WESTERN TANAGER

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The Races of the

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

by Jon Dunn

The opportunity to observe evolution in action is one of the rarest and most rewarding aspects of nature study. Perhaps the most obvious evidence of this ongoing process is to be found in the phenomenon of subspeciation—the formation, through isolation, of populations that are physically distinct, though not as yet reproductively isolated from their near relations.

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker complex provides a particularly fascinating example of the evolutionary process at work, for the familiar North American species is represented by four distinct forms, presumably isolated from one another by the events of the Pleistocene, and now tenuously separated by the barriers of the Rocky Mountains, the Great Plains and the Sierra Nevada.

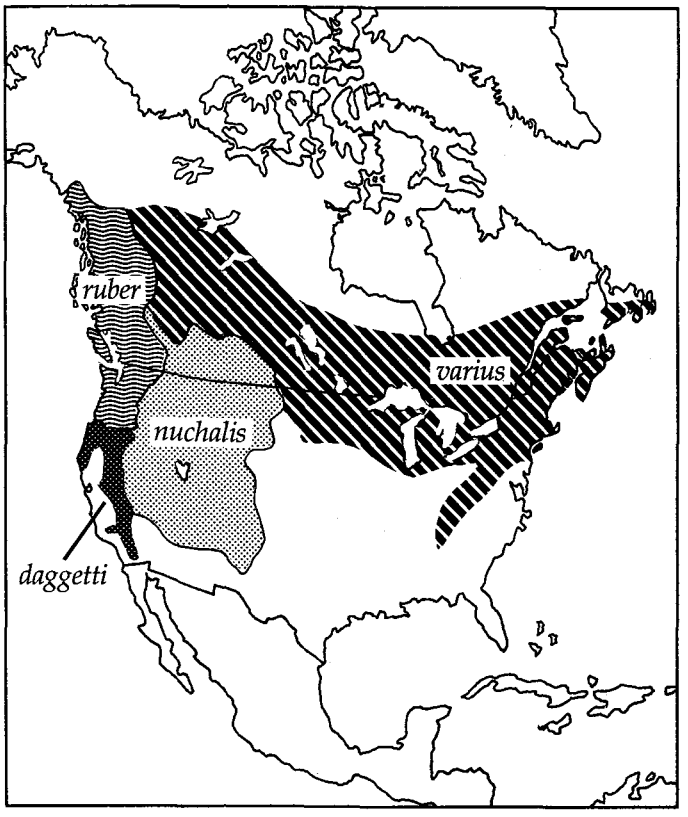
For more than a century ornithologists have quarelled about the exact taxonomic status of the various forms of the species. In years past the A.O.U. considered the "Yellow-bellied" races (*Sphyrapicus varius varius* and *S.v. nuchalis*) to constitute a species distinct from the two "Red-breasted" races (*S.v. ruber* and *S.v. daggetti*). In the early 1950's, however, T.R. Howell took a closer look at the contact zone between these forms and concluded that the two "species" should be lumped. The 1957 edition of the A.O.U. Checklist followed his recommendation by recognizing only one species, with four geographical races. But the matter was not to rest there. In 1969, employing a new criterion for defining the species,* Lester Short recommended, that *three* species of sapsucker be recognized: the "Yellow-bellied Sapsucker" (*S. varius*), the "Red-naped Sapsucker" (*S. nuchalis*), and the "Red-breasted Sapsucker" (*S. ruber,* with *daggetti* included as a race of *ruber*). Pierre Devillers' comprehensive paper on the identification and distribution of the sapsucker complex (*California Birds,* Vol. 1, No. 2, 1970, pp. 47-76) followed Short's philosophy by recognizing three species. Most recently, Ankney and Karosch (*Condor,* Vol. 78, 1976, pp. 253-257), after examining the zones of contact between *nuchalis* and *varius* studied by Howell 25 years ago, recommended that the "Yellow-bellied" form (*nuchalis*) be regarded as a species distinct from the "Red-breasted" form (*ruber* plus *daggetti*).Since they did not examine the relationship between *nuchalis* and *varius,* however, the question of the status of these forms was left open.

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker complex, then, may be considered to comprise one, two, or three species, depending upon which authority one is inclined to accept. But despite the recent papers, the A.O.U. still follows Howell, and refuses to split the species. In Howell's view

Ray Robinson

The "Red-breasted" (daggetti) race of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

*According to Short, if as few as 5% of the birds comprising the populations in the contact area are "pure" parental types, then the two forms are considered distinct species. (L.L. Short Jr., *Auk* 86:84-106).



Breeding Ranges of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

(pers. comm.), there is no evidence to suggest that absolute (genetic) barriers have developed to prevent extensive interbreeding between the forms. Instead he feels that secondary isolating mechanisms are operative, and he advances two persuasive hypotheses to account for the relatively small percentage of hybrids observed in the field (a situation that contrasts markedly with that of a species such as the Northern Flicker, in which the degree of hybridization between eastern and western forms approaches 100%).

The first theory pertains to the extent of red on the heads of the females. Male woodpeckers usually have more red than females, and may use red markings as a way to quickly recognize other males. According to Howell, a male "Red-naped" *nuchalis* might react to a female "Red-breasted" *daggetti* as if it were an intruding male, since the female *daggetti* shows more extensive red on the head than the female *nuchalis*. The same would be the case between *ruber* and *nuchalis*, and presumably between *varius* and *nuchalis*. In fact, of all the hybrid pairs Howell studied, the male bird always belonged to the redder of the two races.

His second hypothesis concerns differential schedules for pair formation. Since *ruber* is largely resident, birds of this race are likely to begin breeding sooner than the more highly-migratory *nuchalis* and *varius*. Therefore, a *varius* or *nuchalis* arriving on its breeding grounds would already find pure pairs of the "Red-breasted" races. The same factor could be operative between *varius* and *nuchalis*, since *varius* is the more highly migratory form and presumably arrives on its breeding grounds later. If both these factors were operative, hybridization would be substantially reduced without any deep-seated isolating mechanisms at work to separate the races.

The argument is particularly compelling since the various forms display no differences in feeding behavior, drumming rhythm, vocalizations, courtship displays, nest sites, or general natural history. In fact the four types are distinguished only by appearance, the result of an incremental increase in the extent and saturation of red pigmentation from the east (*varius*), to the Rockies (*nuchalis*), to the southwest (*daggetti*), to the northwest (*ruber*).

Evidently there is general agreement among the experts that the different forms represent intermediate stages in the speciation process—and as such there is no unequivocal "right" or "wrong" classification. But it is precisely this indecision that makes the case so interesting, for we have before us an example of species evolution in progress—a process not yet fully completed.

Because of the confusion which has surrounded the taxonomic question, the field guides (which like to deal in well-defined species) have treated the matter of sapsucker distribution and identification inadequately, at best. As a result most observers are unfamiliar with those characteristics which could permit them to identify the distinct forms in the field. In the end, the loss is two-fold—for birders are denied an instructive adventure in field ornithology, while the scientists are deprived of a potentially valuable source of data on the dynamics of the interaction between the races.

In the discussion that follows we have adhered to the A.O.U. Checklist by recognizing the four forms as races of a single species. An attempt has been made to outline the range of each form, as well as the marks which may assist the field observer in identifying the races and their hybrids.

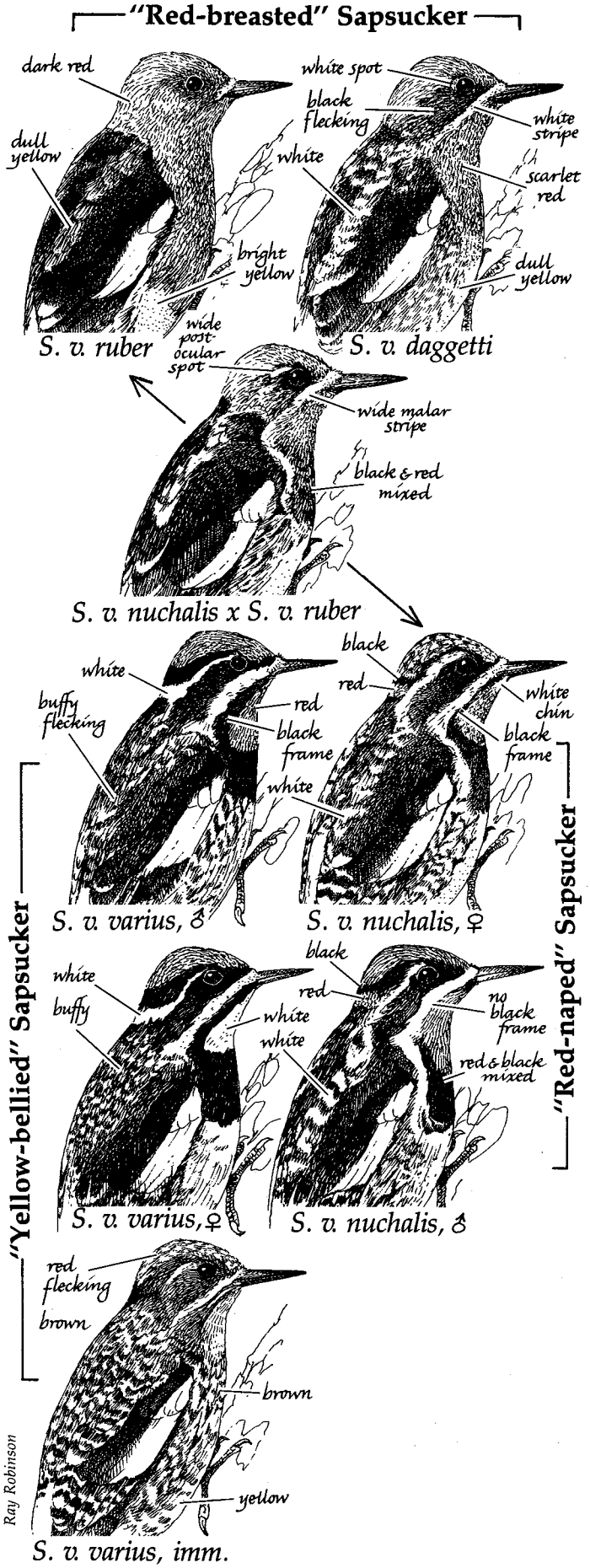
Range

The eastern, "Yellow-bellied" race (*S.v. varius*) breeds throughout the deciduous forests of the northern United States, extending westward across Canada to western Alberta and northeastern British Columbia (see map). The population winters throughout the southern part of the U.S., most of Mexico, and the rest of Middle America, occurring as a rare winter visitor in Arizona. Birds of this race have also been detected recently in California.

The Rocky Mountain, "Red-naped" race (*S.v. nuchalis*) breeds throughout the Rockies from southeastern British Columbia and southwestern Alberta south to Arizona, extending westward to the eastern portion of the Cascades, the Warner Mountains, the White Mountains, and isolated parts of the Sierra Nevada. The race winters throughout the lowlands in the southern part of the Southwest, northeastern Mexico, and Baja California.

The two **"Red-breasted" races** (*S.v. ruber* and *S.v. daggetti*) occupy the western part of the range of the species, with the **northwestern race** (*ruber*) breeding from southeastern Alaska south generally along the coastal slope to Oregon. **The southwestern race** (*daggetti*) nests in the Cascades and in Humboldt, Del Norte, and Mendocino Counties in northwestern California, ranging south through the conifer belt of the Sierras to Southern California (occurring sparsely

The illustrations accompanying this article are the work of Ray Robinson, formerly chief wildlife artist for the Dept. of the Environment in Iran, and illustrator of recent books on the mammals and snakes of that country.



in the mountains of San Diego County). During the winter *ruber* is largely resident within its breeding range, but *daggetti* winters throughout the lowlands of the California coastal slope south to northwestern Baja California.

Southern California

In Southern California only two races of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker regularly occur, the **Rocky Mountain, "Red-naped" race** (*nuchalis*) and the **southwestern, "Red-breasted" race** (*daggetti*). After the breeding season *daggetti* is normally restricted to the coastal slope, though birds are occasionally noted in the desert. By contrast, *nuchalis* is found primarily in the desert during winter and migration, occurring only rarely along the coast from San Luis Obispo to Ventura. As the coastline bends to the southeast, however, the numbers of *nuchalis* increase, until both races are of equal abundance on the coast of southern San Diego County.

Recently, the **eastern "Yellow-bellied" race** (*varius*) has been detected as an occasional fall and winter visitor to Southern California. Of the twelve records, most are from eastern California, and all but one of the records are of birds in juvenile plumage, the sole exception being an adult male on San Nicholas Island on June 13, 1976.

The northwestern, "Red-breasted" race (*ruber*) has been recorded in Southern California on only three occasions: Lakeside—November 9, 1957; Furnace Creek Ranch—October 16, 1976; and Kelso—November 6, 1977. There are also several records for *ruber* from Arizona.

In Southern California most of the migration and winter records for all the races fall between late September and mid-April, with the great majority of these occurring between mid-October and early March.

Identification

Distinguishing between the four races of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is in most cases not very difficult, and the separation of *daggetti* from *nuchalis*, the races occurring regularly in Southern California, should be particularly easy.

The Rocky Mountain, "Red-naped" race (*nuchalis*) differs from the **southwestern, "Red-breasted" race** (*daggetti*) by the presence of a **black cheek,** set off on either side by conspicuous **white stripes** (see illustration). The back portion of the crown on *nuchalis* displays a **black horizontal bar** which sharply separates the red nape from the red crown; and in addition the bird has a **black breast patch,** with the red on the underparts largely **restricted to the throat.** Finally, *nuchalis* shows slightly **more white** on the back than *daggetti*.

The southwestern, "Red-breasted" race (*daggetti*) has a **solid scarlet red hood** which extends down to include the breast, and the bird lacks the black breast patch and the black mark on the back of the crown. The white stripes on the face are also greatly reduced, showing, at the very most, only a small white post-ocular spot and a **thin white malar stripe.** The back of *daggetti* is also slightly darker than that of *nuchalis*. One general point to keep in mind, however, is that the males always show more red than the females, even in the "Red-breasted" races (*ruber* and *daggetti*). Because of this, a female *daggetti* will more closely resemble a *nuchalis* than will a male *daggetti*.

The northwestern, "Red-breasted" race (*ruber*) is the representative of the two "Red-breasted" forms that is generally pictured in the field guides. This form is even

more easily distinguished from *nuchalis* than is *daggetti,* for it **lacks all visible trace of the white malar stripe,** as well as the white post-ocular spot. The red of the hood is of a **deeper shade of red** than the hood of the *daggetti,* and the color **extends further down the breast.** The *ruber's* belly is of a **brighter yellow, sharply separated** from the red on the lower breast, in contrast to the more diffuse separation in *daggetti.* In addition, the back of *ruber* is even **blacker** than the back of *daggetti,* and the two thin rows of pale spots are strongly tinged with **yellow.**

The eastern, "Yellow-bellied" race (*varius*) is more difficult to separate from the **Rocky Mountain, "Red-naped" race** (*nuchalis*), at least when dealing with adult birds. A good mark to use in distinguishing the two races is the **red nape** of *nuchalis* (hence its name), but the extent of the red is variable, and feather wear can occasionally cause a bird to lose the red nape altogether. Also, in some rare cases, the nape of *varius* can be lightly tinged with red. For this reason, it is best to rely for identification on additional characteristics.

Both sexes of *nuchalis* show **red on the throat,** whereas only the male *varius* has a red throat. The female *varius* has a **pure white throat** and sometimes lacks red on the crown. Therefore, an adult sapsucker with a pure white throat is almost certainly a female *varius.* Differentiating adult males of *varius* and *nuchalis* is also fairly easy, for the red on the throat of *varius* is sharply restricted by a **wide black malar line.** In *nuchalis,* the red **extends down into the black** of the upper breast and across the thinner black malar line, often to include a portion of the white lower cheek stripe.

The problem comes in distinguishing the adult male *varius* from a female *nuchalis.* In some females of the *nuchalis* race, the red includes almost the entire throat, with only the chin remaining white (see illustration). It would be logical to assume, however, that such a heavily-pigmented bird would show at least some red on the nape, although this unfortunately is not always the case. In both sexes of *varius* the back shows **more pale spotting** than *nuchalis,* and the spots are usually washed with a **golden buff** rather than a whitish tone.

The juvenile *varius* (the form most likely to occur in Southern California) is much easier to distinguish, for unlike juveniles of the other three races, *varius* maintains its **brownish plumage** throughout most of the winter. In *nuchalis,* as in the two "Red-breasted" races, the juvenile plumage is quickly molted, and long before the birds migrate from their breeding grounds they have assumed most of the characteristics of adult plumage. In the fall *nuchalis,* the only conspicuous remnant of juvenile plumage is the brown scalloping across the black breast. Consequently, any juvenile-plumaged sapsucker seen in migration is almost certainly a *varius.* A juvenile *varius* often does show some red flecking on the crown, and as the fall progresses the male can display a tinge of pink on the chin, but otherwise the immature *varius* appears generally brown with a good deal of gold spotting on the back, and a fairly bright yellow belly. A juvenile *nuchalis* on its breeding grounds (early August at the latest) shows a duller yellow belly, and the flecking on the back is whitish rather than yellow.

Hybrids

The extent of contact between the breeding ranges of the four races is in most cases fairly restricted. Both **"Red-breasted"** forms overlap with the **Rocky Mountain, "Red-naped" race** (*nuchalis*). **The northwestern race** (*ruber*) overlaps *nuchalis* from south-central British Columbia south to southern Oregon, and the **southwestern race** (*daggetti*) overlaps *nuchalis* at several points from southern Oregon south to central California.

Hybridization between the **northwestern, "Red-breasted" race** (*ruber*) and the **Rocky Mountain, "Red-naped" race** (*nuchalis*) involves only a small percentage of the birds in the contact zone, while the percentage of hybrids between *nuchalis* and the **southwestern, "Red-breasted" race** (*daggetti*) approaches 50%. In either case, the evidence compiled thus far fits Short's criterion for the classification of the **"Red-breasted"** (*ruber-daggetti*) forms and the **"Red-naped"** (*nuchalis*) form as full species.

In the eastern portion of Southern California hybrids of *nuchalis x daggetti* are not uncommon. Such forms, whether *nuchalis x daggetti* or *ruber x daggetti* (see illustration), are fairly easy to recognize, for they show obvious characteristics of both races. The hybrid bird often resembles *nuchalis* superficially, but the **cheek shows a good deal of red** with reduced white stripes, and red frequently **extends below the blackish breast patch.** The extent of overall coloration of the head and the blackness of the back can also help to decide whether the hybrid is *nuchalis x daggetti* or *nuchalis x ruber*—but such determinations can be, at best, only speculative.

The two **"Red-breasted" races** (*ruber* and *daggetti*) meet along the southern coast of Oregon and in central Oregon. The *ruber* race replaces *daggetti* rather abruptly in central Oregon, but on the coast of southern Oregon there is total intergradation between the two forms. Therefore, *rubers* from further north (British Columbia to Alaska) look more distinct from *daggetti* than do the birds from the coast of Oregon. The three Southern California records for the *ruber* race seem to represent typical examples from the more northerly portion of their range.

Contact between the **northwestern, "Red-breasted" race** (*ruber*) and the **eastern, "Yellow-bellied" race** (*varius*) occurs in northern British Columbia, while contact between the **Rocky Mountain, "Red-naped" race** (*nuchalis*) and *varius* occurs in southwestern Alberta. In neither case has the contact zone been adequately studied, so it is as yet impossible to speculate about the degree of hybridization between the forms. There are virtually no records of *nuchalis x varius,* but this may be due to the fact that a hybrid would appear very similar to either parental type, and could easily be overlooked.

The field identification of avian subspecies is often a considerable challenge, but the rewards are commensurate with the effort, for the conscientious observer can contribute much to our understanding of the process of speciation. In our area, observers should exercise special care in identifying birds of either the *varius* or the *ruber* race. Fortunately, sapsuckers tend to be rather methodical, sedentary birds, permitting observers time to write detailed notes. Such records, especially where hybrids are concerned, may prove invaluable in confirming an identification.

The author wishes to express his thanks to Pierre Devillers for the material based on his paper, and also to T.R. Howell, who read and commented upon the manuscript of this article.

Corliss Kristensen

The Panama Problem

The debate swirling around the pending U.S.-Panamanian treaty involves not only political-economic issues, but crucial conservation questions as well. Though no one is eager to see the tropical forests of the Canal Zone sacrificed to subsistence farming, experts familiar with the area are divided in their approach to the problem of habitat preservation. Some, convinced that the Zone, once freed of U.S. control, would suffer rapid deforestation, oppose ratification of the agreement; while others, no less despairing concerning the fate of the Zone's forests, favor ratification on political grounds, urging instead that the energies of conservationists be directed toward the protection of more nearly virginal areas elsewhere in the neotropics. Finally, there is a school whose proponents nourish the hope that despite transfer of control of the Canal, positive action may still succeed in securing protection for the best of the existing natural habitats.

To the amazement of many travellers, awed by the luxuriance of the Zone's vegetation, its forests are almost entirely second growth, formerly-cultivated land encouraged to revert to woodland as a result of decades of rigorous, if inadvertent, protection by the Zone administration. Today the Canal Zone survives as an island of verdure surrounded by barren, plowed fields, the life-support of an impoverished nation whose population continues to grow by 3% every year.

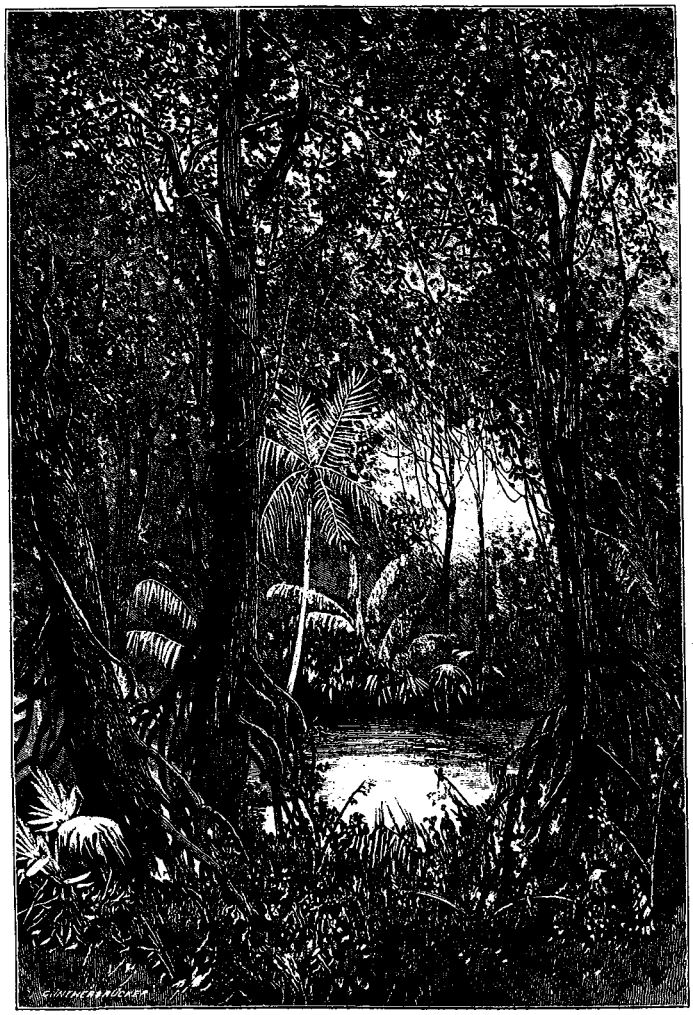
Despite the dubious pedigree of its habitats, the Zone provides sanctuary for an overwhelming diversity of wildlife, including 17 species of mammals, birds, and reptiles protected by the 1973 Endangered Species Act—among them the jaguar, manatee, and tapir. According to Robert Ridgely, author of the recently-published guide to the birds of Panama, the forested areas of the Zone represent "the largest accessible tract of tropical forest in Latin America," supporting more than 560 species of birds. In fact, last year 333 species were found in the Zone in a single day—a new world's record.

For years, the Smithsonian's research station on Barro Colorado Island, created by the damming of the Chagres River, has been a mecca for students of tropical flora and fauna. Fortunately, regardless of the fate of the rest of the Zone, its future is secured by the terms of the Canal transfer treaty.

While Barro Colorado is highly esteemed, another outstanding area, the 15-mile long Gamboa Pipeline Road, holds a special appeal for birders—for it's one of the most convenient places in Central America to observe the birds characteristic of the humid tropical forest. Yet here too there may be guarded cause for hope, since the energetic Panama Audubon Society has secured guarantees from the Panamanian Govt. that the area will be protected from hunting.

It is anticipated, also, that Panama will move to protect prime habitats in the Madden Lake and Chagres River regions, for, as it happens, any large scale deforestation around the River would seriously jeopardize the source of fresh water essential to the operation of the canal during the dry season.

As in many other underdeveloped countries, the best



hope for habitat protection in Panama (within and outside the Canal Zone) may depend upon the lure of the tourist dollar. While Panama has lagged behind other Latin American countries in setting aside parks and reserves, the situation could change, if appropriate pressure is brought to bear. In the view of geneticist Ernst Mayr, "there is no better way to do something for conservation in those parts of the Republic of Panama where it really counts than to be good friends with the Republic of Panama."

Through the offices of such international organizations as the World Wildlife Fund and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, it may be possible to persuade the Panamanians to preserve not only such sites as the Pipeline Road, but such attractions as the country's mountain-top cloud forests, and the wild jungles of the Darien highlands. At the same time, efforts to curb the nation's runaway population problem could only serve the long-range economic and social interests of the Panamanian people.

While there are those who question the right of outsiders to dictate preservationist policies to Panama, a growing body of opinion holds that we possess not only the right, but the responsibility to do so. For, in the view of many conservationists, the natural heritage of the earth belongs to no one nation, and the fate of our dwindling flora and fauna is the proper concern of all the world's citizens.

Corliss Kristensen, a research associate and editorial assistant at UCLA, has joined the staff of the WESTERN TANAGER as Assistant Editor.

Shumway Suffel

BIRDS of the Season

April finds us emerging from the doldrums of March, and at last that gnawing question, "I know it's spring, but where are the birds?" is about to be answered, as the migration, in its time-honored fashion, floods our woodlands with northbound birds. But why, we may ask, must we wait so long, when for weeks the land has hosted an abundance of insects and flowers? The answer, of course, is that the migration is precisely timed to place the birds on their breeding grounds at the optimum moment for nesting and the rearing of young —and there is, unfortunately, little reason for many of the migrants to arrive in Southern California in March when the last of the snow will not leave their nesting sites until late in the month of May.

Though the main wave of the migration is still a few weeks away, the vanguard of migrants has already arrived, among them a few swallows and hummingbirds, plus large flocks of **Turkey Vultures** (moving north along the Colorado River, Feb. 23). Most of the previously-reported winter birds lingered through the past month, and a few noteworthy birds were uncovered. Near Eureka, two **Snowy Owls** alternated perches between the urban power poles and the coastal dunes; a **Blue Jay** was staked-out at a feeder nearby; and two rare Eurasian gulls were discovered—an adult **Little Gull** in winter plumage, and an adult **Black-headed Gull** (6th State record) which already had the dark head of summer plumage. The latter bird was so unexpected and atypical that it was initially thought to be an adult Franklin's Gull.

In Monterey County the **Roseate Spoonbill** in the artichoke fields and the **Emperor Goose** at Moss Landing were still present but seldom seen. However, the wintering **Magnolia Warbler** along the Pajaro River and the **Tropical Kingbird** at the Castroville pond could usually be found by persistent searchers. A **Yellow-billed Loon** was studied at leisure by the LAAS Monterey Bay pelagic trip on Feb. 25 (Larry Sansone et al).

Locally there were few changes in February. Fred Heath found a **Lark Bunting** at Pt. Dume on Feb. 11, and Terry Clark had two female **Black Scoters** and two **White-winged Scoters** (both scarce this winter) in the channel at Marina del Rey, Feb. 17. Barbara Turner heard a **Poor-will** in Big Sycamore Canyon during the warm spell at mid-month, and Dick Swinney flushed one in Big Dalton Canyon, above Glendora—good indications of how temperature-sensitive these hibernating birds are. Our sole report of a **Bohemian Waxwing** comes from Dotty Landing, who saw a single bird on Feb. 21 with the hundreds of Cedar Waxwings which frequent her Woodland Hills neighborhood. Of the six **Evening Grosbeaks** in Griffith Park in late November, only two remained on Jan. 25 (Justin Russell). A single bird was in the Claremont Botanic Gardens on Feb. 11 (Hal Baxter), and up to forty were at Oak Glen, S. Bd. Co. (5000 ft. elev.) (Doug Morton, Feb. 2).

Perhaps the most exciting development of the month was Kimball Garrett's discovery of a previously unbirded desert oasis—at Regina, on the railroad, halfway between Niland and Glamis in Imperial Co. The attraction here is a couple of parallel rows of well-watered tamarisks, several miles long. A brief survey of the first half-mile of trees produced a bright adult male **Pine Warbler** (first winter record, seventh State record, and first interior record), one **Gray-headed Junco,** at least ten **"Slate-colored" Juncos,** and a female **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker,** possibly a hybrid *varius x nuchalis* (the bird lacked the red nape and showed almost a pure white throat, with only a trace of red on the bottom edge). With birds like these in only a small sample of the habitat, one wonders what a complete survey of the area would reveal. Only a few miles southwest of Regina as the birds fly, but sixty miles by road, an **Eastern Phoebe** wintered (late Dec. to late Feb.) along the Highline Canal.

In the Owens Valley above Bishop, Tom Heindel found a swan with a large amount of yellow on the bill, typical of the Asiatic **Bewick's Swan.** Another Bewick's (with two hybrid Bewick's x Whistling immatures) was seen in the delta region of Central California in December. Since Bewick's and Whistling Swans are known to hybridize freely in Siberia, some authorities think they should be lumped and renamed the Tundra Swan.

Along the Colorado River below Parker Dam the **Barrow's Goldeneyes** were easily found, as were the **Inca Doves** in the Earp Trailer Park. But the Coues' Flycatcher and the Cardinal could not located.

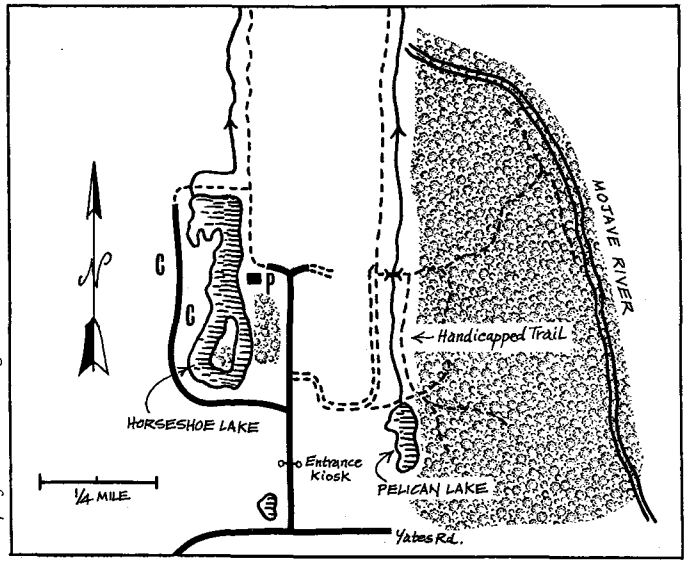
With migration building to a climax in early May, plans should be made to cover the desert oases later this month. The best and most accessible of these is Morongo Valley, followed closely by Yucca Valley, Twenty-nine Palms, Cottonwood Springs, Borrego Springs, and, in the Imperial Valley, Finney Lake and Brock Ranch. The coastal canyons and promontories are not as productive as they are in the fall, but can still provide good birding. **Sage Grouse** should be strutting at their lek (strutting ground) above Lake Crowley in the Owen's Valley. Turn right at the little church 35 miles north of Bishop, and follow the signs which the State Fish and Game Dept. has provided. If you do not find them there, call Tom Heindel in Big Pine (714-938-2757). He knows of another lek in the same area. **Grasshopper Sparrows** are uncommon and secretive, but they sing from the highest weedstem in the spring. They are found on grassy hillsides which are not overgrazed: in the Simi Hills, above Diamond Bar in the Chino Hills, at the end of Dana Mesa Road near San Juan Capistrano, and above the Old Mission Dam east of San Diego. In the riparian growth at Old Mission Dam, as well as below Morongo Valley, there is also a chance for **Bell's Vireos.** Males sing very persistently, a three-part question-and-answer song, the first part ending *up,* and the next part ending *down.* The challenge, once you've heard their song, is to find the easily-overlooked, small gray birds.

Remember, while enjoying the birds this month, don't neglect the wildflowers. After all the misfortune brought by the rains, we may at least be rewarded by a colorful spring.

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

Jean Brandt/BIRDING at

Mojave Narrows



Map by Glenn Cunningham

Springtime on the desert! There is no better birding anytime or anyplace in California. Both Morongo Valley and Mojave Narrows are noted desert oases where any spring day will offer a great, but ever-changing selection of the expected migrants and unexpected vagrants that make birding exciting.

Mojave Narrows Regional Park in San Bernardino County is situated along the Mojave River and is surrounded by typical high desert habitat. The 800-acre park contains two lakes, grassy fields, and an extremely lush riparian woodland. More than 80 species of birds can be found on a good day from mid-April to mid-May. But don't limit your visits here to spring, for fall and winter can be good too. On one cold, rainy January day we had 48 species!

A good selection of waterfowl is attracted by two artificial lakes, fed by a pipeline from the Mojave River. The surrounding cattails host American Bitterns, Long-billed Marsh Wrens, and Lincoln's Sparrows. (There is also a marshy pond just south of the entrance kiosk which has waterfowl and marshbirds.) The outlet stream, flowing north from Horseshoe Lake on it's way to the Mojave River, has created a marsh where both Tri-colored and Red-winged Blackbirds nest.

The outlet stream from Pelican Lake, flowing north through the cottonwood trees, has been dammed by beavers in many places, creating small swampy areas which attract many birds.

To reach the wooded area take the unpaved Pelican Lake Road to the end, at which point a network of trails (not shown on the map) leads through the woods to the river. A level paved loop trail, designed for the handicapped, reaches Pelican Lake and offers a good cross section of riparian habitat.

The fenced pasture land between the streams provides an additional habitat which should be checked for raptors and small birds (pipits and longspurs are possible in the fall). More than twelve species of raptors have been reported.

To reach Mojave Narrows Regional Park, take the Bear Valley Cutoff, east from Interstate #15 (south of Victorville) 3.9 miles to Ridge Crest Road (just across the RR tracks). Turn left (north) on Ridge Crest Road (it becomes Yates Road) 2.6 miles to the entrance on the left. There is a $1.00 per car entrance fee for day use or a $3.00 fee per night for camping. There are well equipped campgrounds ("C" on the map), picnic tables ("P"), and restrooms. Boat rentals are available for fishing and the lakes are stocked. *Good birding!*

Malibu Lagoon Plans

The State Parks and Recreation Dept. has drawn up a tentative plan for the Malibu Lagoon State Beach Park, incorporating into the proposal most of the features for which conservation groups—including Los Angeles Audubon—have campaigned. According to the plan, the area will enjoy protection as a "natural preserve," the marsh will be restored, the baseball diamonds will be removed, trails, overlook platforms, and an interpretive center will be installed, and a parking area of modest proportions will be added on the west side. To insure adoption of this plan, letters of support should be sent as soon as possible to senior planner, **George Rackelmann,** Box 2390, Sacramento 95811.

Volunteers Needed

Audubon House desperately requires two or three volunteers to work from 10 to 3 any day from Tuesday to Saturday, tending the bookstore or the library, answering phones, or assisting with membership registrations. If you have a little free time, please call and sign up. 876-0202.

A Week on the Channel Islands

Lee Jones is scheduled to lead a 6½ day natural history cruise to five of the Channel Islands, April 14-21—a great opportunity to study the Island Fox, the world's largest colony of seals and sea lions, plus many species of birds and wildflowers. Cost: $390, all inclusive. For information contact H. & M. Landing, 2803 Emerson St., S.D. 92106 (213) 626-8005, or (714) 222-1144.

Malaysia in October

Herb and Olga Clarke will be leading a small group of birders to Malaysia from Sept. 30 to Oct. 15, visiting outstanding natural reserves and birding hot spots. The price is approx. $1925, all inclusive. For information contact Olga Clarke, 2027 El Arborlita Dr., Glendale, Calif. 91208 (213) 249-5537.

WESTERN TANAGER

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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.

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

Field Trip Reservations

To make reservations for bus and pelagic trips, send a check payable to LAAS plus a self-addressed, stamped envelope, your phone number, and the names of all those in your party to the Field Trip Chairman, Audubon House. Requests for reservations must be in writing. No reservations will be accepted or refunds made within 48 hours prior to departure. To guarantee your space make reservations as early as possible. Trips will be cancelled 30 days prior to departure if there is insufficient response.

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.

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

FRIDAY-SATURDAY, APRIL 7-8—Lake Crowley by Chartered Bus. An excursion to see the pre-dawn booming of the **Sage Grouse** on their leks near Lake Crowley. The bus will leave the Plummer Park (Audubon House) parking lot at 11 p.m. sharp Friday night, and will arrive at Lake Crowley before dawn. After observing the Sage Grouse, we will do a few more hours of birding and then return to L.A. Space is limited and priority will be established by date of postmark on your reservation. The price is $18 per person. Meet at the Plummer Park parking lot at 10:30 p.m., Friday, April 7. We will return Saturday in the afternoon or early evening. The bus has reclining seats for sleeping, and room for ice chests. Bring enough food to last the trip. Leader: Jerry Maisel.

TUESDAY, APRIL 11—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. **Larry Norris,** a member of LAAS who has led many of our field trips, will speak on **Spring Wildflowers of the California Desert.** He has worked as a naturalist at camps in the High Sierras, is a member of the Southern California Botanists and the Northern Nevada Native Plant Society, and is currently working towards an advanced degree in Outdoor Recreation.

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, APRIL 22—Mojave Narrows Nature Center. Meet at the Center at 8:00 a.m. This area along the Mojave River is excellent for birding, similar in many ways to Morongo Valley, and it promises a good selection of desert residents and migrants. Camping is available for those who wish to spend the weekend, continuing on to Morongo Valley the next day for the field trip there. This should be a great weekend for desert birding! Take Hwy. 18 toward Victorville, exiting at Bear Valley Cutoff, and then go east. Or you may get there via the Antelope Valley Fwy. to Pearblossom Hwy. (138), then along Hwy. 18 to the intersection with Hwy. 15; then right (south) to Bear Valley Cutoff, and east to the Nature Center. Leader: Larry Norris, 996-6857.

SUNDAY, APRIL 23—Morongo Valley. Meeting at 8:00 a.m. in Covington Park, in the town of Morongo Valley. This is one of the renowned birding spots of the west, a trap for migrants funnelling into the Pacific Flyway from the Sonoran Desert. On a good day over 80 species can be found, including the Vermilion Flycatcher, Summer Tanager, Lucy's Warbler, and Weid's Crested Flycatcher, four species which reach the terminus of their breeding ranges here. Dry camping facilities are available in Joshua Tree National Monument and there are convenient motels in 29 Palms and Yucca Valley. Take Interstate 10 east to 29 Palms Hwy. (62), 2.5 miles east of Whitewater, then go north approx. 10 miles. Leader: to be announced.

SUNDAY, APRIL 23—Reptile Trip to Camp Pendleton. Meet at 7 a.m. at the Audubon House parking lot for car pooling to Camp Pendleton, near Oceanside. Bring lunches as we will be returning late in the afternoon. An evening educational session will be scheduled about a week before the trip. As space is limited, reservations must be made by calling Audubon House after April 5. Leaders: Jay Kilgore of the L. A. Zoo, and Larry Norris.

SATURDAY, APRIL 29—Chantry Flat and Santa Anita Canyon. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the end of the Santa Anita Canyon Rd. Be prepared to hike down to the canyon stream and upstream to the falls to see the resident Dippers, Canyon Wrens, and spring migrants. This is a strenuous hike, but rewarding to those who take it. Take the San Bernardino Fwy. to Rosemead Blvd., go north on Rosemead to Foothill Blvd., east on foothill to Santa Anita Ave., then north to the end of Santa Anita Rd. Leader: Hal Baxter, 355-6300.

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.

Los Angeles Audubon Society
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