

# WESTERN TANAGER

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## Colombia Birding At Its Best

by Clyde Bergman

**I**n Colombia all the seasons occur at once, one atop another. The country has a climate that changes with altitude, ranging from steamy-tropical jungles to wintry-cold Alpine Andean ridges. Three prongs of the Andes poke through the western third of the nation, and on their slopes and in their valleys live most of the people—plus of course, the *birds*.

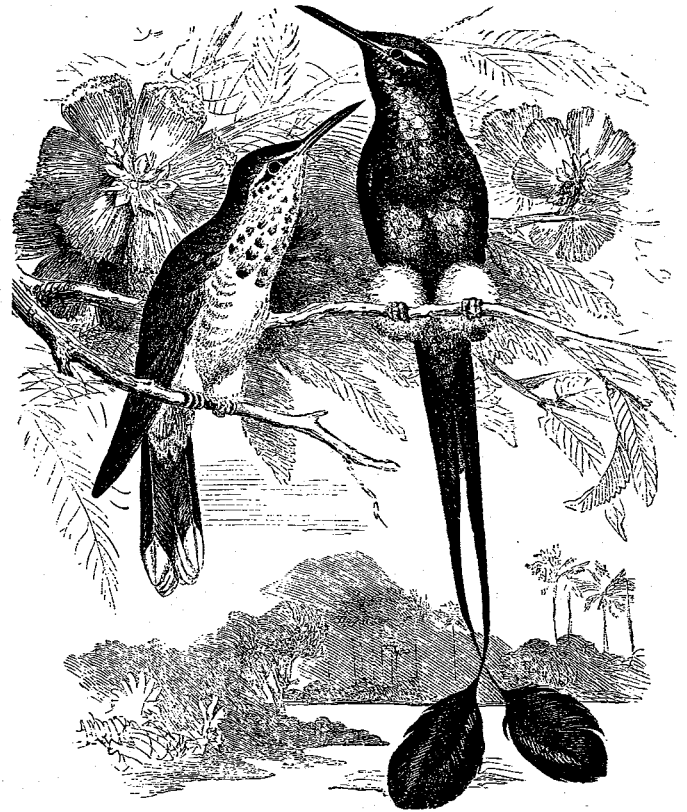
The isolating effect of Andean ridges, valleys, and dry deserts gives rise to lots of indigenous species. In fact, no single country in the world is inhabited by so many different kinds of birds. 1567 species (with 2654 subspecies), or 56% of all the avian species in South America, live there, in an area the size of Texas.

Naturally enough, Colombia is a birder's paradise—but at the same time it's a place that can make us more aware of the necessity to take a more active personal role in helping to preserve the environment.

Our expedition to Colombia began on August 11, 1975, under the leadership of Herb and Olga Clarke. Herb had chosen August for the trip since migrants from North America had not yet arrived, and so we would be free to concentrate on the local species. The group included Jim Huffman, Hank and Priscilla Brodtkin, Dorothy Arvidson, Bob Penn, Glenn Cunningham, and Debbie Worcester. With companions like these one couldn't help but have a great time.

When we first met in Cali, however, I wondered how we would all get along, since some were novices and others experts in birding. On an earlier trip to Australia with the Clarkes and Jim Huffman, I had learned how it was to bird from dawn to dusk. But after two weeks of intense birding in Colombia we found we were most compatible. After all, we shared a common interest: *birds*.

This was my first trip to South America, and though I have traveled extensively throughout the rest of the world, I somehow had never felt I would be at ease there. As it turned out, however, Colombia was wonderful and friendly. Kjell Von Sneidern, our field adviser, who helped with bird identification, was very knowledgeable, and great with the Spanish language. Bob Penn's excellent Spanish also helped in communication, when needed. And it was a pleasure to



*The Booted Racket-tail, one of the distinctive pufflegged hummingbirds resident in the Temperate Zone of the Colombian Andes.*

share a room again with Jim Huffman, as I had done on our Australian trip. He gave me a lot of insight into the art of accurate observation, as well as the necessity of knowing the birds, their territories, and their habits.

Our evenings were occupied with discussions of the birds we had seen during the day, and with careful cross-checking of reference books. These sessions, with Herb, Olga, Jim, and Hank recalling their observations, really made one understand what it takes to make great birders.

Six a.m. on the first day we were out on the "old road" to Buenaventura—and in no time all of us were thoroughly enchanted with tropical birding. Along the road we found numerous species of tanagers: Emerald, Metallic-green, Golden-naped, Silver-throated, and Crimson-backed, to mention just a few. (All in all, we saw 51 species of tanagers during the two weeks of the trip). In fact, birding was so good that we spent a second day along the old road, and in *one tree* at the 75 kilometer mark I saw 18 life birds! Debbie, who is studying to be an ornithologist but as yet had spent

*Continued Overleaf*

photo: Herb Clarke



*Pacific slope rain forest, along the old Buenaventura Rd.*

little time birding, suddenly became ecstatic, and for the remainder of the trip maintained a high level of enthusiasm.

Hank Brodtkin, an exacting and enthusiastic birder, had a habit of saying "woops!" when he thought he had spotted something new. It proved to be a very catchy expression—and before long our Spanish-speaking driver would instantly apply the brakes and pull over the moment he heard the exclamation.

We proceeded to Pichinde, where our greatest disappointment was in *not* seeing the celebrated Cock-of-the-Rock, though we did manage to hear it. At the Buga marshes in the Cauca Valley we found the Horned Screamer, plus numerous other interesting species.

On August 16 we travelled on to Popayan in our mini-Mercedes bus. The vehicle provided us with ample room and a comfortable ride—and en route we saw the Wattled Jacana, the Southern Lapwing, and the Flame-rumped Tanager.

Birding in Colombia is done with the altimeter, since species tend to reside only in the geographical zones where they evolved. The Tropical Zone reaches from sea level to 4500 ft., the Subtropical Zone from 4500 to 8500 ft., the Temperate Zone from 8500 to 11,500 ft., and the Paramo Zone from 9500 to 11,500 ft., or the snow line.) It soon became apparent that a bird seen far outside of its typical zone was most likely misidentified.

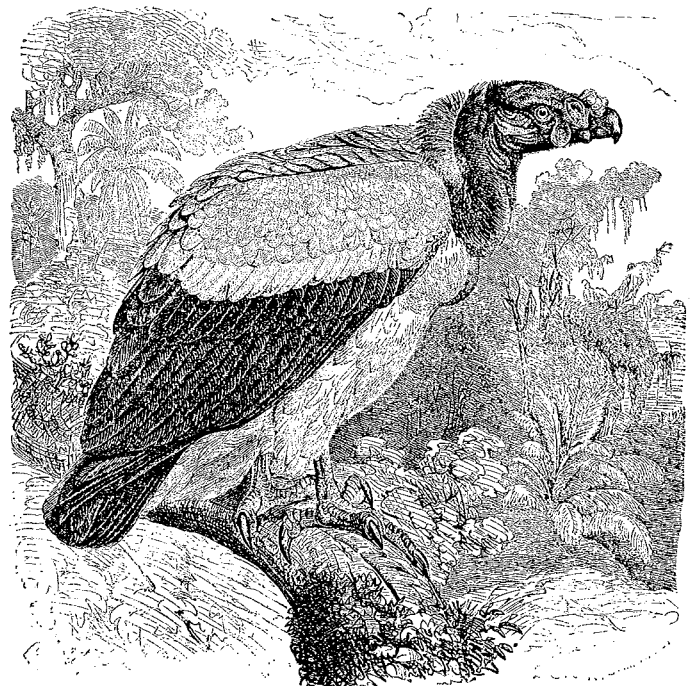
So, with one eye on the altimeter we pushed onward into the central Andes and Purace. The Andean landscape is utterly spectacular—abundantly green, with Alpine meadows, mountains shrouded in clouds and mist, and picturesque villages clinging to the steep mountain slopes.

Soon we were climbing into the high Paramo Zone, and encountering a drizzling rain with some sleet. But enthusiasm was still riding high. In fact, at one point Debbie climbed out in her stocking feet to bird in the mud and the sleet. Along the road we discovered a Plumbeous Kite, grounded by ice. We took the bird aboard the bus until it warmed up—but then, without warning, it darted out through the only open window, very nearly colliding with Hank and Priscilla on its way.

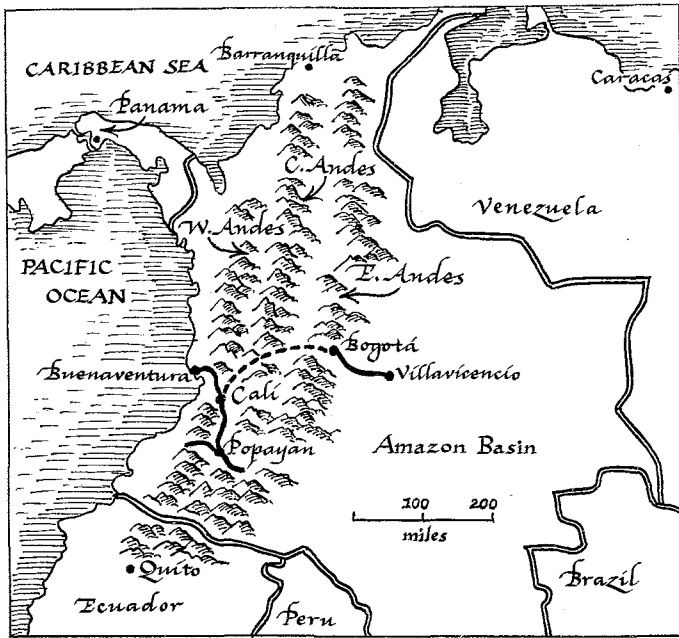
My greatest joy, however, occurred on our way down the slope. The clouds lifted finally, and on a distant cliff wall we observed through our scopes an Andean Condor sunning itself. On this leg of the trip we also found the Yellow-headed and the Crested Caracara, plus the Black-chested Buzzard-eagle—though the Torrent Duck eluded us the entire trip.

Our next venture was on August 18, a spectacular excursion into the Western Andes along the Micay Road. By now we were doing very well with our hummingbirds (43 species were recorded during the whole period). My favorites among them were the *pufflegs*. In fact, I could hardly believe such birds existed until I saw one—a real "woops" bird. Among the hummingbirds we saw were the Green-fronted Lancebill, the Long-tailed Hermit, White-tipped Sicklebill, Gray-brested Sabrewing, White-tailed Hillstar, Great Sapphirewing, Glowing Puffleg, Green-tailed Trainbearer, and the Booted Racket-tail.

The following day, August 19, we flew to Bogota, leaving early the next morning in our bus to drive over the Eastern Andes to Villavicencio. We traveled through breathtaking high mountain country, on typical Andean mountain roads with many switchbacks, stopping periodically along the way to bird.



*The King Vulture, a majestic bird of Colombia's tropical lowlands.*



The author's itinerary, August 1975

Here at home we've long been aware of the way that drastic ecological changes threaten the natural environment. But the situation in the Andes is just as critical. Everywhere in Colombia the land is changing, and today only small patches of the original vegetation remain. One result of this is massive erosion—as we soon discovered for ourselves. Along our route we came to a place where half a mountain-side had slid down over the road, causing a traffic jam. Fortunately for us, the military had erected a bridge for one-way traffic, and we were able to proceed on our way.

At our frequent birding stops we saw the Squirrel Cuckoo, plus Chestnut-collared, White-collared, and Gray-rumped Swifts, the Chestnut-eared Aracari, Yellow-ridged Toucan, and the Crested Oropendola.

We were still in high spirits as on August 21 we arose early to bird in the llanos beyond Villavicencio. We were now in the upper part of the Amazon basin, a vast trough that slopes slowly away to the Atlantic. The llanos consist of grassy meadows and savannas—hot, flat, and sparsely-settled, covering the eastern two-thirds of Colombia. Only 7% of the 26 million Colombians live here, and as a result it's a great place for the birds. Among the exciting species we found were the Capped Heron, Greater Yellow-headed Vulture, Cobalt-winged Parakeet, Sand-colored Nighthawk, Black-tailed Tityra, and the Yellow-rumped Cacique.

Almost before we knew it, however, we had to start back over the Eastern Andes to Bogotá, and home. In the course of the trip we had seen 339 species, most of them life birds for me. But most of all, we were now firmly convinced that each of us must rededicate his efforts to save what remains of our natural environment—if only for the enjoyment of one more generation. 🐦

**Dr. Clyde Bergman** is a General Surgeon practicing in Montebello, California. His interest in nature began during childhood in Ethiopia, and in recent years his passion for birding has taken him to the far corners of the globe.

The engravings accompanying the article are from Alfred Brehm's *Tierleben* (1871), one of the great old encyclopedias of natural history.

## The 1975 Christmas Count

The data is now in from Los Angeles and Malibu and although the totals can't compare with Catemaco, Mexico's 293, or Freeport, Texas' 228, (or even Santa Barbara's 202), both counts produced respectable figures and some truly unusual sightings.

On December 21, 85 birders gathered for the **Malibu Count**, to tally a record 36,025 individuals of 163 species, exceeding the previous record by 14 species. New count highs were recorded for 98 species, and 9 species were added to the all-time count roster. The White-crowned Sparrow (3862) was the most commonly counted bird, but the rarities lent spice to the proceedings: a **Red-necked Grebe**, 2 **Northern Orioles**, and a **Nashville Warbler** in the Paradise Cove area (Jon Dunn et al), a **Harris' Sparrow** and **Black-headed Grosbeak** near Mulholland Dr. (Herb and Olga Clarke), the **Northern Waterthrush** that showed up for lunch at Tapia Park, and many others only slightly less remarkable. The record total was confirmed amid abundant pizzas, coffee, and beer at an after-dark compilation in Malibu. Co-compilers Kim Garrett and Jean Brandt extend thanks for the tremendous cooperation, and invite everyone to join them again on Sunday, Dec. 19, 1976.

A week after the Malibu count, on December 28, 82 birders joined the **Los Angeles Count**, logging a total of 147 species—10 more than last year. Nonetheless, several fairly common species were unaccountably missed: e.g., Redhead, Canvasback, Snowy Plover, Common Snipe, Roadrunner, and Hutton's Vireo. The Harlequin Duck was gone from the Marina, as well as the rare Red Knot, a Cattle Egret, an a White-winged Scoter—all seen within a few days of the count. On the positive side, Dave and Carol Vleck found a pair of **Northern Orioles** in a Rustic Canyon garden, and Bob Penn and Ron McClard spotted our only **Western Tanager** at UCLA. Then in the afternoon, John Menke and Kimball Garrett unearthed the **Winter Wren** in the UCLA Botanical Garden—the first one on the count since 1963. At Holy Cross Cemetery John and Kim got our only **White-tailed Kite**, and to top off the day, Kim found a **Poorwill** in the headlights of his car at Hollywood Reservoir—a bird also last seen in '63.

The Meyerdierks had 3 **Cinnamon Teal** at Elysian Park—a surprisingly rare bird on Christmas counts here. Bob and Melba Blackstone paddled their canoe to the outer breakwater at the Marina and got a **Black Oystercatcher** and 2 Wandering Tattlers. The Axelsons, on the beach at Playa del Rey, found 2 **Common Terns** among the Forster's, and then a pair of **Parasitic Jaegers** flew in to scatter them all. Marge Wohlgemuth saw the only **Hairy Woodpecker** of the day, and Bob Johnson had a **Varied Thrush** in Will Rogers State Park. The Marina troops, maneuvering in one of the most challenging areas, produced 2 **Long-billed Dowitchers**, 20 **Greater Yellowlegs**, and the first **Common Goldeneye** since 1966. The most dramatic bird of the day, however, had to be the **Peregrine Falcon** at the Hughes property near Ballona Creek, seen briefly but positively by Bob Margolies, Hal Ferris, Ernie Abeles, and Chuck Bernstein.

All in all, a very good showing by a lot of dedicated people. Compiler Sandy Wohlgemuth passes along his thanks and the exhortation, "Next year, 150 species or bust!"

## Jon Dunn/FIELD NOTES

## The Identification of Longspurs

One of the most difficult challenges a birdwatcher may encounter is in finding and identifying longspurs. In order to be successful at the task, you must be willing to spend hours at a time, grueling over the same huge flock of birds in the hope of finding a single longspur. Sub-freezing temperatures and wind can make the hardest birder's spirits bleak; but usually, if you're patient and persistent, you will be rewarded. In the following discussion I will attempt to give some pointers as to how and where to find longspurs and how to identify them once you've discovered them.

The general rule of longspur-searching is that they usually occur with the massed flocks of Horned Larks in the various dirt and short grass fields that abound in the agricultural areas of California. I have never found them among the huge flocks of Water Pipits, and I know of no one else who has fared well either. The best time to search for longspurs is during the fall (mid October through November), but winter searches can also be productive, particularly in the Imperial Valley. I would also recommend the following areas: the Antelope Valley (mid October through November), Death Valley & Deep Springs Valley (October to early Nov.), Honey Lake (October-Feb.), and the Tijuana River Valley (mid October to late Nov.). While longspurs usually occur with larks, during migration they can also turn up by themselves. In fact I have never seen them with larks in Death Valley or the Deep Springs Valley.

One of the best ways to spot longspurs is to walk into a flock of larks, for often the longspurs can be picked out as the flock takes flight. The longspurs appear chunkier, darker (except McCown's), and smaller than the larks, and they have the habit of flying above or to the side of the main flock. A keen ear is most useful, for if you can pick up the distinctive longspur call notes among the thousands of larks, you can then home in on the calling bird. I have also noticed that an individual longspur will be chased by one or more larks, thus disrupting the smooth continuity of the flying flock. On the ground, longspurs are much more difficult to locate, as they have a hunkered-down posture that flattens them to the ground, making them hard to discern.

The most common longspur, taking California a whole, is the **Lapland**. Indeed, flocks of hundreds can be found every winter in Northeastern California. In Southern California this species is less common than the Chestnut-collared or McCown's, though numbers occur here in the South during the fall and winter (primarily in the Imperial Valley). The Lapland is the largest and the darkest of the longspurs. The darkness of these birds really stands out in flight among the paler Horned Larks. On the ground, Laps have distinctive dark ear patches, dark chocolate brown upperparts, and *whitish underparts*, with some blackish flank streaking. The males, particularly the adults, have distinct rusty nape patches and a black smudge on the breast. Laps have the *least* amount of white in the tail, the white being confined to the outer edge of the outer tail feather (hard to see). One of the best marks of a Lap is the *bright rusty area on the wing* between the two wing bars. The call of a Lapland Longspur

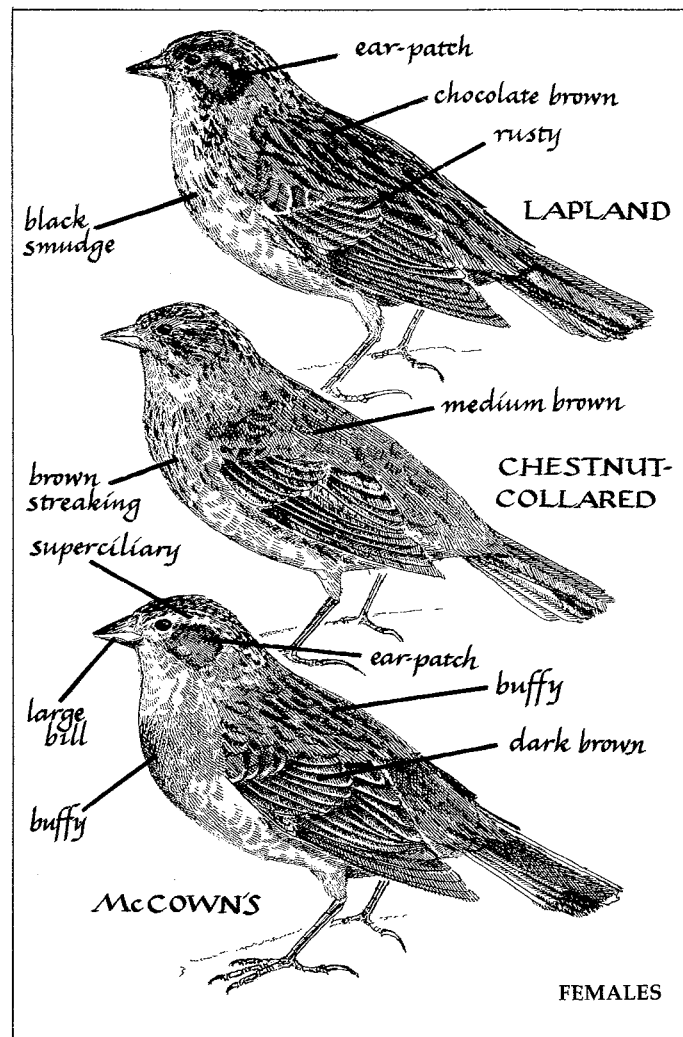
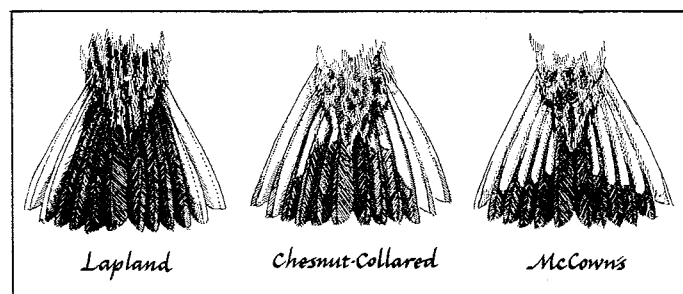


illustration by Mary Ellen Pereyra



is a loud dry rattle (described as very similar to the call of the Nuttall's Woodpecker). Their whistled *pugh* note is also diagnostic.

The **Chestnut-collared Longspur** is perhaps the most numerous longspur in Southern California during the fall (I have seen up to 50 in a day in the Antelope Valley). However, they are considerably rarer during the winter. The Chestnut-collared generally prefers denser cover than either the Lapland or the McCown's, and is most likely to be found away from the flocks of larks, frequently occurring in singles or in small groups of its own species. Often the species will remain well concealed until one approaches too

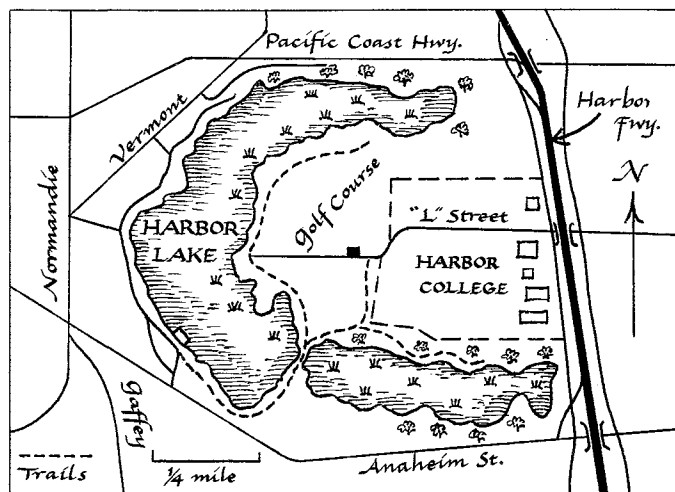
closely, at which point it flushes, uttering a loud finch-like *kiddle-kiddle* call (K. Garrett). This probably serves as an alarm call. The vocalization is diagnostic, since it is totally different from the dry rattles characteristic of the other two species. Be careful though, as the Chestnut-collared can *also* give a light rattle, much softer and higher pitched than the rattles of the other species. The Chestnut-collared is the smallest longspur, appearing a great deal smaller than a lark. If located on the ground, the male can be told immediately by the *blackish suffusion on the belly*. The females are a medium brown throughout, with no distinctive marks apart from dull *dark brown streaking* across the breast. In flight the Chestnut-collared shows a great deal of white in the tail, although not so much as the McCown's.

The rarest species of longspur in California is the **McCown's**. In fact it can be found regularly only in the Imperial Valley and the Northeast corner of California (Honey and Tulle Lakes). There are no more than a half dozen records from the coast, of which all but one are from San Diego County. Considerable care should be taken in identifying this species away from the Imperial Valley or N.E. Calif., since reliable records from the other regions are mostly lacking. Confusion has frequently occurred due to misleading information in the field guides. The McCown's is slightly larger than the Chestnut-collared and it is found in areas that are more open than the typical habitats of its smaller cousin. Frequently it is found on bare dirt. Be sure to note the overall *grayer underparts*. The female only has a slight buffy suffusion across the breast, and it lacks the characteristic breast streaking of the Chestnut-collared. The upperparts of the female are of a paler buff color than the other species, and the back feathers are broadly edged with whitish buff. The area on the wing between the wingbars is slightly darker than the rest of the upperparts. The female also has a more distinct ear patch than the female Chestnut-collared, and it is bordered by a distinct buffy-yellow superciliary line. While both the male and female have rusty edgings to the middle wing coverts, it is usually *very* difficult to discern this, particularly with the female. I would therefore de-emphasize this mark, although it is useful if noted. The immature male is more easily identified, as the plumage is even grayer and the birds have the distinct blackish blotch on the breast. Basically, though, they resemble the females. Fall adult males roughly approach spring birds. A mark that I feel is very useful on both sexes is the *much larger* bill. The lower mandible is also a fairly bright *pinkish* color: distinctly different from the grayish-blue of the Chestnut-collared's bill. The nape also tends to be grayer in the McCown's. In flight the tail shows the most white of any longspur (an inverted black "T" on a white background). Care should be taken, though, for the male Chestnut-collared can appear to have almost as much white in the tail. Guy McCaskie has also noted that in flight the McCown's flight feathers have a silvery appearance. The underwings are much whiter than those of the other species, and the McCown's gives a distinct dry rattle (similar to the Lapland), which is useful in differentiating it from the Chestnut-collared. ♀



Jean Brandt

## Birding at Harbor Lake



Based on a map by Glenn Cunningham

Located near the intersection of the Harbor Freeway and Pacific Coast Highway, Harbor Lake is well worth birding at any time of the year: spring, for warblers; summer, for nesting birds; fall, for vagrants; and winter for gulls. However, a brief review of recent history makes one dream of those long-gone days when such birds as Fulvous Tree Ducks, Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Bell's Vireos, and Black Terns nested, and in winter one could paddle a canoe from where the lake now stands all the way to Redondo Beach. Originally an inland marsh, the lake area dried up in drought years and it was in the early 1950's that Marion Wilson, backed by LAAS, motivated the City Dept. of Parks and Recreation to maintain an acceptable year-round water level through use of low flow runoff waters. The lake as it now stands was completed in 1971, but there are currently plans to develop and maintain a natural protected area in the southeast corner.

Over the years, 280 species of birds have been found here, and the area has been classified as an "endangered habitat" by the L.A. County Resource Board. One endangered species makes unique use of Harbor Lake. The Least Tern has recently established a nesting area on nearby Terminal Island. When the fledglings are out of the nest, the adult birds guide them to the lake to teach them to feed.

There are three distinct areas here to bird: the lake itself, the marsh at the southeast end, and "warbler trail," the best riparian habitat left in the South Bay region. To reach "warbler trail," enter the campus of Harbor College on "L" St., and follow it around the golf course to the end. Walk through the gate (or around the fence if the gate is closed) and climb up on the low bluff overlooking the willow thickets on your left. There is also a muddy trail along the water's edge where you should look for Tri-colored Blackbirds; and with luck you might flush a Least Bittern.

There are four entrances to the lake itself. Restrooms, picnic tables, and plenty of paved parking are found at each entrance, and gas, restaurants, and motels are nearby on Pacific Coast Highway. ♀

Shumway Suffel

## BIRDS of the Season



**E**arly winter birding was notable, but not for the expected reasons. For the most part, the hoped-for irruption of unusual mountain and northern birds failed to materialize. **Robins** were the exception, as literally thousands roosted at Mountain View Cemetery in Altadena, and at the Arcadia Arboretum, after feeding on the bumper crop of toyon berries in the nearby foothills. True, there was a single **Evening Grosbeak** in Santa Monica on Nov. 14 (Ginny Johnson); four to six **Lewis' Woodpeckers** at the 3-par golf course at Lake Arrowhead in early November (Helen Dickinson), and one more near Lake Sherwood at about the same time; a **Varied Thrush** in Big Sycamore Park on Nov. 4 (Hal Ferris et al), with another in the Arcadia Arboretum after Dec. 8; plus two **Winter Wrens** near the confluence of Santa Anita Canyon and (very appropriately) Winter Creek, above Arcadia, on Dec. 24 (Don Sterba). There were also scattered reports of **Golden-crowned Kinglets**, **nuthatches**, **chickadees**, etc., but these few records hardly constitute a major invasion of our lowlands.

What *was* noteworthy were the laggard migrants (and vagrants!) which were found in November and December long after their normal migration time. Many reports came in of late **swallow** sightings: **Rough-wings** in late November and **Trees** in December at the El Monte Nature Center (Dave Foster); **Violet-greens** at Lake Sherwood and on the Sepulveda Basin Golf Course in December (Sandy and Marge Wohlgemuth); and up to six **Barn Swallows** at Harbor Lake well into December (Shirley Wells and Van Remson, independently). A very late small, dark **swift** (either Vaux's or Chimney?) was seen flying over Marina del Rey on Dec. 2 (Jerry Johnson). A few western warblers lingered into December, as might be expected: a **Townsend's Warbler** in Temple City on the 2nd (Madeline Falcetano), a **Wilson's Warbler** in the South Coast Botanic Gardens on the 6th (Shirley W.), a pair of **Black-throated Greys** in Fairmount Park, Riverside, on the 7th (Van R.), and a **Nashville Warbler** in Tapia Park on the 17th (Ernie Abeles).

Tapia Park, partially because of unusual coverage by eager birders, also proved to be the epicenter for rare vagrants. Three hard-core birders (Bruce Broadbooks, Hank Brodtkin, and Jon Dunn) met there, by chance, early on Thanksgiving morning, and, to be trite about it, the early birders got the **Worm-eating Warbler**—for which there are only a dozen California records! Within two hours more than twenty hopeful birders were there, to search in vain for another two hours. We were rewarded, however, with a **White-throated Sparrow** and a **Black and White Warbler**, which had been in the area for a week or more. The **Harris Sparrow** found by Jerry J. on Nov. 19 was not seen, nor could we find the **Tree Sparrow** which Jerry had correctly identified on Nov. 25. It was seen for the last time on that day by George Ledec. The **Northern Waterthrush**, which was first spotted along the stream on Dec. 15, very obligingly remained for the Malibu Count on the 21st.

Not all the late vagrants were at Tapia, however. Hank B. and Doug Wilson found a rare and late **Cape May Warbler** in wintry Covington Park, Morongo Valley, on Dec. 7;

Armand Cohen identified an immature male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** in the Arcadia Arboretum on Dec. 23; Van Remson had two **Swamp Sparrows** and a late **Western Flycatcher** in Fairmount Park, Riverside, on Dec. 7; and Ernie Abeles found a late **Sage Thrasher** among the usual winter birds at the end of Kanan Rd., near the Simi Hills, on Dec. 22.

**S**till further afield, the second and third **Sprague's Pipits** this fall were found below San Diego—one early in December (Guy McCaskie), and one on Count Day, Dec. 20. The only other Calif. records were in late Oct. of '74 and '75. Guy also found two **Eastern Phoebes** on the same day, Nov. 9—one in the Tijuana River Valley and one on Pt. Loma. Another was at the railroad oasis of Kelso on Dec. 4 (Van R.). The *ther oases in San Bernardino and Inyo Counties yielded a wealth of rare birds in November: California's second Olivaceous Flycatcher* at Furnace Creek Ranch on the 29th (Guy McC, et al); a male **Black-throated Blue Warbler** at Kelso on the 9th (Hank B.); a male **Hooded Warbler** at Mesquite Springs on the 1st (Herb and Olga Clarke); at least three **Rusty Blackbirds** at F.C.R. on Nov. 1, and one still there on the 22nd (Isobel Ludlom and Glenn Cunningham); three **Scarlet Tanagers** (the first reports in several years): one at Kelso, one at Panamint Springs, and one at F.C.R.; and at least one **Black Rosy Finch** with the **Gray-crowns** in Westgard Pass, east of Big Pine (G. McC, Nov. 29). In addition, there were several reports of **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks**, **Tree Sparrows**, and **Harris Sparrows**; and a few sightings of **Lark Buntings**, **Clay-colored Sparrows**, and **longspurs**.

Because of their presence in previous years, we may reasonably assume that at least some of these late migrants are wintering birds. Most notable among these is the **Tufted Duck** at Lake Sherwood, which returned for the third winter (Jerry J. Nov. 18). It is also possible that the female "**Yellow-shafted**" Flicker which Jerry found the same day is the same bird as last year.

Don Tiller at the Salton Sea Refuge reports an unprecedented flock of *twenty Oldsquaws* (very rare inland and unknown here in flocks of such size), and six "**Aleutian**" **Canada Geese**, a race which was once on the verge of extinction. There were an unusual number of reports of **Hooded Mergansers**—a male at Malibu Lagoon on Nov. 16, and two there on Dec. 21 (Bruce B.); a male at Marina del Rey Nov. 19; and two on the New Lakes at Whittier Narrows in early Dec. (Dave Foster). The first local report of a **Black Scoter** in nearly two years comes from Van Remson: a young male or a female in lower Anaheim Bay, Seal Beach, on Dec. 13.

Coincidence adds interest to any report. The Lane Slates of Pacific Palisades spotted an adult **Condor** in a small flock of Turkey Vultures from the Ventura Fwy. near Malibu Canyon on Dec. 6, precisely duplicating Jon Dunn's sighting nearly four months earlier, on Aug. 20.

**Rough-legged Hawks** are unusual in our urbanized area, but Rusty Scalf found one near Dominguez State College on Dec. 5, and another was discovered near Pt. Dume on Dec. 23, just in time for the Malibu Count (Gene Abrams and Lois Boylen). The Carrizo Plains are famous for raptors, and Harold Swanton's sighting of five **Ferruginous Hawks** there on Dec. 6 gives ample confirmation to this fact. The species can also be found in the area west of Lancaster. A new bird for Los Angeles County was the immature **Zone-tailed Hawk** seen by Shirley Wells over Pt. Fermin, San Pedro, on Nov. 7. Lake Mathews, south of Riverside, is the most reliable place to find both **Bald** and **Golden Eagles**, according to Herb and Olga Clarke, who saw both species there Nov. 22.

Another coastal record of a **Black Oystercatcher** comes from Abalone Cove, Palos Verdes (Harold Ericsson, Nov. 30). **Kittiwakes** appeared in good numbers during December—seven at Malibu and several more at King Harbor, Redondo Beach; but only two **Franklin's Gulls** were reported—one in the Ballona Creek channel at the end of Alla Rd. (Bruce B., Nov. 15) and one in Santa Barbara at about the same time. About twenty **Thayer's Gulls** were found at Hansen Dam on Nov. 28 (Jon Dunn) and several more were at the New Lakes and at Malibu.

Irma Rogers has had a **White-throated Sparrow** at her Monrovia feeder each winter since 1971, and has assumed that they were different individuals each year, since they were all in what the field guides describe as immature plumage—black and brown crownstrips, not black and white as in the adults. Now I learn from Kim Garrett that there is a form (biologists call it a **morph**) of the White-throat which has black and brown crownstrips as an adult. This makes it probable that the same individual is returning winter after winter. A similar situation existed with the White-throated Sparrow which was seen at the Arcadia Arboretum for three successive winters. 🐦

**Unusual bird sightings** for inclusion in this column, or for the weekly recorded Bird Report should be reported to either Shum Suffel (797-2965) or Jean Brandt (788-5188). Punctuality in reporting is essential, so that other birders may share your observations.



## WESTERN TANAGER

EDITOR Barry Clark

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Audubon membership (local and national) is \$15 per year (individual), \$18 (family), or \$7 (student), including AUDUBON Magazine, and THE WESTERN Tanager. To join, make checks payable to the National Audubon Society, and send them to Audubon House. Subscriptions to THE WESTERN Tanager separately are \$3.50 per year, with \$1.00 additional if you wish First Class Mail.

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## Gail Gifford/FIELD TRIP REPORTS

**UPPER NEWPORT BAY—October 5.** About 18 birders gathered under the leadership of Freeman Tatum. Coastal fog cleared by mid-morning, with hazy sun thereafter. 63 species were seen. There was an unusually high tide and it was about noon before the water receded enough for shorebirds to come within binocular range. Ducks had not yet arrived in large numbers but about 150 Pintails, 80 American Widgeons, 20 Shovelers, and 6 Mallards were counted. The 6 Clapper Rails seen were the lowest number Dr. Tatum has noted there at this date in several years. He thinks it possible that vegetation growing in the bay away from shore may provide cover. Only 5 Dunlins were seen, and it was reported that they had just begun to arrive. There were a good number of American Avocets, and a relatively large number of gulls.

**GOLETA SLOUGH, Santa Barbara—October 18.** T. Nelson Metcalf was the leader of 15 birders (8 from LAAS and one from Nebraska). 63 species were observed. The first three days of the week had seen excellent birding, with 16 species of warblers reported. But the weather turned, and with fog each night no migrants showed up for the trip. The tide was against the group and they did not go to the Devereux Slough.

**BUTTERBREAD SPRING—October 25-26.** Keith and Pam Axelson led 29 desert enthusiasts on the annual field trip to the Spring, starting from the gathering spot at the Jawbone Cyn. turnoff. The weather was excellent, with temperatures ranging from 48-68 degrees. 65 species were observed. Among the most interesting were the Mountain Plover, Evening Grosbeak, Pinyon Jay, Pine Siskin, and Long-eared Owl. The group camped overnight at Kelso Creek, and on Sunday lunched in the foothills of the Piute Mountains.

**SANTA FE DAM AREA—November 8.** There were 32 participants under the leadership of Dean Harvey. Weather: hazy sun, 65-70 degrees, with no wind. 37 species were observed, most of them within the interesting coastal desert sage community. Among those seen were Sage and Black-throated Sparrows, and a Short-eared Owl—new for the area list.

**McGRATH STATE PARK—November 9.** A small group led by John Schmitt walked two miles and drove two miles in 55-70 degree weather. 78 species were observed, including 4 Parasitic Jaegers, 3 Red-throated Loons, and a Short-eared Owl. There were 150-plus Brown Pelicans and 10 Mew Gulls at the Park.

**CARRIZO PLAIN—December 6-7.** Gerald Maisel led 18 cars of birders. The weather was good, with temperatures in the low 60's. A total of 40 species was recorded. All the raptors expected were there including 3 Ferruginous Hawks. Others seen were Red-tails, Rough-legs, American Kestrels, Golden Eagles (7), Marsh Hawks, Prairie Falcons, a Short-eared Owl, and a Burrowing Owl. Most of the raptors were at the northwest end of the plain. Canvasbacks were at the pond, and 106 Mountain Plovers plus 125 Sandhill Cranes were counted. The plain is overgrazed, perhaps by sheep, and there is little vegetation left for the cranes. They were seen in the sagebrush.

*Gail Gifford, our new Activities Editor, will report on LAAS field trips each month in the Tanager.*

## The Condor Fund

To date, LAAS members have contributed over \$3500 toward the support of the Condor sanctuaries, making 1975 a record year for donations. Many thanks to all who have helped out. A check for the full amount will be presented to John Borneman, Condor Naturalist, at the Annual Dinner, February 10.

# CALENDAR

Los Angeles Audubon Headquarters, Library, Bookstore, and Nature Museum are located at Audubon House, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles 90046. Telephone: 876-0202. Hours: 10-3, Monday through Friday.

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5—Executive Board Meeting, 8:00 p.m.,** Audubon House.

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8—Louis Rubidoux Nature Center, Santa Ana River Park.** Meet at 8:30 a.m. in the parking area. Take the Pomona Fwy. (60) to the Rubidoux exit, and turn right on Rubidoux Blvd. Continue on Rubidoux Blvd. to the first signal (Mission Blvd.) and turn right. Follow along Mission to the second signal (Riverview Dr.) and turn left. At the fork in the road, stay to the left on Riverview Dr. The Nature Center is approximately 2 miles from that point. This area offers diverse habitats, from chaparral to riparian, and includes a large marsh area that attracts waterfowl and shorebirds. Leader: Doug Hay, Park Naturalist.

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10—Annual Dinner,** at the Fish Shanty Restaurant, 4th and LaCienega, in Hollywood. Reception: 6:15 p.m., Dinner: 7:30 p.m. Price: only \$7.90 per person. Specify entree you prefer (steak or salmon) and send check to Joann Gabbard, 1318 Euclid Ave., Apt. 7, Santa Monica, Calif. 90404 (Tel. 395-1911). The program will feature the Canadian nature film, "Wild Africa—The Way it Was," produced by John Livingston, with photography by Roger Tory Peterson.

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14—Morro Bay.** Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the foot of Morro Rock. This is one of our best areas for wintering coastal 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 half day Sunday. There is camping at Morro Bay State Park, and many motels are located in Morro Bay and nearby San Luis Obispo. Reservations should be made in advance for the campground. Morro Bay is approximately 210 miles north of Los Angeles via Hwy. 101. Leader: Roger Cobb. (Note change of date from 7th to 14th.)

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22—Pelagic Trip** to cruise Anacapa and Santa Cruz Islands. Departs at 8:00 a.m. and returns at 4:00 p.m. \$14 per person, 40 passenger capacity. To make reservations, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Mrs. Joann Gabbard, 1318 Euclid Avenue, Apt. #7, Santa Monica, Calif. 90404. Be sure to list names of members in your party, and be sure to include a telephone number where you can be reached the evening before the trip in case of cancellation due to poor weather. For further information call Mrs. Gabbard, at 395-1911.

**THURSDAY, MARCH 4—Executive Board Meeting, 8:00 p.m.,** Audubon House.

**SUNDAY, MARCH 7—Tujunga Wash and Hansen Dam.** Details in the next TANAGER.

**TUESDAY, MARCH 9—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m.,** Plummer Park. Everyone welcome. **Dr. Luis Baptista**, Curator of the Moore Ornithological Laboratory at Occidental College, will present a program entitled, "How and Why Do Birds Sing?"

**NOTE**—If you wish the advance schedule for the 1976 pelagic trips, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Mrs. Pamela Axelson, 3262 Midvale Avenue, Los Angeles, Calif. 90034.

*Audubon Bird Report—call 874-1318*

The Los Angeles Audubon Society and its authorized leaders cannot accept responsibility for the protection or well-being of persons attending field trips, or for any accidents, personal or otherwise, incurred during a sponsored trip. The Society also regrets that it cannot be responsible for transportation. Always bring binoculars and lunch. No pets or collecting permitted. For last minute changes or cancellations, call the BIRD REPORT (874-1318) on the Friday before the trip. For further information regarding any field trip, call the Field Trip Chairman, Pamela Axelson: 474-6205 (evenings).

## Non-game Decals

Few of us may realize that we have a splendid opportunity now to help preserve some of the dwindling wildlife in California. For years, hunting and fishing licenses have provided most of the funds to maintain and manage habitat for game fish, birds, and mammals. In addition, Duck Stamps—both Federal and State—are sold to hunters for the care and feeding of nesting ducks in Canada.

Inevitably, the emphasis in the agencies involved with wildlife has been with the species taken for sport—and there has been relatively little money and manpower available for helping nongame animals survive the pressures of land development and human population growth.

Now, however, the California Department of Fish and Game, under the Native Species Conservation and Enhancement Act, is accepting contributions from the public to further the acquisition of prime habitat, provide for conservation education, wildlife surveys, and management. This is an excellent chance for those of us who

care about a healthy environment to do something about it. For a \$5 donation, you will get a decal of a Sea Otter, a delightful animal that was rescued from near extinction by the DFG. You may also get a nice warm feeling inside.

The address is: Decal, DFG, Sacramento, Calif. 95814.

## Bird Slides Needed

Our Society regularly receives requests from schools, service clubs, and the local news media to provide photos illustrating common birds of Southern California. So, in order to help spread the Audubon message, we've decided to establish a **Slide Bank**—a library of good color pictures of a few dozen of our most typical birds. If you are a photographer and have slides we could use, please give Jean Brandt a call, at 788-5188. We'll pay for duplicating and return your originals to you. And remember, we need photos of even the most commonplace birds. House Sparrows, Starlings, Mourning Doves—we accept them all!

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