

# WESTERN TANAGER

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## South Fork Kern River Riparian Area: Cuckoos and Tanagers

by Bob Barnes

Fifty-five miles northeast of Bakersfield is the largest contiguous cottonwood willow forest in California. From the 62,000 acre Dome Land Wilderness at 2900 feet elevation on the east to 11,400 acre Isabella Reservoir at 2600 feet elevation on the west, the South Fork Kern River flows for fourteen miles of its eighty-five mile length through 3,000 acres of lush, deciduous riparian forest. The Fremont cottonwood is found throughout. Alder predominates along the upper three miles while red, sandbar, and black willow predominate in the lower eleven miles. Set in the South Fork Valley, Kern County, this fork of the Kern is bounded on the north, south, and west by Sequoia National Forest, and to the east by the Walker Pass Region. The southern Sierra terminates here. Pinyon pine and Joshua tree wrap around the east and south gracing the Kaweah and Piute Mountains and Kelso Valley. The Greenhorn Mountains lie to the west. Amidst this ecological potpourri, the South Fork riparian forest and east shore of Isabella Reservoir have yielded over 235 species of birds, including a remarkable 80 known and 20+ probable breeding species.

A field trip to the riparian forest and edge may result in between 70 and 120 species, depending upon the expertise of the observer, season of the year, weather conditions, time of observation, and access to prime birding locations. Spring produces the most species, summer holds the South Fork "specialties" (breeding Wood Duck, Osprey, Common Snipe, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Willow Flycatcher, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, Black-tailed Kite, and Lawrence's Goldfinch), with fall and winter offering a wide diversity of species, including Bald Eagle, winter Buteos, and Merlin. The number one recommendation is a two-day visit on one of the last two weekends in June. 135-145 species were recorded on such visits in June, 1982, when



the surrounding mountain areas were also covered.

The purpose of this article is to assist interested persons in the finding of the diverse avifauna of the South Fork Kern River and its environs.

### HOW TO GET THERE

From Highway 99 near Bakersfield in the west, take the Lake Isabella turn-off to Highway 178. Proceed eastward on Highway 178 through the stunning Kern River Canyon, along the south shore of Isabella Reservoir, to

Sierra Way (Kernville turn-off) beyond the east shore.

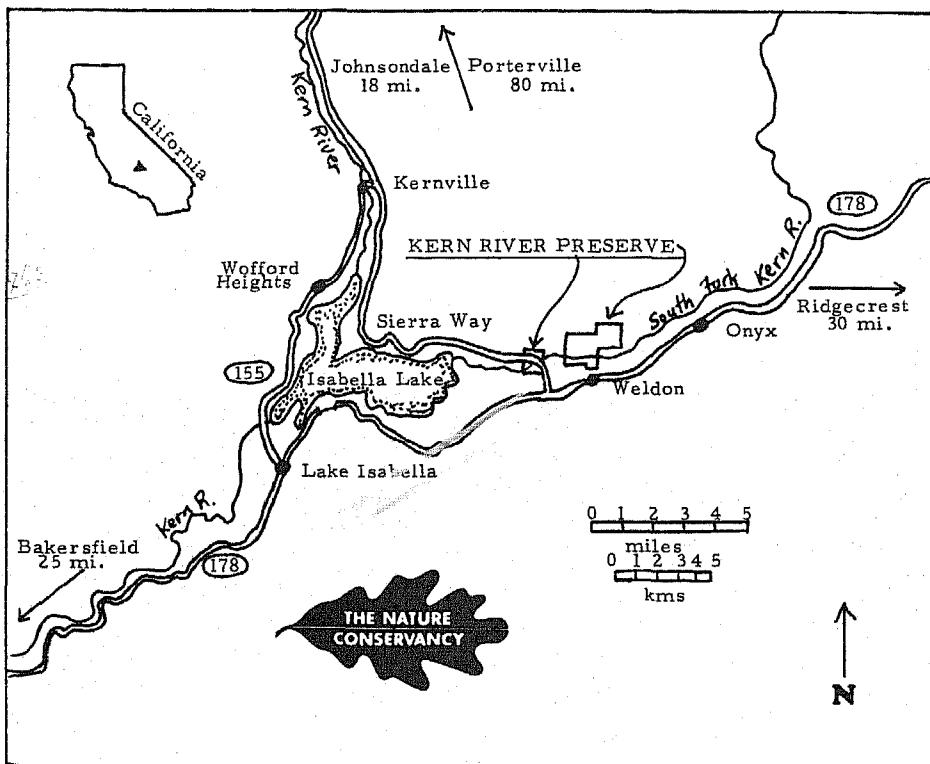
From Highway 14 north of Mojave, take Highway 178 west, past Joshua trees and Pinyon pines, through mile high Walker Pass, along the southern edge of the South Fork Forest, to Sierra Way, thirty miles later.

Both routes are beautifully scenic.

### WHERE TO STAY

There is a KOA Kampground and a motel on Highway 178 within one mile of Sierra Way. There are numerous campgrounds

*Continued next page*



around Isabella Reservoir and along the main fork of the Kern River. Several motels and restaurants are found in Lake Isabella, Wofford Heights, and Kernville, all within 15-30 minutes of South fork.

## BIRDING STRATEGY

Birding is best started, especially in summer, about  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour before sunrise. Summer temperatures range from 50 degrees F to 115 degrees F. It seldom gets above 85 degrees F before 11:00 a.m. By birding the cottonwood/willow forest between 5:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m., one will avoid the extreme summer heat. Summer afternoons are best spent exploring nearby mountain meadows and forests. Evenings may be rewarding around the ponds and marshes as ducks and blackbirds come in for the evening and summering. Lesser Nighthawks come out to feed. Be sure to bring plenty of insect repellent for mosquitos. The mosquitos at the South Fork are not like those in Alaska or New England, but they certainly take a back seat to no others in California! Birders are urged to be prepared to wade, as many species may be more easily observed if one is willing to ford a branch of the river or plunge in and through a slough.

In spring, summer, and fall, it is suggested that birders work the Army Corps' South Fork Wildlife Area, then the Kern River Preserve-Prince Pond Addition area. After covering the aforementioned places, proceed to the Kern River Preserve, Fay Ranch Road/Mariposa Marsh, the southeast shore of Isabella, then Hanning Flat, before heading to the mountains.

In winter, it is suggested that birders work the east edge of Isabella Reservoir, then the

southern edge of the cottonwood/willow forest from Sierra Way, westward past Prince's Pond to Isabella's shore again. Next, proceed to the Army Corp's South Fork Wildlife Area, the Hanning Flat Reservoir Area, and, finally, the Kern River Preserve/Mariposa Marsh locations. Winter temperatures range from 20 degrees F to 70 degrees F.

## BIRDING THE SOUTH FORK

NOTE: The birding paths and general features of these areas are shown on the map. The numbers in the text correspond to numbers on the maps.

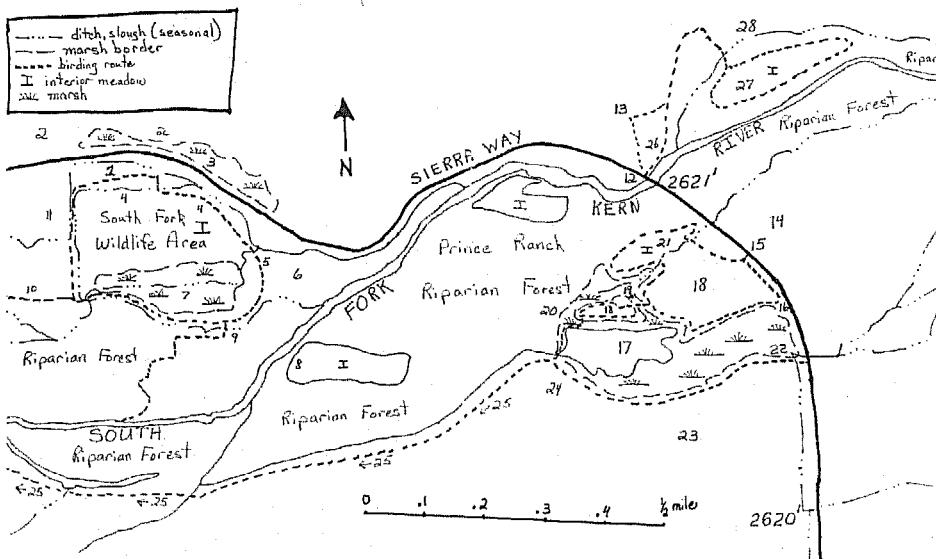
CAUTION: Due to heavy rains or flood control activities, some paths may not be passable at certain times. It is well to check with the Nature Conservancy-Kern River Preserve (619-378-2531) or join an Audubon or other group on a first time trip.

Unless otherwise noted, the following describes the South Fork and possible bird species during the period from June 15 to July 15.

**SOUTH FORK WILDLIFE AREA.** Start at the parking lot of the 1400 acre Army Corps' preserve located 1.9 miles north of Highway 178 on Sierra Way (1). On the side of the road across from the parking lot is a steep hillside covered with various sized boulders, grasses, shrubs, and a few scattered trees (2). In addition, there is a small, seasonal marsh and grassland area at the base of the hillside with one conspicuous willow and a few smaller ones (3). Look for duck species at the marsh, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, and other raptors soaring over the ridge; Chukar, Greater Roadrunner, Rock Wren, Canyon Wren, and

Rufous-crowned Sparrow on the hillside; White-throated Swift and four species of swallow catching insects on the wing; Blue Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting in the conspicuous willow, on the boulders, or in the shrubs and grasses. A good way to start the day!

Paralleling the parking lot is one of the meandering channels of the South Fork, bordered by a vigorous stand of willows (4). Look here for the Yellow-billed Cuckoo, the grosbeak and buntings, Tricolored Blackbird, Lawrence's Goldfinch, and, in fall, numerous warbler species. A one mile long loop nature trail leads from the parking lot, across a bridge, and in a southeasterly direction to an exceedingly large Fremont cottonwood in a few hundred yards (5). Between the bridge and cottonwood, continue to look for the above mentioned species. Also, listen for Yellow-breasted Chat. Check the mature forest (6) to the east of the cottonwood for cuckoo, Willow Flycatcher, and buntings. The marsh to the west (7) varies in quality from year to year, but check it for heron and bittern, duck, rail, and blackbird species. A fence between the cottonwood and forest to the east may be followed in a southerly direction across another channel of the South Fork, into the main forest, to a third channel. By walking east (left) upstream, one will come to the edge of an interior meadow on the Kern River Preserve's Prince Addition (8). Check here for cuckoo, Willow Flycatcher, chat, Summer Tanager, and numerous warbler species (in August). Returning to the cottonwood, the trail proceeds toward the main forest and skirts it a few yards to where a spur trail leads southward (left) over a bridge into the heart of the forest (9). A very high reservoir level in 1982 caused extensive damage, but it is worth checking, especially for Summer Tanager. The main trail continues westward, paralleling the forest edge. Check the large dead tree for raptor species and numerous land birds. Upon coming to the next bridge, continue to look for Yellow-billed Cuckoo, as well as airborne Double-crested Cormorant, Wood Duck, Osprey, and, in winter, Bald Eagle. After crossing the bridge, another spur trail (10) leads westward (straight) along the edge of the forest to the shore of Isabella Reservoir. Cuckoos have been observed as far as 300 yards west of the bridge. The main trail turns north (right) from the bridge. Blue Grosbeak and both buntings have been observed in the fields to the west (11) (left). Spotted Sandpiper, Tricolored Blackbird, and warblers (in migration) may be looked for in and along the forest edge to the east (right) of the trail. A return to the parking lot completes the loop. By the time the South Fork Wildlife Area has been covered, birders may have recorded most of the South Fork "specialties" as well as 30-50 common species. Red-breasted Merganser and Solitary Sandpiper were observed here in Spring, 1982.



Map for locations 1-28

#### KERN RIVER PRESERVE-PRINCE'S POND ADDITION

This area is productive year round. Park at the Sierra Way Bridge (12) located one mile north of Highway 178. The Nature Conservancy owns the land on both sides of Sierra Way (300+ acres). On the northeast side of the bridge is a steep hillside (13) similar in character to that across from the South Fork Wildlife Area except that it lacks trees. Look here for Prairie Falcon and Greater Roadrunner. At the bridge look for many landbirds including cuckoo and Summer Tanager. Proceed south on Sierra Way from the bridge toward Highway 178, birding the cotton and willows that line the road. A few hundred yards along, to the east (left) behind the trees, lies an open area (14) that varies from wet marsh to wet meadow to dry grassland, depending upon spring and/or summer precipitation. Check here for duck species, including Blue-winged Teal, and nesting Common Snipe. Listen for the winnowing call of the snipe and watch for it circling high over the meadow.

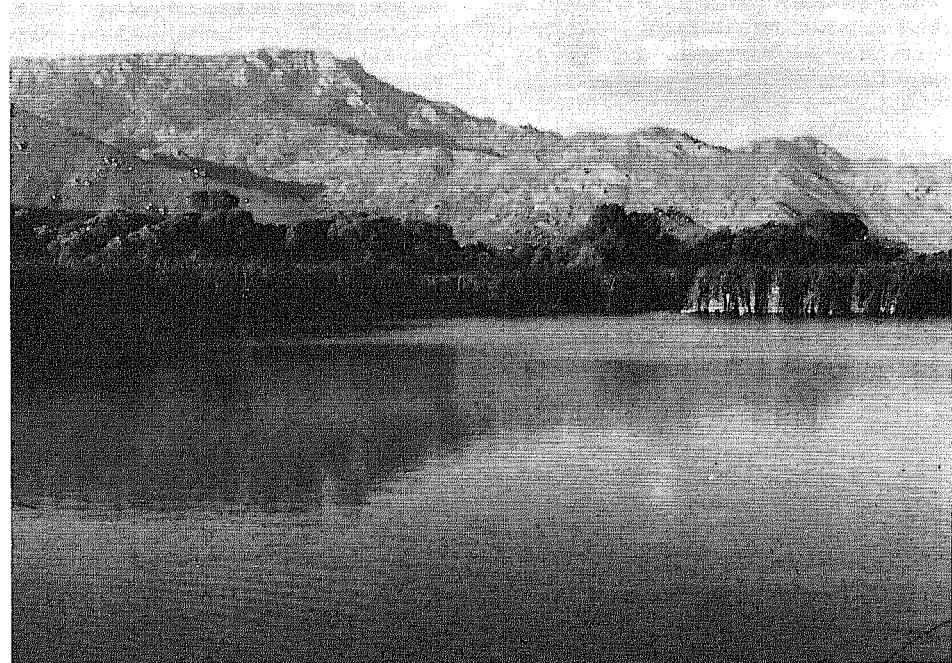
To the west (right) of Sierra Way lies most of the Kern River Preserve's Prince Addition. The Nature Conservancy owns the first cultivated field to the south of the pond, the pond and marsh, and all of the riparian forest from the Sierra Way Bridge westward to a common boundary with the Army Corps' 1400 acre South Fork Wildlife Area.

Enter the KRP-Prince Addition between the pond and the river (15) and walk along the fence paralleling Sierra Way to the willows at the east end of the marsh (16). Check the willows for Willow Flycatcher. Walk along the marsh edge westward toward the pond (17). Check for Least Bittern, Virginia Rail, Sora, Common Yellowthroat, Tricolored Blackbird, and Yellow-headed Blackbird in and over the marsh. At the pond look for Wood Duck, Redhead, and Common Moorhen. Check the fields (18), cross the slough (19), and continue along the edge of the pond and marsh to

its west end (20). Here the water from the pond flows into and under the main South Fork riparian forest. Check here for Willow Flycatcher. On the way back, check the riparian growth along the slough to the north (20)

marsh.

On the south side of the marsh, cross between the cultivated field (23) on the south (left) and the marsh on the north (right) at location 22. Depending upon season and amount of water the following species may be looked for on the cultivated fields: in winter ... geese, ducks, raptors (including Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawk and Merlin), Northern Shrike, Mountain Bluebird, and large (to 10,000) blackbird flocks ... in spring ... Whimbrel and Franklin's Gull ... in spring and summer ... Yellow-headed and Tricolored Blackbird. After checking the cultivated field, proceed westward along the southern edge of the pond and marsh to its west end where the water from the pond flows into and under the South Fork riparian forest (24). Listen here for the abundant (5-10 in a few hundred years) Willow Flycatcher. A walk along the forest edge (25) to the lake has often resulted in all the South Fork "specialties" including Wood Duck, Osprey, cuckoo, Blue Grosbeak (abundant), Indigo Bunting, and Summer Tanager. Numerous wet areas, small ponds, fence lines, snags, and other habitat niches are found on this route. Hundreds of ducks and shorebirds may be present year round and the Osprey nesting platforms are visible here. Return to



Kern River Preserve -Prince's Pond Addition

to 19) for Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Between the pond and the river, the meadow is penetrated by riparian growth at several points, including the above mentioned slough area. The part of the meadow closest to the river (21) is choked with mulefat. Check here for Yellow-breasted Chat (up to four have been observed at any one time). This area has also been the location for summer records of Brown Thrasher, Black-and-white Warbler, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Now, go back out to Sierra Way and proceed to the south side of the

Sierra Way and back to the bridge (12).

**SPRAGUE MEADOW.** On the northeast side of Sierra Way Bridge is a trail (26) leading eastward. Cross through the gate onto Nature Conservancy land and take the 2-5 minute hike up to the first set of boulders about fifty feet above the road. From this vantage point (13), there is a magnificent view of the South Fork Valley including about five miles of the riparian forest. Behind Prince's pond and marsh rise the Piute Mountains. Slightly to

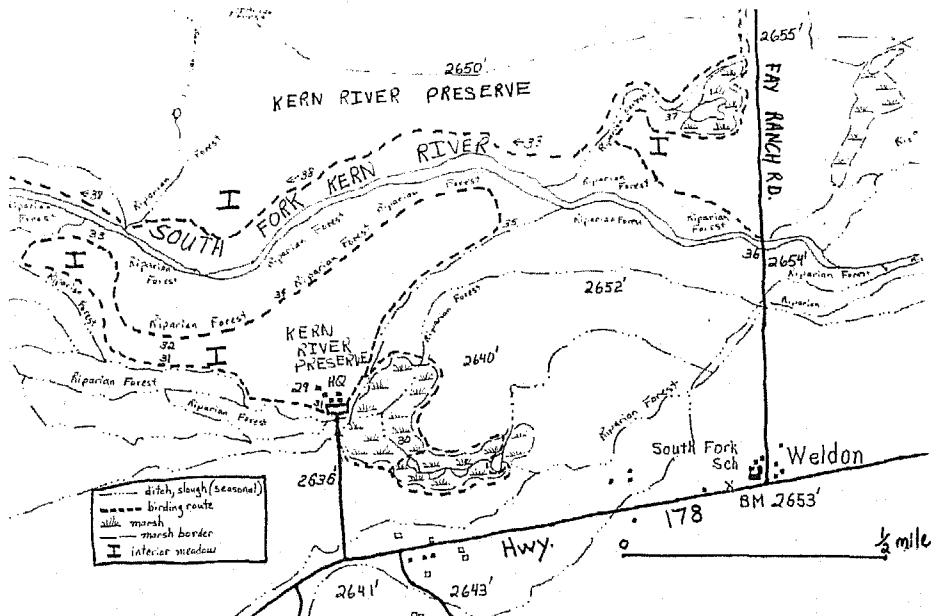
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east (left) of the Piutes is Kelso Valley, then the Kiavah (Scodie) mountains, followed by the Walker Pass region. On the far eastern horizon is 8475 foot Owens Peak, the dominant peak of the far southern Sierra. To the west is Cook Peak and the Greenhorn Mountains. A short, easterly walk from the vantage point will afford a view of an interior meadow (27) of the South Fork. The meadow is Sprague Meadow, the destination of this walk. After spotting the meadow, go back down to the trail and proceed eastward through a fence separating the KRP-Prince Addition from the Sprague Ranch (private) at a point about 200 yards east of Sierra Way Bridge. Black-and-white Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Northern "Baltimore" Oriole have been observed in the next 100 yards. In a short while, one will come to a large meadow (28). There is a small, seasonal pond with a check dam. Cross here into the forest for 100-150 yards to Sprague Meadow. In summer, this meadow has hosted Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, Indigo Bunting, and Lawrence's Goldfinch. The quality of birding between the Sierra Way Bridge and Sprague Meadow has been highly variable. Go here if desired species are not found at the South Fork Wildlife Area, Prince Addition, or Kern River Preserve. In any case, do not miss the hike up the hill near the bridge for the rewarding view of the South Fork Valley and environs.

**KERN RIVER PRESERVE.** To reach the preserve, proceed one mile east on Highway 178 from Sierra Way to the entrance on the north (left). The Kern River Preserve is a Nature Conservancy property consisting of 1200 acres of riparian forest, fields, ponds, marshes, and sloughs. At the headquarters' complex (29) is a private residence, private guest house, research guest house, and visitor center. The visitor center has birdlists, displays, maps, and other literature. Outhouses are located behind the visitor center. The preserve is open to the public, but a phone call (619-378-2531) prior to arrival is required.

There are several ponds and an extensive marsh (30) running from behind the old flour mill to headquarters. Look here for Least Bittern, Wood Duck, Virginia Rail, Sora, Common Moorhen, Solitary Sandpiper (late July and August), breeding Common Snipe, Common Barn-Owl, Lesser Nighthawk, Belted Kingfisher, Tricolored Blackbird, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. The trees in the headquarters' yard should be checked for Lawrence's Goldfinch. Look for nesting Say's Phoebe around the research guest house. Hummingbirds frequent the feeders and Yellow-billed Cuckoo has occasioned the trees around the house.

A one mile loop nature trail leads westward from the parking lot along the edge of a slough and riparian zone (31). A Yellow-billed Cuckoo pair nested here in 1982. The



Map for Locations 29-38

field (32) to the north (right) of the trail should be checked for Lark Sparrow and Lawrence's Goldfinch. Say's Phoebe often sits on the fence wire. A few hundred yards west of the headquarters the trail cuts north across the field to the edge of the mature riparian forest (33). An adventure off the trail into the mature forest has consistently yielded Summer Tanager. The trail crosses a fence at the southeast corner of the mature forest (34) into an area of scattered Fremont cottonwood, willow, and abundant mulefat. Upon exiting the forest area, one will find oneself several hundred yards east of the headquarters at point 35. The trail proceeds back along a ranch road, passing under large cottonwoods, near a slough (Wood Duck and Yellow Warbler nesting), and finally paralleling the marsh to the parking lot.

#### FAY RANCH ROAD/MARIPOSA MARSH.

From Sierra Way go two miles east on Highway 178 to Weldon. Turn north (left) on Fay Ranch Road toward the forest. Proceed to the bridge over the South Fork Kern River (36). Red-shouldered Hawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Western Bluebird, Yellow Warbler, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Lazuli and Indigo Bunting, and Northern Oriole have been observed here in a single visit; a spectrum of color to delight the observer. Warbler species that have been observed along the river immediately west of the bridge (private land) in mid-August include: Orange-crowned, Nashville, Yellow, Black-throated Gray, Hermit, Northern Waterthrush, McGillivray's, and Wilson's. During October, add Yellow-rumped and Townsend's Warbler.

A little farther down the road on the west (left) side, is a marsh, pond, and outflow stream that runs to the river. This is The Nature Conservancy's Mariposa Marsh area of the Kern River Preserve. Check the marsh for all

typical dwellers including rails and Common Moorhen. The willows in and bordering the outflow area (37) have been excellent for Willow Flycatcher (up to four singing individuals at any one time) and Summer Tanager. Look for the tanager in the Fremont cottonwoods. Walk back along the river, checking for riparian forest birds, to the bridge. An ambitious extension of the trip would be to continue westward along the north side of the main forest (38), beyond the slough, for two miles to the Sierra Way Bridge. This would necessitate "spotting" a car at the bridge prior to starting.

**ONYX RANCH ROAD.** Six+ miles east of Sierra Way off Highway 178 is the Onyx Ranch Road. Turn north (left) onto the road and proceed to the bridge (39). All of the South Fork "specialties" have been observed on the private land on both sides of the bridge. Three Solitary Sandpipers were observed feeding on the riverbed within 100 yards of each other in August, 1981.

Just across Highway 178 is the Onyx Store. The large Fremont cottonwood to the left of the entrance has a Red-shouldered Hawk nest in it. Check here for European Starling and House Sparrow (ugh!!!!)!!!

**ISABELLA RESERVOIR-EAST END.** Where the South Fork Kern River empties into Isabella Reservoir has proven to be an excellent birding location. From Sierra Way (40) take Highway 178 west 1.8 miles to a turn-off to the north (right) onto Patterson Way (41) (unmarked) which leads one to the south shore of the east arm of the reservoir. To access the reservoir from the north, take Sierra Way from Highway 178 for 3.9 miles to the Hanning Flat Recreation Area (42). Spring excursions (late April) have yielded numerous winter lingers and migrating newcomers. Six Franklin's



### *Mariposa Marsh*

Gulls were here in April, 1982. In summer, grebes, cormorants, herons and egrets, ducks, shorebirds, gulls and terns have been present in numbers along with hundreds of swallows and blackbirds. Osprey have consistently nested on the south side in snags and/or nesting poles put up by the Army Corps. Summer finds have included Magnificent Frigatebird (photographed July, 1980), Ruddy Turnstone, and Baird's Sandpiper. Fall and winter field trips have yielded 85+ species. As many as 40,000 ducks (of eighteen species) have been present including up to 3000 Canvasback, 10,000 Lesser Scaup, Surf Scoter, White-winged Scoter, Barrow's Goldeneye, up to 100 Common Goldeneye, 200 Buffle-

head, 1500 Common Merganser, and 30,000 Ruddy Duck. Winter raptors have included Bald Eagle, Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawk, Merlin, and Prairie Falcon. Also present in winter have been Common Loon, Eared Grebe (to 1400), Western Grebe (300), Great Blue Heron (100), Tundra Swan (300 December, 1978), Canada Goose (400), White-throated Swift (500), Mountain Bluebird (150), Water Pipit (800), and Vesper Sparrow (15).

**SCODIE PARK.** This park is in the town of Onyx just off Highway 178, 6.7 miles east of Sierra Way. Check here for wintering and migrating species.

**COTTAGE GROVE CEMETARY/BLOOMFIELD RANCH.** Just east of the town of Onyx, about seven miles east of Sierra Way on Highway 178, on the south (right) side of Highway 178, just beyond a sharp corner, lies the Cottage Grove Cemetery. From here eastward to the Bloomfield Ranch (43) are some of the hillsides on the south (right), and marsh, riparian forest, fields, and Joshua trees on the north (left). Listen and look here for Mountain Quail, Cactus Wren, Brewer's, Black-chinned, Black-throated, and Sage Sparrow, and Scott's Oriole.

## FINAL NOTES

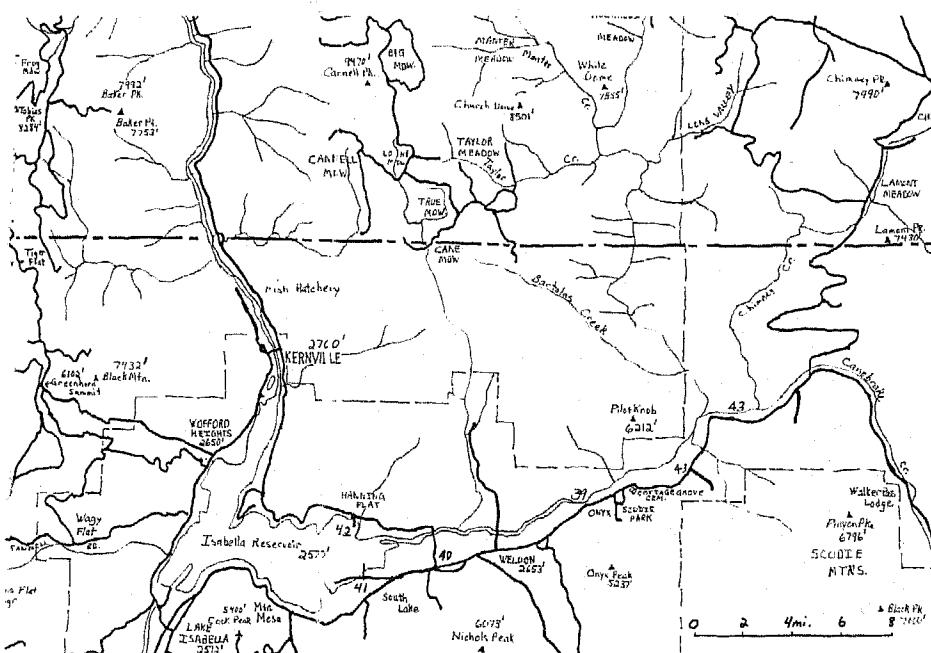
For further information on birding the South Fork and the prime spots in the surrounding mountain regions, call or write Bob Barnes, PO Box 269, Porterville, CA 93258 . . . (209) 784-4477. Several Audubon chapters have field trips scheduled this spring and summer and guided field trips are available on request on weekends from mid-April to mid-July. The Kern River watershed still has a lot of information to yield to birders. Please send copies of all field notes in the area to Bob Barnes at the above address. Bob is frequently assessing the range and occurrence of species in the watershed and would like the help of birders who visit the area. More work especially needs to be done on the following species' status in the area: Least Bittern, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Goshawk, Common Snipe, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Willow Flycatcher, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Le Conte's Thrasher, Bell's Vireo, Virginia's Warbler, Summer Tanager, Indigo Bunting, and Brown-headed Cowbird. Finally, contact Bob if you would be willing to help out on a Christmas Bird Count type census on a weekend in May, June, and/or July. The purpose is to try and get an idea of the numbers of the many unusual species that occur in the watershed. For example, there may be as many as 20-25 pairs of Summer Tanager in the riparian forest!!!!

The Nature Conservancy is raising about three million dollars for the Kern River Preserve. Your tax-deductible donations are solicited and should be sent to TNC-Kern River Preserve, 156 2nd St., San Francisco, CA 94105.

Thank you . . . Bob Barnes, Porterville, California March, 1983.

#### *ABOUT THE AUTHOR:*

*Bob Barnes is a resident of Porterville, Tulare County, California. He is a past President of the Tulare County Audubon Society. Bob started the Springville and Kern River Valley X-mas count and helped start the Three Rivers X-mas count. He has observed over 250 species in Tulare County and produced the first checklist of Tulare County birds and the checklist for Birds of Lake Success. He has been a frequent contributor to American Birds and works with the Condor Recovery Team and Tulare County authorities in the efforts to preserve the Sierra population of the Condor.*



### Map for Locations 39-43

## From the Editor

by Fred Heath

It's good to be back, after not doing an editorial in the April issue. As usual, I noticed a problem for which I must apologize to my many (I hope) readers. Teri Matelson's very fine maps were obviously rendered a touch too small. Anyone planning to use these maps will probably need a magnifying glass to read them. Most of the artwork/maps I get has to be reduced to fit in the *TANAGER*. This usually works out fairly well since our printer, Artisan Press does a good job of reproduction. However, in this case, I didn't stop to consider how small the letters would be. I hope no one including the authors is too upset with me for this, because enough people are upset over the April Fools issue.

One amazing thing to me is that although I've received a number of letters with suggestions about how to improve the *TANAGER*, I have never yet gotten a single letter saying how they didn't like anything in the *TANAGER*. I find this all the more amazing since a number of the Board of Directors finds my choice of material, as well as the length (12 pages instead of 8) objectionable. Needless to say, the April Fools issue is causing more controversy than ever. I have broad shoulders and don't take too much seriously anyway. But it does occur to me that the Board is worried that I may offend, upset or disappoint you the readers of the *TANAGER*. Since I haven't heard any negative words outside of the Board's, I wonder if they are slightly over-protective of your feelings. If you are unhappy with any aspect of the *TANAGER* please let either me or Bob Shanman, our President, know by writing. Even if you don't want to sign your name, write anyway. A post card would be preferable to your harboring that anger.

On the question of 12 pages versus 8 pages; I've always believed if I had enough good material that I should print it. Needless to say, the Board wants to be financially prudent and spend money wisely (and obviously a 12 pager costs more than an 8 pager). I again would like to appeal to you my readership for your thoughts on the matter. Longer articles can be broken into parts (which I do quite a bit of already) or maybe we could dispense with or shorten some regular features (like this useless column for starters). Look over some past issues and let me know what we could have done without. By the way, I'm not a masochist and would enjoy anything good you had to say much more. I get a kick out of doing the *TANAGER* each month, but I'm not supposed to be doing it for my own enjoyment, but yours.

## The Kern River— Wet and Wonderful

by Dorothy Dimsdale

We stood, Barbara and I, at the South Fork of the Kern River, neat and clean in our Gortex hiking boots, color co-ordinated jeans topped with 'shoo-bug' jackets, and hats laden with badges bolstering our so-called birding prowess. A heavy cloud of 'Off' engulfed us as we gave ourselves a final topping of insect repellent—and we were ready—or thought we were.

Bob Barnes, who was greatly instrumental in persuading the Nature Conservancy that the South Fork is indeed a worthy nature reserve, was on hand to show us the various habitats and help us to find the birds.

It was 5:30 a.m. and we started at a brisk pace towards the meadow east of the bridge on Sierra Way. The meadow was muddy, but having our assurance that we were prepared for mud, Bob forged across a swampy area and we followed. The mud came to the tops of our boots, which was fine. A bat flew overhead and as I followed its flight through my binoculars, I felt the mud squish over the tops of my boots and inside, seeping into my socks. Barbara was having the same experience. We continued on, the Summer Tanners were too lovely to miss. Our boots proved to be waterproof, they didn't let the water in and they didn't let it out, but the mud was cool and squishy and we'd just heard a Yellow-billed Cuckoo call, so who cared about feet?

Crossing Sierra Way, and now west of the bridge, we strode on (almost galloping) across long, thick, six foot high grass which had blown flat. It was knee high, so each step consisted of sort of lifting one's foot thigh high and leaping forward (very good for the thigh muscles). We saw Lazuli and Indigo Buntings and Blue Grosbeaks which was very satisfying. Then we heard more cuckoos and ran, bent at the waist, under the trees till Bob stopped and listened and then without pausing, waded deep into the river, till his legs were completely submerged. Halfway across he looked back to where we stood on the bank and said "Is this alright?". "Sure!" we cried loudly, more to convince ourselves than Bob, and waded in after him. Actually the water was cool and clear and helped sluice out the mud which was almost congealed in our socks. We saw a cuckoo briefly as it flew between the trees, but had a lovely view of a Willow Flycatcher.

The remainder of the morning was spent in and out of the river as we traversed from side to side (now I know how a tea-bag feels when it's being dunked) but Bob said we were very lucky as only the previous week, Ian Austin, L.A.S. Field Trip Chairman, had been *waist* deep in the same areas. My respect for Ian shot up 30% though I wasn't sure at the time whether he was an avid birder or just plain

water crazy.

We drove up into the Greenhorn Mountains for the afternoon. Lovely, lovely habitat where the warm sun dried us off while we traversed up and down and round and across, mostly on foot at about 7000 feet for three and a half hours. Then we heard a Blue Grouse booming at Raven Meadow and Barbara spotted the bird at the top of a Jeffrey Pine. It must've been 50 feet up and although it was still booming, we could not see it. After forty minutes of peering and neck-ache, it came into view and we saw the orange sacs displayed as it boomed. It was a marvellous moment followed by the realisation that I was already to lie down and sleep for four years. However we had to walk back to the car which was about a mile *up* the mountain. By this time, whenever Bob spotted a bird, Townsend's Solitaire, Nuttall's Woodpecker or whatever, I raised my binoculars dutifully to my eyes but I was unable to lift my eyelids at the same time and given a chance I'd have slept standing up.

Somehow I managed to bird Portuguese Meadow, which Bob had kept as a surprise for the end of the day, and under normal circumstances I would have revelled in every moment. It is quite lovely with a very active bird population of all the common montane species. I had simply not geared myself up for such an energetic day, and while Bob's enthusiasm was a great sustainer, I was more than ready to return to the motel that evening.

Waiting for us at the motel were two newly arrived birders whom we didn't know, but who had been told by the motel owner that we were out in the field. These two sweet souls were all agog to compare notes and generally spend a long evening chatting about the possibilities for the following day. Pleading an invented ailment, an attack of 'purple nephritis' which has got me out of many a tight corner, I shut the door firmly with Barbara gamely insisting that I needed to be watched carefully if the attack were to be gone my morning. She followed me in, where we both fell into bed and were instantly asleep.

The next morning at 5:30 a.m. we were bright-eyed and bushy-tailed if somewhat smelly. The muddy, stagnant water had dried in our now stiff-as-a-board jeans, though our boots were miraculously dry and unaffected. Bob met us at the Nature Reserve and we piled into his car to drive east to Canebrake Creek on Rte. 178 for an early look at Cactus Wrens (five of them together on a small cactus tree) and Sage and Black-throated Sparrows. Next we started to drive up a mountain towards Lamont Peak. About two miles up on the dirt road, Bob's car suddenly stopped, and nothing would persuade it to start again. He let it roll down the mountain as far as it would, but when we came to a short, steep rise in the road the car would roll no further. It was time for 'walkies'.

There wasn't a soul or a vehicle in sight and

we had a vista of several miles from our perch up the mountain. However the morning was pleasant and the view sublime so we set about walking back to civilisation. We were gazing at some more Sage Sparrows when a small cloud, somewhat *larger* than a man's hand, appeared on the road in the distance. It was a pick-up truck with two men, who though polite and kindly, were not crazy about returning from whence they came. However they were very helpful and drove us to the nearest phone, which happened to be a cafe and took them about half an hour of retracing their route. Once at the cafe, the smell of eggs and bacon was too much, and we had a hearty meal while waiting for the haulage truck.

Four hours later we were on the road again—this time in my car—and heading through Kernville north and east to the mountains. We climbed to 9382 ft. on Bald Mountain and saw everything in between on the meadows and winding mountain passes. It was a glorious drive with a multitude of stops for birding. We saw about 75 Pinon Jays together in one place. Hairy, Downy and Nuttall's Woodpeckers were abundant and I had my first look at a female Williamson's Sapsucker in Troy Meadows looking so very like a small Flicker and quite different from the male. In fact the female was first identified, so I learned, in 1852 while the male wasn't found for another 5 years and named as a separate species. It wasn't till 18 years later in 1875 that Henry W. Henslow proved that they were different sexes of the same species. (see Bent's Life Histories).

Our last stop for the day was Bob's favorite place, Chimney Creek Campground, and a glorious place it is, with great rocks of granite hanging on each side of the trail and Warbling Vireos, Flycatchers (various) and Wrens everywhere.

By this time evening was approaching and because I had been mentally prepared for an energetic day, the weariness of the previous one had not recurred. Both Barbara and I were ready to skip dinner and drive up into Green Horn Mountains again, with a tape which Bob had very kindly recorded for us of the Flammulated Owl.

By the time we reached the upper regions of the mountain it was pitch dark and I was uncomfortably aware that if my car broke down, we would be marooned for the night at the very least.

We parked way up the mountain by a stream and apart from the gurgling water, there was utter silence. There appeared to be no moon or perhaps we were canopied by trees, there was no way to discern the skyline so we stood in the blackness and waited for Bob to turn on the recording. When he did so there was a loud crackle and then we heard great crashing sounds as though rocks were being hurled at a wall, and faintly in the background one could hear the owl. Bob assured us that the extraneous noises would

not adversely affect the pulling power of the owl's calls. However the tape was played several times while we stood emersed in utter silence, apart from the recording of the rocks or whatever being hurled, but nothing moved and nothing called in reply. It's odd how ridiculous one feels at such a time. Finally we decided that if there were any Flammulated Owls there, they weren't interested in communicating with us, and we drove majestically down the mountain and so to bed.

The last morning we were up early and very eager to get a good look at the Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Bob had been birding for an hour with a young woman, Melody Serena, who was doing a survey of the Willow Flycatcher in the area. Both Melody and Bob were already muddy up to their ankles, so we knew the route they had taken. They planned to continue by covering the areas on the west side of the bridge on Sierra Way. As we were leaving for LA at noon, we rather hoped not to get too wet, so we decided if possible, to try to find somewhat shallower crossings when necessary. We followed Bob in single file through the six foot high grass—this particular area had not been flattened so that it was easier to negotiate than that of the previous two days, and we made good time. Suddenly there was a loud splash and we noticed that Bob was no longer with us. We could hear muffled exclamations and then saw a hand holding binoculars, waving above a hole in the ground which had been hidden by grass. Seconds later Bob emerged from the deep water-filled hole, none the worse for wear, but wet through. Undeterred, he plodded on and we followed managing to stay dry and yet see all the habitats again. Finally Bob took us to an area where he was sure we would see the cuckoo as it was known to be nesting there. He stood knee deep in water (how else?) with his scope at the ready, and we lurked in some bushes up on higher ground. A cuckoo flew over and perched so that we could look closely at it, then it flew off again and the rufous wing linings and the black and white tail were very obvious, as had been the yellow bill. At last victory was ours and we were still dry!

Our trip bird count was 114 species. This article stresses more the nature of the trip than the actual bird sightings as I felt one should be mentally prepared for strenuous and long hours if one wishes to thoroughly investigate this lush area.

Bob was a delightful trip leader and his penchant for water was exceeded only by his enthusiasm for showing us every possible habitat and the birds which flourished in them, so grab your waders, and make for the Kern River Preserve. The headquarters there are well worth seeing and an enormous amount of work has been put in by the manager, Rick Hewett, and volunteers to make the whole place a pleasure to visit. They have regular birding trips and you can call them at (619) 378-2531.

## The Identification of the Thrushes of the Genus *Catharus*

### Part Three: Swainson's Thrush

by Jon Dunn<sup>1</sup> and  
Kimball Garrett<sup>2</sup>

NOTE: This is the third installment of a four-part series. The final part next month will treat the two *Catharus* which are vagrants in California, the Veery and the Gray-cheeked Thrush.

Along with the Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*), the Swainson's Thrush (*C. ustulatus*) is the common species of spotted thrush found in California. It is a common breeder over much of the riparian and coniferous woodland of coastal northern and central California, extending less commonly (and declining) through coastal southern California. Breeding populations also occur inland, e.g. on the flanks of the Sierra Nevada. It is also a rather common, or even abundant, spring transient over much of the state; in fall it is much more localized, being quite rare at this season in the interior and, interestingly, along parts of the coast as well (e.g. from coastal Santa Barbara County south to Orange County). It is numerous in fall on the offshore islands.

Unlike the Hermit Thrush, this species does *not* winter in California. Despite the plethora of reports (with many of the offenders being from Christmas Bird Counts) only one record is considered valid—that was of a crippled bird in Coronado, San Diego Co., on 15-16 December 1979. There is an additional record of a late fall migrant from San Diego on 1 December 1964. This problem of winter sightings of Swainson's Thrushes is not unique to California—it is shared throughout the country (where Veeries and Gray-cheeked Thrushes are erroneously reported in winter as well). It can't be stressed enough that in almost all cases wintering *Catharus* in the United States are Hermits, and that continued reports to the contrary will be treated by the ornithological community with skepticism unless they are thoroughly documented with a specimen or photographs.

Like the Hermit Thrush the Swainson's shows distinct geographical variation, and even more than with that species the failure of the popular field guides to adequately handle the variation has led to a good deal of confusion with the other *Catharus* species.

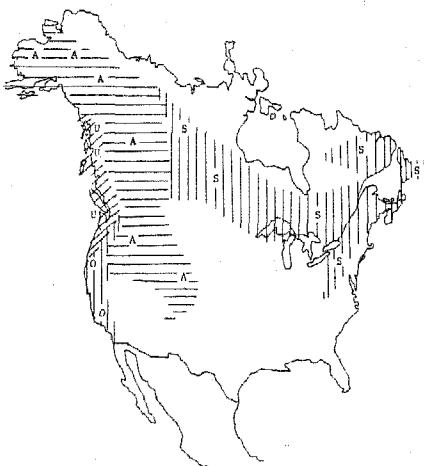
There is little that is consistent among all of the races of Swainson's Thrush except for a distinct buffy eye-ring and most aspects of behavior and vocalizations. Note that the Hermit Thrush also shows a complete (but more whitish) eye ring; this fact has no doubt

been largely responsible for the many winter reports of Swainson's Thrushes. The presence of this complete eye-ring will separate both of these species from the Veery and the Gray-cheeked Thrush. Unlike the Hermit Thrush, the Swainson's lacks the distinctly reddish tail which contrasts with the remaining upperparts although as noted last month some races and worn individuals of Hermit Thrush can show very pale cinnamon tails. The Swainson's also does not flick its wings and tail nearly to the degree shown in the Hermit Thrush; wing flicking is actually quite rare, and we have never observed Swainson's engage in tail flicking or raising. Those habits are characteristic traits of the Hermit Thrush. Finally, in California, Swainson's Thrushes appear distinctly larger than the wintering *guttatus* group of Hermit Thrushes (although this would not be the case with the larger, summering Hermit races *sequoiensis* and, particularly, *auduboni* and *polionota*).

The song of the Swainson's is a series of fluty notes that rises very rapidly up the scale. The first note is quite drawn out and the last notes become rather faint. The very distinctive common call note, "whit" or "wink" can perhaps be best described as the sound of a large drop of water falling into a calm pool. Nocturnal migrants overhead can frequently be heard giving a rich "quee?" call.

#### Geographical Variation

Pacific coast races of the Swainson's Thrush (the "Russet-backed" Thrushes of the older literature) have a warm reddish tone above, rather diffuse spotting on the breast, and a rich buffy wash across the chest that extends down to the buffy-brown flanks. There is gradation from the very bright birds of the Pacific Northwest (*C. u. ustulatus*) to somewhat duller birds further south. The latter



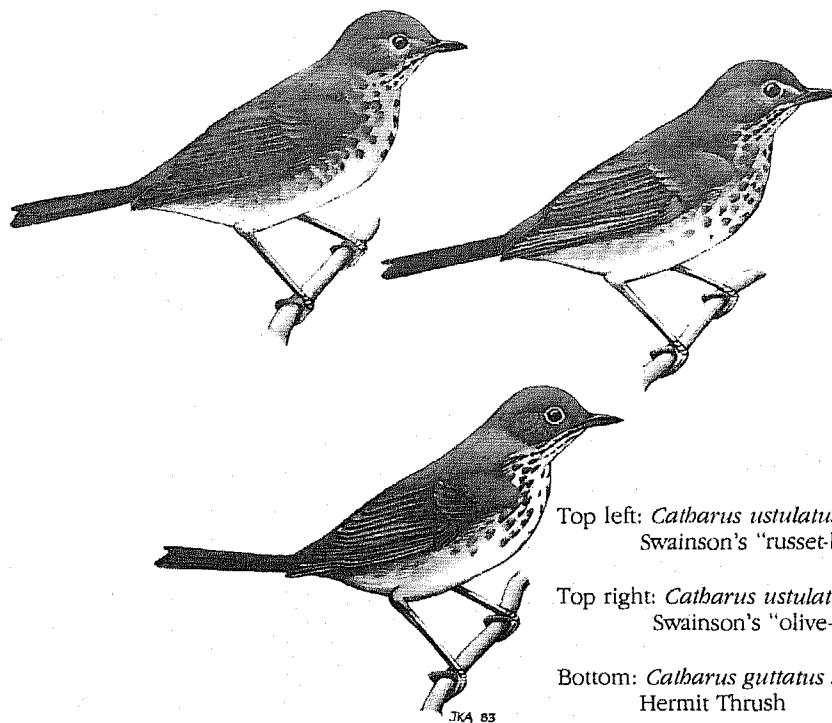
Breeding ranges of the races of Swainson's Thrush (after Bond 1963)

U = *ustulatus*

O = *oediclus*

A = *almae*

S = *swainsoni*



Top left: *Catharus ustulatus ustulatus*  
Swainson's "russet-backed"

Top right: *Catharus ustulatus swainsoni*  
Swainson's "olive-backed"

Bottom: *Catharus guttatus steveni*  
Hermit Thrush

birds have been assigned by many workers to the race *oediclus* (see review by Bond, 1963), although the A.O.U. Check-List (1957) includes all of the Pacific Coast birds in nominate *ustulatus*. *Oediclus* differs from *ustulatus* in having more brownish (less rufous) upperparts, slightly darker spots on the breast, and slightly duller brown flanks. The vast majority of Swainson's Thrushes seen in California belong to one of these two races. The breeding birds are *oediclus*, but the majority of the migrants noted are likely *ustulatus*. In any case these birds can be further distinguished from the western races of the Hermit Thrush by the much warmer tone to the upperparts, the presence of a rather strong buffy wash across the breast and particularly the flanks, and by the more diffuse and less distinctly blackish chest spots (except in the Hermit Thrush race *steveni*, which has smaller and fainter spots on the chest than the other races of *C. guttatus*). "Eastern" Hermit Thrushes (*saxoni* and *crymophilus*) also have buffy flanks, but the breast is much more boldly marked with black spots. Of course, a comparison of "Russet-backed" Swainson's and "Eastern" Hermits would be very rare, as their ranges (even in migration) do not overlap.

The "Olive-backed Thrush", *C. u. swainsoni*, is actually a bird of the eastern and boreal woods. Birds from much of Alaska, and southeastward through the Rockies and the mountains of the Great Basin, are very similar to this race but are grayer overall (especially above) and have been assigned to the race *almae*. It is interesting to note that although *almae* ac-

tually nests in northeastern California (locally from the Warner Mountains south along the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada to Mono Co.; see Grinnell and Miller 1944). It is only very rarely recorded in migration. It would appear that their fall migration must first take them almost due east. They are also almost unknown as a migrant from Arizona (Phillips et al., 1964). Not surprisingly, where *almae* comes into contact with *oediclus* there is interbreeding (e.g. in the Lassen area; Grinnell and Miller, 1944). The nesting habitat of *almae* in the Rockies and mountains of the Great Basin differs somewhat from that of the coastal races; it is a bird of willow thickets along streams as well as of aspen groves (often where mixed with firs).

Compared to the Pacific Coast races, the "Olive-backed" race *swainsoni* and the adjacent *almae*, are much more olive or grayish-olive above, lacking the warm russet tones. Below they have blacker spots on the breast and darker gray spots (less brown or buffy-brown) below the breast wash. The wash of color across the breast is duller (less buffy). Also important is the much grayer cast to the flanks (making them brownish-gray, rather than buffy-brown). Additionally, the malar stripe appears darker in *almae* and *swainsoni* in comparison to the Pacific coastal races. Finally, it is our tentative opinion that the more eastern races (*almae* and, especially, *swainsoni*) have a broader, bolder buffy eye-ring and a well-developed buffy supra-loral line (extending from the eye just above the lores to the base of the bill). In the coastal races the eye ring often appears a bit thinner and the

# President's Corner

by Bob Shanman

This month I would like to update three major LAAS projects: Mono Lake, the Condor, and Ballona Wetlands. In the past month or so, there has been a lot of activity on all three.

**MONO LAKE:** As most of you know by now, the California Supreme Court ruled in favor of National Audubon Society in its suit against LADWP over Mono Lake. The Court ruled that California water law does not override the doctrine of public trust, and that Audubon does not need to exhaust all administrative procedures prior to bringing the suit to federal court. As a result, the issue now goes back to the Federal District Court in Sacramento. Preliminary hearings were scheduled in April.

Parallel to this good news is word that Congressman Richard Lehman of the San Joaquin/Tuolumne area (which includes the Lake) has reintroduced legislation to make Mono Lake a National Monument. The Monument would be made up of federal lands in and around the Lake, authorize a study for managing waters of the Mono area, and provide for scientific monitoring of the Lake's biological resources. The bill is HR 1341. Please write your congressman today to state your support of the bill, and let both our senators (Cranston and Wilson) know that you support this bill.

**CONDORS:** The Condor recovery project is having a successful spring. As I write this, two eggs are in captivity in the San Diego Zoo, both are fertile, and should be hatched by the time you read this. A third egg has been identified, and hopefully will be in the zoo by



*Sisquoc, the first of two California Condors recently hatched at the San Diego Zoo, is shown at 12 hours in this photo by Bob Shanman of the zoo's videotape.*

now. The pair that laid the first egg has been seen mating again, and most recently was looking for a new nest site. It is hoped that all pairs who have an egg taken will double-clutch this year. This could result in six to eight new birds—an increase of 25 to 33 percent of the total population.

At the March 1 Banquet, we presented National Audubon with a check for \$4,000, of which you, the members, contributed over \$2,800. The money will be directed to supporting Audubon's habitat studies, which have just recently begun. Thanks to all of you

supra-loral line is vague or occasionally (?) hardly evident at all. We outline this as a tentative character because the pattern on the feathers around the eye is difficult to ascertain with precision from museum skins.

In summarizing the geographical variation, we feel that most individual Swainson's Thrushes seen can be assigned to one of two racial groups—coastal (*ustulatus* and *oedicus*) and interior/boreal (*almae* and *swainsoni*). Note that the latter "Olive-backed" groups is not strictly "eastern" (as often incorrectly perceived by birders), as *almae* breeds west to eastern California. We certainly don't encourage field identification to race *within* each respective group. *Oedicus* can be defined as being somewhat intermediate between *almae* and *ustulatus*, but is usually closer to the latter. In any case, field recognition of the extremes of both groups is quite easy and we encourage observers to carefully and cautiously look for more *almae/swainsoni* type migrants in California. It would also be helpful to try to look for additional breeding localities

of *almae* in California, and additional zones of overlap between *almae* and *oedicus*.

A fairly good photograph of a Swainson's Thrush from the Pacific Coast group can be found in the *Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds, Western Region* (1977), Fig. 538 on p. 300; a bird from one of the "Olive-backed" types is depicted in the companion eastern volume (Fig. 502, p. 281).

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who were able to contribute to this very important project.

**BALLONA:** On March 22, the Coastal Commission heard six hours of testimony on the Marina/Ballona Local Coastal Plan. Following an additional two hours of discussion, the Commission agreed with the staff report that significant issues exist and voted not to accept the plan. The staff was instructed to work with the County Planning Commission to resolve the issues. The staff identified five major issues and the size of the wetlands was number one on the list. The Commissioners appear to be favorably disposed to a large wetland area. The commission voted to add a sixth issue—that of the public trust. The day prior, the Federal Supreme Court agreed to hear Summa's case on public trust with regard to Ballona Lagoon (located north of the main entrance channel). National Audubon will probably file an amicus curiae brief on this case as they did at the state level.

Dick Martyr testified for National Audubon at the hearing, and very carefully separated the issues of wetland boundary determination and manageability. On the latter issue, he pointed out that Cal Fish & Game's recommendation for a 162-acre wetland plus 96 acres of support area could be managed and have some exciting educational programs associated with it. However, he pointed out that the purpose of National's involvement was not to assess the boundary of the area; rather, it was the Commission's responsibility to sort out the recommendations of the various agencies and groups involved. Dick stated that Audubon supported the largest wetland area that the Commission could come up with, and stated that should the commission err, they should err on the side of conservation.

## Rare Bird Causes Trespassing Problem

On the Dec. 19, 1982, Orange County (Northeastern) Christmas Bird Count a very rare Thick-billed Kingbird was discovered on Irvine Company land in Peters Canyon. Since the bird was readily observable from the end of La Cuesta Rd. in Lemon Heights, its presence was publicized to birders throughout Southern California.

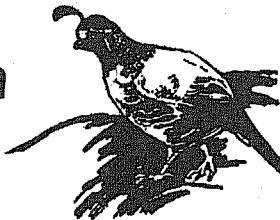
Despite the presence of clearly posted **NO TRESPASSING** signs, a group of about twenty birders climbed over the fence in pursuit of the bird and were challenged by Irvine Company personnel.

These thoughtless birders should realize that permission to bird their property on Christmas Count Day was given very reluctantly by the Irvine Company. If property owners begin to feel that birders on Count Day inevitably lead to trespassers on succeeding days, we may be denied entry to their property in the future.

*Sylvia Ranney*

# Birds of the Season

by Shum Suffel



It's difficult to write about May, one of the most exciting months of the year, in the middle of March, one of the most disappointing months. True, there were a few early migrants—Turkey Vultures, Rufous Hummingbirds, and swallows—but most birding attention was focused on the rarities of the past winter and a few new arrivals.

Most astounding was the report of **TWO Rufous-backed Robins** in the Newport Beach Environmental Nature Center. A letter from Mark Miller, of Sunnyvale, tells of finding the first robin when returning from San Diego on 1 January. The second robin was found in mid-February by another central Californian, Clay and confirmed by Sylvia Ranney on 23 February. She observed the birds in what appeared to be an agonistic (or courting?) behavior—chasing, posturing, and bill-pointing. At least one robin was seen there well into March. This was apparently a good winter for Rufous-backed Robins, as four were reported on three southern Arizona CBCs. The **Thick-billed Kingbird** in nearby Tustin also remained into March, but the accompanying **Olive-sided Flycatcher** was last reported in early February (*fide* Doug Willick).

A last wrap-up of the winter's activities shows little change from previous reports—a lack of invasion species, the gradual departure of wintering non-passersines, and a few noteworthy additions. The L.A.A.S. trip to the vicinity of Santa Barbara Island on 11 March was rather dull, except for unusual numbers of **Black-legged Kittiwakes** (75+), **Rhinoceros Auklets** (50+), and **Pomarine Jaegers** (20+). Very few **shearwaters** were seen—six **Sooties**, three **Pink-foots**, and two or three **Black-vented**s. Later that afternoon a run along the L.A. Harbor breakwater provided close views of all three cormorant species, two **Black Oystercatchers**, several **Black Turnstones**, and three **Wandering Tattlers**. From Guy McCaskie comes word that an **Olivaceous** (Neotropic) **Cormorant** was building a nest at the south end of the Salton Sea (SESS) on 27 February. Richard Webster reports that the southern herons below San Diego are still being seen in early March, and that the **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** has been re-found in San Elijo Lagoon above Interstate 5.

Seldom is the life of an individual wild bird as well documented as was that of a male **Aleutian Canada Goose** found by Larry Sansone at the mouth of the Santa Maria River on 26 November 1982. It was banded at Lake Earl near Crescent City on 25 March 1980, then sent by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

to the Dakotas to be mated with a female there. On August 6, 1982, it was released on Agattu Island in the Aleutian Chain, and three months later it was back in California. Twelve **Ross' Geese** in the San Diego area were an unusual number along the coast, and 300 **White-fronted Geese** above Lakeview, Riverside Co., on 12 February, were probably northbound transients. This has been a good winter for **Eurasian Wigeon**, with reports from Lakeview, Pasadena, below San Diego (2), Orange Co. (2), and Swan Lake, near Ontario, San Bernardino Co. The male **Tufted Ducks** at Lake Perris stayed well into February, possibly longer. Neither of the two female **King Eiders** in Orange Co., nor the male below San Diego, have been seen since the severe oceanic storms of late January, but the female **Steller's Eider** in Crescent City Harbor stayed until at least 3 March, I'm happy to report. The only **Oldsquaw** south of Morro Bay was seen occasionally at the Imperial Beach Pier below San Diego. A male **Red-breasted Merganser** (rare away from salt water) at Lake Mathews on 1 February (Hal Baxter) was seen again on 21 February (Doug Willick). No Harlequin Ducks or Hooded Mergansers were reported in our area.

Most of the large hawks, except Red-tails, had left the Antelope Valley by 26 February when photographers Arnold Small, Herb Clarke, and Clyde Bergman were there. However, two adult **Rough-legged Hawks** (we usually get immatures) were near Lancaster on 12 March (Kimball Garrett and Bruce Broadbooks). Single **Merlins** were reported in Altadena (Lois Fulmor, 25 February), at the Brookside Golf Course, Pasadena (Chuck Hamilton), and in the Irvine area, Orange Co. (Doug Willick, 20 February). Both the **Black-headed Gull** and one, or possibly two, **Little Gulls** were at the Stockton Sewage Ponds on 2 March; this is their fourth winter there. Two salt-water loons were reported inland (where of casual occurrence): a **Red-throated Loon** near Anaheim (Steve Ganley, 15 February), and an **Arctic Loon** at the Whittier Narrows New Lakes (Natasha Antonovich, 9 February). **Common Ground-Doves** are uncommon residents in the areas to the east and south of Los Angeles County, but there are only four recent records within the county itself. It is therefore surprising to read in the Conejo Valley A.S. "Roadrunner" that "... Ground Doves have been seen in numerous spots in Ventura County", which is just northeast of Los Angeles Co. The **Barred Owl** (first state record), which was found last year by Dick Erickson near Crescent City, was calling again in February, and

another Barred Owl was heard south of Willow Creek (which is inland from Eureka). A hybrid **Nuttall's XLadder-backed Woodpecker** wintering at California City, east of Mojave in Kern Co. (Mark Chichester) was at some distance from the known overlap area between these two species in the Walker Pass area of Kern Co.

An **Ash-throated Flycatcher** was wintering near San Diego, and another was in San Dimas on 4 March, about three weeks before their usual arrival time (Milt Blatt). The only reported **Eastern Phoebe**s were in Orange County: the one found by Doug Willick in Serrano Park on 12 December was still present on 8 March, but the one seen by Arleta Patterson in late February in Irvine Park was not seen again. Swallows, as expected, were early, with **Cliff Swallows** near Bakersfield by 14 February (Mark Chichester); later in the month they were building nests under the overpasses of nearby Highway 5. Three early **Rough-winged Swallows** were at Whittier Narrows on 13 February (Natasha Antonovich). The **Black-tailed Gnatcatchers**, which arrived in the Oak Canyon Nature Center in Anaheim after the devastating fires of last October, are showing signs of nesting (Doug Willick, 9 March). A note from Justin Russell, vacationing in Texas, tells of "large flocks of **Cedar Waxwings** in Phoenix and Tucson, etc., in early March. While very few waxwings wintered in southern California, there were also indications of a spring influx in many local areas by early March.

A **Solitary Vireo** of the *plumbeus* race was at Morongo Valley on 20 February (Lloyd Kiff), and another was in Mohave Narrows Park on 5 March (Marcyn Clements, *et al*). **Solitary Vireos** of the *cassinii* race were at Whittier Narrows on 29 January (Natasha Antonovich) and in Huntington Beach Central Park (HBCP) on 8 March (Steve Ganley *et al*). An early migrant **Warbling Vireo** in the Oak Canyon Nature Center, Anaheim, after 5 March was in full song. It definitely was not there during the winter, as Doug Willick covers the area almost daily. A **Tennessee Warbler** was a new bird for the Arcadia Arboretum (Jerry Johnson, 3 March). At Huntington Beach Central Park the **Black-throated Green** and **Hermit Warblers** were found well into February, but the **Black-and-Whites** and the **Philadelphia Vireo** were last reported in early January. At Harbor Lake, Dave Richardson saw **Black-and-White**, **Yellow**, and **Black-throated Gray Warblers** on 10 March, Brian Daniels' **Worm-eating Warbler** in Long Beach Recreation Park could not be found after its favorite rows of shrubbery were cut down in early March.

At least forty **Chestnut-collared Longspurs** were in a pure flock north of Lakeview (and not with Horned Larks, as previously stated). The few **McCown's Longspurs** seen there in January could not be re-found, but the "staked out" **Lark Bunting** across the road was widely reported. Larry Norris' trip to Furnace Creek Ranch on 11 February did not

# Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

**C**oncern for the environment in America is not a phenomenon of the last 20 years. Most of us are aware of the beginning of the national park idea in the 19th century with John Muir and Gifford Pinchot. We're proud of our first conservationist president, Theodore Roosevelt, whose macho delight in big game hunting and charging up Cuban hills at length was sublimated into a vigorous drive to preserve some of the Great Outdoors. The National Audubon Society and the Sierra Club began in struggle: Audubon against the plume-hunters who were decimating our herons and egrets, the Sierra Club fighting the despoilers of Yosemite. For half a century thereafter, though there were a few spurts of environmental energy, most conservationists seemed content to watch birds or hike through the mountains.

It wasn't until the 60s and the 70s that the ideas of "environmentalism" coalesced to become a spontaneous, irresistible wave that swept over the nation. What brought this about? Initially, perhaps there was a strong element of the liberal youth movement challenging an establishment still wedded to the accepted belief that nature was to be used, to be conquered. It became more than a

find the hoped for Harris' or Tree Sparrows, but did turn up 15 **Great-tailed Grackles** and a female **Greater Scaup** (a new bird for Death Valley). The earliest report of a male **Hooded Oriole** was in Irvine, Orange Co., on 7 March (Doug Willick). A few **Scott's Orioles** wintered for the third year in the hills above El Toro, Orange Co., but the only desert record was one at the Whitewater Trout Farm (David Hatch, 20 February).

Migration may have peaked in late April, but then again it could be early May. There will still be many passerine migrants, including the normally late Willow and Olive-sided Flycatchers, Swainson's Thrushes, Yellow Warblers, and Western Tanagers. But May is the month for vagrant passersines. The search for these lost birds will receive maximum attention from compulsive birders into early June, and will climax with the annual Memorial Day hejira to the oases of Inyo and Mono Counties. As many as forty birders have braved the 100°-plus temperatures of Death Valley, some of them for a full week, in past years. Knowing them well, they will probably do it again.

children's crusade when thousands of citizens of all ages picked up the vibrations and became aware of the threat to the limitless wealth of natural America.

What were the ingredients that found their way into the simmering soup of environmentalism? There were many. Smog. After the early Bob Hope jokes about Los Angeles, smog crept on huge tiger paws into most of our big cities. It hit us right where we lived. On bad days we choked and teared and cursed. We gave up our backyard incinerators and it didn't seem to make any difference. We put smog devices on our cars but our eyes continued to sting. And all the time we thought longingly of the clear days of earlier years before the ugly brown cloud chased after us into the suburbs and the sun went down like a red, sick jellyfish. We learned that "mile-high" Denver, surrounded by pure air and the magnificent Rockies, had become one of the worst smog traps in the country.

We knew about nuclear fallout. A decade after Eniwetok and Bikini the radioactive junk was still circling high above the earth and showing up in our children's milk. We read Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring." That was a mind-blower—and it had tremendous impact. It taught us about the nature of the chemical cloud that swirled around us and made us realize our cavalier attitude toward the poisons we juggled. Our education expanded into a new awareness of the toxic substances in our food and water. We now read the small print on the breakfast cereal boxes. We flinched at every new report of nitrates in hot dogs, of laboratory rats and saccharin, of caffeine in our soda pop. We found ourselves surreptitiously eyeing health food stores and munching granola.

We read about factory wastes pouring into the Mississippi River and getting into the water supply in cities downstream. Underground water around the country was infiltrated with a dozen varieties of lethal goodies that were pumped from wells into the kitchen taps. We were made aware of the miasma of garbage floating about in the air of the workplace. We learned about brown lung and black lung, of silicosis and asbestosis—and we didn't like what we learned. Only illiterates or desert island inhabitants were exempted from a slight case of paranoia about all this.

The pressure grew and grew and finally exploded into an unprecedented profusion of environmental laws. We woke up one morning and found ourselves with a National Environmental Policy Act, an Environmental Protection Agency, an Occupational Safety and Health Administration, an Endangered Species Act. DDT and other poisons were eliminated. On the vast grazing lands of the West Richard Nixon banned the use of Compound 1080 that killed more beneficial species of wildlife than the so-called "varmints" it was aimed at. Wetlands received more protection. Environmental impact state-

ments slowed down the developers eager to close up our open spaces. We got a Clean Air Act and a Clean Water Act—and more. It was a kind of green revolution. There seemed to be nearly universal agreement that this was *right*. Mr. Nixon never expressed his opposition or threatened to use the veto. There were no significant protests from industry. Yet, today—some ten years later—Ronald Reagan, with much the same business constituency as Nixon had, says these environmental laws are bad for industry and therefore bad for the country. To get government off our backs and end the recession we must weaken or remove the regulations. Logically the laws should be repealed. Since this is politically difficult, the next best thing is to appoint agency directors who will sabotage their own departments. In the name of budgetary necessity and "cutting the fat" they fire the scientific staff and the inspectors so the job can't be done. Funds already appropriated to purchase national park land are withheld, the endangered species program is stalled, solar and geothermal research funds are eliminated, acid rain is given the silent treatment, public land is up for grabs to the private sector—and on and on.

Perhaps the Administration thinks the American people have lost their enthusiasm for clean air and water and all the rest. Possibly it is felt that the 60s and 70s were a passing fancy, that concern for the environment is a fad that has run its course. If that is so, the Administration may soon find it is dead wrong. Since "Silent Spring" the environmental movement has become more confident and sophisticated. Membership in conservation organizations has burgeoned. Polls continue to report powerful and unmistakeable sentiment for a clean land in spite of the cost—even in today's depressed economy.

The signs are there that people are sick and tired of pollution and the fear of unseen substances threatening their physical and mental health. They want to preserve the scenic beauty of America forever. They are not ready to give up the progress of the last several years to grab-and-run special interests. This is not the 19th century when children worked a 12-hour day in the cotton mills and immigrants labored in sweatshops for a pittance. Most of us feel that a function of government is to promote the general welfare by protecting its citizens from the excesses of unbridled greed. In November, 26 new congressmen—all committed to a decent environment—were elected. Surely this is tangible evidence that the demise of environmentalism has been wishfully exaggerated.

We have two more years of environmental Reaganomics ahead of us. If we sit back and meekly bow to the wishes of Watt and Gorsuch and their mentors we will be coping out on America. The fight against the plume-hunters was won by an aroused, determined people. Can we do less?



# CALENDAR

**MONDAY, MAY 2** — **Harriet Bennish** will lead a trip to **Sycamore Canyon**. Meet at **8:00 a.m.** at the entrance to Sycamore Canyon Park. Half day trip, i.e. until 12:00 noon. Trip for beginners but experienced people welcome. Expect to see orioles and owls. For further information, call Harriett at (213) 659-0604.

**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.

**SUNDAY, MAY 8** — Bird **Morongo Valley** with **Ed Navojosky**. Meet at **7:30 a.m.** at Covington Park.

**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.

**SATURDAY, MAY 21 — 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.**

**MONDAY, MAY 23 — Harriet Bennish** will lead a trip to **Will Rogers Park**. Meet at **8:00 a.m.** at the parking lot opposite the polo field. A beginners trip but experienced people are most welcome. If you need further information, you may call Harriet at (213) 659-0604.

**TUESDAY, JUNE 14 — 8:00 p.m.** — Evening meeting. **Paul Meister, President of L.A. Oceanic Society**, will present, **"Monitoring undersea life along Palos Verdes Peninsula."** Don't miss this special event!



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.

## 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).

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## WESTERN TANAGER

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### LAAS Nominations

The following slate of officers has been chosen for next year:

**President:** Bob Shannan

**1st Vice President:** Ellsworth Kendig

**2nd Vice President:** Robert VanMeter

**Executive Secretary:** Marge Wohlgemuth

**Treasurer:** Dexter Kelly

**Registrar:** Andrea Kaufman

Other nominations can be made at the regular evening meeting on May 10, 1983.



## 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	Cordel Banks and Beyond/ Ted Chandik, Guy McCaskie	\$36
July 30	Monterey Seavalley/ Leader to be announced	\$35
August 13	Monterey Seavalley/ 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.

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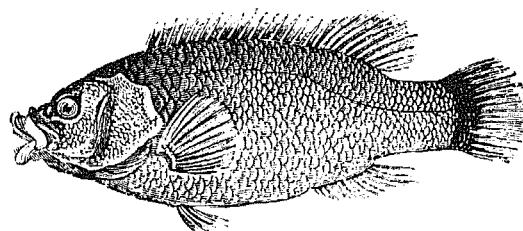
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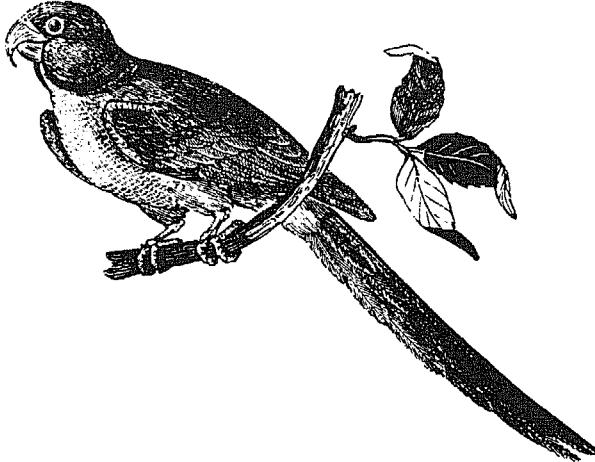
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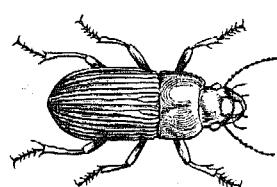
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