

# WESTERN TANAGER

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## BUGGING YOUR GARDEN

*Article and Photography  
by  
George K. Bryce*

**B**irders in general, and listers in particular, become very excited at the thought of adding another bird to their growing lists. The prospect of seeing a large percentage of the 9000 or so birds in the world is enough to set any lister's mouth to watering. But think of the possibilities for listing with a group of animals that already has a million species described, with possibly another 4 million yet unnamed! What group am I talking about? The insects, of course. It is possible to identify many of the common local species. And you don't have to travel any farther afield than your own backyard. But more important than just checking a species off on a list is the potential for learning more about our natural world. The insects are a fascinating group for study at any level. They are a group that should not be ignored by any student of life.

The first question that comes up is what exactly is an insect? This question would not be a problem with birds because we are all familiar with what a bird is. The distinction between what is a bird and what is not a bird is very clear. Not everyone, however, has a good idea of what an insect is. The distinction between what is an insect and what is not an insect is just as clear, but most are not familiar with what these differences are. In this article I hope to give you an idea of what insects are and introduce you to a handful of the insects you may encounter in your yard.

The insects are in the largest of animal groups (or Phyla), the Phylum Arthropoda. These are the animals with an external skeleton and jointed legs. This large group includes the crustaceans (crabs, lobsters, sowbugs, etc.), the arachnids (spiders, ticks, scorpions, etc.) and the insects. The insects can be distinguished from these other groups by their particular combination of characters.

Insects range in size from tiny beetles of 0.1 mm to tropical moths of 30 cm. Insect bodies are divided into three regions: the head, thorax and abdomen. There are three pair of legs on the thorax. Many insects also have two pair of wings, also located on the thorax. The insects are the only group of animals, aside from the vertebrates, that have developed the power of flight. This is one of the features of insects that has led to their tremendous success as a group. The ability to fly has allowed insects to occupy portions of the environment that are not available to other animals.

There are, of course, many exceptions to these general characteristics of insects. And while it may not be possible to become familiar with all of the species of insects in the world, it is possible to get to know some of the common local forms you may see in your garden. And so, without going into too much detail, I would like to present in pictures and words a half dozen insects. Hopefully this brief introduction will help to get you started.

#### **Tomato Sphinx *Manduca sexta* (Order Lepidoptera)**

Those of you that have ever tried to grow tomatoes in your yard should be particularly familiar with this insect. The large (4"), green "tomato hornworm" is well known for its ability to devastate a tomato vine practically overnight. This hornworm is actually the immature stage (larva) of a large sphinx moth. After feeding on your precious tomato plant this larva burrows itself into the soil to undergo the transition to the adult moth. This transition stage is known as the pupa. The larva and the adult are very different in body form. They have completely different types of mouthparts and so feed in different environments. This type of development in which there is an

egg, an immature feeding stage (larva), a quiescent transition stage (pupa), and an active adult stage which has specializations for reproduction and dispersal is known as complete metamorphosis, and is one of the major features that has contributed to the success of the insects as a group. It occurs in well over 80% of all the species of insects.

#### **Gulf Fritillary *Agraulis vanillae* (Order Lepidoptera)**

Next time you pass a Passion vine (*Passiflora* sp.), take a minute to look at the underside of the leaves and along the stem. Chances are good that you will find either a tiny dome-shaped yellow egg or a purple and orange caterpillar. These belong to the Gulf Fritillary Butterfly, a form common in our area wherever the Passion vine occurs. The adults are a beautiful deep orange on the upper surface of the wings and on the lower surface there are a number of conspicuous metallic silver spots.

These butterflies are involved in an interesting relationship with a tiny green wasp, known as *Pteromalus puparum*. The wasp is said to be a parasitoid of the Gulf Fritillary, as well as a number of other species of butterflies. The female wasp lays its eggs in the body of the developing butterfly. During the pupal stage of the butterfly these tiny wasp eggs hatch and the larvae of the wasp consume the butterfly pupa. The wasp larvae then enter a pupal stage, and finally emerge from the now empty husk of the butterfly pupa. The parasitoid relationship is an important one because it is the basis of many of the attempts at biological control of insect pests.



Gulf Fritillaries

George Bryce is a PhD candidate in Entomology at UCLA. Mosquito taxonomy is the subject of his thesis. His interests in insects range from taxonomy to general natural history and public health. As attested to by the accompanying photographs, he is also a superb nature photographer.



Green Blow Fly

**Green Blow Fly or Green Bottle Fly** *Phaenicia sericata* (Order Diptera)

When you see any small insect flying around your house you may call it a "housefly." There are actually a number of species of flies that may occur in your home, this species being one of the most common. The color of this fly varies from a deep metallic green to a bronze color. All of the domestic flies are annoying, and some potentially dangerous because of the diseases they may transmit.

All of the blow flies breed in some kind of decomposing organic material. This ranges from animal carcasses to the slop that accumulates at the bottom of trash cans. In this group the immature stage is commonly called a maggot, a form that most people find particularly loathsome. Actually, maggots play a major role in natural communities. They are important in the process of breaking down organic materials so that the nutrients can be returned to natural cycles.

Flies all have complete metamorphosis. One interesting point about this type of development is that the only stage in which growth takes place is the larval stage. The adults do not grow. This means that little flies do not grow up into big flies, as is commonly supposed. Usually little flies and big flies are different species.

The adult flies feed by regurgitating a drop of saliva onto the food to liquify it. The food is then sucked up by the highly specialized mouthparts. They feed on a variety of materials, including feces and decaying matter. At these sources they can pick up a number of microorganisms, both on their bodies and in their digestive tract. The possibility exists that they can then transmit these microorganisms to humans as they enter our houses and walk and feed on our food.

The sheer annoyance caused by a lone fly buzzing around a room is familiar to most people. All things considered, it is not difficult to understand why most people are repelled by flies. And yet when we look closely at flies we can see an intricacy of structure and beauty of color not matched in many other animals.



Harlequin Bug

**Harlequin Bug** *Murgantia histrionica* (Order Hemiptera)

This attractively colored insect gets its name from its contrasting color pattern of black with bright orange or red splotches. It is an example of the group of plant sucking bugs, the Order Hemiptera. Insects in the Order Hemiptera have their mouthparts modified so that they are able to pierce plant tissues and suck up the juices. From an economic standpoint this is a tremendously important group. They are responsible for transmitting many of the major plant diseases, as well as doing mechanical damage to the plant. This is the only group of insects that an entomologist (a scientist who studies insects) would call true bugs. This particular species is especially attracted to the wild mustard that grows in vacant lots, although it may be found on a number of plants which occur in your yard.

These insects show a type of development that is different from the majority of insects. From the egg hatches a small form that is very similar to the adult. It has the same kind of mouthparts and thus feeds in the same environment as the adult. The important difference is that this immature form, called a nymph, does not have functional wings. The wings are developing in pouches that are external to the body and usually called wing buds. Since the external skeleton is relatively rigid, growth occurs by a periodic shedding of the skeleton in a process known as molting. The form that emerges from the old skeleton is at first soft and can expand. In the course of development there are a series of these molts. The final molt produces the adult insect, with fully functional wings. This type of development is called gradual metamorphosis and occurs in all the true bugs, as well as in certain other groups of insects.



Ladybird Beetles

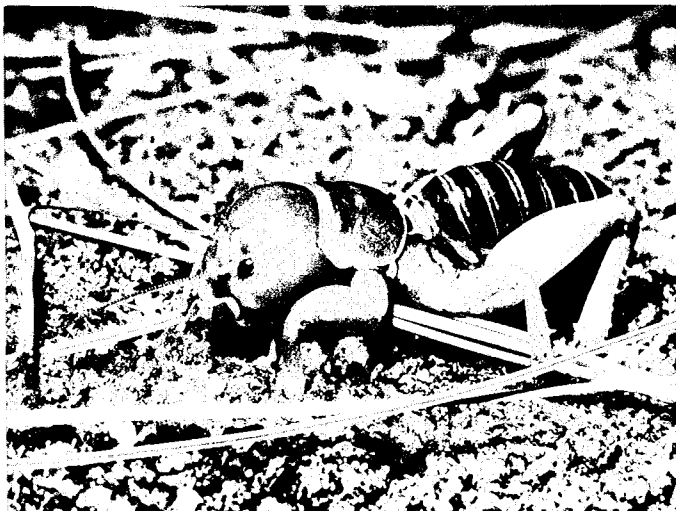
**Jerusalem Cricket** *Stenopelmatus fuscus* (Order Orthoptera)

While digging in your garden you may have unearthed this large (2") insect with a huge head. Or you may have seen it walking around the yard on some foggy night. But whenever you encountered it, you probably have not forgotten what may be one of our most unusual looking insects.

The Jerusalem Cricket is sometimes known as a "potato bug." This name is somewhat misleading because it doesn't feed on potatoes and it is not a true bug. Perhaps it got this name because it may, to some, resemble a potato (especially if you happen to be crawling around your yard some foggy night).

This insect is one which has lost its wings during the course of evolution. It spends most of its time under ground, but it may come to the surface at night. It feeds on a variety of roots and tubers. Although it has large mandibles and could give quite a nasty bite if you got your fingers a little too close, it is really quite harmless.

The Jerusalem Cricket is another form that has gradual metamorphosis, as do the rest of the members of the Order Orthoptera.



Jerusalem Cricket

**Ladybird Beetle** *Hippodamia convergens* (Order Coleoptera)

The beetles are the largest group of insects, and thus the largest group in the animal kingdom. There are around 200,000 species of beetles already described, and it is very likely that there are many more still unknown to science. The group of beetles which is probably more familiar than any other is the ladybird beetles. There are about 8-10 species of ladybird beetle common in the Los Angeles basin.

Ladybird beetles are well known because of their feeding habits. Both the larvae and the adults are voracious predators on a variety of soft bodied plant sucking bugs, most notably the aphids and scale insects. Because of this ladybird beetles have been used in a number of cases for biological control of pest species. The most famous example of this involves the ladybird *Rodolia cardinalis*, or the Vedalia beetle. This beetle was imported from Australia to California in the early part of this century to control one of the major pests of the citrus industry, the Cottony-cushion scale, and was tremendously successful.

**T**his has been the briefest introduction to six of the common species of insects that occur in our local area. Entire books could be written about each of these species. These six represent only an infinitesimal part of our total insect fauna.

Insects can be viewed on many levels. Without a doubt the insects are the most important group of animals in terms of human welfare. No other group has such an impact on the quality of human life. They annoy us with their presence, they eat our food, they invade our homes, they feed on our blood and the blood of our domestic animals, and most importantly, they transmit some of the most important diseases that face mankind on a global scale. Attempts to protect ourselves and our crops against the effects of insects has seriously compromised the quality of the environment in some areas. The use of pesticides to control the depredations of insects has, in many cases, led to environmental tragedies. But it is not without cause that we seek some means to control these pests. It is doubtful that we could maintain our present standard of living unless we had some way to control the insects that compete with us so effectively. But because of the tendency to focus on the ways in which insects affect humans, we often lose sight of the other ways we can look at insects. For the biologist the insects form some of the most intriguing biological systems that exist. Their complexity poses major questions and avenues for research. For anyone interested in the natural world, insects represent a most fascinating group to examine, to study, to know. Anywhere you go you can find insects (frequently it is the insects that find you). Almost any time of the year. Any time of the day or night. Next time you are out take a look for the insects that are around you. You won't regret peeking into this fascinating little world. And for you listeners, think of the possibilities with over a million species!

For those of you that would like more information about the insects, especially those in our area, one book stands out. This is *The Insects of the Los Angeles Basin*, by Dr. Charles L. Hogue, Senior Curator of Entomology at the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles. □



# CHRISTMAS COUNT RESULTS

## Los Angeles

by Lee Jones

The 32nd annual Los Angeles Christmas Count was held on December 23rd under ideal weather conditions with 81 people participating. Thanks to careful advance planning and a lot of hard work by co-compilers Janet and Art Cupples, 47,000 birds comprising 153 species were seen—sixth highest in the count's history. While not the highest count ever (170 species in 1977 is the record), a bumper crop of unexpected species and a record of sixteen species with all-time highs were recorded.

Among the more outstanding species seen were a Red-necked Grebe, an Oldsquaw, a Golden Eagle, a Lesser Yellowlegs, two Nashville and three Black-throated Gray Warblers. Kimball Garrett found the count's first-ever Gray Flycatcher and Starr Gussman found the first American Redstart in the count's history. But top honors must surely go to Kimball, not only for finding the best bird of the day, a Broad-winged Hawk, but for being alert enough to see it perched on a wire while driving through traffic in downtown Beverly Hills!

The record number of high individual counts is probably not an indication that there are more birds around now than ever, but rather a reflection of increased coverage and expertise by the participants. The record 431 White-winged Scoters, however, is a clear indication of an exceptional invasion of that species into our area this winter. They nearly outnumbered Surf Scoters (451) for what would have been the first time ever!

What was the most abundant species? It should come as no surprise that the ubiquitous Yellow-rumped Warbler (alias, Audubon's and Myrtle) topped the list with 5553. Second highest was our "old" nemesis the European Starling with 4929—a remarkable, if not depressing, feat when one considers that the first starling was not recorded until 1960!

Christmas Count results compared over the years can be a sad commentary on the alteration of a major habitat. For example, one need look no further than the L.A. Christmas Count results since 1948 to see when Marina del Rey was built. Never mind the history books or dusty old newspaper clippings. The birds tell it all. There was a sudden and irreversible drop in abundance of all saltmarsh birds between 1960 and 1961. One species, the now endangered Clapper Rail, completely disappeared from the area shortly after the Marina was built. Great Egrets and Snowy Egrets, once common inhabitants of the Ballona Wetlands, were seen every year through 1960, and Black-crowned Night-Herons every year but one, with average respective numbers of 28, 24 and 20 annually. In the nineteen years since 1960 an average of only 0.4, 0.9, and 0.2 respectively, have been recorded with all three species missed in most years. Similarly, Northern Harrier (alias, Marsh Hawk) numbers have plummeted since 1960, with an average of 6 per year through 1960, but only 0.6 per year since 1960—a drop of 90%. Who says, "One little old marina never hurt anybody."? Add to this the many other marinas in the southland and it's easy to see why wetlands are the number one endangered habitat in the state! □

## Malibu Canyon

by Kimball Garrett

In a recent issue of Natural History magazine, Carl Bock noted that the annual Christmas Bird Count generates an enormous amount of chaff, from which ornithologists and ecologists may obtain a "small amount of wheat." Bock (who heads a group of biologists at the University of Colorado which makes it its business to mine meaningful patterns from mountains of Christmas Counts data) has shown that the worth of the Christmas Count effort lies in the sheer quantity of data amassed, rather than in the quality of any individual sighting. Some 80 participants worked hard to stir up chaff and wheat in Malibu on a clear and calm Sunday, December 16th, and the result, on our local scale at least, was pure gold.

The day's species total of 174 was a record high for the Malibu count circle. The total was aided by an unusually high diversity of waterbirds at Malibu Lagoon, and of seabirds offshore. Numbers in chaparral and woodland habitats were up considerably from last year (in large part because of vastly improved counting conditions—it rained most of the day last year!). Montane birds were well-represented (with some 55 Red-breasted Nuthatches being a 5-fold increase over our previous high count for that species).

Jon Dunn earned the coveted Roadrunner trophy with his three Marbled Murrelets at the Malibu Pier (one of our earliest indications of a subsequent major invasion of this species into southern California this winter). Ancient Murrelet was also recorded for the first time on the count; other notable sea and shore birds included 43 Manx Shearwaters, three species of egrets (most years we get none), several scarce ducks (Redhead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser), and both Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers.

Four species of falcons was unprecedented for Malibu (and a rare event anywhere on the continent). Bonus landbirds included a *Selasphorus* hummingbird at Malibu, a Solitary Vireo (*plumbeus*) at Malibu Lake, a Hermit Warbler and three Red Crossbills on Pt. Dume, and a Western Tanager at Paradise Cove.

The count compilers, Jean Brandt and Kimball Garrett heartily thank everybody involved for the most heroic effort in the count's 25 year history. And, of course, our thanks also go to every one of the 35,000+ birds out there who stood up, flew up, swam up, or piped up to be counted! □

*"This public county park is dedicated to the memory of Forth District Supervisor Burton W. Chace whose vision, faith in the future and wise counsel converted these formerly mosquito-infested mudflats into the now world-renowned Marina del Rey Small Craft Harbor...."*

Dedication Plaque  
Burton W. Chace Memorial Park

## Kimball Garrett

# A CLOSER LOOK

**T**he **Bushtit**, a common and characteristic resident of our brushy habitats, seems a plain and uniform enough bird to allow one to forego any field identification below the species level. Its fussy four inches are a rather sombre gray-brown, with no important markings. But careful study of a passing flock will reveal a distinct sexual dimorphism in eye color. Furthermore, there are two rather distinct subspecies groups of bushtits found in southern California, and occasional vagrancy of flocks means that racial identification can yield important distributional information. This month we'll take a closer look at variation in the bushtit.

Ornithologists have long noted that some Bushtits have dark eyes and others have light eyes. We now know that the dark-eyed birds include all males and nestling females, while the light-eyed birds are post-fledging females ( See Figure ). The sexes are otherwise similar, except that freshly-molted males in fall may show a pinkish suffusion on the flanks.

Bushtits of chaparral and woodland habitats on the Pacific Coast are characterized by relatively dark plumage and by brown crowns which contrast somewhat with the grayish upperparts. Coastal birds do not show contrasting auricular (ear-patch) areas. Generally quite sedentary, coastal birds (*Psaltiriparus minimus minimus* in our area) are widespread west of the deserts. They even occur on Santa Cruz and (formerly) Santa Catalina Islands, and a recent record for Anacapa Island probably pertains to this subspecies.

Interior populations (now generally all called *P. m. plumbeus*, or the "Lead-colored" Bushtit) occur in our region in dry brush, pinyons, and junipers at higher elevations from the White Mountains south through the ranges of the Mohave Desert. They are characterized by a uniform gray coloration (paler than that of the coastal races), and a slightly contrasting brown auricular area ( See Figure ). They also measure slightly larger, but this difference would not be noticeable in the field. On rare occasions Bushtit flocks are noted on our deserts outside of suitable breeding habitat (for example along the Lower Colorado River). Most or all of these records probably pertain to *plumbeus* types, but observers are urged to scrutinize extralimital bushtits carefully.

The taxonomic demise of the "Black-eared" Bushtit should be of interest to birders because it illustrates how superficial plumage differences may be unimportant in terms of the species question. The frequency of the black-eared trait in Bushtits is clinal, with only juvenal males and occasional adult males showing it along the border ranges from extreme southeastern Arizona east to the Chisos Mountains of western Texas. At the southern tip of the species' range, in Guatemala, all young birds, and all adult males show black ears. Allan Phillips (in *The Birds of Arizona*) discusses in his inimitable way the historical follies of Bushtit taxonomy, and emphasizes that there is little, if any, justification for the notion that "Black-eared" Bushtits are ecologically (altitudinally) segregated from the plain-eared "species." The Bushtits of the southern California desert mountains are really just "Black-eared" Bushtits beyond the far extreme of the cline, thus the "black-eared" trait is never seen in California. □

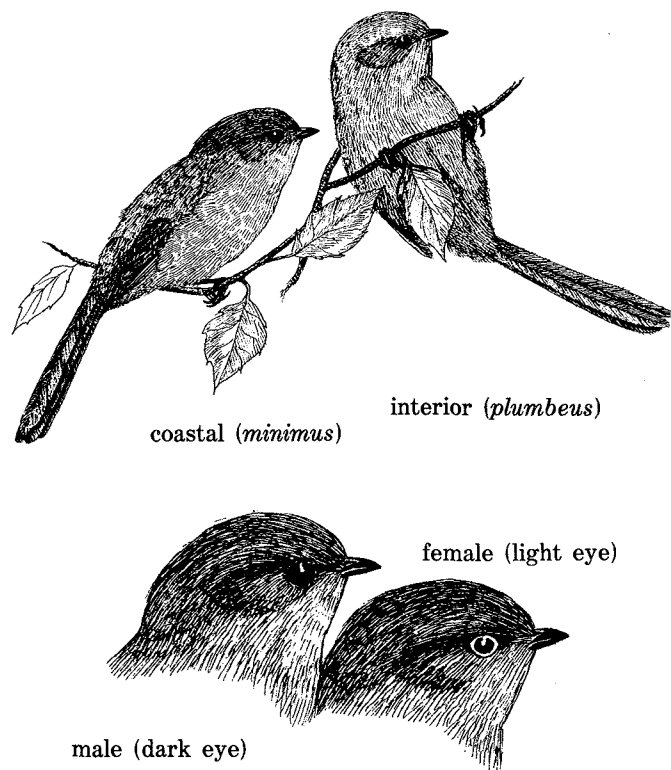


illustration by Kimball Garrett

**Thank you** - to a generous member who wishes to remain anonymous! After reading of the desperate need for a new copying machine for our office, this kindly benefactor donated a Pitney Bowes copier and accessories!!! Such a machine is almost a requirement in an office as busy as ours and now members will be able to do limited copying of materials from our files. We anticipate good use of the machine and only wish that the donor would let us thank him publicly.

**Bird-a-thon** - almost \$2000.00 was raised by LAAS members in the recent fund raising event. Kimball Garrett had the most sponsors and raised over \$1300.00 alone. The runner up was David Mooney who raised more than \$400.00. Thanks to everyone who participated and a special thanks to Janet Cupples, who organized our efforts.

**Condor Fund** - once each year, LAAS asks members and friends to contribute to our Condor Fund. So far this year, we have collected over \$2000.00 and the society will add to this, bringing the total to \$2500. A check for this amount will be presented to John Borneman, the National Audubon Condor Naturalist, at the annual banquet. The Audubon Society is committed to raising \$500,000.00 for its share in the Condor Recovery Program. Obviously, our \$2500 is but a drop in the bucket and a grand scale fund raising event will be forthcoming from the National Society.

## Sandy Wohlgemuth

# CONSERVATION

What is recreation? Golf. Bowling. A seat on the 50-yard line. Blackjack at Vegas. Cycling. Climbing the North Face. Chess. Shuffleboard. Racquet ball. M\*A\*S\*H. Michener. Mozart. Make your own list. "Refreshment of the strength and spirits after toil; diversion; play," says the dictionary. We *re-create* ourselves. In a world of toil and tension we try to move toward a balance, toward sanity.

Let's confine ourselves today to **outdoor recreation**. The amiable pastime of birding takes us out of the house and into the backyard, the city park, the hills, the seashore, the desert, the wilderness. Birding can be a multiple experience. What kind of flowers do hummingbirds prefer? What kind of trees do sapsuckers fancy? What kind of butterfly just flew by? How do you tell the person you're with which shrub the Blackburnian flew into? The toyon, the sumac? If you don't know and point vaguely, the bird may never be found again. Even on an unsuccessful hunt for a rare bird we've been out in the fresh air and sunshine. We may have had a pleasant walk or discovered a birding habitat new to us. Sure, this may be rationalizing, but we've still managed to break away from humdrum routine. We've had diversion, recreation.

Others share the outdoors with birders: hunters, fishermen, motorcyclists, four-wheel-drive enthusiasts, dune-buggy operators, model-airplane buffs, soccer players. With the green and brown world of open space dwindling before our very eyes, every acre is up for grabs. Every new golf course in the suburbs subtracts from the limited store of open fields. Manicured fairways replace irregular patches of weeds and flowers that support seedeaters, mice and raptors. The Little League fields at Malibu Lagoon were built after clearing away scarce *Salicornia* marshland. The hills near Gorman are scarred by motorcycles gouging furrows into them. The creation of Marina del Rey provided hundreds of slips for recreational boats and destroyed one of the most magnificent wetlands on the Pacific coast. Our great deserts are plagued by the devastation of off-road vehicles that crush vegetation, trample endangered tortoises and leave tracks in the desert pavement that will not disappear for a hundred years. These—and many more—are "consumptive" recreation. They are legitimate forms of recreation, but they *consume* the land, the resources, the environment. The Marina marshes will never come back; the desert may recover only after decades. The trigger-happy novice hunter may pop off an eagle or a condor at the close of a deer-less day.

The hiker, the bicycle rider, the botanist, the mountain climber, and the birder are *non-consumptive* sportsmen. For the most part they adhere to the hoary motto of the National Park Service: "Take nothing but pictures; leave nothing but footprints." Does this make us more virtuous? Yes and no. On the one hand, the bicycle rider burns no gasoline, makes no noise, and would have the devil of a time climbing a dirt hill in Gorman. Most mountain climbers are not interested in hunting bighorn sheep. And birders tend to be consumptive only in their fantasies—when confronted by a few hundred starlings. On the other hand, how many of us have chosen an avocation deliberately because it did not use up the environment? We

became non-consumers, for the most part, because we liked to bird, or climb mountains, or identify flowers. We can claim no medals for enjoying ourselves. We're *inadvertently* on the side of the Good and the Blameless. Some of our competitors for natural areas do not consider us blameless. We are accused of depriving them of their rightful share of the good stuff; we want to "lock up" the wild areas in our selfish, sentimental way. The ORV fans say they are taxpayers and should be able to enjoy the desert as well as others: the desert is huge and can take a little punishment. Besides, they're careful. If we oppose more boat slips in the Ballona wetlands, this means we care more for wildlife than our fellowman. In the Mono Lake brouhaha we are told we are more concerned about brine shrimp and seagulls (sic) than people. We deny this vigorously. We insist that all people are poorer when open space, and the wild creatures it harbors, are diminished.

Unfortunately, we non-consumers tend to be quiet, undemonstrative folk. We don't fire hunting rifles, we don't scream at the Rose Bowl (at least on our birding days), we don't drive our Yamahas offroad from Barstow to Vegas. There can be a hundred birders at Big Sycamore or Devereux Slough one morning and they'll hardly be noticed. But a hundred Little League players and their supporters can make a big blast. And, unfortunately, the recreational consumers tend to be highly organized and vocal. The squeaky wheel gets the most oil. And bureaucrats and politicians are peculiarly attuned to squeaks. When the pie is cut, the quiet ones may well be left with just a few crumbs.

Somehow, we must let the world know that we're here, that we have a constituency, and that we have rights. In the next environmental crisis (will we ever run out of them?) let us raise our voices a few decibels. We will not only be squeaking for ourselves, but for the birds. □

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### Mono Lake Update

The Mono Lake Interagency Task Force report is out. After a year of research, discussion and debate the Interagency Task Force has come up with an excellent plan which would assure the survival of Mono Lake without imposing water rationing and with no change in user habit. This plan would only cost L.A. residents 54¢ a year. National Audubon has appealed to Mayor Bradley for an immediate moratorium on water diversions from Mono Lake's tributary streams. LAAS, Friends of the Earth, the Planning and Conservation League, the Mono Lake Committee and the Sierra Club have joined National Audubon in its appeal for this moratorium. The L.A. Department of Water and Power has attacked the task force plan, but the local utility has offered nothing in its place. Your legislators need to hear public support for this outstanding plan. For more information, or if you would like to meet with your legislators, contact Tom Cassidy, 838-4909, or Corliss Kristensen, 391-8845.



## Shum Suffel

## BIRDS of the SEASON

What can February bring to equal the birding excitement of early winter? True, there was little evidence at year's end of major invasions of our lowlands by northern or montane birds, but the last two months of the year were very productive, with Christmas Counts to top them off.

The reported occurrence of **Cook's Petrels** (*Pterodroma cookii*) at the Davidson Seamount some 60 miles off the Big Sur coast in central California led to three pelagic trips from Morro Bay on successive weekends. Each of these rough twenty-four hour voyages found *Pterodroma* petrels, but in decreasing numbers. The first trip on 17 November found seven of these "gadfly" petrels, most of which were Cook's. But there was a strong feeling that at least one was the very similar **Stejneger's Petrel** (*P. longirostris*). The last (and roughest) trip had only a brief sighting of a single Cook's Petrel. Many participants plan a rematch against the sea next October, with a Red-tailed Tropicbird as a hoped-for bonus.

Along our coast loons and grebes were present in good numbers (particularly **Red-throated Loons**), but the only southerly **Red-necked Grebe** was found from the Santa Monica Pier on 21 December (Arthur Howe) and refound for the L.A. count on the 23rd. Southern herons went unreported except for five **Louisiana Herons** in the San Diego area. A **Wood Stork** near the Whittier Narrows Nature Center (Mickey Long et al) was probably the same stork that was found at the South Coast Botanic Gardens on 13 September and then moved to Harbor Lake for over a month. A **White Ibis** in a flock of White-faced Ibis at the Pt. Mugu gun club (Walter Nichols) has been seen elsewhere in the area since last summer and is thought to be an escaped bird. A "**Common**" **Teal** (a Eurasian race of our Green-winged Teal) was in Anaheim Bay, Seal Beach along with a **European Wigeon** on 4 November (Brian Daniels). Another European Wigeon was seen at Upper Newport Bay, where one or more are expected each winter (Roger Lindfield, 2 December). The Conejo Valley Audubon Society "Roadrunner" states "during a rainy Wednesday, November 7th, 15-20 **Wood Ducks** flew into Lake Sherwood adding to the eight or so residents which nested successfully last year." Unquestionably Wood Ducks are commoner today than they were 10-15 years ago. A female **Oldsquaw** found in Ballona Creek for the L.A. count on 23 December (Ebbe Banstorp et al) was the first this winter. Although there have been very few reports of **Black Scoters** to date, **White-winged Scoters** seem much commoner than usual, particularly near ocean piers and harbor channels. Three male and two female **Hooded Mergansers** at Malibu Lagoon (Sandy Wohlgemuth, 27 November) stayed at least through December. Sandy also saw a possible **Mallard X Gadwall** hybrid there. Another pair of Hooded Mergansers was in the small ponds along the Santa Ana River near Anaheim (Doug Willick, 24 December). A single **Sandhill Crane** was soaring over the settling ponds near Forest Lawn Cemetery, Burbank, as Jean Brandt drove by on 28 November.

Put Kimball Garrett behind the wheel of a speeding car in heavy traffic and his bird-finding ability increases geometrically. His first **Broad-winged Hawk**, an adult,

was discovered at 55+ miles per hour from the San Bernardino Freeway in Rosemead on 21 November. To confirm this ability he detected an immature **Broad-wing** on the L.A. count (23 December) at the busy intersection of Santa Monica Blvd. and Rexford Dr. in Beverly Hills. These were the only Broadwings reported locally to year's end. An immature **Swainson's Hawk** near Santa Maria on 2 December (Jon Dunn) constitutes one of the very few documented winter records for North America. The first **Rough-legged Hawk** of the season was in Afton Canyon between Barstow and Baker on 6 November (Jean Brandt). An **Osprey** and a **Prairie Falcon** were seen regularly at the Whittier Narrows New Lakes in December (Steve Bonzo et al). Infrequently seen at the Arcadia Arboretum was the **Merlin** reported last month (Barbara Cohen).

Four **Black Oystercatchers** on the upper Malibu coast (cited in the last Tanager) were not in L.A. County, but the four seen on the rocks below Pt. Fermin (Brian Daniels 27 December) definitely were. The permanent pastures near Santa Maria hosted more than 20 **American Golden Plovers** on 2 December (Jon Dunn). An extraordinary concentration of about 8000 **Red Phalaropes** was off Morro Bay on 30 December (Hal and Nancy Spear). The Spears also reported a buffy immature **Glaucous Gull** at King Harbor on 5 and 9 December. **Franklin's Gulls** were seen at Cabrillo Beach (John Ivanov, 8 November), at Malibu Lagoon (Terry Clark, 5 December), and off Newport Beach (Orange County coastal count, 30 December). This is a poor winter for **Black-legged Kittiwakes**, with the only report being to the north of us at Morro Bay (the Spears, 30 December). Terry Clark had a late **Common Tern** at Malibu Lagoon on 5 December.

Both **Ancient Murrelets** and **Marbled Murrelets** staged an unprecedented invasion into our coastal waters in December. Ancients, as stated last month about the 8 October bird at Marina del Rey, are very rare in our southern waters; Marbleds were unrecorded for many years in southern California prior to this December. On 10 December Jon Atwood found an Ancient in the Los Angeles Harbor at Cabrillo Beach, and the next morning Brian Daniels sighted it, or another, on the ocean side of Cabrillo Beach. Later that morning a murrelet in L.A. Harbor proved (after examination through a scope and a perusal of skins at the County Museum) to be a Marbled Murrelet (Hal Baxter, Ian MacGregor, Shum Suffel). Then, near the Hermosa Pier, the Spears saw as many as four Ancients on several occasions in mid-December. On the Malibu count Terry Clark had an Ancient off the Paradise Cove pier, and Jon Dunn studied three Marbled in the morning off the Malibu Pier; that afternoon the group saw two Ancients practically in the surf off the Malibu Pier. The San Diego count (15 December) had three Marbleds off the Imperial Beach pier, far south of any previous record. By 27 December there were two Ancients in the L.A. Harbor (Brian Daniels); one of these was said to have been hooked by a fisherman a day or so later, and a **Cassin's Auklet** met the same fate at the Hermosa Pier (Arthur Howe, 20 December). The climax of the murrelet saga comes again from the Spears, who took an inshore pelagic trip for the Morro Bay count on 30 December and counted 79 **Marbled Murrelets** and 58 **Ancient Murrelets**! The Morro Bay area was previously considered the southern limit for these



species, but even then there was only one murrelet on the 1978 count, and none on the 1977 count.

A large number of **Vaux's Swifts** (probably wintering) was seen on the Oceanside count (22 December), and single late migrants were found at Malibu Lagoon (Terry Clark, 5 December) and Pt. Dume (Kimball Garrett, 9 December). A "**Yellow-shafted**" **Flicker** was in Griffith Park on 4 November (Justin Russell). This is not much of a winter for **Lewis' Woodpeckers**, with only two reports: At Forest Falls (6000') in the San Bernardino Mountains on 8 November, and at O'Neill Park in Orange County on 16 December (both by Doug Willick).

There have been only four previous records of the **Olivaceous Flycatcher** in the state, but none as far south as the one found near Irvine on the Orange County count (Chuck Caniff, 30 December). The **Willow Flycatcher** which stayed through December at the Arcadia arboretum is the first to winter in California. A **Gray Flycatcher** was found at the Arboretum on 10 November in the same place where one wintered two years ago, and a second Gray was found in a different location there on 26 December. The wintering **Western Flycatcher** there made a total of four **Empidonax** of three species—unprecedented in winter (all Barbara Cohen). The occurrence of one **Coues' Flycatcher** nearly every winter is difficult to explain, as this Mexican bird is unknown here at other seasons. This winter one was near the Merry-Go-Round in Griffith Park after 7 November (Rolly Throckmorton et al).

Very few **Mountain Chickadees** were reported in the lowlands to date, but **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were locally numerous (e.g. over 100 in Hope Ranch on the Santa Barbara Count, 29 December). **Robins** were generally scarce until the end of December, when flocks moved in to utilize the abundant crops of Toyon Berries. **Varied Thrushes** were unreported except in the mountain canyons, with "a few" at Mt. Baldy (Bill Wirtz, 9 December), "one or two" at Forest Falls (Doug Willick, 20 December), and one high in the Santa Monicas on the Malibu count, 16 December. Every year or so a **Bendire's Thrasher** shows up in winter on the coast, but this winter there were two or more. The first was at Cabrillo Beach after 24 December (Hal Ferris et al) and one, maybe two, were found on the Orange County Coastal count on 30 December.

The **Warbling Vireo** at the Arboretum on 12 November (Barbara Cohen) and one near the Griffith Park Merry-Go-Round on 16 November (Kimball Garrett) were probably late migrants, as neither were relocated, but one in Montecito on 29 December (Lee Jones, James Wolstencroft) was probably wintering. A **Solitary Vireo** and a **Black-and-White Warbler** in Riverside on 16 December (the Cardiffs) were also probably migrants. Another "Black-and-White" was on the Orange County Coastal count, 30 December. The **Lucy's Warbler** at UCLA was still there on 11 November, and that same day another Lucy's was found at Harbor Lake by Mitch Heindel. On 1 December Mitch had two Lucy's in the same area. A late **Northern Parula** and a **Palm Warbler** put in a brief appearance at Long Beach Recreation Park on 22 November (Jon Atwood). The **Cape May Warbler** on Pt. Loma stayed well into December, and another was found on the UCSB campus by Michael Perone on the Santa Barbara count (29 December). Forest Falls in the San Bernardino Mtns. has freezing temperatures at night, but Doug Willick still found not only "**Audubon's**" and **Townsend's Warblers**, but also a male

**Black-throated Blue Warbler** which stayed for five days after 23 November. Jerry Johnson's garden apartment complex in Marina del Rey yielded a late **Chestnut-sided Warbler** on 17 November. **Palm Warblers**, present in relatively large numbers last October, were still here in December—at Cabrillo Beach, and on the Orange Co. and San Bernardino counts. The **Painted Redstart** in Presidio Park, San Diego, (Guy McCaskie, 2 December) stayed on but proved difficult to relocate.

We have come to expect a few wintering orioles, particularly in flowering Eucalyptus trees, but they seemed relatively scarce this winter—very few **Hooded Orioles**, and a single **Scott's Oriole** at Fairmont Park in Riverside (the Cardiffs, 16 December) to complement the usual small numbers of **Northern Orioles**.

Juncos were present in normal numbers, but a larger number of flocks included **Gray-headed Juncos** this winter—the three mentioned in the last Tanager, plus one in Joshua Tree National Monument (Roger Lindfield, 15 December), and another in the Arcadia arboretum (Shantanu Phukan, 22 December). One, or probably two, **Clay-colored Sparrows** were in the Arboretum after 2 November. At least one **Swamp Sparrow** was still present in Death Valley on 16 November (Kurt Campbell), another worked the edges of the upper pond at the Arboretum from 29 November until mid-December (Barbara Cohen), and a third was in the El Dorado Nature Center, Long Beach (Jon Atwood, 7 December). A single **McCown's Longspur** was near Santa Maria on 2 December, and another was found on the first annual Lancaster count on 15 December (both Jon Dunn).

February gives us our last sure chance to see most of the winter birds as the waterfowl (geese in particular) start moving north this month. The refuges at the south end of the Salton Sea are at their best early in the month. The last high tides of the winter on the 15th and 16th of February give us our last chance for rails and a possible Sharp-tailed Sparrow at Upper Newport Bay. Later on we will find the earliest spring migrants—Allen's and Rufous Hummingbirds, swallows, Turkey Vultures, etc.—but don't expect the full tide of passerine migration until April at the earliest. □

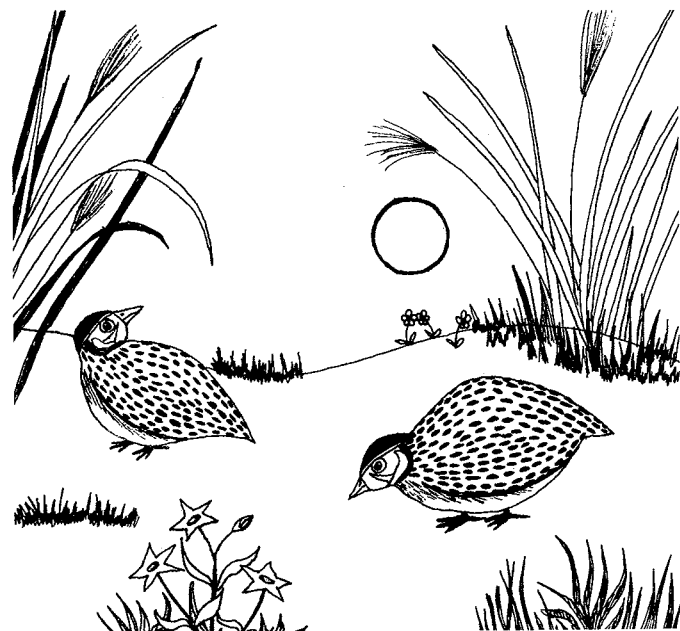


Illustration by Teri Eichholz

**Jean Brandt**

## **BIRDING LOCALITIES**

**L**ocated in the heart of Malibu Canyon and just south of Malibu Creek State Park (see *Western Tanager*, Apr. 1977), *Tapia County Park* offers consistently rewarding birding. Once per year—the first Sunday of the annual Christmas Count period—dozens of top birders gather there for the mid-day compilation of the Malibu Christmas Bird Count which has recorded 155 or more species of birds each of the past four years.

Birds find the park hospitable, with both native and introduced vegetation and a year-round running stream. Here you will find several habitats in a relatively small area: chaparral, oak woodland, riparian, evergreens and rocky outcroppings. The alders and willows along the stream are subject to yearly flooding.

Directly south of Tapia, across the stream is the Las Virgenes treatment plant, complete with the occasional noxious outflow typical of such a place (Don't pick the watercress!).

Upstream is a Salvation Army Camp. Birders should ask permission at the residence near the camp entrance before going onto their property.

Resident birds, so often eagerly sought after by out of state birders, include California Quail, White-throated Swift, Acorn and Nuttall's Woodpeckers, Black Phoebe, Plain Titmouse, Bushtit, Wrentit, California Thrasher, Western Bluebird, Hutton's Vireo and Brown Towhee.

### **GIVE THE GIFT OF AUDUBON\***

**“A**udubon means life” and what better message to share during the holiday season? Your gift of a membership in the National Audubon Society is a continuing one. Six issues of the beautiful *Audubon Magazine* and ten issues of the renowned *Western Tanager* are received by each member of the Los Angeles Audubon Society every year. All new members will receive a copy of “Audubon's America,” the nature map of the National Audubon Society created exclusively for this purpose by Hammond. You, as the donor, will also receive a copy of this map.

This membership drive is *critical* to LAAS. If we are able to increase our membership by 10% over the next six months, we will receive a one-time-only \$5.00 bonus per new member. We desperately need this additional income! Our conservation commitments (\$10,000.00 to Mono Lake alone), the restoration of Audubon House, the replacement of old and broken office equipment, *plus* inflation, has us in a bind.

A gift membership in Audubon may mean a new way of life to the recipient, a new understanding and appreciation of the world and its problems. Please, everyone - **HELP!**

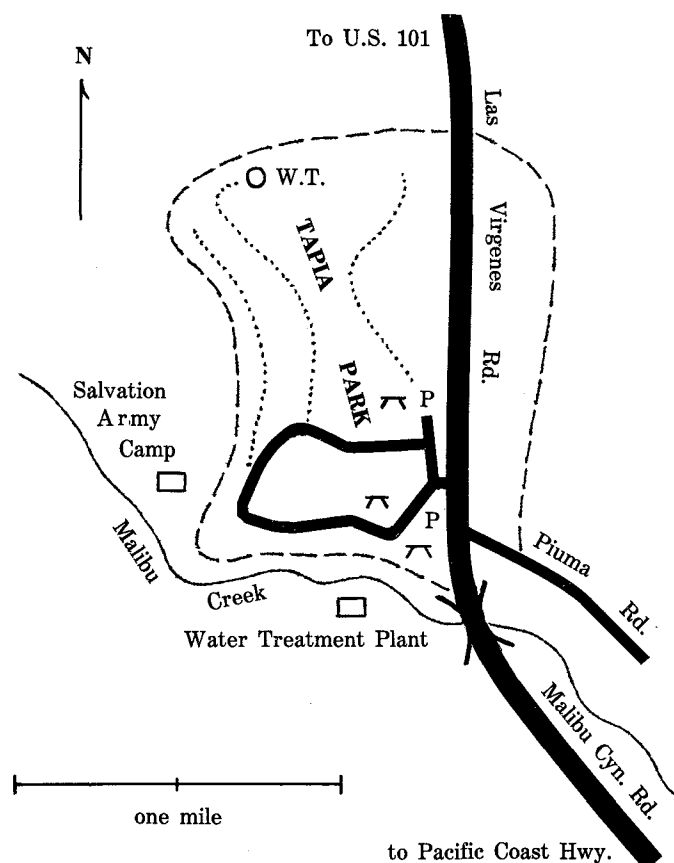
\*This article should have run last month with the membership envelopes enclosed in that issue; however, it was inadvertently omitted. Please use last month's gift membership envelope and *share Audubon with a friend*. Do not use these envelopes to renew your own membership.

In summer, Tapia Park is hot, dry and very heavily used for public recreation; however, many birds absent in winter successfully nest here. Some of these are: Black-chinned (riparian) and Costa's (chaparral) hummingbirds, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, a few Swainson's Thrushes, Phainopepla, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Northern (Bullock's) Oriole and Black-headed Grosbeak.

Winter residents have included: Lewis' Woodpecker (occasional), Red-breasted Sapsucker, Winter Wren (occasional), Varied Thrush (irregular), Golden-crowned Kinglet (also irregular), Northern Waterthrush (two consecutive years) and Golden-crowned Sparrow (common). Every year, one or two Slate-colored and Gray-headed Juncos are found in the large flocks of Oregans.

This is a good place to check for vagrants, especially in fall. Worm-eating (one Thanksgiving morn), Virginia's, Lucy's, Black-throated Green and Blackburnian warblers and Summer Tanager have all been recorded.

Tapia Park is more dependable than exiting, but the birds are there and it is an easy drive from either the Pacific Coast Highway or the Ventura Freeway. There are picnic tables and restrooms. Full facilities are in nearby Malibu or Agoura. □



## Rona Parrot

# SQUAWK TALK

**D**espite the claims of my detractors your beloved Rona Parrot is alive and well—fresh from a trip to Amazonia for a little M & M (that's bird jargon for Molt and Migration). Yes, I'm back sporting a fresh set of feathers and a fresh image to boot. I will be actively soliciting letters from the readership on matters of general interest to *Western Tanager* subscribers. If you have a burning bird-related question you would like answered, pipe up and be counted! Chances are that there are others out there who've been pondering the same question, but were too timid to ask. Perhaps I can pique your inquisitive spirit with a few examples: Why do House Sparrows take dust baths? It is really true that Dippers take bubble baths? Why are there so many Cedar Waxwings this year, yet none last year? I'm sure you can think of many others.

Perhaps you have a gripe instead. Do you think there is too much emphasis on subtle matters of bird identification in the WT? Too little? Do you approve of articles on subjects other than birds in the WT (such as this month's lead article by George Bryce)? Or should the WT be strictly for the birds? How about a little controversy? Are you in favor of the Condor Recovery Program (see last October's *Western Tanager*)? What about plans to remove the goats from San Clemente Island?

To start things off I have a few letters here in my nest hole that I'll share with you.

Dear Editor,

Tell that ridiculous bird of yours to migrate to Brazil! [I did and she did, but like all true migrants she came back—Ed.] I was incensed by that obscene photograph in the September issue!

Still Steaming  
Santa Ana



**WESTERN  
TANAGER**

**EDITOR** Lee Jones

**ASSISTANT EDITOR** Teri Eichholz

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**1st VICE-PRESIDENT** Kimball Garrett

**2ND VICE-PRESIDENT** Fred Heath

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Audubon membership (local and national) is \$20 per year (individual), \$25 (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.

Dear S.S.,

Please accept our sincerest apology. The editor takes full responsibility for that one. The picture of "Barry and friend" (ex-editor Barry Clark and wife Terry) was supposed to be tongue in cheek; however, due to a mix-up, the wrong picture was printed, resulting in what was clearly a case of....well, tongue in *chin* instead.

Dear Rona,

I have taken custody of a bird from my yard that is suffering, I am told, from a disease called bumblefoot. The bird store manager who identified the disease told me it was incurable. However, the other night on some animal program (I saw only the last part of it), there was a wild animal or bird preserve somewhere in California where they were injecting something into the leg of a small bird to cure bumblefoot. Where can one go to get wild birds taken care of?

E.L.  
Beverly Hills

Dear E.L.,

My personal veterinarian tells me that bumblefoot is an abnormal swelling of the foot resulting from a bacterial infection, usually *Staphylococcus* or *Streptococcus*. It results from a bruise or puncture of the foot pad which then becomes infected. It is most frequent in caged birds exposed to protruding nails, splinters or wires. As you point out, however, it can occur in wild birds as well. Since it is a bacterial infection it can often be successfully treated with an anti-bacterial agent, either by draining and cleaning the wound or by injection. Better leave this to your veterinarian, however. My Uncle Ara nearly died after self-administering a homemade remedy for premature feather fallout—he ate a bottle of Elmer's!

### Please note:

I will publish as many letters of general interest as time and space allow. If you want (or do not want) your name published along with your letter, please so indicate when corresponding. Send all letters to Rona Parrot, c/o *Western Tanager*, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles 90046. □



# 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 2 weeks 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. There should be a separate check for each trip.

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5** — Corliss Kristensen will be holding monthly **Conservation Meetings** in Plummer Park one hour preceding each month's evening program. Have an early dinner and come to Plummer Park at 7:00 p.m.—be a voice of support in our conservation effort.

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5—Annual Banquet**, Sportsman's Lodge, 12833 Ventura Blvd., North Hollywood. \$12.50 per person. Guest speaker **Arnold Small** will give a slide presentation entitled *Birds and Beasts from the Bottom of the World*. To make reservations send your check payable to Los Angeles Audubon to LAAS, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90046.

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16—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: \$18 per person. Leaders: Arnold Small and Shum Suffel.

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23 —Santa Barbara.** The Santa Barbara area hosts the greatest mid-winter diversity of birds in virtually the entire United States. Some of the more unusual birds present this winter in this area include Cape May Warbler and Grace's Warbler. This trip will cover various areas from Montecito to Goleta. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Andree Clark bird refuge (reached by taking the "Child Estate-Zoo-Cabrillo Blvd." exit from U.S. 101 in Santa Barbara—meet at the refuge parking lot just south of the freeway) Leader: Louis Bevier (805) 962-1037.

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25 —Cabrillo Beach.** Waterbirds around Los Angeles Harbor, and a chance for unusual wintering landbirds. Geared to beginning and intermediate birders. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the entrance to Cabrillo Beach; take the Harbor Fwy. south to its end and continue south on Gaffey. Jog left (east) and continue south to entrance of Park. Leader: Jean Brandt 788-5188.

**SATURDAY, MARCH 8**—Beginner's bird walk in **Tapia Park** (see Birding Locations, this issue). Meet at 12:00 noon in the lower parking lot at Tapia Park. Leader: Gail Baumgarten, 788-7357.

**TUESDAY, MARCH 11—Evening Meeting 8:00 p.m.** Plummer Park. Tentatively scheduled: "*Grouse Country—a film unveiling the secrets of mating behavior in three species of North American grouse.*" Speaker to be announced next month.

**SUNDAY, APRIL 27—Land on Santa Cruz Island at Pelican Bay.** Departure at 7:30 a.m. aboard the *Sun Fish* from Island Packers Dock in Ventura Marina, returning at 5:30 p.m. Price: \$20 per person. Leaders: Ken Wiley, Shum Suffel, and Phil Sayre.

**SUNDAY, MAY 4—San Pedro to Osborne Bank Pelagic Trip.** Departure at 6:00 a.m. aboard the *Vantuna* from USC Dock at San Pedro, returning at 6:00 p.m. Price: \$18 per person. Leaders: Fred Heath and Ed Navojosky.

**SUNDAY, MAY 18—San Miguel Island and Out To Sea.** Departure 7:00 a.m. aboard the *Sun Fish* from El Capitan State Beach, Goleta, returning at 5:00 p.m. Price \$27 per person. Leaders Herb & Olga Clarke.

## An Interim Protection Period for the Santa Monica Mountains

For more than six years now L.A. County supervisors have been granting construction permits in the Santa Monica Mountains without an area plan. An area plan would establish specific regions eligible for development, recreation and protection. Congressman Anthony Beilsenon has called for a moratorium on subdivisions and minor land divisions until an area plan is adopted—one that would take into account plans for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Letters and calls supporting the adoption of an interim protection period are urgently needed. Please write or call County Supervisor Baxter Ward, 500 W. Temple, Los Angeles 90012.