

Los Angeles Audubon Society

The Western Tanager

VOLUME 41, 1974-75 No.9 June

CORTEZ STEPPED HERE

by Terry Clark

AFTER nearly two months of hard work in the soggy summer of Nassau, we found ourselves conjuring up fantasies of places dramatically different. While surrendering to the blaze of Bahamian sun, our thoughts escaped to high altitudes, chilly nights, thin, dry air. We would always cherish Nassau's romantic dilapidation and lackadaisical existence, but now we longed to immerse ourselves in an intensely cosmopolitan experience. Besides, the average temperature in Mexico City in August is 61.

AS soon as business obligations terminated, we exchanged the sensuous languor of the Bahamas for the confident hustle and bustle of the second largest city in the western hemisphere. Fanciful cloud formations floating in high contrast against brilliant blue gave way to the soft haze of smog settling low over the mestable concrete of Mexico City. What we wanted is what we got: radical architecture; inspiring, innovative museums; sophisticated boutiques; a frustratingly long list of highly-rated restaurants with those irresistible dessert carts. But most of all, the sheer dynamics and momentum of a great city.

17,761 foot Mt. Popocatepetl, 50 miles southeast of Mexico

City, in the pine-fir zone of the Sierra Volcanica Transversal.

IN order to fully experience the Distrito Federal, however, we wanted to see it in its total setting: the juxtaposition of man's manipulations and nature's specious timelessness. And it seems that the easiest way to get a sense of a natural realm is by the observation of its birds (as the environs change, one avian community replaces another, each adapted to a particular set of conditions).

ONE day was spent at Desierto de Los Leones, a national park of pines and firs just 15 miles north of the city limits and some 3000' higher. Easy, gratifying birding, though the abundance of *Red Warblers* sometimes tried our patience. We also saw *Brown-backed Woodpeckers*, *Golden-browed* and *Crescent-chested Warblers*, *Rufous-capped* and *Green-striped Brush-finches*, for example. On a Sunday we followed the hoards west to Cuernavaca, descending the Pacific slope of the Sierras to the warmth of the tropical deciduous forest. While most of the Mexico City throng visited markets and plazas, we followed the directions in Edwards' "Finding Birds in Mexico" to Canon de Lobos, some 12 miles south of Cuernavaca. Bird songs abounded but dense, high foliage thwarted most attempts to "spot" the characteristic birds of the Pacific Lowland community. *Scrub euphonias*, a *Golden Vireo*, *Black-chested* and *Rusty-crowned Ground Sparrows* were some of the birds that did cooperate. Ah, the bitter irony of tame albino peacocks and crowned cranes strutting under our noses in the garden of Las Mananitas, where we sipped cocktails for two hours while waiting for a table — reunited with the throng from Mexico City. But a truly gourmet lunch more than made up for earlier disappointments.

continued overleaf



OUR

most spectacular expedition took us as far as the state of Veracruz, as far east as Fortin de Las Flores. More a bouquet than a town, Fortin offers, as special bonus, an awesome view of Orizaba's 18,800' peak of perpetual snow. Looking for birds of the Atlantic Lowland community, we again turned to Edwards. This time the book, almost in spite of itself, directed us to an ideal birding spot in the tropical evergreen forest of the Gulf slope. "A wide gap in the low wall of the viaduct" proved to be a lovely road lined with benches, leading to a manicured but romantic picnic area within sight of an inoffensive generator plant which utilized the rapid flow of the Rio Metlac. The road also led to *Blue-crowned Mot-mots*, *Squirrel Cuckoos*, *Band-backed Wrens*, *Buff-throated Saltators*, *Bush* and *Yellow-winged Tanagers*, *Brown Jays*, *Yellow-throated Euphonias*, *Black-hooded Orioles* and More. But the beauty of the road would have been enough.

As we prepared for our 3½ hour return to Mexico City, we imagined we were setting out with Cortez's army, marching towards the City of Gold. Having traveled to Fortin under the cloak of night, we were eager to add the sense of sight to our strange, suggestive journey of the day before. Shortly after getting on the toll road which we followed back to the capital, we noticed we were rapidly leaving the valley of Acultzingo. With the orchards, coffee plantations and canefields behind, we climbed 3000' in the next 14 miles. From the 7,800' summit of Cumbres de Maltrata we witnessed the series of hairpin turns snaking down to the valley. We could only gasp: the night before we had spiraled down that very route, engulfed in clouds and further encumbered by rain. Though it was now early afternoon, scanning the fertile fields below we could see the steady approach of thick, white clouds which would re-enact the daily pattern of blanketing the valley, then retreating to the cloud forest high above. Looking down, we marvelled that we had made it. How on earth had Cortez?

Neither of us remembers much downhill approach to the plateau of the central highlands. Perhaps because we were so startled to come out of a cloud forest into a desert. For some 20 miles, amid tree yuccas and high desert scrub, we seemed to be back in our own Joshua Tree Monument. The rest of our trip across the state of Puebla took us past miles and miles of cornfields. We could have been driving over the flatness of Ohio, but the occasional sight of a Mexican arguing with his burro, or an old Indian woman washing her feet in an irrigation canal, or the colorful array of laundry drying from the points of an agave plant were enough to remind us of place, if not time.



NEW ORLEANS

THE TRAIL OF THE LONE DELEGATE

Dorothy Dimsdale

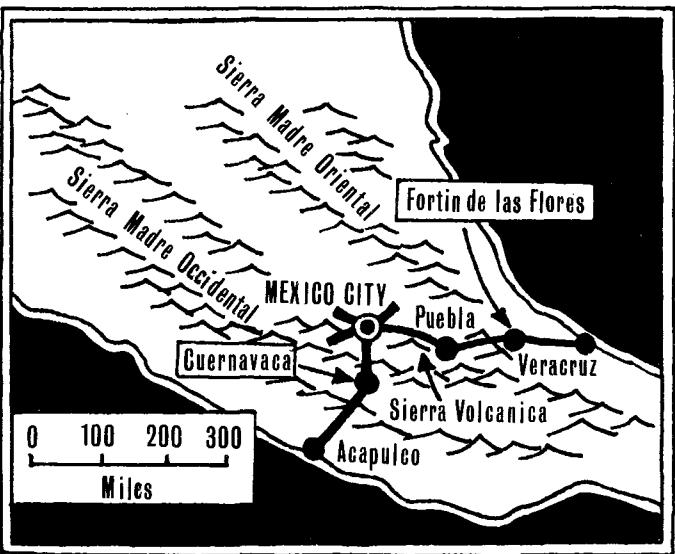
From whence cometh thou
And whither art thou going?

This question turned up on a yellowing illustration of birds, done decades ago by one of the first members of the Los Angeles Audubon Society. Much the same question passed through my mind as I stood, somewhat overwhelmed by the crowds of Audubon members, checking in at the National Convention. I was alone and slightly apprehensive as the representative for our Society.

It's remarkable how one's confidence builds as soon as one acquires one's badge, with name and long green ribbon labelled 'Delegate'.

I first went to the 'Hospitality Room' where almost immediately I found myself talking with members and delegates from Societies all over the country. We exchanged views for the whole five days, pausing only for eating, listening for programs and speeches and bird watching. I never felt alone or lonely or bored or pressured. All that was needed was John James Audubon himself to make the party complete.

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Near the city of Puebla cornfields abruptly gave way to the shiny bumper crop of a colossal Volkswagen factory. Once past this state capital, we made a subtle ascent from the Puebla basin — one of the seven valleys of the central plateau. As we climbed along the Sierra Volcanica Transversal we observed the snowy crater-tops of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, the entirety of their lower slopes obscured by clouds. The highway went right past the national park summit, Llano Grande, which offered a recreation area under towering pines and firs. The habitat looked promising though ubiquitous *Mexican Juncos* and a lone *Black-headed Siskin* were all we observed at mid-afternoon. Down below, but out of sight, lay the metamorphosed remains of Tenochtitlan, now Mexico City.

In August 1520, Cortez had led his army on a slightly straighter path to Destiny: from Puebla's outlying neighbor, Cholula, he crossed the Sierra almost midway between the looming volcanic giants. But we had covered essentially the same variety of landscape and climate: green valleys and desert on the plateau, pine-fir forest, sub-tropics and tropics. To cross that succession of ecological zones in 3½ hours is no mean experience. For our present-day consciousness it is an invaluable aid to visualizing and understanding adaptation, natural diversity, speciation. Or very simply, getting the "total picture" while traveling: man-made plus natural. We look forward to making the trip again, hoping to absorb even more next time. But as a foot soldier in Cortez's army? Not even for a City of Gold.

Canon de Lobos, near Fortin de las Flores, 150 miles southeast of Mexico City, at 3000' on the edge of the Gulf slope tropical evergreen forest.

audubon activities

CHANTRY FLAT & SANTA ANITA CANYON, April 5. With scattered showers already beginning, 20 hardy people showed up at Chantry Flat for the annual trip. The rain held off until we were part-way down the canyon, but from then on it steadily increased. Under these conditions the birds mostly stayed well under cover, so the day's list was only 20 species. No early migrants were found, but most people had a look at some of the 5 Dippers which were seen. Hal Baxter, leader.

EVENING PROGRAM, April 8. Our program for the evening was a presentation on Tropical Ecology by Dr. Thomas Emmel of the Department of Biology, University of Florida. Through the medium of very excellent 35 mm slides Dr. Emmel displayed the wide variation of life forms of the tropical rain forests. The infinite variety of plant life from fungi to orchids was shown to provide habitat for a wide range of creatures, including insects and tree sloths. Frogs that spend their life cycle in the cup of a single bromeliad were photographed. Exotic butterflies were shown sipping nectar from even more exotic flowers. Dr. Emmel showed many vividly colored birds that inconceivably could disappear in the green foliage. And last, but not least, he showed the effects of modern man on this fragile environment.

TRIPPET RANCH, April 13. A cool and cloudy Sunday morning again greeted the L.A.S. at Topanga State Park. The Trippet Ranch area proved to be abundant, as expected, with typical chaparral birds; but some of the usual spring migrants were conspicuously absent. Three pairs of Western Kingbirds were seen at the Tank Site, and two Black-headed Grosbeaks were found. The only warbler observed was the Yellow-rumped. A Great Horned Owl was flushed from the trees along the streambed, but was seen only by the leader and one other brave soul who risked a stroll through the Poison Oak. At the old hunting lodge Otto Widmann heard his first Lark Sparrow in song! The Trippet Ranch area provides a rich birding experience, and its utilization is encouraged. Our group saw 32 species and covered about 2½ miles on foot. Roger A. Cobb, leader.

SANTA BARBARA ISLAND, April 13. Forty observers left Oxnard at 5:00 a.m. aboard the Paisano on a trip to Santa Barbara Island which was highlighted by excellent views of numerous Xantus' Murres and a brilliant display of Giant Coreopsis in bloom on the island. Pelagics were low in numbers as can be expected at this early season. Some 40 Sooty Shearwaters, 3 Pink-footed Shearwaters, 2 Red Phalaropes, a distant Rhinoceros Auklet, and a small distant group of Cassin's Auklets were the only true pelagics observed besides the 70+ Xantus' Murres which fed in a well-defined zone 2 to 8 kilometers out from the island. Pigeon Guillemots, all three local cormorants, Black Oystercatchers, and a Wandering Tattler were observed on or near the rugged shoreline of the island. We spent 3½ hours on the island, covering the canyons and Coreopsis thickets for land-birds, and viewing the Western Gull breeding colonies from a distance. Interesting land-birds included a Long-eared Owl, a good study of a Hammond's Flycatcher (giving a Pygmy Nuthatch-like "peep" callnote), a lone Cedar Waxwing, 3 Solitary Vireos, numerous Orange-crowned Warblers, and several Lincoln's Sparrows. An argument over the identity of an elusive male oriole in a Coreopsis thicket was pleasantly solved when bright male Hooded and Northern Orioles finally obliged us by perching in the open. Two Dark-eyed Juncos midway between Oxnard and the Island demonstrated how landbirds often find themselves lost over the open ocean as daylight approaches. Forty-four species were observed during the day. Kimball Garrett, leader.

I am collector of old field and opera glasses, and binoculars. If you know of any, please let me know C. Edelman, 40651 Murrietta Hot Springs Road, Murrietta, CA 92362.



BUTTERHEAD SPRING & KELSO VALLEY, April 19-20. This year only 16 trained eyes showed up for the annual spring Butterbread field trip. Although handicapped by the lack of birders, this small group observed 92 species and 749 individual birds. Among those listed was a variety of spring migrants, our usual resident desert species, and montane birds seen at the Kelso Creek. Three Gray Vireos were seen at Butterbread along with Blue-gray Gnatcatchers (3), 7 species of warblers, and Gambel's and Mountain Quail. We ended the weekend with a Yellow-headed Blackbird and Tri-colored Blackbirds at the pond in Kelso Valley. We have listed 168 species in this area, taking twelve years at this point. Four species in this list were added on this trip. Keith and Pam Axelson, leaders.

MORONGO VALLEY, May 3 and 4. Fortunately, at the suggestion of Russ Wilson, we banded downstream in the Nature Conservancy tract in the morning, which was windless. If we had reversed the route it would have been too dusty after lunch! Migrants were there in quite good numbers, 11 of the 12 hoped-for species being easy to see. Unfortunately Lucy has not yet arrived, what with the late Spring. However at least a dozen Hermit Warblers were seen, a most uncommon migrant in this area.

Spectacularly we had 4 Orioles, with both races of the Northern — Bullock and Baltimore seen practically together and a Scott's nearby! 3 month-old Great Horned Owls perched in the sun atop a tall stump all day, and the parent Long-eared Owl was seen several times going to and from its nest. Amazing to us was having Coopers Hawk nesting within 40 feet of the Long-eared Owl! Altogether we had a list of 86 species by lunchtime including several Wied's Flycatchers and at least 3 male Vermillions.

A surprising number of people stayed over for Sunday either camping out in Joshua Tree or moteling it nearby, and another 6 or 8 came out Sunday after missing Saturday. As happened last year the Summer Tanager was not there until Sunday morning when most still present were able to see it; Also a goodly number of Western Bluebirds helped run the total up to just over 100. Lil and I stopped at Whitewater Ranch for a while on the way home and were lucky enough to see at least 2 Chimney Swifts mixed in with some Vaux's. George Venatta, leader.

EVENING MEETING, May 13. Guy McCaskie gave us a very professional discussion on "Why does California have so many Rare Birds?", illustrated with photographs of several rarities taken at the time of their discovery. These slides of course are not always as photogenic as those presented in typical evening lectures, for obviously a rarity is not always in a suitable position. However, these photographs emphasized their great value as convincing evidence for a record of an occurrence, even though the image might be very small or partly hidden by a leaf.

The California State List now consists of some 525 species (compared to 433 listed 30 years ago in Miller), of which 360 are permanent residents and nesters; 85 are regular migrants and 80 are "vagrants" (70 of which have been added in the past 15 years). Guy McCaskie is accumulating all the data of the records of the latter rarities, and is slowly building up a pattern, with some explanations. Some, such as the Painted Redstart, are appearing in increasing numbers, to nest in appropriate habitats. Typical of a lecture of Guy McCaskie, many not generally known helpful identification features were pointed out, together with the admonition that a Field Guide is only a guide.

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

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Abigail King

Audubon House Hours 10 to 3, Monday through Friday

**Audubon
Bird Reports
874-1318**

Sun., June 1. MC GRATH STATE PARK. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the entrance to the Park. Take Hwy. 101 to Victoria off-ramp, between Oxnard and Ventura. Go under freeway to Olivas Park Rd., turn right on Olivas to Harbor Blvd., turn left on Harbor to McGrath (on right). Parking is available inside the park at a fee or on the north side of bridge over Santa Clara River (free). Look for late migrants and shorebirds.
Leader: Ed Navajosky

Thu., June 5. EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING, 8:00 p.m., Audubon House.

Sat., June 7. GREENHORN MTNS. This is an overnight camping trip and will involve about 350 miles of driving. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Rancho Bakersfield. From Freeway (Rte. 99) take 24th St. off-ramp east about 15 blocks to H St., turn left (north) on H which runs directly into the Rancho Bakersfield located on old Hwy. 99 (business). Be prepared to leave at 8:15 sharp as there will be a lot of driving and birding ahead. Motels available in Kernville 15 miles east of Greenhorn. Montane birds to be seen. Leaders: John MacDonald & Jim Stevens.

Tue., June 10. EVENING MEETING, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. Jim Clements will present a program entitled "A Birdwatcher Down Under" illustrated by his slides from a recent birding trip to Australia.

Wed., June 25. CONSERVATION MEETING, 7:30 p.m., Santa Monica City Library, 6th and Santa Monica Blvd. Glenn Olson, Chairman.

Sat., June 28. MT. PINOS. Meet any time after 9:00 a.m. at the Condor Observation Point on Mt. Pinos. Take Hwy. 5 north to the Frazier Park turn-off approximately 2 miles beyond Gorman. Drive west to Lake of the Woods and make right turn indicated by signpost to Mt. Pinos. John Borneman, National Audubon Condor Naturalist, will be available to answer any questions about the Condor. Other birds to look for are Calliope Hummingbird, Red Crossbill, Green-tailed Towhee, and other montane species.

Sun., June 29. YOUTH FIELD TRIP: Ferndell Park. Meet at 8:30 a.m. in the parking area. This trip is specially arranged to introduce the younger members and friends of L.A. Audubon to birdwatching. We will be looking for chaparral birds and possible late spring migrants. The emphasis will be on these birds relate to their environment. Willabelle Maloney, Education Chairman, will direct.

Sun., Jul. 20. FIRST ANNUAL LOS ANGELES AUDUBON FAMILY PICNIC: to be held at Trippet Ranch from 3:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Bring your own picnic dinner. There will be bird walks every half hour and owling at 7:30. At 8:30 a natural history program will be presented in the club house. Refreshments will be served following the program. All members and their friends are cordially invited. Take Topanga Canyon Blvd. to Entrada Dr., 1 mile north of the village. Take Entrada Dr. to fork and left fork to gate at end of road.

Sat., Jul. 26. MT. PINOS. Meet any time after 9:00 a.m. at the Condor Observation Point on Mt. Pinos. (See directions above.) John Borneman, National Audubon Condor Naturalist, will be available to answer questions about the Condor.

EXHIBIT OF WILDLIFE PAINTINGS

Highlighting the evening meeting on June 10th will be an exhibition of the works of the Los Angeles wildlife artist, Tom Lay. Mr. Lay is employed by Walt Disney Studios, where he is designing the upcoming animated feature, "The Rescuers." Mr. Lay's approach to wildlife art differs from that of many of the well-known nature painters, since he is more concerned with the subjective than the objective experience

of nature. "There is a difference between what the eye sees and the mind sees," he says. "We see softness in the mind, not in the eye, for example. I prefer to paint what the mind sees."

A few examples of Mr. Lay's work will remain on display at Audubon House during the week following the meeting, for members who wish to drop by and see them.

The Western Tanager

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EDITOR Gilbert W. King "The Western Tanager" is free to members of Field Notes Shumway Suffel National Audubon Society assigned to the Los Audubon Activities Donald Adams Angeles chapter. For all others annual subscription is Calendar Caroline Adams \$3.50. For first class mailing, send \$1.00 to Audubon Mailing Supervision .. Hans Hjorth House.

THE MEXICAN DUCK

Bonnie Swarbrick

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"The Vermilion Flycatcher," Tucson Audubon Society.

As is the case with so many endangered species, the Mexican Duck is a victim of habitat destruction. In the past this bird's distribution involved the San Simon Valley on the Arizona-New Mexico border and the Rio Grande Valley of Mexico to the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt south of Mexico City. Although still found in virtually all of its former range, the bird has disappeared as a breeding species in much of this extensive area. A survey eight years ago revealed Mexican Ducks to be widely scattered but still present in small numbers in localized areas of their range.

In both Mexico and the southwestern United States, suitable waterfowl habitat is rapidly disappearing as a result of overgrazing, drainage, irrigation farming, or diversion of water for other human needs. The Mexican Duck has been described as a wary bird, perhaps not as tolerant of human activity as is its close relative, the Mallard. But disturbance by people or livestock occurs almost everywhere, leading to nest desertion and lowered productivity.

Opinions differ concerning how many Mexican Ducks actually exist. The 1952 winter duck survey in Mexico tallied 4,700, while literature estimates run as high as 20,000 (1961). At least until recently, New Mexico harbored the majority of the U.S. population, the state's figures totalling only around 100 individuals.

The past 18 months I have conducted a study of the Mexican Duck in the Sulphur Springs Valley of Arizona, concentrating on a 60-mile long area around Willcox. The approximately 150 "pumpback" irrigation ponds in this region provide habitat which is successfully being used by Mexican Ducks. I estimate the valley to contain at least 150 of the birds; this would be the largest concentration of the species in the U.S. at present. According to available records, it seems that the presence of the species in the Sulphur Springs Valley is a range extension rather than only an addition to present knowledge of the Mexican Duck's distribution. Pumping of underground water into artificial impoundments has vastly increased within the past 20-30 years, apparently allowing the species to spread into this valley in the face of marsh destruction in its historical habitat. But even here the bird's success may be short-lived. The replacement of pumpback methods by overhead moveable sprinkler systems and the lowering of the water table due to extensive irrigation may soon eliminate waterfowl habitat in the valley.

Hybridization between Mexicans and Mallards is another factor threatening the Mexican Duck's status as a distinct species (or mallard subspecies, according to many authorities). At present this valley is a sympatric region for both the Mexican Duck and Mallard, being the northernmost and southernmost areas of the breeding ranges for the respective species. It is probable that the Mallard has invaded this valley only in recent years, as the Mexican Duck apparently has. I have found the Mallard-Mexican breeding population in the area to be comprised of 70% Mexicans, 25% Mallards, and 5% obvious hybrids. The percentage of hybrids certainly is even higher than this, since subtle differences are hard to detect in the field. It seems that few or no physical, behavioral, or ecological factors act to separate the two species reproductively; therefore, the high percentage of mallards in the population can easily lead to extensive hybridization. Cross-breeding is a problem in New Mexico also. It is quite likely that the Mexican Duck's integrity as a species in this country will be lost through interbreeding with the Mallard. Mallards apparently rarely nest in Mexico, leaving the Mexican Duck essentially a pure strain in that country.

Although on the protected list, Mexican Ducks are mistakenly shot by hunters because of their great similarity to

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NEW ORLEANS — THE TRAIL OF THE LONE DELEGATE

Continued from page two

New Orleans is great. I took the N.A.S. tour round Lake Ponchartrain where we saw numerous IBIS and to my delight a BACHMANS SPARROW as well as a RED COCKADED WOODPECKER. We had a prolonged stop at Fontainbleau State Park where there were so many birds, one almost fell over them. The PAINTED BUNTING was my favorite. The land close to the bayous was swampy and box turtles bumbled about happily amongst the crawfish mounds. There were tracks of armadillos and many empty carapaces lying about. The mosquitos were minimal — I should know, I'm their prime target. Sadly, the beautiful but intrusive water hyacinth was everywhere, so thick that broad swathes of water appeared like solid land.

The next day, at the hotel, I heard speeches by Dr. Elvis J. Stahr, President; Russell Train from the Environmental Protection Agency and many others. They had enthusiastic audiences who shared their sense of urgency that more must be done to protect the environment.

At another meeting, Clyde C. Lockwood, President of Baton Rouge Audubon, a young man, perhaps in his late twenties gave a moving and fascinating slide show of the Atchafalaya Basin. He is an excellent speaker. I was sorry I could not go on a field trip in that area and would urge anyone visiting Louisiana to contact Mr. Lockwood. He leads trips of small parties of four or six, by boat into the bayous of the Atchafalaya Basin.

By the end of the second day I had formed a friendship with Dr. Gertrude (Trix) Machris of Golden Gate Audubon. She is witty and wise and we had much to discuss with regard to our respective Chapters. We have a common interest in the greater protection of raptors.

I was surprised how much I enjoyed the Delegates' meeting and would have liked to see it expanded. Trix Machris and I were able to speak of our concerns on the raptor and falconry questions and to quote Robert Arbib Jr.'s editorial in 'American Birds'. There was a good response from the Delegates after the meeting.

My next N.A.S. trip took me on a steamboat down (or was it up?) the Mississippi with Alexander Sprunt IV as the nature guide. Standing on the prow was a stalwart character facing into a brisk wind. He was protected by a splendid sweatshirt bearing an enlarged portrait of John James Audubon. All the portraits of Audubon which I have seen have given him the appearance of a serious, stern looking fellow. Maybe it was my imagination, but here in Louisiana sailing down (or up) the Mississippi, Audubon was smiling. When the wearer of the sweatshirt lowered his binoculars, I admired his choice of clothing and we started to talk. This sweatshirt wearer turned out to be Robert Arbib Jr. whose editorial had so impressed our Society. We had had 3000 copies printed for members who might want to read it. (There are only 2900 left, so you'd better hurry!)

To be concluded in the next issue

female Mallards. Hunting loss is probably of no major concern in the Sulphur Springs Valley, since duck production seems to remain good. Duck hunting pressure in Mexico is relatively very light.

We may therefore lose an endemic species not through persecution by over-hunting but by conversion of wildlife habitat into farmland or pasture. Several agencies are working to prevent this loss. Mexican Duck programs are operating at the La Joya State Game Management Area and Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico. Drainage of marshes in the San Simon Valley of New Mexico and Arizona has been counteracted by the BLM's creation of some new habitat in the region. These New Mexico areas have also profited by the release of pen-raised Mexican Ducks. In the Sulphur Springs Valley, the Arizona Department of Game and Fish purchased two square miles of land near the Willcox Playa, and several ponds have been constructed on the area.

Although it is improbable that Mexican Ducks will reach the volume of numbers in this country that they have in the past, perhaps these restoration programs can at least preserve the species. It would be a shame to lose this desert duck, the only resident species of waterfowl found exclusively in this portion of the Southwest.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRDS

by Shumway Suffel

JUNE provides a period of stability between the spring and fall migrations, but this hiatus is surprisingly brief, as the last few migrant passerines are still present in early June, and the first few non-passerines (shorebirds, particularly phalaropes, and male hummingbirds) arrive by July first. However, for the avid birder this is no time to relax, as many migrants, being lost and therefore late, have been found in early June. This is the time when we might be able to add a species or two to our California or possibly even to our U.S. list. This is also the time when the mountains should be most hospitable for birds, after the late, cold spring with snow down to 5,000 ft. in early May.

The desert oases will be the best spots for vagrant passerines in early June, just as they were for migrants in April and May. The Salton Sea is very high this spring, so high in fact, that most of the mud flats and beaches are flooded, thus eliminating the best shorebird habitat, so its productivity is questionable. The coastal marshes and lagoons are almost deserted in June, except for a few larger, non-breeding shorebirds, but if you should find a "peep"-sized shorebird, study it carefully, because it may be a real rarity.

With the seemingly endless light rains in March and April, the spring migration was predictably late. The L.A.A.S. trip to Morongo Valley on April 26 (usually a peak time) was disappointing, but during the next week reports of "waves" of migrants were pouring in from desert and coastal locations. As an example, Abigail King and Joan Mills on the morning of April 28 found 100 HERMIT, 80 TOWNSEND'S and 50 BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLERS, plus other warblers and flycatchers in the oaks of upper Tuna Canyon, Malibu. The same day Jean Brandt, Ed Navajosky et al found migrants plentiful along Little Rock Creek on the desert edge of the San Gabriel Mountains. Ed also saw a male SUMMER TANAGER in the riparian growth of Soledad Canyon, which is north of their known breeding range. By May 3 both SUMMER TANAGERS and WIED'S CRESTED FLYCATCHERS had returned to Morongo Valley, their most northwesterly nesting location, but LUCY'S WARBLERS could not be found there, possibly because the mesquite had not leafed out yet. Unaccountably, Jan Tarble reports LUCY'S WARBLERS near Tecopa in Inyo County, which is well north of Morongo, on April 13, the mesquite was in leaf there.

Peter Bloane's observation of a female FRIGATEBIRD soaring over Newport Harbor on April 1, aside from being a rare bird at an unusual season, raises a fascinating philosophical question. If a bird as conspicuous as a Frigatebird can soar over a well-populated harbor on our well birded coast at high noon with only a single report, how many hundreds of thousands of less conspicuous, rare birds move through our area unobserved? This is the thought that makes our endless search for the rare and unusual even more compulsive. Even though COMMON LOONS are considered "rare spring migrants" at the Salton Sea, Larry Sansone found seven of them at the north end on April 13. The drake HARLEQUIN DUCK which has been at Marina del Rey since March of 1972, was joined by a female OLDSQUAW this April. Although SURF SCOTERS were seemingly as common as usual this winter, there were very few White-winged Scoters, and to my knowledge, no Black Scoters in southern or central California.

The former abundance of migrating SWAINSON'S HAWKS, as contrasted with their present scarcity in California, makes every report noteworthy. A single Swainson's was seen flying north over the desert between Yuma and Holtville on April 16, by Bruce Broadbooks. Another was seen flying north over his home east of Riverside on April 20 by E. N. Anderson, who in his words, is "familiar with the bird from earlier, happier (for the Swainson's Hawk) days in California." The most intriguing report came from Ellen Stephenson, who saw 12 to 15 large buteos flying northwest along the base of the San Gabriel Mountains above Pasadena on April 29. Although she could not positively identify them because of

their altitude, Swainson's do migrate in flocks. The timing is right and this is a traditional route.

Russ and Marion Wilson's bird-oriented travels always make interesting reading. At Huntington Beach on April 15 they had a very late GLAUCOUS GULL, our only local report this spring. The next day on their spring move to Morongo Valley they sighted four late ROUGH-LEGGED HAWKS in the Santa Ana River canyon. They found Morongo Valley cold for mid-April with "more birders than birds." The birders, however, were rewarded with a PAINTED RED-START on April 19. There were two other PAINTED RED-START sightings in April — one on the 16th at the Brock Ranch, east of Holtville (Bruce B.) and one in a canyon of the San Gabriel Mountains on the 22nd (Arnold Small). These, combined with last summer's sightings in the San Bernardino Mountains and an unsuccessful nesting in the Laguna Mountains, east of San Diego, suggest pioneering attempts at a range extension by this Arizona species (Western Birds" — vol. 5, #1 & #2).

Most people were thwarted in their attempt to find SAGE GROUSE on their strutting grounds above Bishop by snow covered grounds or impossible roads, but Jim Stevens made it on his second try. He saw a dozen grouse "still there, still strutting and quite accessible" on April 19. Despite the high water level at the Salton Sea, Harry Krueger found a flock of Western Sandpipers at Red Hill on May 4, and was able to single out one rare SEMI-PALMATED SANDPIPER by its short bill, gray plumage (no rusty) and feeding habits. Herb and Olga Clarke confirm the presence of at least one ELF OWL at Corn Springs near Desert Center in late April, but fear for its future there because of human disturbance.

Although RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRDS are one of our earlier migrants (mid-February) a few were still present in late April, making this the most extended period we know of, according to Shirley Wells. At the other extreme, the BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRDS arrived in San Pedro in mid-April and within a week were building nests (Jesse Morton). Nearby, Martha Hunt was delighted to find a BROWN THRASHER in her Palos Verdes garden. It stayed into May and is our only local report of this handsome bird this spring.

Justin Russell's frequent surveys in Griffith Park produced a YELLOW WARBLER on March 15 (so early that it may have wintered there), a BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER on April 17, a HARRIS' SPARROW in spring plumage on April 20, and a male ORCHARD ORIOLE on April 24. All these were right in our backyard while rare birds were scarce elsewhere. The occurrence of Scotts Orioles at local feeders in the spring is always puzzling. Possibly they just get on the wrong side of the mountains. Jim Steven's feeder in Sunland attracted a male on April 24, and another or the same male was there March 31, 1974. This happens once or twice each spring and usually along the foothills. A male BALTIMORE ORIOLE was at Morongo Valley on May 3 (Harry K. et al.) and there was talk of two others there the same day.

A male INDIGO BUNTING was singing near Mecca on May 5 according to Charlie Collins. The WHITE-THROATED SPARROW which wintered for the third year at Irma Roger's home in Monrovia departed on April 27 and another stopped briefly in San Pedro on April 24 (Shirley Wells).

With spring migration over, we shall have to travel a little more for good birding. An evening picnic at Santa Anita Falls above Arcadia should provide Dippers along the stream, Black Swifts at dusk below the falls, and with the help of a tape recorder, owls, (Great Horned, Screech and possibly Spotted) on the way out after dark. An all day trip to the San Bernardino Mountains might find Williamson's Sapsuckers on the back road from Green Valley to FawnSkin; Pinyon Jays around the cabins southwest of Baldwin Lake and Brewer's and Grasshopper Sparrows on the flats around the lake. Hepatic Tanagers might be found at Arrastré Creek where they have nested, although not seen in 1974. Also possible would be Gray Flycatchers and Scott's Orioles near Round Valley and Gray Vireos just east of Rose Mine Pass. The Colorado River above Yuma is incredibly hot and humid in summer, but by birding morning and evening with an air-conditioned motel for sleeping and a mid-day nap, it can be done quite comfortably. This area provides several birds which cannot be found easily anywhere else in California