



WESTERN TANAGER

Los Angeles Audubon Society

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Birding The Hawaiian Islands

by Helen and Teri Matelson

Maps and illustrations by Teri Matelson

Stainback Highway is called the "road to nowhere". It has no outlet. The natives will tell you this road leads only to a prison. Maile Stemmerman, Hawaiian birder, saw an Ou along this road.

Hawaii is an exciting place to visit, a strange place to bird. One can trudge for hours through the Alakai Swamp on Kauai amid lush vegetation. Flowering trees and plants inspire visions of birds a-bounding. This does not happen. Bird life here is sparse.

With a list of extinct birds to make one weep, quite a few soon likely to be added to the list, one must be satisfied with encountering a number of introduced species, and working very hard to find the few endemics. Introduced birds, whether by unenlightened man or accidental cage escapees, form a large percentage of Hawaiian bird life.

The excellent comprehensive book by Andrew J. Berger, *Hawaiian Birdlife* (second edition, 1981; The University Press of Hawaii) tells the sad tale of the islands' endemic birds—wiped out or endangered by avian malaria, habitat destruction, the introduction

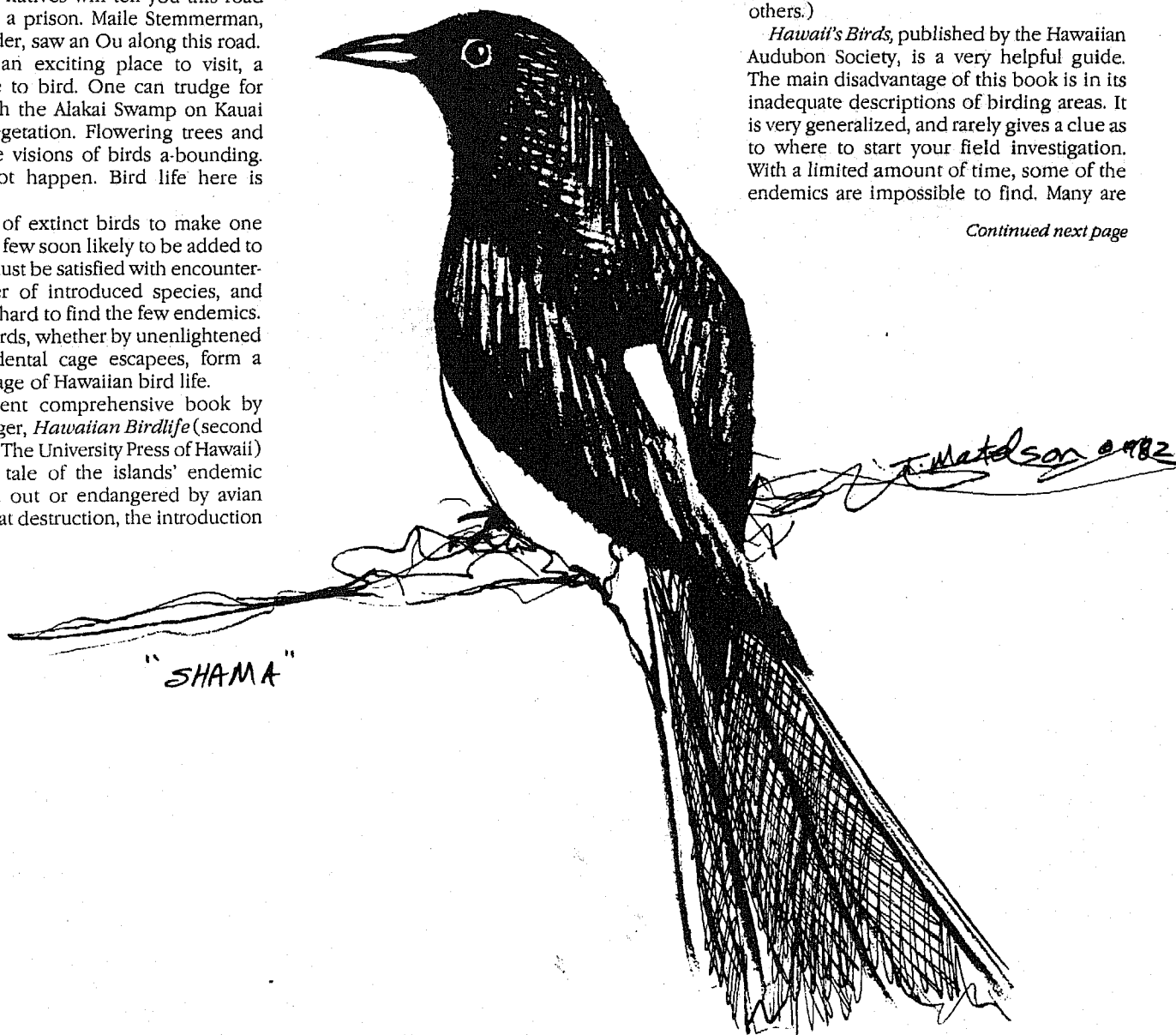
of rats, mongoose, pigs, rabbits etc., killing for feathers—but a few neat endemics still survive. The Hawaiian Goose or Nene, is in a captive propagation program to revive the species after almost total extinction. The subfamily of honeycreepers, Drepanididae is unique to these islands—two crimson species, the pinkish-billed Iiwi and the dark-billed Apapane are wonderful to see flashing through the forests. Below 3,000 feet, it is

said avian malaria destroys these endemics. The Elepaio and common Amakihi seem to have developed some immunity to this disease and appear in lower elevations.

Sub-species should intrigue the birder. The Hawaiian creeper is a real puzzler. On Kauai, the creeper is a nondescript grayish-brown above with white underparts; on Maui the creeper is yellow with a greenish back and a chubbier look; on the big island, the creeper is olive green, paler below. (Ed Note—The new AOU check-list supplement gives species status to these three plus two others.)

Hawaii's Birds, published by the Hawaiian Audubon Society, is a very helpful guide. The main disadvantage of this book is in its inadequate descriptions of birding areas. It is very generalized, and rarely gives a clue as to where to start your field investigation. With a limited amount of time, some of the endemics are impossible to find. Many are

Continued next page



Early the next morning, with great anticipation, we set out on Rte. 50, turning right on Rte. 550 at Waimea for the ascent on a fine road to Kokee State Park and the Alakai

The Identification of the Thrushes of the Genus *Catharus* Part Two: Hermit Thrush

By Jon Dunn¹
and Kimball Garrett²

The Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*) is the commonest and most widespread *Catharus* in California, and the only one to be expected in winter. As such, it is a "standard" to be learned thoroughly in order to facilitate the field identification of less frequently encountered members of the genus. Hermit Thrushes are also of interest to the birdwatcher because of the considerable geographical variation shown. Like the Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*), this species is both highly polytypic and highly migratory. Therefore we can learn much about migration strategies of these species because it is possible to trace the origins, at least roughly, of our wintering and transient birds.

In the present article we will discuss the status and distribution of the Hermit Thrush in western North America, review the characters which distinguish it from the Swainson's Thrush (*C. ustulatus*, the other common spotted thrush in California), and discuss the patterns of racial variation shown.

The map shows the general breeding distribution of the races of the Hermit Thrush (utilizing the nomenclature of the fifth edition of the A.O.U. Check-List, 1957). Our thanks go to Philip Unitt who allowed us to borrow freely from a range map he had

Birding Hawaii *continued*

crater trails might lead one to a Nene. Nenes are always found on the local Volcano Golf Course, tame and tagged, but Nenes nevertheless.

A good birding area, lushly vegetated, is found by continuing along Rte. 11 toward Hilo, stopping at the community of Mountain View. Turn left on Kulani Road to Stainback Highway, a dead-end road leading to a prison. Do not continue all the way to the prison. The telephone poles along this road are numbered. Drive to about 330. From there, down toward Hilo, there are many good paths extending into the beautiful orchid-studded terrain. Birders tell us the Ou has been spotted along these lanes. Wear boots in this rain forest.
ALOHA!

drawn. In a simplified summary, small, dark northwestern birds (*guttatus* and *nanus*) grade, through *sleveni*, to increasingly large and pale western montane races (*sequoiensis*, *polionotus* and *auduboni*); additionally, through the boreal and eastern forests, are the richly-colored, brown-flanked races *faxoni* and *crymophilus*. In California, *sleveni* breeds from the Oregon border south, mainly coastally, to southern Monterey County. *Sequoiensis* breeds from the northeastern part of the state south through the Sierra Nevada to some of the higher ranges of southern California. *Polionotus* breeds east of the Sierra Nevada in our Great Basin ranges (e.g. the White Mountains, Clark Mountain). Most, if not all individuals of these three races depart the state after the breeding season for more southerly wintering grounds. In their place, in winter, we receive an influx of the more northwesterly races *guttatus* and *nanus* (indistinguishable in the field, but probably both common and widespread).

The following points deserve more careful

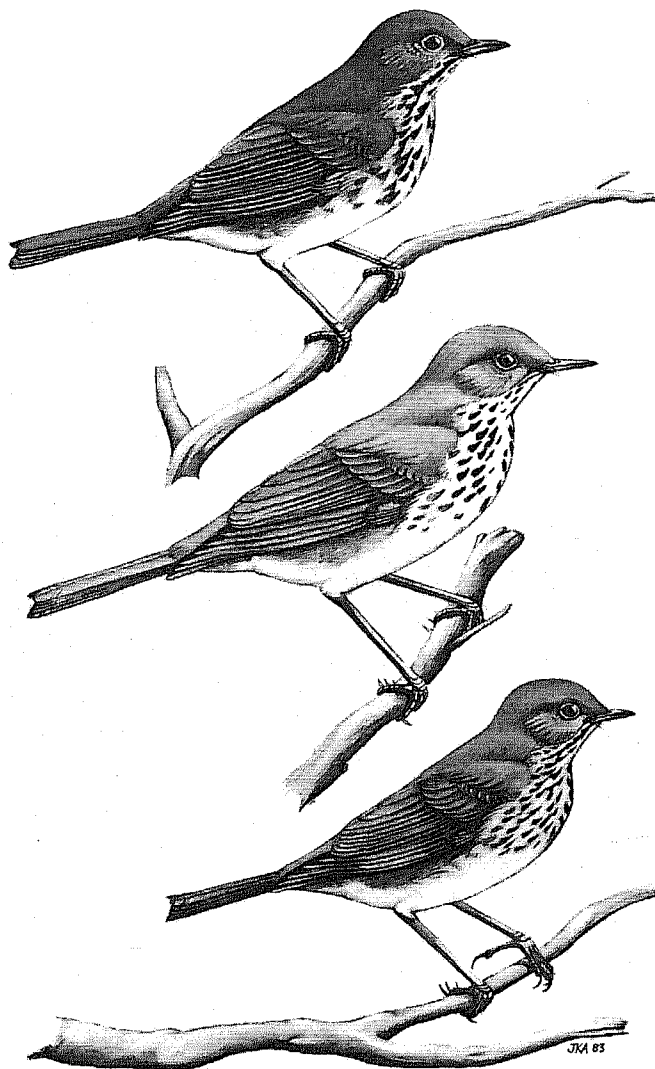
field study in California: (1) On which Great Basin and southern California mountain ranges does the species breed? (It is only very recently known, for example, from the mountains of San Diego Co.); (2) What is the southern limit of the coastal breeding range (*sleveni*)? (3) Is there a breeding population in the Santa Ana Mountains, and if so, which race is represented? (see Sexton and Hunt, An Annotated List of the Birds of Orange County, California. University of California, Irvine, Museum of Systematic Biology. Research Series No. 5, 1979); (4) Is the species as scarce as thought in winter on the California deserts? (5) What is the status in migration of the various racial group (particularly on the deserts and the outer coast and islands)? and, (6) Does boreal/eastern *faxoni* ever occur (e.g. might anomalous late spring records pertain to this race, which is currently unrecorded in California)?

Species Identification. The Hermit Thrush is the smallest of our "spotted" thrushes. It has conspicuous, blackish spots or inverted "V" markings on the breast (though

c.g. *faxoni*

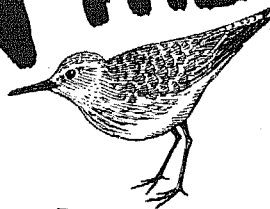
c.g. *auduboni*

c.g. *guttatus*





KNOT THE WESTERN TANAGER



Los Angeles Audubon Society

April 1, 1983

The Field Identification of Great, Common, and American Egrets

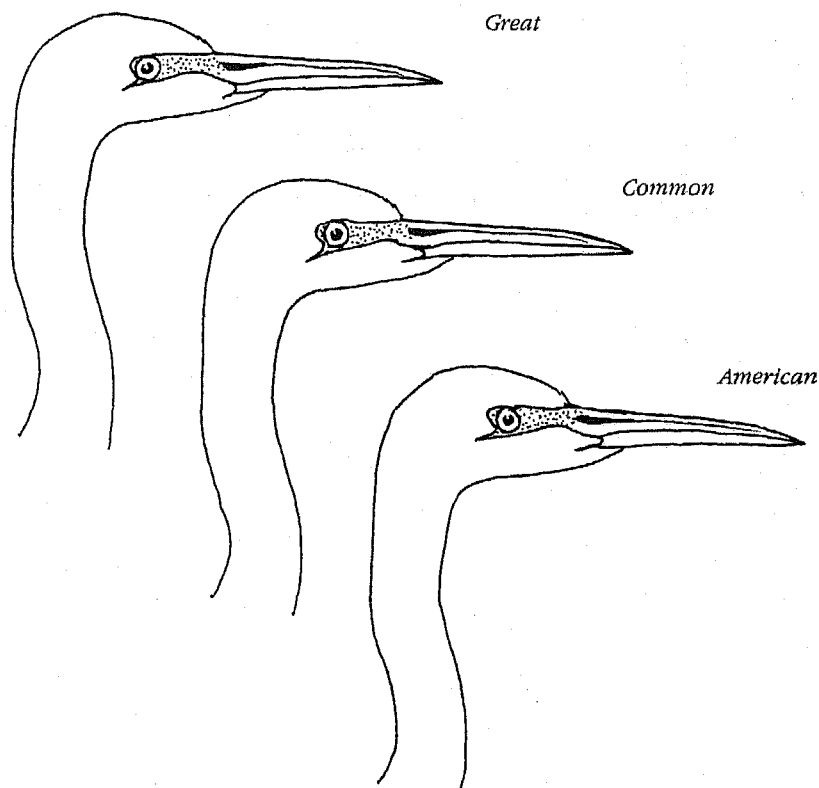
By Jon Dunlin
and Kimball Parrot

Regular readers of our columns have undoubtedly noted that the development of proper field identification skills stems primarily from an understanding of two things: distribution and feather edgings. This month we present an unusual case where all of the birds in question are entirely white, and thus have no discernable feather edgings. Moreover, ornithologists have found no significant ecological differences among the forms, and many observers have commented that they seem to have entirely congruent distributions.

Clearly, the three egrets of the genus *Casmerodius* present a difficult field challenge. The birds in question are the Great Egret (*C. albus*), the Common Egret (*C. albus*), and the American Egret (*C. albus*). Additionally, observers should be aware of the possible vagrant occurrence of the Old World forms, the Great White Heron (*Egretta alba*) and the Great White Egret (*E. alba*); as these last two are unrecorded in North America, they are considered beyond the scope of the present discussion. We feel that the differentiation of the members of this group is perhaps as vexing a problem in North American field ornithology as any, apart, perhaps, from the Arizona/Mexican/Graybreasted/Ultramarine Jay complex (a group we will tackle next April Fools).

The changing status of these three egrets is of interest to the birder and conservationist alike. American Egrets have declined greatly throughout their range since 1957, and Great Egrets have shown a dramatic increase since 1973. Recent surveys also reveal a serious decline in populations of the Common Egret. Reasons for these trends are not clear; many consider the trends to be artifacts of observer bias.


The figure illustrates Great, Common, and American Egret heads. In any season all three



can be told from the much smaller Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) by the yellow bill and blackish feet. Note the pronounced differences in "jizz" or "gestalt" among the three forms illustrated; while these distinctions are hard to describe, we feel that an examination of the illustrations and careful field study will aid the confused birder.

We admit to being stumped frequently by this identification problem, and our field notes often read "*Casmerodius*, sp?" or "G/C/A Egret". Perhaps the most pertinent message here is that it is okay to occasionally swallow one's pride and resist the

temptation to make a shaky field distinction.

The British, always a step ahead of us in the evolution of field skills, may have come through with a major breakthrough regarding this thorny problem. They have suggested that the Great Egret nod its head with each step with its right foot while walking, whereas the Common nods while planting its left foot. The American may only nod with every third step. While further study and field testing is clearly required, we do urge observers to consider these nod:step ratios as possible field characters. Stationary birds may have to go unidentified. 

The European Starling ?

by I.C. Aves

A great controversy is raging throughout the United States. It is pitting conservationists against each other much to the delight of James Watt. This conflict involves the "hands-on" versus the "hands-off" approach to the European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) in this country. Simply put the "hands-on" people believe the Starling should be exterminated. A group of experts on the Starling have banded together (they've been banding birds together for years) to form the Starling Removal Program. The "hands-off" group believe the Starling should be left alone and have joined the Wright-to-Life (named after the discoverers of manned flight). This group also refers to the "hands-on" group as the Starling Removal Pogrom Team.



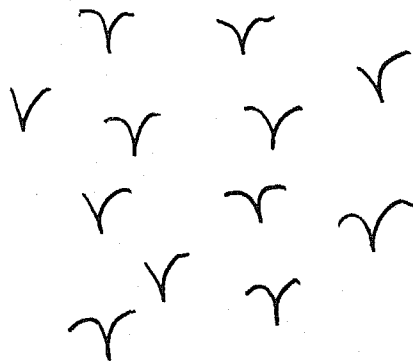
Illustrations by Holly Heath

The center of the "hands-on" effort is in southern California where many of the birders would just as well see the Starling eliminated since they don't count introduced birds on their life lists anyway. The center of the opposition is Florida where the state bird list would be cut in half, if introduced birds were to be removed. Their cries are "Today the Starling, tomorrow the Bude-rigar" and "Remember the Monk Parakeet".

The "hands-off" people point out that the Starling first appeared in North America as an accidental before they were released in New York City's Central Park in the 1890's and might have spread on its own power like the Cattle Egret.

Lee Junco, an unemployed ornithologist who lives in a local center of Starling abundance, MacArthur Park, is strongly "hands-on". From his park bench domicile, he says:

I'm sick and tired of all of this whistling and chirping, not only from the Starling, but those damned cheerful



Starlings in Flight

little House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). One might think that as an ornithologist I would rather have some introduced birds to look at rather than none at all. But I've been doing studies on my favorite bird in this island of greenery in the middle of the city. Yes, I'm checking out this bottle of Thunderbird (a member of the *Gallo-nauseous* family).

Within the "hands-on" group there is lots of disagreement as to the best method of doing away with the Starling. Many feel the actual hands-on approach with direct pressure to the windpipe is best. There are others who don't want to actually touch a Starling and suggest a slightly less direct approach: using a shotgun or poison popcorn. They point out that the poison popcorn has the added advantage of knocking out some Rock Doves (*Columba livia*) and House Sparrows along with the Starling. James Watt is a big advocate of this approach and says it can solve the Coyote problem at the same time. He has even suggested the government is planning to donate several tons of the stuff for the next Audubon picnic.



"Hands-on" Approach

John Ostrich, a member of the Starling Removal Program says, "We can't bury our heads in the sand. We must take a more enlightened approach". He says, "We need more knowledge of their habits before we knock them out of existence. We don't know some very basic things such as how many there are. They multiply so fast, some of us think they may reproduce using fission. We also urge people not to chop up Starlings in little pieces just in case they can regenerate from the pieces like Shmoos (not to be confused with Smews)."

In order to more carefully study the habits of the Starling, the Removal Team got permission to radio tag the first born son of one thousand Starlings. A radio was attached (see photo) to each bird. The volume was turned up to maximum and tuned to KROQ (a New Wave music station). This allows the observer to follow the bird. And the so-called music



Radio Equipped Starling

blends right in with the clamor of the typical Starling roost. The birds which have been radio tagged to date have been real easy to follow because they haven't gone too far. Some "hands-off" people have suggested the But the Starling wouldn't be taking over this country if it were a weak bird.

Another aspect of the Starling Program is the Captive Breeding Program. This program would allow a number of individuals to be kept in zoos all over the country. People would then be able to see what miserable birds they are. Hopefully no one would then think about trying to reintroduce them into this country. Needless to say this part of the plan is extremely risky as Starlings have been known to break out of their cages even in maximum security zoos.

A number of Starlings have expired during handling and the "hands-off" people feel that the "vibrations" from the "hands-on" group may be the cause. The "hands-on" people have agreed that maybe they do shake some of the birds a bit too much. But they only do it to bring some of the more hysterical birds to their senses.

Please don't send any letters to me about this article. The Board of Directors has forbid me to even read such letters — Editor



Seasoned Birds

by Shum Souffle

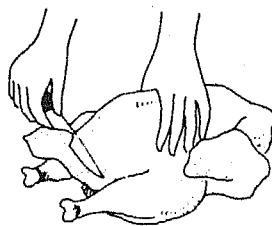
April is an excellent month to be munching on some of our feathered friends. The following recipes should make the month a taste sensation.

White-Wings a la Arizona

- 6 White-winged Doves
(*Zenaida asiatica*)
- 4 slices bacon
- ½ cup chopped onions
- ¾ cup diced carrots
- ½ cup sliced celery
- 1 can beef bouillon
- 2 cups dry white wine

Sprinkle birds with seasoned salt and dredge in flour seasoned with salt and pepper. Cut bacon into small squares, fry and remove from bacon fat. Saute doves in bacon fat, place in casserole, add cooked bacon. In remaining fat saute onion, carrots and celery for about three minutes, stirring constantly. Pour over birds. Add beef bouillon, previously brought to a boil. Cover casserole and bake in 350°F oven for 1½ hour, adding 1 cup of wine after first ½ hour and the second cup after an hour. When birds are done, remove them, strain liquid and make gravy.

Submitted by Bisbee Lawyer



Blackbird Pie

- Pie Crust
- 24 Blackbirds (*Turdus merula*)
- Salt & Pepper

Roll out bottom crust and place in 9" pie pan. Arrange blackbirds in 2 layers, sprinkling each layer liberally with salt, pepper. Cover with top crust, slash in several places. Bake in 350° oven for 45 minutes. If when pie is opened, the birds fail to sing, you have overcooked. If properly done, this is a dish fit for royalty.

Curried Coot

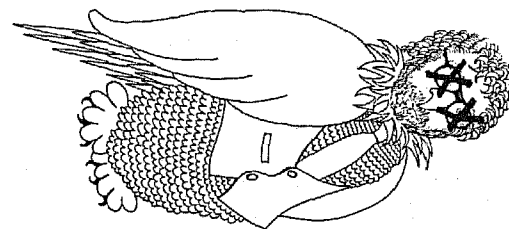
Cut up a coot (*Fulica americana*) weighing between 1-2½ lbs. Wash well, cover with water and simmer until tender (2-3 hours) adding 1 teaspoon salt for last 10 minutes. Remove coot and liquid.

Cut up 2 onions, brown in stew pot in butter size of coot egg. Remove onions, add coot and fry for 3-4 minutes. Sprinkle coot with 2

From the Editor

by Fred Heath

The editor claims no responsibility for any material contained in this issue. So what else is new?



teaspoons curry powder (double if coot was taken in a sewage pond). Pour over liquid in which coot was stewed and simmer for 5 minutes. Thicken with 1 tablespoon flour thinned with a little water.

Serve with hot boiled rice.

This dish is a welcome change from the "same old coot recipes".



Conservative Conversation

by James Watt

The following would be funny if it weren't true. But it fits right in with the rest of the ridiculous stuff in this special issue.

Watt Lines

"We don't have to worry about endangered species; why, we can't even get rid of the cockroach."

Speaking to National Park concessionaires: "We need an aggressive program with the private entrepreneurs who are willing to invest and manage resources in the National Park Service for people."

"The Department of the Interior . . . must be . . . the Amicus for the minerals industry in the court of Federal policy making."

Referring to legal changes in environmental laws: "We will use the budget system to be an excuse to make major policy decisions."

"I am accomplishing what is spelled out in the Republican Platform. It is a blueprint for James Watt."

"I don't like to paddle and I don't like to walk." "There is no way you could get me on an oar-powered boat."

Responding to the problem of overcrowding in the national parks: "We can learn a great deal from Walt Disney's crowd management principles."

"Environmentalists are the greatest threat to the ecology of the West."

"I speak in black-and-white terms without much gray in my life. I see problems without the complexity that is confusing to a lot of people. I don't create complexity. I solve problems and see things in simple terms."

"My responsibility is to follow the Scriptures, which call upon us to occupy the land until Jesus returns."

Asked by a congressional committee if he was concerned about the environment and future generations: "I don't know how many future generations we can count on before the Lord returns."

"As President Reagan talks about it, we are on a crusade. I kind of feel that mission, and that's what makes people feel nervous about my religion. But I'm on a Ronald Reagan crusade. I do have it."

"There are two kinds of people: liberals and Americans."

In a letter to the Israeli ambassador: "If the liberals of the Jewish community join

with the other liberals of this nation to oppose these efforts (to expand off-shore oil drilling and coal-mining on public lands), they will weaken our ability to be a good friend of Israel. Your supporters in America need to know these facts." [Watt apologized to the Jewish community.]

"If you want an example of the failure of socialism don't go to Russia. Come to America and see the American Indian reservations." [Watt apologized to the Indians.]

The National Audubon Society ". . . wants a government that believes in centralized socialistic planning."

"Environmentalists are 'political activists, a left-wing cult which seeks to bring down the type of government I believe in.'"

Environmentalists use their issues ". . . as a tool to achieve a greater objective" (which is) "centralized planning and control of society." "Look what happened in Germany in the 1930s. The dignity of man was subordinated to the powers of Nazism. The dignity of man was subordinated in Russia . . . These are the forces that this thing can evolve into." [Watt has not apologized to environmentalists.]

We are "in the mainstream of the environmental movement."

Because of the multitude of requests for more scientific articles, the following article in the language of our respected ornithologists is presented. —Editor

Carpe Diem

Pulcherrimus dies erat. Cum sol supra Ranchum Parkum Golfum Cursum ortus est primos radios solis in facie sentire potuimus. Chorus aurorae avium nos in hortum duxit.

Stupimus cum supra capita nostra quatour Amazonae ochrocephalae (*Yellow-bearded Parrots*) crepitantes volaverunt. Multi Sturni vulgares (*European Starlings*) et Euphagi cyanocephali (*Brewer's Blackbirds*) in arbore vicini se posuerunt. Familia Icteridarum et Sturnidarum certe favoritae nobis non sunt.

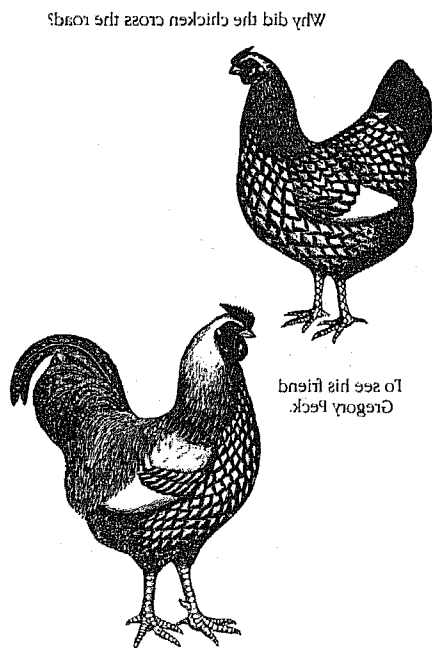
De improvviso cantus sub capita elatus est. Ecce! Est Minus polyglottos (*Northern Mockingbird*) amicus, immitans Aphelocoma coerulescentem (*Scrub Jay*). Quam ingenium! Unus in pluribus!

Quid est hoc in pyracantha? Vermivora peregrina (*Virginia Warbler*)? Humanum est errare: sed non habet lineas albas supra oculis. Ipso facto solum Vermivora celata (*Orange-crowned Warbler*) est.

Specta! Ibi sunt duo meinbra familiae Columbidae. Haec est Zenaida macroura (*Mourning Dove*) et illa est Streptopelia chinensis (*Spotted Dove*).

Cogitate! Quinque "minutas" observandi et septem species avium, tres harum in nostram regionem illatae vidimus. Meridies Californiae quidem mirus est.

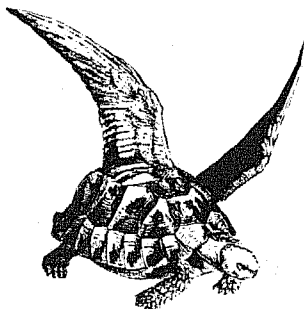
Pax (et aves) vobiscum. Semper fidelis,
Plinius Junior



Why did the chicken cross the road?

To see his friend
Gregory Peck

KNOT THE CALENDAR



SATURDAY, APRIL 32 — Field trip entitled **Looking Up to Birds**. Identification of Water Fowl in Foul Water from below. Scuba gear recommended, snorkel ok. Meet **8:00 a.m.** at Lancaster Sewage Ponds. Leader: **Jon Dung**

SUNDAY, APRIL 31 — **Birding the Four-Level** with **Tom Thrillman**. Expect to see Starling and House Sparrow in their favorite habitat. If time permits a quick side trip to the East LA barrios. No need to bring lunch (except to feed the pigeons) as a stop will be made at Burrito King. Meet at transition of Harbor and Hollywood Freeways at **3:00 a.m.**

TUESDAY, APRIL 37, 8:00 p.m. Evening Meeting. **Peep Show**. X-rated educational slide show with discussion of various body parts as well as displays and mating techniques. This meeting is part of our neighborhood exchange program. Jon Dunlin will be giving his own version of the Peep Show at the nearby Pussy Cat Theatre next week.

SATURDAY, MAY 33 — Full day field trip to locate all of The Los Angeles County introduced species. Will meet at second garbage can on **Olvera Street** at **10:00 a.m.** to get an early jump on the Ringed Turtle Dove. Day will finish at the intersection of Bundy and Sepulveda in West LA to watch evening flight of Yellow-headed Parrots. Leader: **Kimball Parrot**.

SUNDAY, MAY 32 — Annual **One Good Turn Moto-cross** field trip and bike race through the Venice Beach Least Tern colony. Starting gun at **8:00 a.m.** sharp. Join us for post-race brunch featuring scrambled eggs. Dirt-bikers only.

TUESDAY, MAY 34, 8:00 p.m. Evening Meeting. Our very own **Dr. Sigmund Freud** will present **Birding Without Embarrassment**. He will discuss Boobies and Tits without blushing. Illustrated with full color slides (some from our April 37 meeting).

TUESDAY, JUNE 31, 8:00 p.m., Evening Meeting. **Identification Problems Between Calliope Hummingbird and California Condor**. Because both species occur sympatrically on popular Mt. Pinos, **Larry Lupine** will explain, using his beautiful slides, the differences. In addition, he will show pictures of each of the 523 species of flowering plants found in the area which also might be mistaken for these birds.

TUESDAY, JULY 00, 8:00 p.m. Evening Meeting. Fascinating slide show entitled **Last Look** by that eminent ornithological proctologist, **Dr. John Bunn**. He will lead a lively and enlightening discussion of little known field marks of native species.

UP COMING EVENTS

An ORV trip up to the top of **Clark Mountain** led by James Watt's half-brother Watt Now.

List of all **Hanukkah Counts** in southern California including the famous Fairfax Avenue Count.

1984 Annual Bash. Since everyone complains about the food anyway, we are dispensing with the Annual Banquet. Instead we will have our get together in a local bar.

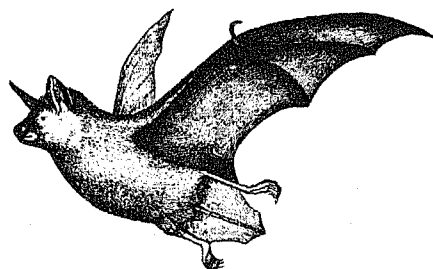
We will attempt to get ex-Western Tanager Editor, Fred Heath, speaking on **How to Avoid the Wrath of LA Audubon Board Members**.

SPECIAL SALE

We are having a special sale of field identification photos and complete written descriptions of many interesting rarities including Ivory-billed Woodpecker, Bachman's Warbler, etc; suitable for submission to American Birds directly or for Christmas Count compilers who have run a fowl of Guy McGanser.

1st ANNUAL BIO-CHARITY DRIVE

This drive is on-going. Please contribute old faded jeans, tee-shirts, tennis shoes (do not wash) or any other donations to help support out-of-work biologists. There are many biologists, especially those who specialize in ornithology who are simply not re-trainable to any real world skills. Leave any donations under the bridge over Malibu Creek at the Lagoon.



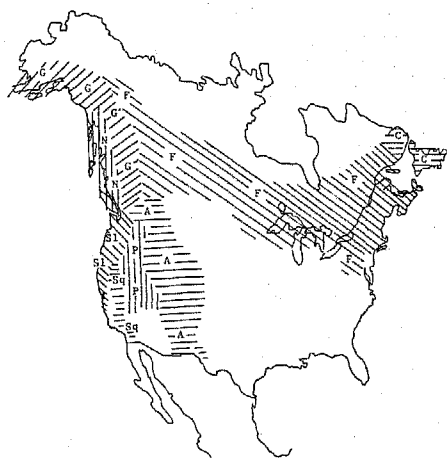
EDITOR Fred Heath Hen
DESIGN Keith Lee
PRINTER Artisan Press
CONSERVATION EDITOR James Watt
ORNITHOLOGY CONSULTANT Kimball Parrot
KNOT CALENDAR EDITOR Peggy Penguin

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PRESIDENT Names have been
1ST VICE PRESIDENT withheld to protect
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY the innocent.

Thrushes continued from page 4

the intensity and abundance of the spotting varies geographically, as we shall see; these spots are on a whitish to light buffy background. Field guides stress as a mark the contrast between the rusty tail and the more gray-brown back; while this is an excellent character, we shall see that tail and back color vary considerably among the races so that, under many lighting regimes, this dorsal coloring can be of limited use in the field. Perhaps most diagnostic is the posture and behavior of this species. Like all *Catharus*, the Hermit Thrush perches with an upright stance, but it is unique in its habit of raising and slowly lowering its tail as well as nervously flicking its wings upon alighting (or upon coming to a halt after a short, quick run along the ground).



Breeding ranges of the sub-species of Hermit Thrush recognized by A.O.U. 1957.

- G = *guttatus*
- N = *nanus*
- SI = *sleventi*
- Sq = *sequoiensis*
- P = *polionotus*
- A = *auduboni*
- F = *faxoni*
- C = *crymophilus*

The vocalizations of the Hermit Thrush are also distinctive. Noted for its virtuosity, the Hermit Thrush delivers an "ethereal", fluty song which consists of a long opening whistled note and then a series of notes spiraling down the scale; this pattern is then repeated in various keys. But, as full songs are primarily given only on the breeding grounds, it is the various call notes which are most useful in species identification. The familiar call of the Hermit Thrush is a soft "chup" (or doubled "chup-chup"). It is quite different from any notes given by the Swainson's Thrush. Other common calls (which many birders are surprised to learn are attributable to this species) are a clear, descending, whistled "teeuu", and a breathy, rising "whheee".

Racial Identification. We should point out that the racial characters discussed below are seldom obvious in the field, and subject to considerable individual variation. In particular, the observer is cautioned that freshly molted birds in fall and early winter may appear brighter and browner/buffier than more worn birds in spring and summer. At the very least, however, it should be possible to distinguish our common small, brown wintering races from the relatively large, pale montane breeding birds, should the two groups be encountered together during migration.

The illustration shows representatives of the three racial groups: *guttatus*, *auduboni*, and *faxoni*. *Guttatus* (*nanus* is similar) is the smallest. It is relatively dark and brown above (but not as rich a brown as *faxoni*). Its tail is deep rusty, and the flanks are gray-brown. There are numerous dark, bold breast spots (approaching arrow shape); these spots are on a slightly buffy background. *Auduboni* (*polionotus* similar) is the largest race (nearly an inch longer than *guttatus*). It is decidedly pale and gray, with a rather pale, cinnamon tail. The flanks are gray (not brown). The breast spots are large, round, and black, but relatively sparse; the background color of the breast is whitish. The bill is relatively long and thin. *Faxoni* (*crymophilus* is similar) is somewhat larger than *guttatus* (but smaller than *auduboni*); its bill is relatively stout. Its breast spots are large and black, and slightly arrow-shaped; there is a strong buffy wash on the breast in fresh plumage. The malar stripe is dark and solid. The upperparts are dark, rich brown, almost with a reddish tint. Unlike other racial groups, the flanks are a rich brown.

The most widespread montane breeding race in California, *sequoiensis*, resembles *auduboni* (i.e. is relatively large, pale, and gray) but is slightly smaller and the breast spotting is less bold. The coastal breeding race of California, *sleventi*, is part of the small, dark *guttatus* group, but is grayer and paler than *guttatus*, with smaller breast spots that aren't as black (i.e. it is rather intermediate between *guttatus* and *sequoiensis*).

In closing, we certainly don't encourage observers to put a subspecies name on every Hermit Thrush they observe in the field; the foolishness of this would become clear upon examination of extensive museum series. However, we do feel that many individuals studied carefully can be assigned to racial group with some confidence, and that such knowledge will help clarify the status and migrational strategies of the various forms.

Next month we will present a parallel discussion of variation in our other common *Catharus*, the Swainson's Thrush, and reiterate the points which separate the Hermit and Swainson's.

Jon Dunn: 4710 Dexter Dr., Santa Barbara, CA 93110

*Kimball Garrett: Section of Ornithology, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, 900 Exposition Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90007

Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgenuth

Sea Otter

LA Audubon's telephone alert people wrote letters in January to the US Fish and Wildlife Service asking that the decline in the sea otter population since the mid-seventies warranted classifying the species "Endangered." The regional director responded with a form letter (for which he apologized) saying his office had received over 1200 cards and letters relating to reclassification of the otter. He said Fish and Wildlife is conducting a five-year review of the animal's status as required by the Endangered Species Act. This is most encouraging and is a good example of the power of positive letter-writing.

The excerpts from the following item in the sports section of the Los Angeles Times (Feb. 4, 1983) indicates that both California Fish and Game and US Fish and Wildlife are taking more immediate steps to protect this delightful ornament of our California shore.

DFG Taking Measures to Protect Sea Otter Population

Wildlife officials are expanding efforts to protect sea otters in California.

The California Department of Fish and Game said 6 of 99 otters found dead in 1982 were shot, and up to 36% found dead in 1981 and '82 were victims of man.

The DFG and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said that effective immediately all officers assigned to duty within the otters' range—Ano Nuevo to Point Sal—will spend a minimum of five hours weekly on otter duty, looking for long-range weapons that might harm the animals. Aircraft and patrol boats will step up surveillance, and an information network is being formed.

The DFG said the sea otter population has been static since 1974—a count last November showed 1,338—in part due to human depredation. Otters have long been protected by state and federal laws. They live on mollusks, and fishermen blame them for depleting populations of abalone and clams.



To join the LA Audubon Alert, write or call Sandy Wohlgenuth, 19354 Calvert St., Reseda 91335; 344-8531.

Birds of the Season

by Shum Suffel



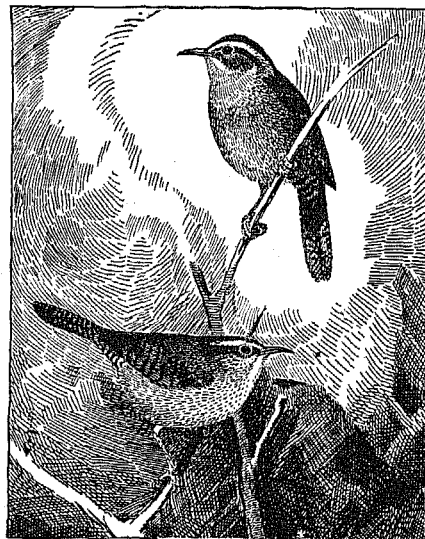
April again promises a build-up in migration as the month progresses. The hummingbirds and swallows have been with us for a month or so now, and the first summer residents—flycatchers, orioles, vireos, etc.—are arriving, but the bulk of the migrants bound for the mountains or northern areas are waiting for a proper reception on their nesting grounds.

Late January and early February were mainly devoted to a review of the rarities uncovered last month, with a few notable additions. A contingent of L.A.A.S. hopefuls braved the wintery seas off Monterey on 5 February and were rewarded with a **Laysan Albatross** which lit behind the boat for a feather by feather study. Also seen were a **Black-footed Albatross**, one **Short-tailed Shearwater**, and a number of expected alcids. While in the area, several participants went to Foster City, below San Francisco, to see the **Smew**, there for its second winter. It was accompanied by both **Common** and **Barrow's Goldeneyes**. Further north, in Crescent City, Dick Erickson confirmed a female **Steller's Eider** for a first California record. It apparently had been there for some time before the news got out. In the same corner of the state California's first **Barred Owl** is still being heard.

The tropical herons below San Diego, a **Reddish Egret**, two **Little Blue Herons**, and a **Tricolored Heron**, could be found with difficulty well into January by persistent searchers. Also below San Diego, the male **King Eider** alternated between the Imperial Beach Pier and the Glorietta Bay Park, where it could be approached very closely. It may well have been sick. According to Russ and Marion Wilson, who live nearby, the female **King Eider** at the Huntington Beach Pier disappeared after 11 January but returned two weeks later. It has been missed by others in February. Then on 29 January Arthur Howe found a female **King Eider** near the fishing pier at Cabrillo Beach, San Pedro. It was later reported to have a fish line hanging from its bill—an all too frequent fate when birds associate with fishermen. Jacob Szabo found two female **Black Scoters** in the scoter flock on the ocean just south of the jetties at Marina del Rey on 2 January, and two days later he watched an immature **Golden Eagle** flush the birds on the nearby marsh. Two **Tufted Ducks** in a large flock of scaup at the north end of Lake Perris, Riverside Co., were the only ones reported this winter. A pair of **Barrow's Goldeneyes** at Lake Mathews, Riverside Co., were rather far south for this species (Jerry

French, 9 February). **Hooded Mergansers** were scarce, but a male and two females were on Lake Cachuma, Santa Barbara Co., and two females were on the Los Olivos Golf Course pond, Ventura Co. (Larry Norris, 1 January). Larry also reported four pairs of **Greater Scaup** at Bolsa Chica on 30 December.

The L.A.A.S. field trip to the south end of the Salton Sea on 5 February was a "mud-out"—only the paved roads were passable after several days of rain. The **geese**, both **Snow** and **Canada**, were only seen at a distance, and not well enough to separate the twenty **White-fronteds** which had been seen there the previous weekend (Bob McKernan and Mickey Long). The fish hatchery ponds provided hundreds of ducks including **Redheads** and **Canvasbacks**, and a few shorebirds including two **Common Snipe** and a few **Greater Yellowlegs**. The best bird of the day was Hank Childs' **Lesser Golden Plover** (casual in winter there). Unfortunately it was at maximum scope range by the time most observers saw it. Two **Laughing Gulls** at Finney Lake (four were there a week earlier) constituted only the fifth winter record for the Imperial Valley.



The **Zone-tailed Hawk** (probably only one, not two as reported last month) was still being seen soaring over the hills above Fallbrook, San Diego, Co., by a few lucky observers in January. Lake Mathews is a reliable, nearby place for **Bald Eagles** in winter. Two subadults were conspicuous on the large island near the dam on 1 February. There may be as many as six eagles there. Most intriguing was the report of **Clapper Rails** at the New Lakes, Whittier Narrows, by David Bontrager, who is familiar with the species from recent coastal surveys. He heard two rails calling and observed one. This is the first report of this species in Los Angeles Co. since the early 1950s when the Playa del Rey marshes became a marina. They could not be found again. The most southerly **Rock Sandpiper** was near San Simeon, San Luis Obispo Co., where there were also three **Oldsquaws** (*fide* Don Sterba). There are very few winter records of **Wilson's Phalaropes** away from south San Diego Bay; thus Larry Norris' report of one at Red Hill, south end of the Salton Sea, on 27 December is noteworthy. Those who watched the Phoenix golf tournament got a new T.V. bird, as a small flock of **Inca Doves** was flushed from a sand trap by an unfortunate golfer.

An update on Orange County's rare birds shows that both the **Thick-billed Kingbird** and the **Rufous-backed Robin** stayed well into February. As previously, both could be difficult to locate—the kingbird because of its wide-ranging life style and the robin because of its secretive habits ("more like a Varied Thrush than an American Robin", according to Guy McCaskie). The **Olive-sided Flycatcher** and the two **Cassin's Kingbirds** at the Thick-billed Kingbird spot also stayed on. Richard Webster found another Olive-sided near Bonsall, San Diego Co., on 8 January, which is extraordinary, as until this winter there were only three acceptable winter records (see Garrett and Dunn, 1981). Strangely, the only report of **Winter Wrens** comes from the south of us in San Diego County where there were two in January (*fide* Richard Webster). At Huntington Beach Central Park the **Black-and-white Warbler**, the **Black-throated Green Warbler**, and the **American Redstart** stayed into February, but the **Philadelphia Vireo** has not been seen recently (*fide* Doug Willick). The only report of the **White/Black-backed Wagtail** in the Los Angeles River Channel, Long Beach, since mid-December comes from Bob Van Meter who saw it on 18 January. Let's hope it sticks around to molt into adult plumage so that it can be identified to species. A female **Hepatic Tanager** in the South Coast Botanic Gardens (Stu Bedwell and Eric Brooks, 2 January) could not be relocated. A "patchy red" **Summer Tanager** was in the Arcadia Arboretum on 30 January (Barbara Cohen), but San Diego

outdid us again, with six Summer Tanagers there. Several **Chestnut-collared Longspurs** and two or three **McCown's Longspurs** were found with the Horned Larks in the San Jacinto Valley north of Lakeview, Riverside Co.



After a winter of generous rains, even the deserts should be lush and green, with wildflowers everywhere. This is good for the birds, but not necessarily for the birders, as water and food will be widely available to the birds and there will be less need for them to concentrate at coastal canyons and desert oases. Nevertheless, these will still be the best places for passerine migrants. Morongo Valley and adjoining Covington Park will receive maximum coverage. Specialties there are Lucy's Warblers and Vermilion Flycatchers after April 1st, and later in the month Summer Tanagers and Bell's Vireos. The Brown-crested Flycatchers and the vagrants may not arrive until early May. Wherever you are, keep an eye on the sky for Vaux's Swifts and migrant hawks, particularly Swainson's Hawks which formerly migrated here in large flocks but are now rare on the coastal plain. Shorebirds will be coming through in breeding plumage—plovers with black bellies, avocets with rusty heads, and phalaropes in their "coat of many colors". April is the month to see Sage Grouse on their leks (strutting grounds) north of Lake Crowley in the Owens Valley. The California Department of Fish and Game may be able to help with directions to the best location. April is also the best time for owls in the nearby mountains, as their territorial calling helps in locating them. Two Colorado River specialties deserve mention: the Black Rails at the northwest corner of West Pond near Imperial Dam on the Colorado River, and the possibility of an Olivaceous (Neotropic) Cormorant on West Pond itself (there are three April records there). Obviously it isn't a question of what to do in April, but of how to find the time to do it.

(P.S. Thanks are due to Kimball Garrett for reviewing these articles for content and, particularly, for typing—a skill I never learned.—Shum S.)



Send any interesting bird observations to:
Shum Suffel, 1105 No. Holliston Ave.
Pasadena, CA 91104.

A Letter to the Editor

Your readers might be interested to learn of a new monthly publication I am starting in March, called WING (What I Need Guide), which will compile Audubon Society events and field trips throughout southern California. Information will be obtained from newsletters of the various groups, so WING will be mailed first class by the first week of each month. Yet it's a low-budget operation, with subscriptions (Oct.-June) \$5.00 including first class postage. A sample copy is available for 50 cents.

May I also request that interested readers let me know of other animal and plant oriented groups who might like to be listed in WING. I had to start somewhere, and Audubon seemed like the best place (nearest to my heart as well). As soon as the core of subscribers permits, other organizations will be added to the listing.

Harriet Kimbro, WING Editor
2128 Stonyvale, Tujunga, CA 91042

BIRDING License Plates

I will relinquish my California license plates *BIRDING* to the person pledging the largest donation to the Nature Conservancy. The donation will go toward the purchase of land on the South Fork of the Kern River, as part of the California Critical Areas Program. The plates will go to the highest bid received by *April 30, 1983*, at the address below. The donation will be made directly to the Nature Conservancy, and should be fully tax-deductible. (The highest bidder will also be responsible for any fees set by the Department of Motor Vehicles, including a \$25 transfer fee.) Send bids to Bill Principe, 1907 Tondolea Lane, La Canada, CA 91011. The



Dr. Roberta Crutcher, a Wednesday volunteer for several years, until her health began to deteriorate in 1981 has recently passed away. Contributions in her name are being asked for Childrens Hospital, Caltech, the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society and the Audubon Society.

CCAP may be the most important project in the history of the California chapter of the Nature Conservancy, so be generous with your bids.

(P.S. I'm not giving up birding, just the plates!)

National Audubon Western Regional Drawing

Don't forget that April 18 is the day of the drawing for all those wonderful prizes like the trip for two to the Amazon or a WIND-SURFER sailing board. Drawing is free, but a \$2 per ticket donation is suggested. All donations will be going to support programs in the Western Region. For further details call Audubon House.



Tanzania-Seychelles-Kenya in 1983.

Dr. Charles T. Collins of California State University, Long Beach, a past speaker at our chapter meetings, will be co-leading a tour with Diana Matthiesen of the University of Florida to East Africa and the Seychelles 27 July to 18 August, 1983.

The itinerary is carefully planned to take maximum advantage of early mornings, daytime, twilight and night-time opportunities to photograph and observe the diversity of big game animals, spectacular birds, colorful butterflies, and the endlessly varying spectrum of the African landscape.

Each safari, member will have a window seat while travelling, and all vehicles, each with an experienced driver/guide, will have an open roof and side window for photography inside park areas where foot travel is not possible. The scheduled accommodations emphasize the use of modest but quite comfortable park lodges in the field rather than major city hotels.

Note that the cost of the trip is all-inclusive out of New York and that, unlike many other tour prices, it includes all meals, all accommodations, and all international and local transportation, as well as many other costs often added on to the basic quoted price. Cost \$3997.

For further details and/or descriptive brochure, contact Dr. Collins at: Dept. of Biology, C.S.U.L.B., Long Beach, CA 90840 or (213) 498-4813, 598-4385.



CALENDAR

MONDAY, APRIL 4 — Caryol Smith will lead a trip to **Lime-Kiln Creek Park** near Tampa and Rinaldi. Take HWY 118 to Tampa off ramp, right on Tampa, ½ block to Rinaldi, make left and proceed short distance to dead end. Meet at **8:00 a.m.** Mixed habitat with both riparian and typical inland species. Roadrunners, raptors, warblers and water birds. Call Caryol at 885-0052 for further information.

SATURDAY, APRIL 9 — Interested in trying a new sport? Join Lee Jones for a birding tour of the **ANTELOPE VALLEY** — on bicycle. You will use new high-tech, low weight mountain bikes to discover some of the more remote areas of the Antelope Valley. A support vehicle will take you to the Antelope Valley, carry supplies and food and pick you up at the end of the day. The terrain will be level and you will be spending most of the day travelling well-marked, dirt roads and trails. Nevertheless, a little bike riding experience prior to the trip is advised. For more information (cost, itinerary, what to bring) write or call Casey Patterson, P.O. Box 692, Topanga, CA 90290 (213) 455-2544.

SATURDAY, APRIL 9 — **Ballona Wetlands.** Join **Bob and Roberta Shanman** (545-2867, after 6) for a morning of birding in this threatened wetland. Ducks, shorebirds, gulls, terns and other water related species will be in evidence. Meet at **8 a.m.** at the Pacific Ave. bridge. Take 90 West (Marina Fwy.) to its end at Culver Blvd. Continue west on Culver, turn north onto Pacific Ave. and continue to bridge.

TUESDAY, APRIL 12 8:00 p.m. — Evening Meeting. **Lloyd Kiff**, Curator of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, will present a brand new slide program on "**The History and Natural History of the California Condor**". Don't miss it.

SUNDAY, APRIL 17 — **Whittier Narrows.** **David White** will lead a morning trip through this unique area alongside the San Gabriel River. Meet at the Nature Center at **8 a.m.**

SUNDAY, APRIL 17 — **Kimball Garrett** will lead a seabird watch to Pt. Dume. Meet at **1:00 p.m.** at Westward Beach Rd., south end of **Zuma Beach**, just off P.C.H. Late comers may join the group at the tip of Pt. Dume but beware of parking restrictions. Plan to see spring wildflowers and whales, if they're there!



Call tape the Thursday before all scheduled trips for changes or verification.

NOTE: All evening meetings are held in the large meeting room on the south side of Plummer Park.

SATURDAY, MAY 7 — **Fred Heath** will lead a trip to **Antelope Valley**. Meet at **8:00 a.m.** at the Lamont Odett Overlook on HWY 14, just south of Palmdale. Plan to see local specialties and migrants. Bring water and lunch and be prepared for any kind of weather. Wild flowers should be excellent.

TUESDAY, MAY 10 8:00 p.m. Evening Meeting. Our own **Guy Commeau** will present "**Alaska—For All People**", a slide show on the wildlife of Alaska, with an emphasis on the birdlife.

Audubon Bird Reports:

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

Los Angeles Audubon Headquarters, Library, Bookstore and Nature Museum are located at Audubon House, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90046. Telephone: (213) 876-0202. Hours: 10-3, Tuesday through Saturday.

WESTERN TANAGER

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PRESIDENT Bob Shanman

1st VICE PRESIDENT Ellsworth Kendig
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Subscriptions to THE WESTERN TANAGER separately are \$8 per year (Bulk Rate) or \$13 (First Class, mailed in an envelope). To subscribe, make checks payable to Los Angeles Audubon Society.

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Leaders Needed

We need people to lead field trips. Do you have a favorite birding locale? You don't have to be an "expert" to show other birders, especially beginners, a few nice looks at some of our common species. Your trip doesn't even have to be long . . . you can opt for a short morning excursion. Call our Field Trip Coordinator—**Ian Austin** to make arrangements (Day 879-9700, Evening 452-3318).

Shearwater Trips

Debra Love Shearwater runs a series of regular pelagic trips out of Monterey and Morro Bay. The following is a list of upcoming scheduled trips from Monterey Bay:

May 14	Monterey Bay/ Jeri Langham, John Luther	\$24
May 21	Cordell Banks and Beyond/ Ted Chandik, Guy McCaskie	\$36
July 30	Monterey Seavalleys/ Leader to be announced	\$35
August 13	Monterey Seavalleys/ Leader to be announced	\$35
August 20	Cordell Banks and Beyond/ Leader to be announced	\$36
August 27	Monterey Bay/ Leader to be announced	\$25

Reservations are made by sending a check payable to Debra, with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

Debra Love Shearwater
362 Lee Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
(408) 425-8111

A detailed brochure is available which describes these 1983 pelagic trips. Write or call Debra for further information.

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

Mr. Lawrence Sansone III
3016 Hollyridge Dr.
Los Angeles, CA. 90068

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