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California's Galliforms

by Steve Strann



The avifauna of California is amazingly diverse, with species adapted to habitats that range from the sagebrush and scrub of the deserts to the coniferous forests of the high mountain ranges. The success or failure of an avian order is largely determined by the ability of its members to adapt to a varied spectrum of natural environments; and by this criterion the gallinaceous birds of California have done remarkably well—though today the fortunes of some of their number are far from secure.

Ranging from quail to grouse and from pheasants to turkeys, the galliforms constitute an intriguing component of the avifauna of California. Worldwide, the order comprises some 250 species—basically terrestrial birds, noted for their short, explosive flights and often bizarre courtship behavior. In California the galliforms are represented by species most often grouped into three distinct families: the Phasianidae (quail and pheasants), the Tetraonidae (grouse), and the Meleagrididae (turkeys). Members of the order are distributed throughout most of the state's natural vegetation communities. To augment the state's game resources, no less than five foreign species have been introduced into the state—most notably the Ring-necked Pheasant.

QUAIL

This family, with 30 members in the New World, is represented in the state by three of California's best known galliforms: the **California Quail** (*Lophortyx californicus*), **Gambel's Quail** (*Lophortyx gambelii*), and the **Mountain Quail** (*Oreortyx pictus*). All are small (9½-11½") gregarious birds, often seen in coveys of 50 or more individuals. The Gambel's and California species are very closely related, claiming descent from a common ancestor, whose population was fragmented by the Pleistocene glaciations. It is interesting to



California Quail

Illustration by H. Lee Jones

note that the Scaled Quail (*Callipepla squamata*) and the Elegant Quail (*C. douglasii*) of western Mexico and southwestern United States are also thought to have derived from this same primitive stock. Accordingly, the forthcoming A.O.U. checklist will combine the two *Lophortyx* in the genus *Callipepla*. The Mountain Quail, once believed to have evolved from an even more primitive progenitor, is now considered to bear a close affinity to this complex.

The **California Quail** comprises 7 distinct subspecies, 4 of which reside in the state. The species, which enjoys the title of California's State Bird, breeds throughout the length of the state, with the exception of the higher mountains and the southeastern deserts. In addition, a well-defined race is resident on Santa Catalina Island. Preferred habitat includes brushy areas, riparian associations, chaparral, and the fringes of cultivated land. Heavy forest and dense chaparral are usually avoided (though stiff-twiggled, dense trees are used for night roosting). A readily-available supply of fresh water is a necessity. Seeds (*Lotus*, *Lupinus*, *Trifolium*) com-

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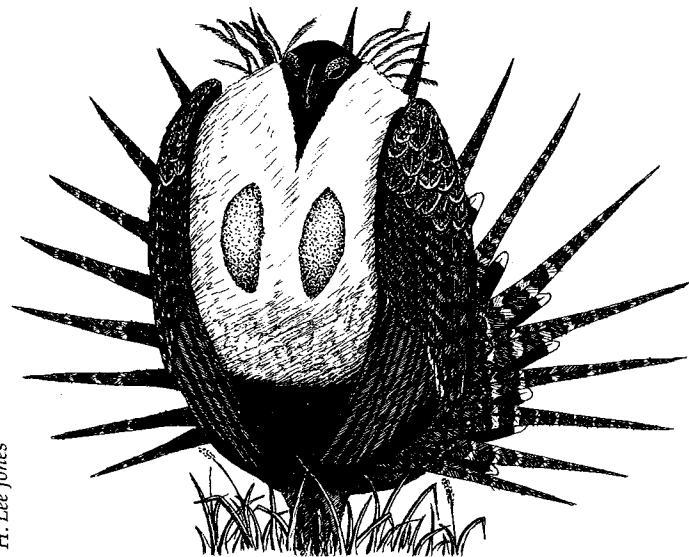
prise 60-80% of its diet, while leaves make up the remainder—though these percentages vary with the season. The normally-gregarious birds form pair bonds in the early spring, laying an average of 14 eggs, 40-55% of which hatch and survive until fall. The species is relatively sedentary, and birds have been known to live a maximum of 4.7 years.

Gambel's Quail (3-7 subspecies, 1 in Calif.) is a bird of the Sonoran Desert of southeastern California, where it is most at home in riparian associations—though it also utilizes desert brushlands, so long as water is available. In the northern Mojave, Gambel's is replaced by the California Quail, with hybrids occurring in the area of overlap (in the vicinity of San Gorgonio Pass in Riverside Co.). The feeding habits of the species are similar to those of the California Quail, with *Lotus*, *Lupinus*, *Mimosa*, and *Prosopis* the most important food sources. The average clutch size is 13 eggs, and the maximum life expectancy is 4 years. Again, the species is sedentary, one report indicating that an adult female moved only 6.5 miles in a period of two years.

The more montane regions of California are inhabited by the **Mountain Quail** (5 subspecies, 3 in Calif.) Suitable habitats include dense montane chaparral (manzanita, snow-bush, and chinguapin, within firs, pines, or black oaks), or, locally, associations of pinyon-juniper-yucca. Though fruits and seeds make up the majority of its diet, a ready supply of water is a necessity. The species nests at a higher elevation than any other North American quail. While the coastal subspecies is found up to 5600', the Sierran race ranges to 10,000'. Of particular interest is the fact that the Mountain Quail is known to undertake a vertical migration of up to 9000' (20 miles horizontally) at the onset of the breeding season and again in the fall—to escape the snowbound heights. This migration is mainly on foot, though birds have been seen flying across canyons. On their montane nesting grounds, clutches of 9-10 eggs are laid. After breeding the covey regroups, though the typical covey comprises fewer individuals (3-20) than are normally found in coveys of California and Gambel's Quails.

GROUSE

The Tetraonidae is a Holarctic family consisting of 17 species, 4 of which are native to California. The Blue Grouse



Sage Grouse

(*Dendrapagus obscurus*), Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*), Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), and the now-extirpated Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Pedioecetes phasianellus*) are medium to large, fairly solitary birds that are remarkable for their elaborately ritualized social behavior. The contrast with the quail is especially striking.

Among California's three species of quail a monogamous mating system prevails, in which a pair bond is developed and maintained throughout the breeding season, while a non-territorial social system is in effect the rest of the year. Among the advantages of this strategy are protection, incubation, and later, the care of the young by both parents. The grouse, however, are strongly territorial, with a direct relationship prevailing between the male's ability to maintain his territory and his ability to reproduce successfully. It is a system exhibited in varying degrees by the grouse of California.

The **Sage Grouse** (2 subspecies, 1 in Calif.) is at one extreme of the social behavior gradient. Among the most stirring spectacles in nature is that of the male Sage Grouse on his territory before dawn, loudly booming, with yellow air sacs inflated, and wings and tail rustling. Between late February and early April, males of this classic *lek*-forming species convene upon the "strutting ground," where, through a complex social ritual, dominance hierarchies are established. The ultimate result is that the dominant male fertilizes the most females.

The Sage Grouse lives in a very well-defined, but restricted habitat, closely associated with sagebrush (*Artemesia tridentata*), which provides up to 77% of its total diet. The species is known to occur at elevations up to 12,000' in the White Mountains of Mono Co., and still breeds in the northeastern and east-central portions of the state. However, due to over-hunting and habitat destruction by intensive sheep-ing, its range in the Great Basin has been gravely diminished. The birds are quite large (males up to 30") and may live as long as 7 years.

The **Blue Grouse** (8 subspecies, 3 in Calif.) is a fairly common resident of the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada, where it resides between 6,000 and 12,400'. It is also fairly common in the northwestern and north-central portions of the state; but its status in Southern Calif. is unclear. The Mt. Pinos subspecies was last observed on Mt. Abel, in Kern Co., in 1957, and the existence of a relict population in the San Jacintos was postulated by a sight report in 1971. The species feeds primarily on the needles of fir trees, preferring the margins of true fir (*Abies*) and Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga*) forests, while tending to avoid pure redwood forests. Breeding at lower elevations, the Blue Grouse spends the fall and winter at or above timberline. To accomplish this, it undertakes a two-month vertical migration (often covering a horizontal distance of some 30 miles).

The reproductive behavior of the species, while not so complex as that of the Sage Grouse, is still interesting. Upon arrival on the breeding ground, or when snow conditions permit, the males immediately become territorial. Displays include the inflation of yellow-to-reddish air sacs, wing clapping, drumming, and tail fanning. These performances are staged on the ground, in fir trees, and in the air, to the accompaniment of constant vocalization. As a rule, there is no *lek*; the female's nest is not always associated with the male's hooting site; and the males' territories are not con-

tiguous. Though the Blue Grouse is basically polygamous, exceptions do occur, for a strong pair bond lasting throughout the breeding season has been known to develop within various local populations. The female, again without help from the male, produces an average clutch of 8 eggs.

The **Ruffed Grouse** (10 subspecies, 1 in Calif.) prefers a habitat composed of dense growths of deciduous and coniferous trees along streams or in deep canyon bottoms. While nowhere common in Calif., the species is found quite locally in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties, and has been reported in Trinity and Siskyou Counties. About 16-19" long, the Ruffed Grouse is the smallest of our native grouse. Its preferred foods are twigs and buds in winter, berries and fruit in summer. Due to the high water content of these foods, standing water is not thought to be needed. The bird's reproductive behavior, as in the Blue Grouse, falls somewhere between the nearly monogamous pair bond of the quails and the lek system of the Sage Grouse. Though lacking air sacs, the males nonetheless present a distinctive display, with hissing, neck fanning, and "strutting." No lek is formed, but "activity clusters" have been observed, in which up to 8 males perform in fairly close proximity. An average clutch of 11 eggs is produced, with the female totally responsible for incubating the eggs and rearing the young.

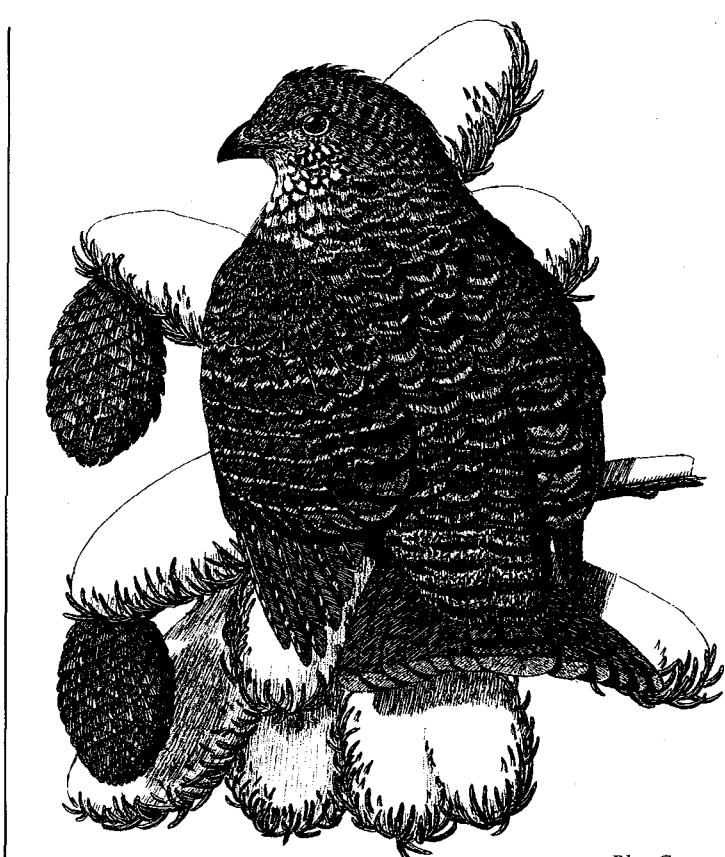
The **Sharp-tailed Grouse** is extinct within California and is rapidly declining through much of the remainder of its range. Formerly inhabiting the grassland and sagebrush of the semidesert northeastern plateau region, the species was last reported in Calif. in 1915. As a result of the same combination of factors which have reduced the range of the Sage Grouse, the Sharp-tailed in California is now no more than a memory.

INTRODUCED GALLIFORMS

While some of California's native galliforms have declined due to habitat destruction, alien species have been introduced in an attempt to fill vacated niches with species capable of thriving with little assistance from man.

The most obviously successful introduction is the **Ring-necked Pheasant** (*Phasianus colchicus*). First introduced from China in 1889 by the California Fish and Game Commission (CFGC), this true pheasant is now established in many areas where grain is available—such as brushy fields, on cultivated lands where the ground is relatively moist, or near open sections of river bottoms—wherever food and water are easily obtained. It has, however, not been established in woodlands or chaparral. In its adopted home the bird breeds freely (8-15 eggs per clutch), and it has proved of significant economic value as a game species.

In 1877, wild **Turkeys** of the subspecies *Meleagris gallopavo merriami* were introduced onto Santa Cruz Island. Then in 1908, the CFGC released 22 birds into the San Bernardino Mtns. While unsuccessful on a long-term basis, these initial plantings prompted continued introductions throughout the state. Finally, in 1968, it was decided that the populations in various areas were stable enough to permit a one-day hunting season (since expanded). Today the Turkey is established as a breeding species in Mendocino, Santa Clara, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Riverside Counties, occurring locally, as well, in the Sierran foothills. The species prefers riparian, oak, or transition woodlands, and is solitary only during the breeding season. Primarily vegetarian, it



Blue Grouse

H. Lee Jones

subsists on a diet composed of about 15% insects and other small invertebrates. Eight to fifteen eggs are laid, with nest building, incubation, and the care of the young relegated entirely to the female.

Commencing in 1877, attempts were made to introduce the European, or **Gray Partridge** (*Perdix perdix*) into areas of the state from Modoc and Lassen Counties to San Diego County. As of this writing, successful establishment is uncertain. However, in 1932 another partridge, the **Chukar** (*Alectoris graeca chukar*) was introduced from stock obtained from India. This planting has proved to be successful, and the species is now established in the sagebrush and saltbush communities of the dry and arid foothills of desert areas from northern Siskiyou County to Kern and San Bernardino Counties in the south.

The most recent galliform introduction took place in 1971 and 1972. **White-tailed Ptarmigan** (*Lagopus leucurus*), a bird of the alpine tundra, was introduced at Mono Pass near Yosemite by the California Dept. of Fish and Game. The rationale for the addition of this species to the alpine community was to increase hunting opportunities along the Sierran Crest. However foolhardy this thinking may be, the species appears to be successfully advancing, as birds were found up to 20 miles from the site of introduction 4 years later.

One final thought: The next time you are on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, be sure to look on the rooftops of the homes in the area. You just might see another of California's introduced galliforms. It seems that a stable, feral population of **Indian Peafowl** (*Pavo cristatus*) has made itself right at home—a testament to the hardiness and adaptability of this fascinating and diverse order of birds. 

Jean Brandt/BIRDING along

The Colorado River Pt. II

The Colorado River is historically renowned for its birding habitats. Though much has been lost as a result of human encroachment, much also has been gained: Witness the fine birding around the dams, parks, and ranches. In the March 1977 *Tanager* we covered birding locations along the stretch of the river from Yuma to the Imperial Dam. Here we begin at the Imperial/Riverside Co. line and continue north to Parker Dam.

In winter, the agricultural fields along Hwy. 78 north of the Imperial Co. line (1) often host flocks of Mountain Plover and Horned Larks. And whenever you find flocks of larks, be sure to check for longspurs. Prairie Falcons, Ferruginous Hawks, and (rare) Rough-legged Hawks may also be found wintering here. In addition, be sure to check the blackbird flocks for Yellow-headed Blackbirds.

The only native cottonwoods along the river are to be found on private property—ranches and trailer parks. Most people welcome birders, provided you *request permission first*. The trees and adjacent lawns may offer excellent birding. North of Blythe (2), check such areas for nesting Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Wied's Crested Flycatcher, Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, and Vermilion Flycatchers. Though uncommon, all occur regularly. From mid-April to late July, look in the trees and lawns for Bronzed Cowbirds, which parasitize the nesting Northern Orioles. **Mayflower County Park**, north of Blythe (3), supports resident Inca Doves. In August '78, a Thick-billed Kingbird was found at **Sue Clark's ranch** (4), north of Desert Oasis. Mrs. Clark welcomes birders, and all of the birds noted above have been seen on her property.

Farther north, **Lost Lake Resort** (or Lost Lake Oasis) (5) boasts another good stand of trees. Vermilion Flycatchers nest here, and the area should be checked for migrants (mid-April to mid-May, Sept. -Oct.) and for vagrants (late May thru June, Oct. thru Nov.). Among the birds that have wintered (uncommonly) here are the "Plumbeous" Solitary Vireo, Northern Waterthrush, American Redstart, and Gray-headed Junco. In addition, this is a good place to study the races of sapsuckers (*nuchalis* primarily, with a few *daggettii* and some intergrades. The eastern *varius* race has also been found nearby).

One of the few places in California where you can find "real" Cardinals (the ones at El Monte are introduced) is south of Earp. Search in the brush and mesquite south of **Wheel-Er-In** (6) (but note that Wheel-Er-In itself is *strictly* off limits to birders). You can also find Gambel's Quail, Ground Doves, Black-tailed Gnatcatchers, Lucy's Warblers (late March thru July), Crissal Thrashers (secretive),

and Abert's Towhees here. The **Riverview Trailer Park** (7), north of Earp (ask permission) may harbor more Inca Doves than any other locality in California. In winter scan the river here for Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Lesser Scaup, American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Gadwall, and such rarities as Barrow's Goldeneye (winter '78) and Wood Ducks.

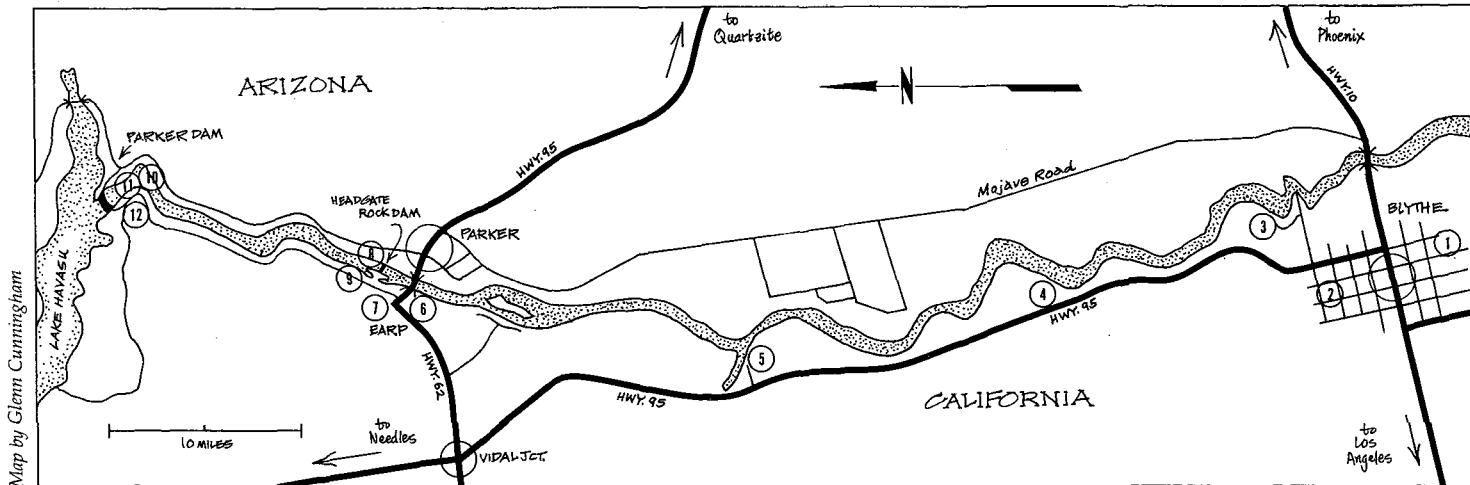
Headgate Rock Dam (8), north of Earp, had California's first Brown Booby plus many Roseate Spoonbills during the summer of '73. There are reeds and a marsh here, and a few of the endangered *yumanensis* race of the Clapper Rail are resident.

North of here, the river flows through a lovely **gorge** (9), whose slopes are home to both Rock and Canyon Wrens.

About 3 miles below **Parker Dam** (10) there is a sharp bend in the river. This spot is the best place along the Colorado for Greater Scaup—and the only place where Arizonans can see the species within their state. Huge flocks of Common Goldeneyes (up to about 750) and Common Mergansers are found here from late Nov. to mid-March. One or two Hooded Mergansers are regular in winter, plus Red-breasted Mergansers (mainly on migration). Closer to the **base of Parker Dam** (11), up to ten Barrow's Goldeneyes have been seen with the Commons. Always look for ducks here at first light, because the boaters start at about 8:00 a.m., and the ducks then forsake the river for Lake Havasu, where they are impossible to see. Most of the wintering gulls on the river are also found below Parker Dam. Check through the large flocks of Ring-billed Gulls for a few Herrings (regular), occasional Bonaparte's, and a possible accidental—such as the Black-legged Kittiwake which appeared there in Nov. '78.

Government Camp (12) is an area of about 100 homes just south of the road to Black Meadow Landing. Ask permission to gain access to the Power Plant. This area is very good for migrants, including transient Calliope Hummingbirds (mid-April) in the flowering plants. All of the species noted for location (2) may be found here. A few Inca Doves are resident. Rarities include the Hepatic Tanager and Coues' Flycatcher (winter '77 and '78). Violet-green Swallows nest in the steep bluffs above the river—the only area in the lowlands of southeastern California where this normally-montane species may be seen.

All services are readily available along the route, with good motels and restaurants at Blythe and at Parker (Ariz.). The So. Calif. Auto Club has an excellent map (*Guide to the Colorado River*). Be prepared for intense heat in summer. ☀



Jon Dunn/FIELD NOTES

Loggerhead/Northern Shrikes

The American shrikes sometimes present problems in field identification, due in part to the fact that the field guides fail to emphasize the best marks. Observers in So. Calif. should be warned that although the Loggerhead Shrike predominates throughout the year, the Northern Shrike is an increasingly regular winter visitant to the northern portion of the region.

The **Loggerhead Shrike** is a very widespread species, found fairly commonly in relatively open country throughout So. Calif. Though in winter the species withdraws from northeastern Calif., it remains numerous during the colder months in So. Calif., even in the frigid Owen's Valley east of the southern Sierra.

The **Northern Shrike** is an arctic breeder that winters fairly commonly in varying numbers from year-to-year south to northeastern Calif.—where it significantly outnumbers the Loggerhead Shrike in winter.

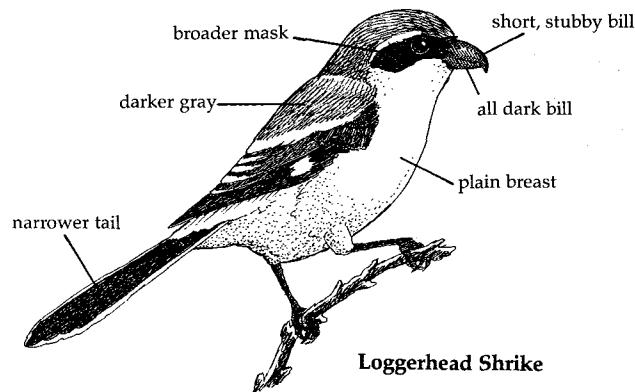
The first Northern Shrike in So. Calif. was recorded on Nov. 15, 1969 in Inyo Co., and since then the species has proved to be a regular winter visitant to the county, with at least a few found in almost every winter. South of Inyo Co. there were only four records prior to last winter, when a major invasion occurred, with six birds in the Antelope Valley alone and a total of five scattered elsewhere south of Inyo Co. Of particular note was the bird at McGrath St. Beach from Jan. 27-Feb. 3—the only coastal record for So. Calif. While last year's invasion was remarkable, it is likely that the species had been overlooked in previous years. Birder coverage in the areas now producing Northern Shrikes was not at all thorough.

The Northern Shrike appears noticeably *larger, heftier, bigger-headed, and longer and broader-tailed* than the Loggerhead Shrike, but one of the best marks is the bill: the Loggerhead's appears *shorter and more stubby* than that of the Northern, with a much *less prominent hook* at the tip. In addition, the adult Northern is a much *paler gray* overall than the Loggerhead, particularly on the upperparts; and the Northern has a *much thinner black facial mask*.

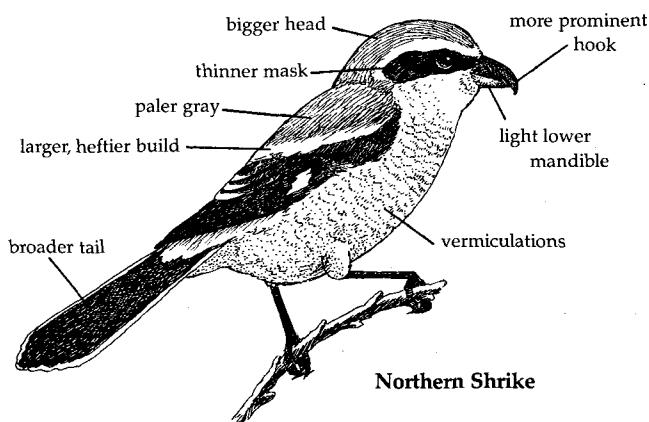
In my opinion, little stock should be placed in the color of the mandible, or in the vermiculations on the underparts of the Northern, for while these marks are present and distinctive, they are usually visible only at very close range. Matters are further complicated by the fact that the Northern is often very difficult to approach closely.

During the winter, adult and immature Northerns occur in So. Calif. in roughly equal numbers. The immature Northern is much easier to identify than the adult because of its *brownish* overall coloration, plus the distinctive *dusky-brown bars* across the underparts.

While juvenal Loggerheads are also brown, by late summer they have molted into adult plumage. Therefore, any brownish shrike seen in late fall and winter may be assumed to be a Northern. Toward mid-winter, immature Northerns gradually begin to develop some gray, particularly on the back, and by the end of the winter they are largely gray, normally retaining a trace of brown. However, these late winter birds never appear quite so pale as the adults. 



Loggerhead Shrike



Northern Shrike

Illustration by Ray Robinson

Convergence Quiz

It is interesting to note the results of *convergent evolution*, the process by which species of widely different origins come to resemble one another when they fill similar ecological niches. To illustrate this we have made up two lists of roughly-equivalent birds from two distinct avian orders: the owls (which are primarily nocturnal), and the hawks (which are almost exclusively diurnal). The test: to match the birds from Column 1 with their equivalents in Column 2, taking into consideration size, habitat, habits, and food preferences. *Answers will appear next month.*

HAWKS

1. Goshawk
2. Kestrel
3. Gyrfalcon
4. Northern Harrier
5. Merlin
6. Red-shouldered Hawk
7. Red-tailed Hawk
8. Rough-legged Hawk
9. Swainson's Hawk

OWLS

- A. Great Gray Owl
- B. Great Horned Owl
- C. Hawk Owl
- D. Long-eared Owl
- E. Pygmy Owl
- F. Screech Owl
- G. Short-eared Owl
- H. Spotted Owl
- I. Snowy Owl

Audubon Bookstore

Among the new books recently added to the stock are the following: **A GUIDE TO THE NATIONAL PARKS OF ZAMBIA**, Clarke and Loe, \$9.95

BIRDS OF SONOMA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, \$4.95

FIELD CHECKLIST OF THE BIRDS OF HONG KONG, \$1.50

RAPTORS OF CALIFORNIA (Dept. of Fish and Game), \$1.50

Shumway Suffel

BIRDS of the Season



March is a month of change, not quite winter, but not yet spring. This is particularly true in the avian world, as many winter birds are still with us and the earliest spring migrants have already arrived. Despite the coldest winter in this century, swallows, at least, were very early, with many **Rough-wings**, and at least two **Cliff Swallows** at Unit 1 of the Salton Sea Refuge on Jan. 28 (John McDonald), plus a **Barn** and a **Cliff Swallow** near Ventura the same weekend (Richard Webster). The first report of a migrant **Allen's Hummingbird** (there is a resident race on the offshore islands and Palos Verdes Peninsula) was a male at Malibu on Jan. 14 (Kimball Garrett). A few days later several were seen in the Santa Barbara area.

Santa Barbara was a magnet for LAAS birders during January, as most of the birds found on their Christmas Count stayed well into the month. Among these: the **European Wigeon**; **Golden Plover**; **Prothonotary**, **Black-throated Green**, and **Palm Warblers**; one or two **Orchard Orioles**; and one **Harris' Sparrow**. In January, birders visiting the area found a **Broad-winged Hawk**, a **Black-and-white Warbler** (Nancy Spear, Jan. 19), and a **Rusty Blackbird** (Guy and Louise Commeau, Jan. 22). Three **Whistling Swans**, nine **Bald Eagles**, and 200 **Violet-green Swallows** were at nearby Lake Cachuma (large numbers of each for this area in winter).

Near Oceanside, the pair of **Hepatic Tanagers** stayed on through January; a **Black-and-white Warbler** was in a nearby park, and the **Harlequin Duck** was back again near the power plant; but the **European Wigeon** which has visited Whalen Lake for the past few winters failed to show. The Riverside area, capably covered by Gene and Steve Cardiff, among others, produced two **Thayer's Gulls** (uncommon inland), three **Solitary Vireos**, including one of the "Plumbeous" race, a **Black-and-white** and a **Tennessee Warbler** (in Fairmount Park), and a **Magnolia Warbler**—in the UCR Botanic Garden. A **Broad-billed Hummingbird** at a nearby feeder was the eighth in the last three years, after 10 years without a sighting in So. Calif.

The LAAS field trip to the south end of the Salton Sea on Jan. 27 was a great success, despite limited access to many areas due to the heavy rains during the week, plus the high level of the Sea itself. The spectacle of 15,000 **Snow Geese** milling in the fields and flying overhead in the brilliant sunshine would have made the day, but in addition there was the exhilarating challenge of extricating from this flock some 20+ **Ross' Geese**, plus two adult and two imm. "Blue" **Geese**. Appropriately, the most satisfying experience of the trip came as the sun set over Finney Lake. A **Least Bittern** stood motionless on the shore, apparently unaware of a jostling crowd of birders and photographers only 10 feet away. Among other notable sightings during the day were hundreds of egrets of three species, three **American Bitterns**, several **White-faced Ibis**, some 4,000 **Canada Geese**, ten species of ducks, twelve species of shorebirds, and many landbirds, including **Ground Doves** and a **Great-tailed**



Grackle. Adjoining areas were covered the day before and the day afterward, adding 25 **White-fronted Geese**, a **Ferruginous Hawk**, a **Prairie Falcon**, **Burrowing** and **Short-eared Owls**, and **Mountain Plovers**. On Jan. 28 Terry Clark found two **Rough-legged Hawks**, another **Ferruginous Hawk**, several **Gila Woodpeckers**, and two flocks of **Mountain Plovers** below Brawley. Earlier in the month two **McCown's Longspurs** and several **Mountain Plovers** were in a large field east of Niland (Jon Dunn, Dec. 28, Jan. 18). At Salton City a female **Barrow's Goldeneye** was a first for this species at the Sea (Guy McCaskie). Four **Gull-billed Terns** at the south end of the Sea on Dec. 16, and two at the north end (Larry Sansone, Jan. 20) were the third and fourth winter records for this species.

Along the Colorado River below Parker Dam, the Christmas Count revealed **Greater Scaup** (seldom seen inland), both **Common** and **Barrow's Goldeneyes**, **Inca Doves** (of course), and for the second year, a **Coues' Flycatcher**. On Dec. 12, farther down the river near Yuma, Jon Dunn glimpsed a thrasher which appeared to be a **Curve-billed**. It disappeared over a bush; but on the far side Jon found a **Crissal Thrasher** (not unusual there). A month later, on Jan. 19, the scenario was repeated; but this time a **Crissal** and a **Curve-billed Thrasher** (very unusual there) were waiting on the far side of the bush.

Locally there were scattered reports of interest. Two **Whistling Swans** at Bolsa Chica increased our already-high winter count. A pair of **Hooded Mergansers** and three **Common Goldeneyes** were the object of Lyn Shively's search as she birded from the high bank at the edge of Malibu Lagoon on New Year's afternoon—when an earthquake, with its epicenter only four miles offshore, carried the bank away, very nearly taking her with it. Also at disaster-prone Malibu, Gail and Fritz Baumgarten had to cut short their birding on Jan. 28, because it was *snowing*.

Our sole report of an **Oldsquaw** comes from Hank Brodin, who found an imm. male in the channel near his home in Marina del Rey, Jan. 29. Hank reports sighting only three or four **Kittiwakes** at King Harbor, a locality where 30-40 of the birds normally winter.

Black and Say's Phoebes are the only regular and common flycatchers here in winter; yet every year a few other species occur in very small numbers. Among those present this year: an **Ash-throated Flycatcher** at the Oak Cyn. Nature Center near Anaheim (Doug Willick, Jan. 10); the previously-mentioned **Eastern Phoebe** at the Arcadia Arboretum; the two **Least Flycatchers** (one at Yuma, the other near Fillmore); and the three **Vermilion Flycatchers** (also near Fillmore). In addition, a **Western Flycatcher** was glimpsed twice at the Arcadia Arboretum (Hal Baxter, Jan. 7, and Barbara Cohen the next week). Most of these birds stayed through January.

A **Varied Thrush** in the riparian growth along the Santa Clara River (Ed Navojosky) was only our second report south of Santa Barbara this winter. Warblers, too, except for the ubiquitous "Yellow-rumps," are a winter rarity—but **Black-throated Grays**, **Townsend's**, and an occasional **Wil-**

son's were sparingly, but widely reported. Winter orioles were fewer than usual this year, with a very few on the Christmas Counts, and an imm. male **Hooded Oriole** near Anaheim (Doug Willick, Jan. 10).

Our early and ample winter rains should insure a bumper crop of spring wildflowers, plus an abundance of insects for the birds. Unfortunately, however, there is no guarantee that migrants will be easy to find, particularly in early March. But before the month has ended we should have recorded "firsts" on kingbirds, Empidonax flycatchers, Warbling Vireos, several warblers, and both orioles. 

Santa Monica Mountains

In an act of historic significance for Southern California, Congress in October passed a bill providing \$125 million to purchase lands for the Santa Monica Mts. National Recreation Area (NRA), with an additional \$30 million to develop existing parks and to purchase natural areas within Los Angeles. Over a decade has passed since efforts commenced to create a national park and seashore area within the more than 220,000 acres of canyons, streams, grasslands, chaparral, oak woodlands, marshes, and lagoons of the Santa Monica Mountains. With the exception of the three State Parks (Topanga, Malibu Creek, and Pt. Mugu) it has not as yet been determined which other lands will be included in the NRA. Our continued support is therefore required to insure that the final plans for the NRA provide maximum protection for the more sensitive biota, and that the best remaining natural areas are acquired before further encroachment occurs.

Coastal Action Alert

The promises of the 1976 Coastal Act to protect our coastal environment could be retracted unless our legislators hear from us soon. By monitoring development along the coast, the Coastal Commission has attracted powerful opponents among prospective developers—and the threats to amend and weaken the Coastal Act are real. The future of such wetland areas as Ballona Creek hangs in the balance; as does the ability of the Coastal Commission to limit development in the Santa Monica Mts. during the sensitive interim period while the boundaries of the National Recreation Area are being defined. **Letters supporting an unweakened Coastal Act should be sent to Gov. Ed. G. Brown, Jr., Sen. James Mills, and/or Speaker of the Assembly Leo McCarthy, State Capitol, Sacramento, Calif. 95814.**



WESTERN TANAGER

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Steve Strann/BOOKS

THE HERONS OF THE WORLD, by James Hancock and Hugh Elliott, paintings by Robert Gillmor and Peter Hayman. Harper and Row, New York, 1978: 304 pp, 63 color plates, line drawings, maps, slip cased. \$65.00.

In the past few years we have witnessed a proliferation of ornithological monographs. Four or five works on waterfowl (the subject of a future report), magnificent illustrated treatises on parrots and birds of paradise, and reviews of the pigeons and crows have all been released. Now a group of British authors and illustrators have collaborated to present an analysis of the family Ardeidae—the Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns. Generous in size (13 3/4" x 9") and lavishly composed, this new effort is a welcome addition to the bird enthusiast's bookshelf.

Who is not familiar with the Heron family? All one has to do is to drive California's highways to observe Snowy and Great Egrets, or to watch Great Blue Herons standing in open fields or near water. Placed in the order Ciconiiformes, the Ardeidae is a cosmopolitan family with representatives throughout the temperate and tropical world. The family is further divided into two subfamilies: the Typical Herons (Ardeinae) and the Bitterns (Botaurinae). Subsequent taxonomic division is discussed by the present authors in an open manner, recognizing the current state of confusion that exists in the family. The authors recognize 61 species, based primarily on the 1956 revision of the Ardeidae by W. Bock. This is by no means a definitive conclusion, however, as species are continually being lumped or split. (Clements lists 64 species in his revised World Checklist, and he claims to have lumped whenever possible). A good example is the Great Egret; this species is variously placed, by different authors, in *Ardea*, *Egretta*, or *Casmerodius*. To the authors' credit, an extensive bibliography of almost 1000 titles has been included so that the reader may locate the primary research material, in order to better understand the basis of a particular decision.

The book is divided into two sections. The introductory chapters cover general topics concerning the Ardeidae. Problems and features of classification, plumage and moult, feeding, migration and dispersal (with a special section on the range expansion of the Cattle Egret), and conservation are presented in a brief but informative manner. The second section of the monograph is devoted to individual species accounts. Each account details the distribution, migration and habitat, the general appearance and identification, and the behavior of the birds. In some cases, where unusual taxonomic complexity or confusion is apparent, a special section devoted to this problem is included. Recognized subspecies are listed and all data is copiously referenced. The information is well presented and provides a wealth of knowledge that is easily accessible.

As is true with many of the recent monographs, the illustrations comprise a major portion of this work. Each species account is accompanied by a full page illustration of the species under discussion. Gillmor and Hayman have endeavored to present the birds in lifelike settings and in postures corresponding to those most commonly found in the field. Where two or more morphs exist within a particular species, representative samples are displayed (the Green Heron and the Western Reef Heron are examples). In some cases immature plumages are also illustrated. For the most part the illustrators have achieved their goal, but Gillmor's work, which includes the line drawings interspersed throughout the text, appeals more to me, as his birds seem to be more natural, and more accurately proportioned than Hayman's.

My general feeling is that *The Herons of the World* is a success, for it is not only a beautiful book, but an important addition to the ornithological literature. 

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 4 days 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, MARCH 1 —Executive Board Meeting, 8:00 p.m., Audubon House.

SATURDAY, MARCH 3 — **Santa Barbara.** Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Andree Clark Bird Refuge. Exit from Hwy. 101 before reaching the traffic lights at Cabrillo Blvd. and proceed under the fwy., turning right into the dirt parking lot along the N.W. side of the lake. We should see numerous Allen's Hummingbirds, plus those wintering rarities still present. Leaders: Paul Lehman and Louis Bevier, 805-968-7394.

FRIDAY, MARCH 9 — **Gull Workshop at Malibu Lagoon.** Meet at the ocean side of the lagoon at 12 noon. Take Hwy. 1 past Malibu Pier, and park in the lot on the north side of the bridge. Leader: Jon Dunn, 981-1841.

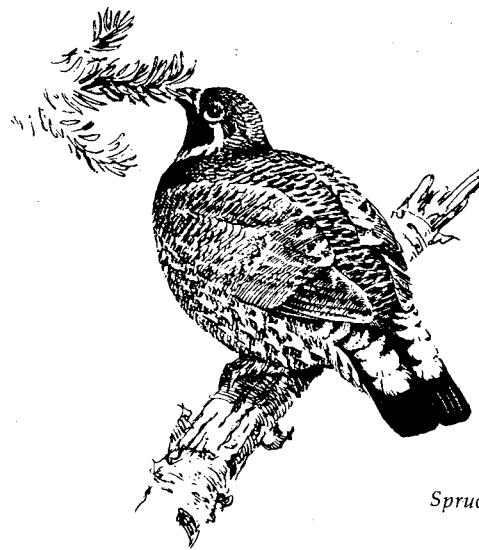
TUESDAY, MARCH 13 — **Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m.,** Plummer Park. Noted field ornithologist **Arnold Small** will explore **The Lure of the Alaskan List** — an account of birding adventures in the outer islands of the Bering Sea.

SATURDAY, MARCH 17 — **Beginner's Walk: An Introduction to Birding.** Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Tapia Park parking area (to the left as you enter the main gate). Take Las Virgenes Rd. toward the coast from Hwy. 101; or go north 4.5 miles on Malibu Cyn. Rd., from Hwy. 1. Leader: Art Cupples, 981-4746.

SATURDAY, MARCH 24 — **Big Sycamore Cyn, and McGrath State Beach.** Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the parking lot at the entrance to Pt. Mugu State Park. Take Hwy. 1 five miles past the Ventura Co. line. Leader: Richard Webster, 805-487-1012.

SATURDAY, MARCH 24 — **Bodega Bay to Cordelle Bank Pelagic Trip.** Departure at 7:00 a.m. aboard the *Sea Angler* from Tides Landing, Bodega Bay, with return at 2:30 p.m. Price: \$22.00 per person. Leaders: Jon Dunn, Phil Sayre, Arnold Small.

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



Spruce Grouse

SATURDAY, APRIL 7 — **Antelope Valley.** Meet at the parking lot on Hwy. 14 overlooking Lake Palmdale (south of Palmdale). The turnout is just before you drop into the valley. Wildflowers and early migrants are likely. Leader: Jon Dunn, 981-1841.

TUESDAY, APRIL 10 — **Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m.,** Plummer Park. **Bob Van Meter** will present a film tour of **Ecuador and the Galapagos.** Mr. Van Meter is a dedicated amateur with a lifelong interest in nature. His film documents the wildlife, the birds (including Darwin Finches), the insects, plants, and people encountered on this expedition, described in the Feb. 1979 *Western Tanager*.

MONDAY-FRIDAY, APRIL 16-20 — **The Islands of Baja.** A four-day natural history tour sponsored by San Diego Audubon Society. The 85-foot *H & M. Mascot VI* will tour the Los Coronados, Todos Santos, and the islands of San Martin, San Geronimo, and the rarely-visited Isla Guadalupe — home of the elephant seals and Guadalupe Fur Seal. Expert naturalists will lead the trip. Cost: \$255, all meals included. For info. write or call Bill Everett, 4461 Olive Avenue, La Mesa, California 92041 (714-464-7251).

SATURDAY, APRIL 28 — **San Pedro to Osborne Banks Pelagic Trip.** Departure at 6:00 a.m. aboard the *Vantuna* from USC Dock at San Pedro, with return at 6:00 p.m. Price: \$18.00 per person. Leaders: Jon Dunn and Olga Clarke.

California Native Plant Society

Both members and nonmembers alike are invited to attend the monthly field trips, lectures, and wildflower slide shows presented by the Santa Monica Mtns. Chapter of the Calif. Native Plant Society. Meetings are held at the Santa Monica Library. Contact Grace Heintz (396-8756) or Nancy Dale (346-4925) for further information.

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