

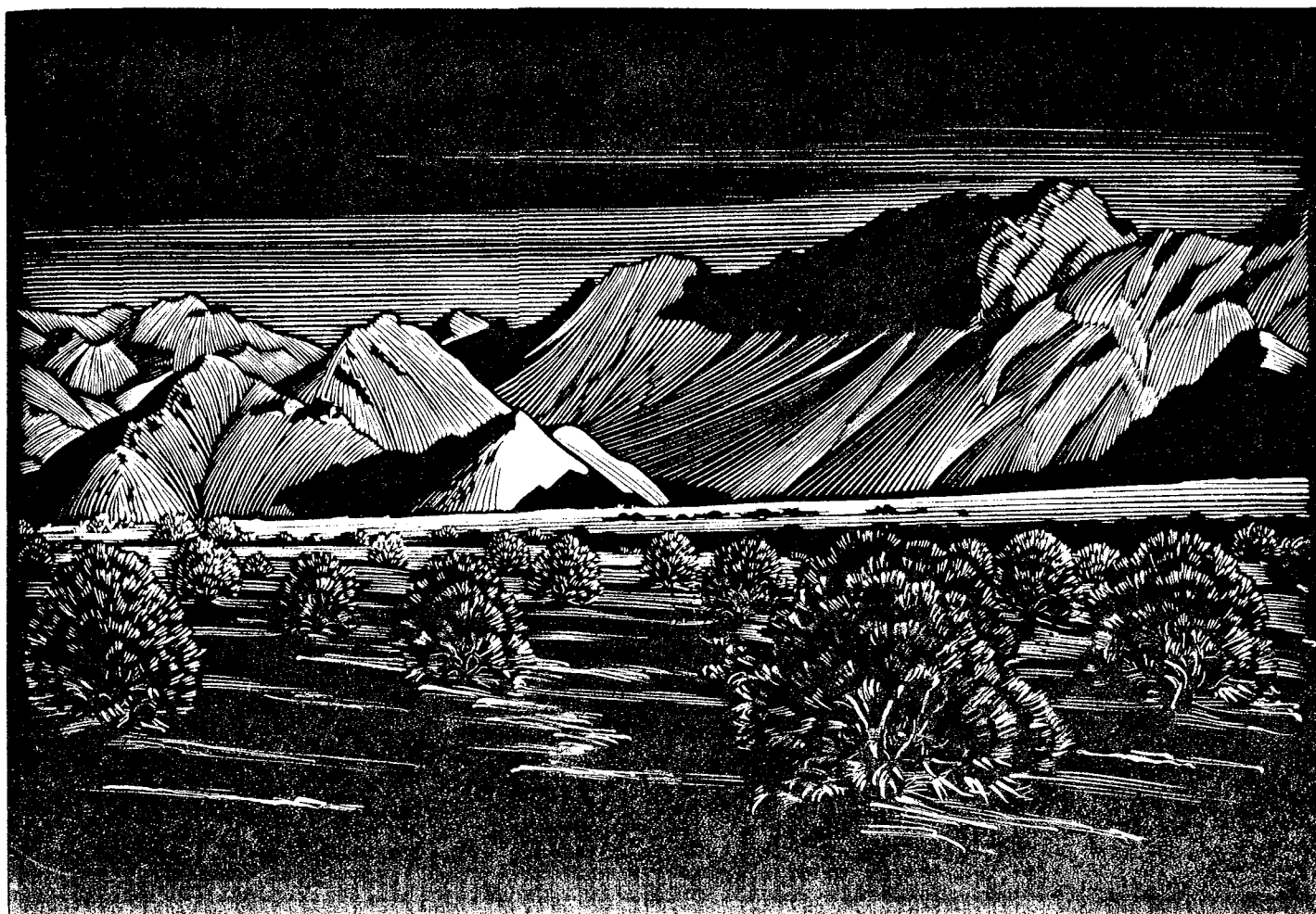
WESTERN TANAGER

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Woodcut by Paul Landacre

The Salton Sea -a Chronicle of the Seasons

by Jon Dunn

It is ironic that one of man's environmental accidents should lead to the creation of one of California's most intriguing bird-watching localities. Yet this is precisely what happened when the Colorado River Aqueduct broke in 1905, diverting the entire flow of the Colorado River into the Salton Sea Basin. Though the event was viewed by some as a tragedy, the resulting thirty-three mile lake would add an important ornithological niche to the State.

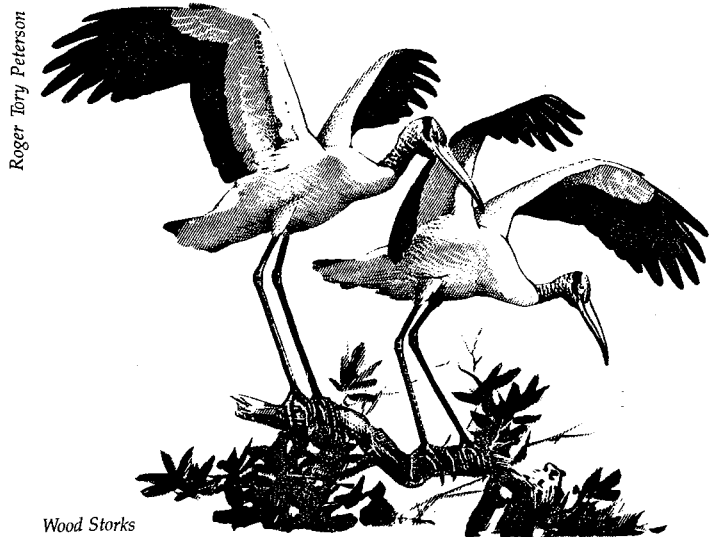
Although the Sea has derived most of its renown from the post-breeding arrival, during the hot summer months, of

various species generally restricted to the Gulf of California, the area has something special to offer the birder during every season of the year.

Winter is the most pleasant time to visit the area, as the average daytime high is rarely over 70°, and it is during this season that tens of thousands of waterfowl are in residence. During these months, the Sea itself is covered by huge rafts of Eared Grebes, Ruddy Ducks, and Canvasbacks, while

Continued Overleaf

Lesser Scaup and Common Goldeneye, though considerably less numerous, are fairly common. In the ponds bordering the Sea, tremendous numbers of "puddle ducks" congregate, the majority of them Pintails, Shovelers, American Wigeon, and Green-winged Teal. It is, however, the planted grass fields at the South End of the Sea that attract most of the birders, since this locality harbors thousands of wintering geese—the largest concentrations of geese in Southern California. Most of the birds are Snow Geese and Canadas, but a careful check of the flocks of Snow Geese almost always reveals a few family groups of the smaller Ross' Geese—and usually a few "Blue Geese"—the blue color-phase of the Snow Goose. Although the White-fronted Goose occasionally winters at the Sea, the birds generally pass the season further to the south, and this species is therefore most plentiful during the migration period.



Wood Storks

The Sea in winter also attracts thousands of wintering gulls, and while the majority of these are Ring-billed, Herring Gulls are also quite common. Although rare, Thayer's, Glaucous-winged, and Mew Gulls are usually found each winter. The Glaucous Gull has also been recorded on several occasions, and of the four State records of Little Gull, two come from the Salton Sea.

While the waterbirds are the main winter attraction, there are many other enticements for the visiting birder. The dry dirt fields that surround the South End of the Sea support one of the country's largest winter concentrations of Mountain Plovers. Although the species is spotty in its distribution, it is generally encountered in large numbers when found. Also spotty are the Horned Larks—but usually there are several sizeable flocks that wander over the area. These flocks often contain longspurs—and, while the Lapland is the most numerous, concentrations of up to twenty McCown's have been found. In fact, there is no better locality in the State for this species. Ironically, the most numerous longspur in the rest of Southern California, the Chestnut-collared, is decidedly the rarest species at the Sea.

The fields near the Salton Sea are also good localities for raptors, and while *buteos* are proportionately much scarcer here than at other localities in the State, a fairly high proportion of those sighted are likely to be Ferruginous or Rough-legged Hawks. Though uncommon, the Merlin and the Prairie Falcon are also regularly found.

Two tamarisk-lined rivers, the New and the Alamo, drain into the South End of the Sea. These streams support large concentrations of wintering passerines, and while the great majority of these are Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers, the American Redstart and the Yellow Warbler winter regularly in small numbers—making the Sea the only locality in the State where these species can be found with regularity in winter.

Another rewarding habitat that can amply repay exploration is the rich ranchland around the South End of the Sea. The scattered trees and bushes planted here support a good population of wintering landbirds; and on several occasions the very rare Pyrrhuloxia and the Curve-billed Thrasher have been found—species that have only occurred casually in southeastern California.

Another species that can be found most readily at the Sea is the Franklin's Gull. During both the spring and fall migration, very small numbers occur regularly in the area, often in the flooded fields, and a few sometimes summer at the North End.

The clump of trees at Finney Lake and the groves in the various ranchyards may often teem with migrant spring passerines. The flowering mesquite, in particular, may be full of migrants, while overhead, massive concentrations of swallows and Vaux's Swifts sweep through the Salton Sea Basin.

Spring is one of the most productive seasons at the Sea, since species normally restricted to the coast find their way there from the north end of the Gulf of California, where they are trapped on their northward migration. At this time, species such as the Whimbrel—extremely rare elsewhere in the inland Southwest—are actually abundant, and concentrations of thousands are not uncommon. Three other normally-coastal species that occur in concentrations of up to a hundred birds are the Black Brant, the Sanderling, and the Knot. Among the species that occur more rarely are the Arctic Loon, White-winged and Surf Scoter (regular), Wandering Tattler, and the Ruddy Turnstone (regular). The accidentals of this type include the Black Scoter, Black Turnstone, Surfbird, and the Arctic Tern. Although these ocean-dwelling species can be found at any locality around the Sea, they are often concentrated at the North End—since, after pushing north across the water, they dam up before migrating overland again.

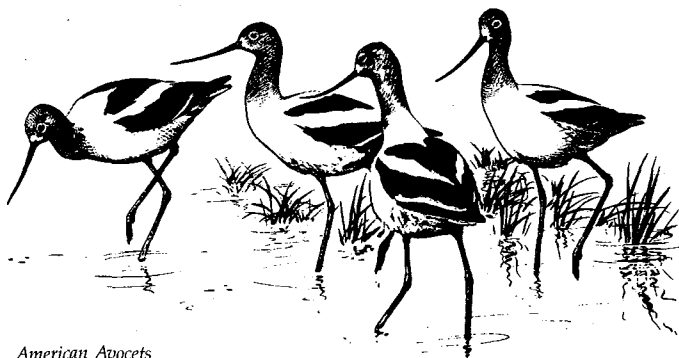
The Sea in spring is also a very important locality for migrating shorebirds, and one of the most interesting species that occurs in this season is the Stilt Sandpiper. Extremely rare elsewhere in the State, it can be fairly common at the South End, with occasional concentrations of up to a hundred individuals. Although most numerous during migration, the species also winters regularly in small numbers, usually in the very shallow ponds, where it is often found in loose association with the much larger flocks of Long-billed Dowitchers. Another species, the Semi-palmated Sandpiper, is considerably rarer, but a few are usually found each spring. The Salton Sea is the best locality in the State to find this very rare species, with the majority of records clustered from mid- to late May, after most of the other peeps have left. The Curlew Sandpiper, Rufous-necked Stint, and the White-rumped Sandpiper have all occurred accidentally—the two records of the White-rumped Sandpiper representing the only known occurrences in California.

Fall at the Sea is much the same as the spring, but the numbers of birds are usually reduced—particularly with regard to the coastal species. However, one of the more interesting facets of the fall is the regular appearance of Parasitic Jaegers. Migrating directly overland from their high Arctic breeding grounds, the Jaegers arrive at the Sea usually in mid-September, and can be seen through much of October. Although always scarce, concentrations of up to a half dozen individuals have been encountered—most often at the North End. In addition, the Long-tailed Jaeger has occurred once—and the Pomarine Jaeger should be located in the future. One or two Sabine's Gulls are also sighted at the Sea each fall.

Fall migrant passerines are less numerous than in the spring, but a number of eastern species have been sighted over the years—including the Cerulean Warbler—the rarest of the fall vagrants so far recorded.

Summer—despite the heat—is probably the most interesting time at the Sea, for a variety of species formerly restricted to the Gulf of California now annually make their way up to the area. A few of the species—among them the Fulvous Tree Duck, Gull-billed Tern, and Black Skimmer—come in the spring and stay to nest; but most come to the Sea as post-breeders, arriving from late June through August. The Brown Pelican, Wood Stork, Laughing Gull, and the Yellow-footed race of the Western Gull all occur in fairly large numbers—though their populations vary greatly from year to year. Several Magnificent Frigatebirds wander up to the Sea each summer and the Roseate Spoonbill also irregularly strays to the area, though its numbers are usually very small. 1973 was a big Spoonbill year, however, with a hundred post-breeding birds. While rare, the Least Tern and the Heermann's Gull are both found on the Sea at some point each summer. In the very rare category are the various species of tropical herons (Louisiana, Reddish Egret, Little Blue Heron). Each of these has occurred at the Sea only on a couple of occasions—although it is certainly conceivable that the Little Blue Heron could eventually colonize the area, since up to four were seen at the Sea last year.

One of the most eagerly-anticipated, and unpredictable, happenings at the Sea is the flight of the boobies. During most years none of the birds appear—or, at best, only one or two—but now and then major pushes occur. In the last decade three sizable incursions of boobies have been recorded (in '69, '71, and '72)—and the year of '71 brought over a hundred of the birds to the Sea. While the great majority of the boobies sighted are Blue-footed, the Brown Booby also occurs (up to 8 in '69). The reasons for the flights are as yet unknown—but once the birds reach the Sea, a number of them eventually die.



American Avocets



White Ibis

What is particularly interesting about these flights from the Gulf is that the situation seems to be changing from year to year. In the last ten years the Black Skimmer has colonized the Sea and is now a fairly common summer resident. The Yellow-footed Gull was also unknown at the Sea prior to the mid-60's—and now up to a hundred individuals can be seen in a single day. Thus, by visiting the Sea over a period of years, the birder can observe first-hand the shifting patterns of bird distribution—and perhaps help to unravel some of the mysteries behind the phenomena.

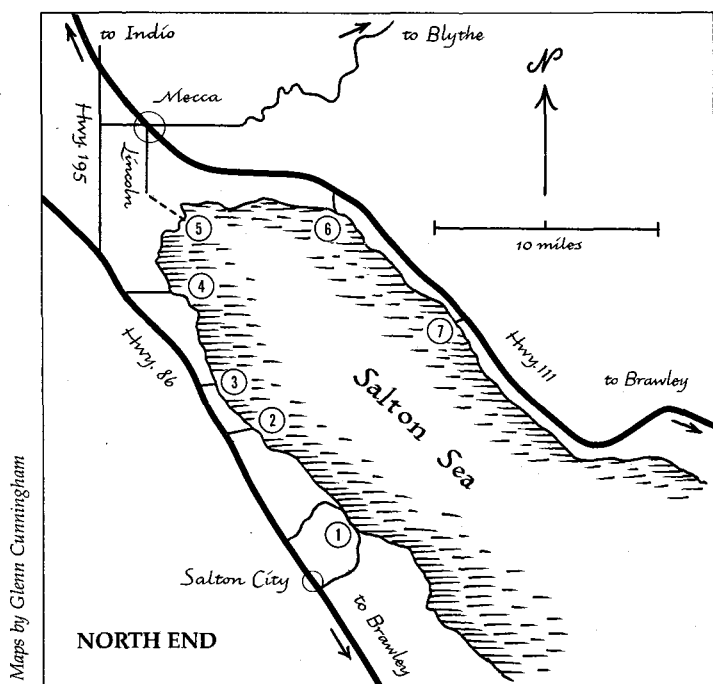
Among the many intriguing aspects of the Sea is the unusual abundance in summer of non-breeding waterfowl and gulls. A number of coastal species, among them the Scoters, Black Brant, and Red-breasted Merganser, end up summering at the Sea—as do non-breeding California and Ring-billed Gulls. Although the Black Tern does not breed at the Sea, literally tens of thousands can be found on a single summer day.

But perhaps the single element which makes the Salton Sea so fascinating to the birder is the ever-present potential for the unknown. In 1971 a Red-headed Woodpecker spent at least a month at the South End of the Sea—the first and only record for the State; and last summer California's second White Ibis was found at the North End. One of the more amazing events last fall was the invasion of Least Petrels—after the remnants of Tropical Storm Kathleen passed through the Imperial Valley. Among the several hundred Least Petrels, a single Leach's Petrel was found. Even more amazing are the records of the Sooty Shearwater—and, particularly, the New Zealand Shearwater. It is truly mind-boggling to try to imagine how such strictly pelagic species could end up at the Sea. While the birds undoubtedly came out of the Gulf, the New Zealand Shearwater is unrecorded from Mexican waters.

Clearly, the Salton Sea is engaged in a process of constant change. In fact, so much has changed in the last decade—with rapid colonizations by such species as the Black Skimmer—that it is safe to assume that the next decade will bring changes that are at least as drastic. At this point, no one can predict what those changes will be—but it is certain that each new discovery will be cause for fresh excitement among those who bird the Sea. ♡

Jean Brandt

BIRDING at the Salton Sea



Maps by Glenn Cunningham

About 150 miles, or three hours' driving time, transports the birder from the heart of Los Angeles or San Diego to the Salton Sea—and all the unique birding opportunities described in Jon Dunn's article. One can start at either end of the Sea and proceed in either direction, as there are good birding spots all around the shoreline, but the principal locations of interest group themselves into two main regions: the North End, reached from Indio, and the South End, reached from Brawley.

At the moment many of the well-known birding locales are flooded, due to the high level of the Sea, so it would be wise to check first at the Salton Sea NWR Headquarters for maps, road conditions, and up-to-the-minute birding information. A good map of Imperial County is a necessity.

Birds abound, and distances are considerable, so if possible, try to devote at least two days to the area. Both Indio and Brawley provide accommodations, and campgrounds are available nearby.

THE NORTH END

1. Salton City. From the intersection of State Hwys. 195 and 86, take Hwy. 86 south 17.5 miles to Marina Drive, turn left on Marina Drive and make a loop along the shore of the Sea; return to 86, birding all the paved dikes and jetties. This area is excellent in fall for shorebirds (remember that "fall" begins in late July for migrating shorebirds), and the Wandering Tattler has been seen (accidental at the Sea in the spring). If it is a "booby year," both Blue-footed and Brown Boobies might be found. In winter, check the gulls for Glaucous-winged, Thayer's (both rare), and Mew—plus (occasionally) the Yellow-legged race of the Western Gull. Also look for Red-breasted Mergansers, both Surf and White-winged Scoters (very rare), and Common Goldeneyes. From August to October, watch for Common Terns; and in summer, for Frigatebirds.

2. Salton Sea Beach. Take Hwy. 86 north from Salton City.

3. Desert Shores. Continue north on Hwy. 86. Both Salton Sea Beach and Desert Shores might have the same birds as the Salton City shores, but these locations are generally not as good.

4. Oasis Dike Road. From the intersection of Hwys. 195 and 86, go north on 195 about 0.2 miles to "Oasis School." On the south side of the schoolhouse turn east on a dirt road, drive to the gate, and walk to the Sea. The spot is good for shorebirds and ducks. Look for the same birds here as in No. 5—and in summer watch for Brown Pelicans.

5. Whitewater River Mouth. From Mecca, drive south on Lincoln Street to the end of the pavement. At the present time the road is impassable from here on, and you must wade through waist-high water at times. The hike is not recommended; but the birding is great! Look for large numbers of shorebirds (California's first White-rumped Sandpiper was found here in June, '69), and check the mudflats (in July, '76, California's second White Ibis was found here). Look in the trees for herons, including possible Little Blue and Louisiana Herons, and Reddish Egrets. Roseate Spoonbills may be here in summer. Check the gulls for Franklin's (spring, summer, and fall), Laughing (late summer), Heermann's (rare in summer), and possibly Sabine's (very rare in Sept.). Jaegers, both Long-tailed (only inland record) and Parasitic (uncommon in Sept. and Oct.) have been found. Check the terns for the rare Least (in summer) and Gull-billed (in spring and summer), and look for Black Skimmers. In flight years this is also a good place for Boobies—which like to sit on the dike. Walk (or wade?) the reedy channel to search for Least Bitterns.

6. North Shore. From Mecca, go south on Hwy. 111, to North Shore Marina turnoff. Then proceed to the Sea. Check the lagoon for occasional boobies and Frigatebirds in summer. The breakwater is generally good for rock birds.

7. Salt Creek. From the North Shore, go south on Hwy. 111 about 10 miles to Salt Creek Campground. The area has an all-year fresh-water stream lined with reeds. In winter it is a good place for gulls, including (rarely) the Glaucous-winged and Thayer's. It's also good for ducks.

THE SOUTH END

There are dirt roads all along the South End of the Sea, but these can be treacherous when wet. Plowed or dirt fields should be scanned in winter for Mountain Plovers and longspurs. The entire southeast end of the Sea is good all year for Cattle Egrets and White-faced Ibis, and in summer for Laughing Gulls. Franklin's Gulls are uncommon in spring and fall. Be sure to check the trees around the ranches (after asking permission) for migrants and winter rarities.

1. Unit 1 (Salton Sea NWR). Drive north on Vendel Road to the gate. Park and walk through the gate, and then bird the fields and ponds on both sides of the road. Stilt Sandpipers have been seen here every month of the year except mid-May to mid-July, and this is a good area for Wood Storks (in summer) and shorebirds—including the very rare Semipalmated Sandpiper (in May). One of California's two records of the species was from here.

2. New River Mouth. From Calipatria, drive west on S30 to Gentry. Turn south 0.5 miles to Bowles, then turn west on Bowles (which becomes dirt) and go to the end. The area is best in the summer. Look in the reeds for Least Bitterns and Clapper Rails, and on the mudflats for shorebirds, including an occasional Stilt Sandpiper among the thousands of Long-billed Dowitchers, herons, Laughing Gulls, and Gull-billed Terns. Check the trees for Wood Storks (and possibly a Roseate Spoonbill).

3. Headquarters, Salton Sea NWR. From Hwy. 111, go west on Sinclair Road to the end of the pavement. The area is best during migration, but Whip-poor-wills (one record, in August), and Saw Whet Owls have been found (in winter).

4. Rock Hill. From the Headquarters a dirt road leads west then north to Rock Hill. In winter check the huge flock of Snow Geese for occasional Ross' Geese, as well as the blue phase of the Snow. White-fronted Geese migrate through here in Nov. and Feb. Scan the lagoon between here and Red Hill for winter gulls (the only Imperial Co. record of Little Gull was here). In summer, watch for Laughing Gulls, Wood Storks, and (rare) Spoonbills.

5. Red Hill. From the Headquarters, go east on Sinclair one mile to Garst. Then go north on Garst to the entrance. The terraces here afford an overall view, and in summer, watch for Frigatebirds. The Yellow-legged race of the Western Gull is found here, and also the Laughing Gull.

6. Wister Waterfowl Management Area. Go north from Niland five miles on Hwy. 111 to the entrance, on the west. The only Calif. record of the Red-headed Woodpecker was obtained here. The fields are good for geese in winter, and the diked ponds are good for shorebirds. In May, check among the Western Sandpipers for the very rare Semi-

palmed Sandpiper, and for Stilt Sandpipers among the dowitchers. In summer look for Gull-billed Terns and the Black-bellied Tree Duck (casual or accidental). Tree Ducks have also been found at Finney Lake and Unit 1.

7. Ramer Lake. From Calipatria, drive south on Hwy. 111 to Albright. Turn east 0.4 miles to Kershaw. Turn south 1.5 miles to Quay Road. Then turn west and cross the RR tracks to the entrance. This is the best place in the area for Yellow-headed Blackbirds, nesting marsh birds, deep water ducks, and occasional loons (the location has the only Imperial Co. record of the Arctic Loon). The south end of the Lake is especially good—and one Black Rail turned up here on the 1976 Christmas Count.

8. Finney Lake. From Ramer, drive south on Perimeter Road about one mile to the entrance. Among the nesting birds is the Least Bittern. Abert's Towhees, Cactus Wrens, and Crissal Thrashers are resident, and two rare Curve-billed Thrashers were here in the winter of '75-'76. The tamarisks are good for spring migrants. Look for Fulvous Tree Ducks in spring and summer, and American Redstarts and Yellow Warblers in winter.

9. Pioneer's Memorial Hospital, in Brawley. Take Hwy. 86 south about 1.2 miles to the hospital turnoff, on the west side of the road. Then follow the dirt road to the end. This is the only place in the Imperial Valley to see resident Gila Woodpeckers—in the eucalyptus trees! It may sound strange, but it's only in keeping with all the many other interesting anomalies that abound at the Salton Sea, all of which combine to make the area an unsurpassed mecca for birders.

Good birding! ♡

Peter Skipper/CONSERVATION

Toying with Tilapia

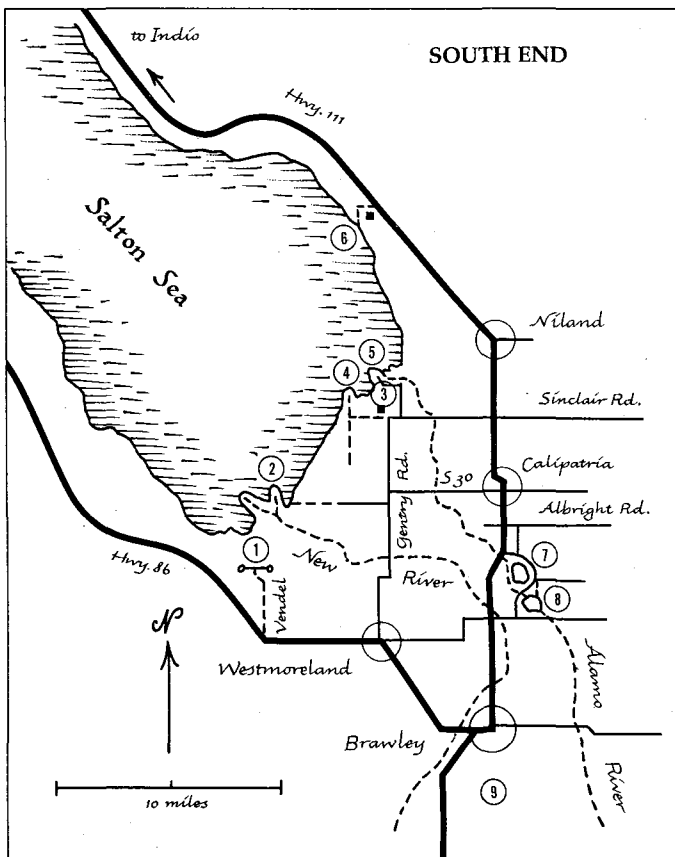
Officials of three water districts in Southern California have decided to release East African *tilapia zilli*—a particularly gluttonous fish—into irrigation and water transport canals, to feed on weeds and debris.

Judging from the experience in Florida with exotic newcomers, releasing tilapia into the waterways may be a mixed blessing, with as yet unknown consequences. Jerry Banks of the Florida Fish and Game Commission has said, "We don't know if they are a detriment. We sure wouldn't want to release any more of them. But if they only inhabit these lakes that have gone to pot, then what harm can they do?" The introduction of the South American toad and the great African snail have not proved to be assets to Florida.

The Coachella Valley County, Imperial Valley, and Palo Verde water districts are conducting studies with the University of California, Riverside, under the supervision of the Fish and Game Commission, in an attempt to determine the consequences of such an introduction. However, the hungry fish are already in the irrigation ditches. As conservationists, we must urge utmost caution—since the record of alien introductions has been far from encouraging.

Banded Curlews

If you should spot a Long-billed Curlew wearing a colored leg-band, you are requested to send detailed information on the sighting to the Office of Migratory Bird Management, Laurel, Maryland 20811. They are conducting a study of Curlews released last fall in the Columbia Basin.



Shumway Suffel

BIRDS of the Season



t year's end there is no indication that we can expect a winter invasion into the lowlands of northern or mountain birds. The one notable exception is the unusually large number of **Golden-crowned Kinglets**, with us since October. But there have been no Crossbills or Evening Grosbeaks, no Pygmy, and very few Red-breasted Nuthatches, very few **Lewis' Woodpeckers**, and only two reports of **Varied Thrushes**. Even Robins and Cedar Waxwings are in small numbers, and the junco flocks seem smaller than usual—though this year they contain a larger proportion of the "Slate-colored" race. Our sole **Gray-headed Junco** was found on the Palos Verdes Count, by Harry Kreuger (Dec. 29).

Loons of all three expected species were common along the coast in December, with Arnold Small's report of a possible **Yellow-billed Loon** at Malibu Lagoon causing some controversy among those who saw and studied it. **Arctic Loons** are unusual away from the coast, but one was at Legg Lake, El Monte (Ed Navojosky, Nov. 25), where both Arctic and Red-throated Loons have been found previously—probably due to the presence of planted fish. **Black Brants**, too, are unusual away from salt water—so one on the lawn at Harbor Lake, San Pedro, was of interest (Shirley Wells, Dec. 2). At Upper Newport Bay, two **Snow Geese** and an apparent **Ross' Goose** stopped briefly on Nov. 26 (John McDonald). A few **European Wigeon** winter here every year, but one at Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley (Jerry Johnson, Nov. 24), was most unusual—despite the fact that one wintered there last year. **Wood Ducks** were widely seen after Nov. 1st: five at Holiday Lake, west of Lancaster (Kimball Garrett et al); four at the Arcadia Arboretum (Armand Cohen); one at the New Lakes, El Monte (Dave Foster); and one on a small pond in the Malibu Mtns. (Bonnie Kennedy). Our most hoped-for returnee was the male **Tufted Duck** at Lake Sherwood (Jerry J., Nov. 19), back for the fifth winter there. Guy McCaskie's group at Furnace Creek Ranch found both a female **Barrow's Goldeneye** (first record there), and a female **Common Goldeneye** (rare there), on Nov. 26. The only local reports of **Oldsquaws** probably involve the same individual, a female-plumaged duck found on a small pond in Huntington Beach (John McD., Nov. 26 and 28) and at nearby Bolsa Chica Lagoon (Dale Delaney, Dec. 1). A female-plumaged **Harlequin Duck** was singled out from a large flock of **Surf Scoters** at the mouth of Topanga Canyon by Bruce Broadbooks and Hank Brodtkin on Nov. 24. Bruce B. also sighted four **Black Scoters** off Hyperion Beach on Dec. 19, after finding the three **Golden Plovers** of the Siberian race which Jesse Morton discovered there a few days earlier. **Hooded Mergansers** seemed more numerous than usual with at least ten reports, sometimes of two together.

Northern raptors were widely reported, partially due to good coverage on the Christmas Counts. A **Rough-legged Hawk** was seen by Dale Delaney from his El Monte office window on Dec. 27, and two more were found on the South End, Salton Sea Count on Dec. 20. A day's birding in the Antelope Valley, west of Lancaster, or on the Carrizo Plains, easily produced five to ten **Ferruginous Hawks**; Jean Brandt

and Glenn Cunningham found three **Merlins** in the area, Nov. 15. **Broad-winged Hawks** are rare birds with us, but three were found this season—an immature at the Fillmore Fish Hatchery (Don Sterba, Nov. 25), an immature in San Diego on Dec. 14, and an adult on the campus of Cal-Poly, Pomona (Bob McKernan, Nov. 30). Lake Mathews is still our best place for **Bald Eagles**, with eight seen there on Nov. 28 (Doug Morton), and three more near the Edmunston Pumping Station, Kern Co. (Abigail King and Joan Mills, Dec. 2). Encouraging news was the sighting of four **Peregrine Falcons**—one at Marina del Rey (Jerry J., Nov. 8), two on the Orange Co. C.C. (Harry Kreuger, Dec. 19), and one on the Palos Verdes C.C. (Bruce B., Dec. 29). Another **Merlin** was near the Rose Bowl in Pasadena on Dec. 26.

At least twenty-five **Sandhill Cranes** were flying high over the Bouquet Canyon Dam on Thanksgiving Day, according to Betty Jenner. On Dec. 19 Russ and Marion Wilson had the good fortune to spot an elusive **Black Rail** scurrying across the pavement on Upper Newport's Back Bay Road. **Mountain Plovers** could not be found on the LAAS trip to the Carrizo Plains, but several flocks were sighted east of Hwy. 111, south of Niland in the Imperial Valley. A single individual was reported at Ballona Creek, Oct. 30 (Ron McClard). The only **Ruff** reported in 1976 was an easily-observed individual in a tiny cove on Monterey Bay in Pacific Grove. Arnold Small's trip to Malibu Lagoon, Dec. 11, produced two rare small gulls—an adult **Laughing Gull** in winter plumage, and a very dark **Franklin's Gull**, probably an immature. Another **Franklin's Gull** was seen in the Ballona Creek channel at Marina del Rey (Jerry J., Nov. 8). Jim Stevens arrived at Monterey during a storm on Nov. 28, and managed to separate one **Thick-billed Murre** from the hundreds of **Common Murres** seeking protection in the harbor. An **Ancient Murrelet**, found at King Harbor, Dec. 19, (Chuck Bernstein and Jerry J.) stayed on for the Palos Verdes C.C., Dec. 29—but was not always easy to find.

Three **Tropical Kingbirds** on the Santa Barbara Count (Paul Lehman, Jan. 2) were exceptional, considering the late date! One or two **Vermillion Flycatchers** have wintered in Legg Lake Park at least since 1968, and according to Ed Navojosky one returned again on Nov. 28. A **Brown Thrasher** at Holiday Lake in the Antelope Valley (Kimball Garrett, Nov. 1) was the only report, except for the bird at Death Valley last fall. A few vagrant warblers lingered into November and December. A male **Black-throated Blue** braved the cold at Morongo Valley (Doug Morton, Nov. 5), as did a **Prairie Warbler** at Scotty's Castle (Garth Altman, Nov. 13, and Nov. 26). But the real surprises of the season were a **Painted Redstart** in Bob and Elizabeth Copper's Coronado garden, on Nov. 21 (and again on Dec. 25)—and a **Black-throated Green** on the North End, Salton Sea Count, near Mecca (Jon Atwood, Dec. 23). Several **Northern Waterthrushes** were found in Inyo Co., and one along the stream in Tapia Park stayed on for the Malibu Count (Dec. 19). A **Parula Warbler** and a **Blackburnian Warbler** were at Mesquite Springs, DVNM, on Nov. 6 (Larry Sansone and Bruce B.). At least five **Rusty Blackbirds** were seen at the

desert oases in Inyo Co. during Nov., and another was near the Goleta Sewage Plant during the Santa Barbara Count, on Jan. 2 (Paul Lehman). It may winter, as one did last year. There are very few winter records of **Hepatic Tanagers**, but Guy McCaskie found one at Oceanside, Jan. 1st. A late male **Summer Tanager** was at Morongo Valley on Nov. 5 (Doug Morton).

Several **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** were seen in Inyo Co. in November, and a fine male visited Gery Haigh's feeder in Malibu on Dec. 12. Another paid a Christmas call at Barbara Drennan's feeder in Sierra Madre, and one or two were counted in Santa Barbara on Jan. 2. A late **Blue Grosbeak** was at the Whittier Narrows Nature Center on Oct. 30 (Dave Foster). **Painted Buntings** are always problem birds (are they wild or escapees?), but an immature male at Scotty's Castle on Nov. 28 was about as far from an aviary as anywhere in the U.S. A few **Tree Sparrows** are found every fall in Inyo Co., but our only local report was at Rose Hills Cemetery in Whittier (Dale Delaney, Nov. 6). **Harris'** and **White-throated Sparrows** were widely seen in Inyo Co. and in Santa Barbara. **White-throats** were also reported in Malibu and Morongo Valley. The only **Swamp Sparrow** found locally was in the Santa Ana River channel east of Anaheim (Fred Baker)—possibly the same bird that was there in Jan. '76. A single **Lapland** and one **Chestnut-collared Longspur** (Jerry Johnson, Nov. 8) were the last to be seen in the large field west of Dominguez State College, but another "**Lap**" was observed on Dec. 2 near the Edmunston Pumping Station (Abigail King and Joan Mills). **Chestnut-collareds** are the only Longspurs which winter here in large numbers—as indicated by the presence of 35 in Antelope Valley (Kimball Garrett, Oct. 31), and 75 near O'Neill Park, Orange Co. (Guy McC., Dec. 26).

February may be your last chance to see most of the winter birds (divers, geese, and some gulls leave early) and your first chance to observe the earliest spring migrants—hummingbirds and swallows. The South End of the Salton Sea and the coastal bays and marshes will be best for waterbirds, while cemeteries, golf courses, and parks should provide good landbirding. ♡

Unusual bird sightings for inclusion in this column, or for the weekly recorded Bird Report should be reported to either Shum Suffer (797-2965) or Jean Brandt (788-5188).



WESTERN TANAGER

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The Christmas Counts

Despite the tinder-dry year, with a scarcity of northern and montane birds, the **Malibu Canyon Christmas Count** enjoyed a virtual repeat of last year's record-breaking effort, as 87 enthusiastic observers turned up some 32,000 individuals of **162 species** on a clear, cool Sunday, Dec. 19th. Although the "staked-out" Harlequin Duck failed to show, the coastline produced a Franklin's Gull, 5 Caspian Terns, 24 Red Phalaropes, and 3 Common Murres (the last 2 species from our first boat survey). Lingering or overwintering landbirds (including Rough-winged Swallow, Nashville and Black-throated Gray Warblers, and a Northern Waterthrush), plus a good variety of waterfowl (including all 3 mergansers, and 129 Canada Geese!) helped round out the total. The count's first Prairie Falcon almost made up for the surprising absence of White-tailed Kites and Marsh Hawks. A total of only 6 Cedar Waxwings and 48 Robins demonstrated the scarcity of these species this winter in the So. California lowlands. The now-famous annual compilation (and wild beer bust) at the Malibu Pizza Palace was an enjoyable end to a productive day.

The Los Angeles Christmas Count, a week later (Dec. 26), also produced respectable results: **143 species** and 31,232 individual birds (plus 3 additional races and five other species seen during the count period). Sixty-eight faithful birders spent 188 hours in the field, travelling a total of 289 miles during the day. The weather for the count was clear and warm under mild Santa Ana conditions, which held the ocean calm for good sightings. A White-winged Scoter was seen off the beach north of Marina del Rey; a White Pelican was on the outer jetty at the Marina; Parasitic Jaegers were spotted from the Santa Monica Pier; and numbers of Western Grebes and Surf Scoters were unusually high. However, there were no Snowy Plovers again this year! The parties at Playa del Rey were busy, though, and came up with a Greater Scaup and a Common Goldeneye on the pond near Ballona Creek, as well as a Peregrine Falcon—seen on the fields east of Lincoln Blvd. Other highlights of the day included: Canyon Wrens and a Merlin in a yard in the Santa Monica Mtns.; a Roadrunner—apparently resident at a fire station in Franklin Cyn.; a Screech Owl in Fern Cyn.; the Winter Wren and a Rufous Hummingbird at the UCLA Botanical Garden; a Sage Sparrow, Rufous-Crowned Sparrow, and a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher in Wattles Park; Tri-colored Blackbirds at Inglewood Cemetery; Canvasback at Echo Park Lake; and Cactus Wrens in the Baldwin Hills. Montane species were lacking—so there were no Mountain Chickadees or White-breasted Nuthatches—and as usual, there wasn't a single Acorn Woodpecker. Nonetheless, 25 people gathered for dinner afterward at Plummer Park, to celebrate the day and enjoy some good-natured fellowship.

At the moment the national Christmas Count picture remains clouded, but Santa Barbara beat us (in the rain) with **191**. If it is any consolation, however, Lethbridge, Alberta came up with a grand total of **11 species** and 236 individuals.

Errata

Please note the following errors in last month's TANAGER. On page 1, delete Black-eared Bushtit; on page 2, substitute Ferruginous Owl for Flammulated Owl; and on page 4, substitute Spruce Grouse for Blue Grouse. As Stuart Keith tactfully pointed out, the Grouse may be "elusive"—but it's not *that* elusive.

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.

Audubon Bird Report—call 874-1318

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, JANUARY 29 and 30—Salton Sea. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at Wister turn-off on Hwy. 111 (about 36 miles south of Mecca, and north of Niland). The trip promises spectacular birding, with thousands of wintering geese (Ross' Geese are usually found) and large numbers of waterfowl and shorebirds. Camping is available at Finney Lake (no water) or Wister Campground. Please be sure to register at the refuge H.Q. at Wister. There are motels in nearby Brawley. Leaders: Shum Suffel, 797-2965, and Harold Baxter, 355-6300.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3—Executive Board Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Audubon House.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 5—Pelagic Trip to Anacapa Island. The *Paisano* will leave the National Parks Monument dock in the Ventura Marina at 8:00 a.m. and return about 6:00 p.m. You are requested to be at the boat one half hour before departure. Price: \$18.00 per person. Make checks payable to Los Angeles Audubon Society and send a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your phone number and the names and addresses of all persons in your party to Phil Sayre, 660 S. Garfield Ave., Apt. 306, Monterey Park, Calif. 91754. Phone: 288-0545. No refunds accepted within 48 hours of departure. Leaders: Herb and Olga Clarke, 249-5537.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 8—The LAAS Annual Dinner, at Yamashiro Restaurant, 1999 No. Sycamore Ave., above Franklin Blvd. in Hollywood. The program will be presented by **Glenn and Trish Warner**, and will feature a film on the life of **Canada's High Arctic**. Cocktails are at 6:00 p.m. and dinner (teriyaki steak) at 7:30 p.m. The price is \$8.40 per person. For reservations, send a check to Phil Sayre, 660 S. Garfield Ave., Apt. 306, Monterey Park, Calif. 91754. Phone: 288-0545.

To reach the Yamashiro Restaurant, take the Hollywood Fwy. to the Highland Exit and follow Highland south to Franklin Blvd. Turn west (right) on Franklin, and right again on Orange Drive (between Highland and LaBrea). Follow Orange Drive all the way to the top of the hill.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 13—Whittier Narrows Wildlife Sanctuary. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Nature Center. This is an excellent trip for beginning birders, for it affords a fine opportunity to become familiar with the wide assortment of species that may be found in the heart of the city. Among the possible highlights are two of our most spectacular birds: the resident Cardinal, and the wintering Vermillion Flycatcher. Take the Pomona Fwy. (60) east to the Santa Anita off-ramp, turn south (right) on Santa Anita to Durfee Ave., then turn east (left) to the Nature Center. Leader: David Foster, Nature Center Biologist, 791-3084.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26—Pelagic Cruise of Monterey Bay. Departure, aboard *Miss Monterey*, is at 7:30 a.m., from Fisherman's Wharf, Sam's Fishing Fleet Dock, in Monterey. The price: \$15.00 per person. Send your reservations to Phil Sayre and follow the same instructions as per the February 5th pelagic trip. Directions for finding the dock for *Miss Monterey* can be obtained in Monterey.

THURSDAY, MARCH 3—Executive Board Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Audubon House.

TUESDAY, MARCH 8—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. Everyone welcome. Two of our most knowledgeable birders, **Herb Clarke** and **Arnold Small**, will present a joint program on the **Birds of the West**. The program will feature some of the most striking photographs from their recently published book, with a survey of the species to be found in our ten major natural habitats.

Costa Rica, 1977

The American Birding Association has announced two birding expeditions to Costa Rica, the first to be led by ABA President, **Arnold Small**, April 9-24 (\$950, all inclusive, from Los Angeles), and the second to be led by ABA V.P. **Bob Smart**, June 6-21 (\$790, all inclusive, from Miami). For information or reservations, contact Arnold Small at 275-8823.

Northeastern Birding Trips

Davis Finch and **Will Russell**—two of the top birders in the East—are leading five tours to the north country in 1977: to **Alaska** (June 1-17), to **Churchill**, Manitoba (July 6-12); to **Britain** (Aug. 29-Sept. 9), to the **Canadian maritime islands** (Sept. 12-22), and to **Monhegan Island**, Maine (Sept. 28-Oct. 5). For complete information, write or call Maude Russell, Seal Harbor, Maine 04675 (phone: 207-276-3963).

Volunteers Needed

The Society has an immediate need for volunteers to help staff Audubon House on weekends—or to come in one or two days during the week. In addition, the chapter would benefit from the informal advice of an attorney and an accountant. If you feel you can help out in any way, please call Audubon House (876-0202), or LAAS President, Sandy Wohlgenuth (344-8531).



Update: The Condor Fund

Contributions to the 1976 LAAS Condor Fund now total over \$2500—a heartening demonstration of the support of our membership for the program to preserve this embattled species. A check for the final amount in the Fund will be presented to Paul Howard of the National Audubon Society at the Annual Dinner, February 8th. Many thanks are due to all those who saw fit to help out.

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