WESTERN TANAGER

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The Colorado

Changing Times Along the River

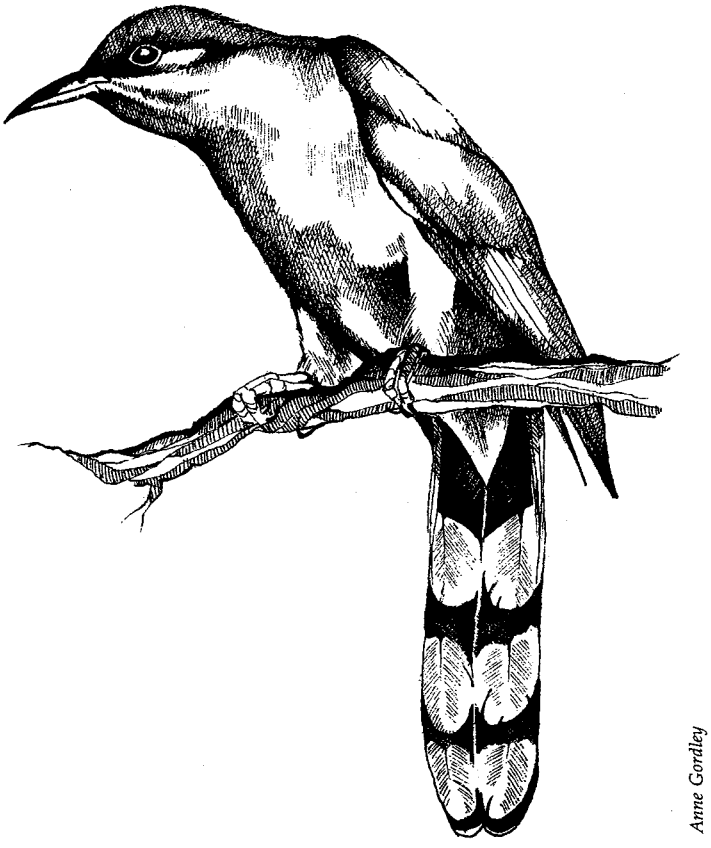
by Jon Dunn

Probably no area in the southwest, with the exception of the Salton Sea, has undergone such a rapid or extensive habitat change as the Lower Colorado River Valley. These changes, directly caused by man, have occurred over the last forty-five years and have had both negative and positive effects on the area's avifauna.

The Lower Colorado area extends from what is now Lake Mead south to the mouth of the river at the head of the Gulf of California, below Yuma. The entire valley is in the Lower Sonoran Zone, and, like the Salton Sea, is known for its very hot summers and relatively mild, dry winters. In former years the Colorado River fluctuated greatly during the course of the year, reaching its highest level in the spring, when melt water from far away in the northeast sent it surging across a vast floodplain, to water extensive tracts of lush riparian woodland (composed mainly of cottonwoods, willows, and mesquite) that in turn supported large numbers of desert-riparian birds.

The construction in 1933 of the Hoover Dam, plus the subsequent completion of other such projects, including the Davis and Parker Dams, was to radically alter the way of life along the Colorado, transforming a muddy, meandering stream into a clear-flowing river that maintained a more-or-less constant flow throughout the year. The most immediate and most drastic change in the natural community resulted from the flooding of large tracts of riparian woodland, to create Lakes Mead, Mohave, and Havasu. Thereafter, most of the areas of riparian woodland that remained were gradually cleared for agricultural use—since now, with the specter of the spring floods put to rest, agriculture was deemed a safe and profitable pursuit.

Today along the Colorado only isolated patches of riparian woodland remain, restricted, largely, to the vicinity of trailer parks and ranch houses. The best of the remnant tracts is to be found in the Bill Williams Delta area near Parker Dam, where the construction of dams far up the Bill Williams River has actually facilitated the growth of trees—since the destructive spring floods no longer sweep through this relatively narrow gorge. As a result, one can get a feeling here of what the Colorado River once was, when the riparian woodland extended for miles. Fortunately, no plans now exist to tamper with this last sizable stand of trees.



Anne Gordley

The Yellow-billed Cuckoo, once a common nesting species along the Colorado River, but now restricted to isolated riparian groves.

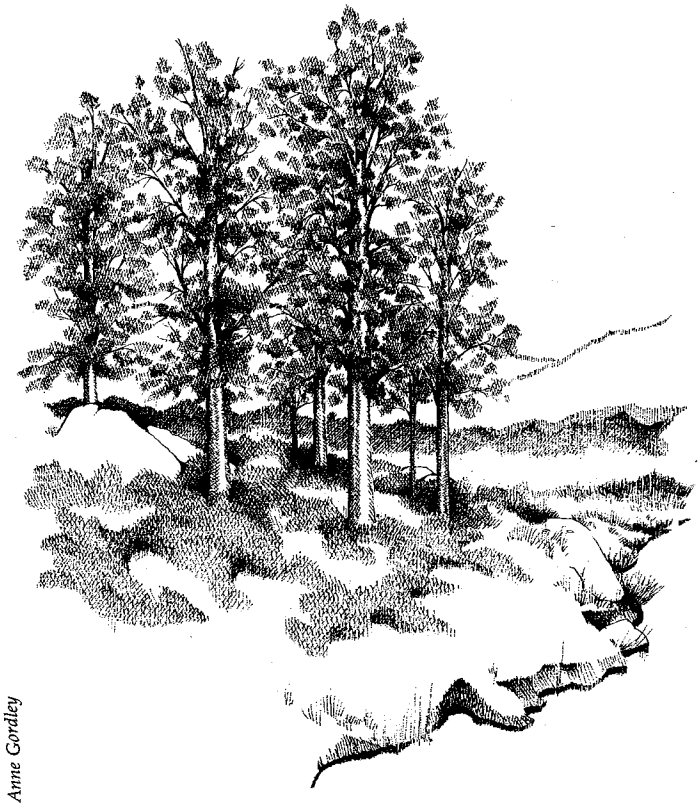
Among the birds of the desert-riparian woodland which may still be found in localized areas of suitable habitat along the river are: White-winged Dove (summer), "Gilded" Flicker (mainly in winter), Gila Woodpecker, Wied's Crested Flycatcher (summer), Vermilion Flycatcher (uncommon), Yellow-billed Cuckoo (summer, after June 1), Black-tailed Gnatcatcher (*P.m. lucida* race, also present in desert washes), Bell's Vireo (*V.b. arizonae* race, now rare and very local), Lucy's Warbler (summer, arriving by March 20), Cardinal (scarce), and Blue Grosbeak (summer). The Yellow-billed Cuckoo, "Gilded" Flicker, Gila Woodpecker, Wied's Crested Flycatcher, and Lucy's Warbler are primarily restricted to the Lower Colorado River, though the cuckoo is found very locally elsewhere through the State. California's only *native*

Cardinals (*C.c. superbus*, the Arizona race) are exclusively restricted to the Colorado River, and though relatively rare, occur locally from Needles to Yuma, with most of the records from the vicinity of Parker, Arizona.

The destruction of habitat along the river has substantially reduced the aggregate numbers of all the species mentioned above, in some cases to perilously low numbers (as in the instance of the Bell's Vireo, a bird undoubtedly victimized as well by Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism). The only species to have thus far been completely banished from the area is the Harris' Hawk—a bird once fairly common along the entire Colorado River. By 1960 the hawk had disappeared from most areas along the Colorado, lingering primarily in the vicinity of Topock, Arizona, where it was detected regularly through the mid-60's. It has, however, been over a decade since the last reliable sight record of the bird, and it now appears that the species, like the Sharp-tailed Grouse, has been extirpated from the State.

The Elf Owl is another species now nearly extinct in the State. The bird's last recent nesting locality—above Needles—was recently cleared, and while the owls managed to nest this year in the half-dozen remaining trees at the site, their continued existence there is highly doubtful. Despite diligent searches, no evidence has been found of the owls' occurrence at such former localities as the oases of Corn and Cottonwood Springs.

Two additional species that have been eliminated from the river are the Willow Flycatcher and the Yellow Warbler—though parasitism from Brown-headed Cowbirds is probably as much a factor in their extirpation as is habitat destruction. In recent years the Willow Flycatcher has disappeared from most of its former breeding range in California, while the Yellow Warbler has lost a subspecies, *D.p. sonorana*, formerly widespread along the Colorado River.



Anne Gordley

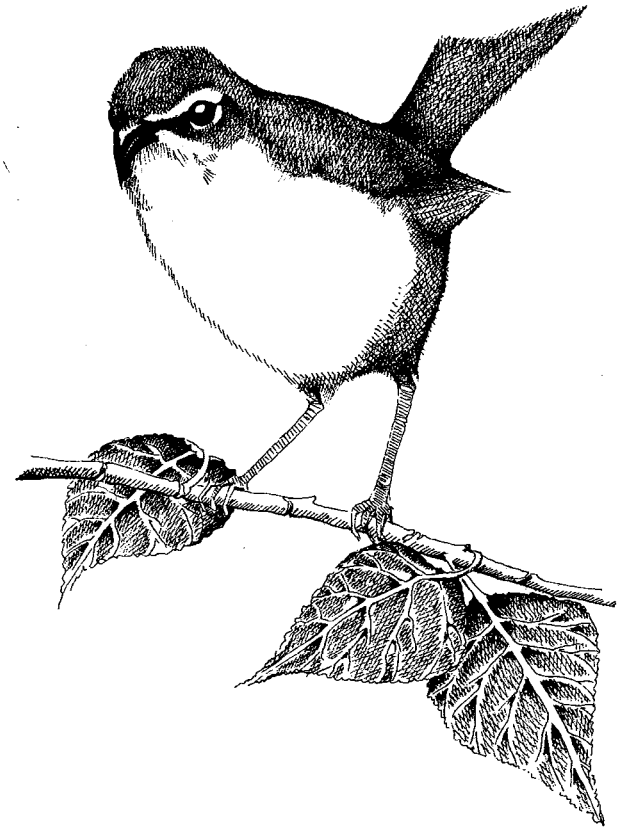
The tule marshes constitute another Colorado River habitat that has suffered, though less acutely than the riparian woodland. Here the Least Bittern, the Clapper Rail (of the endangered *yumaensis* race), the Virginia Rail, and the Black Rail breed (the latter only locally, e.g. above Yuma). While a number of the marshes have been flooded as a result of the damming of the river, much excellent habitat still remains.

But not all the changes along the Colorado have had negative results—for with development new habitats were created, encouraging the westward spread of species formerly restricted to Arizona. Around the ranchyards, trailer parks, and other rural areas, the Inca Dove, Great-tailed Grackle, and Bronzed Cowbird have become established—species which followed the spread of agriculture across the Salt River Valley of Arizona. The grackle and the Inca Dove are now common along the Colorado, though the dove is largely restricted to localities north of Blythe. The Bronzed Cowbird is still uncommon in summer, but it is widespread, occurring from Parker Dam south to Yuma.

The clearing of riparian forest for agriculture also created suitable habitat for large flocks of wintering pipits and Horned Larks. Among these flocks McCown's, Lapland, and Chestnut-collared Longspurs have been detected, and on several occasions Sprague's Pipits have been found in the fields. In winter these fields support large numbers of Mountain Bluebirds, local flocks of Snow and Canada Geese (with an occasional Ross' Goose mixed in), Sandhill Cranes (near Parker, Arizona), and relatively large numbers of raptors, including Ferruginous Hawks and, in some winters, Rough-legged Hawks.

The most radical habitat change along the Colorado was a result of the creation of the large lakes above the dams, with churning water immediately downstream (as at Davis and Parker). These areas provide ample habitat for many species of waterbirds, including a number formerly considered casual or unknown in the southwest. Often, wintering flocks of diving ducks feed below the dams, resting afterwards on the lakes above. Notable species found in this habitat, mainly in winter, include Arctic Loon (rare), Common Loon, Red-throated Loon (casual), Horned Grebe, Western Grebe (also locally common as a breeding species on Lake Havasu, etc.), Greater Scaup (local and uncommon), Common Goldeneye, Barrow's Goldeneye (virtually restricted to the area below Davis and Parker Dams), Hooded Merganser (rare), Common Merganser, and Red-breasted Merganser (mainly on migration). In addition the Oldsquaw and the White-winged Scoter have been found as casual strays. This habitat also attracts moderate numbers of gulls. Though the flocks are composed mainly of Ring-billed Gulls, the California and Bonaparte's Gull occur on migration, and the following rarities have been recorded: Herring Gull (regular), Thayer's Gull, Western Gull (one record of the nominate race, *L.o. occidentalis*), Glaucous-winged Gull, Franklin's Gull (regular), Sabine's Gull, and Black-legged Kittiwake. Bald Eagles are also regularly found in small numbers in the winter.

Last fall all three species of jaegers were observed on the central areas of the larger lakes. In all, three Long-tailed, at least four Parasitic, and two Pomarine Jaegers were recorded on Lake Havasu alone, prompting Arizona birders to begin



Anne Gordley

The Yellow-breasted Chat, one of the birds which breeds in the remnant of riparian woodland along the Lower Colorado.

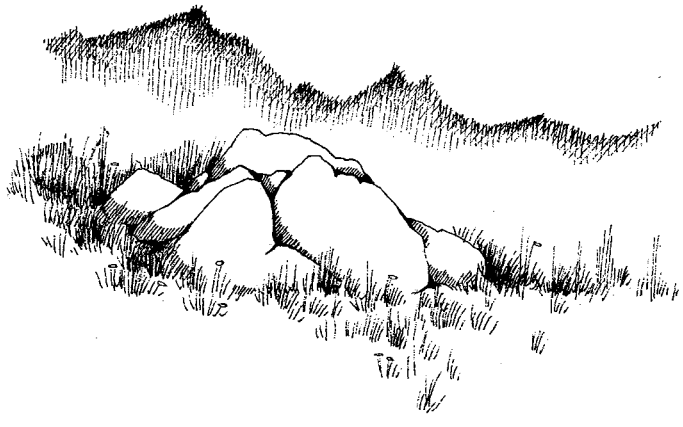
referring to the lake as their "Western Ocean." Further investigation will probably reveal jaegers to be of annual fall occurrence on the Colorado, as they are at the Salton Sea. Common Terns have also proven to be common from mid-August through early October on the larger lakes (as they are at the Sea), locally outnumbering Forster's Terns during this period.

It is interesting to make comparisons between the Sea and the Colorado River regarding the status of various species of waterbirds. Except for the diving ducks, loons, and grebes, the Salton Sea generally attracts larger numbers of any given species of migrant waterbird. It should be noted, though, that many species of waterbirds which occur at the Sea and the River are casual or accidental elsewhere. Among the shorebirds for instance, the Knot, Sanderling, Ruddy Turnstone (very rare), Marbled Godwit, Willet, and Whimbrel are all of regular occurrence to various degrees along the Colorado River, yet are generally much rarer elsewhere in the southwest away from the Salton Sea.

Another group of birds that occurs far more regularly at the Sea than at the Colorado River are those species that migrate or wander north from the Gulf of California—mainly in the summer. Species such as the Gull-billed Tern, Black Skimmer, Laughing Gull, and "Yellow-legged" Gull (*L.o. livens*) are common at the Salton Sea, yet are casual or accidental on the Colorado. This fact is perplexing, considering the geographic placement of the river relative to the Gulf. It would seem logical that birds wandering north would be more inclined to follow the river floodplain rather than to veer westward across open fields and desert to reach the Salton Sea. But this is not the case. The following Gulf of California species have occurred to date on the river: Brown Pelican, Blue-footed Booby, Brown Booby, Wood Stork, Magnificent Frigatebird, Reddish Egret, Louisiana Heron, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Least Tern, and Black Skimmer—though only the Brown Pelican, the Wood Stork, and, perhaps, the Magnificent Frigatebird can be considered to be of annual occurrence.

Finally, it is interesting to note the trends observed among the rarities that have occurred along the river. While the area is not nearly as productive of "eastern" land bird vagrants as either the northeastern desert oases or the coastal promontories, strays such as Cape May Warbler (California's first) and Scarlet Tanager have been recorded. But of particular interest to birdwatchers is the river's reputation for attracting rarities of Mexican or Arizonan origin, species that wander there mainly in late fall or winter. In this category the following species have been recorded: Least Grebe (nested in 1964 at West Pond: the only Calif. record), Olivaceous Cormorant (one bird returned for three consecutive springs: the only Calif. record), Black Vulture (the only Calif. record, pending acceptance by the Calif. Bird Records Committee), Thick-billed Kingbird (3 records), Olivaceous Flycatcher (1 record), Curve-billed Thrasher (over a half-dozen records), Rufous-backed Robin (1 of 2 Calif. records), Hepatic Tanager (3 records), Varied Bunting (1 of 2 Calif. records), and Bridled Titmouse (1 record, on the Arizona side).

Though much has been learned about the avifauna of the Colorado, there is a great deal yet to be learned. With the exception of Gale Monson's careful and systematic field work from the early 1940's through the mid-60's, the area has generally not been adequately covered; and it was not until the last two years, when the Bureau of Land Management undertook a survey of the river's birdlife, that the area began to enjoy the regular attention of small teams of birders. Monson's field work has proven an invaluable resource to the BLM team, for he was able to chronicle firsthand the disappearance and appearance of a number of species along the river. Now, largely under Ken Rosenburg's leadership, much new insight has been gained into the evolving patterns of distribution of the area's birds. It is to be expected that further studies will help to fill in the gaps in our knowledge of the dramatic changes now occurring—some for better, some for worse—in the avifauna of the Lower Colorado.



John Borneman

The Year of the Condor

During the past year only one California Condor was fledged in the bird's historic nesting ground in the chaparral-covered hills of south-central California, and this year's condor survey yielded the lowest number of birds of any such survey conducted under suitable weather conditions. It is estimated that the population continues to decline from the scant 50 or so birds considered to constitute the entire surviving population in 1977.

Recently the report of the Advisory Panel on the California Condor (Audubon Conservation Report No. 6) was released. This report recommends that the long-proposed program of captive propagation of California Condors be undertaken, stating that "if the California Condor is to survive, its support demands drastic action requiring a firm commitment over two to four decades."

Drastic, indeed! Yet it is possible that part of the cause for the condor's decline is our failure to realize that the drastic pressures to which we have subjected the birds (poisoning, shooting, contamination of food, air, and water, destruction of habitat) should have been countered by equally drastic efforts on the species' behalf. When the 1,200 acre Sisquoc Condor Sanctuary was set up in Santa Barbara Co. in 1937, many no doubt considered it a drastic measure. To commit a waterfall and the surrounding slopes to a "buzzard's bird bath" was most certainly an act of folly! And yet, as we look back with 20/20 hindsight, we see that the 1,200 acre sanctuary amounted to a mere drop in the bucket when measured against the desperate need of the condor for space in which to live.

When the 53,000 acre Sespe Wildlife Area (now the Sespe Condor Sanctuary) was established in the early 1950's, it was also considered a most drastic step, for oil lay under its sandstone floor, and oil was needed to supply our troops in Korea with fuel. One irate citizen proclaimed that if oil drilling in the sanctuary were curtailed, "the Communists will be marching down Main St. in Ventura!" But when Fred Sibley concluded his study on *The Effects of the Sespe Creek Project on the California Condor* in August 1969, it became apparent that, as important as the Sespe Sanctuary was to the survival of the condor, its establishment tended to afford decision makers and the general public an unrealistic view of condor habitat requirements, obscuring the urgent need to protect the millions of acres of nesting, roosting, and feeding habitat that lay outside the boundaries of the two existing sanctuaries. The Miller/McMillan report of 1963 stated that "food supply is not a limiting factor at the levels of condor numbers that exist now or that have existed since the 1920's." However, urbanization and the shift from livestock grazing to farming over the past twenty years may very well be factors which limit the condor's numbers.

Because of the condor's short food chain and the relatively uncontaminated feeding habitat of the birds, the Condor Recovery Team doubted that DDT could be a factor in the species' decline. However, it is now known that there has been a 30% decrease in egg shell thickness since 1946—and recent egg shell samples show an apparent return to normalcy since the banning of DDT. Yet it is doubtful that the wild population of condors can benefit in time to regain the foothold they need to survive.

The "drastic action" recommended by the Panel may be palatable to the lawmakers, but the "firm commitment over two to four decades" may present a tough challenge to legislators eager to show their constituents results within their term in office. Therefore, if such a project is to succeed, it will do so only as a result of a strong and sustained demonstration of public support. The stand is a difficult one and will be open to criticism whichever way it goes. Are we up to the challenge?

John Borneman is the National Audubon Society's Condor Naturalist, headquartered in Ventura.

The Condor Fund

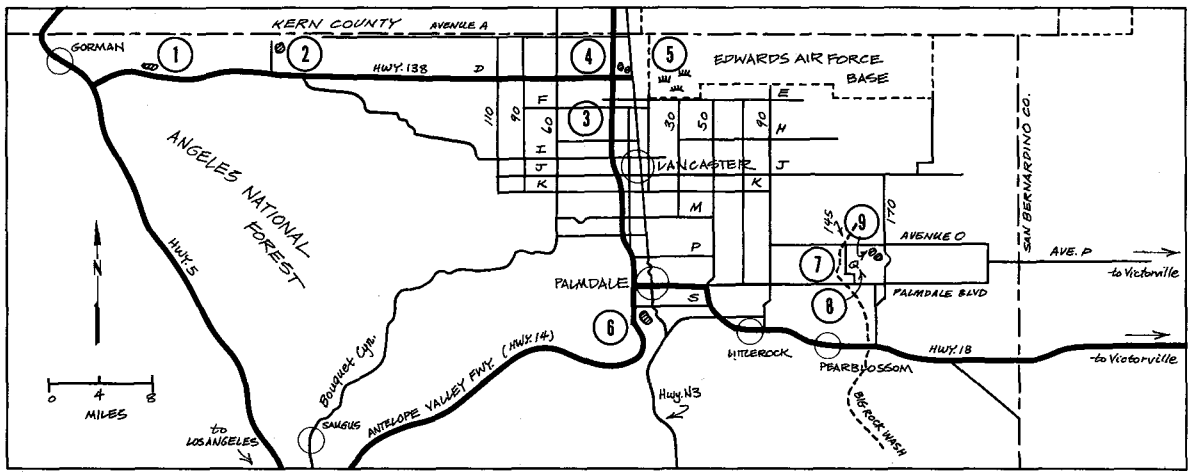
Donations to the California Condor Fund aid the National Audubon Society in its efforts to preserve the condor, through the work of the Society's Condor Naturalist. These funds are used to meet salary and equipment needs, to produce and distribute informational materials, and to support an active and on-going public education program. As a result of this support, Naturalist John Borneman has delivered approximately 700 lectures to schools and civic groups, to federal, state, and county field personnel and administrators, and to private landholders throughout California. His time spent in making observations of condor activity throughout the range of the birds, and his close association with the Forest Service and the other land management agencies has helped to promote condor protection programs on the lands under government juridsdiction.

It is the conviction of experts on condor management that a program of captive propagation coupled with a continuing program of strict habitat protection stands a good chance of assuring the survival of the condor.

Your tax-deductible contribution to the LAAS Condor Fund is urgently needed. Please use the enclosed envelope and make your check payable to the Los Angeles Audubon Society. *Help us make 1979 a year of progress for the California Condor.*

Jean Brandt

Birding in the Antelope Valley



Map by Glenn Cunningham

Long noted for its spring wildflowers and fall longspurs, the Antelope Valley has only recently begun to be thoroughly explored and carefully birded year-round. As a result of a full year of intense birding in the valley, spurred on by renewed interest in the Los Angeles County "List," a number of previously unreported birds have been found. It is now known that LeConte's Thrashers are common residents, and that Swainson's Hawks, Long-eared Owls, Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, and Verdin all nest here, within easy reach of the city.

This article treats that portion of the valley within Los Angeles County, consisting of a triangular area containing over 800 square miles, bordered on the north by the Kern Co. line (Ave. A) and extending south to the mountains and east to the San Bernardino Co. line. Basically a flat plain with an average elevation of 3000', this high desert valley contains agricultural lands with cultivated fields and scattered ranches (surrounded by deciduous trees), Joshua Tree woodland, sagebrush desert, a natural marsh, rocky outcrops, man-made lakes, a sewer pond, parks, and nature preserves.

The east-west avenues, one mile apart, are lettered beginning with "A" on the Kern Co. line. North-south streets, one tenth of a mile apart, are numbered in either direction from Division Street in Lancaster. Although this grid pattern appears simple, it is frequently broken, and one would do well to rely on a map.

The following account is arranged according to habitat, with localities numbered from west to east on the accompanying map:

Agricultural fields. These can be outstanding in fall and winter for raptors (Marsh Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, and Merlin). Longspurs (Lapland and Chestnut-collared) are regular from mid-October to early December, along with huge flocks of Water Pipits and Horned Larks. Whimbrels, rare inland away from the Salton Sea, are fairly common in spring, as are Long-billed Curlews in winter. Look for Lesser Nighthawks (uncommon) at dusk in summer. Mountain Plovers, Mountain Bluebirds (locally in large flocks), and Vesper Sparrows (in brushy edges along the fields) are found in winter, and Sage Thrashers are regular in migration. Burrowing Owls and Lark Sparrows are resident, as are flocks of blackbirds, including Yellow-headed and Tri-colored. Northern Shrikes are rare and irregular in winter.

Sagebrush flats. Roadrunners, LeConte's Thrashers, and Sage Sparrows (common) are all resident, and Brewer's Sparrows occur on migration.

Joshua Tree woodlands. Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, Cactus Wrens, and Verdin (very local) are resident breeding species, while Scott's Orioles are summer residents.

The best place for these birds is an area of mixed sagebrush and Joshua Trees at Ave. Q and 145th Street East (No. **8** on the map.) The rocky outcroppings nearby support resident Rock Wrens.

Big Rock Wash. (No. **7** on the map). An excellent area of riparian habitat just west of Ave. Q and 145th Street East. Nuttall's Woodpeckers nest here and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers nest nearby. Hence an interesting overlap zone exists between these congeneric species. The best way to identify each is by voice.

Ranch houses. These are excellent for migrants (and undoubtedly vagrants), plus locally-nesting Swainson's Hawks and Long-eared Owls. Barn Owls are widespread. Red-naped Sapsuckers *(S. v. nuchalis)* and, rarely, Vermilion Flycatchers may be found in the fall.

The Marsh (on the Edwards Air Force Base: No. **5** on the map). This area, which has both reedbeds and mudflats, supports nesting Eared Grebes (one of the few nesting sites in So. Calif.), Gadwalls, Redheads, Virginia Rails, Common Gallinules, Snowy Plover, Yellow-headed, and Tri-colored Blackbirds. In spring and fall watch for Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs; look also for Baird's Sandpipers (fall), Knot (rare), Dunlin, Sanderling (rare), and thousands of phalaropes (both Northern and Wilson's). American Bitterns are common in winter and Blue-winged Teal are found in spring. Look for Bank Swallows in migration. White-tailed Kites, very rare in desert localities, nest near the marsh.

Lakes. These are especially good for diving ducks. Look for Common Loons (uncommon, in migration), Canvasbacks, Common Mergansers, Redheads, Ring-necked Ducks, and geese (particularly Canadas, including an occasional "Cackling" Goose, *B. c. minima,* and very small numbers of Snow Geese). In late January and February northbound White-fronted Geese have often been noted, and White Pelicans may be seen on migration (they may be observed almost anywhere in the valley, winging high overhead). Whistling Swans have occurred in early winter, and small numbers of shorebirds are regularly noted on migration, in the appropriate habitat.

The following are the best lakes for birding:

Quail Lake (No. **1** on the map)

Holiday Lake (No. **2**). Ask permission. Closed on Tuesdays.

Apollo Park Lake (No. **3**)

The Sewer Ponds (No. **4**). Ask permission.

Lake Los Angeles (No. **9**). Actually *two* lakes.

Lake Palmdale (No. **6**). Though this lake is closed to birders, the overlook from Hwy. 14 is a good place to scope for large birds such as Common Loons, Whistling Swans, and an occasional Osprey.

Motels, restaurants, groceries, and all services are readily available in Lancaster and Palmdale. Be prepared for *extreme heat* in summer, and bracing, windy days in winter. *Good birding!*

Kimball Garrett

BIRDS of the Season

August is often viewed as a dull birding month away from the Salton Sea in Southern California. But this year the Sea turned up little of unusual interest—perhaps in part a result of the fact that the Whitewater River mouth has been closed to the public. On Aug. 5, Shum Suffel, Guy McCaskie, et al, did have an adult **Little Blue Heron** at the south end, along with **Chilean** and **Lesser Flamingos** (escapes of at least 3 species of flamingo have been noted here), while at the north end a **Peregrine Falcon** and **Roseate Spoonbill** provided a tantalizing hint of the off-limit area's potential. One or two **Magnificent Frigatebirds** also put in an appearance at the Sea. Though last year's coastal "invasion" of frigatebirds was not repeated, we do have reports of two of the birds at Upper Newport Bay (John McDonald, Aug. 6), one at Marina del Rey (Carol Friedman, Aug. 15), and a few in San Diego.

The bird of the month, however, was certainly the **Thick-billed Kingbird,** present at the Clark Ranch north of Blythe (on the Colorado River) from early August through at least the 26th of the month. Only the 6th record for California and the first away from the coast, this bird was also extraordinarily early (other records are for late Sept. through Dec.)—a fact which may indicate that the bird was a post-breeding wanderer from relatively close southern Arizona/northern Sonora populations, rather than a "reverse-oriented" vagrant from more southerly populations (the probable origin of our late fall birds). **Inca Doves, Bronzed Cowbirds,** and nesting **Yellow-billed Cuckoos** also rewarded birders who sought the kingbird in Mrs. Clark's "birdy" yard.

Other post-breeding wanderers and early fall vagrants included a **Bendire's Thrasher** seen briefly at McGrath Beach by Richard Webster in mid-August (regular in early fall on the coast), and a male **Vermilion Flycatcher,** spied by Hal Baxter along the freeway near Beaumont on Aug. 5 (perhaps one of the birds which bred at nearby Morongo Valley). The **Eastern Kingbird,** a typically early fall transient, appeared in Goleta in mid-month, while, closer to home, our (presumably) post-breeding congregation of **Chimney Swifts** were observed plunging 55 strong into a Burbank Studio chimney on Aug. 10 (Mike and John Parmeter).

The landbird migration in August included the usual trickle of **Yellow, Wilson's, Orange-crowned,** and **Hermit Warblers** (the latter in the mountains), while Betty Jenner's yard near Exposition Park hosted an **Ash-throated Flycatcher,** demonstrating the promise of migrants even in the inner city.

August is the time for shorebirds on the move. Vancouver's **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** departed by mid-month, and because the species winters north of the equator, local flocks of peeps were being eagerly scanned. Doug Morton found Southern California's 6th **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** (and the first for Riverside Co.) on Aug. 27 in a dried lakebed near Lakeview. **American Golden Plovers** returned to Goleta and McGrath by mid-August, and **Baird's Sandpipers** were, as usual, widespread late in the month (Goleta, McGrath, Malibu, Antelope Valley, etc.). A good complement of rocky shorebirds was at Playa del Rey by mid-month **(Surfbirds, Wandering Tattlers,** both **turnstones,** and at least four **Black Oystercatchers).** Three normally-coastal shorebirds were at the mudflats and marshes north of Lancaster: a **Red Knot** on July 25 (Kimball Garrett and Jon Dunn), a **Sanderling** on Aug. 16 (K.G.), and 1-2 **Black-bellied Plovers** through late August. Also present was a **Common Tern** (scarce inland away from the Salton Sea) on Aug. 16 and 23 (K.G., J.D., Phil Sayre). Common Terns were abundant along the coast by early August and John McDonald reports "more **Elegant Terns** than ever" at Newport Bay at that time. Fred Heath reports 2+ **Craveri's** (that's "Cra-vair'-eez," please!) **Murrelets** in the Catalina Channel on July 30. This early report bodes well for our fall boat trips.

Faulty flap-gates between Playa del Rey's Ballona channel and the mudflats and salt-marsh to the south allowed partial flooding of the area, making it very attractive to waterbirds (the gates are designed to prevent such flooding, but apparently had been propped open). Thousands of shorebirds and terns were the main attraction, but Ed Navojosky spotted a **White-faced Ibis** there on Aug. 9 (now rare in L.A. Co.). Female **White-winged** and **Black Scoters** summered with the **Surf Scoters** in the nearby channel (Jerry Johnson). The **Least Terns** enjoyed a successful breeding season and were not adversely affected by the flooding.

Sadly, no **Purple Martins** returned to their traditional nesting sites near Chilao. While small numbers still nest in neighboring counties, this once-common species is now virtually gone from L.A. Co. as a breeding bird (another Starling victim?).

With so many birds on the move, and challenging juvenal, immature, and fall adult plumages to study, August is emphatically not a dull month to bird. And above all, it is the month of the **California Condor.** With multiple sightings at Mt. Pinos nearly every day of the month, the condors staged a spectacular show for nature lovers from all over the world, dramatically underscoring the urgent efforts now underway to slow their slippage to extinction.

In October, more than any other month, birds find themselves lost, and birders, consequently, find themselves losing sleep and sanity—but rarely enthusiasm. Should the next trip be to Death Valley? to Goleta? or to San Diego? Will that untimely phone call come from Imperial Beach? from Oasis? or from Bolinas? Perhaps by disconnecting our phones, figuratively at least, we could learn a great deal more about our own backyards! A hundred pairs of binoculars, now focussed on some tired fluff of feathered misfortune, could surely generate more knowledge if each pair were to scan some overlooked corner of the local countryside. I'm not suggesting that every birdwatcher should become a hermit, ensconced in his or her secret birding hideaway, nor even that we be unsociable. I merely submit that the vagrant-season ritual of converging upon lost birds and traditional birding hot-spots might be augmented by work in underexplored local areas. For example, the farmlands and ranchyards of the Antelope Valley hold promise of raptors, longspurs,

Kimball Garrett is standing in for Shum Suffel, who spent late August on a birding trip to Surinam.

Mountain Plovers, waterfowl (at Quail, Holiday, and Apollo Lakes, etc.), and vagrant landbirds (for details, see Jean Brandt's column this month). In addition, our local coastal area offers not only the likelihood of vagrants, but a chance to monitor the passage of our regular migrants and arriving winter visitors. Big Sycamore Canyon (Pt. Mugu State Park) has water in the stream for the first fall since the memorable days of 1974, and Leo Carillo State Park, Pt. Dume, Zuma Canyon, Tapia Park, the Playa del Rey willows, Pt. Fermin (and neighboring parks), Harbor Lake, South Coast Botanic Garden, and Long Beach Recreation Park all warrant intensive coverage. But these are just a sample. Countless other areas close to home deserve our attention, many within L.A. County. With a little ingenuity we may succeed in addding both adventure and fresh insight to our autumn birding.

Alaska Alert

To the dismay of environmentalists, the Energy and Natural Resources Committee of the U.S. Senate has cut by 75% the wilderness acreage designated in S-1500 (the Metcalf-Durkin bill) and has placed over 20 million acres of the House-passed HR-39 wilderness parks and refuge lands in weaker management categories. With the Alaska bill poised for full Senate action, the time is now to urge our Senators to vote for maximum protection of the wilderness and wildlife of Alaska. **Write, wire, or phone Senators Alan Cranston and S.I. Hayakawa at the U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202-224-3121).**

The Tijuana River

The State of California is investigating uses made of the Tijuana River and Estuary for the purpose of determining whether any public rights exist in the area by reason of past public use. The sites of interest include the river, sloughs, beach, and upland areas, and access routes to these locations. If you have birded these spots, please call Robert Collins at 213-736-2080 or Rick Sinclair at 213-736-2152, or write to them at the California Attorney General's Office, 3580 Wilshire Blvd., L.A. 90010. Your assistance in this matter may help to insure our future access to this outstanding birding area.

WESTERN TANAGER

EDITOR Barry Clark
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Steve Strann

BOOKS

THE PHEASANTS OF THE WORLD, Second Edition, by Jean Delacour, Spur Publications/World Pheasant Association, 1977: 395pp., 32 plates, 21 maps and diagrams. $40.00

This month I am going to talk about an old friend. As my father is an aviculturist, many of my first memories were of birds. We bred and raised many species, but tended to specialize in pheasants and pheasant-like birds. As a result I must have read Jean Delacour's first edition of *The Pheasants of the World* (1951) at least 100 times, as it was the most useful text then available, with the possible exception of Beebe's monumental *Monograph of the Pheasants.* Twenty-six years later, with the publication of the revised second edition, Delacour's book retains its position as the primary text on this very popular family of birds.

Pheasants are familiar to almost everyone. These large, showy, generally long-tailed, terrestrial birds are included in the family Phasianidae, a group which comprises such species as the Red Junglefowl (the precursor of modern chickens) and the extravagant Peafowls. (The Phasianidae also encompass Partridges and Quails, but they are not discussed in Delacour's book.) All the native pheasants are restricted to Asia, Malaysia, and the neighboring islands of the region, with the sole exception of the Congo Peacock, found in central Africa. Though their natural range is limited, pheasants are today cosmopolitan, due to extensive introduction programs and wide-spread breeding activity.

As these birds are so popular in avicultural circles, Delacour set out to create a book serving two distinct purposes. First, the book is designed to appeal to the scientific interests of professional ornithologists; and to that end, sections on description, geographic distribution, systematics, and natural history have been included. The second goal was to provide the aviculturist with a bank of information concerning successful raising of pheasants in captivity. As Delacour is one of the leading authorities on the subject of pheasants, his information is most useful in this regard. The book contains extensive sections on each species' habits and needs in captivity, plus, in many cases, a brief avicultural history. But it is the extensive discussion of food and feeding methods, diseases, and environmental requirements that most ably assist the breeder.

The first edition was successful in achieving its goals: each species account, assisted by J. C. Harrison's illustrations, was factual, yet quite readable. So, why a second edition? First, the initial printing is long out of print and is now selling for a much as $250.00. Second, and most important, is the fact that much information on the natural history, as well as the behavior and problems of pheasants in captivity has been collected in the last twenty-six years. In the case of the mysterious Congo Peacock, newly discovered at the time of publication of the first edition, information obtained since 1951 is basically all that is known about the species. Delacour chose to keep the original text intact, and all revisions are included under the heading "Complementary Notes" at the end of each account—a construction I find very easy to use.

As a whole, I find my old friend to be even more informative in its second edition. Though Harrison's plates are not reproduced as well as they might have been (Oh, for a work illustrated by R. David Digby, artist of the magnificent Himalayan Blood Pheasant frontispiece, new to this edition), the overall quality of the second edition is quite good. For any lover of pheasants, whether scientific or avicultural, this book is required reading. I highly recommend it.

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 Reservations Chairman, Audubon House. No reservations will be accepted or refunds made within 48 hours of 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.

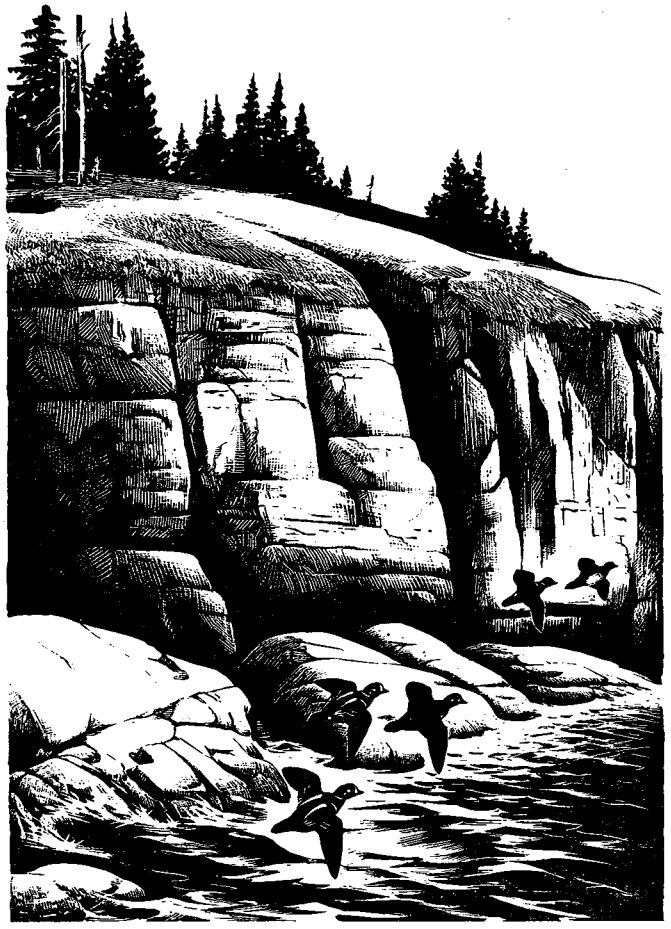
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 5—Executive Board Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Audubon House.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 7—Santa Barbara. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Andree Clark Bird Refuge. Take the Hot Springs Rd. turnoff from Hwy. 101, cross under the RR tracks and turn right one block. The Santa Barbara area is noted for fall migrants and vagrants, and the trip will include visits to several of the best spots between the Refuge and Goleta. See Brad Schram's article in the May-June '77 *Tanager* for details. Leader: Paul Lehman, 805-968-7394.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. Everyone welcome. **James Clements,** author of *Birds of the World: a Checklist,* and president of Santa Monica Bay Audubon, will present an illustrated slide program on **the Flightless Birds of the World.** Jim's travels in search of flightless birds have taken him from the ice floes of Tierra del Fuego to the altiplano of Bolivia; from the jungles of New Guinea and the shores of the Galapagos to Lake Atitlan in Guatemala; and this summer to the swamps of southwest Cuba, where Jim became the first ornithologist in over 30 years to see the elusive flightless Zapata Rail.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14—Monterey Bay Pelagic Trip. The *Miss Monterey* will depart from Fisherman's Wharf, Sam's Fishery Cruises, Monterey, at 8:00 a.m., to return at 3:00 p.m. Price $15.00 per person. Leaders: Phil Sayre and Bruce Broadbooks.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 16—Malibu to McGrath State Beach. The 7th 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.



SUNDAY, OCTOBER 22—Anacapa Island and out to sea. The boat (to be announced) will leave from the Oxnard Marina at 8:00 a.m. and return at 6:00 p.m. Cost: $20.00 per person. Leaders: Larry Norris and Ed Navojosky.

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

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4—Tapia Park and Malibu Lagoon. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the picnic area at Tapia Park. Late fall migrants and possibly a rare vagrant or two will be searched for. Leaders: Art and Jan Cupples, 981-4746.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 11—Antelope Valley. Meet at 7:30 a.m. on the west side of the Avenue A offramp on the Antelope Freeway (Hwy. 14), north of Lancaster. Ferruginous Hawks, longspurs, Prairie Falcons, and Mountain Plovers are all possible. See Jean Brandt's article in this issue of the *Tanager* for details. Leaders: Kimball Garrett, 477-5769, and Jon Dunn, 981-1841.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 14—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. Everyone welcome. Biologist **David Gaines** will present an illustrated program on the **Natural History of Mono Lake,** an incomparable haven for birds east of Yosemite National Park.

Los Angeles Audubon Society
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