

# WESTERN TANAGER

Los Angeles Audubon Society

Volume 43

November 1976

Number 3

## Costa Rica

### An A.B.A. Pilot Expedition

by Hank Brodkin



Costa Rica—for long just a dream to the readers of Paul Slud and Alexander Skutch—has been placed within easy reach of most birders, thanks to the efforts of the American Birding Association, its president, Arnold Small, and the Organization of Tropical Studies—a Costa Rica-based foundation affiliated with various U.S. universities.

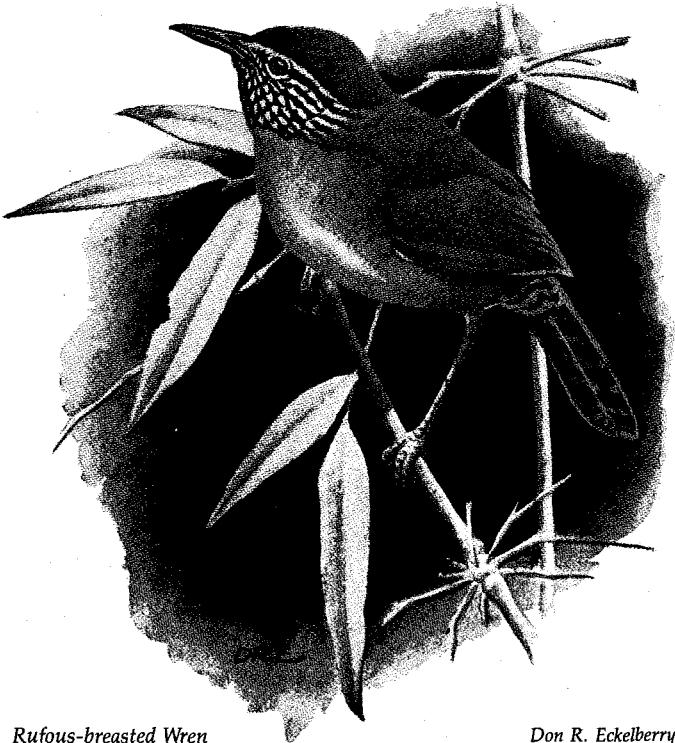
Last June my wife, Priscilla, and I were privileged to participate in the pilot expedition of what is to become a yearly A.B.A. excursion to this amazing little country—an avifaunal melting pot, where many South and Central American species reach their respective northern and southern limits. Here, in an area the size of West Virginia, 760 species of birds are distributed through a dozen or so distinct habitats—and in fifteen memorable days, our fanatically enthusiastic group, led by a fanatically enthusiastic Arnold Small, was to identify some 360 of these—a testament to a well-planned campaign that came off without a hitch.

Arnold Small's ideal neotropical birding trip, he confided to us one rainy evening at *Finca La Selva*, would number among its participants an auto mechanic skilled in the mysteries of outboard motors; a humorist to keep things cheerful when the going got rough; a linguist—for obvious reasons; a minister;—and himself.

"Why a minister?" someone asked.

"To pray for good weather, of course!" came the reply.

Luckily, on our trip we had no need of a mechanic—though we did have to push the bus once or twice to get it started; Robert Pann—a Spanish instructor—filled the niche of the linguist with great facility; and to our good fortune we were stopped only three or four times by late afternoon showers. So it seemed the Heavens were on our side, despite our lack of religious guidance. As for the rest—of the twenty people who comprised our diverse and colorful party, there were no less than twenty humorists.



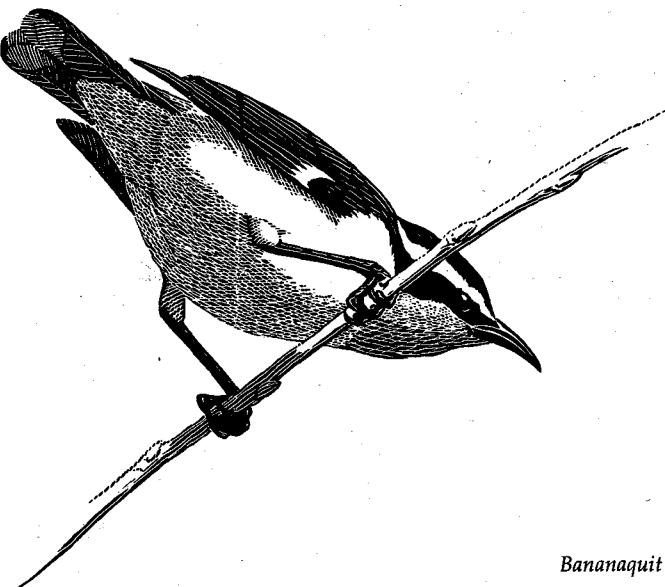
Rufous-breasted Wren

Don R. Eckelberry

With the songs of Clay-colored Robins we greeted the dawn in San Jose. The Holland House Hotel has a coffee *finca*, partially overgrown, on its property, and there we enjoyed a pre-breakfast introduction to neotropical birding, making the acquaintance of such stunning species as the Green Mango, the Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, the Squirrel Cuckoo, the White-eared Ground-sparrow, the Rufous-browed Peppershrike, and the Blue-and-white Swallow. Then, after breakfast, we boarded our "Bluebird" bus, and were on our way to Guanacaste Province in the sub-humid Pacific Northwestern lowlands.

Our first stop was the agricultural station at *Finca Taboga*, where we found the Turquoise-browed Motmot, Magpie Jay, Stripe-headed Sparrow, Streak-backed Oriole, Scrub Euphonia, Double-striped Thick-knee, Crested Bobwhite—and, soaring overhead on great white wings—a magnificent Jabiru Stork. Then we drove the short distance to *Hacienda La Pacifica*, a large working ranch that has recently added a few very comfortable cabins. Here we would stay for two nights, entertained by such non-avian attractions as a troop of Howler Monkeys, and—for those interested in such things—a beautiful tarantula-like arachnid that clung to the wall of one of our cabins.

Continued Overleaf



Bananaquit

In the gallery forest nearby we discovered the Long-tailed Manakin, Rufescent Tinamou, Olive Sparrow, White-lored and Tropical Gnatcatchers, the Yellow-olive Flycatcher, the Banded Wren, and the spectacular Spectacled Owl. Then an excursion to the Pacific coast on the following day turned up the White-necked Puffbird, the awesome King Vulture, the Boat-billed Heron, and the Collared Plover—exciting and exotic species to any but the most jaded *Norte Americano*.

Soon we were on the road again, climbing high into the *Cordillera de Tilaran*, to the semi-isolated Quaker settlement of *Monteverde*, site of one of Costa Rica's finest remaining cloud forests. Here, thanks to Californians George and Harriet Powell and their Monteverdian neighbors, 4,000 acres of amazing virgin wilderness has been rescued from destruction.

We checked in at the *pension* operated by Martha Moss—and as we strolled up the road in search of George Powell, the air rang with the fantastic calls of Three-wattled Bellbirds. Along our way we were detained by Emerald Toucanets, a Prong-billed Barbet, Hepatic Tanager, and Gray-breasted Wood-wren—and by the Preserve headquarters building a Spangled-cheeked Tanager foraged for a few fleeting seconds—our only glimpse of this beautiful bird.

In a moment George Powell appeared on the road, and offered to take us to see a Resplendent Quetzal he had staked out on the nest. As we eagerly followed him up the path we passed Golden-browed Chlorophonias, Silver-throated Tanagers, and the superlative Scarlet-thighed Dacnis. Then we came at last to a clearing—and suddenly there it was: an unmistakable male Quetzal, some thirty feet up, peering out of a hole in a stump! His emerald-green upper tail coverts folded over his head and drooped down like the leaves of an epiphytic fern. And as he studied us, we could make out the bright crimson below his breast.

After a time the female approached, and the male flew to a perch in the trees a short distance away, leaving us breathless with his beauty. Through all of this, right over our heads—almost unheard in our excitement—the call of a Bellbird clanged continuously. We felt as if we had found the Holy Grail!

George then led us up the road to the top of the ridge, and though anything should have been anticlimactic after what we had just experienced, the magnificent forest held us spellbound. Here we discovered the Yellow-thighed Finch, the Eye-ringed Flatbill, Paltry Tyrannulet, Coppery-headed Emerald, Purple-throated Mountain-gem, and the Yellow Grosbeak—plus, as we approached the crest, the Collared Redstart, the Black-and-yellow Silky Flycatcher, and the Ruddy Tree-runner. And then the rains came.

Half of our group started back down the road, while the rest of us plunged through the heart of the moss forest, following George along a narrow trail—in the hope of catching a glimpse of the elusive Crowned Wren-Thrush.

It was a soggy, but beautiful experience, and as we trudged back to the headquarters we were treated to a pair of Azure-hooded Jays, a Spotted Barbtail, and another Quetzal.

It was already dark as we stumbled into the *pension*—tired, wet, and hungry—but Mrs. Moss had a fantastic meal awaiting us: crisp salad, fresh vegetables, a delicious lasagna, plus home-baked bread with home-churned butter—the kind of cooking our grandfathers must have enjoyed before the days of supermarkets and frozen food.

Then the next morning, after a magnificent breakfast, we continued our explorations, discovering the Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, Yellowish Flycatcher, Plain Wren, and the Tiny Hawk—probably the first of the species recorded for the region. Our reluctance to leave this magical place was tempered only by the knowledge that by evening we would be birding in the footsteps of Paul Slud and Alexander Skutch at the legendary *Finca La Selva*, now an OTS research station, in the Caribbean lowlands.

As we dropped into the tropical zone, the climate warmed once again, and new birds began to appear. Among the roadside species were Olive-throated Parakeets, White-crowned Parrots, Flame-rumped, White-lined, and Crimson-collared Tanagers. We reached *Puerto Viejo* at dusk—then journeyed by dugout canoe up a beautiful jungle river, escorted along the way by Rufous and Gray Fish-eating Bats.

We had dormitory-style accommodations at *Finca La Selva*, and though the meals couldn't match *Pension Monteverde*, for the kind of birding we were to experience during the three days that followed we would have slept on nails and eaten bread and water.

As the sun rose that first morning we discovered ourselves surrounded by such birds as Keel-billed and Chestnut-mandibled Toucans, the Collared Aracari, Semiplumbeous Hawk, and Montezuma Oropendola; the Masked Tanager, Green and Shining Honeycreepers, Blue Dacnis, Barred Woodcreeper, Slaty Spinetail—and the Purple-crowned Fairy.

Just a sampler of the kind of birds we found along the well-kept trails would include the Buff-rumped Warbler, Slate-colored and Black-faced Grosbeaks, Brown-headed and Mealy Parrots, Green Macaw, White Hawk, Slaty-backed Forest Falcon, Little, Great, and Slaty-breasted Tinamou, Scarlet-rumped Cacique, White-fronted Nunbird, White-collared and Red-capped Manakins, Gray-headed Wood-Rail, Rufous Mourner, Chestnut-colored and Black-cheeked Woodpeckers, and the Olive-backed

Euphonia. In addition, attending a column of army ants were both the Spot-breasted and Chestnut-backed Antbirds, the Streaked and Fulvous-breasted Antpittas, a Black-faced Anthrush, and the Checker-throated and White-flanked Antwrens! Then, on the last afternoon of our stay, one of the most sought-after birds of the trip was found in the section of the preserve known as the "Arboretum"—a striking purple-and-white hummingbird called the Snowcap.

**O**n our way back to San Jose we stopped by the intersection with the road to *Virgen de la Socorro*—and along that famous birding road we happened upon such goodies as the Black-crested Coquette, Red-headed Barbet, Emerald Tanager, Immaculate Antbird, and two Costa Rican endemics: the Sooty-faced Brush-finches, and the Coppery-headed Emerald. Climbing on toward the capital, we added the Dark Pewee, Green-fronted Lancebill, Three-striped Warbler, and the Barred Becard.

Then, at *Monte Azul*, we turned off for *Paos Volcano*, arriving late in the afternoon, as a thunderstorm broke over our heads. But despite the downpour and the chill we were rewarded with the very rare Ochraceous Pewee, as well as the Sooty Robin, Volcano Bush-tanager, and a Rivoli Hummingbird.

At last, cold, exhausted, and wet, we retreated after dark to the Holland House in San Jose—only to get the word from Arnold: up the next morning at 5:00 a.m.!

At Georgina's, a restaurant-store-bus stop complex owned by people who love and take pride in the local wildlife, we added the Large-footed Finch, Volcano Junco, and the Mountain Elaenia. Then we wound down into the Southern Pacific lowlands.

At *Villa Neilly* we turned onto a rough dirt road that climbs up to *San Vita de Java*, arriving after dark at *Finca Las Cruces*. We were delighted to settle down in one spot for three whole days—though we were soon to wish we had even more time to linger there.

Before breakfast the next morning our explorations produced the Blue Ground-Dove, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, and White-ruffed Manakin—and after breakfast we had Silver-throated, Bay-headed, and White-winged Tanagers, the Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Bright-rumped Attila, and Firey-billed Aracari. Then we set out on the trail that winds through the last remnant of subtropical rain forest to be found in the area.

Back and forth for three days we worked this one-mile trail, discovering new birds on each excursion. To mention only a few among those we saw: there were Barred and Bicolored Hawks, the Blue-throated Goldentail; Rufous-tailed, Violet-headed, White-tailed, and Scaly-breasted Hummingbirds; Green, Long-tailed, and Little Hermits; White-throated and Golden-crowned Spadebills; Ochre-bellied and Gray-capped Flycatchers; the Scale-crested Pygmy-tyrant; the Slaty and Great Antshrikes, the Plain Xenops, and the Screaming Piha. In addition, there was the Tawny-throated Leafscraper, Blue-crowned Manakin, Blue-crowned Motmot, Riverside and Rufous-breasted Wrens, the White-breasted Wood-wren, the Chestnut-capped Warbler, Barred Parakeet, Chestnut-crowned, Slate-headed, and Yellow-throated Brush-finches, the Black-striped Sparrow, and the Blue-black Grosbeak.

But the last day here was perhaps the most memorable of all—for Caroline Adams found and staked out not one, but two White-tipped Sicklebills; and to our delight these incredible hummingbirds perched quietly for everyone to see. Then, as if that weren't enough, two Brown-billed Scythebills completed our day.

**T**he following morning, en route back to San Jose, we spotted a Yellow-headed Caracara a few minutes north of *Villa Neilly*, —an omen, it seemed, of things to come. For as Costa Rica's incomparable forests are gradually destroyed, we can expect more and more of such savanna species to spread into the country from the south.

But despite the concerns we all shared for the future, our journey ended well. As we drove north we thrilled to the sight of a Black Hawk-eagle and a Gray-headed Kite, riding high on a spiralling thermal—and then one more stop at the *Cerro de la Muerte* climaxed our trip with the long sought-after Volcano Hummingbird.

Reluctantly we rose early the next morning, not to go birding, but to drive to the airport. It had been a strenuous, but exhilarating two weeks in this crossroads of the birds of the Americas. But everyone I've talked to who made the trip is eager to do it all over again! 

*Hank Brodin*, in real life a film editor at MGM, is renowned among local birders for his discovery in the fall of 1974 of two new birds for California: the Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher and the Veery—both at Big Sycamore Canyon.

Don R. Eckelberry



Bay-headed Tanager

Though there was muttering of mutiny among the troops, all were thankful the following day as our bus climbed toward the 11,000' summit of *Cerro de la Muerte*, the highest point on the Pan-American Highway. For now it was clear that we would need every precious minute to search out the unique montane specialties that inhabit this part of the country. Full of spirit, we birded our way toward the OTS station at *Finca Las Cruces*, near the Panamanian frontier, stopping along the way at the only remaining patch of temperate cloud forest left on the entire highway. Here, every inch of every tree was overgrown with moss, orchids, bromeliads, and other epiphytes—and it was in this wonderland that we spotted the Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher, Black-cheeked Warbler, Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, Firey-throated Hummingbird, Yellow-bellied Siskin, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Sooty-capped Bush-tanager, Black-capped Flycatcher, and Ochraceous Wren. And it was here that Arnold turned up a Peg-billed Finch. Further along, near the treeless summit, we found the Timberline Wren—but to our disappointment we were unable to locate a Volcano Hummingbird.

Jean Brandt

# BIRDING at Griffith Park

City parks, golf courses and cemeteries are among the last "natural" habitats in our urban world, and are usually excellent places to bird. Trespassing is not recommended on golf courses and it is very frustrating to stand at the fence and watch your bird disappear over the fairway; one also gets queer looks while standing next to a tombstone with binoculars in hand. At any rate, the city parks are public, accessible and often very birdy. Griffith Park, centrally located and easily reached by public transportation is just such a place. The whole park should be birded, but the very best locations are listed below:

1. **Brush Canyon:** Park at the end of the road and walk into the canyon. The trail goes on for miles, but the best birding is within the first mile. There is a flood control check dam you will pass, where Sage Sparrows have been found. Just below the dam, in the canyon, look for woodpeckers and owls. Also bird the picnic areas below the parking lot and walk up to the old quarry, where you will find Rock Wrens and Rufous-crowned Sparrows.

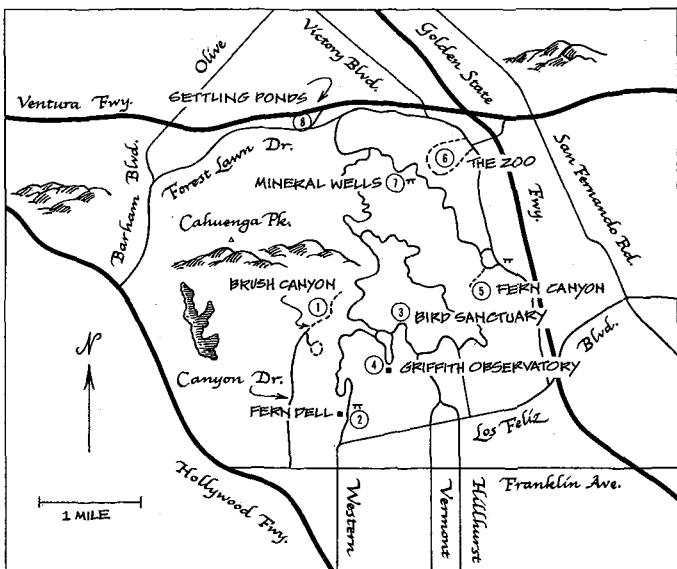
2. **Fern Dell:** One of the oldest picnic areas in Los Angeles, Fern Dell is shady, tranquil and usually full of people. But birds also abound, and last year the Swainson's Thrush nested here. Above the nature center, there are some dry ponds (full after a storm) where the only Virginia Rail ever to be seen on an L.A. Xmas Count was found in the *tree tobacco!* Migratory birds like Fern Dell and this is also one of the best places to learn about our local birds. See the CALENDAR page for the Nov. 27 field trip.

3. **Bird Sanctuary:** Located just above the Greek Theater. Good for chaparral birds.

4. **Griffith Observatory:** The conifers just below the observatory are often filled with wintering mountain birds and the view from the platform on a non-smoggy day is worth the drive.

5. **Fern Canyon:** Walk up here to look for Hairy Woodpeckers in winter and migrants in season. There is usually a stream, and resident birds stay nearby.

6. **Los Angeles Zoo:** One of the world's finest collections of exotic birds is here. If you are planning a trip out of the



Based on a Map by Glenn Cunningham

country, this is a good place to do your homework on what you will be seeing. The only California Condor in captivity is held here under the protection of the Calif. State Fish and Game. The bird will be on public exhibit next year.

7. **Mineral Wells:** A nice picnic area with many birds. Varied Thrushes are possible in winter.

8. **Settling Ponds:** When these are full of water, they are excellent for ducks and shorebirds. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be any sure time when there will be water, so you should check the ponds whenever you are nearby.

All of the canyon roads have small picnic areas and stands of trees, and each of these has a potential for good birding. Spend the day, explore—and try to come during the week to miss the crowds.

Griffith Park is partially serviced by the RTD. Line #23 offers daily service to the Zoo entrance. Line #95 reaches the bird sanctuary and Griffith Observatory daily in summer, afternoons only, and on Saturday, Sunday and holiday afternoons in winter. Fern Dell can be reached by a short walk from the corner of Western Ave. and Franklin Ave., served by Line #89. Otherwise a car is necessary. There are hiking trails throughout the park and a map can be obtained from the Park Ranger. *Good birding!* 



## The Great Seabird Die-off

Bird biologists at the Point Reyes Bird Observatory are piecing together a complicated puzzle involving the invasion and death last winter of large numbers of Black-legged Kittiwakes and Northern Fulmars in California waters.

These Bering Sea nesting species migrate south in midwinter, dispersing along the Pacific Coast as far south as northern Baja California. Since the arrival of the birds in California waters coincides with our worst winter storms, information on the two species is sketchy.

Scientists are using indirect evidence of the die-off phenomenon by counting the carcasses of dead birds at 35 sampling beaches from Cape Mendocino to Camp Pendleton. Dead bird counts have been conducted by the PRBO since 1971, allowing comparisons of last winter's fulmar and kittiwake counts to past years.

In late February biologists noticed a rapid buildup in the numbers of the two species offshore. At the same time fulmars and kittiwakes began to wash ashore dead or dying all along the California coastline. An average of six fulmars and four kittiwakes were counted at sample beaches, far exceeding previous records for the same two species.

Did the increases in dead birds washed ashore only reflect the increase in the local populations of the two species or had their mortality been increased because of some other factor or factors? Lacking good estimates of offshore populations, scientists are hard pressed to assess the importance of these dead bird counts. One theory holds that many seabirds died when in late February and early March water temperatures increased to above normal levels, decreasing available food for the birds and leading to their deaths. Whatever the cause (or causes) of the die-off, the mystery will not be unravelled easily.

—Steve Maskel

## Jon Dunn/FIELD NOTES

## The Identification of Pipits

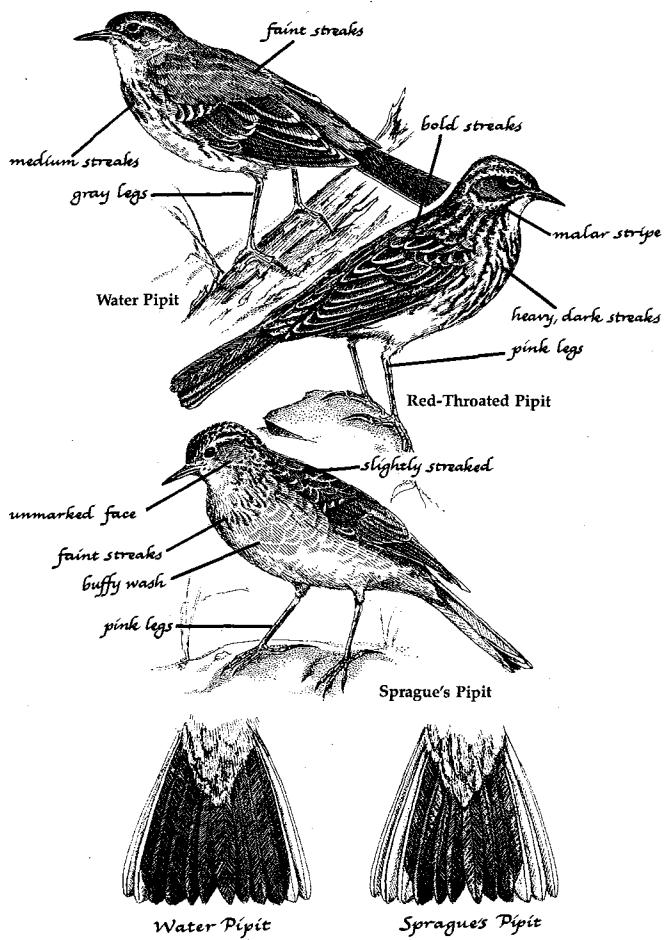


Illustration by Mary Ellen Pereyra

In mid-October large flocks of pipits regularly arrive in the agricultural areas of California. While all but a few are certain to be Water Pipits, diligent searching among the flocks might reveal the Asiatic straggler, the Red-throated Pipit.

The abundant **Water Pipit** can be found in winter wherever there are suitable dirt or short-grass fields in which to feed. The species is a drab grayish-brown above and a dull off-white below, with medium dark streaks on the underparts. The back is only faintly streaked, and the legs are a dull grayish-slate color. The call note, given in flight as with the other pipits, is a strident *pip-pip*.

The **Red-throated Pipit** was first found in California in 1964 when Guy McCaskie located several with the flocks of Water Pipits in the Tia Juana River Valley. Since then they have occurred in several years, the latest being 1974 (with fifteen in one year). All of the records of the species in California are from the Tia Juana Valley, except for three from the offshore islands. Though the adults have the distinctive red throat, all but two of the birds recorded have been immatures, and these lack any trace of the throat color. The best mark in differentiating these birds from the Water Pipit is the boldly streaked back, the very dark streaks contrasting strongly against the pale brownish background. The Red-throated also has a distinctive yellowish stripe on the scapulars, giving its back a Savannah Sparrow-like

appearance. The underparts of the Red-throated are of a clearer white, and the streaking is of a much heavier and darker tone than on the Water Pipit. Another good mark that some Red-throated Pipits have is a dark, broad malar stripe that is set off against a very white throat. While the streaked rump has been mentioned as a good mark, it is difficult to see—so I would not emphasize it as a useful field character. The call note of the Red-throated, a loud, lispy, descending *speew*, is totally different from the calls of the other two North American pipits, almost reminding me of the call note of the Rose-throated Becard. Finally, the leg color of the Red-throated is of a fairly bright pink color.

A third species, the **Sprague's Pipit**, has recently been found in California, and indications are that it might be more regular than the four records (involving seven individuals) might suggest. The records are all from the fall (from mid-October to mid-December). The Sprague's Pipit, unlike the preceding two species, is a solitary bird, rarely associating with other pipits. It is also more secretive, preferring denser cover—a habit that makes the bird difficult to locate unless flushed. When the bird is jumped, one of the first marks to watch for is the more extensive white in the tail, including the outer  $2\frac{1}{4}$  tail feathers (compared to  $1\frac{1}{4}$  for the Water Pipit). When flushed, the loud, squeaky *pips-QUEET* call note should stand out from the softer, more mellow calls of the Water Pipit. Sprague's Pipits have the unfortunate habit of flying to a very high altitude before descending to the ground—but if the observer watches where the bird drops, and is patient and careful in his approach, he has a good chance of relocating the bird.

The Sprague's is the *buffiest* of the three species, with a distinct *buffy wash* across the breast, extending up into the face (above the eye) and into the ear coverts. This unmarked buffy face, contrasting with a dark crown, makes the *beady black eye* stand out prominently. The Sprague's Pipit is also primarily *unstreaked below* (except for a few faint streaks on the breast). This character, along with the unmarked buffy face, is totally misrepresented by Singer in *The Birds of North America*. The crown, nape, and back of the Sprague's Pipit are quite dark, with a distinct pattern of buffy scalings, giving the upperparts a *slightly streaked* appearance. The base of the Sprague's bill is pinkish, compared to the dark "horn" color of the other two species. While the Sprague's Pipit has pale pinkish legs, its preference for dense cover makes this mark difficult to see. Finally, while both the other pipits vigorously wag their tails, the Sprague's does not wag its tail at all. 

## The Santa Monica Mountains

In January, the State Parks and Recreation Department, after months of public testimony, will unveil a plan for developing three Santa Monica Mountain areas into State Parks. The areas involved are **Topanga**, **Malibu Creek**, and **Point Mugu State Parks**.

The State's approach to planning the Santa Monica Mountain parks resembles the Department of the Interior's Yosemite Plan process, in which extensive public response was solicited before a final plan was drafted. We can only hope that the final plan for the Santa Monica Mountains accurately reflects the dominant public view: namely, that the parks should be designed for low intensity use, so that the native biota is minimally disturbed and wilderness values are maintained.

Shumway Suffel

## BIRDS of the Season



The Southwest's first hurricane in nearly forty years made last month the second wettest and coolest September in history—not "the hottest, driest month of this hot, dry year" as predicted. Not only did "Kathleen" postpone, and possibly eliminate, the threat of brush fires in our mountains, she also brought Southern California the first hurricane birds in recent years.

On hurricane day (Sept. 10), Ruth Lohr, returning from Arizona, sighted six **Frigatebirds** flying over the desert seven miles west of the Colorado River near Blythe, Riv. Co. With news like this, birders waited impatiently for the flood waters to subside at the Salton Sea; and then they were both disappointed and surprised—for there was no bonanza of species blown in from the Gulf: no frigatebirds, no boobies, no tropicbirds. But there were **Least Petrels**, several hundred of them—and with them a few **Leach's Petrels** of the dark-rumped race. Neither species had been recorded inland before. Later visits showed the **Roseate Spoonbill** and **Laughing Gulls** still there, but no Brown Pelicans remained from the fifty or more in July (Dan Guthrie, Sept. 18).

Whether hurricane-connected or not, an unusual number of petrels were identified on three trips off Long Beach by Charles Collins in September: forty-plus **Black Petrels**, a few **Least Petrels**, and one **Ashy Petrel**. On September 21, some were so close in that Ed Navojosky saw both Black and Least Petrels from the headland in San Pedro's Pt. Fermin Park. Even more remarkable was the sighting of an adult **Long-tailed Jaeger** (usually found, if at all, far offshore) from the Huntington Beach Pier (Stewart Wharter, Sept. 12). Probably not hurricane-connected was the discovery of the U.S.'s only 1976 **Blue-footed Booby** on a lake near Stockton in Central California. But how did it get to the heart of the State, with no sightings to the south or the west?

Surely the most welcome arrivals in September were the **White-crowned Sparrows**, which delight us all winter with their subdued plumage, their humble ways, and their plaintive evening songs. But the month also brought us more exciting—if more transitory—visitors.

A **Common Loon** found on the ocean near Big Sycamore (Lew Hastings, Sept. 13) was just too early, and was probably one of the few which sometimes summer here. Jon Alderfer, a new resident of Marina del Rey, reports a **Red-necked Grebe** on one of the back channels of Ballona Creek on Sept. 23. This is particularly remarkable, as they are seldom seen even in mid-winter this far south. **Red-billed Tropicbirds** were found on all four of the mid-September pelagic trips out of San Diego. Usually more than one was seen per trip, and two were observed on the water near the boat.

The **White-faced Ibis** is becoming a rare bird along our coast; and the one at Malibu Lagoon was the first L.A. Co. report in several years (Terry Clark, Sept. 5). An immature **Broad-winged Hawk** was soaring high over the Mexican

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).



border below San Diego, and attacking a much larger **Red-tailed Hawk** as it flew nearby. The first two **Pectoral Sandpipers** of the season were found Sept. 6th at the grassy ponds in the Sepulveda Recreation Area, by Curt Wohlgemuth. John Menke's frequent trips to this fine birding spot yielded two **Solitary Sandpipers** and ten more **Pectorals** on Sept. 16. John also found an early **Palm Warbler** there on the 23rd. **Solitary Sandpipers** were also found at Harbor Lake, San Pedro, by Linda Hale on Sept. 13 and 17, and at the New Lakes, Whittier Narrows (Jerry Friedman, Sept. 6). Although **Stilt Sandpipers** are regular at the Salton Sea, they are rare along the coast. So the discovery of one a mile up Ballona Creek on Sept. 8 was noteworthy (Bob Margolis).

**A** report of a **Glaucous Gull** at Marina del Rey suggests that a note of caution may be in order. Most white gulls in our area are *not* Glaucous Gulls. They are albino or retarded individuals of other species (such as the albino Western, or possibly Herring, Gull which wintered at the Marina last year). For identification pointers see the April '76 TANAGER—but note that the eye of a first year Glaucous Gull should be dark. There is an excellent photo by Richard Bradley in the Feb. '74 TANAGER.

Hundreds of **Black-legged Kittiwakes** are still at King Harbor, Redondo Beach, and it seems likely that they will remain at least through the winter. **Vaux's Swifts** were widely seen along the coast in September, as the persistent cloud cover brought them low enough for observation. Vern Vaughn missed the Condors at the Edmunston Pumping Station, Kern Co., on Sept. 4, but did see five **Lewis' Woodpeckers** in the nearby oaks (they have nested in the Tehachapi Mountains). Further north, at Oasis Ranch, Mono Co., at least twenty **Lewis' Woodpeckers** were found by Steve Bailey, Sept. 20. A **Williamson's Sapsucker** in Fairmount Park, Riverside, on Sept. 21, was unexpected so far below its montane forest home (Van Remsen).

**Eastern Kingbirds** appeared along our coast in mid-September, as expected. Guy and Louise Commeau found the first at McGrath S.P. on Sept. 13; Jerry Friedman saw them at both Big Sycamore and Tapia Parks on Sept. 16 and 17; and Armand Cohen sighted one at the New Lakes, Whittier Narrows, on the 18th. It stayed for at least a week and was later joined by a **Tropical Kingbird** (Steve Bonzo, Sept. 22). This made it possible to see all four kingbirds together, as Cassin's and Westerns were also present. At least two more **Tropicals** were seen below San Diego during the last week of the month.

The presence of two **Pinyon Jays** on Catalina Island (Lee Jones, Sept. 13) is truly amazing, as they are basically non-migratory, and are virtually unknown on the mainland coast. Lee also found another pinyon-juniper bird on Anacapa Island the next day—a **Gray Vireo**. A **Sage Thrasher** near Malibu Lagoon (Jerry Haigh, Sept. 8) was not quite so unusual, as they have been seen along the coast before. A **Gray Catbird** (considered accidental here) was discovered on Pt. Loma, Sept. 24, by Kent Van Bergen, and enjoyed by many Saturday birders the following day.

# BOOKS

**A GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF PANAMA** by Robert S. Ridgley, Princeton University Press, 1976, \$15.00.

Having binned on every continent, and possessing a rather complete library of every section of the world for which guides are available, I wish to state unequivocally that this is the best field guide yet to be published.

Ridgely has done a remarkable job—and as a *field* (as opposed to a *museum*) expert. Opening sections include specifics on climate the whole year; a list of 127 long-distance migrants plus the 33 rare or casual vagrants; a section on conservation; and, most useful—the “Plan of the Book,” which defines all the terms used in the text.

Concise summaries of each family’s distribution, number of species, general characteristics, nesting and food habits, etc. precede the species accounts. These consist of a crisp description, followed by notes on similar species, status and distribution, habits and range (world-wide). The procedure is followed for every species in Panama—even the most doubtful ones.

The artist, John A. Gwynne, Jr., has also done a remarkable job. Of the 883 species covered in the text, 710 probably nest in Panama, and all of these are well illustrated in the 32 color plates—with the exception of the U.S. migrants and a few pelagics. All the birds are cross-indexed from text to plate and back. In addition over 50 line drawings (including excellent flight patterns of raptors) are scattered throughout.

Appendix I lists all the birds in middle Central America that do not occur in Panama, with good descriptions of those which also do not occur in Mexico or Guatemala. Therefore it is now easy to bird all of Central America with just two books: the present volume, plus Peterson and Chalif’s *Field Guide to Mexican Birds*.

Finally, Appendix II, “Finding Birds in Panama,” gives explicit directions on where to go, how to get there, and what to look for where! The only drawback is the book’s size—9" x 6 1/4". But you will find a way to carry it! Truly a great guide by a very knowledgeable birder.

—George W. Venatta

## Assistant Registrar

With the Society growing at a record rate, we have an urgent need for an Assistant Registrar—someone who enjoys filing and typing and is free to spend each Tuesday, from 10-3, at Audubon House helping Ruth Lohr with the work. If you’d like to give it a try, please call the house any weekday, 876-0202.



## WESTERN TANAGER

EDITOR Barry Clark

ASSOCIATE EDITOR Steve Maskel

Published 10 times a year, monthly except January and July, by the Los Angeles Audubon Society, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90049

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1ST VICE-PRESIDENT Edward Navojosky

2ND VICE-PRESIDENT Kimball Garrett

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY Ann Skipper

Audubon membership (local and national) is \$15 per year (individual), \$18 (family), or \$8.50 (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 (Third Class), or \$6.00 (First Class, mailed in an envelope). To subscribe, make checks payable to Los Angeles Audubon Society.

As members of the Audubon Society, we are contributing to the goals of conservation by becoming informed, and by making our influence felt. There is, however, much that

remains to be done. In the past two months alone there

have been a dozen or more public meetings relating to

important conservation issues in the Los Angeles area. We

need better representation at these meetings, to permit us to

make constructive recommendations to decision-making

agencies. The process is exciting, and the prospect of

progress is real. If you have the time and the inclination to

attend some of these hearings, just give Audubon House a

call (at 876-0202). The staff there will inform you of the

schedule of upcoming meetings. Your input can be of

immeasurable value to our Conservation Committee in

strengthening the Society’s environmental stand.

—Peter Skipper

# 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.

Calendar Editor: Gale Gifford

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

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 9**—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. UCLA Ornithologist, Lee Jones, will present an illustrated program on the natural history of the **Channel Islands**. Dr. Jones recently completed his graduate studies under Prof. T. R. Howell, and has been investigating the bird populations and the general ecology of the islands.

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13**—Pelagic Trip to Anacapa Island. The *Paisano* will depart from the Channel Islands National Monument Pier at the Ventura Marina at 8:00 a.m., and will return about 6:00 p.m. You are requested to be at the dock 1/2 hour before departure time. The boat will cruise the north shore, round the tip to look for the American Oystercatcher (found on the August 18th trip) and then make a wide loop out to sea for pelagic birds. It was this type of maneuver that located 3 New Zealand Shearwaters and the Galapagos Petrel on the August 18th trip. Take Highway 101 north to Ventura, exit at Victoria Ave., and follow the Channel Islands National Monument signs to the Marina. The price is \$18.00 per person. Make checks payable to L.A. Audubon Society, and send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Phil Sayre, Apt. 306, 660 Garfield Ave., Monterey Park, Calif. 91754. List your telephone number and the names and addresses of all in your party. No refunds on cancellations within 48 hours of departure. Leader: Kimball Garrett, 479-8667.

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13**—Tapia Park and Malibu Lagoon. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at Tapia Park in the parking lot just left of the entrance. This is an excellent trip for those wishing to see both chaparral and shore birds on the same day. Beginning birders will find it helpful for new species. Both areas are fairly concentrated, so the walking is easy. To reach the park from the San Fernando Valley take Highway 101 north to Las Virgenes Rd. (Malibu Canyon) and turn left toward the coast. From the western part of Los Angeles take Highway 1 (Pacific Coast Hwy) north to Malibu Canyon and turn right. Go 4.5 miles through the canyon to the park. Leader: Jerry Altman, 784-7167.

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20**—Morongo Valley. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in Covington Park, Morongo Valley. This is our first fall trip to this renowned birding spot. Members who have birded here in November and December report that the birding can be excellent—and rare eastern warblers are sometimes found. Yucca Valley and Joshua Tree National Monument can be covered on Sunday by those wishing to make it a weekend trip. There are convenient motels in 29 Palms and Yucca Valley, with dry camping facilities available in Joshua Tree National Monument. To reach Covington Park take Interstate 10 east to the 29 Palms Highway (62), which is 2.5 miles east of Whitewater. Turn north approximately 10 miles to the park. Leader: Larry Norris, 365-5063.

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 21**—Harbor Lake. Meet by the boat house in the south end of the park at 8:00 a.m. This is a good birding area for gulls and some shore birds. The lake has woods and a marshy area at the north end. A scope is useful. Franklin's Gulls and a Little Blue Heron have been seen there. (See Jean Brandt's column in the Jan-Feb. '76 TANAGER). To find Harbor Lake go south on the Harbor Freeway (11) to Pacific Coast Highway (1). Turn right (west) to Vermont Avenue. Turn left, and the park is right there at the corner. Leader: Cliff Pollard, 833-3694.

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 27**—Fern Dell, in Griffith Park. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the entrance to Fern Dell. This is one of the most beautiful areas of the park, and it attracts a variety of birds due to the artificial stream that flows there. New birders will have an opportunity to learn many of our common chaparral birds. Fern Dell is reached by taking Western Avenue north to Los Feliz Blvd. Turn right to the first red light, and then left into the park. The entrance is straight ahead. Leader: Betty Jenner, 748-7510.

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 2**—Executive Board Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Audubon House.

**DEC. 11**  
**SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4 and 5**—Carrizo Plains. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the corner of Highway 33 and Elkhorn Grade Rd. The group will look for LeConte's Thrashers at the meeting place. Other possibilities during the trip are the Sandhill Crane, Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Mountain Plover, Sage Thrasher, Bald Eagle, and Short-eared Owl. To reach the meeting place take Highway 5 north to State 166 (Maricopa turnoff). Go west on 166 to Maricopa. Be sure to have a full tank of gas before leaving Maricopa. Turn south on Highway 33 and go 1.6 miles to the Elkhorn Grade Road, where we will meet. Motels are available in Taft for those who wish them. Leader: to be announced.

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14**—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. Everyone welcome. Lloyd Kiff, curator of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology Museum in Los Angeles, will present a program entitled, **Pesticides Still Persist**.

*Audubon Bird Report—call 874-1318*

## THE 1976 CHRISTMAS COUNTS

This year, as last, LAAS is sponsoring two Christmas Counts—the **L.A. Count** on Dec. 26, and the **Malibu Count** on Dec. 19. Anyone who has ever participated in this annual exercise knows the Count to be the most rewarding and entertaining activity in all of birding. No vast expertise is required—just an average familiarity with the local birds, plus a willingness to spend a day on the beach, at a feeder, or in some canyon, ticking off the species you see. Probably no other big city can boast the numbers of birds to be found around L.A.—and in the past our Count totals have been respectable: 158 species in L.A. in 1972, and 163 in Malibu in 1975. But each year many species are missed. This year, with an unprecedented number of devoted birders in the field, we'll be in a great position to set some new records. Make note of the dates, the 19th and the 26th, then give the Compilers a call to volunteer your services: for the L.A. Count, Nancy Spear, 372-7653; and for the Malibu Count, Kimball Garrett, 479-8667, or Jean Brandt, 788-5188.