



# WESTERN TANAGER

Los Angeles Audubon Society

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## Saturday Matinee . . . All Day!

By Chuck Bernstein

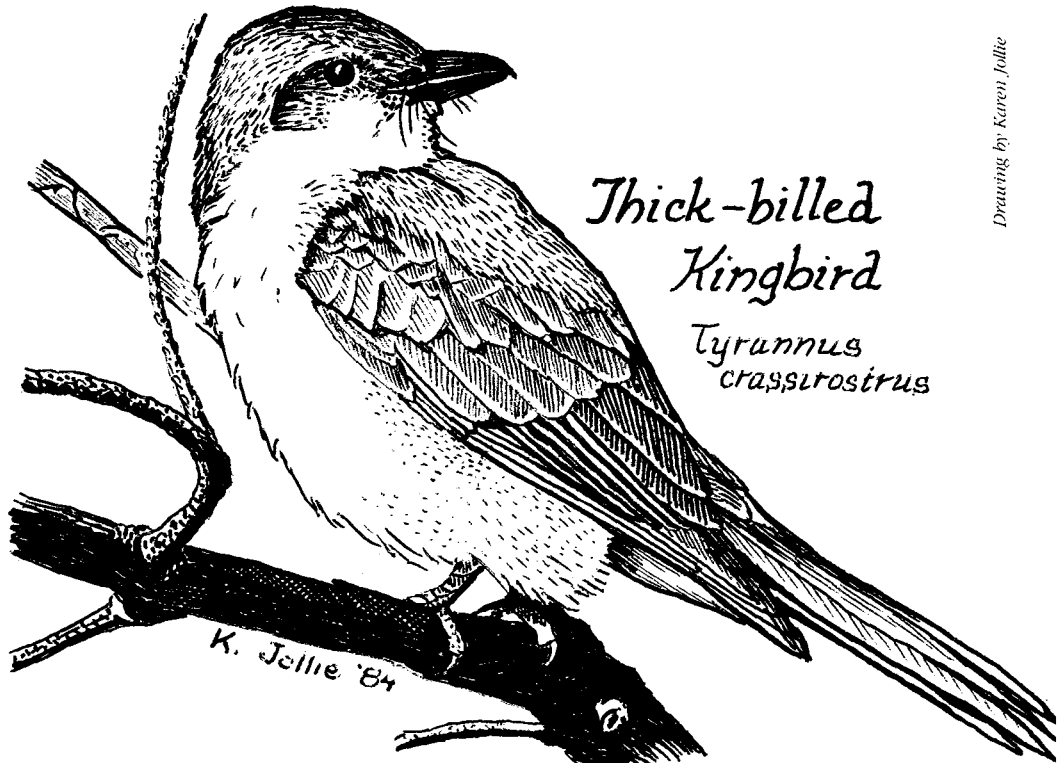
When I was just a kid we looked forward with hunger to the best of all days, Saturday. For at that time of the world it was the custom—indeed the *civil right*—of every kid in the neighborhood to attend the movie matinee and personally experience yet another chapter of a thrill-filled weekly serial.

There was the high adventure of the hunt, frenzied chases against time, suspense, surprise, frustration, love, romance, comedy—all the elements of a most satisfying Saturday matinee. I loved it and still do. But now I've come to know that for a birdwatcher our planet is a theatre, admission is free, and the serial changes every day!

January 8, 1983. Seven a.m. I am hurtling towards my birding day southbound merging from the Hollywood onto the Santa Ana Freeway. The sky is rosy in the east, I feel great and look forward to the day with relish. Eight days into the new year and I haven't been birding for three whole days! Starting my new year list will give each bird seen, no matter how common, added significance. But there are more than common birds awaiting.

I feel a bit like a border patrolman, for I'm on the trail of two trespassers from Mexico, first a reported Thick-billed Kingbird on private property in Orange County's Lemon Heights, then a Rufous-backed Robin the shrubbery at Newport Ecology Center in Newport Beach (where for my year list I also hope to add a Virginia's Warbler), on north up the coast to the Huntington Beach Pier for a female King Eider, an adventuress from far over our Canadian border, then inland to the Huntington Beach Central Park to intercept two invaders from the east, a Philadelphia Vireo and a Black-throated Green Warbler.

Three days prior, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History where I am studying bird skins, Kimball Garrett casually mentions the Rufous-backed Robin. I drop the bird skins—it would be life bird for me!—and dash pell-mell for my



Thick-billed  
Kingbird

*Tyrannus  
crassirostris*

Drawing by Karen Jellie

*car. I search under the front seat. Damn! My binoculars are at home. At home is in the opposite direction! I've missed birds by waiting for "a better time." When I hear of a good bird, if at all possible, I go NOW.*

*At 3:15 I am at the Ecology Center ready to look for the bird, but there is no chase. Don Roberson from Northern California is already here and focused in on the Robin! It is "in hiding" on a redwood limb above us, watchful, wary and silent except for the short flights when it utters a bushed squeaky call. It is much like our own Robin but appears larger, has rufous on the back and lightly on the wing coverts and lacks the familiar white eye ring of our Robin. Don is exuberant; there is his 499th state bird!*

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As I open my car door at the end of Foothill Road in Lemon Heights at 8:10 I hear, "Che-beek!" and at the top of a tall eucalyptus tree I immediately find the yellow-fronted black-

backed kingbird. To rule out a Cassin's I set up my scope, and confirm that it is indeed the Thick-billed. Rick Clements arrives with another birder and we take turns studying it through his powerful Celestron scope. The bill, thick and heavy as compared to the shorter, thinner bills of Cassin's and Western, is readily apparent.

Rick and his friend will follow me to the Rufous-backed Robin. They haven't seen it yet. We go toward the ocean through a cloud of fog that gets more dense as we approach the coast. At the Ecology Center by 8:50 we are in a gray haze with visibility at perhaps 20 feet. Rick and his birding buddy go off to breakfast "while the fog burns off."

Fifteen minutes later the fog pocket lifts and the gathering birders have good looks as the skulking Rufous-backed flushes into an open willow tree from the impenetrable toyon bushes where it has been feeding on rich red berries.

Down in the wash in a tangle of foliage

*Continued top next page*

behind a chain-link fence I find the Virginia's Warbler. It is a tiny gray bird with a wide white eye ring, a tinge of yellow on the breast and a yellow-green splash on the rump and the very short undertail coverts.

I join with Phil Sayre and his friend to caravan to the beach for the King Eider. The closer we get to the shore the heavier the fog. Parking the cars, we plod through the sand searching for the pier. Reaching it and walking out with the sea around us the cold salt spray on my face is bracing, but we cannot see the ocean below us, we can barely make out the wooden planking underfoot!

Finally, at 11:45 we identify the King Eider with a flock of Surf Scoters, bobbing like corks on the fitful sea, periodically escaping the fog and the voyeurs on the pier by diving for their food. Its larger size and distinctive head and bill shape, together with the much lighter brown color than the female scoters, identify our bird.

*So far, great birding. I have two birds from south of the border, one from north of the border plus a refugee from the Great Basin ranges, the Virginia's Warbler. Now for the eastern vagrants!*

In Central Park we quickly call out the Black-throated Green Warbler from the eucalyptus trees near the entrance to a miniature amphitheatre built into the side of a grassy hill. Responding alertly to my owl call it comes in low and very close to us. It is a first-year bird with a bright green back, and light yellow wash on the face as well as the sides of the vent below the belly.

Now for the Philadelphia Vireo! We look up at, into, over, under, around and in between every branch and twig in that area of the park. We look, of course, for a small bird with yellow breast, even a faint wash of yellow, and a prominent white supercilium over a black eyeline. If here it would not be easily overlooked. We come up with the bespectacled Solitary Vireo, not previously reported here, plus all the expected species, but no Philadelphia Vireo.

At 2:30 I am introduced to Tom Payne and Ed Greaves, birders from Sacramento who have just seen the Rufous-backed Robin and hope to find the Black-throated Green Warbler, a life bird for Tom, who by now is en route to the airport to return home. Other birders arrive, including four from San Francisco, and, well—you know how it is—I volunteer to show them the warbler.

To my surprise, we find the amphitheatre packed with well-dressed people, a portable organ playing "Here Comes The Bride" and a minister performing the rites of an outdoor wedding! But the out-of-towners are in a hurry; they all have to make their planes.

We do try to be as quiet and unobtrusive as possible so as not to disturb the ceremony, but to get the bird out I know I will have to do the screech owl. Further complicating matters, a singer bursts forth with "Oh, Promise Me!" I am prudently embarrassed but

adamant. And the scenario goes thusly:

*"Oh, promise me that someday you and I"... (I let go softly with a quavering descending owl call)... "Will take our love together"... "Chuck, get that bird out; I gotta go!"... (I emit a more brazen screech owl call)... "neath some sky"... The organist glances our way and plays louder... Tom whispers, "I have to go!"... The girls in the wedding party are Western Bluebirds, all blue and rufous and pink; the boys in tuxedos are Black Phoebees... Icy glares are cast from this finely-plumaged flock of somewhat grubby group of birders spread, beads back and open-mouthed, before them... Again, "Oh, promise me!"...*

*As the organ gets louder I get braver and throwing caution to the winds whistle a loud spine-tingling screech owl call. Then, as the minister imparts memorable admonitions to the bride and groom, out comes the warbler! I fix my binoculars on the bird to make certain, and then, as the wedding ring is being slipped on her finger I scream in a hoarse stage whisper, "Black-throated Green Warbler at One o'clock, top of the eucalyptus tree!"*

The dozen or so birdwatchers that had gathered come scrambling from every direction swelling the chorus of "Oohs and Aahs." They are getting good looks at the bird. The bride and groom are in a deep embrace. The Bluebirds and Phoebees are fluttering and applauding.

And where is Tom? Here is his life bird and Tom is gone! Off in the distance, across the park, I catch sight of two figures, Tom and Ed, hurrying away. *It must be them.* A girl halfway between us and carrying binoculars hears my call and is racing back. I yell for her to pass on the news and point toward the two disappearing figures. She takes up the call. I see them turn. I wave frantically. They run all the way back. Breathless, Tom gets his life bird.

And now the bride in a yellow gown and the groom wearing black tux and a white carnation have come out with the minister, the Bluebirds, and the Phoebees to have pictures taken and the guests hang back a moment before getting started through a reception line.

Somewhat contrite, I start towards the minister to make my apologies. But before I can reach him he accepts a pair of binoculars offered and is *himself* studying the warbler. And to my delight, as I reach his side, he says over and over again, "Oh, what a bird! Oh, what a bird!"

★ ★ ★

All the elements of a most satisfying Saturday matinee.

*From The Joy of Birding by Chuck Bernstein, published by Capra Press, © 1984*

## Birding — It Really is a Sport

By Jim Halferty

**A**sk the average birder, "What is birding? How do you classify it?" Our average birder will hem a little, haw a little, shift feet, clear throat, and say something like, "It is sort of a hobby, but not exactly. Avocation, no that's not the right term, nor is it just a pastime. I don't think it is a sport. I guess it's an activity, an outdoor activity—yes, that's probably it".

Bunk. Birding is a *sport*. Why do we birders feel guilty or inadequate about calling it what it is. In Webster's New Twentieth Century Unabridged Dictionary, the first of many definitions of the word sport reads, "Any activity or experience that gives enjoyment or recreation."

Ever walk out on an ocean pier, say the one at Cabrillo Beach, and watch all those somnolent types, some with their electronic noise boxes rocking away, tending poles and occasionally reeling in a one-pound mackerel? That, friends, is a sport called fishing.

Ever see a group of grown men huddled in a cold, wet blind with their keester's half frozen, waiting for a few ducks to fly over so they can raise a ten pound gun to their shoulder and fire a couple of shots? And if they are successful, a dog does all the work of bringing in the bird. That is a sport called hunting.

You participate in a sport—the sport of kings, actually—when you go out to Santa Anita, binoculars in hand, and watch the ponies circle the track. Your exercise, and your participation, is confined to running, or walking, to the \$2.00 window.

There are a lot of sports more strenuous than birding. But the definition does not say anything about strength or endurance or danger, or even competition. It says, "Any activity, etc." Hiking is a sport, of which mountain climbing is the most strenuous and dangerous aspect. Birders do a lot of hiking but seldom climb a mountain the hard way. And a chess match, of all things, is classified as a sport.

The more advanced—some say, wacky—forms of birding involve individual competition (listing), and team competition (big days). And birding can get real strenuous, although that is not the norm.

So don't be shy about it. Stand up, put your hand over your heart and say out loud, "Birding is a sport!" Be a good sport about this sport.

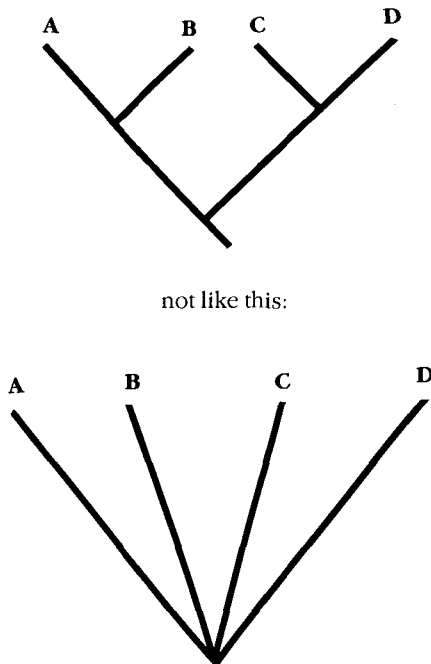
# Terms of Emberizment

## Part 2

by Thomas R. Howell

In addition to the accumulation of new biological data on relationships, another important influence on classification has been the rise of "phylogenetic systematics" following principles propounded by the German entomologist Willi Hennig. The system is complex and several recent books are devoted to it; there is space here for only a simplified discussion of some of the basic concepts, which include:

1) Evolution proceeds, for the most part, by dichotomous branchings, not simultaneous multiple branchings. Thus, we should diagram the evolution of four species A, B, C, and D as something like this.

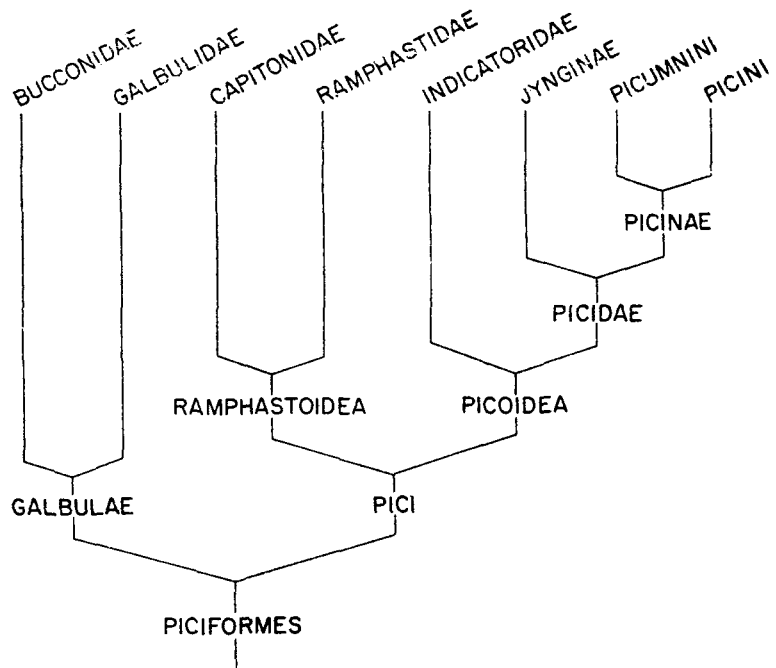


The first figure is called a cladogram and advocates of this system are called cladists; "phylogenetic systematics" is sometimes called cladistics.

Each branching gives rise to two "sister groups" which are each others' closest relatives and must be accorded equivalent taxonomic rank. In the above example, species A and B are one sister group, and species C and D are another; also, A is the sister group of B, and C the sister group of D (a "group" can be just one species). This means that, if we decide that these four species belong in two different genera, A and B must comprise one genus and C and D the other; we could not place A, B, and C in one genus and D in another. Neither could we say that

*The new higher level classification of the Order Piciformes that follows is based on the phylogenetic relationships hypothesized in Fig. 1.*

- Order Piciformes
  - Suborder Galbulae
    - Family Bucconidae—puffbirds
    - Family Galbulidae—jacamars
  - Suborder Pici
    - Superfamily Ramphastoidea
      - Family Capitonidae—barbets
      - Family Ramphastidae—toucans
    - Superfamily Picoidea
      - Family Indicatoridae—honey-guides
      - Family Picidae
        - Subfamily Jynginae—wrynecks
        - Subfamily Picinae
          - Tribe Picumnini—piculets
          - Tribe Picini—woodpeckers



A and B constitute a distinct family and that C and D are a subfamily of some other family.

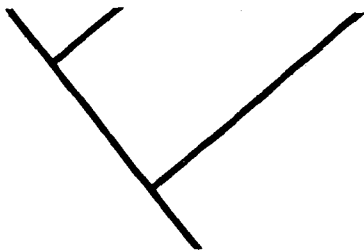
This is a logical system, but how do we decide which taxa are each other's close relatives? Hennig's principle is that you should base this on "shared derived characters". In other words, the common ancestor of A, B, C, and D had certain "primitive" characters that evolved into two different "derived" conditions shown, respectively, by A and B and by C and D. In general, a derived condition is one that seems to represent a later development from the ancestral condition. Example: a muscle which is simple, arising from one bone and attaching by a tendon to another, might be considered the primitive condition; if (in some species) the same muscle splits into two parts, with

tendons attaching to two different bones, that would seem to be a derived condition. If, say, only two species shared this derived condition, they would be each other's closest relatives. Primitive to derived, though, does not necessarily mean only simple to complex. The loss of a toe in certain three-toed birds with four-toed relatives is considered a derived condition. The Black-bellied Plover has a small hind toe, and this is lacking in the golden plovers (now 2 species). This latter is thus placed after the former within the genus *Pluvianus* and the difference is not considered significant enough for generic separation.

Problems arise, of course, when one encounters a mixture of primitive and derived characters in the same taxon. There are also nomenclatural problems in following faith-

fully the principle that sister groups are taxonomically equivalent. Here is a recent example of a cladistic classification of the Piciformes by Swierczewski and Raikow (Auk, July 1981): The strictly dichotomous system requires two suborders, two superfamilies, six families, two subfamilies and two tribes. There is nothing wrong with this—evolution is complex—but when one pursues the branchings back to higher and higher categories more and more intermediate taxa have to be recognized. Also, the principle of equivalence can have other consequences. For example, birds and mammals evolved from different reptilian stocks. The ancestors of birds were the archosaurian reptiles, which included the dinosaurs and the crocodilians—the latter have survived. Thus, birds and crocodilians are sister groups, and together constitute a sister group of mammals: This means that, if

crocs   birds   mammals



mammals constitute a class, birds and crocodiles combined constitute another class, and birds can be no "higher" than a subclass. This is not necessarily wrong, but some taxonomists say that the great evolutionary advancement of birds merits recognition as a class separate from reptiles.

This example points up a fundamental difference between the two systems. Traditional classification is based in large part on the degree of overall similarity and difference between groups and the taxonomist's judgment of how these should be evaluated and the groups ranked. Agreed, birds evolved from reptiles, but are they different enough to be a different class? In contrast, the cladistic approach is strictly genealogical, like tracing your family tree. The branchings determine which are your sisters, your cousins, and aunts. You can't reclassify a cousin as your sister because she so closely resembles you, nor can you classify a branch of your biological family as belonging to some other family that is, in your judgment, more like them. Cladists say, therefore, that a synthesis or compromise with other systems of classification is not logically possible. A most important question, though, is how to be sure that one is really determining genealogy. Isn't human judgment (and thus potential error) involved in determining what are shared derived characters, and in separating

the significant from the trivial? And so the debate continues. The AOU Check-list by no means followed Hennigian principles in detail, but the committee was influenced by the concept of primitive to derived sequences and that of taxonomic equivalence of sister groups. This was one reason for the downgrading in taxonomic rank of some groups formerly recognized as families to subfamilies.

The message for birders is that we are in a period of taxonomic revolution. The new genetic data seem certain to bring us much closer to a better understanding of relationships and working this into the system of avian classification is almost sure to cause some drastic changes from what is presently familiar. But it should be an exciting time, and the rewards in greater understanding should provide more than enough compensation.



## Backstage

Glenn Cunningham, the official Historian of the Los Angeles Audubon Society, is best known for his articles in the *Western Tanager* entitled "Audubon - The First Thirty Years" and the maps he prepared for Jean Brandt's *Birding Locations In and Around Los Angeles* and her *Tanager* articles. Numerous other contributions have included several years of work in the Audubon House library, where he created a card catalog of locations covered by the field guides and checklists carried by our bookstore.

Glenn is in charge of our map collection, which is lucky for us as he is a retired professor of geography from City College. Glenn took up birdwatching when he retired, and after several question-and-answer visits to Audubon House, he was recruited as a volunteer by Jean Brandt at the annual picnic at Trippet Ranch in 1975. When he recorded 400 life birds he was named "Rookie of the Year" by his co-workers.

An ardent and frequent traveler, our Mr. Cunningham's astringent wit is sadly missed by his co-workers on many a Thursday. Which just goes to show that one of the chief benefits of working at Audubon House is the high-class company you keep.

### RENEW THRU L.A.A.S.

Whether you have to RENEW your membership in the National Audubon Society, or JOIN for the first time, Call Audubon House to arrange to renew through L.A.A.S. This will ensure that you will keep getting the *Tanager* and be able to participate fully in Chapter activities. And it will help us keep better track of our membership. Thanks!

## Birding In Australia Part IV. Tasmania and Weste

By Henry and Helen Childs  
**Tasmania**

Tasmania has always seemed to me to be one of those places at the end of the earth that one would never ever get to see. The mind conjures up the Tasmanian Devil lurking among the Tasmanian tree ferns. Regretably, we were able to spend only one short day there.

Our time was running out, so instead of taking the ferry we flew to Launceston from Melbourne and thereby missed the good pelagics. Our motel, the Crystal Motor Lodge, was reasonable, comfortable, and provided the necessities in a refrigerated "honor bar" pay on the way out for what you used!

Contact with R. H. Green, a local authority on the Tasmanian birds, gave us directions to the Nodley Fern Gorge, a magnificent remnant of the original tree fern forest. On the way we observed the flightless Tasmanian Native Hen, a terrestrial, territorial gallinule which



Photos by Henry Childs

Port Lincoln Parrot

actually fights instead of posturing and flying away when attacked. At the gorge, the exquisite Flame Robin and its less spectacular relative, the Dusky Robin, were found with the endemic honeyeaters and thornbills. The Green Rosella was more difficult to find and less colorful than the rosellas of the "North Island."

An Echidna was seen wandering along the edge of the road. It proceeded to bury itself in seconds, a noteworthy activity of this egg-laying mammal.

Along the river north of Launceston, Sooty Oystercatchers (much like our Black), Pied Oystercatchers, Silver and Pacific Gulls and Black-Faced Cormorants were found. Forty

## rn Australia

species in one day, with eleven of them new, allowed us to catch our evening plane back to Melbourne but left us with the hope that someday we would get back to this lovely island again.

### Perth and Southwestern Australia

One cannot fail to be impressed with the beauty, and especially the cleanliness, of the city of Perth. Fishing and shrimping were going on in the crystal-clear, pollution-free water at the docks just below the Hilton in the center of the city. It is one of the few places we've seen in our travels where we might like to live.

We rented a campervan, and with Ian Edgar, a delightful 81-year-old birdo and photographer, headed south to the Dryandra Forest. Wildflowers were at their height... the birds, fabulous. Laughing Doves, Red Wattlebirds and Port Lincoln Parrots were on our list before we were out of town. At camp the most spectacular bird was the White-Tailed Black Cockatoo, but the Rufous Treecreeper, Crested Bellbird, Western Rosella and Red-Capped Robin provided plenty of WOWS. There were a number of Malleefowl mounds in the area and we finally did see this bird, famous for its incubation of the eggs by the heat of fermentation and the sun. The next day produced the elegant Parrot, Western Spinebill, Blue-Breasted and Mallee Heathwren.

Most of the towns in this area have a name ending in "up" (an aboriginal name meaning

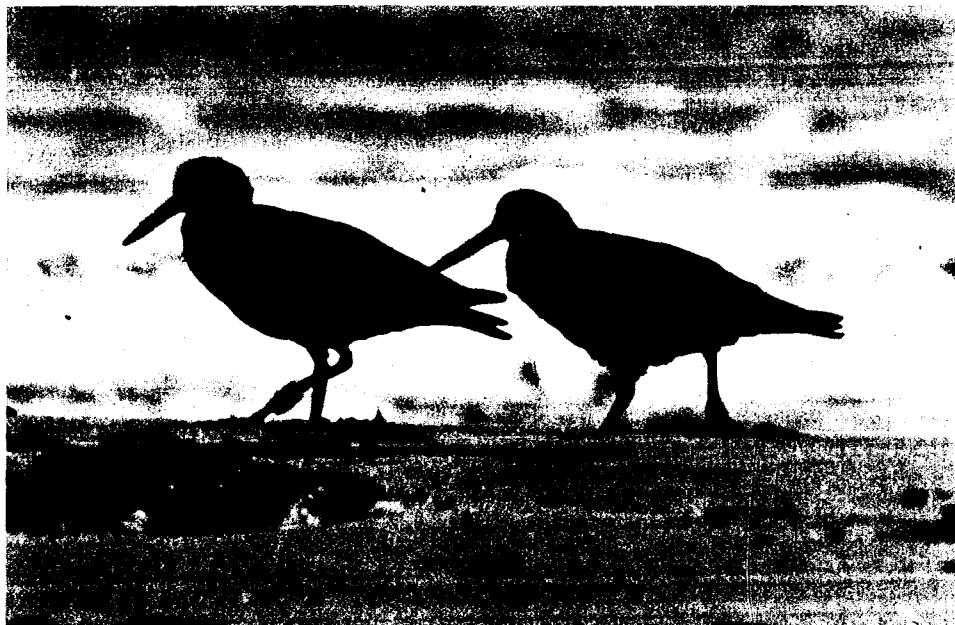


*Red-capped Robin*

water), the area being referred to as the "up" country. At Manjimup the best birds were Red-Winged Wren and White-Breasted Robin, neither bird being members of the wren and robin families of North America.

Again, the lack of population made all of this area seem untouched and a joy to be in. At One-Tree Bridge, named for the original bridge made of one tree about ten feet in diameter, a magnificent stand of 200 foot Kara Trees were seen, including one with a fire tower built 180 feet up.

We left Perth for New Zealand, a country we found interesting, but the birding definitely second-rate, as most of the birds are introduced species from England. The native species have almost been wiped out. We will treasure always the birds, and especially the friends we made, in Australia. In closing, we can only urge *you*, don't wait, do it now! Start planning your Australian trip.



*Sooty Oystercatcher*

## Summer Outing Ideas

*By Wanda Conway*

In addition to our scheduled trips, you might like to take advantage of some special outings that are being planned in connection with the Olympics. Many are natural history walks to local areas, with some particularly being keyed to birders. The National Park System has at least two a day planned for the period of July 7 through August 25. For a schedule of their outings, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the National Park Service, 22900 Ventura Blvd., Suite 140, Woodland Hills 91364 or call 818-888-3440.

The Sierra Club has a variety of trips, both interesting and energizing. Their booklet may be picked up at your nearest camping store or ordered through the Angeles Chapter (\$4.50 incl. mailing) 2410 Beverly Blvd., L.A. 90057 or call them at 387-4287.

The Nature Conservancy has two other trips to Santa Cruz Island from Santa Barbara besides our scheduled August 5 trip. Contact Sea Landing (805-963-3564) for further info and reservations, or the Santa Barbara Nature Conservancy at 805-962-9111. Closer to home, the Southern California Project Office of the Nature Conservancy (622-6594) at 849 So. Broadway, Suite 660, L.A. 90014 has a wide variety of trips planned for the summer months.

You might also like to spend some time in one of our excellent Natural History Museums (closed Mondays). The Los Angeles County Museum (774-3411) is located at 900 Exposition Blvd. The San Bernardino County Museum (714-792-1334) is in Redlands at the California offramp of Freeway 10 and the Santa Barbara Museum (805-682-4711) is at 2559 Cuesta del Sol.

If you're one of those that likes to strike out birding on your own, check with our bookstore. Two items that you'll be sure to want are *Birding Locations in and around Los Angeles* by Jean Brandt and *A Birder's Guide to Southern California* by James Lane. Arnold Small's *Birds of California* is excellent for understanding habitats and Kimball Garrett and Jon Dunn's *Birds of Southern California* is indispensable for knowing the status and distribution of birds. You'll also find numerous books and bird lists for most anywhere in the world. If you can't get in to browse, do call (876-0202) and for a small charge your items will be in the next mail.

Best wishes for a special summer!

### Audubon Bird Reports \*

Los Angeles	(213) 874-1318
San Bernardino	(714) 793-5599
Santa Barbara	(805) 964-8240
San Diego	(619) 435-6761

## Whittier Narrows Field Trip

By David White

The LAAS field trip to Whittier Narrows on Saturday, April 21, was exceptional for the quality of sightings, but no one complained about quantity; between 8:00 a.m. and noon on this sunny, warm day, we tallied 50 species.

Before we left the Nature Center parking lot, we were treated to a good view of a pair of Red-shouldered Hawks; one brought a freshly-captured meal into a large sycamore, while the other circled overhead being persistently harassed by an American Crow. Also circling were White-throated Swifts and Cliff Swallows, and numbers of other birds were active in trees and shrubs around the parking lot, including Song Sparrows, Brown-headed Cowbirds, Lesser Goldfinches, and a Rufous-side Towhee. Once on the path, we quickly added California Thrasher, Cedar Waxwings, and Nashville and Wilson's Warblers to the list. Red-tailed Hawks were seen nesting in a high-voltage transmission tower, and we got a good look at a singing male Black-headed Grosbeak.

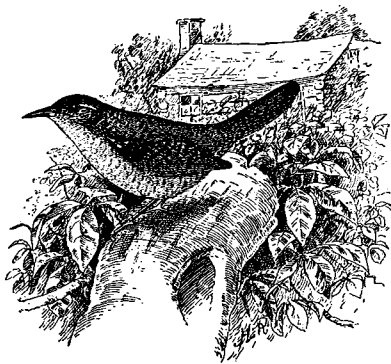
Lake Aguaticos produced a Warbling Vireo and a Yellowthroat, and along the San Gabriel River we found Western Sandpipers, Killdeer, and a Greater Yellowlegs. Back along the siphon ditch there were Black Phoebe, American Goldfinches, and Audubon's and Black-throated Gray Warblers. Over in the New Lakes area, several people added a "life nest" to their list when we found the swallow-like mud domicile of a Black Phoebe family under the eaves of a small shed; the 3 youngsters had fledged and were nearby, being fed by their parents.

At the Three-acre Lake we got our first bonanza; there was a Least Bittern on floating vegetation at the west side of the lake, and it sat still while we got it in the scope and all 11 people in the group took a look. This was most unusual; it is seldom enough that we see a Least Bittern, and when we do it generally flees straightaway into dense reeds, so quickly that only those in the vanguard catch a glimpse of it.

On over at the Twenty-acre Lake, we heard a Yellow-breasted Chat singing (if one can dignify that whoop-and-holler pandemonium by calling it "song"). Seeing a chat is not at all easy; the voice comes out of dense thickets (mulefat, in this case) and is ventriloquial in quality so that one is never entirely certain where to look. After about five minutes, just as a few less patient group members began muttering darkly about the noisemaker's alleged identity, out came the chat onto an open branch of a willow. As it continued to sing, we got it in the spotting scope and everyone took a turn—and then everyone took a second turn, and some of us came back

to look again. I had never seen a chat quite so well; we were able to watch as it whistled and hooted and threw its voice here and there, puffing out its throat so far that it looked like some strange sort of small misshapen yellow grouse.

There were other birds—Snowy and Great Egrets, Black-crowned Night Herons, a Green-backed Heron and a Great Blue Heron, a Caspian Tern, both Anna's and Black-chinned Hummingbirds, Vaux's Swifts and a Barn Swallow—but nothing could top the excellent views we had of the bittern and the chat. There were very few waterfowl, and the White-crowned Sparrows had departed entirely, but we expected that. There was, in fact, only one disappointment: we had heard a Northern Cardinal singing, but we never even got a glimpse. Still, the cardinals are there all year, and there's always the next field trip.



## Request For Observations of Willow Flycatchers

The California Department of Fish and Game is undertaking a study of the Willow Flycatchers (*Empidonax traillii*) in California to document distribution, abundance, habitat requirements, and reproductive success. Please send any reports of recent sightings (within the past decade) of breeding Willow Flycatchers to Ronald W. Schlorff, California Department of Fish and Game, 1416 Ninth Street, Sacramento, CA 95814. Please include your name, address, and phone number, along with the following: location of sighting, (if possible, provide legal description of nest territory—township, range, section, 1/4 section—ideally, a copy of a topographic map should be included), date of observation, behavioral notes, and any other relevant information (e.g. evidence of nest parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) or threats to habitat). This information will assist State and Federal agencies in developing habitat protection and species management plans for this bird species of special concern.

## From the Editor

by Dexter Kelly

First, my abject apologies to Dr. Thomas R. Howell of UCLA, whose outstanding article *Terms of Emberizment* appeared on the front page without any byline; to Henry and Helen Childs, whose latest installment of their wonderful *Birding in Australia* series went similarly uncredited; and to Herb Clarke, who provided all the photos for the June issue without a line of recognition. In our zeal to get the *Tanager* out on time, we sometimes cut corners with disastrous results—like my failure to have the pasteup boards inspected while I was out of town and the resulting disappearance of contributor's names. Our goal of producing a newsletter that is both good-looking and timely has not yet been wholly achieved, but plans are in the works that will streamline production of the *Tanager* and make sure glitches of the sort described above will not happen again.

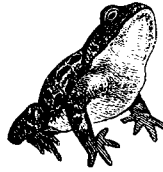
The absence of credits is all the more embarrassing to me, because I planned this column to be mainly a renewed plea for contributions to the *Tanager* for writers, photographers and artists. Line drawings, woodcuts, lithographs and the like reproduce particularly well on the *Tanager* paper, and the appearance of original art work by the many fine bird and nature artists in the L.A. area will give our newsletter a fresh, open look. Any kind of artwork, from full bird portraits to natural landscapes to "filler" designs will be appreciated. Of course, our first-rate photographers will be hit up for pix—Herb, I hope you're not turned off. As for writers: many of you have responded outstandingly to our plea for material. Others have remained mute. To these timid souls I say: Don't be so shy! If you have a great vacation or birding experience, write it up and send it in.

I should mention our deadlines, which are pretty far in advance of publication. All written material must be submitted no later than the third Friday of the second month preceding the month of publication. For example, articles for the September issue must be in by Friday, July 20. Artwork may be submitted a week later.

One final note: The absence of the *Birds of the Season* this month has been caused by the absence of Kimball Garrett, who departed in May for a sailboat journey from Panama to Tahiti, by way of the Galapagos and Marquesas Islands. Kimball need not polish brass or climb the rigging in this expedition. He is serving as staff ornithologist à la Charles Darwin, in the great 19th century tradition of field naturalists. He'll be back in July with plenty of pictures, colorful tales, scientific data—and a whole series of articles for the *Tanager*!

# Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth



Costa Rica arises from the blood and turmoil of Central America like a beacon of sanity and tranquility. With neighbors armed to the teeth or languishing under the yoke of military juntas, democratic Costa Rica has legally eliminated its army, navy and air force. In a region of endemic ignorance it has fostered education. As one drives through small towns in the hinterland, the most conspicuous buildings are usually the schools. The country has a literacy rate of 91%, highest in the Americas. When the pressure of population and development began to be felt in the '60s, when people could see their lush forests and clear streams deteriorating, they decided to do something about it. Beginning a mere 12 years ago, enlightened presidents and inspired conservationists established a program of national parks and wildlife refuges second to none in the world. Twenty-five percent of the country is now set aside as parks, monuments and forest preserves. This is a particularly happy circumstance in a country the size of West Virginia that counts 200 species of mammals, 210 of reptiles, 1000 of butterflies and 850 species of birds. There are 2500 species of large and medium-sized trees and 1200 species of native orchids.

In addition to the national parks and preserves, several biological and botanical research stations have been created in natural areas, most of them under the sponsorship of the Organization of Tropical Studies. The OTS is a consortium of 25 American and 4 Costa Rican universities. Graduate studies and established scholars come and go, some year after year, pursuing their work with insects, mammals, plants and birds. At La Selva Biological Reserve, experimental plots of forests are cut down sequentially at yearly intervals and the rate and nature of re-growth is studied. This 3500-acre research area adjoins some 370 square miles of tropical rain forest, nearly all of it undisturbed. A five-year study of Costa Rica's six cats—all of them threatened or endangered—began at La Selva this year. The natural history of some, especially the margay and the little spotted cat, is almost entirely unknown. It is hoped that radio telemetry will reveal the extent of the range of all the felines, the kind of prey and vegetation they prefer, and their basic ecological requirements.

Two indispensable organizations have contributed much to the environmental

health of Costa Rica: the Nature Conservancy and the World Wildlife Fund-US. When the National Parks Foundation was created in 1978 as a private group to help the government develop the natural area program, seed money was provided by the two American organizations. The fund-raising techniques and land acquisition expertise of the Conservancy has been very helpful in this bootstrap operation. World Wildlife was deeply involved in saving the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve from the intensive logging that threatened it.

Monteverde is one of the natural wonders of the world. Even in the dry season it is green, green, green! The undergrowth is thick and luxuriant and the overarching canopy of trees is festooned with a variety of spectacular epiphytes. The forest teems with birds. A bewildering variety of brightly-colored tanagers, hummingbirds, cotingas and warblers come and go. More soberly-feathered spinetails, flycatchers and woodcreepers flit furtively through the vegetation. Turkey-sized Black guans zoom across the trails and pairs of Resplendent Quetzals gaze down stolidly, the males' long, trailing feathers bent double in their hole-nests.

It is significant that the most active conservation organizations have come to realize that this is indeed one world, one Spaceship Earth, one interrelated organism. The mysterious El Nino phenomenon affects the entire Pacific Ocean, changing weather patterns and food supplies and so the fate of fish and birds and men. Volcanic ash travels around the world on prevailing winds and blocks out sunlight far from its origin. Fossil fuel consumption in one country sprays acid rain on another. The disappearance of Latin American forests has a profound effect on man and wildlife. It is more than a birder's parochial concern for the winter habitat of "our" attractive migrants. The incredibly rich plant life of tropical and subtropical forests has yielded valuable medicines and foods in the past, with the possibility of more treasure to come. And preserving the gene pool that has developed over millions of years is essential to maintain the natural diversity of life. Nor can we ignore the importance of a green mountain and a tumbling stream to the sensibilities and well-being of human beings.

While the Costa Rican venture was spearheaded by an intellectual elite—some of it educated in the United States—the roots of

the environmental impulse have begun to sink deeply into the consciousness of the general public. Although this small country has suffered severely from the global economic recession, it has not given up the long-term goal of saving its magnificent wilderness for future generations. The pressure for cutting down the forests for timber, agriculture and cattle range is greater than ever, but many citizens are quick to protest any harm to the forests, wetlands and other habitats.

There is a museum of sorts in the small, rather primitive headquarters building in the Tapanti Wildlife Refuge that illustrates the conservation ethic at work in Costa Rica. Hand-painted on the wall in bright colors and a Grandma Moses style is a series of pictures and captions. A picture of caged birds has a hand pointing to a variety of bugs and reads, "Caged birds means more insects." A snake is shown cut in two with a machete and the picture says, "More rats!" A final painting is of a clear-cut forest and then a child-like array of animals and birds on their backs with their feet in the air. A note says, "Destroy the forests and lose all the animals." In a similar spirit, a cardboard sign reads: "To be man is to have a son. To be a man is to write a book. To be a man is to plant a tree!" The old macho ways are still present of course, but the new conservation attitude is refreshing.

Refreshing is the word for Costa Rica. This amazing country may be the little Dutch boy with his finger in the dike holding back the flood of overdevelopment.

## 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.

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# CALENDAR

## Upcoming Special Trips

**WEEKEND, JUNE 30-JULY 1 — First Annual L.A.A.S. Campout/Picnic.** At press time we still don't know whether it will be at **Table Mountain** in the San Gabriels. Check the tape for confirmed location and directions.

**WEEKEND, JULY 7-8 — Sequoia National Park: SATURDAY — Mineral King Area with George San Miguel and SUNDAY — Giant Forest Area with Larry Norris.** See beautiful areas, some wildflowers, and lovely vistas while looking for Pileated Woodpecker, Winter Wren, Dipper and other nesting mountain birds. Be prepared to drive over curvy high mountain roads, particularly for Mineral King area. Suggest camping or motels in the Three Rivers area for close access to meeting areas. Maximum participants: 20; \$15 per person.

**FRIDAY, JULY 20 — Deadline** for September Western Tanager material to Editor Dexter Kelly, c/o Audubon House.

**WEEKEND, JULY 28-29, Tulare Lake Basin, Creighton Ranch and Sequoia National Forest with Rob Hanson and Bob Barnes. SATURDAY EVENING Natural History Program by John Lindsay, "The Way It Was."** One day we'll search for landbirds such as Blue Grosbeak, Mountain Plover, Short-Eared Owl and Vesper Sparrow, then onto the Tulare Lake Basin (where we have been granted special access permission) to see hundreds and thousands of breeding White Pelicans, Snowy and Great Egrets, Eared and both W. Grebes, Wilson's Phalaropes, Black-crowned Night Herons and smaller quantities of stilts, avocets and even a possible Little Blue Heron. Depending on timing and bird distribution, we may go on to the Kern Wildlife Refuge. The other day will be spent in the Jack Flat area of Sequoia looking for Pileated Woodpecker, Townsend's Solitaire, Warblers, Hutton's Vireo and other mountain birds. Suggest camping at Creighton Ranch or moteling at Porterville. Maximum participants: 30; \$20 per person.

**SUNDAY, JULY 29 — Whittier Narrows Reg. Park.** Meet **David White** for his monthly walk through uniquely varied habitat, looking for orioles, grosbeaks and resident birds. Meet at 8 a.m. at the Nature Center, 1000 Durfee Ave., So. El Monte, near crossing of freeways 10 and 60.

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 5 — Santa Cruz Island Nature Conservancy Preserve.** This natural history trip will be led by a Nature Conservancy naturalist familiar with birds. Departure from the Ventura Marina is at 8 a.m. with a 6 p.m. return. You should be in good physical condition—able to move from a skiff to a rocky shore and manage a fairly strenuous 1½ mile hike. Wear good hiking shoes and dress in layers as it is usually quite cold at sea. The island will be warmer and you may wish to swim during the 3½ to 4 hours ashore. In addition to bathing suit or shorts, bring suntan lotion and hat. Take your own food and water. There are no

facilities on the island. Island Packers (805-642-1393) will handle reservations and finances. Maximum 35 participants; \$28 for Nature Conservancy members, \$33 for non-members. Go north on Fwy 101 beyond Oxnard taking the Victoria Ave. exit. Go left under the freeway approximately 1 mile to Olivas Park Dr. and go right; continue through intersection which becomes Spinnaker Dr. to 1867 (follow signs to Channel Island National Park Headquarters.)

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 11 — Ballona Wetlands. Bob Shanman** (545-2867 after 6 p.m.) will lead this morning's walk in this critical area. We'll be looking particularly for shorebird migrants. Take Marina Fwy (90) west to Culver Blvd; turn left to Pacific Ave., then right to bridge at end. Meet at 8 a.m. (\$3 parking fee)

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 18 - Shorebird Field Study with Jon Dunn.** We will carefully study plumage to differentiate juveniles from adults and various differences in peeps and other shorebirds. The approach will be gradual and beginners are encouraged. We'll spend lots of time looking at individual birds. Expect to be quizzed. Do wear shorts and expect to get wet and muddy. Location will depend on water levels for maximum number of shorebirds. The day is meant to be fun as well as instructive. Maximum participants — 20; \$15 per person.

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 19 — Condor search at Mt. Pinos.** Join **Jean Brandt** for her annual outing at 8 a.m. in the large round parking lot at Iris Meadows. Take Hwy 5 north through Gorman, exiting at Frazier Park and continuing on this highway, bearing left at Mil Portrero junction to Iris Meadows. As the dirt road to the top of Mt. Pinos is poor, be prepared to walk up and backpack your food and water. Those wishing to carpool should meet across the street from Denny's at the Roxford exit of Hwy 5 at the north edge of the valley. Be prepared to make arrangements and leave this point by 6:30 a.m.

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 25 — Whittier Narrows Regional Park** See July 29 above.

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 26 — Poorwill and Western Screech Owl Search with Jacob Szabo** on private property in the Santa Monica Mountains. This is a reservation trip, although there is no charge. Location and directions will be furnished to those signing up for the trip. Reservation procedure is the same for other such trips, except for the absence of a fee.

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

## Pelagic Trips

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 12 — Shearwater and store petrel trip. Santa Barbara Island and out to sea.** Depart 6:00 a.m., return 6:00 p.m. Price is \$22 per person. NO discount for 2. **Leaders: Larry Norris and Louis Bevier.**

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23 — Red-billed Tropic-Bird Trip. San Clemente Island.** Depart 5:30 a.m., return 6:00 p.m. Price is \$25 per person. NO discount for two. **Leaders: Louis Bevier and Richard Webster.**

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14 — Storm-Petrel Trip. Santa Barbara Island and Out to Sea.** Price is \$22 per person. NO discount for 2. **Leaders: Phil Sayre and Louis Bevier.**

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. There is no galley on board, so bring lunch and fluids.

**CARPOOLING:** As conservationists, let's try to reduce gas consumption and air pollution whenever possible. In sharing costs, remember that a typical car journey costs 20¢ a mile.

### Policy for Paid Reservations

Reservation priority will be given to those first meeting the following requirements: Include: (1) Event desired; (2) Check to LAAS for exact amount per event; (3) Names of people in your party; (4) Phone numbers —(a) usual and (b) evening before event in case of emergency cancellation; (5) self-addressed, stamped envelope, for confirmation and associated event information. Send to:

Reservations Chairman, Ruth Lohr, LAAS  
7377 Santa Monica Blvd., L.A. 90046.

If there is insufficient response, the event will be cancelled two weeks before the scheduled date and you will be notified; otherwise no refunds during the last two weeks unless there is a paid replacement.

## Shearwater Trips

Sat. July 28	Monterey Seavalle & Ascension Canyon Chandik/tba	\$27
Sat. Aug. 4	Cordell Banks leader tba	\$37
Sat. Aug. 11	Monterey Seavalle & Ascension Canyon Allison/Baldrige	\$27

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.