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Claude Lorrain

BIRDING in San Diego County *by Philip Unitt*

San Diego is unquestionably the most fascinating and diverse county for birds in the state of California, and few areas of North America can offer comparable rewards for birders. Its 4261 square miles have produced 435 species, more than any other county in the state, and more than most entire states in the country. Several factors contribute to this diversity. The county extends through many habitats, from offshore waters through several varied coastal and lowland environments to forested highlands of over 6000 feet (in the Laguna, Cuyamaca, and Palomar Mountains), then down the eastern slope of these ranges to the Anza-Borrego Desert. Significant remnants of habitats which elsewhere have been largely destroyed persist in places in the county—particularly salt marsh in the estuary of the Tijuana River and lowland riparian forest

along some of the more substantial watercourses, such as the Otay, San Diego, San Luis Rey, and Santa Margarita Rivers. The county's position at the southern end of the state maximizes its potential for wanderers from the south, and since the coast extends further east here than elsewhere in the state, the likelihood of vagrants from eastward is enhanced. But perhaps most important of all, San Diego County has enjoyed a long (15 year) history of coverage by skilled observers well aware of the area's potential for turning up interesting birds.

The accounts that follow describe some of the best birding localities, numbered to correspond to the areas marked on the county map.

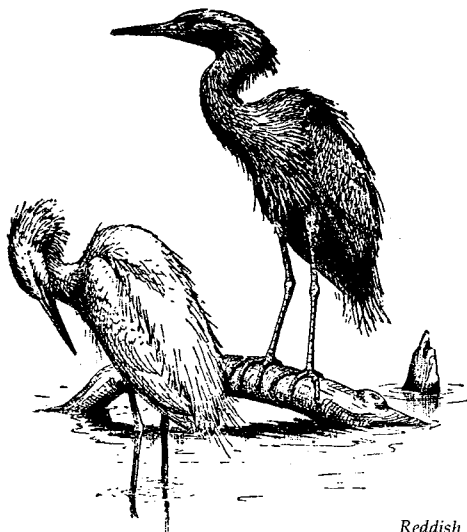
The author, a native San Diegan, will graduate this spring with a degree in zoology from San Diego State University.

The Southern Area

1. The Tijuana River Valley, in the extreme southwestern corner of the state (west of Interstate 5 between the Mexican border and the city of Imperial Beach) is an outstanding area, famous for the vagrants it has produced, including some 14 first California records. Of great importance is the estuary marsh of the Tijuana River. This is one of the major population centers of the Clapper Rail in coastal Southern California (population about 150 birds). The birds are most easily observed when a particularly high tide floods the marsh, but are usually not difficult to see, or at least to hear, at any time. The marsh is also good for the southern herons in winter: Louisiana Herons are found here each year, Reddish Egrets have occurred several times, and there are two records of Yellow-crowned Night Heron. To reach the marsh, go south on First Street in Imperial Beach, which borders the habitat, or west on Monument Road into Border Field State Park. Proceed to the parking lot at the end of the road, then work northward. The ponds along the road in Border Field attract shorebirds when they are filled with water after a rain. The wash at the end of the road supports some willows and tree-tobacco, and is worth checking in the fall for land bird vagrants. Virginia's Warblers (primarily September) and Tropical Kingbirds (primarily October) seem to have a particular affinity for this spot.

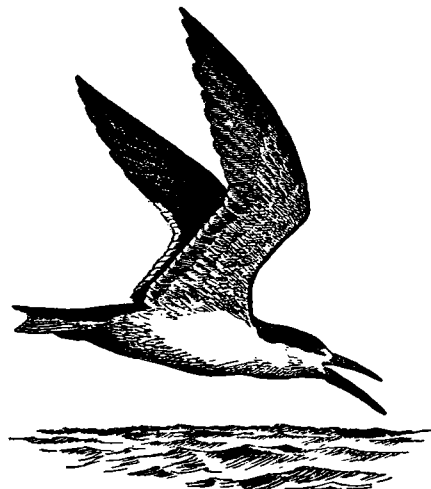
Other areas in the Tijuana River Valley are of interest mainly in the fall. At this time the tamarisk trees in the valley carry a small green insect which is an attractive food for warblers, and eastern species may appear in some numbers between late August and mid-November. The principal tamarisk clumps are along Hollister St. ("Myers' Ranch"), south of Monument Road between Hollister and 19th Street ("Windover Ranch"), and a few hundred feet north of Monument and west of 19th. Also of interest is the willow forest behind Windover. To reach this area, go south along the base of the hill west of the ranch. Another productive line of tamarisks is to be found by going north along 19th Street north of Palm Avenue. The trees are across a field from the north end of the road. All these areas in the Tijuana River Valley are private property; whenever birding away from roads exercise the utmost caution and courtesy. One unfortunate incident with the property owners can (as has happened in the past) result in their closing the property to birders for years to come.

The Tijuana River Valley also provides excellent opportunities to see freshwater shorebirds. Golden Plovers (Sep.-Nov.), Pectoral Sandpipers (Sep.-Oct.), and Solitary Sandpipers (Aug.-Sep.) are all regular visitors, and Ruffs have been found a few times. Look for these birds in the fields of grass bordering 19th Street if they have been flooded. You should also walk west along the ditch which crosses 19th near the north side of the valley. In addition to check-



Reddish Egret

Earl L. Poole



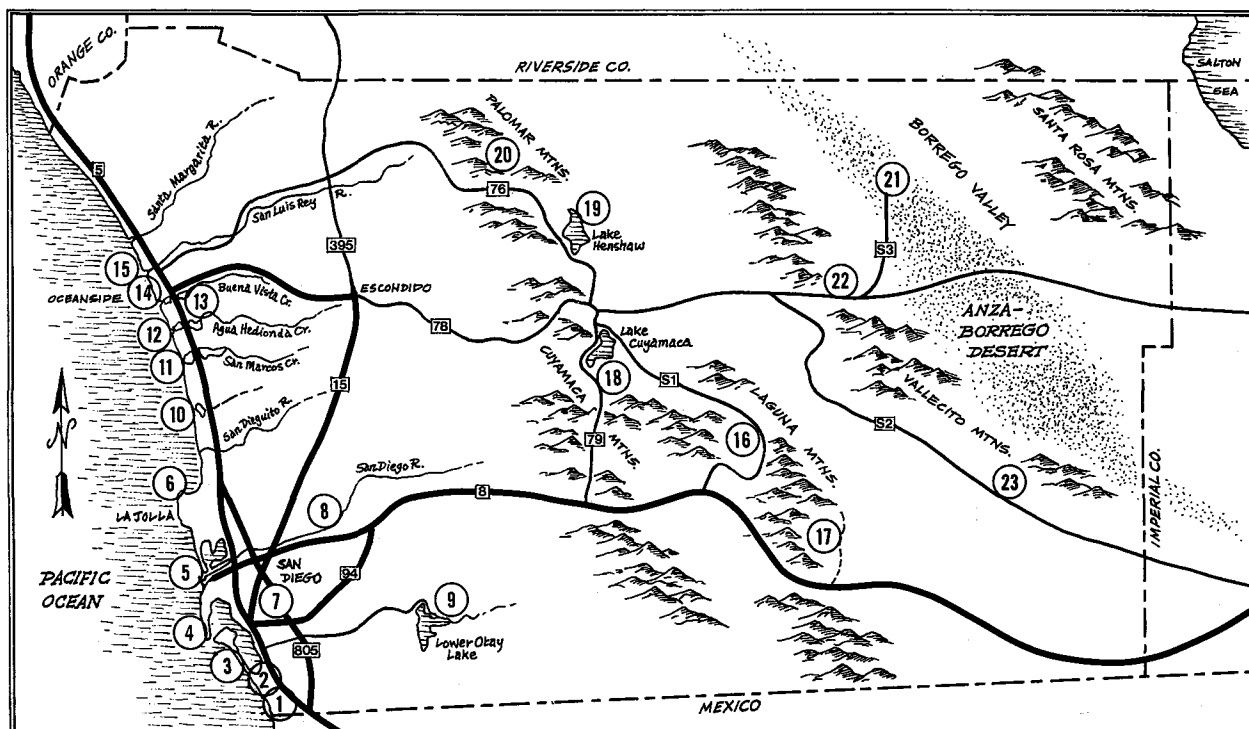
Black Skimmer

ing the ponds in the ditch for shorebirds, look in the willows and reeds for land birds (Swamp Sparrow, Nov.-Dec.; Northern Waterthrush and Dickcissel, Sep.-Oct.). And be sure to scan the fenceposts for flycatchers. Western and Cassin's Kingbirds are often common here in the fall, and all these should be scrutinized to turn up the rarer species such as Eastern and Tropical Kingbirds and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. Another good shorebird spot in the valley is the pair of ponds in the riverbed near Dairy Mart Road. The eastern pond is adjacent to the road, and the western can be reached by driving west on the dirt road which intersects Dairy Mart immediately south of Interstate 5.

Mountain Plovers are regular visitors to the valley from late October to January, and should be looked for in fields of bare plowed dirt anywhere in the area. Such fields often host large flocks of Horned Larks in the fall, and especially in October and November it's a good idea to carefully search through these flocks for longspurs. All three species recorded in California appear to be regular here.

2. The Salt Works at the south end of San Diego Bay is a very interesting area, attracting immense numbers of shorebirds. It is the only regular U.S. wintering area for Northern Phalaropes, and during migration Northern and Wilson's Phalaropes cover the ponds by the thousands. In winter the area also offers one of the better chances for Louisiana Heron and Reddish Egret. The only U.S. nesting colony of Elegant Terns occupies the Salt Works dikes in spring and summer, along with colonies of Least and Caspian Terns. Birders are therefore urged to refrain from trespassing on the dikes at this time of the year. Black Skimmers, present in the area throughout the year, began nesting here in 1976 and produced seven young in 1977. The Salt Works can be reached by driving to the north end of 7th, 10th, or 13th Streets in Imperial Beach. Or the area can be scanned from the west by pulling off to the side of Hwy. 75.

3. The Silver Strand. The mudflats along the Silver Strand are excellent for salt water shorebirds. Go north from Imperial Beach toward Coronado on Hwy. 75. Past Silver Strand State Beach, but south of the Naval Amphibious Base, you will see large mudflat areas along the Bay shore. Park adjacent to the "Emergency Parking Only" sign. Elegant Terns are almost always present here Mar.-Nov., often in large numbers—and it is not at all unusual to see all six species of common coastal terns (Forster's, Common, Least, Royal, Elegant, and Caspian) standing together on the mud, providing the observer with an excellent opportunity to study their field identification. Red Knots, while very uncommon elsewhere in Southern California, are also usually easy to see here. The birds winter on San Diego Bay in large numbers, and a few may even linger through midsummer.



Birding Areas in San Diego County

4. Point Loma is another outstanding birding area, as worthwhile for land bird migrants and vagrants as the Tijuana River Valley. In addition, however, the Point offers productive birding in the spring, when the tamarisks in the Tijuana Valley are sterile and birdless. Late May and June are best for eastern vagrants; April is good for migrant Calliope Hummingbirds. Check the trees around the Visitors' Center at Cabrillo National Monument near the end of the Point, and search the bushes in the parking lot as well as those on top of the bluff, plus the grove of *Myoporum* trees along the road to the lighthouse. Interesting birds may also be found in Fort Rosecrans Cemetery, along the road out to the Point. Look in the cypress trees just north of the northeast entrance, and cover as many of the *Myoporum* trees scattered about the cemetery as you can. Warblers, orioles, tanagers, and the like are often dispersed randomly through these trees. A few Golden-crowned Kinglets frequent the cypresses from mid-October into the winter. When birding the cemetery in fall or early winter, look for the flock of Chipping Sparrows which may usually be found somewhere in the southern part of the grounds. This flock deserves patient study, for unusual species often turn up in its midst. Clay-colored Sparrows are particularly frequent (several are found here each fall), and other species to watch for include the Bobolink, Indigo Bunting, Gray-headed Junco, and Harris' Sparrow. The Tree Sparrow has been observed here once, and even a Worm-eating Warbler has been discovered with the Chipping Sparrows! Other spots which may prove worthwhile are Point Loma College (reached by going west from Catalina Blvd. on Garden Lane or Dupont Street), and the residential area along Rosecroft Lane east of Catalina Blvd.

A good spot for rocky shorebirds (during low tide) can be reached from Point Loma by turning right just before entering Cabrillo National Monument and proceeding down the hill to the parking lot adjacent to the Naval Ocean Systems Center facility. Brandt's Cormorants, which breed on cliffs just north of here, often fly by in large flocks, and a few pelagics can usually be spotted as well. Wandering Tattlers and Black Turnstones are easy to find, and often Surf-birds may be seen. There is also a remote chance for the Black Oystercatcher—an extremely rare species in San Diego County. The gate out to Fort Rosecrans on Point Loma does not open on weekends until 9:00 a.m., but on weekdays you can get out as early as you like.

5. The San Diego River. In the deeper water at the downstream end of the flood control channel a flock of Black Brant regularly winters, a remnant of the vast numbers which once frequented San Diego and Mission Bays; and toward the upstream end, a wide assortment of wintering waterfowl and shorebirds may be found. This is a spot to search for the rare southern herons, as well as the Peregrine Falcon, present from time to time, preying on the shorebirds. The upper end of the channel may be easily reached by turning off Sea World Drive onto the frontage road, which runs adjacent to the channel. To get to the lower end, turn west on West Point Loma Blvd. from Sunset Cliffs Blvd., then take the first right and go through the baseball field parking lot.

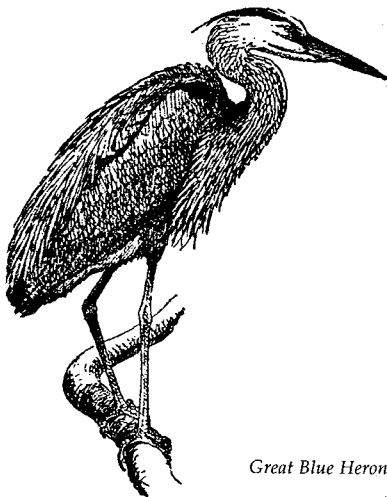
6. La Jolla is another good area to see the rocky shorebirds and cormorants mentioned above, and it qualifies as the best seawatching spot in the county. Pelagic birds frequently come near shore here—particularly after a cold front, when a strong westerly wind blows the birds in. While Manx Shearwater, Northern Fulmar, and Parasitic Jaeger are the pelagics most commonly seen, in a really strong wind there is plenty of potential for surprises (Short-tailed Shearwater and Fork-tailed Storm-petrel have each been observed once under such conditions). From Interstate 5 North, go west on Ardat Road, and continue onto Torrey Pines Road. Turn right on Prospect Street, then right again down the steep slope on Cave Street. The best place to seawatch is from the lifeguard station at Scripps Cove, a few blocks south of Cave Street on Coast Blvd.

7. Presidio and Balboa Parks in San Diego are excellent areas for such rare wintering birds as tanagers and orioles—and a few species rare in California at any time of year may be found. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks turn up almost every winter in one or the other parks, and there is one record for each park of Tree Sparrow and Coues' Flycatcher. Presidio Park is reached by taking the Taylor Street exit off Interstate 8 east, doubling back to the west, then turning left up the hill at the first opportunity. Interesting birds could be anywhere in the park, but pay particular attention to the eucalyptus trees if they are flowering. One of the best birding spots in Balboa Park is the area of ornamental plantings along the canyon rim west of Hwy. 163, adjacent to the road which runs between 6th Ave. and the freeway. The flowering eucalyptus in the canyon just east of this road and south of Laurel Street often supports the most

birds. Another good area lies between the organ pavilion in the center of the park and Park Blvd., south of El Prado.

8. Old Mission Dam, on the San Diego River, is an excellent area to visit at almost any time of year. The many habitats present here within a small area make it a particularly interesting spot to bird and, in fact, a total of about 200 species have been recorded from the site. But perhaps the greatest attraction is the population of Bell's Vireos, present from April to August. This species is close to extinction in California, and Old Mission Dam supports the largest known concentration in the state. The area is also good for the Yellow-breasted Chat, another riparian species rare in the state. Yellow Warblers and Swainson's Thrushes, common in migration but rare in summer, breed here; and the uncommon Grasshopper Sparrow nests on the grassy hills just north of the river. Also of interest are the rocky bluffs a few hundred feet downstream from the dam. Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Canyon Wrens, and Rock Wrens are resident here, and Black-chinned Sparrows are present in spring and summer. The dense riparian habitat is good for migrants and winter visitors as well as breeding species. In addition to numbers of common western migrants, quite a few more uncommon (eastern) species have been recorded. Northern Waterthrush (Sep.-Apr.), Summer Tanager (Aug.-Sep.), and Black-and-white Warbler (fall-winter) are particularly frequent. Old Mission Dam is reached by driving north on Mission Gorge Road from Interstate 8. Turn left on Father Junipero Serra Road (marked with a sign for Old Mission Dam Park) and continue through the gorge to the parking lot.

9. Jamal Creek. This is another excellent area of riparian woodland, just east of Lower Otay Lake. All the riparian species present at Old Mission Dam, including Bell's Vireo, can be found here, and even the Willow Flycatcher, probably extirpated as a breeder in Southern California, has been seen here (once) in summer. Although the area has not been worked so intensively as Old Mission Dam, its potential should be similar. From Interstate 805 in Chula Vista, go east on Telegraph Canyon Road, which becomes Otay Lakes Road. Continue east past Lower Otay Lake, then park off the side of the road. The habitat is plainly visible on the south side.

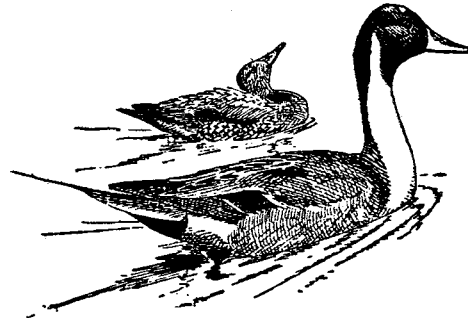


Great Blue Heron

The Northern Area

10. San Elijo Lagoon, on the central coast of San Diego County, is usually a good area for observing a wide variety of waterbirds. Large numbers of waterfowl congregate here in winter, and the site attracts many migrant shorebirds, including Baird's Sandpiper (in August). Cactus Wrens can be found in the cactus patches north of the lagoon east of the freeway, and an impressive assortment of rarities has turned up in the area, including Little Blue Heron, European Teal, Chimney Swift, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, and Eastern Phoebe. The water level fluctuates considerably, and in late summer the lagoon may dry up almost completely, serving then

only as a resting area for large flocks of Elegant Terns. You may view the north side of the lagoon by taking Manchester Avenue off Interstate 5 and parking along the road. To visit the south side, take Lomas Santa Fe Drive west from the freeway, then turn north on Rios Avenue. Continue to the end of the road, which overlooks the lagoon.



Pintail

Further north along the coast there are three lagoons which are of interest principally for their large populations of waterfowl:

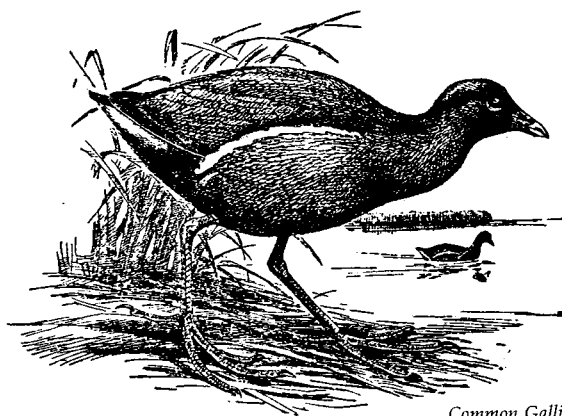
11. Batiquitos Lagoon may be reached by taking La Costa Avenue east from Interstate 5. The road runs along the south shore.

12. Agua Hedionda, the next lagoon north, can be productive for saltwater ducks. Greater Scaup and Black Scoter have been found here, and even Harlequin Duck has turned up (in the winter of 1977-78). The most interesting feature of the lagoon is the westernmost basin, adjacent to the Encina Power Plant. To reach the site, take either Tamarack Avenue or Palomar Airport Rd. west to the Old Coast Highway, then south or north respectively to the lagoon.

13. Buena Vista Lagoon, between Oceanside and Carlsbad, may be reached via Hwy. 78 east from Interstate 5, turning south on Jefferson Avenue. From here a frontage road doubles back on the north side of the lagoon. Or, as an alternative, you may continue around the south side of Jefferson.

14. Oceanside. In winter two areas in this city may prove interesting: the grounds of the Rosicrucian Fellowship, and Buddy Todd Park. Considering that these spots have been investigated only in the past three years quite a variety of interesting birds have been found. Red-breasted Nuthatches and Mountain Chickadees appear to be resident (unusual for such lowland localities), and such rarities as Coues' Flycatcher and Hepatic Tanager have turned up (the latter in both 1976-77 and 77-78), as well as the less-surprising Summer Tanager and Golden-crowned Kinglet. For both spots, take Mission Avenue east from Interstate 5. To reach Buddy Todd Park, turn right on Mesa Drive. The park lies on the left side of the road just beyond the point where it turns sharply to the left. The Rosicrucian Fellowship is on the north side of Mission Avenue just east of Mesa Drive.

15. The San Luis Rey River. The lower stretch of the river supports some very worthwhile riparian habitat, and in addition to hosting all the riparian species mentioned earlier, it is the only locality in the county where Downy Woodpeckers may be found. The area is interesting in winter as well as summer, and among the rare winter visitors that have turned up are Solitary Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Hermit Warbler, and Northern Waterthrush. Go east on Mission Avenue in Oceanside, turn left at the first traffic light after you drop down into the San Luis Rey River Valley, and continue on this road past the point where it turns back to the west. The road leads right up to the San Luis Rey River, where you will see a metal wall around a wrecking yard. The best habitat is on the downstream side of the yard. Many other spots along the river may be of interest, but few have been explored, as far as birds are concerned. It is probable that the entire area is very good during migration.



Common Gallinule

The Mountains

San Diego County offers many opportunities for interesting mountain birding. Since the local mountains are neither as high nor as extensive as the San Bernandinos or San Jacintos, the variety of resident montane species is correspondingly reduced—but all the species which occur in those ranges *have* been found in San Diego County, if only as rare winter wanderers. Finding Williamson's Sapsucker, Clark's Nutcracker, Evening Grosbeak, or Cassin's Finch is an enjoyable challenge to anyone interested in San Diego County bird distribution. There are three principal mountain ranges: Laguna, Cuyamaca, and Palomar.

16. Agua Dulce Campground is probably the best spot in the Laguna Mountains. In addition to most of the common Transition Zone breeding species, Spotted Owl is known to occur here—and the site is the only known breeding locality in the county for the Dusky Flycatcher. Among the commoner species, Band-tailed Pigeons and Lawrence's Goldfinches are particularly abundant. However, the area's principal claim to fame is as the site of the only known California nest of the Painted Redstart (in 1974). Unfortunately the birds have not returned since that year. To reach the area, go north on Sunrise Hwy. (S-1) from Interstate 8. About a mile before you reach the village of Mount Laguna, make a sharp left on the road to Agua Dulce Campground (marked with a small sign). Continue past another campground to the Agua Dulce parking lot, conspicuously marked. Take the trail down to the campground, which encircles a large meadow. From there you can work down along the streambed, which runs through the best area.

17. The Gray Vireo is a very scarce and local species in California nowadays, but in 1977 a spot was discovered on the south side of the Laguna Mountains where it is quite common. Take the Cameron Ranger Station exit off Interstate 8 and continue east on the old Hwy. 80. After a few miles turn left on the La Posta Truck Trail, which passes under a large bridge. Go north on this dirt road, continuing to the left where the road forks. After a few miles you will come to a closed gate. This marks the start of the Gray Vireo habitat, and the birds may be found along this road for a few more miles. Listen for the characteristic four-part Solitary Vireo-like song. The birds are present in the summer as late as July. The early arrival date is not yet known, but may be in late March.

18. Paso Picacho Campground, in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, is the best area in the Cuyamaca Mountains. The White-headed Woodpecker, a species seldom seen in the Lagunas, can be found here with a little searching, and this also seems to be the most likely spot in the county for Williamson's Sapsuckers (in winter). Paso Picacho lies on the west side of Hwy. 79 a few miles south of Lake Cuyamaca. The lake itself may be of interest in fall and winter when Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawks may be found over the extensive grassy plain to the north.

19. Lake Henshaw, in the mountains of northern San Diego County, is always worth a visit in fall and winter. The grassy plains which extend over dozens of square miles east and north of the lake are an

excellent area for raptors. Ferruginous Hawks (Oct.-Mar.) and Prairie Falcons should be seen on every visit, and the area is a regular wintering locality for Rough-legged Hawks. A few Bald Eagles also winter at the lake itself. Countless thousands of waterfowl, including large numbers of Canada Geese, winter on the lake, and quite a few Common Mergansers may be present at times. Lake Henshaw appears to be a regular wintering locality for Chestnut-collared Longspurs (up to about 25 individuals have been seen here with the large flocks of Horned Larks). Look for them in the grass and weeds around the southeastern corner of the lake. The lake may be reached by taking Hwy. 76 east from Oceanside, or Hwy. 79 north from Santa Ysabel. To look for birds of prey, work along Hwy. 79 on the east side of the valley, or, better yet, along Hwy. S-2.

20. Mount Palomar is in many ways the most interesting of the San Diego County mountains. Lying further north and west, it receives considerably more rainfall than the other ranges. All of the montane species found elsewhere in the county are present here, and Dippers—extremely rare in the county—may be resident on Pauma Creek in Palomar Mountain State Park. But it is for its owls that Palomar is best known. Spotted Owls are quite common, and Saw-whet Owls are apparently not uncommon. Pygmy Owls, though rare, may also be found; and even the Flammulated Owl has been found a few times (probably a rare summer visitor). While any trail through the forest can be good for owls, Fry Creek Campground may be the best spot. From Hwy. 76, take S-6 north up the mountain to the junction with S-7. To reach Fry Creek, continue north on S-6. The campground is on the left a mile or two before you reach the observatory. To reach Palomar Mountain State Park, take S-7 west to its end. To get to Pauma Creek, park at the road to the Baptist Camp between Cedar Grove and Doane Valley Campgrounds. The "Baptist Trail" starts about 100 feet down this road. Take this trail down the hill until you reach the creek; then work downstream.

The Desert

21. Borrego Valley. The floor of this valley is the westernmost locality for a number of desert birds, including Gambel's Quail, the *lucida* race of the Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and Crissal Thrasher. While the quail and gnatcatcher are common, the thrashers are restricted to the dense mesquite thickets in the center of the valley, and are exceptionally shy. Borrego Valley is, in addition, the best place in Southern California to see Swainson's Hawks in spring migration. The birds may be found mid-March through April, with a peak in early April. When the rains produce a good crop of spring wildflowers abundant food is provided for myriads of caterpillars—the main attraction for the hawks. To reach Borrego Valley take S-2, then S-23 east from Lake Henshaw, or S-3 north from Hwy. 78. To get into the Crissal Thrasher habitat, continue due north on the dirt trail from the point where S-3 turns west toward Borrego Springs.

22. Tamarisk Grove Campground, at the intersection of Hwy. 78 and S-3, is well known as a good spot for the Long-eared Owl. At least one pair nests here, and others may congregate in the area during the winter. The surrounding desert is of interest since several desert species (e.g. Ladder-backed Woodpecker) overlap here with some coastal-slope birds (California Quail, California Thrasher).

23. Agua Caliente Hot Springs County Park, along Hwy. S-2 in southeastern San Diego County, is a good place to look for the earliest appearance of regular spring migrants in Southern California. Several rare vagrants, including Broad-billed Hummingbird and Hepatic Tanager, have been found here in winter. This is also the most regular wintering locality in California for the White-winged Dove.

If you see anything out of the ordinary while birding in San Diego County, local birders would appreciate it if you would spread the word as soon as possible. Please call Phil Unitt at 714-281-0653, or write to him at 3411 Felton Street, San Diego 92104.

Shumway Suffel

BIRDS of the Season



he first month of the year exceeded expectations as the birdiest January in memory. Apart from the minor invasion of northern birds (mostly **Northern Shrikes** and **Varied Thrushes**), many rarities were discovered—a result of the excellent coverage achieved by the hundreds of birders fielded during the annual Christmas counts. As would be expected in winter, it was the coastal areas, from Oregon to the Mexican border, which hosted the most noteworthy birds.

The northwest corner of the state produced at least two **Snowy Owls** (near Arcata) and probably three **Blue Jays**—all of which proved difficult to relocate, especially by the dozen disillusioned birders who made an all-night drive in the rain after the aborted Monterey pelagic trip. Arnold Small's remark, "This is absolute insanity!" aptly describes the situation. Further south, at Limantour Estero in the Pt. Reyes Seashore, the three **Emperor Geese** (first in several years) remained well into January. A single Emperor stopped briefly at Moss Landing on Monterey Bay about Jan. 10, and nearby our latest and most northerly **Roseate Spoonbill** fed with the egrets in the rain-soaked artichoke fields. The **Oldsquaw** in Monterey Harbor during December was succeeded in mid-January by a handsome drake **Harlequin Duck**. A **Thick-billed Murre** was along the coast west of the harbor. A **Ruff** which had frequented the tidepools on Pt. Pinos could not be found during the storm that cut short the pelagic trip. The Jan. 22 trip out of Morro Bay was rough, but more successful birdwise, with a few **Black-footed Albatross**, a **Flesh-footed Shearwater** (the 2nd winter record), two or more **Short-tailed Shearwaters**, **Rhinoceros** and **Cassin's Auklets**, and of course, the **Peregrines** which are resident on Morro Rock itself.

Santa Barbara probably led the nation with a high total of **214** species on their well-planned Christmas Count, Dec. 31 (thanks to Paul Lehman et al). Among the unexpected birds were a **Spotted Owl** and a **Brown Thrasher** in Hope Ranch (Kimball Garrett), plus two **Tennessee Warblers** and six orioles in the flowering eucalyptus behind the Biltmore Hotel (Kevin Aanerud). These orioles included a male "**Baltimore**," two "**Bullock's**," a **Hooded**, an **Orchard**, and a "swinger"—originally thought to be another Orchard because it was small and short-billed, but later thought to be a second **Hooded**. In nearby Goleta the **Golden Plover** and **Rusty Blackbird** stayed on for their second winter. Two **Tropical Kingbirds** (not unexpected in winter) apparently departed in January. While driving the freeway on his way to work, Brad Schram found two **Broad-winged Hawks** in Montecito—one on Jan. 24 and the second on Jan. 26. The most southerly record of an **Emperor Goose** since 1968 was a widely-seen individual at Pt. Mugu Naval Air Base. Also at Pt. Mugu were an elusive **Roseate Spoonbill**, a **Whistling Swan**, two **Northern Waterthrushes**, and a **Vermilion Flycatcher** (Elmer Colley). An **Oldsquaw** in the same area on Dec. 21 was unusual (Walter Nichols).

In the Antelope Valley, L.A. Co., attention focused on the **Northern Shrikes**, **LeConte's Thrashers**, **Mountain Plovers**, and particularly the large raptors: **Golden Eagles**, **Rough-legged** and **Ferruginous Hawks** (including one of the rare dark phase), **Northern Harriers**, **Prairie Falcons**, and **Merlins**. At Holiday Lake in the west end of the valley there were reports of **Whistling Swans** and **White-fronted Geese** (Jean Brandt, Jan. 28).

A **Red-throated Loon** (rare away from the ocean) turned up in late January in MacArthur Park Lake (downtown L.A.), while a **Franklin's Gull** dozed nearby in the sun. The **Swamp Sparrow** at Malibu Lagoon was characteristically difficult to find, and one or more **Hooded Mergansers** were present only when the lagoon was full. The El Dorado Nature Center in Long Beach hosted a **European Wigeon** and a "**Eurasian**" **Green-winged Teal** during

most of the month. The **Broad-billed Hummingbird** in Marina del Rey was not seen after Jan. 25 (Jerry Johnson). At the Arcadia Arboretum that hard-to-identify **Clay-colored Sparrow** and the **Gray Flycatcher** were seen repeatedly, but the **Goshawk**, the **Merlin**, and the two **Warbling Vireos** proved difficult to relocate (Armand Cohen). While visiting the Arboretum on Jan. 28, Jon Dunn and Richard Webster discovered four **Western Tanagers** and a **Townsend's Solitaire**. Two other Western Tanagers were at Olga Clarke's house in the Verdugo Hills on Jan. 7. A delayed report of six **Evening Grosbeaks** in Griffith Park (Justin Russell, Nov. 26), and three in Peck Park, San Pedro (Palos Verdes C.B.C., Dec. 31) were the only reports from our coastal slope. A **Painted Redstart** near Lake Norconian, Riverside Co., was a rare bird here (San Bernardino A.S., Jan. 16). While looking for the redstart, Kimball Garrett found another **Swamp Sparrow**. The only **Lark Bunting** of the winter was near Sunnymede, Riv. Co. (Doug Morton, Jan. 7). At Newport Bay, Orange Co., there was a more-or-less-expected **European Wigeon** (there have been as many as four there), six **Mute Swans** (undoubtedly released birds), and three **Harlequin Ducks** (Clyde Bergman, Jan. 5). In Oceanside, San Diego Co., the female **Hepatic Tanager** returned for its second winter and was joined by a female-plumaged **Summer Tanager**. Nearby, in mid-January, a **Zone-tailed Hawk** was seen occasionally west of Mission San Luis Rey. Below San Diego the **Reddish Egrets**, the **Little Blue Heron**, and the **Louisiana Herons** were not seen after the heavy rains, as much of the area was inaccessible. But the **Hooded Warbler** (first winter record) below Sweetwater Dam survived the storms and was present late in the month.

Away from the coast, California's first **Blue-throated Hummingbird**, a female, frequented Gertrude Schukert's feeders in Three Rivers, Tulare Co., where arrangements permitted birders to study this rare Mexican visitor without disturbing their hosts. Some 250 birders signed the guest register during the first week! **Bald Eagles**, **Common Mergansers**, and a variety of raptors and ducks on or near Lake Kaweah provided a post-hummingbird treat. Along the Colorado River there were **Barrow's Goldeneyes** (below Parker Dam), and nearby, in the government village, Jon Dunn found a **Coues' Flycatcher**. Gene Cardiff's stop at Brock Ranch, southeast of Holtville, Imperial Co., proved well worthwhile, as he found a **Pyrrhuloxia** there on Dec. 23 (about 5 state records).

The first weekend after the close of hunting season, Jan. 28, found at least four Audubon Society field trips at the Salton Sea, with 65 participants from LAAS alone. More than 10,000 **Snow Geese** provided a spectacular sight as they fed in the fields and later flew overhead against a deep blue sky. With them were more than 20 of the diminutive **Ross' Geese**. But for the first time in many years no "Blue Geese" were seen. Also much appreciated were two **Bald Eagles** at the fish hatchery, and a flock of **Mountain Plovers** found by Hal Baxter above Calipatria. Most unexpected was a **Lesser Nighthawk** (very few winter records) at Finney Lake that evening, and a **Roseate Spoonbill** spotted by the Sea and Sage A.S. group as it flew overhead near Rock Hill in the early morning. A **Gila Woodpecker** on the power pole behind our Brawley motel was a bonus bird. The next day, Ed Navojosky and Jim Halferty found **White-faced Ibis** at Unit 1, plus a previously unreported flock of **White-fronted Geese**, three **Stilt Sandpipers**, a few **Lesser Yellowlegs**, and a **Vermilion Flycatcher**. Near Westmorland, a **Ferruginous Hawk** (rare in the valley), and a possible **Peregrine Falcon** were seen. Another rarity in winter was an *Empidonax* Flycatcher—probably a **Dusky Flycatcher**—at Finney Lake (Jon de Modena, Jan. 29). Well over 100 species were recorded during the weekend.

We cannot expect the coming month to continue this parade of exceptional birds, even though the earliest migrants—hummingbirds and swallows—will arrive before the end of February. Yet there is much birding to be done: a chance to catch up on the last of the winter birds, to record "firsts" for the season, and to study every bird that moves in that tall flowering eucalyptus, that dense clump of brush, or that far-off mud flat, in the hope of finding an overlooked avian rarity. And should you be fortunate enough to turn up something unusual, be sure to call Jean Brandt (788-5188) or myself (797-2965) so that we can pass the word to others who may be eager to share your discovery. ♡

The Black-tailed Gnatcatcher

Readers of Jon Dunn's column (Feb. '78) will be aware of the uncertainty that surrounds the status of the coastal (*californica*) race of the Black-tailed Gnatcatcher. As a first step in promoting protection for this distinctive bird, El Dorado Audubon is conducting a population survey, sponsored by the Shirley Wells Conservation Fund. Survey coordinator Jon Atwood requests current and historical data on the occurrence of the birds from the Santa Clara River to the Mexican border. Please send your comments to him at 2218 San Anselme #6, Long Beach, Calif. 90815.

Audubon Scholarships Awarded

This year our Chapter has awarded six scholarships to the summer sessions of the Audubon Camp of the West, in the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming. Recipients are graduate student Larry Norris, Arboretum employee Tana Sechrest, State Park Ranger Robert Wong and his wife Virginia, and schoolteachers Robert and Carolyn Bowlus.

Audubon House Hours

To ease the burden upon our volunteers, Audubon House will now close on Mondays, while remaining open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Anyone who has a few hours free and is willing to help at the House in any capacity is urged to call Executive Secretary Anne Skipper at 876-0202.

Tanager Subscription Rates

Due to increased postal costs, it has become necessary to raise the price of our subscriptions to the following levels: First Class (non-members): \$6.50, Third Class (non-members): \$4.00, First Class (members): \$3.00.



**WESTERN
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CALENDAR EDITOR Gail Gifford

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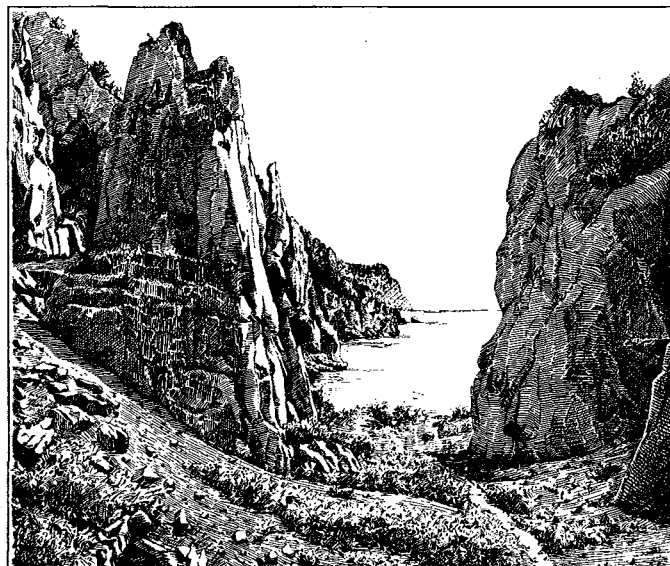
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Audubon membership (local and national) is \$15 per year (individual), \$18 (family), or \$8.50 (student), including AUDUBON Magazine, and THE WESTERN Tanager. To join, make checks payable to the National Audubon Society, and send them to Audubon House. Subscriptions to THE WESTERN Tanager separately are \$4.00 per year (Third Class), or \$6.50 (First Class, mailed in an envelope). To subscribe, make checks payable to Los Angeles Audubon Society.



Santa Cruz Island

A New Sanctuary?

A historic opportunity has recently presented itself for the acquisition of 55,000 acres of the largest and most biotically diverse of So. California's northern Channel Islands. The motive force behind the campaign to assure the protection of Santa Cruz Island is Nature Conservancy, the nonprofit organization that has succeeded in preserving, among many other outstanding areas, the birding oasis of Patagonia in southeastern Arizona, Morongo Valley in the Colorado Desert, and Cold Creek Canyon in the Santa Monica Mountains. Like each of these, Santa Cruz Island represents a unique natural environment—supporting 6 endemic forms of plants, 44 resident species of birds, and the endemic Island Kit Fox. Never guilty of shrinking from an insuperable challenge, the Conservancy has launched a drive to raise the \$4 million needed to acquire the rights to the land—with \$3 million due no later than July 4th. Just \$72, however, will endow an acre of the island, and tax-deductible contributions in any amount will be gratefully received. The address: **Nature Conservancy, 425 Bush Street, San Francisco 94108.** Additional information can be obtained from **Barbara Horton** of the Conservancy, at 797-0573 or 798-8315.

The Condor Fund

Once again Los Angeles Audubon members have demonstrated their support for the efforts to save the California Condor, with contributions totalling over \$2000 to the Chapter's Condor Fund. A grant from the LAAS conservation fund has raised the total to \$3000, and on February 18th, at the Chapter's Annual Dinner, a check for this amount was presented to Audubon Condor Naturalist John Borneman. All those who contributed so generously may be assured that their contributions will substantially aid the Society in its continuing campaign to insure a future for the embattled species.



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, Tuesday through Saturday.

Audubon Bird Report—call 874-1318

Pelagic Trip Reservations

For all trips, make checks payable to LAAS and send with a self-addressed, stamped envelope, your phone number, and the names of all persons in your party to Phil Sayre, Reservation Chairman, P.O. Box 831, Monterey Park, California 91754. No reservations or refunds will be accepted within 48 hours prior to departure. To guarantee your space please make reservations as early as possible. Trips will be cancelled 30 days prior to departure if there is a lack of response.

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

SUNDAY, MARCH 5—Malibu Lagoon. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the supermarket parking lot adjacent to the lagoon. A good variety of shorebirds, gulls and waterfowl is expected. Petitions are now being circulated to save this area. Come and see for yourself the necessity of preserving it. Malibu Lagoon can be reached by taking Hwy. 1 north from Santa Monica, or by going north on the Ventura Freeway to the Las Virgenes offramp, turning left and following Malibu Canyon to the coast. Leader: Ed Navojosky, 938-9766.

TUESDAY, MARCH 14—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. Diver-photographer **Alan Heller** will present a program on "The Channel Islands—An Underwater Experience." Heller is President of the Underwater Photographic Society, and in his years of diving he has explored the waters off the Calif. Channel Islands, Hawaii, Florida, and British Honduras. His photos have won numerous awards and his articles have appeared in several national magazines.

SATURDAY, MARCH 18—Los Angeles Zoo. Special arrangements have been made for those wishing to view the only remaining captive California Condor—one of less than 50 of the birds still alive. There will also be a tour of the flight cage. Curator of Birds, Mike Cunningham, will meet the group at 2:00 p.m. at the African tram stop. Admission is \$1.50.

SATURDAY, MARCH 25—Big Tujunga Wash and Hansen Dam. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the intersection of Foothill Blvd. and Conover Place. The location is just west of the westernmost of two bridges across the wash, and about one mile west of downtown Sunland. This is a beautiful canyon and chaparral area, where Costa's Hummingbirds, Rock and Cactus Wrens and early migrants are among the birds to be looked for. Leader: Jim Stevens 352-3057.

SATURDAY, APRIL 1—Malibu Creek St. Park (formerly Century Ranch). Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot near the entrance. This outstanding area is one of the newest to be opened to birding. Early migrants will be looked for. Take Pacific Coast Hwy. (1) north to Malibu Canyon, turn right into the canyon, and go about 6 miles. Or take the Ventura Fwy. north, exit at Las Virgenes Rd., and go about a mile toward the coast. Leader: Barry Clark, 556-3963.

SUNDAY, APRIL 2—Harbor Lake and South Coast Botanic Gardens. Meet at 8:00 a.m. by the boat house at the south end of the park. This is an excellent place to observe gulls, and the woods at the north end are good for migrants and warblers. Bring lunch as we will bird at the South Coast Botanic Gardens in the afternoon. 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, APRIL 11—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. Program to be announced.

SUNDAY, APRIL 16—Anacapa and Out to Sea. The *Sea Con* will leave Channel Island National Monument dock in the Ventura Marina at 7:00 a.m. and return at 5:00 p.m. The American Oystercatcher is generally seen on this trip, the only spring cruise to the area. Price \$20.00 per person. Leaders: Ed Navojosky and Larry Norris.

SATURDAY and SUNDAY, MAY 13-14—San Miguel and Santa Rosa-Cortez Ridge. The *China Clipper* may be boarded in the Oxnard Marina at 9:00 p.m. Saturday for a midnight sailing, returning late on Sunday. There is a large galley on board with reasonable prices. No ice chests are allowed. Bunk space limited to 53 people. \$30.00 per person. Leaders: Lee Jones and Kimball Garrett.

UCLA Courses on Birds

Marine Birds of the Gulf of California: an opportunity to observe the fascinating flora and fauna of the remote midriff islands in the Gulf. Orientation: April 4; Cruise: April 22-29. Fee: \$595.

Instructors: **Daniel Anderson** and **Lloyd Kiff**.

The Behavior of Birds: instruction for amateur birdwatchers in the procedures and principles for observing and interpreting avian behavior. Weekly classes: April 6-27, plus one Saturday field trip. Fee: \$65. Instructor: **Judith Hand**.

Birds of Prey: their biology, ecology, and behavior—including discussions of worldwide conservation efforts. Weekly classes: April 3-June 12, plus two field trips. Fee: \$85. Instructor: **Hartmut Walter**.

Field Studies of California Birds, II: an introduction to the observation, identification, ecology, and study of birds in the field in Southern California. Five classes, from March 29 to June 6, plus four Saturday field trips. Fee: \$80. Instructor: **Arnold Small**.

Birds of the Chiricahuas: six days at the Southwestern Research Station in southeast Arizona, studying the unique birds of the area. Orientation: June 7. Field Trip: June 18-23. Fee: \$200. Instructor: **Kimball Garrett**.

For information regarding any of these courses, please write or phone Dept. of Biological and Physical Sciences, UCLA Extension, 6115 Math Sciences Bldg., UCLA, Los Angeles, Calif. 90024, 213-825-7093.

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