

# WESTERN TANAGER

Los Angeles Audubon Society

Volume 46

Number 9

June 1980



**B**ack in February the Bureau of Land Management produced a massive 5½ lb., 436 page document for public review. It is called: *The California Desert Conservation Area: Plan Alternatives and Environmental Impact Statement, a Draft*. This large (11x14" format, 1½" thick) volume is complete with maps—many large, colorful maps—charts, illustrations and photographs, the culmination of years of research by countless biologists, archaeologists, geologists, recreation enthusiasts and government officials.

The draft plan discusses four management alternatives for the future: a no action alternative ("continue with present management"), a protection alternative ("maximum preservation of natural and cultural values"), a use alternative ("obtaining the highest degree of consumptive use and

production that desert resources are capable of providing") and a balanced alternative ("a compromise" between management affording maximum protection and maximum use). The desert plan proposes to divide the desert into a patchwork of multiple use management areas using a zoning concept based on four multiple use classes. These classes are: Class C (controlled use) primarily to protect wilderness areas; Class L (limited use) to protect sensitive resources; Class M (moderate use) provides for resource uses such as grazing, mining, utilities; and Class I (intensive use) provides for consumptive uses—ORV open areas, open pit mines. The use alternative adopted for a given area of the desert depends on the plan alternative that is eventually accepted. It is clear from the beginning that BLM favors the balanced alternative.

The deadline for public review and comment on this draft management plan was, unfortunately, May 15th; however, the final plan will not be drafted for several more months and your input can still be valuable. The best person to write at this point would be:

Frank Gregg, Director  
Bureau of Land Management  
Washington, DC 20024

or James B. Ruch,  
California State Director, BLM  
2800 Cottage Way, Room E-2841  
Sacramento, CA 95825

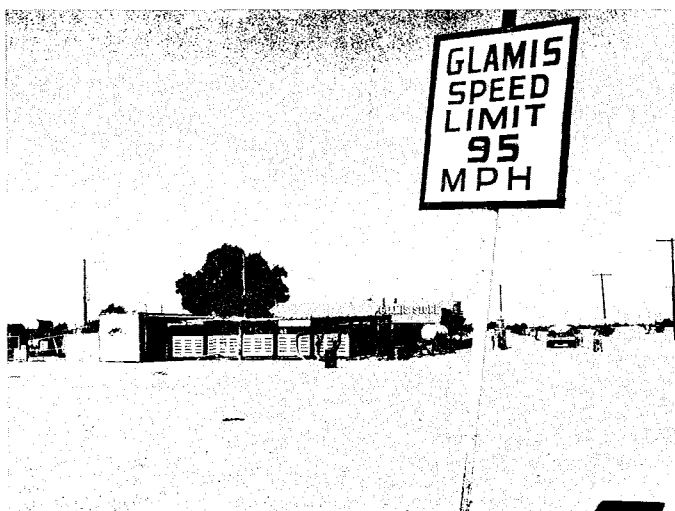
This article critically reviews the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and suggests alternatives not addressed in the draft management plan.

### The EIS and Non-compliance with Laws, Executive Orders and Policy

The EIS fails to consider all reasonable alternatives. The present alternatives do not provide a range of actions that give the public or the agency reasonable choices. It fails to describe resources which would be in specific treatment areas such as grazing allotments, ORV open areas, and wilderness study areas. It fails to provide the environmental consequences of designating or not designating wilderness study areas. Additionally, it fails to identify a proposed action or preferred alternative. The public must be provided with an opportunity to review the consequences of a preferred alternative.

Multiple Use Class M protects only "critical portions of significant riparian areas" from livestock use, and Class I reduces livestock only on "critical riparian habitat." Furthermore, there are no restrictions on horse and burro use of riparian vegetation outside of the grazing allotments. The plan does not provide the means to avoid long-term and short-term adverse impacts or to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of riparian areas required by Executive Order 11990 signed by President Carter on May 24, 1977 and the BLM Manual 6740. This manual also requires that the BLM implement a management system to protect and enhance all wetland-riparian areas.

The California State Director's policy on wildlife management states that the objectives of all programs will include the means to improve the habitat and delist officially listed (State rare/endangered and Federal threatened and/or endangered) species. Examples of non-compliance with the above policy are: The *Mojave Ground Squirrel*, listed as rare by the state. No plans are included for habitat management. As it now stands 4-7% of its habitat will be improved and 53-96% of its habitat will be subject to negative or highly negative impacts depending on the alternative adopted. The *Black Rail*, listed as rare by the state. There are no plans for habitat management and 33-80% of its habitat will be subject to negative impacts. The *Black Toad*, listed as rare by the state. Again, no plans for habitat management, with 100% of its habitat subject to negative or highly negative impacts.



photograph by Lee Jones

### The EIS and Multiple Use Classes

The boundaries of the multiple use classes discussed above were *supposed* to be based on the sensitivity of the resources present and the current and projected demands for use and development of resources. There is, however, very little evidence in the plan that "sensitivity of the resources" had any significant impact on boundary determination. For instance, the habitat boundaries of most rare, threatened, endangered and sensitive species are not recognized. Ecosystems are not even recognized in the plan. Use area boundaries were accepted as submitted by *user* groups, only.

### The EIS and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

Only 50 of 165 candidate ACEC's were included in the plan. As for those included, there is an apparent inconsistency of selection/rejection criteria. For example, the Fort Soda Mojave Chub habitat is included even though there are now no serious threats to this area which is already afforded strong legal protection. Similarly, Black Springs is included as an ACEC even though it is already fenced and continued protection is part of the grazing plan. On the other hand, Milpitas Wash is not included, though it is a classic example of Sonoran Wash vegetation with serious and immediate threats from winter semi-permanent campers and ORVs. Habitat for rare and sensitive species such as the Mojave Ground Squirrel, Black Toad and Desert Tortoise is also not included. There are serious threats to already declining populations of these species from grazing, vehicles, roads and powerlines.

The plan calls for inappropriate management of some ACECs. As for Afton Canyon, the plan states the need to control vehicles and campers, but the existing draft management plan leaves the vehicles and campers in the *heart of the riparian vegetation*. Corn Spring is a rare fan plant oasis, habitat for the Elf Owl which has been proposed as an endangered species by the state. But there are no plans to remove the campground or protect the habitat under the existing plan.

### The EIS and Wild Horse and Burro Management

The protection alternative allows for *more* wild horses and burros than do the balanced and use alternatives! The plan calls for an initial reduction of 5,000 animals at a cost of about \$1 million, but gives no timetable for burro reductions. If we wait five years there will be at least 3,000 additional burros for a net reduction of only 2,000. Afterwards, the plan calls for an annual reduction of 600 animals at a cost of \$200,000 per year. Assuming this reduction offsets annual reproduction, this cost will continue every year. The analysis of impacts assumes that burro numbers will remain at 1980 levels, but with a known increase rate of at least 15% of the total population each year the number of burros will continue to increase, thus steadily increasing their impact on the environment.

The overall burro management program is far too expensive to implement. The plan assumes unlimited money and people to reduce and control burro numbers. There is no provision to control burro use and numbers on sensitive habitats. Such uncontrolled use is destroying riparian areas and the vegetation around them—areas such as the Inyo Brown Towhee habitat in the Argus Range, Grapevine Canyon in the Nelson Range, and the east face of the Inyo Mountains.

What are the consequences of delayed implementation of burro reductions? Expect severe declines in Desert Bighorn



photograph by Colin Penno

numbers with extirpation of some populations. Expect further deterioration of riparian vegetation and deterioration of the habitats of the very rare Inyo Salamander and Panamint Alligator Lizard and the uncommon Gilbert's Skink.

#### The EIS and Livestock Grazing

Between the four alternatives there is little difference in forage allocated to wildlife. It would seem logical that in the protection alternative there would be a significantly higher amount of forage available for wildlife. The implementation assumptions fail to clearly describe grazing management restrictions. For example: "only one grazing pass with sheep in crucial habitat areas." This doesn't define what "one pass" is or how it will be enforced. "Use in crucial habitat will be monitored by a team." It does not define what the team can do or criteria for action. "Livestock grazing will be restricted in some areas of bighorn sheep habitat." It doesn't say what restrictions will be applied or when. "Develop alternative sources of water for cattle and bighorn." First, the problem is usually space; second, you can't develop alternatives if there aren't any. "Maximum use of key forage species will be restricted." It does not say what restrictions will be imposed or what the key species are. "Critical portions of significant riparian habitats will be fenced." There is no definition of critical or significant. "Allotment management plans will be developed....and implemented six years later." This doesn't provide a time frame for preparing the management plans.

#### The EIS and Impacts on Wildlife

##### AMPHIBIANS

*Tehachapi Slender Salamander*—state listed rare. Deterioration of potential habitat on the east slope of the Sierra Nevada from grazing, ORV use and camping is expected. There are no immediate plans to control any of this use in these narrow canyon riparian areas.

*Inyo Mountain Salamander*—discovered in 1974. There are only 20-30 acres of habitat in existence for this species. It is being considered by the state for rare listing. Uncontrolled burro use could destroy the habitat. Mining could divert the water.

*Black Toad*—state listed as rare. It is known from only one location Deep Springs Valley. There are threats from proposed livestock grazing and water developments. There are currently proposals to develop springs, drill wells and pipe water to cattle watering troughs.

*Couch's Spadefoot Toad*. Noise from vehicles has been shown to cause untimely emergence behavior in this species. Potential to destroy populations northeast of the Imperial Sand Dunes is high.

*Pacific Tree Frog*. There are relict populations in the Panamint Mountains, Great Falls Basin, Big Morongo Valley and along the Mohave River. Threats from burro use and uncontrolled recreation use will cause deterioration of riparian vegetation, streamside cover and water quality.

*Amargosa Toad*. 80% of the potential habitat along the Amargosa River is subject to high severe negative impacts from horses and unrestricted vehicle use.

##### REPTILES

*Desert Tortoise*. Recent studies show severe habitat loss, fragmentation of populations and habitat, and declining populations throughout the range of this species. The BLM is required by its own policy to reverse these downward trends and ensure that the desert tortoise does not become endangered. These trends are the result of vehicles, grazing, burros, roads, collecting, etc. The effects of the draft management plan: a) only two of four major populations are likely to survive under the balanced alternative; b) high to severe negative impacts will occur on 31% of the habitat in the protection alternative, 77% in the balanced alternative and 97% in the use alternative; c) road and way restrictions are not scheduled for designation for seven years; d) There is no fixed schedule for implementing livestock grazing management plans—It may be many years before grazing is controlled; e) 20% of the Desert Tortoise habitat is grazed by feral burros with no schedule or money for controlling burro numbers.

*Flat-tailed Horned Lizard*—a species fully protected by the Fish and Game Department and under status review by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. There are only 330 square miles of optimal habitat remaining. Of this, 124 square miles are currently being negatively impacted by ORVs, geothermal

development and gravel pits. The remaining habitat, although in good condition, is being fragmented. Effects of the plan: a) geothermal development is proposed for the area; b) ORV use areas are proposed; c) additional gravel pits are proposed. All of this will result in negative or highly negative impacts occurring to 72% of the habitat in the protection alternative, 84% in the balanced alternative and 98% in the use alternative. It is expected that this species will become endangered because of the proposed management.

*Western Pond Turtle* (southern California subspecies)—becoming very uncommon. There is a relict population in Afton Canyon. Effects of the plan: ORV use and camping will continue adjacent to the only desert population of this species. Expect this population to be eliminated.

### MAMMALS

*Desert Bighorn Sheep*—populations are declining. Several populations are so low they may not recover. Habitat is being negatively impacted by livestock, burros and vehicles. Effects of the plan: a) grazing will continue on bighorn ranges; b) all proposed management is general and does not address needs of specific populations; c) 39% of bighorn habitat is grazed by horses and burros; d) proposed reductions in burros will not eliminate the negative impacts to bighorn; e) lack of a schedule for management implementation may mean that populations will be eliminated before anything is done; f) areas being overgrazed now will continue to be overgrazed for several more years. It is expected that the Desert Bighorn will become threatened or endangered.

*Mojave Ground Squirrel*—listed as rare by the state. The habitat is deteriorating because of vehicles, grazing and agriculture. Effects of the plan: a) negative to highly negative impacts will occur on 53% of the habitat in the protection alternative, 95% in the balanced alternative and 98% in the use alternative; b) it will take up to seven years to designate roads and ways for vehicles, in the meantime all roads are open. It is expected that populations of this species will continue to decline and will be listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as threatened.

### BIRDS

*Golden Eagle*—fully protected by State and Federal law. This species is sensitive to environmental degradation. Effects of the plan: a) 67% of existing nest sites will be negatively impacted in the balanced alternative; b) 76% of foraging areas will be negatively impacted, primarily by deteriorating habitat of the prey species; c) there will be a high level of disturbance from human activities (ORVs and camping). Expect populations to decline.

*Prairie Falcon*—fully protected by State and Federal law. Populations are declining in the desert. Effects of the plan: a)

46% of existing nest sites would receive negative or highly negative impacts in the balanced alternative; b) 76% of the foraging area would be negatively impacted by vehicles and grazing. Expect populations to continue to decline. Desert populations are likely to become threatened.

*Swainson's Hawk*—sharp declines throughout the state. Only six reported nestings on the desert since 1950. Effects of the plan: a) nearly all of the habitat will be negatively impacted by cattle and feral burros; b) there are no plans to improve habitat or protect existing nesting territories. Expect extirpation of this species from the desert.

Riparian raptors such as *Cooper's Hawk*, *Great Horned Owl*, *Common Screech-Owl* and *Long-eared Owl*. These species are losing large amounts of habitat, particularly in washes and riparian vegetation areas. Effects of the plan: a) unlimited vehicle use will be allowed in 36% of the washes; b) unlimited vehicle use will be permitted on an additional 42% of the washes for up to seven years; c) uncontrolled burro use of riparian vegetation. Expect loss of habitat to continue and populations to decline.

*Elf Owl*—proposed as endangered by the state. It has already been virtually extirpated from the desert with only one known nesting site remaining. Effects of the plan: a) the campground will remain at Corn Springs, a recent breeding area; b) human disturbances and habitat destruction will most likely make the area unusable. Expect habitat to be destroyed and no further use by this species.

*Yuma Clapper Rail*—listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as endangered. Effects of the plan: negative impact to 100% of the habitat. Expect extirpation from the California desert.

*Black Rail*—listed as rare by the state. Effects of the plan: depending on the alternative, 33% to 64% of its habitat will be negatively impacted.

*Inyo Brown Towhee*—proposed endangered by the state. Extremely limited habitat. Effects of the plan: a) no time frame for removing burros; b) habitat will continue to deteriorate; c) no plans to protect water sources from diversion to other uses (domestic and mining). Expect the subspecies to become extinct unless immediate action is taken to remove the burros.

### FISH

*Desert Pupfish*—proposed as endangered by the state. There is limited habitat in fresh water areas around the Salton Sea. Effects of the plan: a) proposes to dispose of the Whitewater River marsh; b) there is no protection of water sources in other habitats (San Sebastian Marsh and Salt Creek); c) 42% to 65% of the habitat will be negatively impacted. Expect the species to become endangered.

*Amargosa Pupfish* and an as yet undescribed *speckled dace*. Populations are small but currently in good condition. Effects of the plan: a) there is no timetable for removing livestock grazing or feral burros; b) there are no plans to protect water sources; c) negative impacts will occur on 38% to 70% of the habitat depending on the alternative. Expect populations to decline unless there is immediate action to control burros.

It is quite clear that the Draft California Desert Plan is unsatisfactory as it is presently written. None of the proposed alternatives is adequate or workable. Your input is still needed if we are to ensure that our desert is preserved for future generations to enjoy. □



# BIRDS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

by Kimball Garrett and Jon Dunn

This is the second of a series of excerpts from the soon to be published *Birds of Southern California* by Kimball Garrett and Jon Dunn.

## BLACK-TAILED GNATCATCHER *Poliophtila melanura*

Fairly common resident on the Colorado Desert (common in District R [= Colorado River]), extending locally and uncommonly north through the eastern Mohave Desert. Also resident locally in arid coastal sage scrub in District C [= coastal slope] from Los Angeles Co. south.

The desert subspecies in the region, *P. m. lucida*, is a common resident along the Colorado River, and fairly common resident in the southern part of District D [= deserts] west to the Anza-Borrego Desert SD and Palm Springs RIV. Occurs north through the eastern Mohave Desert to the Lanfair Valley SBE and the Amargosa River INY (where scarce). Extends west on the Mohave Desert to the vicinity of Yermo SBE. A report of nesting at Mesquite Springs in the northern part of Death Valley INY (Grinnell and Miller 1944) likely pertains to the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. Avoids agricultural portions of District S, [= Salton Sea/Imperial Valley] but occurs on the arid fringes of that district.

*Lucida* gnatcatchers reach peak abundances in desert washes with a dense growth of mesquite, palo verde, ironwood, or acacia. They also occur sparingly in other desert scrub habitats such as creosote flats (especially in winter). They avoid agricultural areas and introduced salt cedar scrub.

The coastal subspecies, *P. m. californica*, is an uncommon and local resident in arid coastal sage scrub habitats from the lower coastal slopes of the San Gabriel Mtns. LA (very rare and local) and western Riverside Co. south locally through San Diego Co. Along the immediate coast occurs on the Palos Verdes Peninsular LA, vic. Laguna ORA, Camp Pendleton SD, and the Tijuana River Valley SD. The center of abundance may be on the arid interior slopes in eastern Orange Co. and southwestern Riverside Co. south through the foothills of San Diego Co. (e.g. El Cajon, Sweetwater Res.). Unrecorded on the Channel Is.

A vagrant *californica* was collected with *lucida* at Palm Springs RIV 1 Jan 1904 for the only record of this race outside of District C.

*Californica* bred formerly northwest to the vicinity of the Santa Clara River VEN and the northern San Fernando Valley LA. Local declines have resulted from the destruction of habitat for housing tracts, etc., and perhaps from pressures of cowbird brood parasitism. This race breeds in low dense scrub in arid washes, and on mesas and the slopes of coastal hills. California sagebrush and patches of prickly-pear cactus are particularly favored. This subspecies is quite distinct from the desert races in plumage, voice, and habitat preferences. For more information see Atwood, *Western Birds* (in press). □

District	Habitat	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
DR	d												
C	c												

DR = deserts/Colorado River

C = coast and ocean

d = desert scrub

c = chaparral/coastal sage scrub

■ = fairly common

— = uncommon

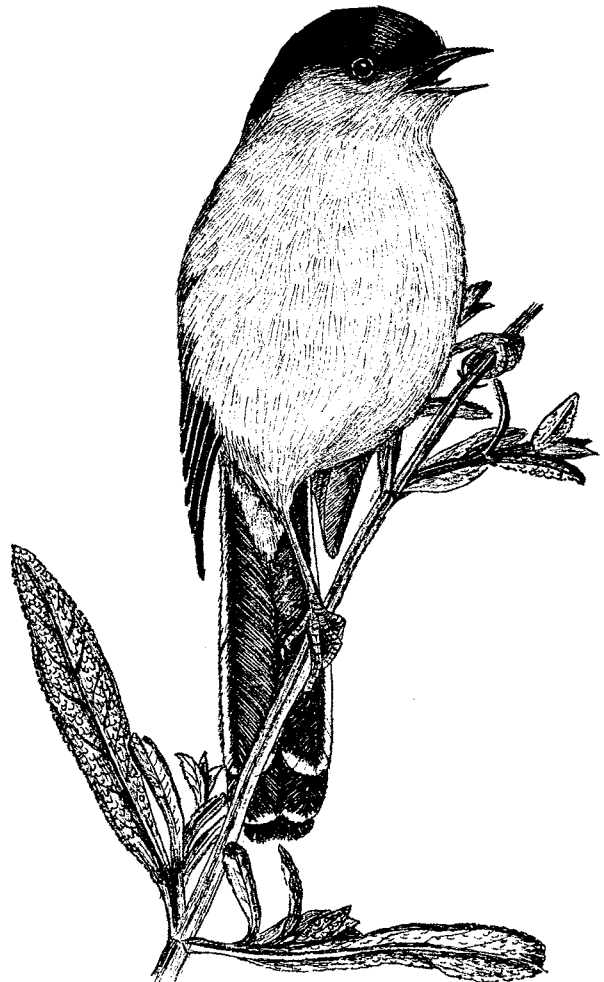


illustration by Lee Jones

## Galapagos Tour, August 9-23, 1980

Spend eight full days in the islands on privately chartered yachts. Visit all major islands (including Tower Island, home of the Red-footed Booby, and Hood Island where the world's only colony of Waved Albatross resides). Hike to the wild tortoise reserve on Santa Cruz Island. There will be five free days in Quito with time for optional birding opportunities in the Pacific slope rainforests and the Paramo Life Zone of the high Andes—home of the Andean Condor. Cost: \$1600 per person, which includes all airfare, chartered yacht, hotel and sightseeing expenses and most meals. There is an optional Amazon extension available after the tour. Leader: Lee Jones. For more information write or call:

AVENTURA  
2838 Santa Monica Blvd.  
Santa Monica, CA 90404  
(213) 829-3532

Space is limited.

## Kimball Garrett

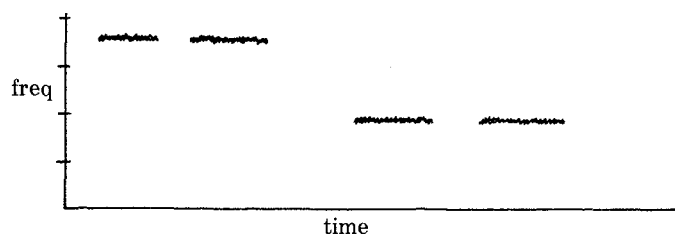
# A CLOSER LOOK

**P**revious "Closer Look" articles have treated southern California bird species which vary in their appearance according to age, sex, season, geographical locality, etc. But many other species, including this month's subject, the **Mountain Chickadee**, are remarkably uniform in their appearance. Subtle differences in measurements and in plumage pigment saturation in the Mountain Chickadee would surely be overlooked by even the keenest field observers. But the chickadee represents another type of within-species variation which is familiar to most bird-watchers—that is, geographical variation in vocalizations.

Bird vocalizations, particularly the more complex ones we call "songs," are subject to the same geographical influences that give rise to human dialects and accents. Bird species differ greatly in the degree to which their vocalizations vary between populations. In most shorebirds, for example, calls are quite uniform throughout a species' range. Dialects are quite common and marked in many passerines. One need only listen to the various recordings of Rufous-sided Towhees, White-crowned Sparrow, and other species on the Peterson *Field Guide to Western Bird Songs* to appreciate the degree to which songs of the same species may differ. Intensive studies on song variation and dialects have been made on the White-crowned Sparrow, the Cardinal, and other species with relatively simple songs. Analyses of very complex songs (e.g. House Finch, Fox Sparrow) have added much to our knowledge of the nature of song variation, but can be somewhat overwhelming when dozens or even hundreds of themes, notes, phrases, or syllables

are involved. I have chosen to discuss the Mountain Chickadee here because its song is very simple (two to seven pure notes) and still shows prominent variation even within southern California.

Mountain Chickadees breed commonly in a wide variety of conifer-dominated forests and woodlands throughout the highlands of southern California (and elsewhere in the west). Isolated populations even occur on the desert ranges of the eastern Mohave. The basic territorial song of the male consists of from two to several clear whistles on two or more pitches. A crude sonograph (plot of frequency versus time) might show a typical song as follows:



There are innumerable variations in this simple structure, but, as a general rule, neighboring birds tend to sing similar songs and therefore the observed variations can be thought of as dialects. I have listened to or tape-recorded Mountain Chickadee songs in several parts of the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mtns., finding consistent dialects through the years. A small pocket of birds along the south shore of Big Bear

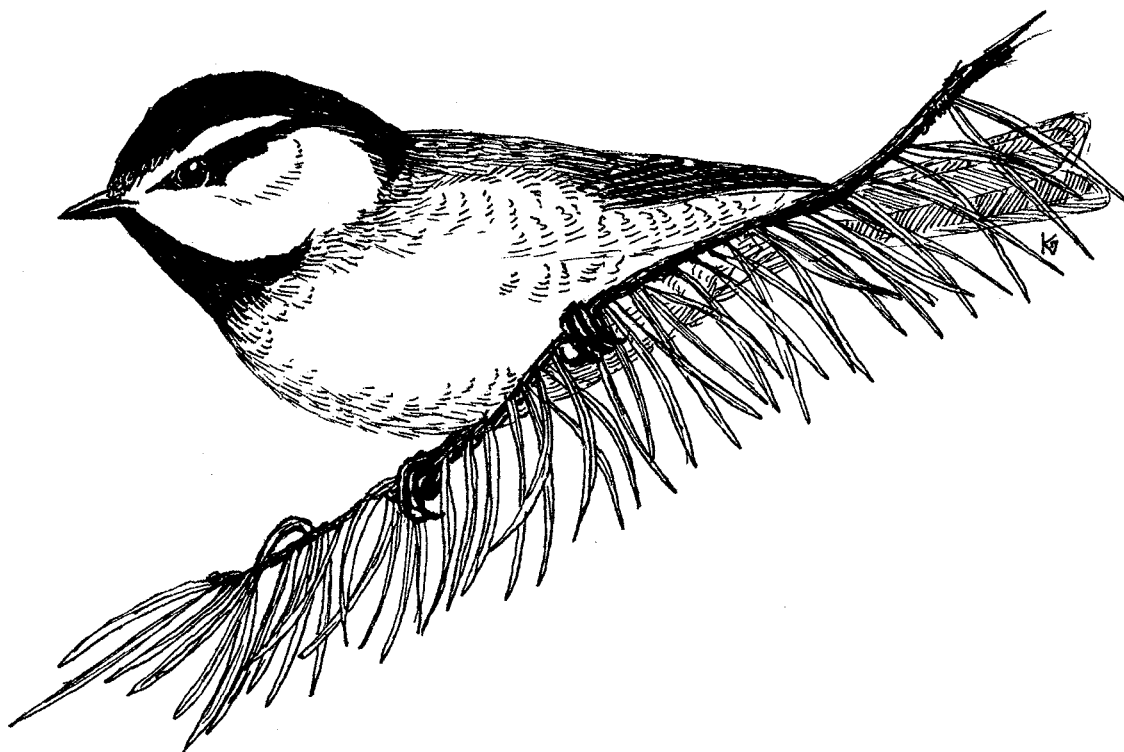
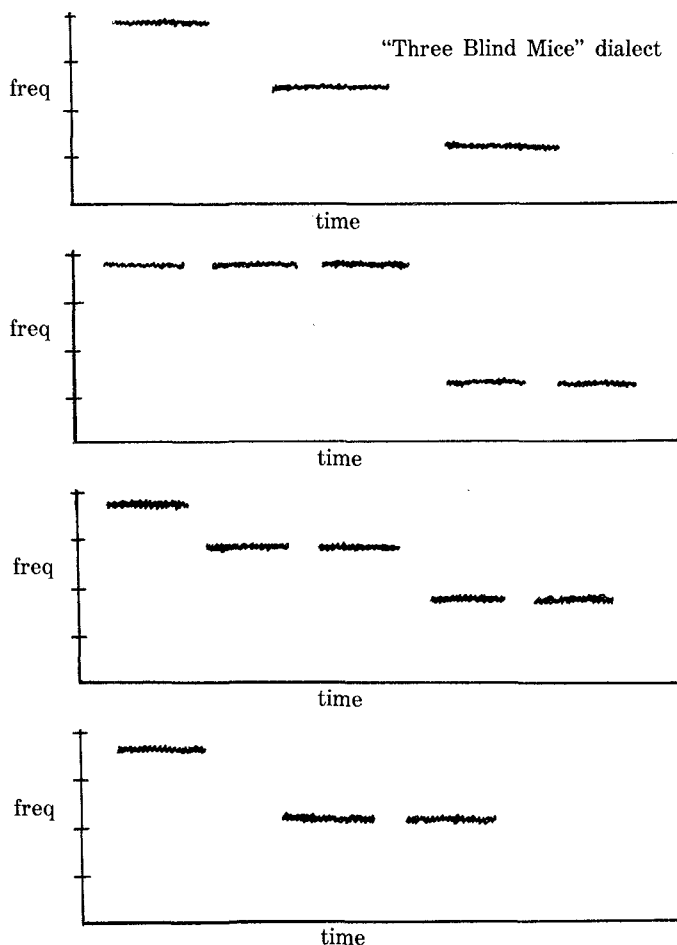


illustration by Kimball Garrett

Lake, in the vicinity of Cedar and Bluff Lakes, is always heard to give three descending whistles which perfectly follow the tune of "Three Blind Mice." This "dialect" seems to occur nowhere else in the San Bernadinos, despite the lack of obvious habitat or topographical boundaries which would prevent "cultural exchange" of songs. All singing males in this area give the "Three Blind Mice" song and that song only. The crude sonographs below depict this and other typical songs heard in the mountains of southern California:



Observers who spend time within the breeding range of the Mountain Chickadee may find it rewarding to listen to their songs (singing peaks from April through June) and record or graphically represent them. The answers to a number of questions can be sought. Do all birds in a given area (population) give the exact same song? What is the degree of individual and intra-population song variation? Are boundaries between "dialect" types sharp? If dialect boundaries are sharp, do they follow any obvious barriers, bridges, valleys, tracts of unsuitable habitat? Does the dominant dialect in a given area change through time? Crucial to an understanding of the ecological and evolutionary significance of song dialects in the Mountain Chickadee and any other species is the determination of how the song is acquired. Is the song innate, such that birds of a particular genetic make-up will sing a particular song (this rarely seems to be the complete case in passerines)? Or, conversely, is the song entirely learned from other members of the same species in the area? Most passerines fall at an

intermediate stage of this continuum. Their songs have both innate and culturally-transmitted components. At what stage might song-learning take place in the Mountain Chickadee? Perhaps some exceptionally enthusiastic reader may even wish to try to whistle his or her favorite theme into the repertoire of a Mountain Chickadee population. This has often been done in captive birds at a sensitive young age.

Evolutionary explanations for the existence of song dialects in birds are varied. Some scientists feel that local song variations are adapted to fit the physical landscape (e.g. certain frequencies travel better at certain altitudes or through different vegetation types); while this is undoubtedly true most researchers prefer to stress the cultural and ecological bases for dialects. Consider, for example, that a particular population of birds is likely to be genetically most suited to living in its own immediate physical and biotic environment. Other populations fare best in their subtly different environments. Song dialects could then act as a sorting mechanism by which individuals may recognize members of their own population and restrict outbreeding with individuals which are less well adapted to the immediate environment. Such a theory may be intellectually satisfying, but is very difficult to test. Whatever the reasons, dialects are marked in the simple song of the Mountain Chickadee, and are quite easily studied. Readers are urged to spend some time on their next excursion into the mountains taking a closer listen at these common but interesting birds.

□

## LET'S HEAR IT FROM THE 20-200'S!

*by Lewis Garrett*

**A**s the father of a birder whose eyes and ears have been described as "legendary" I would like to enter a plea for those of us who are (to put it euphemistically) near-sighted. I started birding with Kimball when he was five. For a couple of weeks I kept up. About the third time out he noted (without binoculars) that a scrub jay near our Hollywood Hills home was a little peculiar, having lost several of its facial feathers. I could vaguely see the bird in some chaparral 50 yards or so away. It was at that moment I commenced to envy you 20-20 hotshots who also hear a feather drop at 100 paces.

Through the following years I have trudged along with the Baxters, Dunns, Clarks and McCaskies hearing them comment on some bird (unseen by me) and describing it to the last lore. I countered by refusing to acknowledge any bird smaller than a robin as fair game. Over later years my diminutive has grown to Red-tailed Hawk size. Anything less is just "a small bird."

I've tried binocs of larger and larger size—and price. To no avail. The final straw was watching Arnold Small spot a life-bird a mile away through a scope, through which I saw only blue sky.

So I ask only for a little understanding for we of short sight and thin skin. A Canada Goose or an albatross show us. But when you spot a rare bird of smaller size, don't tell us. We only get jealous. □



## Shum Suffel

# BIRDS of the SEASON

**S**pring migration seemed a little late this April, but this is usually the case, as we tend to forget those rare days when western passerines enliven every bush and tree, as they did in mid April 1979, and to remember those disappointing days when it seemed that migration would never begin. True, nearly all the expected migrants had been seen by mid-month, with flycatchers, tanagers, and grosbeaks in small numbers. But hummingbirds, particularly the Rufous, were rarely reported and warblers were scarce until the overcast and drizzles of the last week of April.

Non-passerines, however, were on schedule. **Arctic Loons**, "**Black**" **Brant**, and **scoters** streamed up the coast in uncounted thousands, as the watchers on Pt. Dume on 13 and 24 April can attest. Even though large flocks of migrating **White Pelicans** were reported in early March, there were still about one thousand at the Salton Sea on 3 April (Barbara Turner). Another migrating flock of about 300 was soaring over Palmdale on 12 April (Dan Guthrie). An adult **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** (very rare in California) at the Ventura Marina (Walton and Tamara Green, 20 April) was still present on the 26th but could not be found the next day. Ten **White-faced Ibis**, presumably migrating, were flying up the coast near Laguna on 30 April (Jerry Johnson). Ralph Hoffman, referring to **Swainson's Hawks** in his *Bird of the Pacific States* (1927) cites "a company of fifty or a hundred large hawks in a field," and my own notes from 1945 describe "thirty buteos at 1000' over Pasadena"; this reminds us of better days for the Swainson's Hawk. Today there are few sightings, and these mostly of ones or twos. This spring the high count was five on the L.A.A.S. Antelope Valley field trip of 12 April; another was perched on a telephone pole near Lancaster a week later (Eleanor and Bob Parsons, 19 April), and a nesting pair was near Lancaster after mid-April. A late **Rough legged Hawk** was in Joshua Tree National Monument on 7 April (Barbara Turner). **Golden Eagles** were again seen away from the mountains—in Etiwanda (Henry Childs), and in Griffith Park (Justin Russell), both on 9 April. An adult **Bald Eagle** near the Edmonston Pumping Plant in the southern San Joaquin Valley was far from any lake, but the nearby California Aqueduct does have fish in it (Jim Halferty). Three sightings of **Peregrine Falcons** give us hope that they are making a comeback. Jon Atwood had a "fly-over" at Long Beach on 10 April, Pomona Valley Audubon sighted one on the twelfth, and another was seen over Santa Cruz Island in mid month.

**I**ncredibly, the **American Oystercatcher** is still on Anacapa Island (L.A.A.S. trip, 27 April). It was first found at this exact spot in May 1964. An **American Golden Plover** in a dry field in the Antelope Valley was a surprise to Jon Dunn on 27 April, as was an early **Solitary Sandpiper** at the Sepulveda Basin ponds on 16 April. Three **Baird's Sandpipers** found by Richard Webster at McGrath on 9 April were gone the next day; the only other coastal spring record of this species was from Imperial Beach on 5 May 1973. While still rare here, a very few **Semipalmated Sandpipers** are found each year by those who know how to identify them, as was one at Salton City on 26

April by Guy McCaskie who does know how. Early migrant **phalaropes** included a **Northern** at the Ballona Creek Ponds on 10 April (Bob Shanman and Hal Spear) and three **Wilson's** along the San Jacinto River the same day (Starr Saphir and Kurt Campbell). Both the **Black-headed** and **Little Gull** stayed at the Stockton Sewage Plant into April. A few early **Common Terns** were seen in mid-April as expected—at Harbor Lake (Kurt Campbell) and Malibu Lagoon (Starr Saphir). Most **Elegant Terns** in our area are late summer and fall post-breeding visitors from Mexico, but a breeding colony does exist at the south end of San Diego Bay. This spring, however, there were several sightings along our coast—two by L.A.A.S. seabird watchers at Pt. Dume on 24 April, four at McGrath the same day and six there on the 30th (Richard Webster), and one at Malibu Lagoon on 1 May (Starr Saphir).

Possibly the last pair of **Elf Owls** in California was seen along the Colorado River north of Needles on 13 April (Starr Saphir, Kurt Campbell, and Curtis Marantz). Formerly there were one or two pairs at Cottonwood Springs and at least one pair at Corn Spring near Desert Center, but their population center was along the Colorado River where the cottonwoods, willows, and mesquite have now been cleared for agriculture. The previously reported **Spotted Owls** at Switzer Picnic Area in the San Gabriel Mtns. could not be found on 3 May (Larry Sansone and Craig Robson), and the former nest appeared empty. Two **Black Swifts** were over Santa Barbara in the third week of April (Eileen Gray, et al); they are seldom seen in migration, and this date is exceptionally early. An early flock of thirty **Vaux's Swifts** was over Marina del Rey on 11 April (Jerry Johnson). At last there is a definite report of a male **Rufous Hummingbird** this spring, at Yaqui Well, San Diego Co. (Barbara Turner). Certainly there must have been other sightings, but none was reported to me. **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** were widely reported after early April. Our only wintering **Lewis' Woodpecker** was still at Forest Home (6000' in the San Bernardino Mtns.) on 17 April (Doug Willick).

**Tropical Kingbirds** are virtually unknown away from the coastal slope, and are very rare in spring; a believable description is on file of one found in Joshua Tree National Monument on 19 April by Shantanu Phukan and David Grindell. The Tropical at Pt. Mugu was last seen on 29 March, but the one at Whittier Narrows stayed well into April. An **Ash-throated Flycatcher** was in the Arcadia Arboretum on 3 April and the **Willow Flycatcher** (first winter record) stayed through April (Barbara Cohen). **Hammond's Flycatchers** were widely reported after mid-April, but the only **Dusky Flycatcher** along the coast (where rare) was one found in Ventura by Richard Webster on 27 April. He also found two **Western Wood Pewees** on 26 April. The first **Bank Swallow** was seen in the Antelope Valley on 30 March by Jon Dunn. Bank Swallows may still nest in small numbers along the coastal cliffs west of Santa Barbara, which might account for Richard Webster's high count of eight "Banks" at McGrath on 23 April. **Purple Martins** formerly nested in many places in southern California, including O'Neill Park in Orange Co.; it is good to hear from the Parsons that at least one pair appears to be nesting there again.



Two **Steller's Jays** perched side by side in Altadena (below their mountain breeding range) on the late date of 2 April should make us aware of possible nesting in the lowlands. A letter from Jean Robinson who lives near the Holy Cross Cemetery, Baldwin Hills, updates the **Yellow-billed Magpie** which was previously reported at the cemetery. It visited her yard intermittently, and was interested in the whole peanuts, about which she writes: "The Scrub Jays always use their feet to hold the nutshell still, while they open it with their bills; the magpie doesn't quite have the hang of it, trying to open the nut using just its bill, and ending up pushing the nut all over the lawn."

**T**he bird of the month was the **Gray Catbird** (only Los Angeles Co. record) which stayed in a Northridge neighborhood for three weeks, until it was killed by a cat on 18 April. The gratitude of sixty-one birders goes to their gracious hostess, Caryole Smith, who not only welcomed visitors, but entertained them as well. All but nine of the visitors saw the catbird. A noticeable decline in the numbers of **Bell's Vireos** has been underway since the 1930s, undoubtedly due to cowbird parasitism; each year a few are reported from widely scattered bits of riparian habitat such as Mission Dam near San Diego, Morongo Valley, and now at Willow Hole in Joshua Tree National Monument, and Andreas and Chino Canyons (David Koepfel). **Black-and-White Warblers** were at the Oak Canyon Nature Center, Anaheim (Doug Willick) and in Huntington Beach (the Parsons). Doug also mentioned a **Virginia's Warbler** at Newport Beach. **Lucy's Warblers** were nesting along the Colorado River and at Morongo Valley by mid-April. Richard Webster had his first **Hermit Warbler** on 27 April, and his first **Yellow-breasted Chat** on the 18th. Chats were also at Morongo by mid-month and, closer to home, in San Francisquito Canyon on 8 May (Kimball Garrett). **Palm Warblers** have been seen all through the fall, winter, and now spring in above-normal numbers—at Loyola Marymount University (Arthur Howe, 22 and 24 April), and near Santa Maria on 20 April. Frequent coverage of Bonsall Road in Zuma Beach by Terry and Barry Clark proved this to be the best local spot for orioles. In addition to some fifty **Hooded** and **"Bullock's" Oriole's**, they found a male **Orchard Oriole** on 23 April, and two **"Baltimore"** or **"Baltimore X Bullock's"** crossed from 25 March to 29 April. They also had a **Tennessee Warbler** there on 16 April. An immature male **Orchard Oriole** was in a mixed oriole flock along Troutdale Road near Agoura on 28 April (Starr Saphir and Kurt Campbell). Another male **"Baltimore Oriole"** was in Griffith Park on 9 April (Justin Russell). Two male **Lark Buntings** were identified as they came into their conspicuous breeding plumage (all black and white wing patches)—the first near Lake Matthews, Riverside Co. (Norm Mellow, 12 April), and another near Agoura from 21 April on which was widely seen thanks to the hospitality of Sue Stout. The wintering **Clay-colored Sparrow** at the Arcadia Arboretum stayed into late April, even after the **Chipping Sparrow** flock had departed.

**T**hat can we expect from June birding? Raptors, waterfowl, shorebirds, and many passerines are on their northern breeding grounds, but early June is a prime time for vagrants and summer residents. Vagrant hunting is a "needle in a haystack" proposition, and they are usually found while doing routine birding in promising places.

For the most part, these "promising places" are the same places where the migrants were in April and May. For summer residents, try the San Gabriel, San Bernardino, and San Jacinto Mtns., and the Colorado River above Yuma (with a stop of an hour or two at Brock Ranch between Holtville and Winterhaven). Don't forget the bird tape, (213) 874-1318, for news of special birds! □

Send any interesting bird observations you may have to Shum Suffel, 1105 No. Hollister Ave., Pasadena, CA 91104.

### Morongo Wildlife Reserve Getting Heavy Use

The "Friends of Morongo" and San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society, have expressed concern that many groups arrive at the Big Morongo Wildlife Reserve unannounced and tend to overcrowd the facility on given days, while on other days, there is no one in the park at all. In their estimation, heavy use creates user vs. user conflicts, as well as user vs. habitat conflicts.

The Regional Parks Department is working jointly with this group to do a user study in the Morongo area. They are asking groups planning a trip to Morongo to contact either Mr. Doug Wilson at the park, or the Regional Parks Department (825 East Third Street, San Bernardino, CA 92415—714-383-1912) at least thirty days in advance of such a planned group visitation. Mr. Wilson can be reached at Big Morongo Wildlife Reserve, P.O. 694, Morongo Valley, CA 92256, Tel. (714) 383-6114.

They will not be establishing any kind of rigid reservation system, but are only trying to even out some of the user patterns.



## Sandy Wohlgemuth

# CONSERVATION

**C**onservationists...preservationists...anti-people...fuzzy-headed pinkos...anti-Establishment types...no-growth Zero Populationists...rich elitists. Sticks and stones... Gotta stick to your guns whether you're fighting Summa Corp or City Hall. Who says everyone has to love you? Are we in a popularity contest? Remember Peter Alden, distinguished international birder, in a program at LA Audubon years ago speaking of the birds of Latin America and discussing the disappearance of the rain forests and the wildlife. A matter of life or death to the poor bastards who needed the land to raise food for their families and could care less about birds and beauty. He said maybe birth control would help save some of the wild areas of the planet. And then the startling, impassioned cry from the audience, "I object to your remarks about birth control!" This would never happen today—we've come a long way since then. Even devout parishioners are ignoring their religious mentors and using the Pill. But have we come far enough around the world? Only yesterday's *L.A. Times* had an article about Haiti, the erstwhile "Pearl of the Antilles," being stripped of its rich forests for charcoal. Rain and weather erodes the soil so it bears nothing and people starve. These original "boat people" for years have been fleeing their small islands in the hundreds of thousands seeking refuge elsewhere. A picture floats into the mind from a TV documentary of a charming little girl in India making a snowball out of cow dung, then squashing it against a wall to dry in the sun. This is the only fuel her family has for cooking. Another kid in Africa staggering under a load of sticks he's carried for miles because there are no trees left near home. A man-made desert. The Cedars of Lebanon are nothing but sand today. Thinking of James Michener's character in *The Source* saying, "They used to call us Arabs 'sons of the desert.' We ought to be called 'fathers of the desert.'"

How do you argue with the primordial urge to achieve a primitive immortality by having more descendants? "Multiply and replenish the earth," says the Old Testament. A marginal agrarian society needs all the hands it can get to survive. There's a better chance, with lots of kids that will take you in when the ole rockin chair blues get you down. But a world with over four billion souls....? Growing geometrically! Nor are we fat and rich Americans immune to Population Pressure. In Los Angeles finding a vacant lot can be a real challenge: they're all filled up with townhomes and 7-11 stores. Urban sprawl is moving ever farther out from the center and demands more and more services: water, sewers, police, firemen, schools, dogcatchers. The freeways are jammed as soon as they're finished and the smog grows thicker every year. Where do we stop? Or do we? When we've cut and filled all the chaparral from Griffith Park to Oxnard, where do we go? What happens when the open spaces and the birding locations become fewer and farther away?

Science fiction writers take present-day problems and project them into an imaginary future. It is no accident that a favorite scenario is a world so overcrowded that it is compulsory euthanasia at, say, thirty-nine. There may be

haunting references to the classic experiment where rats were kept so close together that they became psychotic and destroyed each other. Is this the destiny of *Homo sapiens* or is it so much hysterical nonsense? The figures are not encouraging. In the past it took hundreds of years for the world's population to double; now it is a matter of a few decades.

What to do about it? Sign a petition, write to your congressman, attend a hearing, picket the Pope? Who knows? A tough assignment. There's very little tangible action possible other than personal commitment to smaller families. And education, awareness, spreading the word. Join Planned Parenthood?

Any ideas out there? □



### L.A. County Checklist

LAAS has published a *Field List of the Birds of Los Angeles County*, now available at Audubon House. It includes all birds, recorded in Los Angeles County as of April 1980 (but, alas, is *already* out of date with the recent occurrence of a Hudsonian Godwit). There are annotations for birds that breed or have bred in the county and for species that have occurred in the county fewer than 5 times.

### LAAS Bookstore—New Acquisition

The Los Angeles Audubon Society Bookstore now has in stock the *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa—The Birds of the Western Palearctic*, Vol 2, *Hawks to Bustards*, by Cramp et al. The price of Volume 2 is \$85.00.

**Henry E. Childs, Jr.**

## **BIRDING LOCALITIES**

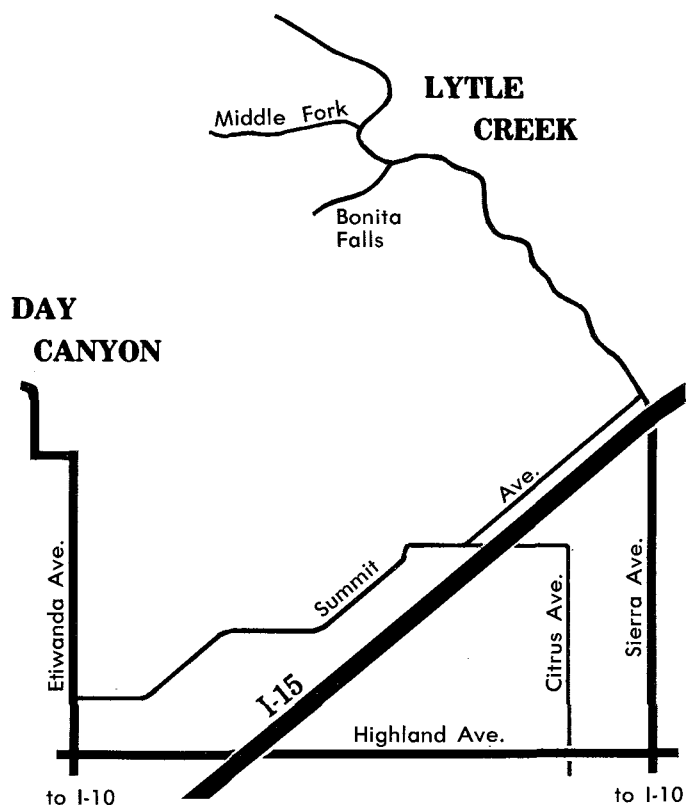
**D**ay Canyon in western San Bernardino County has recently been discovered as an excellent birding area. Observers in the past year have found breeding Sage and Lark Sparrows, Lazuli Buntings in large numbers, Common Snipe, a Swamp Sparrow and a probable nesting pair of Golden Eagles. Much of the area consists of well developed, dense coastal sage habitat where the Sage Sparrows and Lazuli Buntings abound.

To get to Day Canyon take I-10 to Etiwanda Boulevard. Go north towards the mountains to the last eucalyptus tree. Take the dirt road to the left and look for the Sage Sparrows.

Farther up the hill on Etiwanda Avenue is a permanent sedge marsh opposite the Forest Service station which is worth checking at any time. There is a locked gate north of the fire station but one can walk from there to the mouth of the canyon where there is a good permanent stream with large elders. Lots of birds can be found here. The fire season can result in the closing of this latter area. *Caution:* watch out for rattlesnakes during warm parts of the year.

**L**ytle Creek may be reached by turning east on Summit Avenue from Etiwanda Avenue, the only paved street above Highland Avenue in Etiwanda. (If not continuing from Day Canyon, drive north on Sierra Avenue from I-15). At the school, look for Chipping Sparrows, "Slate-colored and Pink-sided" Juncos among the "Oregon's" on the lawn and park area in winter. Farther along, Horned Larks can be found in the open, rocky fields. Turn north into Lytle Creek Canyon at Sierra Avenue.

The south fork of the creek is reached by parking outside of the Bonita Falls Campground, a private operation which must provide access to the creek area. This campground is a good birding area producing sapsuckers, Hairy Woodpeckers and many migrants in season. Proceed up the wash along the way.



Watch the south-facing slopes for Bighorn Sheep, particularly above the narrows about a mile from the campground. Most observers have about a 90% success in seeing sheep here, sometimes at less than one hundred yards.

Investigation of the Middle Fork can be productive for riparian species. Watch for the sign on the left just before the store on the main road. A steep trail from the parking lot at the end of Middle Fork Road is only for the strong. Look for Townsend's Solitaires in the mistletoe in this general area.

The drive to the far end of the north fork is for the dedicated as the far end of the road is somewhat rocky. One does, however, reach the 6500' level with its consequences in bird life. Here one can find all three species of nuthatches, Cassin's and Purple Finches, White-headed Woodpeckers and Band-tailed Pigeons. On the way into this remote spot, one can observe how "shooters" have destroyed and littered much of this fine canyon. □



**WESTERN  
Tanager**

**EDITOR** Lee Jones

Published 10 times a year, monthly except January and July, by the Los Angeles Audubon Society, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90046

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

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.

### **Kimball Garrett Receives Birdathon Award**

Kimball Garrett, representing LAAS, has won first prize in the statewide Birdathon competition by raising \$1321.20. For his efforts Kimball will receive a Bausch & Lomb Discoverer 15X-60X Zoom Telescope with an all-purpose tripod.

# 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, JUNE 7—Griffith Park - Ferndell Beginners Trip.** Chaparral and oak woodland species, with special instruction for novice birders. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Nature Museum on Ferndell Drive north of Los Feliz Blvd. Leaders: Art and Janet Cupples (213) 981-4746

**TUESDAY, June 10—Evening Meeting 8:00 p.m.** Plummer Park. **Jeff Froke** will present the evening program on *The ecology of feral parrots in southern California* emphasizing their exploitation by the exotic bird trade and the problems of importation into the U.S.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 14—San Gabriel Mtns.** Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the entrance to Charlton Flats Picnic Area along the Angeles Crest Highway. Montane breeding birds include Mountain Quail, White-headed Woodpeckers, Dusky Flycatchers, etc. The group will caravan from Charlton Flats to Buckhorn Flat. Leader: Fred Heath (213) 828-6524.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 21—San Bernardino Mtns.** Mountain breeding birds, with a chance for Mountain Quail, Williamson's Sapsucker, Common Nighthawk, Virginia's Warbler, and others. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the dam at the western end of Big Bear Lake. Leader: Kimball Garrett, 477-5769.

**SATURDAY, JULY 19—Mt. Pinos.** The group will bird around Iris Meadows at the end of the paved road, and then walk or drive to the summit to look for condors. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Iris Meadows, reached by I-5 to Frazier Park exit, then west to Lake of the Woods. From Lake of the Woods follow signs to Mt. Pinos. Leader: To be announced.

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7—Morro Bay.** Departure at 9:00 p.m. **Saturday** aboard the *Princess* from Virg's Landing, returning at 8:00 p.m. Sunday. There are 38 spaces available. Leaders: Bruce Broadbooks and Jon Dunn.

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14—San Pedro to Osborne.** Departure at 6:00 a.m. aboard the *Vantuna* from the USC dock in San Pedro, returning at 6:00 p.m.; 44 spaces available. Leaders: Olga Clarke and Kimball Garrett.

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20—Monterey Bay.** Departure at 8:00 a.m. aboard the *Miss Monterey* from Sam's Fishermans Wharf, returning at 3:00 p.m.; 38 spaces available. Leaders: Herb Clarke and Bruce Broadbooks.

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11—Monterey Bay.** Departure and return times, boat, landing and number of spaces same as for September 20. Leaders: Kimball Garrett and Arnold Small.

## Los Angeles Audubon

# ANNUAL PICNIC

**Sunday, July 13, 1980**

**Charlton Flats Recreation Area**

**Bird Walk at 8:00 a.m.**

**Picnic at 11:00 a.m.**

Charlton Flat is located on the Angeles Crest Highway, 9 mi. past the turnoff for Mt. Wilson. Be sure to pack your favorite dish along with your binoculars, frisbees, footballs, etc.

Los Angeles Audubon Society  
7377 Santa Monica Blvd.  
Los Angeles, California 90046

Sherman Suter

c/o 2200 Oakwood Dr., Apt. E  
Columbia, MO 65201

Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Permit No. 26974  
Los Angeles, Calif.