears and Willow Ptarmigan were much harder to locate. The most spectacular birds were the three Gyrfalcons performing unforgettable aerial displays and the perky Hawk-Owls perched on the tops of the spruce trees and even once on a sign post.

Accommodations at McKinley were unique. A disastrous fire last year had razed part of the lodge and as a substitute, sleeper railroad cars were set up. These ranged from fair to terrible, with plumbing poor to nonexisting. The rooms in the remaining part of the lodge were excellent. Crowds of people were constantly arriving and departing. However, this great amount of confusion and poor service did not detract from our enjoyment of the park. Private vehicles other than those of the registered campers are not allowed. There are free shuttle buses which run at frequent intervals, permitting anyone to get

(con't on page 3)

CALIFORNIA DESERT PLAN ADOPTION

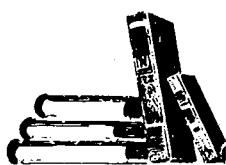
by Pamela Green

Although a "final" plan for California desert use had been adopted as of November 1 by the Bureau of Land Management, many areas are still of undetermined designation.

Owing to our intense efforts to change the proposed status of Jawbone Canyon and Dove Spring, previously described as areas 8 & 9 in the BLM's preliminary plan, we were directly responsible for their decision to withhold a final use designation in the Jawbone Canyon area until a very thorough environmental investigation is established.

The Bureau of Land Management is appreciative of our concern and interest in this specific area of the Mojave desert and would like to enlist a group of birders willing to conduct a bird survey in addition to their staff-operated review. If you would like to volunteer your services and join our group, please contact me at 398-2955. Your assistance is needed.

We would like to be responsible in part for the preservation of this small portion of the vast California deserts. The first victory has been won but the battle rages on. Your letters still count. Show the BLM you support the Society's position on Jawbone Canyon. WRITE TO: California Desert Plan Director, Bureau of Land Management, P.O. Box 723, Riverside, CA 92502.



Book Store

At present we have a large supply of "Field Guide to Mexican Birds" by Peterson so we hope to be able to fill the necessary orders promptly throughout the holidays. At the same time we have reordered "Mexican Bird Songs" by Irby Davis which feature 74 most representative birds of Mexico on a single record. While we are south of the border, we have on present order a newly published book "Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago" by R. French and illustrated beautifully by J. O'Neill. The text includes extensive information on each 400 species of birds described many of which are located in Venezuela and Guianas.

"Sea Birds" is a very special kind of new book by D. Saunders. It covers birds that soar, skim, flit and swim across oceans of the world and describes the biological adaptations necessary for a life at sea. At this point I would like to mention that we also have "Wind Birds" by P. Matthiessen. The author won wide recognition for his text in Shorebirds of N. America and this recent book is an extensively revised version of the same text with 25 black and white drawings by R. Gillmor.

Proudly we are happy to announce that Arnold Small's book "Birds of California" is about to be released. We have been in much need of an up-to-date book on the natural habitats of Calif and the 500 species of birds that inhabit them. Soon looking forward to having it on our shelves here at Audubon House.

Members OF THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY SINCE THE FORTIES

There may be others besides these 39 members. The records are not too accurate from these early years. The earliest starting date listed by National on the annual is 10-61 when joint membership was initiated.

— Ruth Lohr, Registrar

<i>Mr. O.H. Ady</i>	4-45
<i>Mrs. Nona Armington</i>	4-49
<i>Mr. Arthur G. Barton</i>	11-46
<i>Dr. Elmer Belt</i>	7-45
<i>Mrs. J.B. Benson</i>	4-49
<i>Mr. Frederick Blunt</i>	11-47
<i>Frank H. Boynton</i>	4-48
<i>Miss Luana Chadwick</i>	11-48
<i>Mr. & Mrs. Clarence Cleminshaw</i>	12-47
<i>Dr. Roberta Crutcher</i>	7-45
<i>Mr. & Mrs. J.D. Findlater</i>	7-46
<i>Mrs. Catherine Freeman</i>	11-43
<i>Mr. Antonio Gamero</i>	11-45
<i>Mr. & Mrs. Clem Glass</i>	2-49
<i>Dorothy Goddard</i>	9-44
<i>Mrs. Joseph Harper</i>	4-45
<i>Guy Haselton</i>	6-45
<i>Mrs. John Hecker</i>	4-45
<i>Mrs. John Holt</i>	10-45
<i>Mrs. Mary Hood</i>	10-47
<i>Mrs. W.S. Hook</i>	4-45
<i>Mr. & Mrs. Wendell Hoss</i>	9-48
<i>Miss Hilda Jellison</i>	10-48
<i>Mrs. W. Scott Lewis</i>	8-41
<i>Mrs. Wayne F. Lohr</i>	10-42
<i>Mr. Albyn Mackintosh*</i>	10-46
<i>Mr. Charles Mackintosh</i>	9-48
<i>Mr. & Mrs. Earl Mahaffie</i>	10-48
<i>Mrs. Ada E. Mangson</i>	7-45
<i>Miss Ethel Morris</i>	2-49
<i>Mr. & Mrs. George Nielsen</i>	3-49
<i>Miss Ruth Price</i>	5-42
<i>Dr. Calla Starbuck</i>	5-49
<i>Miss Irene Surola</i>	10-49
<i>Dr. Robert Taylor</i>	10-44
<i>Mrs. Georgie Ware</i>	3-42
<i>Mrs. George E. Webster</i>	8-46
<i>Mrs. Cornelius Willis</i>	8-48
<i>Mr. Robin Willis</i>	7-45
<i>Hiram Beebe (deceased)</i>	12-46

*Resigned 10-73

FOWLPOX ON HOUSE FINCHES

Dr. Dennis Power and Gerrie Human of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History are still studying House Finches affected with Fowlpox. The pox occurs as a growth where feathers are absent. Of interest to the research is the location and date seen, sex and location of the pox. Please send information to Gerrie Human, P.O. Box 287, Summerland, CA 93067. Many thanks to readers who responded last spring.

audubon activities

DONALD ADAMS

TIJUANA RIVER BOTTOM, Oct. 13. All the smog from Los Angeles hovered over the San Diego area but the Tijuana River area seemed freer. It was pleasantly warm with a nice breeze and excellent birding. The 14 members saw 81 species in about 7 hours. Highlights of the day were: a **GOLDEN EAGLE** perched 20 feet from the caravan; an **OSPREY** hunting, then feeding in the state park; and in the tamarisk trees the chance to study a **PHILADELPHIA VIREO**, **TOWNSEND'S**, **AUDUBON'S** and **BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLERS**. The day was for the raptors — 3 **GOLDEN EAGLES**, a **SHARP-SHINNED** (hunting down **WESTERN SANDPIPER**s), 2 **COOPER'S**, several **SPARROW** and **MARSH HAWKS**, at least 3 **REDTAILS**, plus the **OSPREY**. The park ranger reported 3 **WHITE-TAILED KITES** in the area but we were not able to find them. There was one **CATTLE EGRET**, several **GREATER YELLOWLEGS**, 4 species of terns, several **BLACK** and **SAY'S PHOEBES**. **ROUGH-WINGED** and **BARN SWALLOWS**, dozens of **WATER PIPITS** and **HORNED LARKS** were flocking together. A few **TRICOLORED BLACKBIRDS** were in among the **RED-WINGED** and **BREWER'S**. We called out the **LONG-BILLED MARSH WRENS** and observed **EARED**, **PIED-BILLED** and **WESTERN GREBES**, dozens of **PELICANS** and some **NORTHERN PHALAROPES**. Otto Widmann, leader.

UPPER NEWPORT BAY, Oct. 21. About 26 members and guests began the day under intermittent drizzles and a heavy overcast that persisted to midday. However, sightings were normal except for the following observations: some surprise at seeing neither **YELLOWLEGS** or **SPOTTED SANDPIPER**s, best waterfowl were **GADWALLS**, and some surprise at the considerable number of **YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRDS** among the hundreds of blackbirds on the power lines overlooking the UCI marsh. In all, 67 species were seen. In preference to a more detailed sighting report the leader would like to say that we were happy to have a number of birders who were relative newcomers to winter-plumaged shorebirds and waterfowl. The day was enhanced by their questions and interest in comparing and studying the large numbers of birds available. Thanks also to the skilled members whose participation and instruction was most helpful. Freeman Tatum, leader.

BUTTERBREAD SPRING, Oct. 27-28. This field trip got underway beneath clear skies, pleasant temperatures and perfect fall desert weather conditions. Our first stop was at Butterbread Spring where a short hike down the canyon started our bird list off with the usual desert residents including **SAGE** and **BLACK-THROATED SPARROWS** and **MOUNTAIN QUAIL**, but no **LECONTE'S THRASHER**. A drive over the Gold Peak road, with only one slight mishap, provided a glorious view of the Mojave Desert. At noon we pulled into the campsite, lunched briefly, then made our way along Kelso Creek where we saw **LADDER-BACKED**, **NUT-TALL'S** and **DOWNY WOODPECKERS**, **RED-SHAFTED FLICKERS**, and flushed a **COMMON SNIPE**. During the night **GREAT HORNED OWLS** were heard calling and several

SCREECH OWLS joined the serenade. **EVENING GROSBEAKS** in several flocks passed over our camp during the early morning on Sunday. We listed a total of 50 species including 9 mountain birds seen as we made our way home over the Piute Mountains. Keith Axelson and Pamela Greene, leaders.

CHANNEL ISLANDS PELAGIC TRIP, Nov. 4. Approximately 40 people enjoyed a beautiful fall day on a trip to the Channel Islands. Anacapa Island was completely circled and the channel was covered. Pelagic birds seen of interest were **JAEGERS**, **KITTIWAKES**, **FULMARS**, **RED PHALAROPES** and only a very few **SHEARWATER (SOOTY and PINK-FOOTED)**. Alcids seen were a number of **COMMON MURRES** and a few **CASSIN'S AUKLETS**. Probably the best bird for a number of people was the **AMERICAN OYSTER-CATCHER** observed from the boat at 50 feet. This was a life bird for many and although this bird is apparently a resident, it is not seen on every trip. **BLACK OYSTERCATCHERS** were common. In all, 45 species were seen. Bruce Broadbooks, leader.



The Annual Dinner of the Los Angeles Audubon Society will be held Tuesday, February 12, 1974. Reception 6:30 p.m., Dinner 7:30 p.m. — Tenderloin of Beef Brochette. Price: \$6.90 per person (includes sales tax and gratuity). Place:

THE LOBSTER HOUSE
4211 Admiralty Way
Marina Del Rey

located on the Marina near Palawan Way, reached from Washington Street or Lincoln Boulevard via Bali Way. Marina Del Rey can be reached from Route 405 (San Diego Freeway) by taking the Marina offramp and proceeding to Lincoln Boulevard.

The evening program will feature the Society's president, Dr. Gerald Maisel, and Mrs. Maisel, presenting their "Alaskan Odyssey."



IN MEMORIUM

Hiram Beebe, a member of the Los Angeles Audubon Society since the 1940's died on August 9th at 87. Mr. Beebe developed an interest in nature at an early age and for a number of years banded birds for the U.S. Dept. of the Interior in his native South Dakota. He maintained a lively interest in the activities of the society, in particular in the displays and the yard at Audubon House. Well known to all staff members, his visits to Audubon House were greatly enjoyed by them.

Los Angeles Audubon Society

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

Dr. Gerald Maisel, PRESIDENT

Agnes Evans, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Calendar

**Audubon
Bird Reports
874-1318**

Thu, Dec. 6 EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING, 8 p.m., Audubon House.

Mon, Dec. 10 NEWPORT BAY, Meet at 8:30 a.m. at west end of Back Bay Dr. behind Newport Inn. High tide will occur. Phil Sayre, 476-5121.

Tue, Dec. 11 EVENING MEETING, 8 p.m., Plummer Park. Dr. Clyde Bergman will show his motion picture of Africa, featuring a trip down the Nile in northern Uganda.

Sat, Dec. 15 SEA & SAGE FIELD TRIP, UCI Marsh in the afternoon and an evening Owl Prowl. Leader: Pete Bloom. For further information call the Sea & Sage Audubon Society.

Sun, Dec. 30 LOS ANGELES CHRISTMAS COUNT. Chairman, Sandy Wohlgemuth, 19354 Calvert St., Reseda, CA 91535. Phone: 344-8531.

Thu, Jan. 3 EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING, 8 p.m., Audubon House.

Sun, Jan. 6 MALIBU LAGOON & TAPIA PARK. Meet at 8:30 a.m. in the supermarket parking lot adjacent to the lagoon. Leader: George Ledec. ~~5420 Russell Ave #20, 217-9027~~

Tue, Jan. 8 EVENING MEETING, 8 p.m., Plummer Park. Dr. Hartmut Walter of the UCLA Dept. of Geography will give an illustrated program, Life & Habits of Eleanora's Falcon, most unusual bird.

Sat, Jan. 12 BUENA VISTA LAGOON. Meet at 8:30 a.m. Take the San Diego Freeway south to Oceanside. Leave freeway north of town, taking the right-hand road that leads through Oceanside. Meet at the north end of the road that crosses the lagoon. Leader: Les Wood, 256-3980.

Sun, Jan. 13 MCGRATH STATE PARK & SANTA CLARA RIVER MOUTH. Meet at 8:30 a.m. in the Park.

Mon, Jan. 14 MALIBU LAGOON. Meet at Malibu Inn parking lot opposite Malibu Pier between 8 & 8:30. Group will bird along coast to Mugu and Santa Clara if time permits. Leader: Ed Navajosky, 938-9766.

Sat Jan. 26 & Sun, &27 SALTON SEA. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at Wister turnoff on Highway 111 about 36 miles south of Mecca, north of Niland. Those wishing to camp Friday or Saturday nights may do so at Finney Lake about 1½ miles south of Calipatria. Bring firewood and water. There are motels in Brawley. This is an excellent trip for wintering waterfowl and shorebirds.

Sat Feb. 2 & Sun, & 3 MORRO BAY. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the foot of Morro Rock. This is one of our best areas for wintering costal birds; it also provides excellent birding in wooded areas and canyons in the vicinity. Many people go up Friday night in order to have a full day Saturday and a half day Sunday. There is camping at Morro Bay State Park or many motels located in Morro Bay and San Luis Obispo. Morro Bay is approximately 210 miles north of Los Angeles via US 101. Leader: Jim Clements, 472-3902.

Thu, Feb. 7 EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING, 8 p.m., Audubon House.

Sat, Feb. 9 MORRO BAY (same as above). Leader to be announced.

Tue, Feb. 12 ANNUAL DINNER. (See notice elsewhere and enclosure.)

Field Trip Information: The society cannot be responsible for transportation. Bring binoculars and lunch on all trips. No pets and no collecting permitted. Leader is responsible for the first day, only, on weekend trips. The Los Angeles Audubon Society and its authorized leaders accept no responsibility for the protection or well-being of persons attending field trips, or for any accident, personal or otherwise, incurred during a society sponsored field trip.

Annual subscription to "The Western Tanager" is \$3.50; first-class postage, \$4.50. The Tanager is free to members assigned by the National Audubon Society to the Los Angeles Audubon Society. By sending \$1.00 to Chapter Headquarters, Chapter members may receive the Tanager first class.

Official Publication of the
Los Angeles Audubon Society

The Western Tanager

EDITOR	...	...	...	...	...	...	Gilbert W. King
Field Notes	...	...	...	...	...	...	Shumway Suffel
Audubon Activities	...	...	...	...	...	...	Donald Adams
Calendar	...	...	...	...	...	...	Caroline Adams
Typing	...	...	...	...	...	...	Hanna Stadler
Mailing Supervision	...	...	...	...	...	...	Hans Hjorth

ALASKA IN AUGUST

(con't from page 2)

off or on anywhere along the road. This allows leisurely enjoyment of the park while reducing vehicular traffic.

The pelagic birding trip out of Kodiak was another high point of the tour. We saw again many of the birds we listed on the Pribilofs with the addition of Bald Eagle, Kittlitz' and Ancient Murrelets, Sooty and Slender-billed Shearwaters, Fork-tailed Petrel, and Rhinoceros Auklet. Land birding was only fair with all the birds being about the same as seen in our Pacific Northwest. The Kodiak Travelodge and its restaurant were very good.

The tour ended at Girdwood, a posh skiing resort just south of Anchorage, a region of spectacular scenery complete with hanging glaciers. Heavy rains which greatly handicapped our activities finally caught up to us here, but we all enjoyed the restful ending of an exciting trip.

71,000,000 BIRDS

(con't from page 1)

1944 and 1953 the Los Angeles count was in the top four every year. We had the highest counts in the nation on four occasions during that period from 132 (!) in 1944 to 151 in 1946 and 1952. The fact that we did so well last year in spite of the enormous urbanization of this city since the war is a remarkable achievement. The spectacular leap from 132 to 226 species over the years is a tribute to the growth of birding and the more meticulous coverage by more sophisticated birders all over the country.

Last year our Los Angeles count, in addition to the expected Ringed Turtle Doves, had the nation's greatest number of Costa's Hummingbirds, Wrentits, California Thrashers, Brown Towhees and Audubon's Warblers. Certainly nothing to be sneezed at. Our chaparral, by the way, has given us the highest count of Scrub Jays on record: 890 in 1964. The most enticing thing about a Christmas count is the possibility of a rare bird. It may appear anywhere. Even you might see it. Last year was particularly bountiful: Pygmy Nuthatch, Mountain Plover, Red Phalarope, Sandhill Crane, Sage Thrasher, Black-chinned Sparrow, Harlequin Duck, Red Crossbill and more. Since 1948 there have been 267 species of birds seen on our count, many of them showing up only once. Listen to some of these beauties: Prairie Falcon, Pomarine Jaeger, Spotted Owl, Long-eared Owl, Coues' Flycatcher, Yellow-billed Magpie, Verdin, Abert's Towhee, Black-throated Sparrow. Fairly makes your mouth water! (By the way, last year's Mountain Plover and Sandhill Crane were the first ever on an LA count.)

Anticipation is half the fun: what will we find this year? We'll certainly lose some of our prize rarities and we can only hope we'll replace them with new surprises. And of course we have to keep slogging away at the meat-and-potatoes birds or some of them are likely to get away. Our fine count last year was more than just a matter of luck. It was 103 observers out there stirring up the pea patch and bringing home the birds. So what we find this year depends on you. One of our count leaders last year noted on his report, "This is a fine territory but it needs more eyes to cover it. We simply couldn't cover it properly." This year he'll get some more help if we all pitch in. Sunday, December 30th is the day. Pitch in, gang. Write or call Sandy Wohlgemuth, 19354 Calvert St., Reseda, CA 91335; 344-8531.

ALASKAN JAILED FOR EAGLE KILLING

A belated report from Alaska informs us that Lloyd Thynes of St. Petersburg was fined \$1000 and sentenced to 30 days in jail for killing two bald eagles last spring; that's tough action for a state that not long ago was paying bounties to eagle killers.

THAYER'S GULL

Since it was first described and named by Brooks in 1915, the poor Thayer's Gull has been shuffled from one taxonomic group to another. At one time or another, it has been lumped with the Herring Gull or the Kumlien's Gull (the latter now considered a subspecies of the Iceland Gull), or it has been called a separate species. In the latest Supplement to the AOU Checklist, it has been granted official species status.

Now that you can add it to your life list, how do you identify it? It's not easy, but with a little patience, you should be able to pick one out of our wintering populations of gulls.

Thayer's Gull nests in Central and Western Arctic Canada, and in N.W. Greenland, on precipitous cliffs, between 100 and 300 feet high. They winter along the Pacific Coast, from British Columbia to California, and occasionally to Baja California.

The birds look very much like Herring Gulls. As a matter of fact, that's the first step toward identifying one; find a Herring Gull and see if it isn't a Thayer's Gull.

Thayer's Gull tends to be slightly smaller than a Herring Gull, about 5%. The bill is about 10% slimmer; a thin bill is the first field mark to look for.

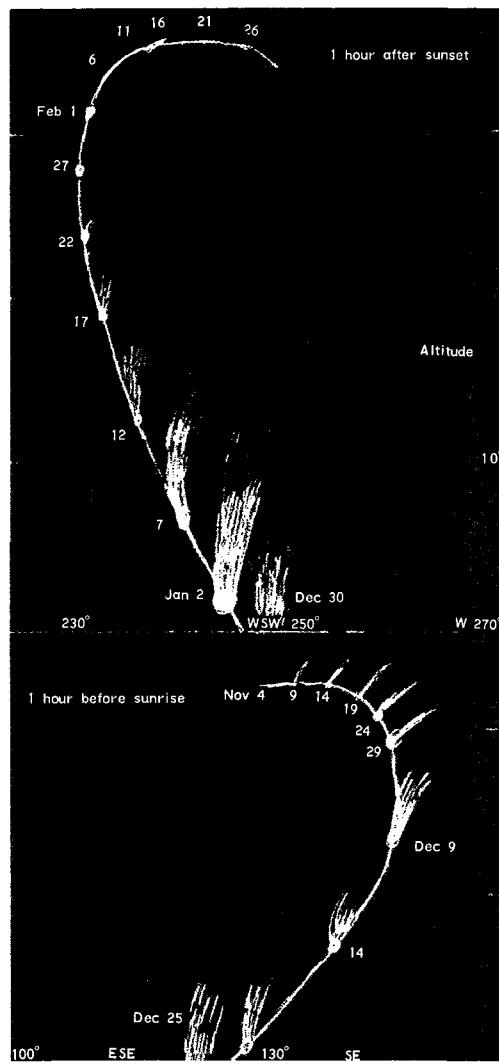
Adult Thayer's Gulls have darker eyes than adult Herring Gulls. The eye ring on a Thayer's Gull tends toward a dusky rose, sometimes even a light purple, while that of the Herring Gull is usually yellow or orange. Also, the iris of the adult Thayer's Gull is usually speckled with brown, while that of the adult Herring Gull is usually pale yellow. Immature Herring Gulls, however, may have a browner iris.

The bill of the Herring Gull tends toward a brighter yellow, and the spot is redder, while the Thayer's Gull's bill has a slight greenish cast with a duller spot, but this probably isn't a very useful field mark except under ideal conditions.

The wingtips of the Herring Gull are usually blacker, and contrast more strongly with the paler mantle of that species. The wingtips of the Thayer's Gull are paler, with more white spots, and don't contrast as strongly with the mantle. From below, the wingtips of the Thayer's Gull may look as pale as those of a Glaucous-winged Gull, and a flying gull with dark wingtips above, and pale wingtips below, is probably a Thayer's. By the way, be careful; Thayer's Gulls with paler wingtips above tend to have paler eyes like a Herring Gull, while Thayer's Gulls with nice dark eyes may have wingtips nearly as dark as a Herring Gull's.

Immature Thayer's Gulls are even more difficult to identify. The young Thayer's Gull looks like a pale immature Herring Gull with a thin bill and a dark eye ring. Don't be fooled by the dark iris of the young Herring Gull. As hard as it is to see, the purplish *eye ring* of the Thayer's Gull is a reliable field mark, in all plumages.

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THE GREAT? COMET OF 1973

As we go to press, it seems that the Kouhoutek comet of 1973 will be a spectacle of a life-time, just before and after Christmas. Comets are small bodies resident in the outermost regions of the solar system, well beyond the orbit of Pluto. It has only recently been realized that the reason for their unpredictable appearance in the sky near the Sun is a subtle consequence of Newton's laws of motion. Jupiter is a very large planet — almost qualifying as a companion double star of the Sun, and it can, when their positions and motions are suitable, attract a small body, accelerating it inwards to the Sun. The reverse of this is the mechanics of the Grand Tour in which a small (man-made) satellite is sent from the Earth away from the Sun, close by Jupiter and expelled into the remote regions of the Solar system — as will be the case with Pioneer.

These objects are about a mile across, and are composed of dirty icebergs, surrounding a small solid ex-asteroid. One once passed between Jupiter and its moon Amalthea, but its tiny mass did not perturb the moon in the least. As they enter the habitable precincts of the solar system, the "ice" melts and vaporizes, leaving a tail which can on occasion fill the whole sky.

Great comets were seen in 1811, 1848, 1855, 1861 and 1882. Halley's Comet which was a great spectacle in the year 1900 is due in 1980, but because of weight loss may not be visible at all next time around.

The new orbits of comets toward and around the Sun persist for several revolutions, so that some of them are reasonable predictable regular visitors to our neighborhood. However, the sublimation on their passage by the Sun clearly reduces them in size, so in a few orbits they are invisible. Why then do objects with a lifetime a small fraction of the history of the solar system exist in this day and age? There are some ten billion of these bodies in the cold storage of remote regions of space — and periodically one gets under the influence of the Jupiter-Sun field of attractions.

To see this comet one should go to a place where the sky is dark, not full of scattered city light, with a clear view to a low horizon in the South-East for morning viewing before Christmas, and in the South-West after Christmas — Remember it may never be seen again.

CALIFORNIA BIRDS

(con't from page 8)

San Francisco." This was a little before my time, but should not have been beyond my knowledge, as it is quoted from "Distribution of the Birds of California" by Grinnell and Miller. Dave was the first of many birders to report two males and a female VERMILION FLYCATCHERS on Oct. 22 at Legg Lake, where they sometimes "winter." Ed Navajosky reports a late ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER at McGrath Park on Oct. 29 (they usually depart by mid-Sept.). On the same day, Ed found a late NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH above Malibu Lagoon, and a BLACKPOLL WARBLER there on Oct. 11. Wendell Mayes and Colleen Mahan found a concentration of birds around a pond in the recently burned-out LaJolla Canyon area of Malibu on Oct. 4, and were excited by the sighting of a rare BROWN THRASHER. The presence of an adult male ORCHARD ORIOLE at John and Pat Hoffman's feeder on Mt. Washington in October provided justification and fuel for Jack Smith's column in the L.A. Times on Nov. 8. At least two of the BOBOLINKS at the So. Coast Botanic Gardens stayed well into October (Jean Brandt and Ruth Lohr). The other coastal reports are of warblers — a BLACKBURNIAN and a PALM on Oct. 8 at McGrath Park (Harry Kreuger), another PALM at Pt. Fermin on Oct. 12 (Hal Baxter), a reported MAGNOLIA above Malibu Lagoon about Nov. 8 (Bob Bechler), and best of all, a PAINTED REDSTART seen briefly but independently by both Gilbert and Abigail King in their West L.A. garden on Nov. 1 and 3.

With winter well entrenched, we cannot expect the rare birds of the late fall migration, but, as we settle down, we shall learn to treasure each new winter species, and with Christmas Counts and Year Lists to be started after January 1st, there will be plenty of activity in the birder's world. Although the pickings will be slim, an offshore boat trip might provide a rare SHORT-TAILED (SLENDER-BILLED) SHEARWATER, a northern alcid, or a pelagic gull. Some of these birds can be seen from the coastal promontories or in the deep-water harbors, as can be Scoters, Oldsquaws, three species of Loons and Red-necked Grebes. The coastal lagoons will have ducks and shorebirds by the thousands and probably a few southern herons to spice up the winter days. The ducks, and particularly the geese at the Salton Sea are a recurring treat, which should not be missed, but possibly should be postponed until the end of the hunting season. In the farmlands nearby three species of Longspurs and Mountain Plovers have been found, but this birding is not for the faint at heart or the weak of legs. It's hard work and the rewards may be only sore muscles and an aching back. I'll see you there.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA Birds



Year's End finds us busy with the Holidays and Christmas Counts. If the events of the Holidays haven't filled your time, the Christmas Counts surely can. With nearly sixty "Counts" in California and twenty-four in our area, from Death Valley to the Salton Sea and along the coast from Santa Barbara to San Diego, and with every chairman anxious to add willing counters to his troop, there is no need to be idle.

A visit to Upper Newport Bay during the high tides of early November disclosed tens of thousands of ducks and shorebirds, three species of rails, and an Osprey, (Jean Brandt saw two there on Oct. 15), but nary a sign of a Black Rail or a Sharp-tailed Sparrow, the particular object of our search.

Russ and Marion Wilson, winter visitors at Huntington Beach, have been birding the beach and the pier almost daily, and report the first BONAPARTE'S GULLS on Nov. 2 and with them two BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKES (almost absent from the California coast during the last two winters). The Nov. 4 pelagic trip to Anacapa Island also spotted a few Kittiwakes, so maybe they will be with us again this winter in their usual small numbers. The Wilsons' best bird was a SABINE'S GULL, "badly oiled" as nearly all on-shore "Sabine's" have been in the past. This beautiful small gull is strictly pelagic. Two FRANKLIN'S GULLS (one of our rarer gulls) were seen — one near Anacapa Island on Nov. 4, and another at Harbor Lake on Nov. 7 (Shirley Wells). SURF SCOTERS increased along the coast in early November, the first WHITE-WINGED SCOTERS arrived, and on Nov. 9 the Wilsons found a female OLDSQUAW and five BLACK (COMMON) SCOTERS, a large number for Southern Calif. More than ten were seen in Drake's Bay, north of San Francisco, where they are regular. Oct. 29 at Pt. Reyes, ROUGH-LEGGED HAWKS were seldom out of sight: more than a dozen were seen during the morning. A week later, along Hwy 5 near Los Banos, equally large numbers were reported by Mike San Miguel. They should be looked for locally as we have a first sighting by Chuck Sexton above Newport Bay on Nov. 12. Jean Brandt's weekend at Mojave Narrows Park provided nine species of raptors, including a single FERRUGINOUS HAWK. Hal Baxter observed another "Ferruginous" and more than two hundred MOUNTAIN PLOVERS in the Antelope Valley Nov. 9, while searching unsuccessfully for Longspurs. Four days later Harry Kreuger found both CHESTNUT-COLLARED and LAPLAND LONGSPURS in the same area, but very few hawks and no Mountain Plovers.

Invading passerine species from the north (and the mountains) were very low in numbers, in contrast with last winter's abundance. A few RED-BREASTED NUTHATCHES were found in West Los Angeles and at Pt. Fermin by Abigail King and Joan Mills on Oct. 30, but Chickadees were virtually unreported. A very few GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLETS were seen in the lowlands, but we can expect more, as they are unusually common this fall in the central valleys and along the coast north of San Francisco. A WINTER WREN (unusual even in winter here) was found in the Morongo Valley area (Jerry Johnson) and a small flock of CEDAR WAXWINGS was seen just north of Desert Center, (they are usually widespread by mid-November).



SHUM SUFFEL

The most sought after bird of the fall was the BAR-TAILED GODWIT at Bolinas Lagoon, north of San Francisco. It has stayed from the day of its discovery, Oct. 25, to at least Nov. 15, and may well winter there as it remained through the series of storms in early November. This Godwit sent many of us to our reference books. It obviously belongs to the Pacific race (E. Siberia and Alaska) which is larger, and darker, particularly on the rump and tail, than the European Godwit which is usually illustrated (e.g. Palmer "Shorebirds of North America").

The three BLACK-BELLIED TREE DUCKS at the Wister unit of the Salton Sea Refuge were also widely seen and admired. The BLUE JAY (3rd California record) at Panamint City could be seen only in a photograph taken in October, as it apparently moved through. Even if it had stayed, it would have been hard to see as Panamint City is accessible only by four-wheel drive.

The weekend of Nov. 4 ended a fantastic two months of rare birds, during which time Guy McCaskie and Jon Dunn, our two most devoted and energetic birders (but only by a very small margin) exceeded the goals set in the October "Tanager" — 15 flycatchers, 30 warblers and 45 seedeaters. Their two real "bonanzas" were a weekend on San Nicholas Island with Lee Jones and two weeks later on a long jaunt to seven desert oases from Desert Center to Death Valley. On San Nicholas they found a BROWN THRASHER, an OVENBIRD, two TENNESSEES and a BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER, a SUMMER TANAGER, two ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAKS, two CHESNUT-COLLARED and one LAPLAND LONGSPUR. As if this were not enough it was exceeded on the second weekend, where they found a YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER of the Eastern race (probably a separate species), two CAPE MAY WARBLERS, two BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLERS, a BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER, two BLACKBURNIAN WARBLERS, two RUSTY BLACKBIRDS, a DICKCISSEL (seen earlier by the Venattas), two TREE SPARROWS, three WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS, and a SWAMP SPARROW. Other observers supplemented their findings with an EASTERN PHOEBE at Panamint Springs on Nov. 11 (Van Remsen), a late GRAY FLYCATCHER at Morongo on Nov. 13 (Hal Baxter), two TENNESSEE WARBLERS at Kelso Station on Nov. 3 (Rich Stallcup), a male BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER at Morongo on Oct. 13 (S.S.) and a female BLACK-THROATED BLUE at Scotty's Castle the same day (G. McC. and J.D.), a BLACKBURNIAN in Covington Park, Morongo, on Oct. 27 (the Cardiffs), an immature CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER near Desert Center on Nov. 13 (Hal Baxter), a CHESTNUT-COLLARED LONGSPUR at Furnace Creek on Nov. 8 (Jerry Johnson), and two GRAY-HEADED JUNCOS in Covington Park on Nov. 13 (H.B. and J.J.).

Although our coastal plain from Santa Barbara to San Diego could hardly match the rare birds at the desert oases, birding coastally was far from dull. Dave Foster reminds me that ROSEATE SPOONBILLS have been "reported" on the Pacific Coast before, by Gambel in 1849, who states "(small flocks) have several times extended up the coast even as far as (con't on page 7)