

WESTERN TANAGER

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Thoreau and the Wonder of Birds



O man has contributed more to our appreciation of the simple joys of nature than Henry David Thoreau.

Though educated at Harvard, he was content to spend his days tramping the woods and fields of Concord, 18 miles from Boston. A visionary and poet, he viewed the world through enchanted eyes—and birds were among his special pleasures. To see them better, he invested \$8.00 to purchase a crude telescope (a sizable expenditure when compared to the \$25.16 it cost him to construct the cabin at Walden Pond). During his two years at Walden and the ten years in Concord that followed, he recorded 147 species of birds—only a few short of the total reported for the area to date. When, in 1862, at the age of 45, he succumbed to tuberculosis, he left to the world a legacy of wisdom as vital today as it was a century ago. The passages that follow were culled from his voluminous journals, spanning the years 1852-1859.

Each year is a surprise to us. We find that we had virtually forgotten the note of each bird, and when we hear it again it is remembered like a dream, reminding us of a previous state of existence. How happens it that the associations it awakens are always pleasing, never saddening; reminiscences of our sanest hours? The voice of nature is always encouraging.

I hear faintly the cawing of a crow far, far away, echoing from some unseen woodside, as if deadened by the springlike vapor which the sun is drawing from the ground. It mingles with the slight murmur of the village, the sound of children at play, as one stream empties gently into another, and the wild and tame are one. What a delicious sound! It is not merely crow calling to crow, for it speaks to me too. I am part of one great creature with him; if he has voice, I have ears. I can hear what he calls, and have engaged not to shoot nor stone him if he will caw to me each spring...

It is a good plan to go to some old orchard on the south side of a hill, sit down, and listen, especially in the morning when all is still. You can thus often hear the distant warble of some bluebird lately arrived, which, if you had been walking, would not have been audible to you. As I walk, these first mild spring days, with my coat thrown open, stepping over tinkling rills of melting snow, excited by the sight of the bare ground... I stand still, shut my eyes, and



Thoreau in 1854, at the age of 37.

listen from time to time, in order to hear the note of some bird of passage just arrived.

The song sparrow and the transient fox-colored sparrow—have they bought me no messages this year? These migrating sparrows all bear messages that concern my life. I love the birds and beasts because they are mythologically in earnest. I see that the sparrow cheeps and flits and sings adequately to the great design of the universe; that man does not communicate with it, understand its language, because he is not at one with nature. I reproach myself because I have regarded with indifference the passage of the birds; I have thought them no better than I.

The hooting of the owl! That is a sound which my red predecessors heard here more than a thousand years ago. It rings far and wide, occupying the spaces rightfully—a grand, primeval, aboriginal sound. There is no whisper in it of the Buckleys, the Flints, the Hosmers who recently squatted here, nor of the first parish, nor of Concord Fight, nor of the last town meeting.

I rejoice that there are owls. Let them do the idiotic and maniacal hooting for men. It is a sound admirably suited to swamps and twilight woods which no day illustrates, suggesting a vast and undeveloped nature which men have not recognized nor satisfied. They represent the stark twilight and unsatisfied thoughts that I have.

Continued Overleaf

All day the sun shone over this savage swamp, where the single spruce stands hung with *usnea* moss, and small hawks circulate above, and the chickadee lisps amid the evergreens, and the partridge and rabbit skulk beneath; but now a more dismal and fitting day dawns, and a different race of creatures awakes to express the meaning of Nature...

Scared up three blue herons in the little pond close by, quite near us... They are large, like birds of Syrian lands, and seemed to oppress the earth, and hush the hillside to silence, as they winged their way over it, looking back toward us. It would affect our thoughts, deepen and perhaps darken our reflections, if such huge birds flew in numbers in our sky.

To see the larger and wilder birds, you must go forth in great storms like this. At such times they frequent our neighborhood and trust themselves in our midst. A life of fair-weather walks might never show you the goose sailing on our waters, or the great heron feeding here... To see wild life you must go forth at a wild season. Then returns Nature to her wild estate...



To see a gull beating high over our meadowy flood in chill and windy March is akin to seeing a mackerel schooner on the coast. It is the nearest approach to sailing vessels in our scenery... Oh, how it salts our fresh, our sweet watered Fair Haven all at once to see this sharp-beaked, greedy sea-bird beating over it! For a while the water is brackish to my eyes. It is merely some herring pond, but if I climb the eastern bank I expect to see the Atlantic there covered with countless sails.

Instead of walking in the wood-market amid sharp-visaged teamsters, I float over dark reflecting waters in which I see mirrored the stumps on the bank, and am dazzled by the beauty of a summer duck. Though I should get no wood, I should get beauty perhaps more valuable. The price of this my wood, however high, is the very thing which I delight to pay.

In my boating of late I have several times scared up a couple of summer ducks of this year, bred in our meadows. They allowed me to come quite near, and helped to people the river. I have not seen them for some days. Would you know the end of our intercourse? Goodwin shot them, and Mrs. X, who never sailed on the river, ate them. Of course, she knows not what she did. What if I should eat her canary? Thus we share each other's sins as well as burdens. The lady who watches admiringly the matador shares his deed. They belonged to me, as much as to any one, when they were alive, but it is considered of more importance that Mrs. X should taste the flavor of them dead than that I should enjoy the beauty of them alive.

While the commentators and translators are disputing the meaning of this word or that, I hear only the resounding of the ancient sea, and put into all the meaning I am possessed of, the deepest murmurs I can recall, for I do not the least care where I get my ideas, or what suggest them.

I knew that a crow had that day plucked the cedar berries and barberries by Flint's Pond and then flapped silently through the trackless air to Walden, where it dined on fisherman's bait, though there was no living creature to tell me.

I once had a sparrow alight upon my shoulder for a moment while I was hoeing in a village garden, and I felt that I was more distinguished by that circumstance than I should have been by any epaulet I could have worn...

In Boston yesterday an ornithologist said significantly, "If you held the bird in your hand—;" but I would rather hold it in my affections.

Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic of wilderness—to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground.

I long for wildness, a nature which I cannot put my foot through, woods where the wood thrush forever sings, where the hours are early morning ones, and there is dew on the grass, and the day is forever unproved, where I might have a fertile unknown for a soil about me...

As the bay-wing sang many a thousand years ago, so sang he tonight... It reminded me of many a summer sunset, of many miles of gray rails, of many a rambling pasture, of the farmhouse far in the fields, its milkpans and well-sweep, and the cows coming home from pasture.

I would thus from time to time take advice of the birds, correct my human views by listening to their songs. He is a brother poet, this small gray bard, whose muse inspires mine. His lay is an idyl or pastoral, older and sweeter than any that is classic. He sits on some gray perch like himself, on a stake, perchance in the midst of the field, and you can hardly see him against the plowed ground. You advance step by step as the twilight deepens, and lo! he is gone... One with the rocks and with us.

I ordinarily plod along a sort of whitewashed prison entry, subject to some indifferent or even grovelling mood. I do not distinctly realize my destiny. I have turned down my light to the merest glimmer and am doing some task which I have set myself... But suddenly, in some fortunate moment, the voice of eternal wisdom reaches me, even in the strain of the sparrow, and liberates me, whets and clarifies my senses, makes me a competent witness...

Now I have passed the Rubicon of staying out. I have said to myself, that way is not homeward; I will wander further from what I have called my home—to the home which is forever inviting me. In such an hour the freedom of the woods is offered me, and the birds sing my dispensation. ↗



Baja... and Beyond

by Dorothy Dimsdale



*B*uenos Dios, I said amiably to the assembled staff of the Mulege airport—that being the closest to *buenos días* my pronunciation ever seems to come. The staff, all one of him, looked puzzled, smiled warily, and returned to his duties—maintaining commerce and transport at this crossroads of nowhere and nothing in the midst of the Baja desert. These duties, apparently, consisted of barbecuing fish and stapling stray papers together. The fish was free and served in tortillas with a delicious sauce. We ate it in the thatched lean-to which passed for an air terminal.

Our Mexican holiday had not been designed primarily as a birding trip. In fact, of the four of us, only one (me) was a birder, and the other three were normal. We'd arrived at Mulege on what was eventually to be a sunny morning—after the vast dust cloud settled on the unpaved airstrip.

Soon the plane departed, covering us with a splendid coat of silt. Had there been any birds about, I'm sure I could have snuck up on them camouflaged as a mound of Mexican earth. Only Black Vultures wheeled about, and I had the distinct suspicion that we were the first moving objects they'd seen in a long time. The birds were too smart to hang around, however—a policy that suddenly made good sense to us too.

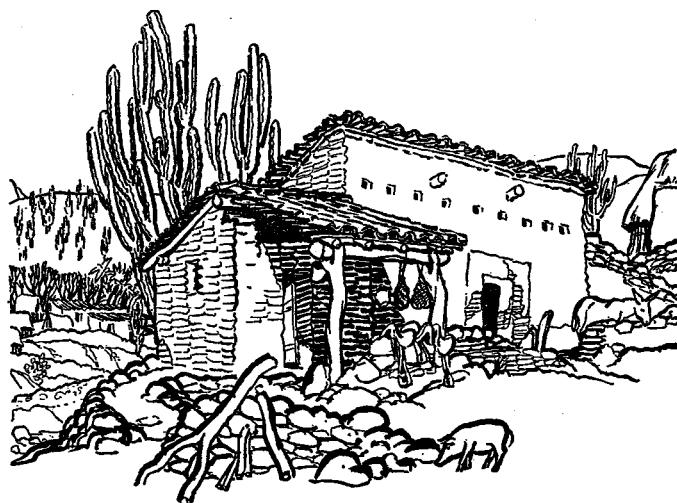
The staff obligingly offered to drive us to our hotel in his "taxi"—an aged truck with its roof festooned with religious objects—an understandable caution in view of the character of the road. As for the hotel: according to the other members of our party, it was fine. I wouldn't know. After politely wishing the hotel staff "Good God," I went birding. I'd spotted an exquisite lagoon within easy walking distance, its shimmering waters seemingly dotted with birds.

A dozen or so charming, wide-eyed Mexican children watched me from a safe distance, clearly fascinated with the loopy lady whose eyes were glued to binoculars, as she studied the Little Blue Herons, Magnificent Frigate Birds, Brown Boobys, and such. The wise children, however, lingered well back from the lagoon; while I, in my zeal, advanced forward. As the sun sank in the west, I sank in the mud—shank deep; but not before spotting a Black-tailed Gnatcatcher and my very first Verdin, in a nearby bush.



Our next stop was Loreto, a delightful village with a well-preserved church and a modern hotel. Here I saw dozens of Phainopeplas and Gila Woodpeckers, plus Vermillion Flycatchers, and a Varied Bunting.

La Paz, near the southern tip of the peninsula, was our final stop in Baja. Exercising rare self-discipline, I suppressed my obsession with birds, and, to the astonishment of husband and friends, volunteered to join them for the afternoon. No birds—just people. I'd go along with whatever activity seemed appealing to them.



Typical accommodations along the road to La Paz.

It wasn't long, however, before I relapsed. In the middle of a conversation I went mute, my mouth fell open, and I stared pop-eyed at the sandy shore across the road, where a clearly confused Sandhill Crane had just dropped in. His arrival may have been occasioned by an injured leg, but in any case he was miles off course. He hopped with difficulty for several minutes and then took off, presumably across the Pacific. It was a sad sight, but there was nothing I could do.

Soon we limped onward ourselves. Next stop, Puerto Vallarta. This is a famous resort, consisting, in my mind, of a small bridge on the grounds of the Camino Real Hotel, where Scarlet-headed Orioles, Cinnamon, Violet-crowned, and Broad-billed Hummingbirds, as well as Scrub Euphonias congregate. I congregated there as well, until the hotel attendants must have thought I was about to sprout wings.

Finally, Manzanillo. We stayed at Las Hadas, a hotel which resembles the dream of an Arabian nut about an Arabian night: moorish arches, domes, stark white buildings, and a swimming pool not quite large enough to accommodate the Americas Cup Race. The place is so exclusive, in fact, that there are literally no birds to be seen on the grounds. I suspect they can't afford it.

Fortunately, a nearby golf course offers avian lodging at more reasonable rates. If you don't mind birding amidst the hail of golf balls and incomprehensible epithets in Spanish, you can observe a marvellous variety of species. I spotted Golden-cheeked Woodpeckers, Pyrrhuloxias, lots of Yellow-winged Caciques, and two glorious species—the Squirrel Cuckoo and the Jacana.

It was hard to leave, but the drive from Manzanillo to Guadalajara is a must for birders. My three companions were forfeited by now with my birding exploits, and we drove non-stop. However, I did see enough from the car window to want to return. That road has every conceivable bird habitat—and, for the dramatically-inclined, there's even a live volcano outside Colima, churning up impressive columns of smoke.

In describing such surroundings, perhaps *Buenos Dios* is an appropriate phrase after all. There's no need to say more, except to add that I, for one, had a marvellous time. 

Jean Brandt

BIRDING at Little Rock Dam

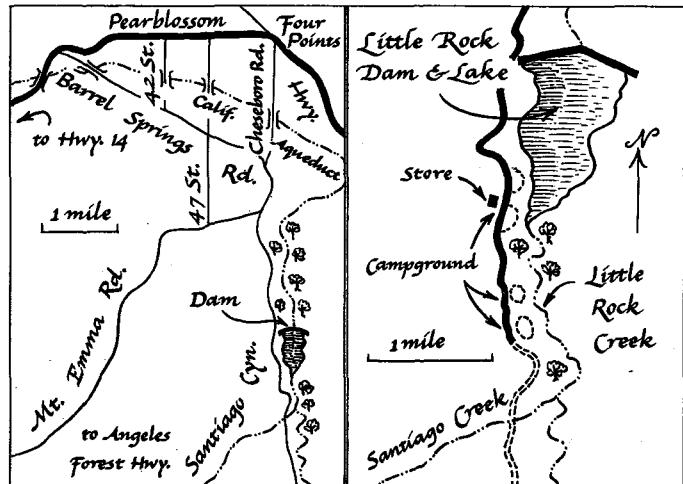
Spring migration is at its best in the high desert oases, and the nearby Little Rock Dam area is no exception. A one-hour drive from the San Fernando Valley, the dam can be reached from Four Points, on the Pearblossom Hwy., by turning south on Cheseboro Rd. As you drive through the lush stand of Joshua Trees, watch for Scott's Orioles, Cactus Wrens, thrashers, and sparrows—and as you cross the California Aqueduct, keep an eye out for shorebirds and ducks.

Just past the entrance sign to the Angeles National Forest, there are some buildings and trailers on your left. If you haven't seen Scott's Orioles by now, look for them in the pinyon trees in this area. The willows and cottonwoods in the canyon below the dam should be checked, but the best birding is in the campgrounds upstream. All of our expected migrants turn up here, and both Northern and Hooded Orioles are abundant. The campgrounds have pinyon, cottonwood, and willow trees, and can be teeming with birds.

Continue on the road one third of a mile after the pavement ends. An intermittent stream enters the canyon from the west. Park and walk upstream (into Santiago Cyn.). Six species of flycatchers, Lazuli Buntings, Western Bluebirds, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and three species of goldfinches are regular migrants here. Listen for the "ping pong ball," which will announce the Black-chinned Sparrows that nest here—as do Nuttall's Woodpeckers and both Bewick's and House Wrens.

On your return trip, turn west on Barrel Springs Road (2.2 miles north of the dam). Roadrunners, California Quail, and Black-throated Sparrows are found alongside the road. Listen throughout the Little Rock area for Gray Vireos, as they have been reported there in the past. At the intersection of Barrel Springs Road and 42nd St., you should look in the cottonwoods for flycatchers and warblers.

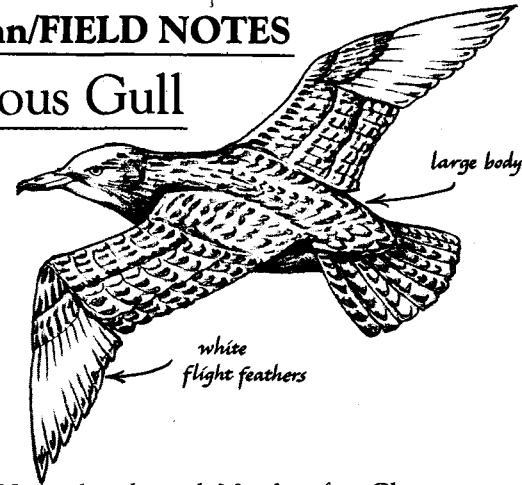
Each of the campgrounds has restrooms, water, picnic tables, and campstoves. Groceries, supplies, gasoline, and a telephone are available at the Little Rock Resort at the lake (in season), and there are motels in nearby Palmdale. Good birding!



Based on a map by Glenn Cunningham

Jon Dunn/FIELD NOTES

Glaucous Gull



From late November through March, a few Glaucous Gulls are found annually along our coast, and occasionally a bird is encountered on large inland bodies of water such as Salton Sea or Lake Tahoe. Unfortunately, though, many reports of supposed Glaucous Gulls prove incorrect—and a great deal of caution is necessary in identifying the species.

On the average, the Glaucous is the largest of our west coast gulls, although some females can be smaller than the larger males of the Glaucous-winged and Western Gulls.

Virtually all our Glaucous Gull records are of 1st-year birds. Typically, these are a chalky white color throughout, with buffy brown horizontal bars over most of the plumage, particularly on the back and wings. The flight feathers, however, are always an unmarked chalky white, standing out from the rest of the wing when the bird is sitting or in flight. As the winter progresses, the gulls gradually lose their brownish barring, until by early February they may be virtually pure white.

Another excellent field mark of the Glaucous Gull is the heavy bicolored bill. The basal two thirds is a pale pinkish color, while the tip is black. The line of demarcation is almost always very sharp. Be careful, though, since worn, late-winter Glaucous-winged Gulls also have a pale base to the bill, though the paleness blends irregularly into the dark tip. Also, these worn Glaucous-wings retain a grayish cast to the plumage, unlike the chalky white tones of the Glaucous.

Perhaps the best mark on the Glaucous is its overall shape. The species has a very large body and short wings. While individuals of other species may stand higher, the Glaucous appears to be more full in the chest and belly. The head is also distinctive, being quite large and square, with a flat forehead. In overall shape, the gull that most closely resembles the Glaucous is the Western (square-headed, but not so large a body).

Even when albinism is encountered, the overall size and shape of the Glaucous should provide important clues. If the bird is pure white, it probably is not a Glaucous, since even a very pale late-winter bird always retains some buffy flecking or barring on the tail and undertail coverts.

Errata

In the column on longspur identification, please note that at all seasons McCown's is the rarest longspur regularly occurring in California. Note also that the midwing area on this species is best described as a dark buff, rather than a dark brown, as indicated on the illustration. In addition, note that it is the soft rattle call of the Chestnut-collared, rather than the kiddle-kiddle vocalization that is thought to serve as an alarm call.

BOOKS

ORNITHOLOGY—from Aristotle to the Present, by Erwin Stresemann, Harvard University Press, 1975 (\$20.00). Birds have always held a special appeal for students of the natural world, and it's not surprising that the history of ornithology reflects the history of natural philosophy—a mirror held up to society and all its foibles. Despite the tantalizing nature of the subject, the present volume is one of the first of its type to be published.

A translation from the German, the book is full of intriguing insights into the life and thought of an amazing procession of ornithologists and adventurers, many of whom were colorful and eccentric figures.

Time and again, ornithologists have pioneered new fields of biology—including zoogeography, evolution, ethology, and ecology. The present volume places this whole exciting story in perspective.

Regrettably, the full history of American ornithology, an engaging tale in its own right, has yet to be written; though Ernst Mayr has contributed some preliminary notes on the subject to this book.

COMPETITION AND THE STRUCTURE OF BIRD COMMUNITIES, by Martin L. Cody, Princeton University Press, 1974 (\$12.50). This volume, by UCLA biologist Martin Cody, represents a fine example of the innovative ideas now sweeping the field of ornithology. The inspiration for the work can be traced to the revolutionary theories of Robert H. MacArthur, whose *Geographic Ecology* (1972) was a classic before it was published. Cody's objective is to understand the way in which avian communities are formed and maintained: i.e. how species divide up their environment. Field work in the grasslands and chaparral of North and South America provides the basis for the theoretical treatment.

Though the methodology is at times abstract, the ideas are nonetheless compelling, for the prospect exists that as a result of work such as this we may gain insight not only into the society of Wrentits, towhees and thrashers, but into the ways of the human community as well.

—Barry Clark

VOICES OF NEOTROPICAL BIRDS, compiled by Dr. J.W. Hardy. Ara Records, Gainesville, Fla., 1975 (\$6.00).

This new album features the vocalizations of some 50 species of tropical birds recorded from Mexico to South America. Many of the songs included here have never before been available to the birder. The songs are sharp and clear, and each runs for a considerable length of time.

Biological aspects of the songs are emphasized in the extensive commentary, an interesting adjunct to the songs themselves. Because of the limited number of recordings of tropical birds on the market, we recommend the acquisition of the disc for your library.

It appears that this is to be the first of a series of recordings by Dr. Hardy, and we may look forward with great interest to forthcoming releases.

—Olga L. Clarke

All books and records reviewed in this column are available at Audubon House, or may be ordered through the bookstore. Hours are Mon-Fri 10-3. LAAS members and TANAGER subscribers are entitled to a 10% discount on purchases over \$5.00. Mail and phone orders are welcome.

Twilight of the Peregrine



The female Peregrine Falcon of the famous Morro Rock pair was found by a group of kids along the highway. Alive, but with a broken wingtip, she had flown into telephone wires over the road. The accident occurred during the Christmas holidays—and since that time the bird has been in a northern California hospital where its wing is being reset. Meanwhile, the tiercel awaits a female to whom he can show his eyrie, and, in turn, form a pair-bond. Times are tough for Peregrines these days. There are only eight known nests left in California, a drastic decline from the 100 or so pairs known from Bond's study in the 1940's. Things look bad elsewhere too. The 14 eyries known in the Rocky Mountains produced mostly rotten eggs in 1973, and fledged only three young. A decline of similar magnitude has been documented along the Pacific Coast of Lower California (Banks; Risebrough).

The tiercel was without a mate in 1970—but at that time he was able to flag in a female. The pair had been productively fledging young each year in the rich biological environs surrounding the rock.

Now the tiercel waits and we all wait.

—Glenn Olson

The drawing of the Peregrine Falcon is by Peter Parnall. Parnall's work, along with that of outstanding nature artists Arthur Singer, Fenwick Lansdowne, Don Eckleberry, and Roger Tory Peterson, is on view at the new **Wings Gallery**, 17310 Ventura Blvd., Encino. The gallery is open 10-5, Tues., Sat., and 12-5 Sundays. Owner Robin Wing offers fellow Audubon members a 10% discount on prints, 5% of which is applied as a contribution to LAAS.



Do you want to know what streets reach Greynolds Park in Miami, or what highway leads to Minnesota's Tamarac Wildlife Refuge, or what birds to expect in Big Bend National Park? The library at Audubon House may be of help. Two file cabinet drawers labeled, "Maps, Guides, Bird Lists," are designed to answer just such questions for the local birder planning a trip—or for birders from elsewhere visiting this area.

Each file contains highway maps and city street maps, plus brochures, pamphlets, clippings, and bird lists for National Parks and Monuments, State and County Parks, wildlife refuges, and sanctuaries. Far from being complete, the collection is new and growing. Contributions are eagerly sought and may be left in the "To Be Filed" box on top of the library cabinet. Materials do not circulate, but are available to all for use in the library.

—Glenn Cunningham

Shumway Suffel

BIRDS of the Season



e've had it pretty easy during the dull days of early spring, and should now be caught up on our non-birding chores—a fortunate state of affairs, since birding activity will increase week by week during April, until it peaks in early May.

That history repeats itself is well known, but it is nonetheless surprising that the correlation is so close between Arnold Small's comments in the March 1963 TANAGER, and ours in the March 1976 edition. We quote Arnold's article, with the 1976 figures in parentheses: "The prolonged drought in Southern California was not alleviated until Feb. 9th (4th). Between July 1, 1962 (1975) and early February 1963 (1976) less than one inch of rain had fallen on most of S.C. Although the storm of Feb. 9-11 (4-8) helped alleviate the drought, the rainfall totals by this time were still far short of normal." Well, too late or too little the rain may be, but we are grateful, all the same, for its lifegiving benefits.

Somehow, even in mid-winter, when expectations are low, a few exciting birds are found. In January, they were the **Broad-billed Hummingbird** (last seen Feb. 18), and the **Curve-billed Thrasher** (which stayed through February). This was a tough pair to top, but February came very close with a **Bar-tailed Godwit** in the Ballona Creek Channel above Marina del Rey—a first for Southern California and only the fourth for California (Bob Margolis, Feb. 12). A second **Curve-billed Thrasher** was subsequently found near Finney Lake (or was it a **Bendire's Thrasher**?—the experts disagree). It had a yellow eye like a Bendire's, but a long bill like a Curve-bill. (In fact, the evening of the LAAS field trip to Finney Lake on Jan. 31 was a scene of great confusion—a case of *too many thrashers*—as both a **Crissal** and a **Sage Thrasher** were also seen nearby).

The prediction that this would be a **Fulmar** winter was confirmed by the sighting of hundreds of the birds in Monterey Bay on Feb. 15—and one was even seen inside L.A. Harbor (Fred Kepler and Armand Cohen, Feb. 8). An adult **California Condor**, feeding with Turkey Vultures on a dead cow along Kanan Rd. at the foot of the Simi Hills (Bob Margolis, Feb. 22) makes it obvious that the two previous reports, Aug. 20 and Dec. 6, 1975, were more than just coincidence. Clearly, a Condor has either taken up residence or is a frequent visitor to our suburbs, well outside its normal range.

Merlins are becoming very rare birds in our area, so the sightings of one in the Santa Barbara Cemetery (Harry Kreuger, Jan. 23) and another in the Sepulveda Recreation Area (John Menke, Feb. 16) are noteworthy. Two more **Hooded Mergansers** were found—a male on a small pond in Malibu Cyn. (Hal Baxter, Jan. 25), and a female on the lake in the So. Coast Botanic Gardens during February (Eric Brooks).

This also is a **Kittiwake** winter, with numbers seen all along our coast, and concentrations of forty or more at Malibu Lagoon, King Harbor, and Los Angeles Harbor. Still another **Glaucous Gull** was found, this time at the south

end of the Salton Sea, a somewhat unlikely location (Guy McCaskie, Feb 7.). The presence of a **Black Skimmer** at the north end of the Sea was confirmed by Dan Guthrie in January.

A Coues' Flycatcher, the fourth this winter (only eight previous records), was found in the reindeer enclosure at the San Diego Zoo (Jon Dunn, Feb. 7). Hummingbirds and swallows, as expected, were our earliest returning migrants. Harry Kreuger found hundreds of **Violet-greens** and about twenty **Cliff Swallows** at the New Lakes in El Monte on the early date of Feb. 5; and with them a single small dark swift which from his description was probably a **Chimney Swift**.

A note from Laura Jenner Vance tells of a **Sage Thrasher** at her new home in Bouquet Canyon on Jan. 17 and 20th. George Thompson reports a pair of **Phainopeplas** resident at Wrightwood (elev. 7000'), amazing for these birds of the dry lowlands. Every winter, one or two **Orchard Orioles** show up here; so the male at Dr. Breckenridge's feeder in Northridge maintains this record intact. A female **Summer Tanager** at Robert and Karl Poehles' feeder in Northridge on Feb. 15 was our only report this winter.

Rare sparrows always add interest to winter birding, as the following reports illustrate: On Feb. 17 Fred Baker wheeled his bicycle from Garden Grove to the nearby Santa Ana River channel, where he found and correctly identified our only local **Swamp Sparrow**. The New Lakes in El Monte are known for their thousands of wintering White-crowns and Savannahs, but it took two banders (Charlie Collins and Bob McKernan) to extricate a single rare **Tree Sparrow** from the horde of lesser *fringillids*, on Feb. 20. A **Harris' Sparrow** near Dan Guthrie's house in Claremont during January and February was moulting into adult summer plumage with much black on the forecrown and upper breast, but another on the Coronado Silverstrand on Feb. 22 was very drab, obviously a winter immature.

The large bare field west of Dominguez State College retained its reputation as the best local spot for grassland birds, when the dull **Lapland Longspur**, reported last month, was joined by another, more colorful "Lap," showing the pattern of black, rusty, and yellow about the head typical of an adult male in summer plumage.

The Morongo Valley field trips in early May should provide an opportunity for beginners to learn the sometimes subtle marks which distinguish the eleven species of western warblers—good preparation for the tougher problems to be faced when vagrants show up at the desert oases or on Santa Barbara Island in late May and early June.

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.

Gail Gifford/FIELD TRIP REPORTS

MORRO BAY—February 14. On a rainy morning, 17 birders met leader Roger Cobb at the foot of Morro Rock. They walked around the rock looking for the elusive Peregrine Falcon, and were rewarded 45 minutes later by seeing a pair in flight. There were jesses on one of them, so it was probably an escapee. The party moved on to Morro Bay State Park to visit the salt marsh and mud flats. There they found many shore birds, plus White-tailed Kites and Red-shouldered Hawks. A Great Horned Owl was flushed from the eucalyptus trees bordering the park. The group then visited the Audubon Lookout on the other side of the marsh, where they found a Virginia Rail and many ducks and shore birds. The next stop was Montana de Oro State Park, where there were Black Oystercatchers, Surfbirds, Black Turnstones, and a Spotted Sandpiper. The trip concluded at the Natural History Museum at Morro Bay State Park, from which the group enjoyed a view of one of California's last great marshes.

PT. MUGU NAVAL AIR STATION—February 21. First, a thank you to Elmer Colley of the Naval Base, who gave so generously of his time in leading the 21 birders around the marshy areas within the Base. Another thank you goes to James Halferty of LAAS who made the arrangements for the first field trip into the area. Ed Navajosky was the co-leader, and a total of 85 species were seen between 8:30 and 4:00 pm. The caravan of cars covered the area under brilliant skies, but was buffeted by a strong wind—not uncommon on the point. Among the species recorded were 3 Goldeneyes, numerous Canvasbacks, a Parasitic Jaeger, a Long-billed Curlew, Common and Red-throated Loons, many gulls (including Thayer's, Glaucous-winged, and Herring), Marsh Hawks, Whitetailed Kites, 1 White Pelican, and 3 species of cormorants. The birders had an opportunity to study Royal Terns standing on a nearby sandbar and one was found to have orange legs. Another beautiful sighting was a White-faced Glossy Ibis which landed near the watchers. On the way out, a Burrowing Owl was the last bird logged for the day.

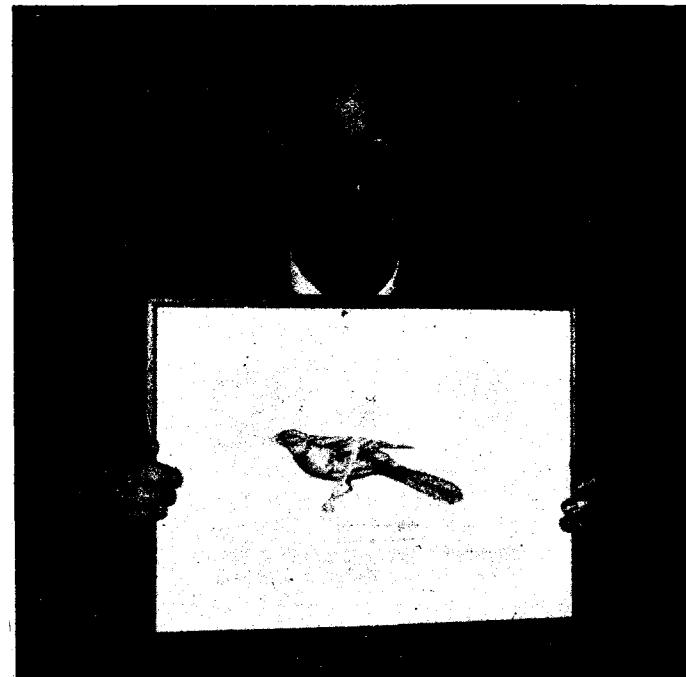
PELAGIC TRIP TO ANACAPA ISLAND—February 22. The trip was made in good weather with extremely clear visibility, which made the birding quite productive. Under Arnold Small's expert guidance, 28 species were located. Bait thrown from the boat attracted numerous gulls, including Mews, Herrings, a Thayer's, and Black-legged Kittiwakes. Pomarine Jaegers, Xantus' Murrelets, 2 Cassin's Auks, and over 40 Rhinoceros Auks were counted. The boat came across a floating sea lion carcass on which 5 Fulmars were feeding—2 light-phase and 3 dark-phase birds. When the boat drew up alongside, many people were able to photograph them. On the island, Wandering Tattlers, Black Oystercatchers, Red Phalaropes, a Great Blue Heron, and a Belted Kingfisher were spotted. The Brown Pelicans were not so numerous as they had been several weeks ago. On the return trip a spectacular sighting of at least 4 Grey Whales within 200 feet of the boat provided an exciting climax to a great day of birding.

Audubon Scholarships

David Foster, George Ledec, Mary Ellen Pereyra, and Nancy Duree have been awarded scholarships by LAAS to cover room-and-board and tuition at the Audubon Workshop of the West, a two-week ecology and natural history camp conducted each summer at Trail Lake Ranch, in the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming. Information concerning 1977 Scholarship Applications can be obtained at Audubon House.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Members who wish to receive the TANAGER by First Class Mail (in an envelope, and a few days early) may do so by sending us \$2.50 to cover the additional postage. Non-members may subscribe for \$3.50 (Third Class), or \$6.00 (First Class).



At the LAAS Annual Dinner, February 10, L. A. Times columnist Jack Smith, the first man to report a Common Grackle in Los Angeles, was presented with a picture of the bird drawn by Mary Ellen Pereyra—so he'd know how it looks. For those of you who wonder how Jack Smith looks, we offer the photo above.



The Virtues of Selfishness

One of the most difficult aspects of urban living is the ever-present threat of anonymity: that sinking feeling of being alone in a crowd. Though individual alienation is symptomatic of a highly mobile, future-oriented society, there are ways to minimize disenfranchisement from one's community—regardless of how complex and unwieldy that community may be.

An active participation in the L. A. Audubon Society is definitely one way. Perhaps joining our organization is the result, initially, of only a philosophical commitment—supporting a "worthy cause." But the next step, a personal commitment, is far more rewarding, and the rewards are more immediate. As a volunteer, you can be part of a definable group, working with people who share some of your own viewpoints and enthusiasms. A "community" within a community. A niche within an otherwise overwhelming social structure. A positive channeling of energy within a labyrinth of disillusionment.

If you, the individual, were to consider personal, selfish gains, the L. A. Audubon Society would benefit greatly. Therefore, if you have one free day a week, use it to indulge yourself in a sense of belonging. Just leave your name and number at Audubon House, any time between 10 and 3, Monday through Friday.

You need us. And we need you. So come and volunteer. It will make you feel good!

—Terry Clark
Publicity Chairman

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, APRIL 1—Executive Board Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Audubon House.

SATURDAY, APRIL 3—Chantry Flat and Santa Anita Cyn. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the end of Santa Anita Cyn. Rd. Take the San Bernardino Fwy. to Rosemead Blvd., north on Rosemead to Foothill Blvd., east on Foothill to Santa Anita Ave., then north to the end of Santa Anita Rd. Be prepared to hike down the canyon stream and upstream to the falls to see the resident Dippers, Canyon Wrens, and the early spring migrants.

SUNDAY, APRIL 11—Louis Rubidoux Nature Center, Santa Ana River Park, Riverside. 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 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 woodland, and includes a large marsh area that attracts waterfowl and shorebirds. Leader: Doug Hay, Park Naturalist.

TUESDAY, APRIL 13—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. Everyone welcome. Dr. Gerald Maisel, LAAS President, will present a photographic report on the **Sociable Weaver** of S.W. Africa. During Nov. 1973, Dr. Maisel accompanied Prof. Tom Howell, George Bartholomew, and Ted White on an expedition to the Kalahari Desert to study these interesting birds. The bird's life revolves around its nest, which may weigh more than a ton and house as many as 500 birds. The weavers continue to build and occupy their nest throughout the year, and the energy expended by one generation results in conserving the energy of future generations—since the nest may be continuously occupied for as long as a century.

SATURDAY, APRIL 17—Trippet Ranch/Topanga Canyon State Park. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the picnic area near the entrance. Take Topanga Cyn. Blvd. to Entrada Drive, one mile north of Topanga Village. Take Entrada Drive to the fork, then go left to the gate at the end of the road. This is an excellent area for chaparral birds, and could produce some interesting spring migrants. Leader: to be announced.

Birding Seminars in Yosemite

A comprehensive three-day course in the bird life of the Yosemite National Park will be conducted June 19-21 by the Yosemite Natural History Association, under the leadership of **David Gaines**, a protege of L.A. Audubon and now at the Environmental Studies Division, U.C. Davis. Lecture topics will include population ecology and migration, with overnight field trips to prime birding locations from the forests of the valley floor to the alpine meadows at Tioga Pass. The fee is \$40.00, with \$17 additional if you wish 2 units of college credit. Contact Y.N.H.A. at Box 545, Yosemite National Park, Calif. 95389.

Los Angeles Audubon Society

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SUNDAY, APRIL 25—Pelagic Trip to Santa Barbara Island. The *Paisano* will depart at 8:00 a.m. sharp from the Ventura Marina, and return around 4:00 p.m. The plan is to watch for pelagic species en route, then land on Santa Barbara Island to search for unusual vagrants. A great opportunity to see some rare species. Unfortunately, however, the trip is already booked. As a consolation, identical trips are scheduled for May 16th and May 30th. If you have a cancellation, please call Joann Gabbard at 395-1911, or the leader, Ed Navajosky, 938-9766.

SATURDAY, MAY 1—Morongo Valley. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in Covington Park, Morongo Valley. Take Interstate 10 east to 29 Palms Hwy (62), 2.5 miles east of Whitewater, then go north approx. 10 miles. This is one of the renowned birding spots of the west, a trap for migrants funnelling into the Pacific Flyway from the Sonoran Desert. On a good day over 100 species can be found, including Vermillion Flycatchers, Summer Tanagers, Lucy's Warblers, and Weid's Flycatchers—four species which reach the terminus of their breeding ranges here. Dry camping facilities are available in Joshua Tree National Monument, and there are convenient motels in 29 Palms and Yucca Valley. Many birders traditionally stay overnight to explore the oases in Joshua Tree on Sunday. Leader: to be announced.

THURSDAY, MAY 6—Executive Board Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Audubon House.

SATURDAY, MAY 8—Morongo Valley. For details, see Saturday, May 1st. Another big weekend in the desert.

TUESDAY, MAY 11—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. Everyone Welcome. James F. Clements, inveterate birder and author of the checklist, *Birds of the World*, will present an illustrated program entitled "**Birding at the Bottom of the World**"—a record of his travels in southern South America, including Tierra del Fuego and the Straits of Magellan.

SUNDAY, MAY 16—Pelagic Trip to Santa Barbara Island. A repeat of the April 25th trip. The *Paisano* will depart at 8:00 a.m. sharp from the Ventura Marina, and will return around 4:00 p.m. The plan is to watch for pelagic species en route, then land on Santa Barbara Island to search for unusual vagrants. To make reservations, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope plus \$14 per person to Mrs. Joann Gabbard, 1318 Euclid Street, Apt. #7, Santa Monica, Calif. 90404. Be sure to list the names of members of your party, and include a phone number where you can be reached the evening before the trip, in case of cancellation due to inclement weather. Leader: to be announced.

SUNDAY, MAY 30—Pelagic Trip to Santa Barbara Island. Details as above.

Nature Conservancy's Annual Dinner

LAAS members are invited to attend the Nature Conservancy Annual Dinner, to be held at Pasadena's Huntington Sheraton Hotel, 7:15 p.m., Sunday, April 4th. The Hon. Tom McCall, Governor of Oregon and noted environmentalist, will be honored guest and speaker. Prior to the dinner, Gov. McCall will appear on NBC-TV's *Sunday Show* (4-5:30 p.m.), a program devoted to the Conservancy's fund-raising effort for the Cold Creek Cyn./Murphy Ranch Preserve. Cost of the dinner is only \$7.50. If you wish to attend, call Barbara Horton at 798-8315. Your tickets will be held at the door.

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