WESTERN TANAGER

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The Night of the Nightingales

and Other Stories

We arrived in mid-April, with the chill of winter still in the air, the buds barely opening on the trees—and we left six weeks later, in the full flush of summer, our heads swimming with strange bird names, our ears ringing with the songs *Sylvia* warblers.

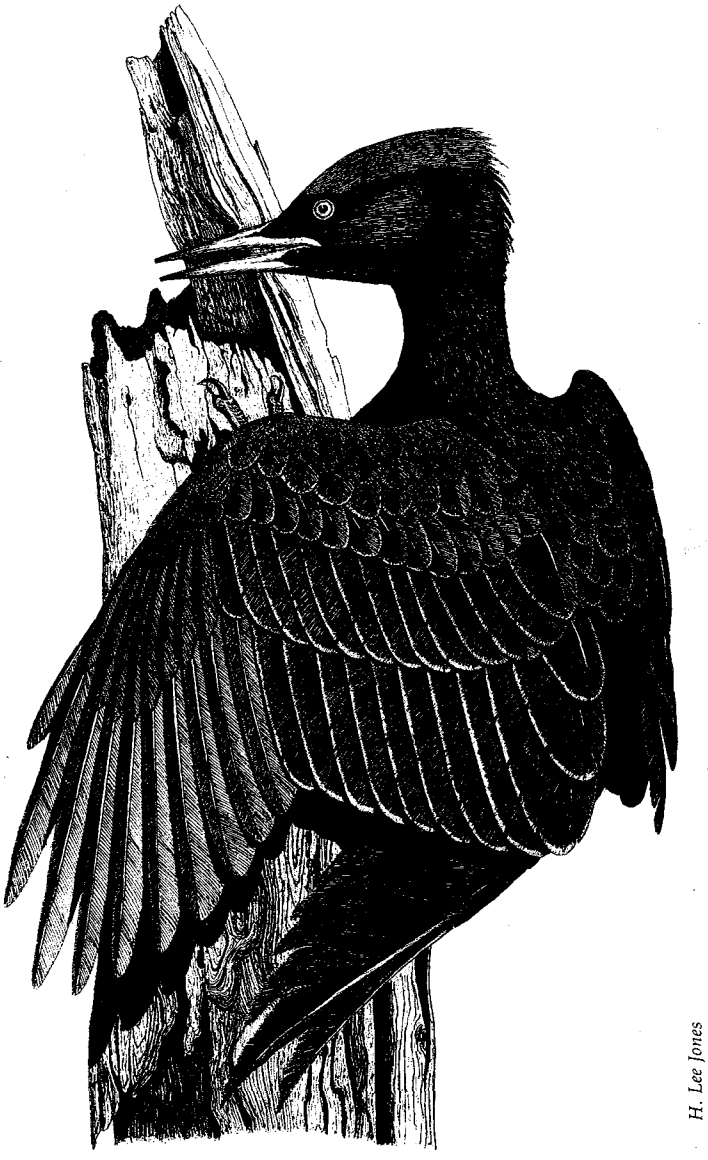
There were four of us altogether: Jon Dunn, the *wunderkind* of Western birding; fledgling ornithologist Diane Petrula; my wife, Terry—an inspired amateur; and myself—the chronicler of those things that transpired.

Our plan was to follow the broad river valleys, hitting the northbound migrants head on. And so, after lingering awhile in the Netherlands to pick up a factory-bought car, we plunged into the dank woodlands of De Hogue Veluwe, to pursue the phantom Black Woodpecker through groves of ancient oaks. Then, still in a daze, we swept down the valley of the Rhine, rolling toward the Black Forest and the headwaters of the Danube. The weather was dramatic, the settings theatrical, and all the birds of Europe were in full regalia and song. Yet, to our surprise, wherever we went we found ourselves oddly alone—alone in majestic forests or in boggy marshland preserves, bypassed, it would seem, even by the brigades of birding tourists.

Alone in the Lampertheim Marsh below Frankfurt, in a grand, Wagnerian storm, we glimpsed our first Bluethroat—of the Northern, red-spotted race—and, after that, we were certain, all that would follow must surely be downhill.

But great adventures yet waited in store for us further down the road. In knee-deep snow in the Bavarian Alps, above Oberammergau, we cornered a covey of Citril Finches—ecological isolates of the canary clan, and among the most prized of European endemics. Then, were that not enough, just three days hence, properly fortified with Sacher torte, we tasted the unique delight of chasing Green and Grey-headed Woodpeckers through the very heart of Vienna—in the woods behind Schonbrunn Palace.

by Barry Clark



H. Lee Jones

The Black Woodpecker, a majestic bird of mature Eurasian forests.

It was, however, only after we reached the edge of the Hungarian steppe and the sprawling Neusiedler See, that we began to meet sizable numbers of species, southern birds surging north with the spring—birds like the Yellow Wagtail and the absurdly improbable Hoopoe.

Now, in a state of high excitement, we pushed on across the Dinaric Alps, toward the sunny Dalmatian coast, pausing to picnic en route in a scrubby Serbian woods, where we listened, enraptured, to a faraway call—that of the first Cuckoo of spring.

Suddenly we found ourselves in the realm of the macchia scrub, among birds like the Subalpine Warbler, reminiscent in voice and behavior of our birds of the chaparral. But now too our tracks began to be haunted by the singer of an astonishing song—a bird that despite our best efforts, refused to reveal itself. Though, on hindsight, it's apparent that we should have recognized it at once for what it was, it would await our second night in the country, bedded out by a backwoods road, before we would learn its true identity. That tortuous night, during which a pair of the tireless songsters kept us awake from dusk till dawn, would thereafter live in infamy as the Night of the Nightingales.

erhaps it's a misconception we all share, but until recently I tended to casually dismiss the entire continent of Europe as a mere mausoleum of cultural monuments, a repository for the relics of a history upon whose excesses I'd rather not reflect. But, as I was to discover this spring, there exists, alongside all that, another Europe, more venerable even than the other, a world with its own culture, its own history and heritage.

The existence of this other Europe is not widely publicized, for nature, on the continent, is not the big draw that it is in other quarters of the globe. But it is *there* all the same—the wild world of Europe—heroically holding its own in spite of all the indignities heaped upon it in the course of that long and convulsive episode known as the grand human adventure.

Wholesale habitat destruction was evidently well under way in the days of the ancient Greeks, and experts contend that not a scrap of the continent now remains in anything close to a pristine state. Be that as it may, to the layman's eye there's still plenty of wild-enough country around—left unmolested for a century or two—and all the visitor has to do to partake of its special pleasures is to extricate himself—if he's able—from the seductive grip of the cities.

And what are the rewards of such rash behavior? In addition to the tonic it does the soul just to wander awhile through woodland and fen, there is that deeper delight to be derived from making the acquaintance of a natural realm that differs in interesting ways from our own.

To the Western birder, Europe is at once intriguingly exotic and reassuringly familiar—for fully 25 percent of its 420 breeding birds are shared with North America—a consequence of climate and the capricious forces that control the Bering Land Bridge—the causeway that from time to time during the past 250 millenia has linked Eurasia and America. Though Europe can claim no tanagers, orioles, wood warblers, vireos, or hummingbirds—and we (alas) have no bee-eaters, accentors, hoopoes, or rollers, the majority of the families of European birds are at home in North America—and much of the divergence that *has* occurred, on a species level, is apparently a product of the most recent period of estrangement, since the apogee of the last Ice Age.

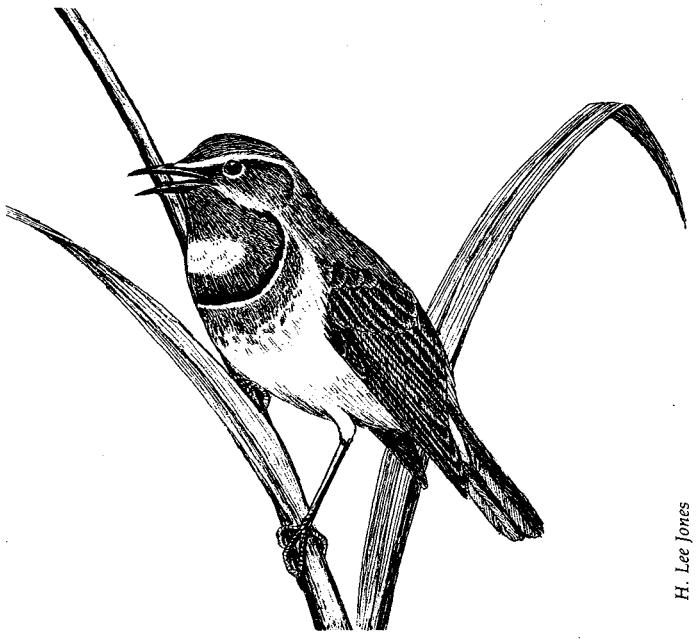
Properly speaking, then, the birds of Europe and North America belong to the same avifaunal regime—a fact to which anyone who has birded the tropics of either hemisphere can readily attest. For at the end of a gruelling twelve-hour flight from L.A. to Amsterdam, the birds that await the traveller betray more in common with those at home than do those of Mazatlan (a long day's drive to the south—yet a world away, in ecological terms).

It should also be noted that whatever *political* validity Europe may have, *biologically* it's purely an abstraction, for without hesitation its predominant habitat types transgress all formal frontiers, to push far into Asia and North Africa. The low species diversity (only 420 nesting species, compared with 600 in North America—and close to 3000 in South America), plus the meager percentage of endemics (a mere 10 species—not one of them restricted to a single nation—compared to 189 in North America, and over 1000 in South America) may be attributed to this lack of ecological singularity—as well as to the relative poverty of habitats on hand: There's no natural desert at all; and though there's a small Alpine community, a contingent on the Eastern steppes, and a tight-knit community of species in the Mediterranean (macchia) scrub—the majority of Europe's birds belong to the world of the leafy forest—the mixed coniferous-deciduous woodland that once covered the heart of the continent.

Further, as a result of the warming ways of the Gulf Stream, the climate zones on the east side of the Atlantic are pushed poleward by ten degrees—so the pure coniferous belt begins well north of its position in North America. And the main mountain ranges—unlike our Cordilleras—run East to West, thus slowing the northward spread of southern birds, while serving during the dire days of the glaciation, as fatal barriers to southward-moving species.

Taken together these factors insure that the itinerant birder must cover the 2000 miles from Stockholm to Istanbul, if he hopes to encounter the range of birds he's likely to see in a 600-mile traverse of California.

But quantity, as we know, is not the only measure of birdwatching potential—and by savoring the birds and biomes of Europe at a meandering pace, one may sense



H. Lee Jones

The Bluethroat, a spectacular bird of Old World marshes and heaths.

—more surely, perhaps, than in the tropics—something of the dynamics of distribution, and the workings of evolution.

And that's more or less what we tried to do, in the course of our 8000-mile journey from the North Sea to Turkey and back.

Not that the attainment of cosmic insight was the sole motive behind the adventure...for there were others. After all, to those who enjoy naming small things that flit away through the bush, the continent offers a challenging new arena—while holding forth, for the inveterate rare bird chaser, the promise of intimate experience with species that may one day turn up in his own backyard.

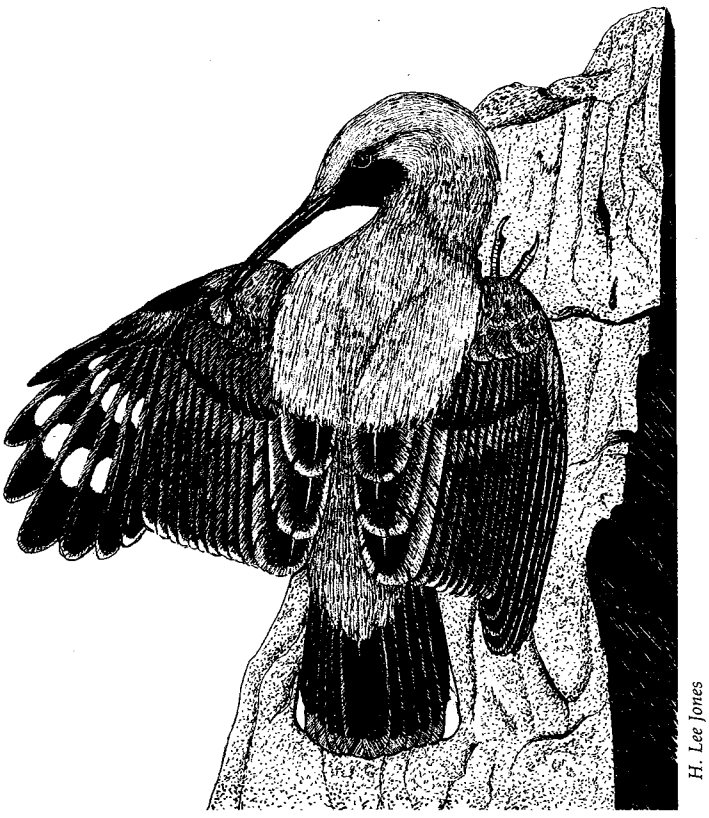
For field guides we would rely upon Bruun and Singer (ideal for the range maps), and Peterson, Mountfort, and Hollom (best for the illustrations). We wisely left Heinzel, Fitter, and Parslow at home, for their pictures are poor and their maps very nearly illegible. For bird-finding information we trusted John Gooders' *Where to Watch Birds in Europe*—a grievous mistake, it developed—for he lured us, with promise of a Lammergeyer, to a remote Yugoslav radar base—and it was only by providence that we managed to escape the clutches of the local militia. In fairness, however, we earnestly suspect that had we followed Ferguson-Lee's *A Guide to Bird-watching in Europe*, our fate could only have been worse.

The sad truth of the matter is that though the great birding routes of Europe have been heavily trod since the Middle Ages, an adequate bird-finding guide to the continent has yet to appear in print. And until it does, it's probably best to stick to word of mouth, plus a measure of common sense.

After a week spent exploring the meadows, marshes, and military bases along the Adriatic, we dropped down into Greece, following the Axios River to its delta near Thessaloniki (a muddy marsh that seemed to our eyes a world of purity and splendor compared to the dusty anarchy of the city). Then, surfeited at least with Bee-eaters and Rollers, Pratincoles, and Black-headed Buntings, we sped southward again, across the golden plains of Thessaly (where Calandra and Short-toed Larks must have sung, even as the legions of Sparta and Persia clashed in the fields below). Down avenues of cottonwoods we drove, the drifting fleece of the cottonwood trees swirling away in our path—then we wound our way up through the storied hills to the mecca of the Old World birders—the classical town of Delphi, perched high on Mt. Parnassus, overlooking the gulf of Corinth.

As we expected, we weren't the only pilgrims in town—for Swedes, Germans, and Englishmen trudged the cobblestone streets, oblivious alike to the tug of history and the hawkers of plaster curios—intent, as we ourselves were, on one objective only: to seek out those Mid-Eastern species that (like the Turks long ages thereafter) had established a beachhead here on the mainland of Europe.

On the rocky slopes of Parnassus we paid homage to the Cretzschmar's Buntings—lunching on French bread and feta, washed down with the local retsina, while Egyptian Vultures soared overhead, and Sardinian and Ruppell's Warblers protested from the tops of the shrubs. Then under lowering clouds we descended to the terraced slopes below, there to engage the Olive-tree Warbler in a hectic chase through the rubble of the ancient oracle—only to lose our quarry at last as it stoically slipped away into the veil of a soft spring rain.



H. Lee Jones

The Wallcreeper, solitary spirit of the high Alpine cliffs.

Having seen Delphi, the European birdwatcher may happily head for home—with a mandatory stop or two on the route to pick up a few area specialties. Near the Turkish frontier we stumbled upon the spectacular Spur-winged Plover—here at the edge of its range, while nearby sulked a pair of stunning Masked Shrikes, plus a passel of rare bird chasers—drawn, as if by an insurmountable urge, to the periphery of the continent. Closing ranks for awhile with our counterparts, we collaborated in the futile pursuit of the secretive Rufous Bush Robin. Then, with time running out, we turned at last to the north, racing up the broad basin of central Bulgaria, along the route of the Goths and the Huns—flanked by highballing Turkish trucks as we followed the great E9 Road back into Switzerland—to track down a staked-out Wallcreeper in the gorge of the River Aare.

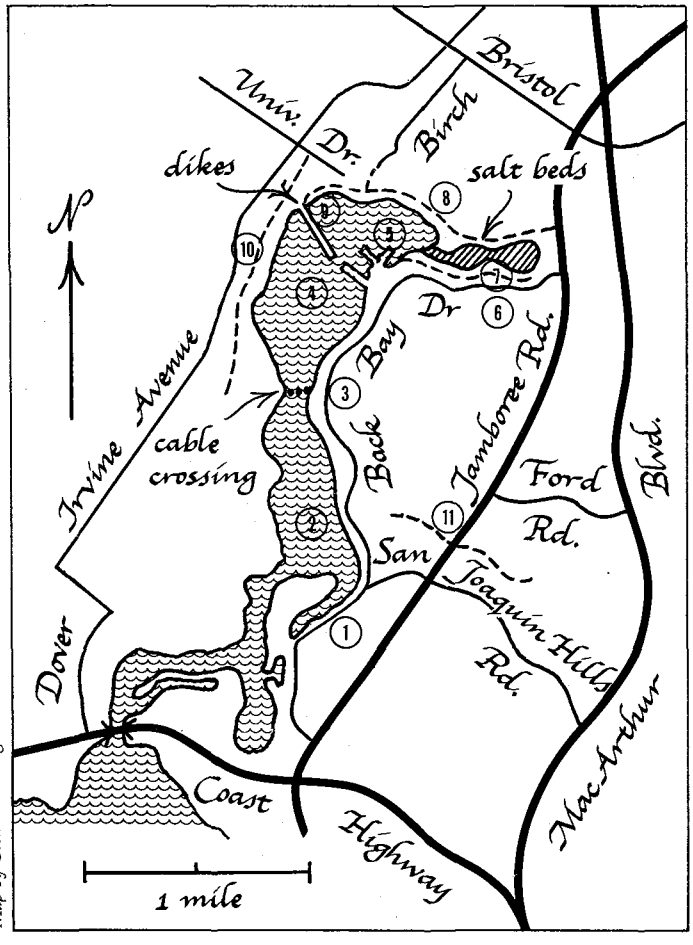
Dizzy with success—and still reeling with the whirlwind of border-crossings—on the 18th of May we crested the Simplon Pass—to wade through wall-to-wall migrants: Rock Thrushes, Whinchats, Ring Ouzels, and Wheatears, forced down by foul weather to feed between patches of snow—the first really overt indication of migration we'd encountered on the whole excursion.

Continued on Pg. 7

The article was illustrated by ornithologist Lee Jones, well known for his studies of the birds of California's Channel Islands.

Jean Brandt

BIRDING at Upper Newport



Map by Glenn Cunningham

This time of year, no place in Southern California offers greater potential for watching waterfowl, marsh, and shorebirds than Upper Newport Bay, with its open water, sand bars, mud flats, and salt marshes. In addition, the adjoining canyons, bluffs, and willow thickets lend variety to a day spent birding the area. By late October all of the shorebirds will have returned, and from then through early March many thousands of birds will rest and feed by the Bay, relatively undisturbed.

Be advised, however, that the mud flats are wide, and a scope is almost a necessity. For optimum birding try to be there early (that's when the light is best); and especially if you're looking for rails, check the newspapers first to choose the hour of the highest tide.

To begin your tour of the area, enter Back Bay Drive from Jamboree Road at the south end of the Upper Bay. Pass the Newporter Inn; then as you round the bend, you will meet the first of many salt marshes **(1)**. American Bitterns and Clapper, Virginia, and Sora Rails are easily found during a flood tide, and the elusive Black Rail is still a possibility. The marshes out in the Bay abound with Great Blue Herons and two of the egrets. Cattle Egrets and both Little Blue and Louisiana Herons have also turned up here.

Driving north along the Bay, look for puddle ducks and grebes close into shore, and out in the deeper water **(2)**. And as you go, watch for diving ducks such as scaup, Buffleheads, and mergansers.

Presently you will pass the intersection of San Joaquin Hills Road. This is a good area to check for Stilt Sandpipers during migration—and perhaps for the Short-eared Owl. European Wigeon have been found here the last two winters (Jan.-Mar.).

The most exciting (and frustrating) birding at the Bay is at the Cable Crossing **(3)**. If you are looking for rails and Sharp-tailed Sparrows, plan to be here ½ hour before peak high tide, and stay for at least an hour. The most recent reliable reports of Black Rails have come from this locale; but if you miss the Black Rail, there are other rails to be found in this area—and Cactus Wrens are resident on the bluff across the road.

Continue driving north and look out into the Bay **(4)**. From here you will see the resident Osprey's favorite pole (sign says "Shoals"). Ducks and more ducks abound here, and Bald and Golden Eagles are always worth looking for.

Soon you will come to the South Dike **(5)**, where you will have excellent views of shorebirds. Gulls and terns wait here for the tide to change, and Red Knots are usually on hand.

As you drive on, check the growth along the bluff side of the road **(6)**—it's good for wintering Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and Hermit Thrushes. A dirt road leads off to your left **(7)** into a willow thicket—a good place to check for spring and fall migrants and Costa's Hummingbirds. The dike area nearby should produce Gadwalls and Green Herons.

At the top of Back Bay Drive, turn left on Jamboree Road, then left on Bristol Street, and left again on Birch Street, continuing to the end of Birch. A trail to the west side of the Bay starts directly across from the end of Birch Street (golf course on the right, corral on the left). Five minutes of easy walking will get you to the Bay; then a left turn will take you along the edge of the salt beds (look for resident Snowy Plovers) and past some good riparian habitat **(8)**. This trail is best at high tide, when the shorebirds crowd into the north end of the Bay; and if there are any Blue-winged Teal around, this is where they're sure to be. In addition, you're likely to spot a Marsh Hawk or White-tailed Kite, hunting over the area.

Back at the trail junction, a right turn will take you out on the North Dike **(9)**—a good place to be in the afternoon, with the sun behind you and a scope ready at hand. Look for Golden Plovers and rarities here. The escaped Flamingos are sometimes seen, lovely to look at, but not to be counted on your "life list."

Another trail enters the Bay from University Drive and continues south along the west side **(10)**. Hope for a raptor here, to put up thousands of birds. There is no more spectacular sight!!

One more place to check for spring and fall migrants is Big Canyon **(11)**. You enter the canyon from Jamboree Road near the intersection of San Joaquin Hills Road, then follow the trail that starts at the very end of the apartment complex on Jamboree. Look for Red-shouldered Hawks and migrants in season.

For easy viewing and for sheer concentrations of birds, Upper Newport Bay is unequalled in Southern California. Food, fuel, and lodging are available on either MacArthur Blvd. or Bristol Street. See the CALENDAR page for details of the LAAS Field Trip to the area, October 16th.

Good birding!

Jon Dunn/FIELD NOTES

The Catharus Thrushes

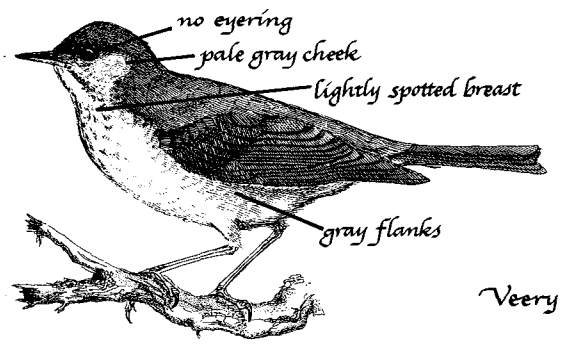


Illustration by Mary Ellen Pereyra

The Veery is an accidental eastern vagrant to California, having been definitely recorded at the traditional vagrant traps on only three occasions (Farallon Islands—Oct. 19, 1973; Big Sycamore Canyon—Oct. 12-16, 1974; and at Oasis—May 28, 1977). There are two distinct races of the Veery. The nominate eastern race, *Catharus fuscescens fuscescens*, is a widespread breeding bird throughout the northern states of eastern North America, and the southern portions of eastern Canada. The western race, *Catharus f. salicicola*, summers in western Canada and in most of the Great Basin states, though it is very local throughout much of the southern portion of its range. *Salicicola* closely resembles the eastern bird except that the color of the upperparts is not as bright. It is interesting to note that despite the close proximity of the western race to California, it is suspected that the three valid records represent the eastern form.

Apart from these records there are a number of additional reports of Veerys—all of which are unsubstantiated, and may well pertain to the "Russet-backed" race of the Swainson's Thrush. The field guides' emphasis upon the tawny-red upperparts of the Veery as the best criterion of identification can easily lead to confusion, because of the rustiness of our race of Swainson's Thrush. Interestingly, most of the unsubstantiated reports are from easterners who are unfamiliar with the brightness of our rusty race of Swainson's. It is true that the rusty-red tones of the nominate race of the Veery are more intense than those of the "Russet-backed" Swainson's, but the difference in back color between *Salicicola* and some "Russet-backed" thrushes is virtually imperceptible.

For this reason I feel that the best mark on the Veery is the patterning of the underparts. The underparts are largely a whitish-gray, and the breast is only *lightly spotted.* The *gray flanks* are also particularly distinctive, contrasting markedly with the rest of the underparts and the rusty-red back. The Swainson's Thrush is much more *heavily spotted* across the breast, and the spots are *larger and darker,* forming a more *extensive pattern,* extending down along the sides. In addition, the cheeks, breast, and flanks of the Swainson's are richly washed with a *bright buff* that is totally lacking in the Veery, except for a tinge of buff restricted to the breast. The Veery lacks the distinctive eye ring of the Swainson's, and its cheeks are a *very pale gray.*

The call note of the species, a downslurred *veer,* is quite different from the call notes of either the Hermit or the Swainson's Thrush.

Richard Spotts

Alaska's Last Chance

The conservation debate of the decade, and perhaps even of the century, is currently taking shape. It deals with Alaska—our last great wilderness frontier. The largest state, Alaska has a total area of 375 million acres. Vast expanses of natural terrain serve as habitat for an abundance of Grizzly bears, wolves, Bald Eagles, and other creatures which have become rare or endangered in the "lower 48."

Unfortunately, Alaska's wild character is rapidly changing. The Trans-Alaska Pipeline will be completed soon. More pipelines, roads, mines and logging activities are planned. There is no question that this development will occur, causing an irreversible impact.

Given the inevitability of these changes, many prominent environmental groups—including the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and the Wilderness Society—have formed the **Alaska Coalition.** Its sole purpose is to promote passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (H.R. 39 and S. 500). Abbreviated as ANILCA, this legislation offers a last chance to protect some of Alaska's best remaining scenic, wilderness, recreational, and wildlife values. If passed, ANILCA would create 51 units—totalling 114.9 million acres—of new national parks, wildlife refuges, and wild and scenic rivers. Indeed, passage of ANILCA would literally double the size of both the National Park and National Wildlife Refuge Systems.

In addition, ANILCA strives for better long-range planning to ensure the protection of environmental values. The proposed new park and refuge units have boundaries drawn in such a way that, wherever possible, whole ecosystems or watersheds will be included. Recent experience in California's Redwood National Park, where upstream and upslope clearcut logging on private lands threatens spectacular redwoods, demonstrates that careful planning is needed to avoid future problems of a similar nature.

Under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, Congress set aside about 125 million acres of unreserved, or "d-2," federal lands. By December 18, 1978, Congress must decide which of these lands will be preserved as new parks, refuges, and wild and scenic rivers, and which will be available for mining, logging, road building, and related activites. Thus, within roughly the next 1½ years, the fate of much of Alaska's dwindling wilderness heritage will be determined.

To help pass the ANILCA bill, and overcome expected special interest opposition, please write your Congressman at House Office Building, Washington, D. C. 20515. Ask him to support and consider co-sponsoring H.R. 39. In addition, please write Senator Alan Cranston and Senator S.I. Hayakawa at Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. Urge them to strongly support S. 500.

For more information, literature on the Alaska Coalition's efforts locally, or to borrow the film *Alaska: Land in Balance,* phone Richard Spotts (721-7466) or Tom Woessner (280-7923).

Shumway Suffel

BIRDS of the Season

October is for rare bird watchers, and after all, who doesn't thrill to the first sight of a new bird? This opening line from my first article for the WESTERN TANAGER exactly ten years ago this month is even more pertinent today, because the number of birdwatchers has increased geometrically since then, with a corresponding increase in expertise. Prior to the 1960's the few active birders concentrated their efforts, in the fall, on returning winter birds, mostly non-passerines, and paid little attention to migrant passerines—and even less to the vagrants that accompanied them. This was the case because the "concentration spots" (coastal promontories and desert oases) which we cover so thoroughly today, were little known then, communication between birders was strictly minimal, and fall passerines were considered a dreary lot, too difficult to identify. Fall birding, as we know it, remained a closed book until Guy McCaskie and a few other pioneers popularized today's "compulsive birding," by teaching us how to identify vagrants and where to find them in the fall. One has only to read the reports of October birds in the TANAGERS of 15 to 20 years ago—or to peruse the paucity of vagrant records in Pyle & Small's *Annotated Field List* (1961) to appreciate the revolutionary change that has recently taken place in California birding.

Late August brought us the first invasion of boobies from the Gulf of California in five long years. Not that it was a major invasion such as that of '71 or 72—only five **Blue-footed**, and possibly two **Brown Boobies**—but it far exceeded the performance of the previous four summers: 1976—one "Blue-foot" on a Sierra reservoir above Stockton, possibly hurricane-connected; 1975—a single "Brown" at the north end of the Salton Sea (NESS); 1974—one "Brown" at NESS, and an injured "Blue-foot" in a San Gabriel yard; 1973—a dead booby at NESS. Contrast these lean years with 1972, when about forty "Blue-foots" were at the Sea—or with the record year, 1971, when not only did some 100 "Blue-foots" reach the Sea, but forty or more flew on to the coast, to generate reports from the Mexican border to Monterey Bay. This season's first Brown Booby was seen on Lake Havasu, Colorado River (Guy McCaskie and Jon Dunn, Aug. 19); an immature was found at the NW corner of the Sea on Aug. 23; with a third report from Salton Sea State Park (Guy and Louise Commeau, Aug. 27); and another report of an adult at NESS (Phil Sayre, Ed Navojosky and Don Osborne, Aug. 28). The original four "Blue-foots" at NESS, plus one at Salton City, all on Aug. 25, either disbursed around the Sea or flew on to the coast, where Lew Hastings saw one off Pt. Loma Aug. 26, and another off Manhattan Beach three days later. A third "Blue-foot" was seen at Marina del Rey by John Alderfer on Aug. 31. Identification of boobies this year was particularly difficult, as one or more of them looked so much like an adult Brown Booby (white belly and dark upper breast) that the first four boobies at NESS were reported as "Browns." But after study and consultation, all were definitely identified as immature "Blue-foots." Unfortunately, the field guides are less than perfect on the identification of boobies, and there is some doubt that there were *any* adult Brown Boobies at the Sea this past month. Perhaps clarification will come in September.

Even more remarkable this month was the first appearance of three **American (Pied) Oystercatchers** at Salton City, on Aug. 14 (Tom Frillman and Fred Heath). These birds unquestionably made the long overland journey from the Gulf, where they are common. They were later seen across the Sea at the State Park (Don Osborne, Aug. 28). Sightings of **Frigatebirds** continued along the coast, with a delayed report of three from the Newport Beach pier (Bob Anderson, July 11); two low over Alamitos Bay (Barbara Turner, Aug. 13); three off Laguna Beach (Jerry Johnson, Aug. 21); and, at the Sea, three north of Salton City (Jean Brandt and Barbara Spencer, Aug. 23). An adult **Little Blue Heron** was reported by Madelaine Caforio at the seldom-birded Irvine Lake, Orange Co. on Aug. 6. At least twenty **Roseate Spoonbills** were at the Wister Unit, SESS (Arnold Small, Aug. 20), and by the 28th, two had moved to the NESS.

A rare **Black-bellied Whistling (Tree) Duck** was found by Ruth Lohr, Aug. 5, along with some sixty Fulvous Whistling Ducks, at a pond beside the New River below Brawley. After the heavy rains, the bird proved difficult to relocate, and was last reported on Aug. 14 (Priscilla and Hank Brodkin).

All records of **Bay-winged (Harris') Hawks** west of the Colorado River are suspect, because several have recently escaped from "would be" falconers; thus the one seen by Jim Stevens near his home in Tujunga on Aug. 21 probably belongs to this category, as do the pair which nested at SESS in 1976, or the one which caught Wood Ducks at the L.A. Zoo, before being released at Bolsa Chica. A **Red-shouldered Hawk** at 7,200 ft. in the High Sierras was at an unusual elevation for this bird of the wooded valleys (John de Modeno, Aug. 15). **Ospreys** have been reported with increasing regularity in recent years. The one found by Holly Peck at Long Beach harbor on Aug. 5 was seen again two weeks later. Another was sighted by Terry Clark at Malibu Lagoon on Aug. 15. A family group of six **Mountain Quail** at Fran Floyd's feeder in the Santa Monica Mts. above Thousand Oaks is the only record we've had of these quail in the coastal range. Any additional reports would be noteworthy.

Paul Lehman believes that the **Golden Plover** (*dominica* race) which was found at Goleta in late August is the same individual which wintered there last year. He also had a **Solitary Sandpiper** there about Aug. 13, and a second was at the grassy pond in the Sepulveda Recreation Area on Aug. 15 (Ian MacGregor). Two more Solitarys were found at Unit 1, SESS, on Aug. 23. **Baird's Sandpipers** were seen sparingly along the coast, with two at McGrath S.P. (Jon Dunn, Aug. 7.), one at SESS (the Brodkins, Aug. 14), and one near Lakeview, Riv. Co. (Doug Morton, Aug. 20); but east of the Sierras, Tom Heindel found *more than one hundred* Baird's at the upper end of Lake Tinnemaha, Inyo Co., in mid-August. The only report of a **Pectoral Sandpiper** was a single bird near Lakeview (Doug M., Aug. 20). At least six

Stilt Sandpipers had returned to Unit 1, SESS, by Aug. 6.

Elegant Terns were along the coast in large numbers, but the sighting of 75 **Royal Terns** on San Miguel Island (Terry Clark, et al, Aug. 28) was extraordinary—since they are normally winter visitors. **Comm n Nighthawks** are rare birds here, even in migration, except for a few in the San Bernardino Mts; but apparently they migrate in numbers east of the Sierras, as a large milling flock was studied as they fed on a cloud of large insects near Oasis in Mono Co. (Ian McG. Aug. 18). Doug Morton visited the remote desert oasis of Ft. Piute, N.W. of Needles, on Aug. 6, and found the migration of small passerines well under way, with many **Warbling Vireos** and western migrant warblers in evidence. Within the week migrants were seen at other oases, along the coast, and even in downtown L.A., where Betty Jenner had **Wilson's, Orange-crowned,** and **Townsend's Warblers** in mid-August. A few **Northern Waterthrushes** and **American Redstarts** were found in the desert, but the only rarities were a **Prairie Warbler** below San Diego (Guy McC.) and a **Prothonotary Warbler** at Oasis on Aug. 17 and 18 (the Heindels). The latter bird proved impossible to relocate in an impenetrable stand of young cottonwoods, even though it had been seen that morning. Jim Halferty had three early **Western Tanagers** at his home N.E. of Pasadena on Aug. 8. Male **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** continued to be found, with one in Rolling Hills (John Essen, July 17), another at Forest Fall in Mill Creek above Redlands (Margaret Willets, Aug. 8), and a third at Deep Springs, Inyo Co., on Aug. 19. **Red Crossbills**, mostly dull, streaky juveniles, were at Oasis on Aug. 18—probably hatched in the nearby White Mts. The last report of the month comes from Malibu Lagoon, where Roland Hull found an **Eastern Kingbird** on Aug. 31.

We are fortunate to live in one of America's best birding areas, and October is the best month for rare birds. So, if you can, spend some time in the coastal canyons or desert oases, looking for those ever-fascinating warblers and other vagrants.

All sightings of unusual birds should be reported to Shum Suffel at 797-2965, or to Jean Brandt, 788-5188.

WESTERN TANAGER

EDITOR Barry Clark
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Steve Maskel
CALENDAR EDITOR Gail Gifford

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Nightingales *Cont'd from pg. 3*

Then, after hastening through Italy and France, pausing to pay our respects to the pleasures of Portofino, St. Tropez, and the Camargue (with its wild bulls, Flamingos, and Sandgrouse), we raced up the Rhône, speeding through Paris non-stop, to spend our last afternoon in a Belgian swamp, serenaded by warblers—of ten separate species.

It was a fitting finale to the whole adventure; for, in retrospect, no birds in Europe had consumed more of our energies than the members of the warbler family. Superficially similar to our New World warblers, these birds bear a reputation for having driven generations of Englishmen into the throes of ecstasy or madness. But despite our worst fears, we found them, with a few memorable exceptions, ingratiating and cooperative, fairly easy to locate, and not too difficult to identify, especially in this season of song.

Unlike our warblers—many of which nest in the conifers—the Old World clan has a penchant for woods and marshes—and in the wetlands of Europe no less than nine distinct species appear to divide up the niches occupied here by our Marsh Wrens and Yellowthroats. In the same eccentric fashion, the *Aquila* eagles (5 of them in Europe, but only one in America) seem to pursue professions reserved in the West for hawks of the genus *Buteo* (of which we have 10, while Europe has only 3).

Though much of the land and the life of Europe seems surprisingly like that at home, inevitably many incongruities remain to nag the visiting birder. But to gain even a fleeting perspective upon this grand procession of life is one of the great rewards of birding—whether in America or abroad.

We realize, too, that what we witnessed this spring in Europe was only a moment in a continuum of constant change: Today, as the Old World woodlands give way to man-made grasslands, opportunists like the Syrian Woodpecker, the Stone Curlew, and the Collared Dove sweep north from the southern steppes, to lay claim to a brand new realm. And so too the Crested Lark, once a bird of the bleak desert plains, finds solace on the edge of the Autobahn—while the rock-loving Black Redstart, having recently learned to live in the ruins of bombed-out buildings, now builds its nest in the crannies of old stone churches, its plaintive song faintly heard above the commotion in the streets below.

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 Saturday.

Audubon Bird Report–call 874-1318

Field Trips

For additional information, contact Field Trip Chairman, Ed Navojosky, 938-9766.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 3—Malibu to McGrath State Beach. This will be the 6th year for this popular Monday trip, on which a high count of 112 species was recorded in 1974. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot behind the market at Malibu Lagoon. The group will bird the lagoon and upstream to Cross Creek Road, then go to Big Sycamore Canyon, Mugu Lagoon, Caspar Road and McGrath. Lunch will probably be at Big Sycamore, and those unable to spend the entire day may join the group for as long as they wish. There is easy walking at all locations. Leader: Ed Navojosky, 938-9766.

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

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8—McGrath State Beach. This is an excellent birding area for shorebirds, ducks, and gulls; and the walking is easy. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the north end of the bridge by the settling ponds on Harbor Blvd. To reach McGrath, take Hwy. 101 north and exit at Victoria Ave. in Ventura. Turn left and pass under the Fwy. to Olivas Park Drive. Turn right to the red light at Harbor Blvd., then left and park by the bridge. Leader: Nancy Spear.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9—Pelagic Trip to Anacapa Island. This trip has been **CANCELLED** due to insufficent response.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9—Harbor Lake. Meet by the boat house at the south end of the park at 8:00 a.m. This is a good birding spot for gulls (Franklin's have been seen here), and also for some shore birds. In addition, the woods at the north end are excellent for vagrant warblers. A scope may prove useful. See Jean Brandt's article in the Jan.-Feb. 1976 TANAGER for more details. Go south on Harbor Fwy. (11) to Pacific Coast Hwy. (1), turn right (west) to Vermont Ave., and then turn left. The Park is right on the corner. Leader: Cliff Pollard, 833-3694.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 11—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. **Bob Witzeman**, President of Maricopa Audubon Society (Phoenix) will discuss the **Central Arizona Project**, a colossal water-diversion scheme which promises to wipe out the best birding areas in Arizona. One of the leaders in the fight against the project, Dr. Witzeman will illustrate his talk with slides of rare Arizona birds. Make a point not to miss this important program.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16—Upper Newport Bay. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the cable crossing, about midway along Back Bay Drive from Jamboree Blvd. One of the high tides of the month occurs on this date (6 ft. at 10:54 a.m.), presenting an excellent opportunity for seeing the rails—with the Black Rail a remote possibility. Sharp-tailed Sparrows have been seen at high tide, and wintering shorebirds and waterfowl should be present in large numbers. The Osprey is another possibility. See Jean Brandt's article in this month's TANAGER for additional details. Take the San Diego Fwy. (405) south to Jamboree Blvd. off ramp, go west on Jamboree to East Bluff Dr., then right on East Bluff to Back Bay Drive. Leader: John McDonald, (714) 536-4001.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22—Big Sycamore Canyon. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the entrance to Pt. Mugu State Park, and park outside the gate. This is one of the best coastal canyons for migrants, and numerous exciting eastern vagrants have turned up here. The Park is five miles west of the Ventura Co. line on Hwy 1. Leader: Otto Widman, 221-8973.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 30—Malibu Creek State Park (formerly Century Ranch). Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot near the entrance. This spectacular area is one of the newest to be opened to birding, and is a relatively unspoiled region containing ponds, oak-covered hills, grassy fields, and riparian streambed. See Jean Brandt's article in the TANAGER, April 1977. Take Pacific Coast Hwy. (1) north to Malibu Canyon, and turn right into the Canyon. Or take the Ventura Fwy. (101) north to Las Virgenes Rd. and turn left into the Canyon. The entrance to the Park is ¾ mile south of the intersection of the Canyon Rd. (Las Virgenes) and Mulholland Hwy. Co-leaders: Guy and Louise Commeau and Ed Navojosky, 938-9766.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3—Exeuctive Board Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Audubon House.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. UCLA ornithologist, **Tom Howell,** will present a lecture on the nesting behavior of the **Egyptian Plover,** a unique African species which regularly buries both eggs and chicks in the sand. Featured in the program will be the first photographs ever taken of these birds (from Gambela, Ethiopia)—as well as slides of other species from this rarely-visited area.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 13—Upper Newport Bay. Directions are the same as those for October 16. Leader: Freeman Tatum.

Docent Classes

A docent class is now forming for a new field trip program for elementary school children at The Nature Conservancy's **Cold Creek Canyon Preserve** in the Santa Monica Mountains. There will be four weekly classes, starting Oct. 12. For more information, contact Judy Surfleet, 575-4785.

To expand volunteer services to school children and the general public at **Los Angeles Co. Nature Centers**, a course is also being offered at the Whittier Narrows Nature Center, in El Monte. The 16 twice-weekly classes began Sept. 15th, but latecomers might call 444-1872, on the chance that they may still enroll.

Los Angeles Audubon Society
7377 Santa Monica Blvd.
Los Angeles, California 90046

Miss Ruth M. Price
20932 Balgair Circle
Huntington Beach, Calif. 92646

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