

WESTERN TANAGER

Los Angeles Audubon Society

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ONE LAST LOOK

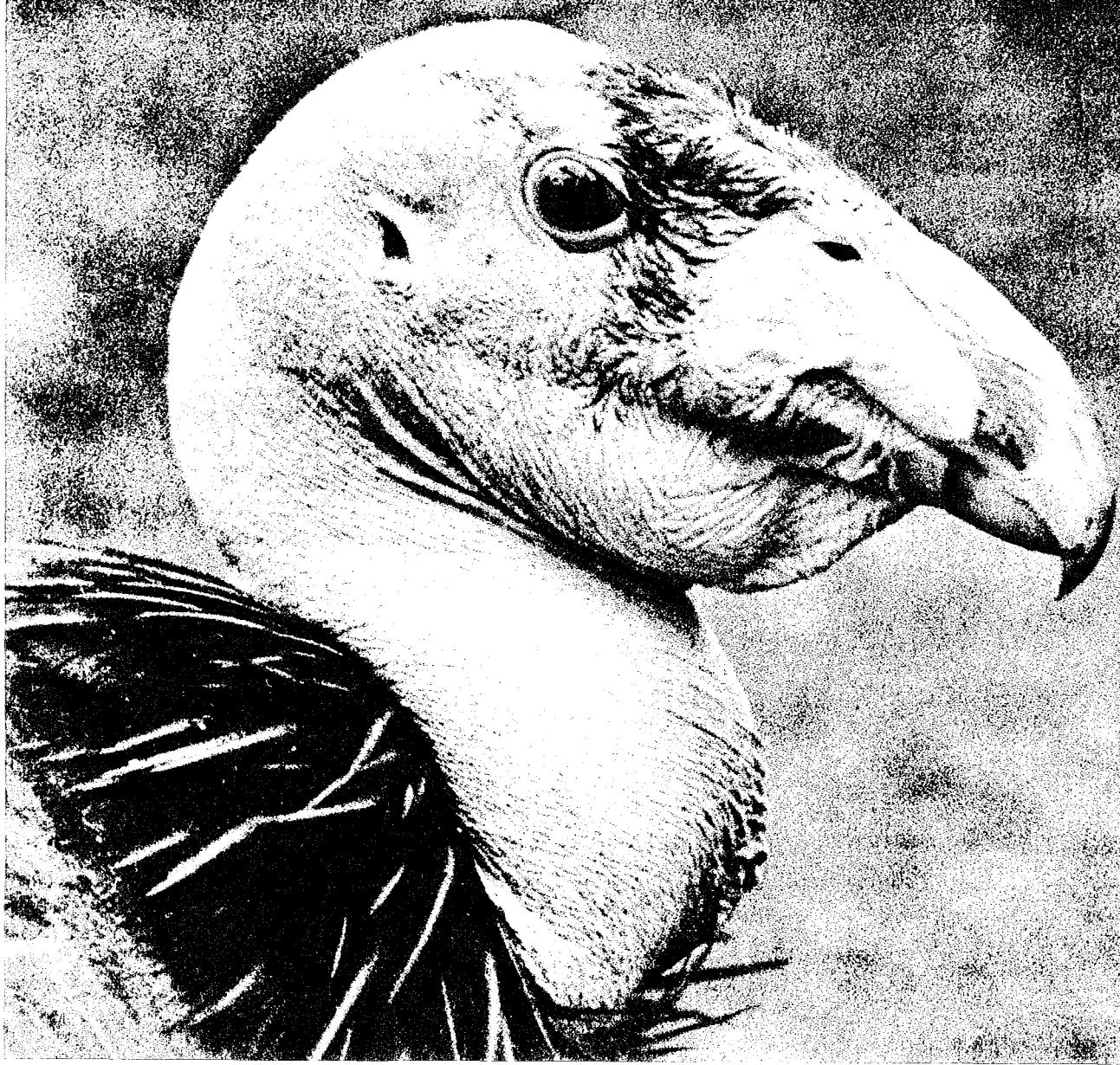


Photo by Sy Osteroff

CALIFORNIA CONDOR: A Captive History

by Mike Cunningham

The California Condor is North America's largest flying bird. The average weight of this species is 22 pounds and the wing spread is over nine and one half feet. The condor is a vulture and, despite its fierce appearance, does not kill its food.

The massive scavenger was at its peak in the Pleistocene Age when it ranged widely in western and southern North America. More recently the range still covered the west coast from British Columbia to Baja California. In the late 1800's the range shrank even more to include only California, although rumors persist that there is an isolated population in the remote mountains of Baja. The present range of the California Condor is a horseshoe shaped area surrounding the south end of the San Joaquin Valley.

The decline in the condor population from prehistoric numbers was probably due to the disappearance of the large herds of animals which once roamed the continent. More recently human population expansion has significantly limited the range over which the condor can forage.

California Indian tribes used condor feathers and other body parts (sometimes live birds) in various rituals and tribal ceremonies. During the gold rush, condor quills were used as dust containers. But probably scientific and hobby collecting of birds and eggs had the most drastic effect on the total population. In a little over one hundred years, there are records of 177 condors killed and 71 eggs taken for collection. During this time, 24 birds were taken alive as pets or public exhibits.

At the turn of the century the population was already alarmingly sparse. Shooting and indiscriminate pest poisoning may have then, and now, taken a great toll on the fragile population. There are very few statistics to substantiate these problems....

All of the problems, together with natural attrition have made their impact on the total California Condor picture.

The following list will show some of the captive occurrences in the history of this species:

- 1866 — One bird received alive - London Zoological Society
- 1898 — One pet bird - H. Rising.
- 1899 — One bird captured alive in San Diego County - F. Stephens.
- 1901 — One pet bird - Frank H. Holmes.
- About 1900 — Five birds - New York Zoological Society (three birds still alive in 1912).
- 1901, 1903, 1909 — three birds - National Zoo - infertile eggs laid 1924.

Mike Cunningham is curator of birds at the Los Angeles Zoo. He has been responsible for the care and well-being of Topatopa the world's only captive California Condor, most of the years since it was found abandoned 12 years ago.

HOW FEW IS ENOUGH? The Case For Captive Breeding

by Lloyd Kiff

The California Condor is perilously close to extinction. Official estimates place the existing population at "around 30," but there is ample reason to believe that no more than 20 of the huge birds still soar over their relatively vast wishbone-shaped range in the heart of California. Since the arrival of the white man on the Pacific coast, condor numbers have declined continuously, but losses during the past 15 years or so have been catastrophic. This appears primarily to be due to their poor reproductive performance. Between 1968 and 1975 the *entire* population successfully fledged an average of only 1.5 young per year. Furthermore, during the past two years there apparently has not been a single successful condor nesting attempt.

Clearly, the conservation measures taken on behalf of this species in the past have not been adequate to maintain the population, although these measures are probably the chief reason that any birds are left at present. While it is imperative to continue such conservation practices as protecting nesting and feeding areas, preventing shooting of the birds, and educating the public about the plight of the condor, it has become obvious that these traditional measures alone will not result in a recovery of the condor population. If the species is to be saved and if its numbers are to be restored to a reasonably secure level, something more must be done.

Nearly every biologist that has examined the condor's current predicament in any detail has concluded that the only hope left for the species is a long-term, large-scale program that includes captive propagation. Captive breeding has been successful with nearly every bird species with which it has been attempted, ranging from ostriches to hummingbirds, and recent interest in this technique as a conservation tool has led to constant improvements in methodology.

Although California Condors have not been bred in captivity, this is due simply to the fact that an adult male condor and an adult female condor have not been placed together at an appropriate time. The similar Andean Condor has proved to be unusually tractable in captivity and was bred successfully in captivity in Europe as early as the 1840's. That species has now produced young in at least 10 different zoological collections on four continents. Other New World vultures, including Turkey Vultures, Black Vultures, and King Vultures, as well as the large Griffon Vulture of Europe have also successfully produced young in captivity.

The principal advantage of a captive propagation program is that it provides an opportunity to increase California Condor productivity over the inherently low natural rate, which

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Mike Cunningham—

1908 to 1928 — One pet bird - W. L. Finley.
 1917 — One bird - Golden Gate Park, San Francisco.
 1923 — One bird - Selig Zoo, Los Angeles.
 About 1930 — One bird with an amputated wing - San Diego Zoo.
 1953 — San Diego Zoo received a permit to capture California Condors for captive propagation; public outrage and inability to capture any birds caused them to abort the project.
 1966 — One bird, apparently poisoned, received at Los Angeles Zoo - released after treatment and recovery.
 1967 — One bird received at Los Angeles Zoo (still in captivity).
 1976 — One bird received at Los Angeles Zoo - shot in wing, died during treatment.

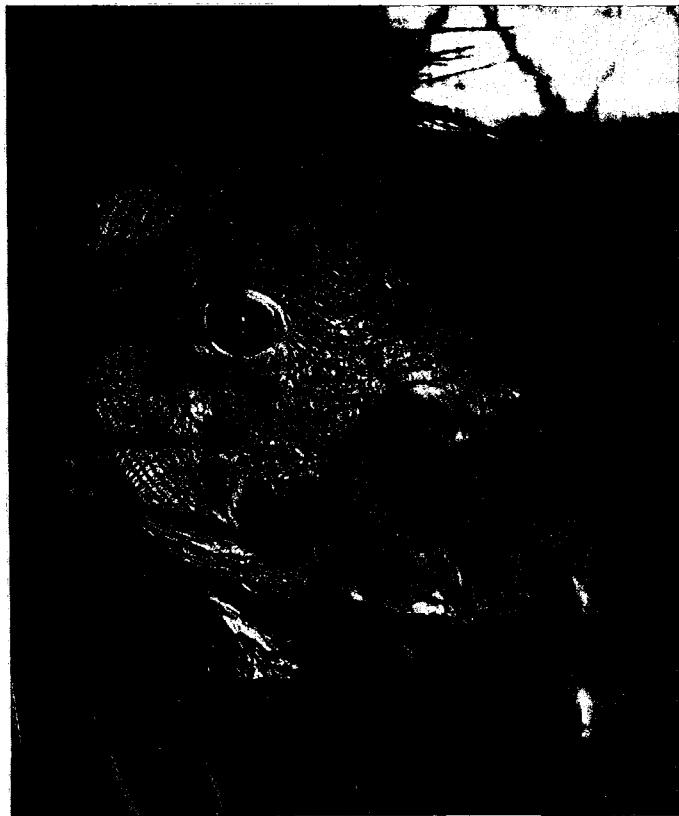


Photo by Sy Oskeroff

The three most recent captive California Condors have been at the Los Angeles Zoo and the author has been involved in their care.

January 3, 1966—Los Alamos condor—an adult California Condor was brought to the Los Angeles Zoo. It was partially paralyzed and thought to be suffering from strychnine poisoning. The bird was placed in a quiet area and heavily fed so that it could regain strength. The bird regained normal motion and behavior and was released into the range on January 12, 1966.

February 13, 1967—Matilija Canyon Condor—an immature bird, named Topatopa, was found weak and apparently

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Photo by Sy Oskeroff

normally results in a maximum of one young produced by each breeding pair every two years. It is presumed that female California Condors, as with Andean Condors, will usually lay another egg in the same season if the first egg is removed; thus, the potential yield of young is two per year, or four times as many as in the wild. It is unlikely that such high productivity could ever be achieved, at least for many years by a single female, but doubling the natural reproductive rate is not an unlikely possibility.

As a technique for restoring the California Condor population, captive propagation has been endorsed by the American Ornithologists' Union and the Cooper Ornithological Society. The National Audubon Society not only strongly supports the notion, but has been instrumental in the development of the specific details of a captive propagation proposal presently nearing final approval by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

This proposal is an integral part of the revised California Condor Recovery Plan, which also provides for an expanded field research program on the free-flying condor population. This ambitious plan calls for an attempt to capture and mark all living condors, to equip many of the released birds with light weight radio transmitters, and to retain several immature birds for a captive breeding program. Initial breeding attempts will be undertaken at a special condor propagation facility to be constructed off public view at the San Diego Wild Animal Park.

The immediate objective of this aspect of the condor program is to establish a healthy captive breeding population that will serve as a buffer against total extinction of the species in case the free-living population meets with total disaster. The ultimate goal is to use captive-reared condors to establish new populations in the wild, or to increase existing populations.

In addition to providing the opportunity to obtain suitable individuals for a captive breeding project, capture of as many condors as possible will have many other advantages. For the first time, biologists should be able to obtain an accurate idea of

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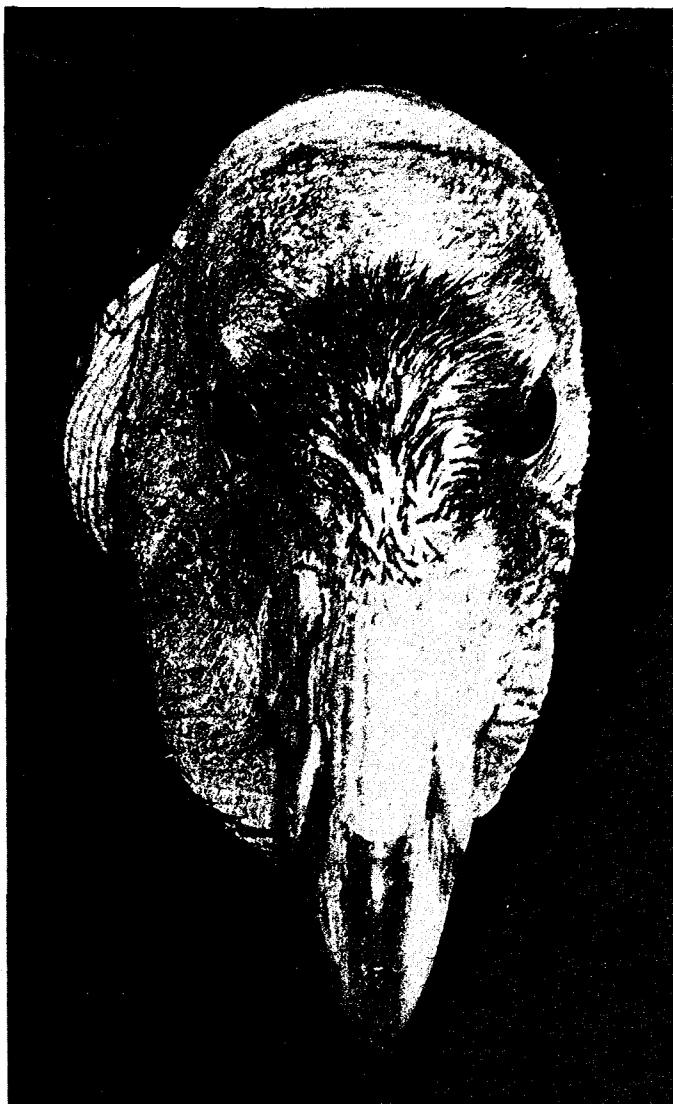


Photo by Sy Oskeroff

abandoned. It was brought to the Los Angeles Zoo. Ten days later, after he rapidly gained strength, it was decided to return him to the wild. He was staked out near a carcass to see if the wild population would accept him. It was not to be. The bird broke loose and disappeared over the ridge after being harassed by the other birds. He was finally recovered, again very weak, after several days and returned to the Los Angeles Zoo on March 3, 1967. He has remained at the zoo since that date, the only California Condor in captivity.

September 16, 1976—Mount Tecuyah Condor—an adult California Condor was brought to the Los Angeles Zoo with a damaged wing and in extremely weak condition. A radiograph determined that the bird had been shot. Because of its weakened condition it was some time before an operation could be performed. On October 28, 1976 with several raptor specialists on hand the condor went to surgery. The damage was so great that the wing had to be amputated. The bird went into shock and died the following day.

Lloyd Kiff—

how many birds are still left, a matter that has been a perennial subject of speculation and controversy. Examination of captured birds will allow them to be accurately sexed (reliable safe methods are now available), aged, and marked as recognizable individuals using colored wing streamers. The latter technique and the utilization of radio transmitters will permit researchers to monitor the movements and activities of specific individuals. This should be especially helpful in refining our knowledge of critical roosting and foraging areas used by condors.

Specific details of the revised Recovery Plan can be obtained from NAS Condor Naturalist, John Borneman (P.O. Box 6203, Ventura, CA 93003). If the plan is approved this fall, the first actual condor captures could be attempted as early as January, 1980. To assure implementation of the plan, Congress appears likely to appropriate \$500,000 for the condor program in the coming budget. For its own part, the National Audubon Society has pledged to raise another \$500,000 over the next five years for condor work, and it is adding a first rate biologist, Dr. John Ogden, to the local condor program. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which bears responsibility for coordinating the overall condor program, is also expected to add one of its top field biologists to the project sometime this winter.

As might be expected with any endeavor where success cannot be guaranteed, there is some opposition to the plan. Certain of these objections are based upon biological or logistical concerns. For example, will condors be injured in attempts to capture them with cannon or clap nets? Although this possibility cannot be totally discounted, experience gained from trapping other large vultures, particularly some African species, suggest that injuries are unlikely if routine precautions are taken. Individual condors do not seem to be nearly as fragile as their population.

A more disturbing possibility is that the pitifully small sample of immature condors that is to be acquired for captive breeding purposes may prove to be individually incompatible, or that the captive population may contain a grossly imbalanced sex ratio. Several condor carcasses recovered in recent years have contained high levels of DDT-type compounds, and severe condor eggshell thinning caused by DDE, a metabolite of DDT, occurred during the 1960's and early 1970's. Recent studies by Dr. Michael Fry at the University of California at Davis have revealed that high levels of DDT-type pollutants in the eggs of birds can produce endocrine disruptions of the embryos that result in would-be males developing as females. What if most or all of the condors produced in the post-DDT period are females? If so, there is at least a better possibility of rescuing such "feminized" males from reproductive oblivion in a captive situation than in the wild.

The majority of the opposition directed specifically against captive propagation proposals for condors appears to be based more upon philosophical or aesthetic objections to the technique in general than upon potential logistical flaws in the revised Recovery Plan. Few issues have emerged on the California environmental scene that have so closely pitted the "purists" (those who would "let Nature take her course" approach) vs. the "managers" (those who would manipulate habitats and species in order to compensate for man's deleterious impact on the environment).

Mike Cunningham—

After the 1978 Condor Count it was determined by the California Department of Fish and Game that the total California Condor population numbered less than thirty. This fact encouraged more serious thought of a captive breeding program to save this highly endangered species. Many controversies have started now over whether the condor can be bred in captivity and if the young can be returned to the range as wild birds. Using statistics from work done with South American condors, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided to make a commitment to captive California Condor breeding. Working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are California Department of Fish and Game, the National Audubon Society and several zoos and conservation groups in California.

This project is a drastic step in the conservation of a species. It is also a long term project which may not show results for five or ten years. During this time we must all continue to assist in preserving the condor range for the eventual success of the total plan.

The California Condor must be saved—not because it is beautiful—not because it is a large impressive bird—not because it belongs to California. The condor cannot be duplicated by modern technology. It must be saved because it is a living creature.

But you know that! □

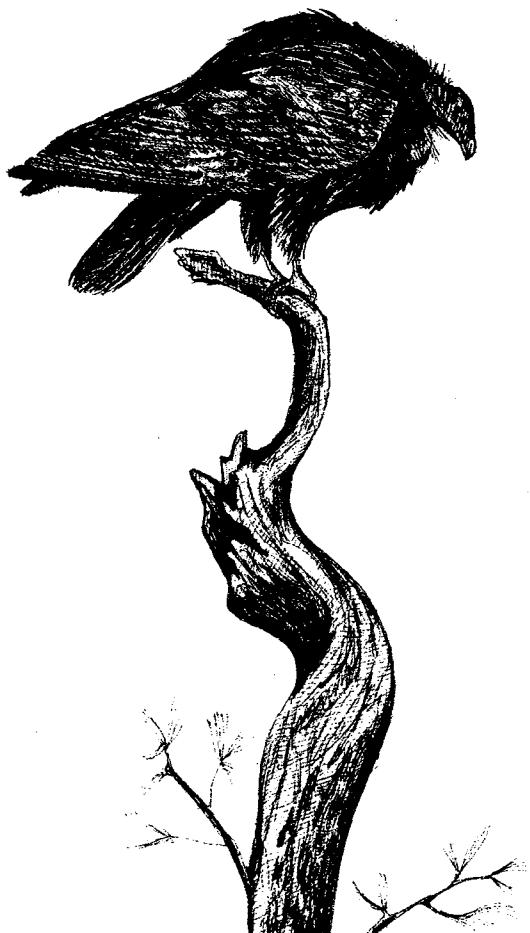


Illustration by Donna Dittmann

Lloyd Kiff—

At the former extreme, some would contend that the California Condor was a doomed species anyway and that it should be allowed to "die with dignity." Such persons are evidently unaware of the true reasons for our present lack of condors—man-induced mortality! Condor losses from natural causes are almost unknown within the species' recorded history.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who contend that all living California Condors should be removed from the wild immediately and incorporated into one or more captive breeding projects. They have concluded incorrectly that the battle to save the condor as a free-living species has already been lost.

I suspect that the view of most persons interested in this matter falls somewhere between these extremes. Most ornithologists of my acquaintance feel that captive propagation is the only technique left to us that holds much promise of *increasing* the number of living condors. If a captive condor is not particularly satisfying aesthetically, it at least holds more hope for the species' future than a dead condor.

At the same time, it is important to continue to wage the battle to save the condor on other fronts. I feel that it is imperative to leave some, perhaps most, of the living condors in the wild even if we are forced to regard sustaining the population at a remnant level as the best victory attainable until captive breeding efforts pay off. Not only will this hedge our bets and provide the justification for maintaining the condor refuges and outlying areas in an undisturbed state, but the continued existence of free-flying condors can serve as a symbolic reminder that our ongoing efforts to save some vestige of wild places and wild creatures in California are not in vain. □

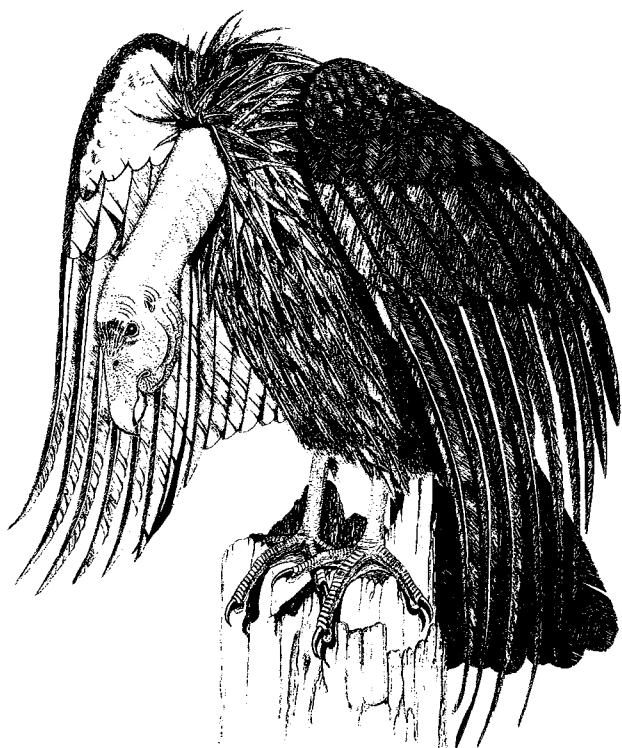


Illustration by Lee Jones

Jon Dunn

FIELD NOTES

The peeps or stints in the genus *Calidris* represent one of the most perplexing problems of field identification. The confusion, for the most part, can be linked to the inadequate coverage in the popular field guides. The recent BTO guide, *Guide to the Identification and Ageing of Holarctic Waders*, as well as two papers in *British Birds* have begun to sort out the difficulties of stint identification. Of the seven stints or peeps found in the world, this column, as with next month's is aimed at the identification of three widespread North American species, the Least, Western, and Semipalmated Sandpipers. The Least and Western Sandpipers are common visitants to California, the Semipalmated Sandpiper occurs only rarely, but more and more records of Semipalmated Sandpiper each year indicate an increasing knowledge of stint identification.

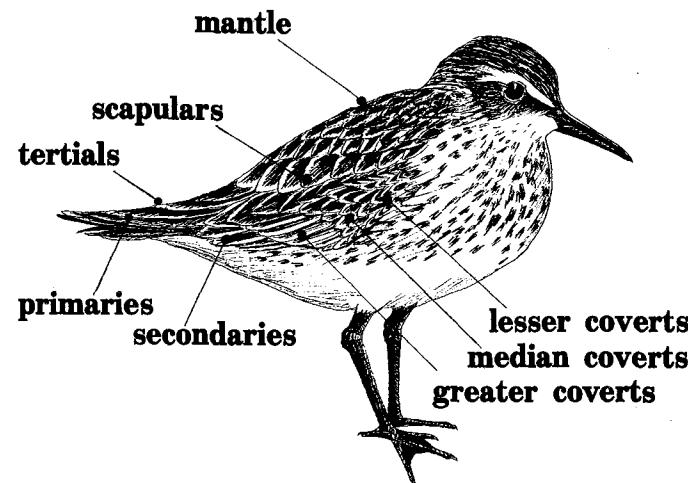
The first step in stint identification is the determination of the plumage and the age. Popular field guides do not discuss juvenal plumage, which is quite different from the basic (winter) and the alternate (breeding) plumage. Substantial numbers of juvenal birds (first year) occur in California in the fall, and without such information the observer may be severely handicapped as to their identification. Uncommon to rare fall transients, Baird's, Pectoral, Semipalmated, Sharp-tailed, and Curlew Sandpipers, are predominantly juvenal birds.

Juvenal birds are easily recognized by their fresh plumage; no indication of wear on the light-edged feathers of the back, coverts, scapulars, and tertials. Adults retain the alternate plumage until they reach or near their wintering grounds. The feathers on alternate plumaged adults appear heavily worn. Some adults in July and August are already molting into basic plumage and show varying degrees of new gray feathers. Timing of molt is species specific. It is important to realize that there is also a tremendous amount of individual variation. The molt occurs over an extended period of time and is illustrated in Graph 1. For further information on ageing of stints and molt sequences, the BTO guide is highly recommended.

Identification of stints is based on a combination of characters. There is no single field mark that is thoroughly reliable. Field guides emphasize leg color. Although useful, it should not be used as the identifying field mark. More often than not, it will result in an incorrect identification. Bill size and shape, overall shape of the bird in flight and on the ground, behavior, and vocalizations are all important in stint identification. Considerable field experience is required, fortunately both Least and Western Sandpipers are abundant and can afford ample opportunities for observation. Stints are also fairly tame and will allow a close approach.

Before attempting to identify a Semipalmated Sandpiper, one should be thoroughly familiar with Least and Western Sandpipers. These two species are frequently confused, and before proceeding further, it is best to review their distribution and identification.

While both species are very common visitants to California, their distribution patterns are somewhat different. The Least Sandpiper is a common and widespread transient and winter visitant throughout the state, wintering even in the colder

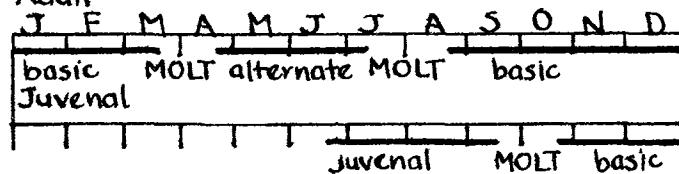


Topography of a Western Sandpiper

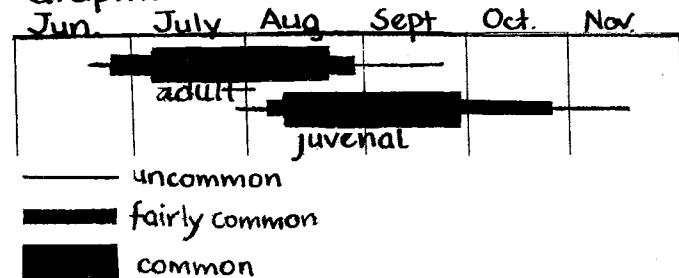
interior portions. The Western Sandpiper is an abundant transient throughout all areas, when it generally outnumbers the Least. Graph 2 illustrates the status of Western Sandpipers. It is important to notice the differences in arrival times between adults and the juvenals. In winter, the Western Sandpiper prefers large coastal bays, such as San Diego Bay and Newport Bay, as well as the Salton Sea. Away from these localities, it is quite scarce. Western Sandpipers, for the most part are very rare at this season in the interior portions of the coastal district (e.g. Riverside) and strictly casual throughout the desert regions, which includes the Colorado River. In conclusion, away from the few favored localities of the Western Sandpiper, one is far more likely to encounter a Least Sandpiper in winter. □

Graph 1.

Adult



Graph 2.



Sandy Wohlgemuth

CONSERVATION

Antaeus was the mighty son of Gaea, goddess of the earth. He was an invincible warrior whose strength was replenished when he was in contact with his mother, the earth. Then wily Hercules defeated him by holding him aloft so he no longer touched the ground and, thus weakened, he died.

Some of us climb Everest, backpack in the high Sierra, walk the Appalachian Trail, canoe the Boundary Waters of Minnesota. Some of us may not be so adventurous or so rugged. We take our recreational vehicles or our tents and settle down in conventional campgrounds. We have a variety of interests: birds, flowers, rocks, mammals, trees, insects, climbing, fishing. Choose one—or all of the above. Or none. We may simply want to stretch out under the clear sky and read and snooze all day or have a drink by a mellow fire at night. And some of us settle for even less. We go to the beach or the zoo, picnic in the backyard or toss a frisbee in a postage-stamp size city park.

But all of us, deliberately or unconsciously, are saying much the same thing: I need a change from the routine of office and shop, machinery and city streets. There seems to be a deep ancestral need for a touch of nature: a patch of blue, sand between the toes or cool grass underfoot. Without it, we are cut off from the source of our energy and are the poorer for it.

The other day, beside a busy freeway on the outskirts of the city, I was reading a book under a scarred live oak. Abruptly I was aware of the familiar scream of a Red-tailed Hawk. I watched it circle high on a thermal and then off to the north until it was a faint speck in the sky. Even as it vanished from view the wild call was still drifting down above the traffic noise. The cry of a raptor, to me, is the very essence of wilderness. Yet here was this magnificent creature still present in the city.

At a recent hearing on Sepulveda basin, the 1984 Olympics testimony, representatives of organized equestrians, cyclists, golfers, property-owners and environmentalists were in attendance. One young woman took the microphone and said, "I'm a dental hygienist and I don't represent anyone but me. I drive by Sepulveda every day going to work and it makes me feel good to see the green fields and the mountains in the distance. Why can't we just leave it alone?" It was a cry from the soul and it did represent many of us, many of us who wouldn't dream of going to such a meeting. Many of us who perhaps were unaware of our own feelings about open space. If the Santa Monica mountains were hijacked by the Wicked Witch of the East some dark Halloween there would be a unanimous scream of horror and pain. The mountains—all our mountains—give life and form and character to Los Angeles. On a clear day they sparkle crisply in the sun. The heart leaps up. Yet there are few of us who are protesting loudly as the developers rush in greedily with their Monster Machines to cut and fill before the government can buy the land for the National Recreation Area.

This is the force that drives the conservationist's motor:

outraged reaction to the abomination of mindless growth. The list is long and without end: the unrelenting proliferation of condominiums everywhere: the spectre of hotels and shopping malls in Ballona Wetlands; destruction of the Whitewater River marsh; urban development of Lake Sherwood; baseball fields in Chatsworth reservoir; Tellico Dam; Lake Powell; Mono Lake... Appalled visitors report a disco at the south rim of the Grand Canyon.

All is not lost, however. Our labors have borne fruit. The original plans for Malibu Lagoon provided for a 300-car parking lot and a large picnic area. Hard work and tenacity helped the State Park department create a new plan that will restore the marsh and declare it a Natural Preserve. Pt. Mugu State Park was to be a recreation area modeled after Yosemite Valley with restaurants and shops and a hotel. There were plans for a rifle range and a motorcycle campground. Environmentalists *en masse* attended a hearing before the Park Commission, spoke out for minimum development, and won the day acquiring State Park status for Pt. Mugu. And the New Lakes victory at Whittier Narrows stands as a proud monument to the vision and courage of Los Angeles Audubon.

Open space in the city is a metaphor for wilderness. We must hold on to it selfishly or the spirit dies. In *Desert Solitaire*, Edward Abbey says, "A man could be a lover and defender of the wilderness without ever in his lifetime leaving the boundaries of asphalt, powerlines and right-angled surfaces. We need wilderness whether or not we ever set foot in it. We need a refuge even though we may never need to go there. I may never in my life get to Alaska...but I am grateful that it's there." □

WATER CONSERVATION TIPS

Write to Mayor Bradley and your city councilman:

City Hall
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Ask for restoration of mandatory water conservation measures to save a dwindling resource.

Facts: 1. We saved 18% (DWP figures) in the 1977 drought year over 1976. The city only asked for 10%.

2. Conservation created no hardship in 1977; there were no moans or angry protests.

3. Hosing down sidewalks and 15-minute showers send countless gallons of wasted water down the sewers.

4. We live in a semi-desert and there will be more dry years ahead. Let's start conserving now!

Shum Suffel

BIRDS of the SEASON

October is the month for rare-bird watchers, and who among us does not thrill at the possibility of finding a new or rare bird? Fall is the time of change in the avian world: a few summer residents linger on, winter birds are arriving, migrant numbers peak early in the month, and of course, there is the chance of viewing one of those ever fascinating vagrants.

Although there was already evidence of passerine migration by mid-month, August belonged to the waders, both large and small. Two **Reddish Egrets** were in San Diego County, both along the coast, and were seen 19 August and after. The adult **Louisiana Heron**, reported last month at the north end of the Salton Sea, was seen as late as 19 August (Richard Webster, et al.). No news has been heard on the **Little Blue Herons**, which nested successfully in the Imperial Valley for the first time in the state earlier this summer. An adult **White Ibis** was present at U.C. Irvine's San Joaquin Marsh. This may be the same individual seen last December near Westminster some 12 miles to the northwest and considered an escapee from the Busch Gardens collection. A **White-faced Ibis** (increasingly rare on the coast) was feeding nearby on 17 August.

Shorebirds received the maximum attention, both along the coast and inland. If accepted, the **Piping Plover** on the California side of the Colorado River near Blythe in early August, would constitute the third state record (Sharron Goldwasser, et al.). The **American Golden Plover**, which has wintered at Devereaux Slough in Goleta for the past three years, returned on 23 August (Paul Lehman). A few **Solitary Sandpipers** were reported: up to four in the Antelope Valley just north of Lancaster, two near San Diego, two or more in Ventura County, and one near Goleta. **Lesser Yellowlegs**, common transients, were found both inland and on the coast. A **Red Knot**, a juvenal bird discovered at the Lancaster Sewage Treatment Plant on 11 August, was the third inland record in Southern California away from the Salton Sea and Colorado River (Bill Principe and Donna Dittmann). There were no reports of **Pectoral Sandpipers** this month. **Baird's Sandpipers** were frequently seen throughout the month, particularly east of the mountains, with a count of ten or more in the Antelope Valley (Jon Dunn, et al.). An early **Stilt Sandpiper** was in the Wister Unit of the Salton Sea on 28 July (Hal Baxter). Two Stilt Sandpipers in the Antelope Valley in early August represented the first records for Los Angeles County. **Semipalmated Sandpipers**, carefully identified, were found this month, three in the Antelope Valley (Jon Dunn, et al.), three at McGrath State Park (Richard Webster), another in the Oxnard Plain (Donna Dittman, Terry Clark), and one at Lakeview (Doug Morton). These numbers far exceed the one or two identified in former years. Increased knowledge regarding the fine points of their identification has resulted in more birds found, as well as better coverage of likely areas where they may turn up in the early fall.

Aside from waders, there is much to report. **Brown Pelicans** reached the Salton Sea from the Gulf in near record numbers (the last major high was 100 birds in 1971). 86 individuals were counted on a circuit of the Sea on 12 August (Guy McCaskie).

The next weekend only 22 could be found, showing a marked decline in their numbers. **Frigatebird** numbers also declined throughout August, to nearly zero by the month's end. As of September 1, no boobies or spoonbills had been reported, demonstrating that a good pelican year at the Sea is not necessarily indicative of a good booby or spoonbill year. A wide ranging **Mute Swan** (an escapee of course!) was seen at Marina del Rey on 1 August (Hal Baxter) and two weeks later it was at Malibu Lagoon. The band on the "Blue" **Goose**, previously reported at the Arcadia Arboretum bore the letters "B G L A," certainly an escapee from the recently vacated Busch Gardens of Los Angeles. **California Condors** were seen throughout the month from Mt. Pinos. Five or six were seen on 25 August, three at 11 a.m. and five at 4 p.m. (or maybe more?). A **Northern Harrier** at the summit of Mt. Pinos was unexpected at 8,800 feet (Don Sterba). An early migrant, first year, **Franklin's Gull** was at Malibu Lagoon from 15 to 18 August (Terry Clark, et al.). Only a few **Common Terns** were found inland, three in the Antelope Valley, and one near Desert Center. An adult **Arctic Tern** was at Baldwin Lake on 7 August, this is the only inland fall record for California (Gene Cardiff). **Black Terns** are abundant at the Salton Sea, but unusual along the coast. One was at Harbor Lake on 27 August (Hal Ferris). A few **White-winged Doves** visit the coast in winter, but one at San Onofre on 7 August was very early (John DeModena). Two **Blue-throated Hummingbirds** appeared at Martha Hunt's feeder for a few days in mid-August, whether or not they are escapees cannot be determined. However, Don Bleitz, an authority on imported birds, states that he knows of no one who imports or keeps Blue-throated Hummingbirds at this time.

The earliest passerine migrants came through in late July. **Western Bluebirds** and **Wilson's Warblers** were seen in Anaheim on 25 July (Doug Willick), but it was not until mid-Aug. that migrants were reported in numbers from either the coast or inland. Five species of warblers, **Willow Flycatchers**, **Warbling Vireos**, and **Lazuli Buntings** were seen on 12 August in the Antelope Valley (Barry and Terry Clark). By the end of the month, both **Hermit Warblers** (Sierra nesters) and **Townsend's Warblers** (which do not breed in California) were at the 8,000 foot level of Mt. Pinos (Kimball Garrett). A **Lucy's Warbler** (Donna Dittmann) on 24 August and a **Virginia's Warbler** (Richard Webster) on 25 August, both at McGrath State Park, were the first ones reported this fall. A **Virginia's Warbler** at Tapia Park on 28 August is one of the few Fall records for L.A. County (Terry Clark). A few days later two more **Lucy's Warblers** were in Santa Barbara—an unusual number along our coast for these desert warblers (Paul Lehman). An adult male **Hooded Warbler** near Santa Barbara was completely unexpected in August: they are rare vagrants at any time of the year. The only report from the Inyo-Mono region was of an adult male **American Redstart** (Kimball Garrett) on 24 August. A male **Indigo Bunting** in heavy molt was along the creek in Tapia Park (Hal Baxter) on 30 August.

An adult male **Dickcissel** was in a cornfield near Goleta on 23 August (Paul Lehman). Also in the vicinity, were an **Indigo Bunting**, a **Solitary Sandpiper**, and on 26 August, a **Bendire's**

Thrasher and a very early **Bobolink**. All of these are noteworthy birds, but there is nothing which appears noteworthy about the area they were in—a cornfield, a row of tamarisks, and nearby a small well-vegetated stream. However, all the essential elements: cover, food and water, were there. Coverage by competent birders developed its full potential.

Most serious birders have at least read about **Jim Vardaman**, as his birding project has made the syndicated news wires several times. His project is to see 700 birds in North America in 1979. A little past the halfway mark (July 12), he had spent 100 days travelling or birding; covered 76,000 miles by plane, car, boat, bicycle and on foot; and seen 657 species to tie Scott Robinson's Big Year record, which was made without the benefit of unlimited financing. Every lister knows that each additional species is more difficult as his objective is approached and this is now Jim's problem. His second trip to Alaska, plus a series of pelagic trips on both coasts, and coverage of previously neglected areas should give him about thirty new birds, but the last ten or fifteen species will be most difficult—a stakeout here, a rumor there... There have been major disappointments; a trip from Louisiana to see the Garganey near Lake Elsinore on 29 March failed, as did one to Chicago for a Curlew Sandpiper, and another to S.E. Arizona for the Eared Trogon. With Jim's energy and resources 690 seems assured and 700 is still possible.

The probability that more bird species will be recorded in October than in any other month of the year is probably unique to California. Excluding the non-passerines, we can expect about 18 flycatchers, 30 warblers, and 45 species of fringillids (Cardinals through Longspurs) this month. No one person will see all these species, but birders who are in the field (in promising places) will find their share.

*Apologies to Newport Beach: my illegible script plus a transcriber from the North, unfamiliar with local place names, resulted in "Newport Bali High School." No pun intended. □

Nature Conservancy Fund-raiser

Dewitt Jones, award-winning filmmaker and *National Geographic* photographer will narrate his latest film, "The New England of Robert Frost," on Thursday evening October 11 at 8 p.m. in the Harry Chandler Auditorium, Times Building, 202 W. First St., Los Angeles, California. This lecture film is a special fund-raising event for the Southern California Chapter of The Nature Conservancy and the California Significant Natural Areas Program. The show will be followed by a special reception hosted by Dartmouth and Wellesley Alumni, at which time the new book "Robert Frost, A Tribute to the Source," will be on display. The book is a major anthology of Frost's poetry accompanied by 45 of Jones' stunning photographs and a biological text by David Bradley illustrating the connection between the poet and the natural sources of his inspiration. Bradley and Jones will both be present at the reception to autograph copies of the book.

Telephone for information: 213-799-9051

What is a *BIRDATHON*?

On 24 November 1979 the National Audubon Society will sponsor the first California Audubon Bird-A-Thon. We hope that Audubon chapters throughout California will encourage their members to participate in this great fund raising event.

To participate in the Audubon Bird-A-Thon, individuals need only to obtain several sponsors who will make a contribution for each bird species seen (5 to 25 cents are common pledge amounts) and see as many birds species as possible in California on 24 November 1979. After the Bird-A-Thon, participants will collect their pledges and submit them to Audubon's Western Regional Office to qualify for a number of outstanding prizes. The prizes for qualifying participants include trips to Hawaii and Mexico as well as spotting scopes, binoculars, etc.

The contributions raised will be used to support Audubon efforts to save Mono Lake and to protect the California Condor. These two issues were selected as the top priorities in California at the January 1979 statewide meeting of Audubon chapters.

Our goal is for each chapter to encourage 40 members and/or friends to join in the California Audubon Bird-A-Thon. Additional information and participant registration forms were sent in the June/July 1979 issue of *AUDUBON CONSERVATION TOPICS, WEST*.

Southern California Address by NAS President

On October 31, 1979, Southern California Audubon Society members will have an opportunity to hear Dr. Russell Peterson, President of the National Audubon Society, speak on the nation's energy crisis and energy alternatives. He will also cover other major conservation issues and discuss the National Audubon Society's immediate and long-range plans.

This will be the first Program Dr. Peterson has given in Southern California since he was elected President of the National Audubon Society. Before joining Audubon, Dr. Peterson was an Executive of the Dupont Corporation, Governor of Delaware and, Chairman of the President's Council on Environmental Quality. He was recently appointed by President Carter to the Commission to investigate the Three Mile Island nuclear accident.

Dr. Peterson's presentation is sponsored by the Pasadena Audubon Society and the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation, and will be held at the Ambassador College Auditorium, 300 West Green Street, Pasadena, California at 8:30 p.m. Ambassador College is easily reached from the Ventura and Pasadena Freeways. If you take the Ventura (134) Freeway, exit on Orange Grove and follow the signs to the Auditorium. From the Pasadena (11) Freeway, exit on Arroyo Parkway in Pasadena, travel north to Green Street, and turn left to the Auditorium.

For additional information feel free to contact Larry Johnson, President of Pasadena Audubon, at (213) 796-8246.

Jean Brandt

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

The Los Angeles Audubon Society currently has 3100 members with an additional 460 people subscribing to the *Western Tanager*. Aside from the members of the Executive Board and the handful of volunteers at Audubon House, it has been suggested that most of the people interested in the society really don't know much about it. In the monthly President's Page, I will try to present highlights of the board meetings, fiscal information and proposed plans and programs.

As each president did before me, I urge each and every one of you to become more active. Participate, even if it is only to write a letter with suggestions or criticisms. Let us know what you expect from your society and help us grow.

The Executive Board meets monthly. Perhaps you'd like to know who we are? Yours truly is Mdm. Pres.; **Kimball Garrett** is 1st Vice Pres., acting Field Trip Chairman and co-leads the Malibu Xmas Count; **Fred Heath** is 2nd Vice Pres. and is also Publications Coordinator; **Carol Friedman** is Executive Secretary, handling the business details of the society; **Art Cupples** is Treasurer and co-leads the L.A. Xmas Count with his wife, **Janet**.

Kay Nakamura and **Andrea Kaufman** are co-registrars, currently involved in reorganizing our entire membership system; **Jill Heaslet** is Recording Secretary; **Sandy Wohlgemuth** is the Executive Past Pres. and co-conservation chairman with **Corliss Kristensen**; Mono Lake is in their capable hands as are myriad other conservation crises.

Marge Wohlgemuth is House Chairman, the most demanding and frustrating job of all; it is she who fills in for everyone at Audubon House if they are not available and she is also responsible for the tender care of all volunteers. She is also the Librarian. **Lee Jones** is the Editor of the *Western Tanager*; **Olga Clarke** manages the bookstore.

Jerry Maisel is Finance Chairman; **Terry Clark** does the Bird Tape; **Willabelle Malloney** is Education Chairman; **Phil Sayre** organizes our pelagic trips; **Ruth Lohr** now handles all reservations including those for the Western Mexico trip; **Gail Baumgarten** is Publicity Chairman; **Dave Koepel** is Program Chairman and **Tricia Glatt** is the Social Chairman.

All of these people work hard and I really appreciate their continued support. Each Chairman needs input, suggestions and help. Read the list over again and see if you are interested in becoming more involved.

At the August board meeting, plans for the Western Mexico tour were formulated and other possible trips were discussed, one being a trip to Chicago to witness the spring migration along the shores of Lake Michigan and then possibly going on to Grayling to see the Kirtland's Warbler.

The raise in National Audubon dues was mentioned. Individual memberships will go from \$18 to \$20 in October with other categories rising correspondingly. The chapters will continue receiving the same amount per member; for instance, for each \$20 individual membership, LAAS will receive only \$6, barely enough to support the *Tanager*. This is why, in the very

near future, we will have to resort to fund raising of some sort. Any ideas?

The Education Chairman announced that she has just completed and had printed two new lesson plans to be used in the elementary schools. She and her assistant, **Tess Gross**, go out into schools, teaching youngsters the value of nature and conservation.

Dr. Russell Peterson, President of National Audubon, will give a major address in Pasadena on Wednesday, October 31, 1979, at 8:30 p.m. at the Ambassador Auditorium. All of our members and friends are urged to attend.

This past month, the bird report tape machine died and a new one had to be purchased. It cost us \$371.00 and a plea for donations to help cover the cost of the machine was made to those who call the tape. We had a very disappointing response but thanks to a few very generous donations, the machine has been paid for with money left over going into the "termite fund." (You'll hear more about this fund later; Audubon House REALLY has termites!)

Well, dear friends, I hope you now have a better idea of what LAAS is all about. I haven't had time to extoll our every dedicated conservation department but they are deeply appreciated by all of us. You have an enthusiastic, hard working board and I hope that you will find time to be a part of us.

Good birding..... □



photo by Lee Jones

Rona Parrot

SQUAWK TALK

The phenomenon known as fall migration is now in progress. More and more vagrants are appearing in the coastal and desert oases. At the heels of every Tennessee Warbler or Red-eyed Vireo are scores of birders. Before long it will be impossible to visit your favorite vagrant trap without running into a familiar face or pair of binoculars. You are not only rewarded with a "good" bird for your effort, but you may be fortunate enough to "tick" off a birder or two. From the celebrity to the novice, you don't even need their autograph, just their name, to add them to your ever-increasing list of birders. And you don't need photo documentation, since as of present there is no Rare Birders Committee. How many new ones will you have at the end of the fall?

I ticked off Ed Navojosky at Big Sycamore while observing two Blackpoll Warblers and an American Redstart under the large Black Walnut tree, Jan and Art Cupples while peering at an adult White Wagtail at the Watsonville Sewage Ponds in Monterey County, (the wagtail was a vagrant from Siberia, the Cupples vagrants from Los Angeles, all three were way out of range!), Arnold Small while looking through storm-petrels on a recent L.A. Audubon Pelagic to the Osborn Bank, and Jerry Johnson while scanning the horizon for Frigatebirds at Marina del Rey. The list is endless.

As certain birding localities are notorious for producing rare birds, they may be the favorite haunts of birders as well. In fact, you might say that they are birder stakeouts. Fred Heath is fairly common in the Antelope Valley, especially in the vicinity of Edward's Air Force Marsh. Paul Lehman is a common resident in Goleta, where he may be frequently seen observing birds at Devereaux Slough. Kimball Garrett can occasionally be seen at Malibu Lagoon, particularly in the fall (a hopeless stakeout when leading L.A. Audubon field trips there). Also, try Bonsall Road or nearby Zuma Beach. Richard Webster can be somewhat difficult to observe, since he ranges



"A hopeless stake-out..."



**WESTERN
TANAGER**

EDITOR Lee Jones
ASSISTANT EDITOR Donna Dittmann

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PRESIDENT Jean Brandt
1st VICE-PRESIDENT Kimball Garrett
2ND VICE-PRESIDENT Fred Heath
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY Carol Friedman

Audubon membership (local and national) is \$18 per year (individual), \$21 (family), or \$13.50 (student or senior citizen), 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 \$6.00 per year (Third Class), or \$9.00 (First Class, mailed in an envelope). To subscribe, make checks payable to Los Angeles Audubon Society.

widely throughout Ventura County. Since the Oxnard Plain is so vast, and Pt. Mugu is off limits, the most reliable place to see Richard is at McGrath Lagoon while he scans the shorebirds for something out of the ordinary (or try the willows in the campground). High tide is best. And what of Jon-Dunn? You'll have to wait until his return migration from Alaska. He should arrive in or about the second week of October. If you were not fortunate enough to glimpse Jim Vardaman, the famous year lister, last week while he was in Southern California, you'd better find some very rare bird to get him back to the West Coast.

The rarer the bird—first, second, or even third state record—the more birders turn out *en masse*. That, of course, is the best chance you have of seeing birders outside their normal range and habitat. So find that Blue-winged Warbler or Short-billed Marsh-Wren, then tally all the birders that chase it.

Get your lists and binoculars ready. The possibilities are limitless, birder-wise and list-wise. State lists, county lists, year lists, day lists, yard lists (yours or theirs?), and, maybe, someday in the future we will have the National Audubon Society's Birder-Athon! □

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 Reports:

Los Angeles 213-874-1318
Santa Barbara 805-964-8240

Pelagic Trip Reservations

To make reservations for 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. If you wish to carpool, please so indicate, and you will be contacted two weeks prior to the trip.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10—Antelope Valley. An excellent time of year for raptors, Mountain Plovers, waterfowl, longspurs, and perhaps, land bird vagrants. The group will caravan around the agricultural regions of the valley, so try to have a full tank of gas at the outset. The group will meet at 8:00 a.m. near Palmdale. **Limited to 25 people.** Phone your reservations to Audubon House, and indicate whether you need or can offer transportation. You will receive details of the meeting place upon making reservations. Leader: Fred Heath.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11—Antelope Valley. Same trip as Saturday, November 10. Again, limited to 25 people. Make reservations with Audubon House. Leader: Jon Dunn.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 13—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m. Plummer Park. Glenn Olson, of National Audubon's Regional Office, will present a program on California's diurnal raptors, emphasizing threatened species such as the California Condor, Bald Eagle, and Swainson's Hawk.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17—Beginner's Trip to Playa del Rey/Ballona Creek. Leisurely studies of gulls, shorebirds, and other groups, with an emphasis on birding techniques. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the north end of Pacific Ave. in Playa del Rey (reached by turning north at the west end of Culver Blvd.). Leaders: Art and Janet Cupples, 981-4746.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m. Plummer Park. Mike Cunningham, curator of birds at the Los Angeles Zoo, will present a program on zoos as conservation organizations with their captive breeding programs.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13—Monterey Bay Pelagic Trip. Departure at 8:00 a.m. aboard the *Miss Monterey* from Sam's Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey, returning at 3:00 p.m. Price: \$16 per person. Leaders: Bruce Broadbooks and Shum Suffel.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21—Natural History of the Oxnard-Ventura Coast. A moderate 5 mile hike around the Santa Clara estuary during which we will explore the ecology of coastal and estuarine environments. Bring your own lunch and be prepared for some shallow wading. Meet at 7:30 a.m. on the NW side of the Harbor Blvd. bridge over the river. Leaders: Nancy and Hal Spear. Carpool requests and offers should be telephoned to them—372-7653.

DESERT SEMINAR

October 27-28, 1979
Riverside City College, Riverside, CA

The goal of the two day conference will be to provide information on desert wildlife and natural areas that will assist the public on evaluating the California Desert Plan scheduled to be released by the Bureau of Land Management in January 1980.

The primary topics to be addressed at the conference will be:

1. Status of potentially new rare, threatened, and endangered species in the desert.
2. Newly discovered critical and unique natural areas in the California desert, including prime birding sites.
3. Studies on the spatial requirements of large predators.
4. Studies of human impacts on wildlife and natural areas.

The conference registration fee is \$10 (checks made payable to the National Audubon Society). Send registration inquiries to: Desert Seminar, 1322 Oak Street, Santa Monica, CA 90405.