WESTERN TANAGER

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Working Against Time:

The Attempt to Save the California Condor

by Harrison Truitt Starr

Just a year ago the Condor Recovery Program, begun in 1979 as a joint effort between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Audubon to save the California Condor from the brink of extinction, was beset on all sides by storms of criticism and doubt. There were accusations that the biologist in charge, who wanted to begin captive breeding and radio telementry were, at best, soulless automatons who would wreak great harm, or, at worst, incompetents infected by evil spirits whose "hands on" approach was going to destroy the majestic bird they'd been assigned to save. It would be best, some held, to let the overwhelming man-made forces working against the bird drive it to extinction rather than subject it to the indignities of zoo based captive breeding. Others more rationally urged that all conservation efforts be directed toward protecting the vast condor habitat, thereby allowing the estimated 28 to 30 surviving birds to recover on their own.

By late summer of 1982, however, one outstanding and unarguable fact emerged from the Recovery Team's massive photographic coverage of the condor. There were only 19, at best 21, birds left. Extinction was inevitable unless immediate action was taken.

Just a year later, on July 25, 1983, the Los Angeles Times, using partial quote from a field biologist, opined in an editorial that, "We will never lose the condor now." How could such a major reversal of such a dire situation take place in such a short time? The answer is — it couldn't. Just as the dark, contentious views of the program in mid-1982 didn't reflect what was really going on then, so the facile optimism of the Times editorial, caused by a limited amount of Recovery Team success, doesn't reflect what's really going on now.

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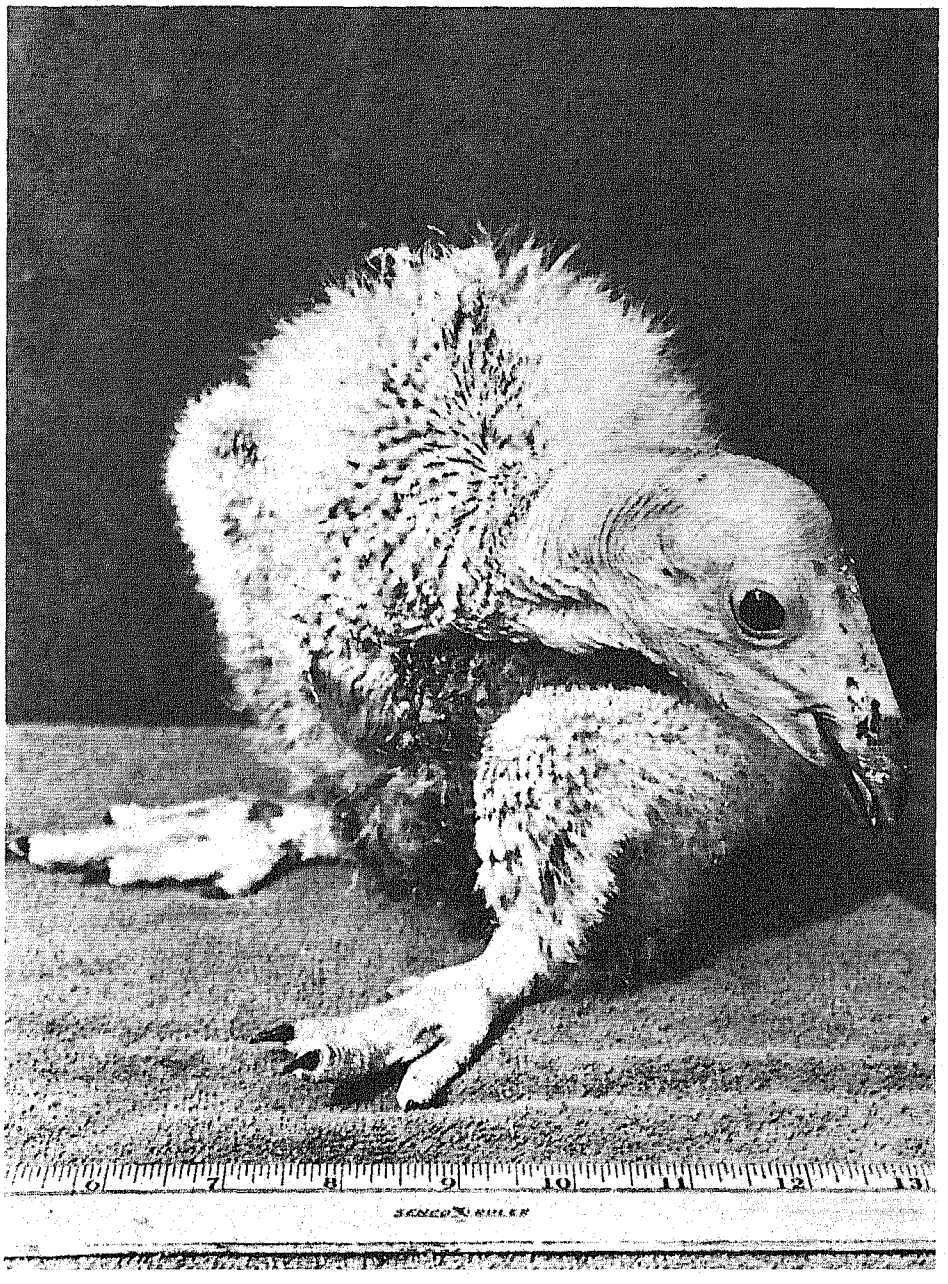


Photograph courtesy of San Diego Zoo

Young hatched at San Diego Zoo

The Recovery Team operates under a rigorously monitored annual permit from the California State Commission of Fish and Game counselled by its Condor Advisory Committee which was created to examine the complexities created by the opposing views of the rescue effort. Because of the rapid rate of condor decline, the field biologists felt that it was urgent to create a captive breeding flock, so their permit renewal of August 1982 requested permission to take two nestlings and three immatures from the wild to join Topa Topa, the captive male in the L.A. Zoo. In the best possible scenario this would provide them with birds to introduce back into the wild around 1988-90, just in time to save *Gymnogyps Californianus* from extinction. With this same thrust, they also wanted to take the first eggs from all of the known hatchlings in the Spring of 1983, in the belief, based on their experience with the Andean Condor, that this would induce double clutching, a second laying in all the nests. They also wanted to tag five birds with radios, a telementry technique proven with Andean Condors to be invaluable in establishing definitive habitat information.

After deliberation the Commission issued the permit: one chick could be taken, one egg in 1983, and one bird could be captured as a mate for Topa Topa. There was to be no telementry, excepting that, if the first potential mates captured were male they could be radio tagged. The problem here was that if the first bird captured chanced to be female (condors are very difficult to sex) a major habitat source of information would be lost.

Disappointment was a barely adequate word to describe the reaction at the Condor Research Center in Ojai, the home base for the Recovery Team. Audubon, which had committed $500,000 to the effort, feeling that the restrictive terms of the permit doomed the program, wanted to pull out. This didn't sit too well with some of the Commissioners who were trying to walk a judicious tightrope in a situation where there were not a lot of hard facts. They did indicate that if there was evidence of success they could be more liberal, and, for the first time, channels for a real dialogue began opening up between them and the Recovery Team.

This rapport was accelerated by the team's next conspicuous success. In August, 1982, navigating in very difficult terrain, they took the permitted chick into captivity without a hitch. The victory was shaded a bit because it turned out to be a male when a female was most needed. The luck of the draw went in their favor, however, in October when the first bird trapped as a potential mate for Topa Topa also turned out to be an immature male, which meant that they could radio him. Later this would become one of the most significant acts in the history of condor research. They trapped another potential mate who was also a male, which gave rise to an uncomfortable suspicion among the scientists: was there a threatening difficiency of females looming in the population? In addition this yearling bird was not in good health, and it was decided that he should be kept at the L.A. Zoo. Their success in handling these birds convinced the Commission to allow another to be radioed. When they took it from the trapping net, it too was a male, and in breeding condition. They tagged and released him with the hope that he would mate. This brought the census of handled birds to three males in captivity in the L.A. Zoo: the adult male, Topa Topa, the yearling male taken in poor condition, and a male chick, plus two radioed birds in the wild; the just mentioned breeding male, and the 3 year old immature male they named "Christopher" or IC-I, both names which would turn out to be prophetic.

Photograph courtesy of San Diego Zoo

Young being cared for by condor puppet

Photograph courtesy of the Los Angeles Zoo

Paxa, captured in December 1982 by Condor Recovery Team

Things were better for the Recovery Program, but the biologists still felt that time was running out, and that they needed to induce double clutching and zoo incubation before there was any chance of success. The Commissioners, although now listening closely, still weren't ready to commit on this issue. Then information began coming in from the radioed birds. At first it didn't contain much news. After the breeding season they congregrated as usual in the late fall to feed on the ranches north of Mt.Pinos. Then in winter, a period in the condors movement about which very little was previously known, Christopher and the three other immature 3 to 4 year old birds did something really remarkable. They took off and in a few hours flew 180 miles around the bottom of the Southern California mountain chain all the way up to the Southern Sierras where no condors had been known to roost before. There, like typical teenagers they were, they lazed around, feeding casually in near proximity to their isolated roosting site for the rest of the winter. This mobility meant, among other things, that all previous condor counts were suspect, because it was highly likely that the birds counted in far northern parts of the habitat in the morning could easily have been counted as separate individuals a few hours late in the southernmost parts of their known range, and this while they were on their way to a far distant place as yet undreamed of by observers as a roosting site. Indeed, a field biologist working in the condors' sparsely inhabited, impassible terrain in the 1970's suspected that there were two sub-populations of condors, because he had no telementry to tell him of this unknown flight capacity. Now, ironically, the recent quantum leaps in technology that have enabled man to threaten the condors' existence also produced the tiny radio that was sending back information vital to the birds' survival.

In the early spring came even more remarkable news. The four immatures took off, and, again in a few hours covered about 200 miles, moving past the Kern County ranches north to the Sisquoc Sanctuary where they fed for a few days. They then flew back to their Southern Sierra roosting site, where they spent a few more days, then returned to Sisquoc, their air speed often 65 miles per hour. Those who've seen these wonderful birds in flight have always been awed by their phenominal powers, but no one imagined they could or would do this. They repeated these flights weekly through April and added an extremely significant variation. Several times, returning from the Sierras, the joined potential breeding adults to reconnoiter all the condor nesting sites from the bottom to the top of their Western range, which is another essential link in the chain of condor behavior that had to be known if they were to be saved. Finally, in spite of dark predictions that a radio would prevent a condor from breeding, the radioed male mated and the pair produced an egg.

In March 1983, the Commission, the Advisory Committee and the Department of Fish and Game, which had been holding almost monthly hearings to review the permit acknowledged the Recovery Teams' accomplishments by allowing them to take all first eggs from the estimated three to five known nesting pairs. In past condor studies there have been conflicting reports about nest intrusions effects, some claiming that it was so harmful as to cause abandonment of the site, others that it could be done with no adverse effects at all. The Recovery Team believed the latter, but were haunted by the nest site death of a chick at their hands in June of 1980, an accident that had seemed to justify the storms of criticism mentioned in the opening of this article. They had three nests under observation, one in the Angeles Forest, one in the Sespe and one in Santa Barbara county and were searching for a fourth, although confident that they could collect the eggs without harm, they couldn't be absolutely sure the pairs would lay again. This was crucial to the maintenance of the wild population, as nestling survival rate is only 50%.

Two eggs were taken without mishap, one from the Angeles nest, one from the Sespe, which was not in very good condition, and they were transported to the San Diego Zoo which has a very successful captive breeding record. If they could incubate at least one egg, there was hope for captive flock.

Meanwhile the two pairs did double clutch, and the Santa Barbara pair, which had a dependent 1982 chick, laid. This was very encouraging news as all previous research had presumed a minimum two year breeding cycle. This egg was taken along with the second egg of the Angeles pair, who were having nesting problems, making a total of four eggs at San Diego.

There they successfully hatched the first Angeles egg, then the damaged Sespe egg, and the Condor Recovery Program's cup truly overflowed. It would be a few weeks before they could sex the birds, however, so the question of the badly needed females was answered.

Then at Sespe the first bad news came; the second egg was lost, possibly to ravens, who

Photograph courtesy of San Diego Zoo

Cuyama, taken from its nest in August 1983

Photograph courtesy of San Diego Zoo

First Flight

have been observed attacking eggs being sat by condors. Shooting the ravens was suggested, but their empty ecological niche would only be filled by others, so the biologists thought that, in the dormant winter season, they might explore means by which they could condition these ravens to find condor eggs repellent. They discovered the fourth breeding pair's nest in Ventura County, but it was too late to take the egg. Still they were elated because of San Diego's success, which was doubled when the second Angeles and the Santa Barbara eggs were successfully hatched. There were now four fluffy chickens in the zoo and all that remained to complete the good news was that at least half of them be female.

But in this fruitful season there remained one more unexpected biological surprise; the Sespe pair triple clutched! Before the biologists could fully absorb the significance of this the first two San Diego chicks were sexed and one was female! Then the next two were sexed, and they were both female!!

This meant that the population of three males in the L.A. Zoo and one male and three females chicks in San Diego was a firm foundation to establish captive breeding, but, to round it out, the unsexed Ventura County chick was taken from its nest, leaving the triple clutched Sespe chick in the wild. So, by the end of the 1983 breeding season instead of two birds the fours pairs would have been expected to successfully produce, there were six new chicks, a massive amount of essential new information from telementry and nest observation, and a sparkling record of success for the Condor Recovery Program.

Why then can we not take the Los Angeles Times optimism seriously, why does it not represent the true state of the California Condor Recovery Program?

These are the reasons.

The present wild popualtion is estimated as follows:

1. 5 pairs of adults of which only 4 are breeding
2. 3 unpaired adults - sex unknown
3. 7 immatures
4. 1 1983 fledgling at Sespe

Recently a member of the non-breeding pair disappeared. Biologists don't yet know, whether this is ominous or not, but what they do know is that condor mortality is unnaturally high, and they still haven't discovered why. Is it some environmental snag like and oil sump trapping birds, or irresponsible or malevolent hunters in a specific area shooting out a roost, or lead or pesticide poisoned carcasses across the entire range, or in one particular spot? Or is it a combination of these or some other completely unforseen factors? Last year at the annual Condor Bust on Mt. Pinos, a gathering of afficianados to celebrate the avian giant, the first bird seen was an immature who came riding the high morning thermals over the mountain, circled the excited onlookers, and disappeared in the direction of Frazier Park never to be seen again. If this happens to two more birds who are members of the four breeding pairs, the outlook for condor preservation could be very grim.

At the end of the summer and into the fall the birds gather to feed on the ranches of northern Kern County. Last year 95% of the existing population were photographed on one old 15,000 acre cattle spread, the Hudson Ranch, which was recently purchased by out of state developers planning to build a community of "ranchettes" as vacation/retirement homes. This is an area where there's very little natural water supply, and summer temperatures often approach 100 degrees, but our modern god, Technology, was going to bring water from the North via the proposed Peripheral Canal, and electricity from the nuclear plant at Diablo Canyon to run the pumps and air conditioners, which would make this development habitable for humans — and uninhabitable for condors.

Prompted by a wide range of constituents California Congressmen have managed a remarkable feat: in one year they brought a measure before the House that would appropriate $5,000,000 toward the purchase of the Hudson Ranch. Unfortunatley there's no corresponding action in the Senate, and in the Regan administration's anti-conservation climate, passage seems remote.

Continuing this political hostility more budget cuts are proposed for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service already decimated by previous slashes, and this at a time when an additional hundred thousand dollars is badly needed by the Recovery Team for habitat evaluation and nest observation.

More nest observtion? Yes, because the success of double clutching has opened up a new and promising possibility; the introduction of zoo hatched fledglings into the wild

population as early as 1985. This could strengthen the condor considerably while additional information is gathered on how to reduce unnatural habitat stress. This can only be done, however, when the biologists have sufficient knowledge to know exactly how and when this crucial act can be accomplished, so that the fledglings can adapt to the wilderness and be adopted by the wild flock. There is some evidence that yearling birds learn from the older immatures, not just their parents. More study is needed, but that is not accomplished by cutting an Endangered Species budge that is already ludicrously small by comparison to a Defense Department petty cash allotment of $7,000,000 on the development of a 4 billion dollar failed weapon.

We do have the remarkable success of the San Diego Zoo's incubation team who've increased the number of condors in our precarious world by successfully hatching all four eggs, and raising the chicks without mishap. Remember, this isn't simple, these are not barnyard fowl, and consequently, like the Recovery Team in the field, the incubation team is constantly treading on the thin edge of the unknown. But, it will be some time before any mating takes place in either the Los Angeles, or San Diego zoos, it's not a certainty, and some time after that in the 1990's before it's known if those chicks can enter the rigorous country that is the condor's natural habitat; that is if any of it's left, and there are any wild condors still there to adopt them.

Estimates for a viable wild population vary from a mimimum of fifty to the ambitious number of two hundred condors, but if there were eighty to one hundred birds out there a lot of people would be very happy. Ten breeding pairs and an immediate family of at least ten more immatures would be a minimum for a captive flock, which could be achieved in seven to ten years, again in the late 1990's.

A Habitat Committee comprised of leading conservationist groups and representatives of the counties involved has been formed by the state, which is a double sign of progress because some of the members are former antagonists from the "hands off" -"hands on" conflict. Let us hope that they work together effectively.

Progress has been made, but mistakes are sure to come. It's a long march to 1990 and there are many essential questions yet unanswered, many problems, particularly that of habitat, yet unsolved.

Patience and perserverance are the watchwords, not facile optimism, because there are no easy answers that are worthwhile. When we have the habitat stabilized to safely support say over seventy wild condors, when there's one, and preferably two, healthy breeding captive flocks of thirty birds, when that day comes fifteen or twenty years hence, and some one rightfully claims that, "We'll never lose the condor now!", it would probably be appropriate for those who care, to raise their hands in a burst of enthusiasm, tempered with caution, and shout, "Hallelujah! The condor is safe at last!"

The Condor Fund

Read Harrison Star's article on the Condor in this issue of the *TANAGER* and you'll understand why now, more than ever, your contribution is needed

Donations to the California Condor Fund aid the National Audubon Society in its efforts to preserve the condor. These funds are used to meet salary and equipment needs, to produce and distribute informational materials, and to support an active and ongoing public education program.

Your tax-deductible contribution to the LAAS Condor Fund is urgently needed. Please use the enclosed envelope and make your check payable to the Los Angeles Audubon Society.

The Los Angeles Audubon Society: The First Thirty Years

by Glenn Cunningham

Part II

Small Scale Beginnings

As might be expected the inauspicious beginnings of the Los Angeles Audubon Society were characterized by small scale activities and accomplishments. Sometimes too small: "On September 28, 1918, the first business or directors meeting of the Los Angeles Audobin (sic) Club for the year 1918-19 was called to be held at the Times Building, at 1 p.m. As only four members were present, not constituting a quorom, the meeting was postponed."

In December, 1918 the Chairman of the Membership Committee reported 12 life members, 1 honorary and 21 annual members, a total of 34, while the treasurer reported a balance of $98.88. By 1919 membership had grown to 80 members, but the same year the Pasadena Society boasted 200 members. In 1925, although membership had grown to 102, the treasury balance had fallen to $50.80.

Expenditures were not great, however, in 1926, for example, typical of the payments approved by the Society were $1.00 for postage stamps and $2.00 for the janitor at the State Building. Also in 1926 the Club was asked to contribute $5.00 to the District Federtion Office to maintain the office and to pay the stenographer. To meet the obligation each member was assessed five cents.

But if expenditures were limited so was income. In May of 1935 members discussed raising the annual dues from $1.00 to $1.25 (plus 25¢ for the Tanager.) The motion was defeated.

Field Trips

Birding in the field was an important function of the L.A. Audubon Society from the earliest days.

The very first entry in the files of the Society, as stated above, reports that on June 4, 1914, an Audubon Field Day was held at Laughlin Park. From the park the group walked to the Western Ave. entrance to Griffith Park. Twenty-four species were sighted and each bird and its actions described in detail in the report dated September 22, 1914 and signed by Carrie Fargo Bicknell.

The first officially sponsored L.A. Audubon Society field trip reported in the records was

that to Sunset Beach and Bolsa Chica on October 3, 1918. Nine participants, led by Mrs. Robert Fargo, reported a total of 50 species. The following month 20 people observed 38 species at Eagle Rock Park, and in December a trip to Old Stone Mill, El Molino, attended by 55, recorded 38 species. Individuals continued to make birding trips by car, especially during the summer. In December, 1918 Mrs. C. Hall, Historian and Recorder of Field Trips, reported on 18 trips during the summer to 14 locations. "The total of 135 land birds and 7 shore and water birds included many rare and unusual species."

Once they were initiated, Society field trips were held monthly, except during the summer, and more than 40 locations were visited. Most popular by far was Griffith Park with the groups assembling at the Western Avenue entrance (Fern Dell) or the Vermont Ave. entrance (Bird Sanctuary), or occasionally the Riverside Drive entrance and the old zoo site.

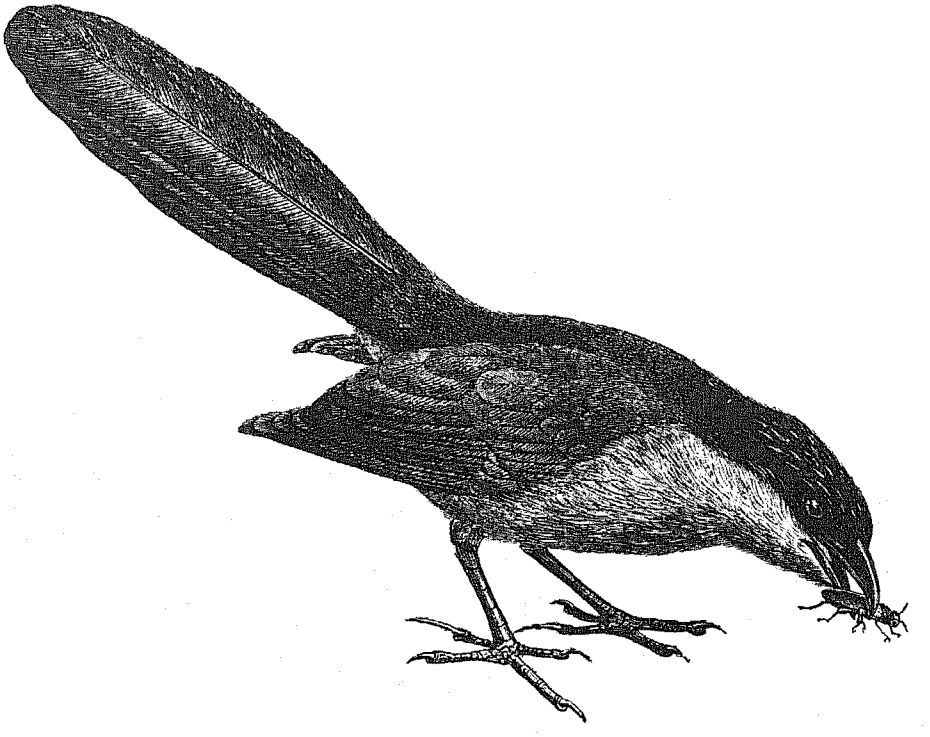
Shoreline excursions as today, proved the most productive, especially Playa del Rey, Sunset Beach and Bolsa Chica, and Santa Monica Canyon and Beach. In March 1935 a visit to Playa del Rey beach and mud flats provided 69 species, the record for those early years. Other areas that consistently produced more than 50 species were Sierra Madre Canyon and another site, no longer available, or even locatable, Sanford Bridge and Slough near Santa Fe Springs.

Many other unfamiliar names, places that have disappeared or been altered beyond recognition, appear on the list of field trip sites, among them Laughlin Park, Hazards Park, and Selig Zoo, Eagle Rock Park, Woodland Park in Whittier, Verdugo Canyon, the Arthur Letts estate, Audubon Glenn, Mandeville Canyon Botanic Gardens, and Bixby Botanic Gardens in Santa Ana. Nor could the writer locate the Clyde Brown Studio on Pasadena Avenue in Arroyo Seco, the Kaust Art Gallery on Mulholland Hwy. or Miss Pratt's garden!

Close-to-town birding was, of course, easier before the intensive development of today. For example, for the field day in January, 1921, a group of 41 met at the Chruch of Angels in Garvanza for a walk around Johnson's Lake "then across the field and hills to Eagle Rock Park," a feat that would be neither possible nor productive to duplicate in today's world.

Ninety-five birders joined the trip to Sycamore Grove in June, 1921 and in the words of the recording secretary "every member was thoroughly enjoyed by all 33 species of birds seen."

An entry in June 1923 reports "Since October, 1922, we have held nine field days with an average attendance of 50, and a total of 130 species of birds in the combined trips."



Not always did these early trips meet with success. In February 1936 permission was requested of the President of the Gun Club in Playa del Rey to study water birds there. Permission was refused. And as today weather frequently interfered. Rain on the February 1935 trip to Lincoln Park discouraged all but two birders, who were rewarded, however, by sighting 33 species. The all time low was reached in February 1938 at Fern Dell with weather so bad that only one birder appeared and only one bird was sighted!

The first use of a bus for field trips was reported in October, 1927, when a Tanner Bus, costing $22.50, was chartered for a trip to Cabrillo Beach. Participants were charged 75¢ for the trip and enjoyed birding the beach and walking on the breakwater to observe water birds.

Additional bus trips were later made to the Bolsa Chica Gun Club, Chatsworth Lake and to Modjeska Canyon accepting the invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Tucker to visit their ranch home which later became the Dorothy May Tucker Memorial Bird Sanctuary following her death on August 19, 1939.

Apparently the first pelagic trip was made in May, 1938, to the Coronado Islands with the Natural History Museum of San Diego.

Bird Species Reported

The reports of species claimed on these trips (for which the author will accept no responsibility) reveal two items of interest, the first records of "new" species, species now more commonly sighted with the growth in numbers of birders; and the occurence of uncommon species in close-in areas that are now shunned by both bird and birders alike.

A fitting introduction to the topic is the March 21, 1919, talk by the President who announced " . . . the number of birds now known to science is 12,000: (!) 1,000 in America; 564 in California; 337 south of the Tehachapi."

Among those "south of the Tehachapi" were the following: In December, 1918, "Mrs. Fargo reported on our newest bird, the white-throated sparrow, a very rare and unusual bird for Los Angeles." Other reports over the years included, in January, 1919, a Whistling Swan at Silver Lake; In February, 1927, a Townsend's Solitaire at Griffith Park; in October, 1927, an American Egret (not to be confused with Common or Great Egrets —Ed.) and an Avocet in Westlake Park; and in March, 1928, a California Black Rail ("a new species here") and 21 Knots at Playa del Rey.

In October, 1927, it was reported in Whittier that "the Cardinal has come home to stay," and in March, 1934, many were seen in Whittier's Woodland Park.

In December, 1928, a Black-and-white Warbler was found in Echo Park, and in October, 1929, a Canyon Wren and two Roadrunners were seen "near an oil station on Ventura Boulevard."

In October, 1931, two new birds were added to the list: a Frigatebird in Malibu Mountains, and a Light-footed Rail at the Del Rey lagoon." In October, 1933 two White-tailed Kites appeared at Playa del Rey, and in November, 1935, the Los Angeles Times "reported seeing 16 Condors" but did not reveal the location.

In April, 1935, Mrs. Brennan was surprised by the visit of a Myna, and Mrs. Hall reported seeing 500 White Pelicans migrating near San Bernardino. In February, 1938, it was reported that 33 species had been sighted on the grounds of Audubon House in Plummer Park.

Undoubtedly the rarest find was made in Griffith Park in February, 1929, when birders discovered nothing less than a Whistling Crow!

Earlier reports utilize species names long since discarded or relegated to sub-species, among them the Dark-bodied Shearwater, Pigeon Hawk, Desert Sparrow Hawk, Water Ouzel, Gambel and Belding Song Sparrows, American Crow, Green-backed Goldfinch, Willow Goldfinch, Spurred Towhee, Parkman's House Wren, Lutescent Warbler, Anthony Towhee, California Partridge, Willow Warbler, Calaveras and Pileolated Warblers, Russet-backed Thrush, Blue-fronted Jay, Anthony Green Heron, and the Magillary Warbler.

Bird Census

According to an item in the scrap book, dated February, 1928, the Christmas Bird Census was launched in 1901 by the Biological Survey of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That first year 25 regional reports were received. The Census, now under the supervision of the National Association of Audubon Societies, currently (1928) receives more than 175 reports, the results being reported in "Bird Lore".

The first Los Angeles area count was made on December 26, 1915, resulting in 131 species, the largest of any, putting Los Angeles in first place, ahead of Santa Barbara, the former leader. In 1916 the count was 106; in 1917, 108.

Although the second annual Census in December, 1916, produced only 106 species, it was still the nation's highest of the 163 areas reporting, ahead of second place Santa Barbara with 102 and third place St. Marks, Florida with 85. The areas covered, all to be "within 10 miles of the city limit" (?) included Los Angeles Harbor, Eagle Rock Valley, Silver Lake, Nigger Slough, Sunset Beach, Eaton Canyon, Benedict Canyon, San Fernando Valley and Hollenbeck Park.

Interest in an Annual Christmas Bird Count lagged thereafter. In December, 1918, a motion to have such a count was defeated. Again in November, 1922, but once more the motion lost because of the small district allowed.

During the next decade, however, another change of heart apparently occured. The first suggestion came in December, 1926, with a motion to cooperate with the Southwest Museum Bird Study Club in taking a bird census.

At the November, 1928, meeting it was decided to hold the December meeting at Westlake Park (MacArthur Park), and to make it a Bird Christmas Festival as a tribute to the bird life of the Park. Members of the California Audubon Society and the Bird Lover's Club were invited to participate.

This became an annual event, and although statistics for most years are lacking, it was reported that in 1930 31 species were counted. In 1931 70 people identified 30 species. The 1932 Festival with 45 present netted 15 water birds and 13 land birds. In October of that year a letter was written to the Venice Gun Club requesting permission to enter their grounds for a Christmas Bird Census but there is no record of response or results.

The October, 1931, report included the fact that 176 species were sighted during the last year, and the January, 1934 report contained the entry "Los Angeles Audubon Society headed the list of State Bird Census with 156, 20 more than in 1933."

Beginning with 1932 the Christmas Festival was referred to as the Bird Census. It continued to be held at Westlake Park until 1937 when 78 members and 200 guests attended the first Christmas Festival at Plummer Park.

About this time the International Bird Census was introduced. Although no other details were included it was reported that the first years count (1932 ?) was 122 species, and the second year, 156. By 1938 the event was apparently well established for in December plans for the Bird Census outlined the national rules for it conduct. As follows:

1. Give time of start and also temperature.
2. Each car should have two and not more than four observers. One list from each car signed by all observers and their addresses.
3. The estimate of mileage of the car and of the observers on foot should be taken, also length of time observing.
4. Hours should be six or longer. Time for observation—sunrise to sunset.
5. List each bird and total numbers of birds seen. If any unusual record, give brief statement of it.

Selection of State Bird

In November of 1927 President Emeritus Bicknell announced her plans for the selection of an official State Bird. The choice, she suggested, "should be (a bird) on a protected list, one of economic food habits, and one found in all parts of the State, well known and of bright colors." The campaign was open to all organizations that would observe these requirements. Most favored by the Cooper Ornithologic Club were the California Quail, California Woodpecker, Red-shafted Flicker, Anna's Hummingbird, Bullock's Oriole, Greenbacked Goldfinch, Brown Towhee, California Thrasher, Canyon Wren and Wrentit.

Other eligibles included the California Condor, Desert Sparrow Hawk, Roadrunner, Western Kingbird, California Purple Finch, Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Tanager, Audubon's Warbler, Water Ouzel, Russet-backed Thrush, Western Bluebird and Bushtit.

Immediately votes began to pour in from interested persons all over the state. By January 1929 over 12,000 had been received with the Bullock's Oriole and the California Quail leading the race. One year later the total had reached 130,000 votes spread over 67 nominees, but it was possible to announce that the quail was the undisputed winner.

In Southern California alone, out of 67,121 votes, the quail received 29,399, the oriole 8,955. Hope was expressed that the necessary legislation would be passed the following fall.

In March of 1931 the Society went on record as supporting passage of Bill 776, and in May heard the statement that the Senate by a vote of 26-7 had passed the bill, thus the California Quail became the official State Bird.

The Western Tanager

In September 1934, it was proposed that the Society publish a monthly paper to be called the Western Tanager. Volume I — Number I, edited by Mrs. Raymond Brennan, appeared the following month with the introductory words, "conceived with the idea of stimulating interest in our feathered friends."

The Western Tanager, (free to members, 50¢ a year or 5¢ a copy to others) was an immediate success, not only locally but nation-wide. Copies of No. I were sent to the National and the Massachusetts Audubon Societies. The latter responded with copies of its publication thus inaugurating a flourishing exchange program that currently (1983) involves more that 60 Societies from all parts of North America.

Mrs. Brennan, assisted by an Editorial Board appointed in May 1935, continued to edit the Tanager for its first two years, followed by Mrs. Maud Murphy, who served for the next several years.

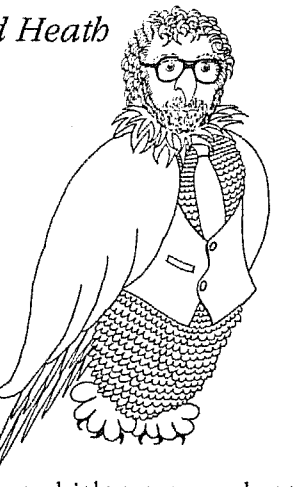
The California Audubon Society announced in October 1938, that it had received a generous legacy and wished to contribute $5 a month toward the expense of publishing the Tanager, coupled with the request that, if agreeable, a page be devoted to their news items and that the Tanager be sent to all of their members at their expense. It was agreeable, and the Tanager circulation immediately increased from 160 to 260.

Circulation continued to grow to the extent that by February 1968 the first bulk mailing was required, and eventually to the present circulation of 3700 (1983).

This article will be continued in the next issue of the TANAGER

From the Editor

by Fred Heath



As you can plainly see, my replacement has not yet arrived. As you can also plainly see this issue of the *TANAGER* has arrived in your mailbox later than usual, a victim of my busy schedule. You also might have noticed my promised article is not a part of this issue either. You'll have to wait for the November issue which I hope to finish this year.

Notice

Effective immediately, members of National Audubon/Los Angeles Audubon will have only two months grace after their membership expiration date on their WESTERN TANAGER subscription. We have been more lenient up to now, but with the escalating costs of printing we must be able to accurately assess the number of copies to be printed in advance of publication.

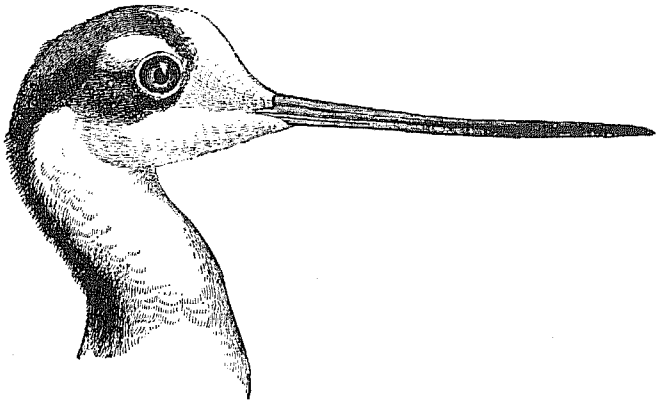
Since the renewel information forwarded to us by National Audubon is usually subject to a two-month delay, we suggest that in order to avoid missing any TANAGER issues you send your renewal directly to Los Angeles Audubon rather than to National Audubon, bearing in mind that the check should still be made payable to National Audubon.

You Can't Hear The Birds?

The purpose of this note is to find out how many birders, who can't hear birds well, would be interested in a "black box" that would dramatically improve this hearing. A very capable audiologist has expressed an interest in developing such a device. He has asked me to find out if there is sufficient interest in this to warrant the development effort.

If you are interested, please send me a postal card stating so. You are not under any obligation.

Charles T. Clark
Star Route #1 Box 442-D
Rockport, TX 78382



Birds of Southern California

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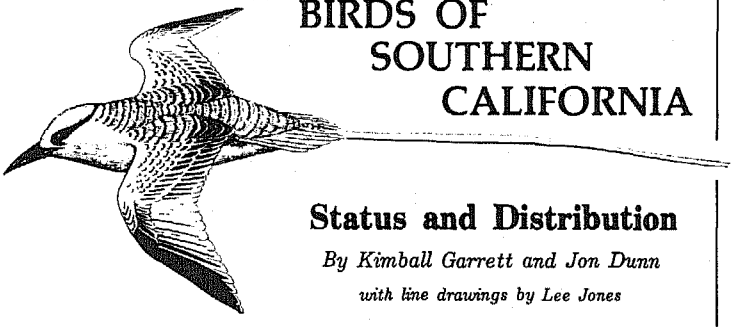

BIRDS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Status and Distribution

By Kimball Garrett and Jon Dunn

with line drawings by Lee Jones

Not since Grinnell and Miller's *The Distribution of the Birds of California* was published in 1944 has there been such a definitive treatment of the status and distribution of southern California's birds. This 400 page book contains species by species accounts of the 500+ birds recorded in this rich area. Essential for the casual birder as well as the serious student of distribution; a must for the occasional visitor as well as the long-time resident.

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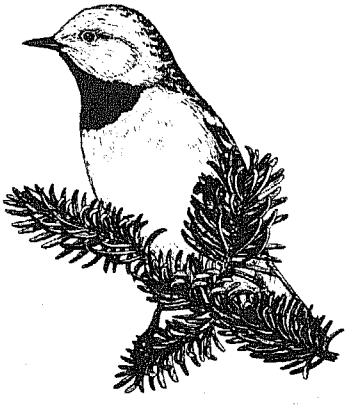

The Birds of Southern California is available in hard cover for $18.96. Add $1.50 for postage and handling. California residents add 6.5% sales tax ($1.23).
Send checks payable to LAAS to:
"Southern California Birds"
Los Angeles Audubon Society
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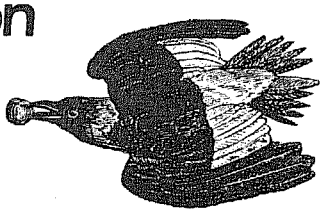
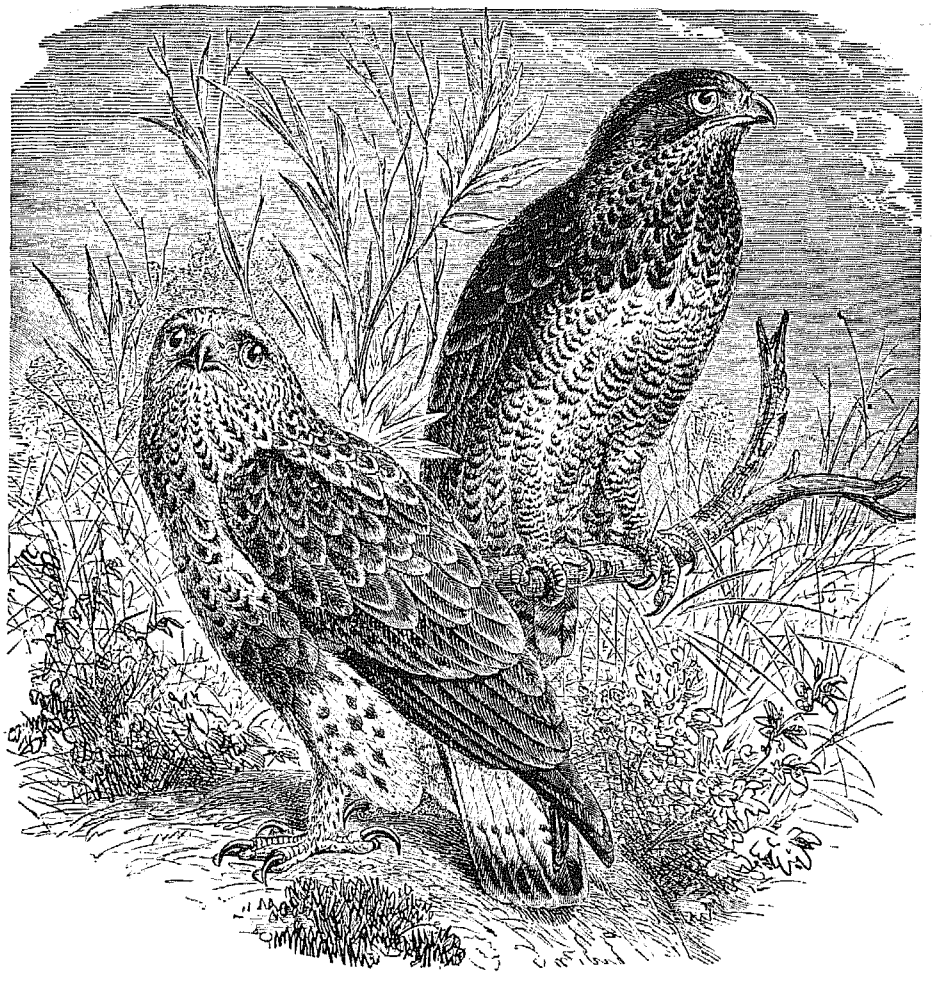
Birds of the Season

by Hal Baxter
and Kimball Garrett

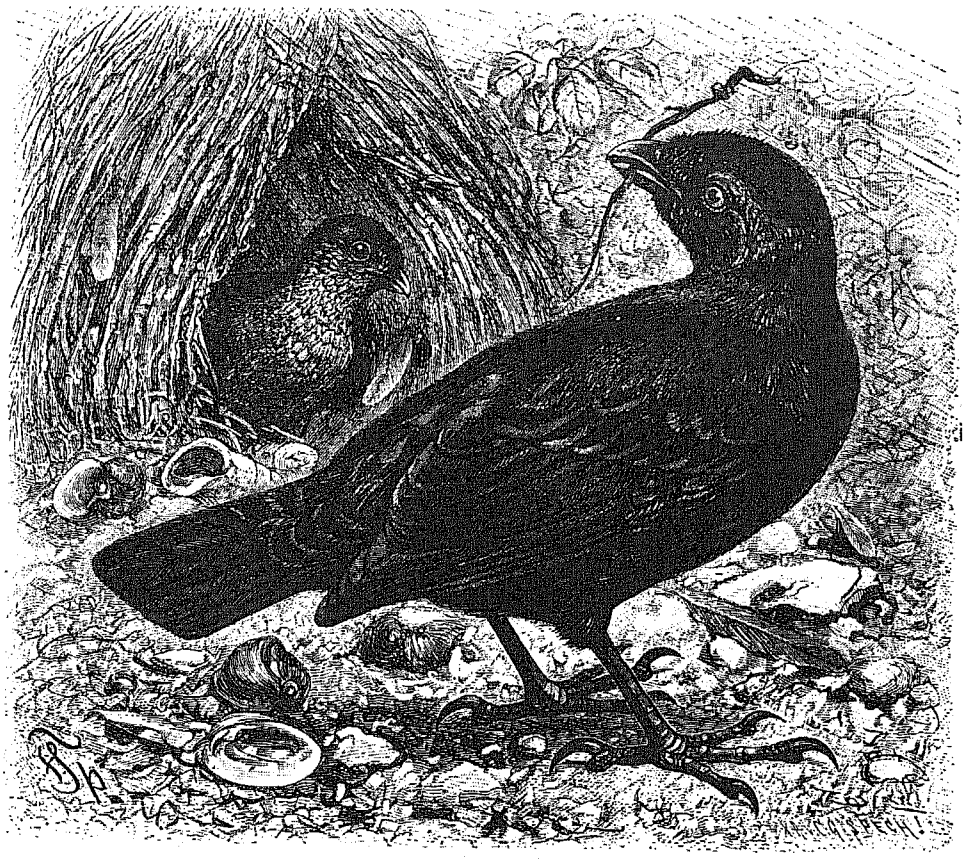


The hot, steamy, and sometimes rainy month of August must have made local birders feel like they were in the tropics. Add to that local ocean temperatures well above normal and current, temperature, and anomalies over much of the Pacific Ocean and bordering continents, and it almost seems surprising that we weren't inundated by a spectacular variety of tropical birds wandering from afar. However, expectations of such invasions were dashed as the summer progressed. Subtropical pelecaniform birds, such as frigatebirds, boobies, and tropicbirds, were largely unreported, although a very few **Magnificent Frigatebirds** were recorded at the Salton Sea and another was found at Sunset Beach, Orange Co., on 1 August (Mike San Miguel). "Southern herons" were few, other than the now marginally-resident **Little Blue Herons** near Imperial Beach, San Diego Co.

The first true test of the response of offshore birds to the climatic anomalies was the LAAS pelagic trip on 7 August, led by Kimball Garrett and Louis Bevier. Perhaps related to the relatively warm water was the abundance of **Least Storm-Petrels.** Some 150 birds were observed, most of which were rafting with the aubundant **Black Storm-Petrels** (500+) some five miles off Pt. Fermin. A handful of **Ashy Storm-Petrels** were also observed, and, on the way out, some five miles from San Pedro, a white-rumped storm-petrel with the flight and the rump/tail pattern of a **Wilson's Storm-Petrel** was seen briefly. The Wilson's would represent the first record for Los Angeles County waters. Some 35 **Black-vented Shearwaters** was a surprising number well north of breeding areas this early in the fall; it seems likely that nesting was severely curtailed this year in this and many other eastern Pacific seabird species, perhaps accounting for their unseasonal appearance to the north. Also observed were some 200 **Pink-footed** and 150 **Sooty Shearwaters,** 100 **Red-necked Phalaropes,** eight **Sabine's Gulls,** and, in mid-channel, a **Long-tailed Jaeger.** Alcid sightings included a lone **Rhinoceros Auklet,** several **Xantus' Murrelets** and **Cassin's Auklets,** and, near Santa Barbara Island, many **Pigeon Guillemots.** From the absence of chicks and juveniles, it was starkly apparent that nesting of guillemots, murrelets, and cormorants on Santa Barbara Island was non-existent (or virtually so) this year. Unusual, and again perhaps related to elevated water temperatures and unsuccessful nesting, were several **Elegant Terns** between Santa Barbara and Catalina Islands (this is normally an inshore species).



August brought the predicted scattering of unusual shorebirds caught up in the annual massive southbound migration. Juveniles began to dominate many flocks of our commmon shorebirds as the month progressed, except in species such as the Long-billed Dowitcher (in which juveniles normally don't arrive until mid-September) and Dunlin (in which even adults are unusual before mid-September). Also, as "predicted" last month, California's first **Temminck's Stint** (pending acceptance) was found by Don Roberson at the mouth of the Salinas River, Monterey Co., on 6 August. The bird was present only briefly, and could not be relocated by others searching for it. Shorebird-watching was otherwise routine, and the Lancaster area proved disappointing after late July. Two **Ruddy Turnstones** (rare inland away from the Salton Sea) were seen at the Lancaster Sewage Ponds by Fred Heath and



his LAAS entourage on 13 August. The Santa Clara River estuary ("McGrath") was probably our best-covered shorebird spot; of interest here were two **Black Oystercatchers** (adult and juvenile) on 18 August (Ed Novojosky) and a couple of juvenile **Semipalmated Sandpipers** (Jon Dunn). Jon also found an unusually early juvenile **Mew Gull** here in late August.

Yet another report of a **Black Rail** from Upper Newport Bay came on 3 August from Mike San Miguel; the bird was seen and heard 1/4 mile past the Back Bay Rd. barricade. The enigmatic **Clapper Rails** at the Whittier Narrows New Lakes were heard again in late August by Natasha Antonovich. Observers should attempt to confirm whether a population of this normally coastal subspecies indeed exists here.

Among raptors, the most unusual bird was the **Mississippi Kite** which continued its stay southeast of San Diego until at least 30 July (Richard Webster). An immature **Zone-tailed Hawk** was reported along Jawbone Canyon Road, out of Mohave, in late August (George Scipione). **California Condors** were observed regularly from "The Sign" along Cerro Noroeste/Mil Potrero Road; sightings were also frequent from the summit of Mt. Pinos, although only two distant birds graced the "Tequila-Busters" on 6 August.

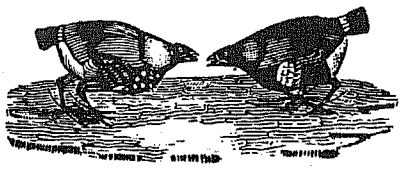
Nesting activity was winding up during August for our landbirds, and migration of western passerines was in full swing by the end of the month. This August migration can be of a great magnitude (especially through the mountains), but is often ovrlooked by observers who are impatiently awaiting the "good" months of September and October. The following paragraphs summarize the few passerine (and other landbird) sightings which were reported for the late summer.

Quite unusual was a transient **Common Nighthawk** found on an Anaheim rooftop on 4-5 July (Doug Willick); the bird was found ill on the latter date and died later. This represents the first certain record of this species for Orange County, and is one of the only a handful of records for our coastal lowlands. The scarcity of this species in southern California must surprise observers who know it as an abundant bird through most of the remainder of the continent. A **Williamson's Sapsucker** was found at Buckhorn Campground by Brian Keelan on 4 August; this species nests sparingly in adjacent parts of the San Gabriel Mountains. The **Chimney Swifts** which frequent Exposition Park in June and July were last noted on 1 August (Kimball Garrett), but the few birds around Arcadia were present at least to 24 August (Mike San Miguel). Quite a stunning sight was a completely albino **Violet-green Swallow** near McGill Campground on Mt. Pinos on 6 August (Kimball Garrett and Fred Heath, *before* the tequila).

The expected flood of rare/vagrant warblers was launched on 28 August by Priscilla and Hank Brodkin, who found a **Northern Waterthrush** just upstream from the bridge at Big Sycamore Canyon. The rarest passerine of the season was a female-plumaged **Painted Bunting** along Atascadero Creek in Santa Barbara (Louis Bevier *et al*, 17 August and for about a week thereafter). This is some three weeks earlier than the previous early record, but the observers felt that the bird was likely a genuine vagrant rather than an escapee.

Our "farther field" department this month is certainly devoted to the **Aztec Thrush** which appeared in upper Madera Canyon in the Santa Rita Mountains of southeastern Arizona around 29 August. This Mexican highland thrush, probably not too distantly related to our Varied Thrush, has been recorded in southeastern Arizona on two previous occasions (in spring and early summer of 1978).

We can't think of any better way to preview the possibilities for that "birdiest" month, October, than to suggest that readers peruse their past December or December/January *Western Tanagers* and read Shum's summaries of the exciting Octobers of the past. This is vagrant season at its peak, and also marks the greatest onslaught of our wintering birds. In preparation for October, one would do well to brush up on one's field description techniques; nearly all of us who are actively afield at this time will encounter birds which will require a detailed written description — either to aid in certain identification of a tricky plumage or to document an unusual sighting. The pen and the field notebook will be as important a part of the autumn birding outfit as the binocular, the 'scope, the coffee thermos, and the Wheat Thins!



Send any interesting bird observations to:
Hal Baxter
1821 Highland Oaks Drive
Arcadia, CA 91006
Phone # (213) 355-6300

CALENDAR

MONDAY, OCTOBER 3 — Malibu Lagoon to McGrath State Beach. For the 12th straight year, **Ed Navojosky** (938-9766) leads this famous coastal tour. Includes Big Sycamore and Pt. Mugu. Bring lunch and meet at **7:30 a.m.** in the parking lot of Malibu Lagoon State Park.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8 — Ballona Wetlands. join **Bob and Roberta Shannman** (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.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9 — Meet **Jerry Haigh** (455-1696) at **8:00 a.m.** at the entrance to the **Trippet Ranch** to bird the Ranch and **Topanga Canyon.** Take Santa Monica Freeway (I-10) West to P.C.H. then take Topanga Canyon Blvd. (about 5 miles) to Entrada (not Entrado) about ½ mile to the entrance to Topanga State Park. Meet at the parking lot gate. Plan to see Chaparral birds and vagrants.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 11 — 8:00 p.m. Evening meeting. Dr. Lee Jones former editor of the *TANAGER* will present a beautifully slide illustrated program on the **Natural History of the Channel Islands** emphasizing his doctoral studies on bird populations.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16 — 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, OCTOBER 30 — Jerry Johnson (831-1919) will lead a trip to **Harbor Lake.** Meet Jerry at **8:00 a.m.** in the northwest corner of Harbor Lake Park in the parking lot at the junction of P.C.H. and Vermont Ave.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8 — 8:00 p.m. Evening meeting — Charles Walcott, Director of Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology will have an illustrated talk on **Mysteries of Bird Navigation.**

Address Change — Many members who move, complain about missing an issue or two of the *TANAGER.* To avoid this, subscribers should notify Los Angeles Audubon Society directly. It takes several weeks for National Audubon to notify LAAS if you only pass your change of address to them.

Leaders Needed

We need people to lead filed 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 683-1560, Evening 452-3318).

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WESTERN TANAGER

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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.

Annual LAAS Banquet in February. Do you have suggestions for this event? Send them to our Social Chairperson, Peggy Pantel, P.O. Box 2528, Gardena, CA 90247.

Shearwater Trips

Debra Love Shearwater runs a series of regular pelagic trips out of Monterey and Morro Bay. The following is a list for the rest of the year.

Oct. 1	Monterey Bay Leader to be announced	$25
Oct. 2	Monterey Bay Leader to be announced	$25
Oct. 8	Monterey Bay Leader to be announced	$25
Oct. 9	Storm-Petrel Study Tour Leader to be announced	$32
Oct. 15	Monterey Bay Leader to be announced	$25
Oct. 16	Monterey Bay Leader to be announced	$25
Oct. 21-23	San Juan Seamount Weekend Baldridge/ McCaskie/ Stallcup/ Webster	$125
Nov. 13	Monterey Bay Leader to be announced	$25
Nov. 19	Inner Monterey Bay Leader to be announced	$30
Dec. 3	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
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