

# The Western Tanager

VOLUME 41, 1974 - 1975 No. 5

February



## UNUSUAL BIRDS OF 1974

Shumway  
Suffel

**1974** was a year for unusual birds, but not for significant avian events such as the invasion by Blue-footed Boobies in the late summer of 1971, the irruption of northern and mountain birds into our low-lands in the early winter of 1972, or the unprecedented flight of Roseate Spoonbills to the Salton Sea and the coast in the summer of 1973.

1974's birds gave us six new species for the California list. According to Guy McCaskie's latest summary, there have been eighty-nine new species added to the California list since the publication of "Grinnell and Miller" in 1944.

**RUFIOUS-BACKED ROBIN** - Found 17 December 1973 near Imperial Dam on the Colorado River, it stayed there until early March of 1974.

**RUFIOUS-NECKED SANDPIPER** - Found near Eureka on 17 June in distinctive summer plumage. Another specimen in winter plumage at the Salton Sea on 17 August was distinguished in the field from the almost identical Semipalmated Sandpiper by lack of webbing between the toes.

**DOTTEREL** - First seen 12 September on the Farallon Islands where it stayed for several days and was photographed.

**SULPHUR-BELLIED FLYCATCHER** - Discovered in Big Sycamore Canyon, Malibu, on 22 September. It stayed for ten days and was widely seen.

**VEERY** - First accepted record (there have been earlier sightings). Found at Big Sycamore Canyon on 22 September. The bird stayed for a week.

**SPRAGUE'S PIPIT** - Two or more seen in a cut-over alfalfa field below San Diego from 19 to at least 25 October.

**GROOVE-BILLED ANI** - Found in the San Jacinto River channel 18 miles southeast of Riverside on 4 November and seen for ten days.

**L**AST WINTER was highlighted by the presence of Snowy Owls in unprecedented numbers. More than forty were in northern and central California, and an invasion of Rough-legged Hawks even reached Southern California. California's second Piping Plover was found at Malibu Lagoon and reappeared again this October. Also seen there were Southern California's first King Eider, and the perennial Harlequin Duck stayed in the channel at Marina del Rey, and the drake Tufted Duck returned to Lake Sherwood for the second winter (and again this winter). The first winter occurrence of a Swainson's Hawk was well documented near Bard, on the Colorado River on 5 January as was a Curve-billed Thrasher. Another Curve-billed was seen at Brock Ranch in April. A Coues' Flycatcher in Presidio Park, San Diego, for two months after 20 January was the seventh California record. Two Rusty Blackbirds (hardly ever seen in winter) were found along the Santa Ynez River near Solvang. An Eastern Phoebe in Tuna Canyon, Malibu, on 3 March probably should be considered a winter straggler, not a migrant.

**S**PRING MIGRATION as usual started in February with the arrival of the first hummingbirds and swallows, but it was May before the flood tide of migration hit the coastal areas. Among the earliest passerines was a Western Kingbird at Rancho Santa Fe and an Ash-throated Flycatcher in Topanga Canyon, both on 3 March. A small flock of Warbling Vireos at a desert oasis in San Diego County on 10 March and by 18 April Russ and Marion Wilson reported from Morongo Valley that "migrants packed into this oasis by the thousands." So it went until Memorial Day weekend when a shower of rare birds hit the oases in the Inyo-Mono region — Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Catbird (6th California record), Brown Thrasher, and two Red-eyed Vireos. Also recorded were a Prothonotary Warbler (4th spring record), two Golden-winged, five Tennessee, nine Parulas, three Magnolia, a female Cerulean (3rd California record), four Chestnut-sided Warblers, four Ovenbirds, four Waterthrushes, nine Redstarts, five Boblinks, and many more. A breeding-plumaged Curlew Sandpiper at the Salton Sea on 27 April being the third record for California and the first in the spring. Two Semipalmated Plovers were there on 11 May, and most amazing, on the twelfth a Horned Puffin was studied at the same time of year and in the same area where one was photographed in 1973 by the L.A.A.S. pelagic trip.

**S**UMMER may be the nesting season in other parts of the country, here nesting begins in early spring. Long-eared Owls were feeding young at Morongo in early May, and both Bendire's and LeConte's Thrashers were nesting just north of Yucca Valley in late April. A singing male Painted Redstart was found in the San Bernardino Mountains on 3 June. Another pair nested in the Laguna Mountains of San Diego County, but deserted the nest after the four nestlings had hatched. While we gained a nesting species in the Redstarts, we probably lost another in the Hepatic Tanagers, which could not be located in the San Bernardino Mountains where they have nested recently. Other new nesters like the Black Swifts in Santa Anita Canyon, the Whip-Poor-Wills in the San Jacintos and the Black Skimmers at the Salton Sea were present again, and all probably nested successfully. A single Brown Booby and at least two Frigatebirds visited Salton Sea, but there were no reports of Blue-footed Boobies, Spoonbills, or southern herons there this summer.

**F**ALL MIGRATION started as early as July for the shorebirds and hummingbirds, but built up slowly to a peak in late September, for most other families. There were hundreds of early Phalaropes at the Salton Sea at the beginning of July, and at the end of the month there were at least seven Stilt Sandpipers there. A Zone-tailed Hawk on Pt. Loma 13 and 20 September, and a Harris' Hawk near the Mexican border 21 September. Most surprising was the recovery of our first Blue-footed Booby since 1972 in a South San Gabriel yard on 15 October. Red-throated Pipits were found below San Diego and on the offshore islands in late October for the first time since 1968. Although there are three records of Great-crested Flycatchers from the Farallon Islands, there was only one previous mainland sighting until one showed up in Santa Barbara on 27 September, and another was on Pt. Loma on 20 October. Four vireos were seen this fall: a Yellow-Green (5th California record), a Philadelphia (8th California record), and a Red-Eyed — all below San Diego, and a Yellow-throated (5th record), on Catalina Island 27 October. Forty species of warbler were recorded during the year. Virginia's Warblers outnumbered the expected Nashvilles in the fennel clumps along the coast during September. Where do they come from and why are there virtually no spring records along the coast? Warblers normally seen in the east included twenty Tennessees, ten Black-throated Blues, and more than twelve Magnolias, a Black-throated Green, Prairie and Canada. Reports of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were so numerous that they became almost ridiculous when four were seen together in the South Coast Botanic Gardens on 4 December.

**T**HIS WINTER'S reports include an adult LITTLE BLUE and the LOUISIANA HERON at Bolsa Chica could be seen from the highway and stayed to be counted in 28 December. Another adult Little Blue was reported at the southeast Salton Sea by Harold Swanton on 7 December. A few CATTLE EGRETS have been seen on the coastal slope for several years now, but the sighting of twenty-six together near Casper Road, Pt. Mugu, on 21 December (Hal Baxter, et al.) was exceptional.

Three swans were seen 17 November on the water at McGrath, by the Axelsons, an adult and two juvenals. They flew away *honking*, not whistling. A single swan was seen with difficulty on Lake Sherwood. Finally, an adult TRUMPETER was seen by many observers (26 December to 5 January) on North Legg Lake. It had the diagnostic labial stripe, as well as the poise and bill recognizable by those who are well acquainted with Trumpeters and Whistling Swans.

In a small but hospitable check dam above Glendora there were

Please turn to page 6

## SANTA BARBARA ISLAND

by John Smail & Robert M. Stewart

Reprinted with kind permission of the Point Reyes Observatory,  
from their Newsletter, Number 31, Sept. 1974.

More than most people, we at the Observatory have been aware of those chronicles of deepening gloom, the endangered species lists. Before our special assignment this spring for the Endangered Species Office, we had never had an official involvement with this cheerless form of listing. It seemed an inauspicious start: with 33 races of the Song Sparrow and 16 of the Bewick's Wren recognized in the 1957 American Ornithologists' Union Check-list, the extinction of one or two of them would perhaps not be a crushing blow, but nevertheless those who took part in the expeditions to the Santa Barbara Channel Islands found themselves strangely moved by the experience.

Our task was to check on the status of the Santa Barbara Island Song Sparrow, and the San Clemente Bewick's Wren and Song Sparrow. Bob Stewart and Bill Clow went to San Clemente Island from 1 to 9 May, and John Smail and Phil Henderson went to Santa Barbara Island from 13 to 17 May. The verdict was stark: there were no Song Sparrows left and only one wren. The account of the Santa Barbara Expedition follows; the San Clemente story will appear in the next issue.



Santa Barbara Island

The Shore of Santa Barbara Island

Santa Barbara Island is an amoeba-shaped blob on the map about 61km from the nearest mainland at Long Beach. On closer acquaintance it turns out to be as starkly impressive as the other Channel Islands even though, at 2.6 square kilometers, it is one of the smallest. It rises steeply from the ocean to an elevated plateau about 100m high, sloping to twice that height at its western edge. There are no trees.

Like all accessible offshore islands, Santa Barbara Island has had an ecologically troubled history. It has endured the ravages of rabbits, goats, cats, sheep, geese, ducks, chickens, turkeys, and pigs. On top of all that it has suffered a disastrous fire. Small wonder that one or two wildlife species have come and gone.

For the Santa Barbara Song Sparrow the end came about 7 years ago. The last sight record was in August 1967. Since then, no birder visiting the island has even suspected he saw one. *Melospiza melodia graminea*, as the subspecies was called, was one of the smallest forms of the Song Sparrow and was differentiated by a very gray back. It relied heavily on the fascinating native tree-sunflower *Coreopsis gigantea* for cover and nesting.

At first sight it seems surprising that since its fortunes were so closely bound to the *Coreopsis*, the sparrow could have lasted through major setbacks to this plant. Terrible things have happened to the *Coreopsis*: it was cleared during the quixotic attempt at agriculture in 1915-1926, and it was severely mauled during a population explosion of rabbits in the 1950's. During all this, the Song Sparrows held their own and were still doing well up until 1958. Then came the fire. In 1959 nearly all the vegetation from the water's edge to the top of the ridge was burned and two-thirds of the island was denuded right down to the soil. The difference between this and previous disasters was that all the slopes and canyons on the east side of the island, the preferred habitat of the Song Sparrow, were stripped of cover. When the farmers cleared *Coreopsis*, they concentrated only on the more level central part of the island leaving thick cover in the canyon bottoms.

The Song Sparrow lasted only 8 years after the fire and perhaps the last survivor was already alive in 1959. With no bushes to nest in, the sparrows can't have bred with much success in the first few years after the fire. (The House Finch population, incidentally, seems to have suffered a similar fate.) Without cover too, the sparrows might

occasionally have fallen prey to the Barn Owls that inhabit the island.

Although the PRBO party combed the island thoroughly for the lost Song Sparrow, its absence didn't leave us without resource: we were able to enjoy a landbird migration wave, a small but interesting crop of seabirds, and a sizable pinniped population — Santa Barbara's version of the sheer biological magic that is an island.

The passerine migrants were hardly to be missed — the island was hopping with them. Predictably for mid-May, they were the commoner west coast migrants; conspicuously Wilson's, Townsend's, and Hermit Warblers, these three species alone numbering well over 300. Naturally it was our duty to record every bird we saw and we had an added incentive to do so in the shape of a newly compiled provisional check-list. We scraped together 53 species — two-thirds of them landbirds — among them three not too exciting new records for the island: Vaux's Swift, Gray Flycatcher, and Black-throated Gray Warbler.

The island does have breeding landbird populations, and very lusty ones at that. The Horned Larks, about 250 of them, were much in evidence and a similar-sized population of Western Meadowlarks was even harder to overlook. The Rock Wrens, described as "nearly extinct" on the island check-list, had a fine chance to boost their numbers this year — we saw two pairs. The Farallon population, by contrast, had a distinctly unpromising breeding line-up this season — three males!

For anyone familiar with the Farallones, the seabird populations of Santa Barbara Island come as a shock. An island nearly six times the size of "ours" has one-hundredth the number of breeding birds. We kept saying in outraged disbelief, "There ought to be a cormorant colony — right here . . ." but there almost never was. Our most exciting discovery was the apparent existence of a petrel colony detected by Phil's sharp nose. Unfortunately we were not able to identify the species of petrel from the smell, but anyone who knows petrels will be ready to accept our word that there are petrels on the very edge of a sheer cliff on the north side of the island. Pusillanimity triumphed over restless scientific curiosity and we did not investigate further — but at least we survived to record this inconclusive observation. As on the Farallones, the only breeding gull is the Western Gull, but in strong contrast to their cousins farther north, the Santa Barbara gulls are having serious problems. The trouble is as obvious as it is baffling. In any normal colony of Western Gulls the clutch is 3 eggs — it seems to be one of life's immutable laws. On Santa Barbara Island over the past few years there has been a remarkable incidence of 4-, 5-, and even 6-egg clutches in which the eggs look normal but are thin-shelled and simply don't hatch. The eggs do not show any abnormal residue of chlorinated hydrocarbons or heavy metals and nothing else incriminating has been found. Fully a tenth of the nests we looked at had 5 eggs and the laying season can't have been over. This rules out simple explanations like two females laying in the same nest.



## audubon activities

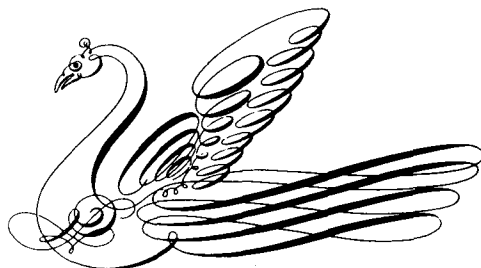
CARRIZO PLAIN, Dec. 9. The day began as usual with the LE CONTE'S THRASHER. Next was the unusual sighting of an immature BALD EAGLE. This year's trip did not produce the Ferruginous Hawk or Short-eared Owls, although the owls were reportedly seen the next day by another Audubon group. Nine species of raptors were observed, including excellent views of a melanistic ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK. The SANDHILL CRANES were there in abundance, feeding in the grain fields, lounging in Soda Lake, or in aerial routes to either of these two spots. When a single flock of approximately 300 MOUNTAIN PLOVERS stopped our caravan briefly, we noticed another Rough-leg feeding on a freshly killed rabbit. By lunchtime we had seen all the species we had expected to see with the exception of the two mentioned, and found ourselves heading for home by two o'clock. Keith and Pam Axelson, leaders.

EVENING MEETING, Dec. 10. Dr. Jared Diamond of the UCLA Department of Zoology presented a fascinating program on the birds of New Guinea that he had studied during his research in the highlands there. His excellent slides were enhanced by his vocal imitations of the birds' calls. He also had unusual shots of the bushmen he had encountered. He called them "walking encyclopedias" of bird lore since they were able to describe in detail a bird they had seen 25 years ago and had never seen since! The evening ended with a bountiful table of Christmas goodies, punch and coffee graciously served by Terry Clark, recently appointed social chairman, and her committee.

MALIBU LAGOON FIELD TRIP, Jan. 4, 1975. Ten birders met on this chilly, clear morning to enjoy once again this great birding spot. The highlight of this trip was the female Hooded Merganser. The wintering Snow Goose was still there along with the resident wintering shorebirds. We had eight species of gulls including a lone Mew Gull. Leader, Glenn Olson.

### AN APPEAL FROM FINCA LA SELVA

Finca la Selva, a prime Costa Rican birding spot used by thousands of people each year for scientific study and birding, is in jeopardy of becoming a wilderness island owing to profiteering interests (lumber, crude oil, etc.). This area can be saved from this fate if 200 surrounding acres can be purchased to act as a buffer zone. Over four hundred species of birds are known to this area with more than three hundred counted solely in one year. The Organization for Tropical Studies has set up a fund and is appealing for donations to this worthy cause. The acres will be slightly over one hundred dollars each. Tax deductible donations can be sent to Dr. Jay Knox Jones, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas.



## BOOK STORE

### NEW ARRIVALS

A BIRDER'S GUIDE TO MINNESOTA, Eckert, \$4.00  
(Incl. state map & checklist)

A BIRDER'S GUIDE TO S.E. ARIZONA, Lane  
(1974 edition), \$3.00 (Incl. checklist)

BIRDS OF THE RIO GRANDE DELTA REGION, Davis  
(1974 edition), \$2.00

WHAT BIRD IS THAT?, Cayley (1971 edition), \$17.50  
(Australian birds)

THE SEABIRDS OF BRITAIN & IRELAND  
Cramp/Bourne/Saunders, \$12.50

ATTRACTING BIRDS TO YOUR GARDEN, Sunset Books,  
\$2.00 (California oriented)

### Correction: Price of

ANNOTATED FIELD LIST BIRDS OF MARICOPA, ARIZONA  
should be \$3.00 in the current sales catalog. Sorry!

## BOOK REVIEW

"The Literature of the California Black Rail," by Sanford R. Wilbur, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Special Scientific Report — Wildlife No. 179, Washington, D.C., 1974. The title of this small pamphlet is misleading. It is in fact the most up-to-date and authoritative account of the black, and should be welcomed by all field observers of the Los Angeles Audubon Society. Sanford Wilbur is with the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, California Field Station, Ojai, California, and is known to us for his work on the California Condor. He has been a contributor to "The Western Tanager."

"Few birds remain so little known as the California black rail." It was first collected in 1859 on the Farallon Islands and not described until 1874 by Ridgway, as the "Farallon Rail." Even after black rails were found on the mainland in 1888, this first bird was held to be a full species in the AOU Check-list of North American Birds (2nd edition) as *Porzana coturniculus*. By 1970 Brewster classified the first bird with the other California birds, which becomes the full species, *Creciscus coturniculus*. In 1918 Oberholser considered the California and eastern Black Rail as the same species, and the former was renamed again, *Crecisus jamaicensis coturniculus*. In 1934 Peters put the Black Rails in the genus *Laterallus*, where they remain to date as *Laterallus j.c.*

Over these hundred years the vernacular name has remained the same. The adjective "California" is appropriate since the western differs from the eastern in a few discernible field marks. The California is smaller (5 inches), has a shorter and more slender bill and a more extended area of chestnut coloration on the nape of the neck. A point of contention is the statement by Wilbur that the legs are blackish-brown, whereas the live specimens seen in the field seem to have bright yellow legs.

Clarifying paragraphs on the song and calls, and the life history are very useful to active birders. The common (and perhaps only) habitat on the coast is in *Salicornia*, but inland (say at Imperial Dam) they occupy bulrush, *Scirpus* sp. The distribution has been quite accurately reported in "The Western Tanager," over the years. Our readers will be pleased to note that reports of sightings in Shumway Suffel's column are included in the official literature of the California Black Rail.

The booklet can be obtained from the Fish and Wildlife Service or the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., for 55 cents (Stock Number 2410-00390).



# The Western Tanager

February, 1975

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874-1318**

## CALENDAR

**Sat., Feb. 1. LAKE NORCO.** Meet at 6th and Hamner in Norco at 8:30 a.m. Take San Bernardino Freeway (Interstate 10) to Milliken turnoff, about 10 miles east of Ontario. Go south about 8 miles to Norco. An alternate route would be Santa Ana Freeway and Riverside Freeway to Corona, then north to Norco via Hamner Avenue. Wintering ducks should be abundant. Wood Duck, European Wigeon, Night Herons. Leader, Ruth Lohr.

**Thu., Feb. 6. EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING,** 8:00 p.m., Audubon House.

**Sat., Feb. 8. MORRO BAY.** Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the foot of Morro Rock. This is an excellent area for wintering coastal birds and also offers 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 in Morro Bay State Park (reservations advisable) and motels available in Morro Bay and nearby San Luis Obispo. Morro Bay is approximately 210 miles north of Los Angeles via U. S. 101. Leader, Jim Clements. (Trip for Feb. 1 has been cancelled.)

**Mon., Feb. 10. SYCAMORE CANYON.** Meet outside entrance to Pt. Mugu State Park at 8:30 a.m. After birding Sycamore Canyon, group will continue up coast, possibly as far as Ventura. Good for wintering land birds, shore birds and marsh birds.

**Tue., Feb. 11. ANNUAL DINNER MEETING.** Smith Bros. Fish Shanty. Reception: 6:15 p.m. Dinner: 7:30 p.m. Price: \$7.90. For reservations, phone Joann Gabbard, 395-1911. Program will be given by John Goddard, internationally known explorer, naturalist and adventurer, who will show his film "Exploring African Wonderland," filmed in East Africa.

**Sun., Feb. 15. TRIPPET RANCH.** Meet at 8:30 a.m. in picnic area near entrance. Take Topanga Canyon Blvd. to Entrada Dr., 1 mile north of village. Take Entrada Dr. to fork. Take left fork to gate at end of road. Excellent area for chaparral birds and owls. Leader, Roger Cobb.

**Thu., Feb. 20. CONSERVATION MEETING,** 9:00 p.m. at Plummer Park. Glenn Olson, Chairman.

**Sat., Feb. 22. LOS ANGELES ARBORETUM.** Meet at 8:30 a.m. in the main entrance. Take the San Bernardino Freeway to Rosemead Blvd., north on Rosemead to Huntington Dr., east on Huntington Dr. to Baldwin Ave., north on Baldwin to Arboretum. Leader, Ellen Stephenson.

**Sun., Mar. 2. TUJUNGA WASH & HANSON DAM.** Meet at 8:30 a.m. on the north side of Foothill Blvd. by the bridge, 2 miles west of Sunland. Cactus Wren and Costa's Hummingbirds are possibilities. Leader, Jim Stevens.

**Thu., Mar. 6. EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING,** 8:00 p.m., Audubon House.

**Tue., Mar. 11. EVENING MEETING,** 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. Dr. Kenneth Stager, Curator of birds and mammals at the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History. "The exotic bird trade, new threat at home and abroad."

**Thu., Mar. 20 CONSERVATION MEETING,** 8:00 p.m. at Plummer Park. Glenn Earling Olson, Chairman.

**Sat., Mar. 15. FERNDAL** (Details in March "Tanager.")

**Sun., Mar. 23. MALIBU LAGOON & TUNA CANYON** (Details in March "Tanager.")

**Sun., Mar. 30. STARR RANCH** (Details in March "Tanager.")

**Sat., Apr. 5. CHANTRY FLAT & SANTA ANITA CANYON** (Details in March "Tanager.")

1975																											
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### FIELD TRIP INFORMATION

The Society cannot be responsible for transportation. Always bring binoculars and lunch. No pets or collecting permitted. On weekend trips, leader is scheduled for Saturday only. 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 trip. For last minute changes or cancellations, always call the **Bird Report, 874 - 1318** on the Friday before a scheduled trip.

## The Western Tanager

Official Publication of the  
Los Angeles Audubon Society

EDITOR . . . . . Gilbert W. King  
Field Notes . . . . . Shumway Sufel  
Audubon Activities . . . . . Donald Adams  
Calendar . . . . . Caroline Adams  
Mailing Supervision . . . . . Hans Hjorth

"The Western Tanager" is free to members of National Audubon Society assigned to the Los Angeles chapter. For all others, annual subscription is \$3.50. For first class mailing, send \$1.00 to Audubon House.



## THE SIBLEY CASE

In an earlier issue of "The Western Tanager" we reprinted an article from "Nature" concerning Professor Sibley and the Lacey Act. Many of our readers were interested, and surprised, that there is indeed a U. S. Federal Statute in favor of birds, which was administered. No comments were made or were necessary on the quality of Professor Sibley's research. Lloyd Kiff of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology and Professor Thomas Howell, Department of Biology, UCLA, both wrote articles in defense of Professor Sibley. With Lloyd Kiff's agreement, only Professor Howell's remarks are published at this time.

"The October 1974 Western Tanager published an account by W. R. P. Bourne concerning violation of the Lacey Act by Professor Charles Sibley. The account appeared in the prestigious British journal *Nature* and has been widely reprinted and used as a basis for editorials. Unfortunately, Bourne's account is both inaccurate and distorted, as will be shown.

"For years, Sibley has asked volunteers to send him samples of egg white proteins for his studies on taxonomic relationships. In 1972, he asked the Jourdain Society in England for egg whites from common species of European passerines; he did not request samples from any rare or endangered species or even any non-passerines. British collectors who volunteered were given very restricted permits, and some of them (not Sibley) decided to exceed their allocations and sent egg whites from non-permit species as well as those taken legally. Sibley had proper import permits, all shipments to him were cleared through U. S. Customs, and he naturally assumed he was not in violation of any law by receiving the unsolicited material. Several British collectors were subsequently charged with violations and fined; their correspondence was seized and their shipments to Sibley were reported to U.S. authorities. On being contacted, Sibley acknowledged receiving the non-permit material although he had not asked for it and was formally charged with violation of the Lacey Act (for receiving bird-derived materials illegally taken in the country of origin) on May 20, 1973. As he was leaving for extensive field work in Africa and Australia on May 27, he paid a fine of \$3000 rather than dispute some of the charges, incur legal fees, and have to abandon his field studies abroad.

"Almost all the illegally-taken eggs were from common species. The only exceptions were one sample each from a Stone Curlew and a Peregrine Falcon. Although it does not justify illegal collecting, neither species is on the endangered list in Britain. Sibley had no need for these egg whites and did not ask or suggest that they be sent. A ridiculous part of the charges against Sibley was that he received some egg-white from captive exotic parrots legally kept by an aviculturist. A U. S. "expert" who checked the charges against Sibley either could not recognize the scientific names of parrots or didn't know that they aren't native to Britain, or both. This absurd charge cost Sibley \$500.

"Bourne's article includes sensational-sounding implications about "the international egg trade" revealed by a "skillful piece of deduction" and concludes ominously "but there is still bigger game in

the woods." This kind of phraseology might be appropriate for a discussion of Mafia operations or narcotics smuggling, but applying it to the present episode is sheer nonsense. There is no international egg trade; no money was involved except small amounts to cover transportation expenses. No skillful deduction was needed as Sibley's request for egg white samples was public knowledge and all his shipments had been inspected and cleared by U. S. Customs. Bourne simply feeds a fantasy that there is some sort of secret conspiracy ("bigger game in the woods") at work to circumvent conservation laws in order to obtain rare birds' eggs, and to profit thereby either monetarily or scientifically. Conspiracy theories are the traditional refuge of those who find reality too prosaic, and in this instance really is just that. Three British collectors, disgruntled over tight restrictions, took eggs from some species not included on their permits and sent these samples to Sibley along with legally-taken material. They were fined, and Sibley was fined for receiving the samples. A N. Y. Times editorial accused Sibley of arrogantly putting himself above the law. The facts are that he was not after rare birds' eggs, he did not solicit illegally-taken material, he cooperated fully with authorities when informed of his unwitting violation of the Lacey Act, and promptly paid the fine even though he knew that some of the charges were erroneous and unjust.

"The statements attributed to Sibley by Bourne are taken out of context and in part rephrased to make them sound offensive to bird conservationists. Yet as birders know, most passerines are highly adapted to egg predation and usually replace lost eggs taken by whatever species; taking a few eggs of such birds (which was all that Sibley requested) has no perceptible effect on the population and does not endanger the species. It would also seem worthwhile to have experts who know that there are no native parrots in the British Isles.

"Space limitations do not permit a more detailed analysis and refutation of the allegations and implications in Bourne's article, but we will be happy to discuss the evidence with anyone with a further interest. At the same time, we urge readers not to be misled by ill-informed editorials or other articles based on the unfounded innuendos about a non-existent 'international egg trade.'"

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## WHOOPING CRANES TO GET ISLAND FROM AIR FORCE

By JOHN W. FINNEY  
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 4 - The nearly extinct whooping crane has finally prevailed over the big-winged machines of the Air Force for use of a tiny island off the Gulf Coast of Texas.

After years of controversy, the Air Force has decided to abandon its bombing range on Matagorda Island near Corpus Christi, Tex. Starting this summer, the whooping crane will have exclusive, peaceful use of the island, without B-52 bombers droning overhead and dropping practice bombs and without helicopter gunships rattling in on target runs.

### Bird Lovers Protested

For untold centuries the whooping crane every fall has flown down from Canada to winter on Matagorda Island and on the mainland across San Antonio Bay in what is now known as Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. But in 1942, the Army Air Force decided that the

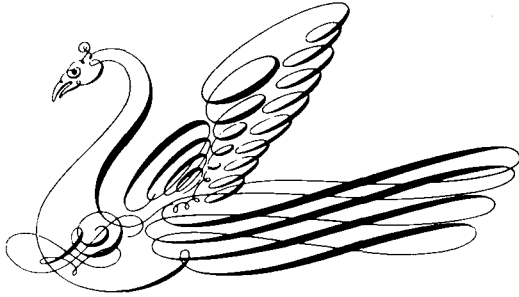
island would make a good bombing range. Ever since, the island has been one of the principal practice targets of the present Air Force and the other military services.

As the whooping cranes dwindled in number, bird lovers and conservationists protested the military's aerial intrusion into the winter

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## UNUSUAL BIRDS OF 1974

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interesting ducks in November, including a male European Wigeon, three Hooded Mergansers and a Wood Duck, according to Dick Swinney. Another European Wigeon was seen at McGrath Park by Herb and Olga Clarke on 29 November. Two **GROSBEAKS** in one winter is unusual and the adult at Big Sycamore Park, found by the Wohlgemuths on 7 December remained to be counted on 21 December and was widely seen. The immature near Tecopa, Inyo County, on 18 November was seen only by Jan Tarble's group due to the remote location. **WHITE-TAILED KITES** are not only doing well in the coastal and interior valleys, they are expanding their range. One nested near Lancaster last summer, and now four were reported in the Imperial Valley on 28 December and two were "counted" near Mecca the same day (Jon Atwood). Among the many Redtails near Irvine Lake, Orange County, Rusty Scalf and David Bradley picked out one **ZONE-TAILED HAWK**. Could it be the same individual that was seen in San Diego last September? **MERLINS** are increasingly scarce in our area and we have only two reports — an immature in Morongo Valley on 8 December (Harold Swanton) and another near Lake Sherwood 24 December. Our only coastal reports of **WHITE-WINGED DOVES** came from below San Diego, and from Big Sycamore on 26 December (Ernie Abeles). Six **VAUX' SWIFTS** at Lake Sherwood on 2 December may have been wintering birds (very unusual) as these birds leave by early October.

Three flycatchers are apparently wintering in California. The **THICK-BILLED KINGBIRD** in McLaren Park, San Francisco, was frequently seen through November and into December. Incidentally, at the same time there was a thick-billed in Victoria, British Columbia. The **COUES' FLYCATCHER** near UCLA stayed into December, and the **EASTERN PHOEBE** found in the Arcadia Arboretum by Mike San Miguel on 11 December was still present at year's end. The presence of a **WESTERN KINGBIRD** as reported by Jim Stevens, at Honey Lake on 30 November is remarkable as they are not known to winter, particularly where the night temperature is below freezing. Almost unbelievable was a plausible report of a **GREEN KINGFISHER** at Cabrillo Beach, San Pedro, on 15 November. The observer, Mr. Zimmerman of Houston, Texas, not knowing any local birders, called the L.A.A.S. and, of course, received no answer over the weekend, and by the next week it could not be found. Hank Brodtkin again proved that Big Sycamore is his special place, by finding a **BROWN THRASHER** there on 28 November. It proved difficult to find during the next few days and then was not seen again until late December (Kim Garrett). A few **GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLETS** were found — four in Tapia Park on 18 November (Sandy Wohlgemuth) and one at Morongo 16 November (H.B.).

A male **BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER** at Vivian Strumple's home on the north side of the San Gabriel Mountains on 14 November was probably a late migrant, but one near San Diego in late December may winter there. The only other Eastern warblers were a **CHESTNUT-SIDED** in the Owen's Valley on 25 November (Dick Neuman), and another on the northeast Salton Sea "count" on 27 December (Jon Atwood), and a late **PALM WARBLER** in Palos Verdes on 4 December (Shirley Wells). A surprising number of **BLACK-CHINNED SPARROWS** (normally only a summer visitor), were seen this winter — one in Griffith Park 10 November (Justin Russel), and two in Sycamore Canyon 26 December (Ernie Abeles).

With every birding year seemingly better than the one before, we can expect great things in 1975, and with ever increasing expertise and more days in the field a good proportion of rare birds will come our way.

## WHOOPING CRANES

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habitat of one of the most ancient and tallest of American birds. But the needs of war always seemed to interfere with any military plans to relinquish the island to the cranes. Most of the bomber crews that dropped bombs over Vietnam, for example, trained first over Matagorda.

It was never proved that the Air Force bombing practice was contributing to the extinction of the whooping crane. The Air Force always pointed out that its practice bombs were not explosive, and that the target area was five miles from the nearest place in which a whooping crane had ever been spotted.

Still, when only 46 cranes reappeared in Texas in the fall of 1973 — nine fewer than in the previous year — an Interior Department study said that it was "reasonable to assume" that the practice bombing and high-speed, low-level flights had contributed to the diminution of the birds.

By the latest Interior Department count, 49 whooping cranes are wintering this year at the Aransas Refuge and Matagorda Island. The department feels that that is not a significant enough increase to prove or disprove the theory about Air Force interference.

It is a fact, however, that the cranes had a quieter winter on the island last year. In response to Interior Department protests, Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger, who is a birdwatcher, last January ordered the Air Force to restrict its bombing practice to June through September, when the birds were nesting in Canada.

The Air Force's withdrawal from Matagorda was prompted in part by concern over the fate of the whooping crane but more immediately by criticism that the Air Force was really interested in holding on to the island as a hunting and fishing camp for officers. Among the facilities maintained on the island were a lodge for visiting hunters and fishermen, quail shelters, turkey roosts and a storage locker for game and fish.

### New Controversy Awaited

When Gen. David C. Jones, who has been leading an austerity campaign since he took over as Air Force Chief of Staff last July, decided that the Air Force could dispose of the hunting and fishing camp on Matagorda, the Air Force also decided that it could go elsewhere for its bombing practice.

New controversy is expected to develop over use of the five-mile-long, 50,000-acre island when the Air Force turns it over this summer to the General Services Administration to dispose of as surplus property.

The Interior Department, which as a Federal agency would have a priority claim, is eying extension of the Aransas Refuge to include at least part of the island. The State of Texas, which is leasing part of the island to the Air Force and to some local communities, is interested in opening up the island for recreational use.

Interior Department officials are suggesting that it should be possible to work out an accommodation between birds and man, since the cranes like the Bay side of the island and the bathers will presumably want to go to the Gulf side.

### GALAPAGOS ISLANDS TOUR

Two members of the Los Angeles Audubon Society will be leading what promises to be a most exciting tour to the Galapagos Islands and Ecuador in June. Pamela Axelson and Glenn Olson, both members of the LAAS Executive Board will lead the group, leaving Los Angeles June 17. They report that they plan to board the S. S. Iguana in Guayaquil and cruise through the islands, with frequent landings for bird observation and visits to places of interest. The group will have several days in Ecuador at the end of the tour, visiting birding areas and native villages. If any of our members should be interested in joining the group, please call Pamela Axelson at 474 - 6205.