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Details on Details: Describing a Bird

By Chuck Bernstein
in consultation with
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No details provided". This is the most common complaint by Regional Editors in recent Christmas Bird Count issued of *American Birds*. And it is the sorriest comment, as reports from all across the country carry the pointed mention of species found in unusual or unexpected places—often birds rare in that area—that have been deleted from the final tally. As new eyes come into birdwatching and the CBC rolls swell, the problem grows ever more pervasive.

Could it be that so many birders do not make notes on rare or unusual species? Is it that so many participants in the annual count simply do not know how to report the sighting with details? Or is the shyness about reporting details caused by an uncertainty with regard to proper terminology of the parts of the bird?

In the sport of birding, much like quarterbacking in football, there is prevalent the feeling that you are remembered for the great plays but forever memorialized for the poor ones: expertise is measured in many communities by how few mistakes one makes. Fear of embarrassment and possibly rejection by the community can make participants overly sensitive, and even can make some-watchers of birds *secretive*. That way, they can make no mistakes.

For many of us, it is time for a review and updating on the accepted formats for taking notes on our observations and writing up the details for submission to a regional editor or compiler. We should also discuss the topography of a bird, as described for birdwatchers in *plain* English.

But one caution: Among birders there has evolved, for various parts of a bird, a blend of scientific nomenclature of specific biological definition (e.g., rectrices, median wing coverts, auricular, etc.) and general names applied by birdwatchers, much less precise but clearly understood (e.g., bib, hood, mantle, etc.). Wherever possible, for simplification and clarity, we refer to the rectrices as the tail, to the auricular patch as the ear patch, etc.

1984 Slide Contest Winners



1st prize—Snowy Egret by Jean Brandt

The 2nd prize photo, a Pileated Woodpecker by Howard Stapleton, cannot be shown because it is copyrighted.



3rd prize—Blue-footed Booby by Sharon Milder



Honorable Mention—Kildeer by T. Keeney

We hope this article helps to at least mitigate a problem that could reflect poorly on the state of amateur birdwatching as an aid to the science of ornithology.

NOTE TAKING

Notes should be made and kept in logical and systematic sequence, if possible, for ease of later retrieval. Try to build a description each time in the same order. Do this by looking for different parts of the bird in the same sequence. This is, of course, not always possible and often you must scramble and take what you can get when you can get it but *trying* to follow the same sequence is a start at learning a good habit. What is more important is writing up the details. The following is an order useful to state rarities committees,

count compilers and regional editors.

First, describe your impression of the bird after a good look. What is the "feel" you get for it? Is it shy, or brassy? Tired and worn, or trim and energetic? Study the bird in life for its gestalt, that is, the bird in its entirety. Study its silhouette, its markings, its coloring, its calls (if any), its behavior, food, and preferred habitat. Of course there will be times when all you'll see is the underside of a warbler, and you may not espy its dorsal surface until the very moment it flies off, if at all. But generally speaking, you should look at the whole bird and form an impression of its self, its manner, its personality, its condition. And start scribbling notes!

Describe the specific parts of the bird,

Continued next page

beginning with its dorsal (the top) surface at the head, the cap, the face—including any eye ring or superciliary—the nape, the back, the rump, the wings and wing coverts, then the flight feathers (the primaries and secondaries, and how long these feathers extend to the rear), then the top of the tail.

Next, again starting at the head, describe the ventral (or under) side of the bird; the chin, the throat, the breast, the belly, the vent area, the undertail coverts, the underside of the tail itself and, if possible, the underwing.

Then describe the “soft parts”, meaning the bill—its length color, curvature—the eye, and the legs and toes. Finally, try to note the calls or songs—or was the bird silent? Remember, more important than what you see is what you write down that you see!

If two birders are together it makes note-taking easier. One should call out the description while the other writes it. When this is completed, trade places; only this time the description should be read back so that the former writer, now the observer, can agree or disagree with length of tail, coloration of back or whatever. If the bird is indeed rare for that area, this method will give the new sight record added credibility.

Compare your sighting with books only after the notes are made. Having the book at hand during the note-taking will only interfere with the process. Many possibly good and valid records have been tarnished because the observer consulted a book before finishing the notes. As a result, the description often is that of the picture in the book, *not* of the actual live bird seen.

Also helpful to a compiler, editor or committee is a general description of the area, time of day, duration of observation, weather conditions and lighting, your distance from the bird, and the nature of the optical equipment used. And though in most fields it is true that one picture is worth a thousand words, even with the best equipment known to photography the store of pitfalls is so vast—leaf shadow, sunlight glare, ruffled feathers, “odd” angles, etc.—that “knowing” you have a “perfect” picture should not preclude your *writing out* the details.

BIRD TOPOGRAPHY FOR THE BIRDWATCHER

The birder is of course interested in what is seen on the *outside* of a bird, basically for identification purposes. It is important to understand that on a bird one feather overlaps or covers another feather, one part overlaps or covers another part, so much of what is visualized through a binocular is *coverup*. Our purpose is to expose and reveal of topography of a bird as it relates to the birdwatcher.

WINGS AND UPPERPARTS

The most distinctive part of a bird is its feathers. The feather makes the bird unique

among organisms. Flight and contour feathers cover virtually the entire bird. And despite the fact that birdwatchers pay particular attention to the feathers that comprise the wings—after all, that’s where the wingbars are—perhaps some birders are hazy about how these feathers lie when the bird is not in flight.

The primaries provide lift and thrust. On the spread wing this is the triangular area of feathers approximating a hand fan from the wrist or “bend of the wing” to the wing tip, and back to where, on a line from the leading to the trailing edge, they meet the secondaries. The long broad feathers from that line back to the body of the bird comprise the secondaries which, like wings on an airplane, function to provide lift surface. Soaring species have the greatest (widest) area of secondaries.

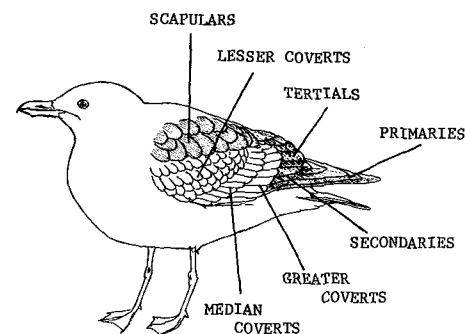
The birdwatcher, carefully and painstakingly studying the gull standing on the beach, will realize that the flight feathers on a standing or perched bird are protected by being folded in and under, leaving visible only the parts of the secondaries not covered by the upper wing coverts and scapulars, and only the tips of the primaries.

On birds other than quail, rails, and the like, where they are short and rounded, the flight feathers are relatively long, whereas wing covert feathers are short and protective.

Both the dorsal (upper) and ventral (lower) surfaces of the wings are protected by wing coverts. The upper wing coverts are the focus of attention by birdwatchers, particularly on passerines, for it is on these feathers that wing bars, if any, are to be found.

Admittedly oversimplified: from a point on the wing closest to the head of a bird (i.e. from “the shoulder”) and proceeding toward the tail, there are marginal coverts, protecting the leading edge of the wing; then, in order, the lesser, the median, and the greater wing coverts. The lesser coverts are difficult to see at all on a perched passerine; they are very small and usually inconspicuous. The looked-for wing bars are actually the tips of the median and greater wing coverts. The top (anterior) wing bar consists, with some exceptions, of the tips of median wing coverts. Below that, the lower (posterior) wingbar is created by the tips of the greater wing coverts. Of course all birds have primary coverts as well, but these are of concern to the birder mainly as the white patch found on a minority of Heermann’s Gulls, as the red upper wing patch of many *Amazona* parrots, and so on.

As has been suggested, there are exceptions. The distinctive white wing patches on Lark Buntings are the entire greater wing coverts. In ducks, the wide, colorful speculum is actually not formed by wing coverts but instead by a group of secondaries; this includes the blue patch tipped in white on



Mallards, as well as the green patch on Green-winged Teal. The chestnut shoulders on the Vesper Sparrow are the colored lesser wing coverts, as is the dark patch on the wing of the immature Common Tern. The rusty patches in the wings of Lapland Longspurs are rusty greater wing coverts, not merely covert tips.

Though usually less colorful (with some exceptions such as grosbeaks), the underwing coverts share the same protective function. It is on the leading edge of the underside of the wing that the birdwatcher seeks out the distinctive dark patagial line of a Red-tailed Hawk or the dark “bend of the wing” or “wrist” of the Rough-legged Hawk. The underside of the wing of an adult California Condor reveals white coverts (or “wing lining”) covering an area from the leading edge of the secondaries back to meet, near the trailing edge, the solid black primaries which extend to the wing tips. This picture is true as well of the light-phase Swainson’s Hawk.

A primary feather consists of a shaft, an outer web (which is narrow), and an inner web (which is wider). As the wing is folded and the bird comes to rest, the outermost wing feathers disappear underneath layer after layer of feathers closer and closer to the body of the bird. One feather overlies the one one beneath it. And as the feathers are brought together they, of course, overlap, covering the inner webbing first. Thus, if you are looking down on a spread winged gull, you may see only the outer, or narrow, webbing of the flight feathers. From below, you are seeing primarily the inner web of each wing feather (white, in the case of the white-winged gulls).

The length of wings in relation to the tail can be a helpful identification aid. The very long wings which, on the standing bird, extend beyond the tail tip help identify both the Baird’s and the White-rumped Sandpiper,

1983 Christmas Counts

Malibu

Over the years the Malibu Christmas Bird Count has attained that most desirable of qualities in a bird census: consistency. Species totals have ranged, since 1975, from 156 to 174, and the count effort, measured very crudely by "party-hours", has consistently hovered in the low-200 hour range. We are grateful this year to the 84 observers who combed the count circle on 18 December to continue the standards of excellent coverage.

The 171 species total was second in the count's history only to 1979's 174 figure; the 46,465 individuals easily constituted our highest total ever. Were there really more birds around? Perhaps, as movements of montane and boreal species into the area were well above average and mild temperatures and abundant growth from unusually heavy fall rains provided good habitat for a variety of wintering species (e.g. 4400 **Yellow-rumped Warblers** and 3908 **White-crowned Sparrows**). Excellent weather on count day facilitated censusing; for example, some 5200 gulls of nine species were counted, whereas in the dense fog of the 1980 count only some 950 gulls of the same nine species were tallied.

The major disappointment of the count was the failure of Malibu Lagoon to produce a good variety of shorebirds and waterfowl. Such expected species as **Northern Pintail** and **Dunlin** were missed completely, and many other ducks and sandpipers were in reduced numbers. The restoration of Malibu Lagoon as wildlife habitat clearly cannot occur overnight, and future counts should show an increase in waterbird diversity.

As for the highlights, there were many. The **Worm-eating Warbler** "staked out" off Bonsall Drive since mid-October was found

on count day, and Fred Heath's party added **Tennessee Warbler** and **Wilson's Warbler** from the mouth of Topanga Creek. To these, Lee Jones added a Palm Warbler at Malibu Lagoon, perhaps the same individual that had been seen there in mid-November. Jon Dunn scoured Pt. Dume with his customary skill and turned up an immature male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** and an adult male "Baltimore" Oriole. Other unusual passerines included a **Solitary Vireo** at Malibu Lake (the Maisels) and **White-throated Sparrows** at the Malibu Civic Center (Bruce Broadbooks) and Bonsall Dr. (Steve Cardiff). As for "aerial birds", we're usually happy just to dig up **White-throated Swifts** (which Cathy and Bill Jacobs dutifully did), but this year the Malibu Lagoon area also yielded a flock of 70 **Vaux's Swifts** (unusually numerous in the Los Angeles area this winter) and an immature **Barn Swallow** (Lee Jones). For the second time in the count's history we recorded all four local falcons and all three egrets.

Numbers of some of our more erratic species included: **Northern Fulmar** 20, **Band-tailed Pigeon** 107, **Red-breasted Nuthatch** 4, **Golden-crowned Kinglet** 32, **Varied Thrush** 28 and **Cedar Waxwing** 234.

It is clear, year after year, that certain pesky biases creep into even the most carefully compiled Christmas Counts. For example, species of dense brushy habitats, which are best located by unspectacular calls, are consistently undercounted (e.g., only 95 **Hermit Thrushes** and 27 **Fox Sparrows**!). Birders who work these habitats should brush up on vocalizations. I am also convinced that many **Sharp-shinned Hawks** are passed off as **Cooper's Hawks**: the roughly even totals for this year's count are unrealistic, as Sharp-shinneds should greatly predominate. An-

other problem involves **Ring-billed** and **California Gulls**—careful scrutiny will show that a vast majority (if not all) of the gulls flying inland over the Santa Monica Mountains and, in fact, throughout the Los Angeles Basin, are California Gulls; reports of hundreds of Ring-billed Gulls engaging in this pattern are suspect.

These negative notes are minor, and the Malibu count remains among the most consistent and productive in the country. Jean Brandt and I sincerely thank those who give their time year after year in order to ensure the success of the count.

—Kimball Garrett

Lancaster

As has become the custom, the fifth Lancaster Christmas Count was held on the first Saturday of the count period, December 17, 1983. And we were thankful that the weather, as also has been customary, was fair and somewhat warm (for the Antelope Valley), with temperatures ranging from 45° to 59°F. The wind, which is often brutal in this area, was blowing on and off through the day, but didn't have much of an effect on the birding.

In fact, the count was the best ever in number of species found, with a total of 118 beating the previous high of 115 seen in 1981. The turnout of thirty-one observers matched the high set the year before. The two major factors responsible for the high species total were better use of the observers and the mild weather prior to the count. Because the Lancaster CBC is still a young one, we continue to find a number of species new to the count. This year was no exception, with 12 new species. Of that number, nine have some relationship to water. There were three new ducks for the count: **Wood Duck**, **Blue-winged Teal**, and **Greater Scaup**. There were three new shorebirds: **Semipalmated Plover**, **Black-bellied Plover** and **Marbled Godwit**. The balance of the nine were **White-faced Ibis**, **Bald Eagle** and **Herring Gull**. The latter six species were all found in the wet areas of Edwards Air Force Base. Of the non-water related new species, the best bird of the count was easily the **Bendire's Thrasher** found by Jon Dunn's party. Single **Lapland Longspurs** were found by two different parties, finally giving the count all three longspurs known to occur in California, the **McCown's** and **Chestnut-collared** having been observed in 1979. The final new species for the count was a flock of 41 **Cedar Waxwings**. Increased coverage of the residential areas this year may account for this find.

Of the previously seen 106 species, 34 (or almost a third) recorded new high numbers. Some of this can be attributed to better coverage, but as with the new species, most of the highs were in water related species (19). Seven ducks and six shorebirds were among those highs. The number of Starlings, 5815,

for example.

Among the very long-winged birds, such as albatrosses and pelicans, it may help to understand the wing-fold, inasmuch as these birds fold the wings not once, as do gulls, but twice; that is, the wing folds itself in half, the outermost part again going underneath. Then the "double half" is tucked away, like the normal-sized wing of any gull.

On the wing's underside, where the wing meets the body, are the axillars, or "armpits". Black axillars on the otherwise white underside identify the Black-bellied Plover. The axillars are composed of those underwing coverts protecting the sensitive area where wing meets body.

On our living model, the standing gull, as we move from the back, just below the neck, toward the tail, we see the scapulars lying alongside the wings. This area is for many birdwatchers a complete mystery. Covering the protecting the sensitive area where the wing meets the back, the scapulars are the

most colorful part of many alternate-plumaged shorebirds. For example, we look for rusty scapulars on breeding adult and on juvenile Western Sandpipers. They form the long black horizontal swath closest to the top of the back on the American Avocet. The large white "wing" patch on the spring male Bobolink is white scapular feathering.

The tertials are long and curved on some shorebirds. But on passerines, being unspecialized and short, they go almost unnoticed. They are an extension of the innermost secondaries, and are closest to the body of the bird on the spread wing. On standing shorebirds, the tertials cover a good portion of the flight feathers.

And finally about wings—when folded, in most species, they cover the lower back and rump. In many species, such as gulls, terns and shorebirds, the folded wings may even obscure most of the tail.

(To be continued)

Book Review: Appendix

by H. Lee Jones

Field Guide to the Birds of North America

National Geographic Society, 1983.

If you're one who pencils in notes in the margins of your field guide, this appendix was designed with you in mind. I have made a cursory run through the book and listed all the errors I could find, along with some other, more subjective criticisms.

I could easily fill this entire issue of the *Western Tanager* with glowing statements about this book's many exceptional features. There are innumerable helpful tips for the sophisticated birder. Did you know, for instance, that there are two color phases of the female Eurasian Wigeon? Or that western Eastern Meadowlarks have an extra white tail feather on either side of their tail? This book is full of gems such as these, plus *many* others. There are countless illustrations of birds in juvenal plumage, of females that are similar to, but noticeably different from, their respective males (Snowy Plover, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Kentucky warbler, to name but a few). Other features shown for the first time in a field guide include many plumage variants (see California and Mountain quail, Northern Waterthrush and Hooded Warbler), seasonal differences (Bobolink, Snowy Egret, American Tree Sparrow, etc.) and geographical differences (Horned Lark, Gray Jay, Bush-tit, House Wren . . .).

Nowhere is this concern for the proper identification of the sexes, age classes, geographical variants, seasonal plumages and color phases more apparent than in the illustrations of the goldfinches on p. 435 and the crossbills on p. 437. But your editor has not allowed me this entire issue (do I detect an audible sigh of relief?), so I'll restrict myself to a listing of the flaws for the remainder of this appendix.

Below you'll find a page-by-page account

of some of the things I have found annoying, misleading, inappropriate, inaccurate and, in some instances, down-right wrong.

p. 10 What is labeled as the mantle is more properly referred to as the back. "Mantle", as I understand it, includes the upper wing surface as well as the back, and is generally used in reference to flying birds such as gulls.

p. 19 Despite the illustrations and what it says in the accompanying text, very few winter and immature **Arctic Loons** have a thin dark line down the side of their neck.

p. 21 Winter plumaged **Red-throated Loons** do not show such a contrasting gray and white head pattern.

p. 24 The wingspreads given for **Short-tailed** and **Black-footed Albatrosses** have apparently been transposed, as Short-tailed should have a much greater wingspan than Black-footed.

p. 25 The wings of most albatrosses illustrated are much too thin and set too far to the rear.

p. 27 The wings of **Flesh-footed** and **Sooty Shearwaters** are too broad and too flexed. In typical flight, their wings are straighter, much like the wings of the Short-tailed Shearwater illustrated to the right, or two of the flying Northern Fulmars shown above.

p. 29 The wings of **Cory's** and **Greater Shearwaters** are also too short and stocky, and more flexed than typically seen.

p. 30 There are no breeding colonies of **Black-vented Shearwater** north of Mexico.

p. 35 Artistic innovation can be effective, but not when it misleads. One rarely perceives a bird so that its tail appears as a mere sliver. Consequently, Marc Hanson's **White-faced Storm-Petrel** comes out looking more like an immature Jacana than a storm-petrel. An analogous "innovation" would be a painting of a flying flicker with its wings closed. After all, they do spend most of their time in flight with closed wings, but we do not visualize that image when thinking of a flying flicker.

p. 36 Add a **Black Storm-Petrel** breeding

colony for Santa Barbara Island. It should be just north and west of the northernmost one shown.

p. 37 The white rump of the **Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrel** should be much more extensive. Many of the birds on this page also suffer from "sliver" tails.

p. 38 Inexplicably, the range of **Magnificent Frigatebird** on the Pacific Coast has been omitted. It is a year-round resident north into the Gulf of California and a summer wanderer north to the Salton Sea and coastal southern California.

p. 44 There are no accepted records of **Anhinga** from California. The last sentence under **Olivaceous Cormorant** should read "Sometimes called Neotropic Cormorant." I question the map for **Great Cormorant** showing its winter range extending all the way to the tip of Florida.

p. 45 The neck of the flying **Great Cormorant** is too short and thick.

p. 46 **Brandt's Cormorant** breeding colonies are indicated only for the Gulf of California. Either these two dots should be eliminated or many more dots should be added for the Pacific Coast from British Columbia to central Baja California. A few also breed in southern Alaska. The map for **Double-crested Cormorant** suggests to me that, in many areas, it is a year-round resident on-shore, but only a winter visitant off-shore. The green areas on-shore (Washington to Mexico; Southeast) should have corresponding green areas off-shore.

p. 47 The necks of the flying cormorants are wrong. The **Pelagic's** should be thicker (same thickness as the head), **Brandt's** should be straighter.

p. 49 The highly stylized flying **American Bittern** shows too much contrast in the wings. The wings, in turn, are too pointed. The illustration in Robbins' *Birds of North America* is much better. The juvenile **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** has a rather strange facial expression.

p. 55 The **Wood Stork** in flight is not carrying a twig. If you look closely you will see that the twig passes *under* the stork's bill. This leaves but one alternative—the bird is about to clip its left wing on the branch.

p. 58 The population of **Whooping Crane** in Idaho was introduced as part of a management program. Those wintering in New Mexico are thought to have come from this introduced population.

p. 82 For the sake of consistency, the pelagic winter range of **Spectacled Eider** should be barred blue and white.

p. 97 All subspecies of **Clapper Rail** are roughly the same size. As illustrated, *levipes* and especially *scottii* are too small.

p. 99 White barred black streaks on the back and wings of the **Yellow Rail** do not show up in the small images illustrated.

p. 104 **Snowy Plovers** breed along the

Count *Continued*

more than double the previous high, might be alarming unless the increased residential area coverage is taken into account. **Ravens**, for which we had the all-time high for any Christmas Count ever in 1982, were down slightly this year. The **Horned Lark**, which had always been the most abundant species on our count until the population crash in 1982, is slowly increasing. But the tally of almost 12 thousand seen this year does not come close to the past high of over 75 thousand recorded in 1981. This year the most abundant species was the **Tricolored Blackbird** with 15,513 counted.

Low numbers were recorded for only five species: **American Bittern**, **Mountain Plover**, **Western Meadowlark**, **Brown-**

headed Cowbird (only 1149), and **Great Horned Owl**, this being the first year we've ever missed this owl entirely.

Some of the other highlights of the count were two birds that do not even enjoy species status these days. The first, **Harlan's Hawk** a dark race of the Red-tailed Hawk, was found in the same location as last year's count. A **Yellow-shafted Flicker**, now a race of the Northern Flicker, was discovered this year on the count. Although we have noted an occasional cross (no longer called a hybrid since they are of the same species) between Red and Yellow-shafted races, this was the first sighting of an apparently pure Yellow-shaft.

—Fred Heath

west coast of Florida, which is off the map.

p. 109 The winter plumaged *fulva* subspecies of **Lesser Golden Plover** is too streaked and the colors are too rich. The *fulva* juvenile should be brighter, especially on its head.

p. 110 Under **Bar-tailed Godwit** it is stated, "appears in migration along Pacific coast." This should be changed to "appears *rarely* in migration along Pacific coast."

p. 123 The breeding and juvenile **Long-billed Dowitchers** illustrated have too much black in the tail. The winter bird shows the proper proportions of black and white, however.

p. 127 The **Surfbird** in flight does not have the right tail pattern. It should have a white rump and the black in the tail should be thickest in the center, forming a black triangle.

p. 139 the **Rock** and **Purple Sandpipers** are too brown. They should be dark slate gray with, perhaps, a wash of brown.

p. 143 I'm confused about the phases in **Long-tailed Jaeger**. All the juveniles I've seen look like the one labeled "dark phase juvenile". Do these become dark phase adults, which are very rare? The text is not clear on this.

p. 144 Laughing Gulls are common in summer at the Salton Sea, though they do not breed there. This should be indicated either on the map or in the text.

p. 153 The wing-tip (upper surface) of the flying **Thayer's Gull** should be black or very dark gray (see wing-tip of standing winter adult).

p. 154 The **Lesser Black-backed Gull** is quite scarce south of the Carolinas and should not have been mapped for Georgia and Florida.

p. 158 **Black-legged Kittiwakes** do not winter in the Gulf of Mexico and are very scarce in the Atlantic south of North Carolina.

p. 161 The gray back of first winter **Yellow-footed Gull** is much too light.

p. 162 There is no indication of the distribution of **Common Tern** in migration. It is common on *both* coasts (contra earlier editions of Robbins' *Birds of North America*), and also over much of the interior.

p. 169 All the **Elegant Terns'** bills illustrated are too red. They should be yellow-orange.

p. 176 **Xantus' Murrelet** breeds north to San Miguel Island (off Point Conception). **Cassin's Auklet** breeding colonies are shown only for Alaska and Canada.

p. 177 I wish all **Craveri's Murrelets** had underwings as dark as those shown! Most have white wing linings with dusky mottling.

p. 178 Only some **Least Auklet** breeding colonies are shown.

p. 179 The body proportions are way off (heads too small for bodies) for **Crested, Whiskered** and **Parakeet Auklets**.

p. 180 **Tufted Puffins** haven't bred south of the Farallones (off San Francisco) since the early 1900s. **Rhinoceros Auklets** do not breed on the Channel Islands.

p. 184 Under the **Bald Eagle** account, "note also Bald Eagle's proportionately . . . longer tail." The illustrations do not bear this out; all Bald Eagles shown appear to have shorter tails than the Golden Eagles.

pp. 195 & 197 Most of the **buteos** have heads that are too small. This is most noticeable in the **Red-tailed, Rough-legged** and **White-tailed hawks**.

p. 199 The **Zone-tailed Hawks** and **Turkey Vultures** shown in flight were intended to be shown in soaring flight with modestly uptilted wings. Instead, they have their wings raised high in the upstroke of strong flapping flight. This is a very misleading illustration. The small illustration of a Turkey Vulture on p. 183 (flying bird on the far left) accurately portrays the angle of wings for both these species in soaring flight.

p. 200 **Ospreys** breed throughout much of Baja California.

p. 209 The flight silhouettes of **Zone-tailed Hawk** and **Common Black-Hawk** are wrong. The Zone-tailed should have broader wings, particularly at the base, as in the Turkey Vulture illustration (lower right), and the black-hawk's wings are *too* broad. The flying black-hawks on p. 199 are much better. The **Black Vulture** has the light areas in the outer six primaries much too light and too uniform. This white area, thus, contrasts too strongly with the rest of the wing. See p. 183 for the correct pattern. Likewise, the **Turkey Vulture's** flight feathers are too uniformly pale gray. They should be darker toward the feather tips (see p. 183).

p. 216 The populations of **Scaled Quail** in Washington and Nevada were introduced.

p. 224 The **Red-billed Pigeon** is not a "rare visitor to the lower Rio Grande Valley", certainly not in the same sense as Ruddy Ground-Dove (see p. 228). It is an uncommon local summer resident.

p. 226 The breeding populations of **White-winged Dove** in Florida were introduced.

p. 233 There is no indication of the **Thick-billed Parrot's** shape in flight—an important field mark. It has a medium length pointed tail and narrower wings than do *Amazona* parrots.

p. 235 The tails of the two gray-phased **Cuckoos** (**Common** and **Oriental**) are twisted oddly sideways (what is shown in the *underside* of the tail), and their bodies are turned nearly perpendicular to their feet. The **Groove-billed Ani** curiously has its tail dropping in front of the branch on which it is perched—and twisted sideways to boot! The flying cuckoos are too long-tailed and their wings are shaped oddly. They remind me of sandgrouse.

p. 237 The tails on the flying **Cuckoos** are too long.

p. 251 The heads of **Parakeet** and perched **Common Nighthawks** are too small.

p. 253 Swifts have very slim wings, but the **Chimney** and **Vaux's** illustrated here have wings too thin, especially the inner wings. The bend of the wing should be less angled, and in some cases closer to the body.

p. 257 Either the **Broad-billed Hummingbirds** are too small (and squat), or the **White-eared Hummingbirds** are too large. The **Violet-crowned Hummingbird** is much too small compared with the two species above. The **Plain-capped Starthroat** is mislabeled.

p. 261 The rufous on the **Rufous** and **Allen's Hummingbirds** is much too rich.

p. 265 The underwing of **Gilded** and **Yellow-shafted flickers** should be the same shade. To my eye, the Gilded shown is too bright and the Yellow-shafted is too dark and dull.

p. 279 Whereas the field marks have been exaggerated on many other plates (see *Empidonax*, pp. 289-293), they have been de-emphasized here. The white in the outer tail of the **Western Kingbird** is usually more conspicuous than shown here. The head and breast of **Cassin's Kingbird** is usually darker than shown and, therefore, set off more strongly from the white throat. Cassin's also shows a little more paleness in the tail tip than shown. Also, the underwing flight feathers of Cassin's appear pale and somewhat translucent in flight—a good field mark not mentioned.

p. 285 The upper illustration of **Olive-sided Flycatcher** is too streaky or spotty. This plumage is not labeled or discussed. Is it supposed to be a juvenile or a variant adult? The wingbars of the **Wood-pewees** should be more distinct.

p. 286 The range map for **Vermillion Flycatcher** shows no breeding areas west of the Colorado River. Since Brown-crested Flycatcher is shown breeding at Morongo Valley, shouldn't Vermillion Flycatcher, which breeds regularly there and occasionally elsewhere in the California deserts, be indicated as well?

p. 287 The red of **Vermillion Flycatcher** is too dark; it should be bright flame red.

p. 289 The **Gray** and **Dusky Flycatchers** are too slim and long-tailed compared with Hammond's. The differences should be slight at best. The **Hammond's** undertail is much too dark. The outer edge of the undertail should be very pale gray, *not* black.

p. 291 Many field marks here are exaggerated. The **Least** is O.K.; the **Acadian** has the white lower breast spot too bold—it should be more diffuse. The illustration on p. 293 looks better. The **Willow, Alder** and **Acadian Flycatchers** appear too sleek compared with Least Flycatcher. **Willow** and **Alder Flycatchers** should have whiter throats.

p. 293 The eye-rings of all the *Empidonax* are too large and bold—especially that of the **Buff-breasted Flycatcher**. The **Westerns** are much too long-tailed and slim compared with **Yellow-bellied** (these two species are extremely difficult to tell apart in the field by visual characters). The **Acadian** shown for comparison should have a significantly larger bill.

p. 295 I've spent a great deal of time on the Channel Islands, but I've never seen a **Horned Lark** that looks like the Channel Islands endemic illustrated (*insularis*). The bird shown is much too streaked. The **Rose-throated Becards** (males) have their heads too large and too dark.

p. 297 The swallows are too stylized. The **Violet-green Swallow** labeled female looks more like a juvenile.

p. 299 The wings of all birds illustrated are too broad, and all birds shown have oddly arched backs (the same is true for birds on p. 297).

p. 307 Many of the crows illustrated are lumpy, especially the **Chihuahuan Raven**.

p. 316 Winter Wren does not breed south to Santa Barbara as shown.

p. 318 The Cactus Wren's range is too extensive in California. It does not breed as far north or west as shown.

p. 334 The range for **Northern Shrike** extends too far south along the coast of California. It is scarce south of the northwest corner of the state.

p. 336 The winter range of **Sage Thrasher** should not extend so far into the Central Valley of California.

p. 339 The **Crissal Thrasher** should have a paler, yellowish iris.

p. 341 The dark streaks on the breast, nape and crown of **Sprague's Pipit** are too extensive and, thus, contrast too strongly with the pale background.

p. 349 I've never seen a **Pine Warbler** with spectacles.

p. 352 Though illustrated, there is no specific mention of the dark lores of **Philadelphia Vireo** as compared with **Warbling Vireo**—one of the best distinguishing field marks.

p. 358 Even though a very few **Nashville Warblers** may winter in coastal southern California, I question the inclusion of this area as part of its "normal" winter range. This is another example of indicating marginal wintering ranges for some species, but not others.

p. 360 Black-and-white Warblers regularly winter farther north in the Southeast.

p. 362 Under **Cape May Warbler**, "all plumages have yellow on face. . . ." is not consistent with the illustration of immature female.

p. 364 Hermit Warbler is shown wintering in coastal California, as is Townsend's, but Hermit is *much, much* less likely. The map is, thus, misleading.

Birds of the Season

by Hal Baxter and Kimball Garrett

As always, birding activity in late December and early January was related primarily to the numerous Christmas Bird Counts established in the region. Elsewhere in this issue are accounts of some of the local counts, but a few additional highlights should be noted here. During recent years Santa Barbara, California, and Freeport, Texas, have vied for top count honors in the country; this year Santa Barbara, under the dedicated leadership of Paul Lehman, appears to have bested the Texas coastal count with a total of 214 species (to Freeport's 206). Morro Bay, San Diego and perhaps a few other California counts were also up around the 200 species level. A better measure of a Christmas Count's worth is its year to year consistency in good coverage, to ensure that the data are meaningful when analyzed. Many Southern California counts were successful in this regard, and the hundreds of participants are to be thanked.

Late fall and early winter is a season when birders in the northwestern part of the continent, and south into California, are on the lookout for vagrants from Siberia. A few such vagrants appear annually, and some species (e.g. Red-throated Pipit) scarcely even raise eyebrows these days. But the sighting this winter of several extremely rare Siberian vagrants has caused ripples even in the

national press. The Missouri **Slaty-backed Gull** made headlines, and a **Brambling** in Colorado and a **Siberian Accentor** in the Pacific Northwest were perhaps as worthy of such treatment. Then, on 7-8 January, Gary Strachan and Dick Erickson found California's first **Rustic Bunting**, an Old World species not too distantly related to our longspurs, near the town of Orick in Humboldt County. This bird, too, made the newspapers, but it didn't make the "state lists" of the disappointed birders who unsuccessfully searched for it on subsequent days. As if to strengthen the notion of a Russian "invasion", yet another Siberian species was uncovered in California later in January. Birders in the Sacramento area located and identified the first **Whooper Swan** for the lower forty-eight states on 16 January (Tim Manolis *et al*, near the town of Grimes in Colusa County). The Whooper Swan is closely related to the Nearctic's Trumpeter Swan; though some authorities treat the two as conspecific, the A.O.U. has maintained them as separate species in the 1983 check-list.

Has there really been an unusual "Russian Invasion"? Probably a great deal of coincidence is involved in this series of records. Weather patterns certainly can contribute to patterns of vagrancy shown in a given year, but a much can likewise be attributed to observer bias (and ever-increasing observer

p. 367 Prairie Warblers should have white undertail coverts.

p. 370 Showing the winter range of **Yellow Warbler** extending to coastal southern California is misleading, as it is a scarce winter visitor here.

p. 371 The **Connecticut Warbler's** feet are *much* too large! The immature female **MacGillivray's Warbler** is too much like the immature female **Mourning**. It should have a whiter throat and grayer head. In fact, the one illustrated (with its brown head) looks more like a typical immature female **Mourning Warbler** than does the corresponding illustration of **Mourning Warbler**.

p. 372 The range map of **Wilson's Warbler** showing it as a year-round resident in coastal southern California is misleading, as it is quite scarce here in winter.

p. 377 The immature female **Common Yellowthroat** is *too* dull. The adult female should have a darker face.

p. 387 The **Green-tailed Towhee's** crown is too bright. The towhees are too stiff and lifeless (note particularly the interior form of **Brown Towhee**).

p. 395 The **Sage Sparrow's** eye-rings should be more prominent.

p. 399 The **Rufous-crowned Sparrow's** eye-rings should be more prominent.

p. 403 The "**Pink-sided**" **Junco** should have a richer reddish-brown back similar to, but paler than, that of "**Gray-headed**" **Junco**, and a paler, more evenly blue-gray head, again more similar to "Gray-headed". The "**Gray-headed**", "**White-winged**", "**Pink-sided**", and **Yellow-eyed Juncos** are simply labeled "♂". There is no indication of how females differ (they are slightly paler or duller).

p. 407 The bill of *stephensi* **Fox Sparrow**, though large, is not as large as shown. The **Lincoln's Sparrow** eye-ring should be more prominent, as mentioned in the text.

p. 410 The underparts of **Smith's Longspur** (winter male and breeding female) are not "pale buff" as stated, but rich buff. The illustrations on p. 411 are correct, however.

p. 425 Some of the grackle illustrations are rather poor. Note the oddly-shaped bill of the juvenile female **Great-tailed Grackle**, the disarticulated tail of the female **Boat-tailed Grackle**, and the tiny western female **Great-tailed Grackle**.

p. 429 The male **orioles** illustrated are all too deeply orange.

awareness), as well as pure serendipity.

Closer to home, the pickings were good this season as well. Southern California's second well-documented **Yellow-billed Loon** was found on Lake Perris in Riverside County on 19 December (Steve Cardiff, Donna Dittmann) and obliged many birders well into January. In fact, it was possible in late December and early January to see four species of loons on western Riverside County's lakes, an unprecedented occurrence. **Horned Grebes** now seem to be surprisingly commonplace on some of our inland lakes (such as Lake Perris), but a **Red-necked Grebe** on Lake Perris after 19 December was exceptionally rare. A Red-necked Grebe at King Harbor (Hal Spear, 6 December) was at a more expected coastal locality. **Short-tailed Shearwaters** were fairly easily found off Redondo Beach and Palos Verdes Peninsula in December and January; this has been a better than average winter for this species up and down our coast.

A small ("**Cackling**") **Canada Goose** was at the Santa Clara River Estuary on 9 January (Guy Commeau). **Eurasian Wigeon** were found at scattered localities; the latest was a male found by Fred Heath at the Pt. Mugu Gun Clubs on 15 January (Fred Heath and L.A.A.S. field trip). Two male **Wood Ducks** were in lower Eaton Canyon on 2 January, and a male was found at Quail Lake near Gorman on 29 December (Arnold Small, Jerry Maisel); the Quail Lake bird may have been the same male seen there during the winters of 1978-1979 and 1979-1980, though it wasn't detected during the past three winters; it was seen as recently as 21 January. From one to four **Black Scoters** have been noted at the Huntington Beach Pier since late November (Russ and Marion Wilson).

A **Rough-legged Hawk** in the Antelope Valley on 6 January (Maisels) was one of the few reported locally this winter. An adult **Bald Eagle** was hunting over Quail Lake on 21 January (Kimball Garrett). Five **Mountain Plovers** were on the Sod Farms on the Oxnard Plain on 30 December (Jerry Friedman); Jerry also had a **fulva Lesser Golden-Plover** at Bolsa Chica on 20 December. Two first-winter **Glaucous Gulls** were found locally. One was at the Van Norman Lakes at the north end of the San Fernando Valley on 26 December (Wanda Conway, Guy Commeau et al), and the other was at the Santa

President's Corner

by Bob Shanman

Well, you have done it again. For the Board, let me say thanks. First, your response to the questionnaire has been outstanding. We have received over 100 responses, representing about 3 percent of the *TANAGER* mailing list. This is considered excellent by most standards. Your comments and suggestions have been invaluable, and a number of you have indicated a willingness to volunteer. Soon we will be contacting those of you who said yes to the volunteer question.

Second, at the time I write this (mid-January), you have contributed over \$3200 to the Condor fund this year. This is the third year in a row that your contributions have increased. You have really indicated a strong willingness to support this program.

Clara River Estuary after 29 December (Barbara Elliott et al). A very pale first-winter **Thayer's Gull** was at the Santa Clara River estuary on 9 January (Ed Navojosky, Hal Baxter); such birds are very similar to field guide portrayals of Iceland Gulls. A winter adult **Little Gull** was found about 4 miles off the mouth of the Santa Ana River on New Year's Day (Olga Clarke et al).

Unprecedented numbers of wintering **Vaux's Swifts** continued to be reported. Flocks were noted on the Malibu and Los Angeles Christmas Counts. The **Thick-billed Kingbird** returned to the Tustin area of Orange County (Doug Willick, after 26 November), but was inaccessible on the Irvine Ranch property. Charles Collins found a **Tropical Kingbird** near Whittier Narrows during the second week of January. A **Brown Thrasher** was seen by a lucky few as it skulked in a San Pedro back yard after mid-January (Brian Daniels). A **Bendire's Thrasher**, first located on the Christmas Count, remained east of Lancaster to at least early January (Jon Dunn et al). **Varied Thrushes** were widespread this winter, with small numbers in most well-wooded oak canyons. A **Bohemian Waxwing** joined a flock of Cedar Waxwings at Fairmont Park, Riverside, on 31 December (Don Hoehlin et al), but was difficult to refind.

In addition to the birds wintering in Goleta and Malibu (Bonsall Drive), another **Worm-eating Warbler** was found by Joan Mills in Sullivan Canyon above Brentwood on 2 January. Exceptional were two **Kentucky Warblers**: One along San Jose Creek in Goleta and another found by Doug Willick in Corona del Mar on 29 December (and widely seen thereafter). Also exceptional were two **Pine Warblers**: One at Pt. Loma College (Richard Webster, after 12 December), and the second on the Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

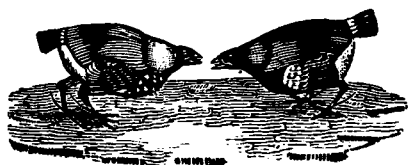
A welcome to two new Board members: in December, Wanda Conway agreed to take on the duties of Field Trip Chair. The pressures of the consulting engineering field had forced Ian Austin to give up this position. Ian, thanks for your help. If things ever get to be "normal" in your office, we hope you will again be able to actively participate in Audubon.

Our second new member is Donna diFiore-Evans. Donna indicated an interest in helping with the accounting responsibilities that Dexter gave up when he took on the *TANAGER*. Donna came to us via the December issue questionnaire, jumped right in when asked to help, and has already contributed significantly in her new position.

campus (Curtis Marantz, after mid-January). "**Baltimore**" **Northern Orioles** were noted locally at the L.A. County Arboretum (Barbara Cohen), Pt. Dume near Malibu (Jon Dunn), and the Los Angeles Country Club (Kimball Garrett and Ken Kendig). Los Angeles County's first recent **Hepatic Tanager** was an adult male found at Vogel Flat Campground in Upper Tujunga Canyon by Lou Falb (after 6 January).

"Winter finches" such as **Pine Siskins** were widespread, but there were no reports of crossbills locally. Fred Heath did find two **Evening Grosbeaks** near Lake Hughes on 26 December. Up to three **Swamp Sparrows** were in the wet fields near the Lake Sherwood fire station after early December (Arnold Small, Hank Childs et al). Two adult Swamps were in the riparian area along the Santa Clara River near Magic Mountain on 21 January (Kimball Garrett). Another was on the Bel Air Country Club on 2 January (Jacob Szabo). A **Lark Bunting** was noted along the Ramona Expressway east of Riverside on 13 January (Hal Baxter).

Whether it feels like it or not, spring has definitely arrived as you read this. Swallows of several species are streaming through, and migrant Rufous Hummingbirds have already joined the very early migrant Allen's Hummingbirds. The northward movement of many waterfowl and of Turkey Vultures is in full swing. Western Flycatchers are already ensconced on territory in some of our coastal canyons by the first week of March, and a host of migrant and summer resident passerines are waiting in the wings, not far behind. Observers are urged to try to chart not only the arrival dates of our standard spring migrants, but the departure (disappearance) schedules of our wintering species as well. And brace yourselves, for the furious peak of spring migration is just around the corner.



Send any interesting bird observations to:

Hal Baxter
1821 Highland Oaks Drive
Arcadia, CA 91006
Phone # (213) 355-6300



CALENDAR

Field Trips

Special Note

It is always a good idea to check with the Bird Report prior to any trip. That way you will learn of any special instructions or unexpected changes that occur (at least through Thursday).

SATURDAY, MARCH 10: Whittier Narrows, David White will lead a morning trip through this unique riparian and wetland area, to look for ducks and other migrants, as well as Cardinals. Meet at 8 a.m. at the Nature Center.

SATURDAY, MARCH 10 and SUNDAY, MARCH 11. Birding Seminar with Jon Dunn. See insert in the last *TANAGER* for details.

TUESDAY, MARCH 13: Evening Meeting at 8 p.m. in Plummer Park. Once again, we are very pleased to present a program by Larry Norris, who has worked as a ranger-naturalist in both Sequoia and Death Valley. Larry will discuss **Death Valley's Geologic Background.** Come and learn how much more there is to Death Valley than, tamarisks, date palms, and vagrants.

SATURDAY, MARCH 17: Ballona Wetlands Join Bob and Roberta Shanman (545-2867 after 6) for a morning of birding in this threatened wetland. Meet at 8 a.m. at the Pacific Ave. bridge over Ballona Creek in Play del Rey.

SUNDAY, MARCH 18: Malibu Creek State Park. Wayne and Judy Moore (347-0915 will lead a morning walk for beginners on this former movie location. Expect a variety of chaparral birds and migrants, and look for Canyon Wren and Golden Eagle. Meet at the parking lot (\$3 fee) 1/3 mile south of Mulholland and Las Virgines/Malibu Canyon Rd. at 8 a.m.

TUESDAY, MARCH 20: L.A. State and County Arboretum. Barbara Cohen will lead a morning walk through varied habitats for quail, owls, herons, raptors and migrants. Meet in front of the gathouse in the parking lot at 8 a.m. (Admission free on this 3rd Tuesday of the month)

SUNDAY, MARCH 25: Boat Trip to Santa Barbara Island. See Pelagic Trips at right for details.

SUNDAY, MARCH 25: Descanso Gardens, La Canada. Warren Peterson leads a two hour walk for beginners. In addition to towhees, raptors, herons and kingfishers, we will look for 3 species of hummers, Western Tanagers, Orioles and other early migrants. Meet at 8 a.m. in Parking lot off Descanso Drive (Free admission if you're on time!)

SATURDAY, MARCH 31: Limekiln Creek Park. Caryol Smith will lead a walk through this area of mixed habitat, where over 50 species (including Roadrunner, Lawrence's Goldfinch, and migrants) can be expected at this time of year. Exit the Simi Freeway at Tampa; go north half a block to first spotlight and turn west on Rinaldi. Park and meet at the end of Rinaldi at 8 a.m.

SUNDAY, APRIL 1: Topanga State Park, Trippet Ranch. Gerry Haigh will lead a morning trip through oak woodland and meadows overlooking the canyons and sea. Raptors, warblers and other migrants will be seen. From Topanga Canyon Blvd., take a sharp east turn uphill on Entrada Drive. Keep bearing to left on Entrada whenever road forks, to where it ends in parking lot (\$2 fee) Meet at 8 a.m.

SATURDAY, APRIL 7: O'Melveny Park. Join Harold Bond for a morning walk through one of the Valley's newest and wildest parks, where waves

of migrants have been seen. From Simi Fwy. exit north on Balboa to Orozco. Turn left and follow Orozco to its end at Senon St., left on Senon to parking lot. Meet at 8:30 a.m.

Leaders and Locales Wanted

We are anxious to learn new areas and to teach the basics to beginners. You don't have to be an expert. Co-leaders can be found and the trip may be short. Call Trip Chairman Wanda Conway at 340-0365 (7:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.) and we'll work out the details. Thank You.

Pelagic Trips

The first two pelagic trips for 1984, sponsored by LAAS, will be held on:

Sunday, MARCH 25 — Alcíd trip. Santa Barbara Islands and out to sea. Depart 6:00 AM, return 6:00 PM. Price is \$22 or 2 for \$40. Leaders will be announced. Birds to be expected include Fulmar, the three common shearwaters, the two common jaegers, Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, Cassin's and Rhino Auklets, and Black-legged Kittiwakes. Rarities seen may be Black-footed Albatross, Short-tailed Shearwater, or Puffins.

Sunday, AUGUST 12 — Shearwater and storm petrel trip. Santa Barbara Islands and out to sea. Depart 6:00 AM, return 6:00 PM. Price is \$22 or 2 for \$40.

All trips will be on the *Vantuna*, leaving from Terminal Island, San Pedro. All prices are tentative and subject to fuel cost increases. Reserve spaces early. To take part in these pelagic trips, send your reservations with the names and telephone numbers of all members of your party along with a self addressed, stamped envelope to:

Reservations c/o Ruth Lohr
Los Angeles Audubon Society
7377 Santa Monica Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90046
(213) 876-0202
(Tues. - Sat., 10-3)

Shearwater Trips

Sat. Mar 10	Monterey Seavalle Baldrige/Chandik	\$27
Wed. Apr. 25	Monterey Bay w/Swedish Ornithological Society Baldrige/Shearwater	\$25
Sun. May 13	Monterey Bay Garrett/Baldrige/Rowlett	\$25
Sat. May 19	Cordell Banks Allison/Baldrige/Chandik	\$37

Reservations are made by sending a check payable to Debra Love Shearwater, 362 Lee St., Santa Cruz 95060 (408) 425-8111. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

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