WESTERN TANAGER

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Plant Communities and Bird Habitats in Southern California

PART II: THE CHAPARRAL

by Eugene N. Anderson, Jr.

Photos by Herb Clarke

Most of California is covered by one or another sort of bush or shrub vegetation. If the brush is at all thick, it is widely and rather loosely referred to as "chaparral" — a Spanish loan-word used all over the Southwest. My dictionary traces it back to Basque *tsapar,* "scrub oak," plus the Spanish ending *-al* meaning "place" or "vegetation type."

California botanists restrict the term to the dense, woody shrub communities of the non-desert parts of the state. In earlier generations, chaparral (like Gaul) was divided into three parts: "hard chaparral," "soft chaparral" and "mountain chaparral." Since Philip A. Munz' classic *A California Flora* appeared in 1959, with its classification of the vegetation communities of the state, only the first of the three has been deemed worthy of the distinguished appellation. "Soft chaparral" became "Coastal Sage Scrub"; "mountain chaparral" ceased to be regarded as a community, the formation being mentioned only as brushfields within coniferous forest communities. Several other scrub communities were recognized, mostly in the deserts.

So restricted, chaparral is a world of tough, woody bushes ranging from three to twenty or more feet tall — usually about six feet. By far the commonest and most widespread species is chamise *(Adenostoma fasciculatum),* a member of the rose family, rather similar to (and related to) spiraea. No other single species approaches chamise in abundance, width of range, and character as typical of the chaparral habitat; the plant practically defines the type, for most of the state.

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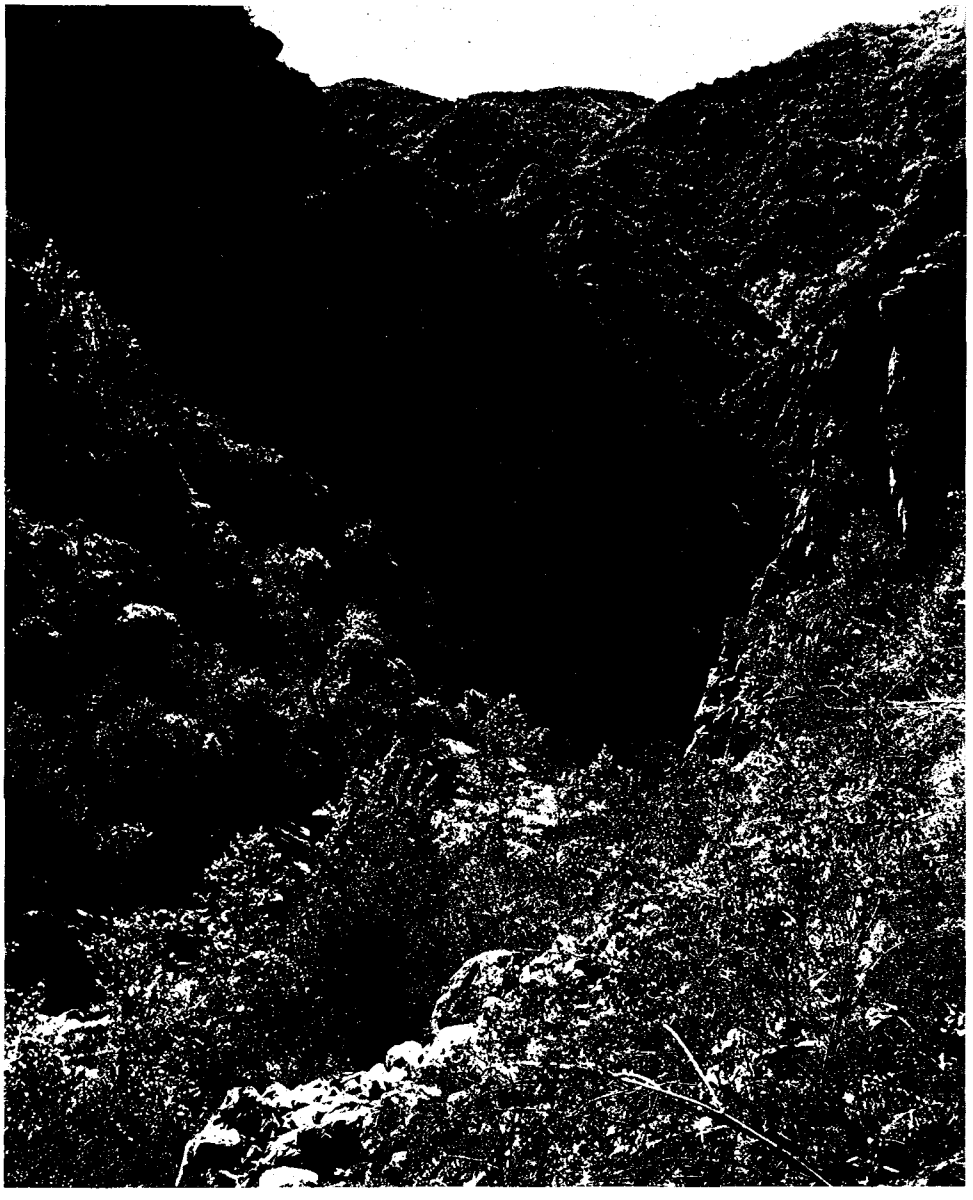
Chaparral — Malibu Canyon



However, three other genera — each with several species — are typical. *Ceanothus,* the mountain lilacs (including many species with various common names), are widely dominant. Dozens of species of the genus occur in chaparral and other California plant communities. The species mostly sort naturally into two groups: rather tall and lush ones that stump-sprout after fires and tend to have blue flowers (subgenus *Ceanothus*) and tough, wiry ones that do not sprout back but grow abundantly from fire-stimulated seeds, and usually have white flowers (subgenus *Cerastes*). *Arctostaphylos,* the manzanita genus, is less dominant but widespread; many species occur. Indeed, mountain lilacs and manzanitas find their center of diversity in the mountains and hills of California and Mexico. Finally, the scrub oaks that give chaparral its name are important and abundant; by far the most typical and widespread is the California scrub oak *(Quercus dumosa).*

No other community recognized by Munz is so heterogeneous as the chaparral. If Munz had split the chaparral community as finely as he split the evergreen forests, we would be talking about dozens of communities instead of one. There are chaparral that are almost pure chamise; others that are almost pure mountain lilac of one species or another. More common are mixtures. Some of the mixtures get quite incredibly complex. A typical foothill slope in the lower San Gabriel or San Bernardino Mountains may have chamise, a couple of mountain lilacs, a manzanita species or two, a few oaks, California laurel, silktassel bush, wild buckwheat, true sages, sagebrush, chaparral pea, tree-poppy, toyon, wild walnut, bigleaf maple and sycamore (at shady springs), a sumac or two, and much else. Cool shady slopes with thick soil will be dominated by oak, laurel, toyon and the larger ceanothus species; ridgetops by chamise and buckwheat; hot south-facing slopes by chamise, sage, sumac, buckbrush (the wiry, white-flowering ceanothus types) and grasses. Rock outcrops have their own distinctive plants, such as monkeyflower and golden yarrow; stream sides may have willow and cottonwood, as well as ferns and small plants.

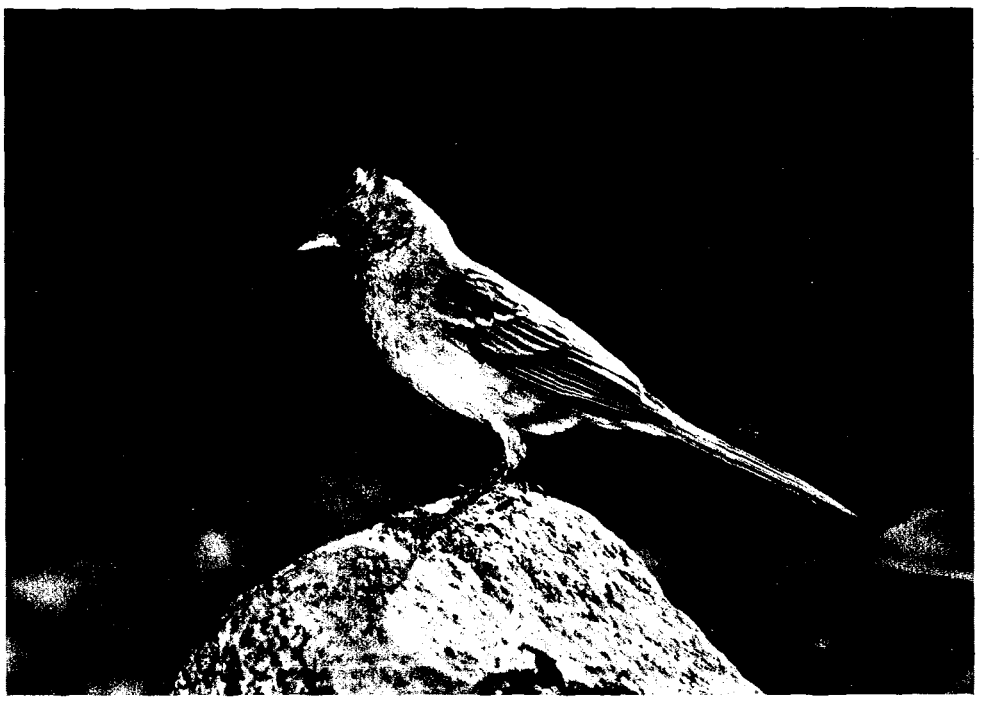
Chaparral is a habitat created and maintained by fire. It burns on a cycle of perhaps 25 or 30 years under normal conditions. Lightning, or even spontaneous combustion in woodrat nests, caused fires long before humans came on the scene. The Indians burned regularly, and modern Californians set fires — but also suppress fires. My friend and colleague Richard Minnich has done much reseach on chaparral fires, and thinks fire suppression is a bad idea. No one can prevent chaparral fires forever. What fire suppression does do is (1) keep the chaparral from burning until a huge amount of dead branch and leaf litter accumulates; and (2) guarantee that the fire will be in the hottest, windiest weather. (Any fires in better weather are put out — but fires that start in a Santa Ana wind get out of control.) Thus fire suppression's only real effect is to make sure that any big fire becomes an absolute holocaust, massively endangering life and property. Early-day fires more often burned during the cool, foggy days of early summer. They came as soon as the vegetation was mature enough to carry a good burn. This created a mosaic. Regrowing chaparral has little fuel and/or tends to be moist and lush, not carrying fire well. Older patches would burn. The chaparral plants all show adaptations to fire — either stump-sprouting from huge root crowns or bearing seeds and fruits that open only after burning or heat stress. The first year after a chaparral burn, the hill slopes are covered with flowers; many of these are obligatory fire-followers. It was instructive to me to see the fire-poppy *(Papaver californicum)* blooming after a fire in Will Rogers State Park a few years ago; the area had not burned in about fifty years, and the poppy seeds must have been waiting in the soil all that time.

A large number of ecologists now feel that controlled burning is necessary to prevent catastrophic wildfires and maintain the health of the chaparral. An even larger number — I hope and trust — oppose the California custom of seeding Italian ryegrass on recent burns. This pestiferous introduction is sown in vain hopes of controlling erosion. Its effect on soil wash is debatable at best. But there is no question that it crowds out the exquisite and diverse wildflowers that follow burns, and that it grows very thick, rank and dry, allowing fires to spread much earlier than they would in the natural vegetation. Other introduced weedy plants, such as cheatgrasses and mustard, also have this effect. Thus the chaparral now often burns on a short cycle of years, with disasterous effects on the larger bushes and on wildlife. The wildlife, like the brush itself, is adapted to regular burning on a rather long cycle. Just as the flowers are often fire-followers, there are birds that follow burns. Thus, for instance, the Lazuli Bunting invades burns a year or so after the fire, and breeds in colonies or loose aggregations till the brush is well grown again — at which time the birds move on. They appear to require tall perches emerging above low vegetation, and find a perfect situation when old burned strubs stick out above new growth.

As far as birders are concerned, chaparral lacks the excitement of desert oases or coastal lagoons, but it is a rich and delightful habitat. The birds of the chaparral are a rather uniform set — common, widely distributed, predictable — but there are lots and lots of them, and many of them surprisingly litle known. This is because of the incredible density of chaparral — a thorny, impenetrable habitat where loose soil, steep slopes, tough thick brush, poison oak and rattlesnakes discourage even the bravest from going "off trail." Many chaparral birds live their lives below the canopy, very safe indeed from the birders' prying eyes.

However, that doesn't mean they are hard to find. The true chaparral birder will become a master of calls and songs, and do well over 90% of birding by ear. Chaparral birds are very vocal — they have to be; they couldn't keep track of each other by sight, any more than you could. They call primarily in the cool of the day, but a dawn start

Black-chinned Sparrow



will give you access to a wonderful world of rich, varied, often lovely vocalizations. Such birds as the California Thrasher and Canyon Wren have few rivals as songsters. The strange staccato songs of the Wrentit are not exactly "music" to a human, but they are so characteristic of the California hill country that they become powerfully evocative and deeply moving to a veteran birder of the habitat. The Bewick's Wren — probably second only to the Wrentit in numbers, perhaps even ahead of it — has so many different songs that even experienced ear-birders are fooled occasionally by some wildly new variant. Once you have learned all the songs of the typical chaparral birds, you can go on to call-notes, and then for the real acid test you can try to learn the call-notes of the migrants that descend on the chaparral in fall and spring. Warbler call-notes in particular are distinctive and usually diagnostic of species, but each species has several inflections of note, and the subtleties are incredibly hard to keep straight from one year to the next. For instance, try to keep the lighter versions of the MacGillivray's note separate from the more emphatic type of the Orange-crown's usually soft call.

There are many chaparral species whose presence would go almost undetected were it not for call and song. The Rufous-crowned Sparrow, for instance, lives such a humble and obscure life that a sharp-eared and sharp-eyed birder will pick up at least ten by ear for every one seen. (I prefer to use my ears and tend to look less than I should, and for me the ratio is more like a hundred to one.)

The common birds of the chaparral, in addition to those already mentioned, include the Red-tailed Hawk, California Quail, Anna's Hummingbird, Nuttall's Woodpecker (in taller oaks), Ash-throated Flycatcher, Raven, Scrub Jay, Bushtit, Hutton's Vireo (taller oaks again), Brown and Rufous-sided Towhees, House Finch, Lesser and Lawrence's Goldfinches, Sage and Black-chinned Sparrows, and — locally — many others. Orange-crowned Warblers abound in moister chaparral, Roadrunners frequent open places, Violet-green Swallows and White-throated Swifts forage above from nests in cliff holes. The Black-chinned Sparrow is generaly confined to the interior, and seems to require conditions in whch tall emergent plants (such as yucca stalks, or burned snags) project over a low mosaic with some bare ground. (Farther north, the Black-chin lives in coastal sage scrub near the coast.) The Anna's Hummingbird has a more or less symbiotic relationship with local gooseberry and currant species; they flower in winter when the hummingbird nests, and time their flowering to be available at the right time in its life-cycle. In return for providing nectar, they get pollinated by the bird.

Few birds are genuinely endemic to the California chaparral. The Wren tit and California Thrasher almost make it, but they extend into other dense-brush habitats. The Lawrence's Goldfinch is confined to southern California and frequents "mosaic" habitats, where trees, brush and grass come together. The really rare and exciting bird of the Southern California chaparral is the California Black-tailed Gnatcatcher. This tiny bird was long recognized as a distinct species, but was "lumped" a few decades ago with the desert species, the Black-tailed Gnatcatcher. There was little evidence for this lumping and plenty against; the birds have totally different habitats, quite different notes and recognizably different plumage. Recent research strongly suggests the California is a distinct species after all. It is more a "soft chaparral" — i.e. Coastal Sage Scrub — species than a true chaparral bird; it lives in areas where the sage scrub is dense, lush and diverse, and appears to be confined to a smaller interior area from eastern Los Angeles County south to Mexico. Virtually the entire known populaton (perhaps as small as 500 birds) is in western Riverside, southern Orange and northern and central San Diego counties.

In winter and migration, the chaparral plays host to a vast range of birds. Hermit Thrushes, Fox and other Sparrows, Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Yellow-rumped Warblers abound throughout the winter. Migrant waves in late April and in May can be impressive — occasionally as dramatic as those of the northeastern United States. Real rarities are not easily found, but can turn up, and searching for them in the "elfin forest" is more aestheticaly satisfying than following up staked-out oddities in the Long Beach Recreation Park! But the serious birder may be even more interested in cracking the mysteries of ecology and behavior of chaparral-haunting populations of the commoner birds. There is a great deal still to be learned about the lifeways of even the commonest, and such retiring species as the Black-chinned and Rufous-crowned Sparrows are even more enigmatic.

Chaparral extends from extreme south-central Oregon throughout the interior foothills of north and central California, and both coastal and interior hills of the south. It continues through northwest Baja California, and in isolated colonies on moister mountaintops as far as the center of that peninsula. One or two species make it to the Cape. In the Los Angeles area, chaparral completely covers the Santa Monica Mountains and most of the Santa Anas, as well as the lower but steep hill ranges and almost the entire lower-slope portions of the higher mountains, especially the San Gabriels. You can get acquainted with chaparral in any hilly area, but my long-standing favorite urban chaparral environment is in the area included in or neighboring Will Rogers and Topanga State Parks. From Will Rogers Park on Sunset Boulevard in Pacific Palisades, you can hike as far as you want into the hills

Ash-throated Flycatcher

— eventually coming out at Topanga, if you are very hardy indeed. Topanga Canyon is richer in birds and more diverse, with oak forest, oak savanna, streamside woodlands of various types, rock cliffs and many other habitats — a southern California microcosm. The whole area is cooler and moister than the interior hills, and thus pleasanter for humans and also richer in birdlife and other wildlife. (Even such normally montane creatures as the California Mountain Kingsnake turn up in damp canyons.)

For a look at the interior chaparral, a particularly varied and interesting drive is the one up City Creek Canyon from Highland to Running Springs, in the San Bernardino Mountains (State Highway 330). For some reason that particular area is incredibly diverse botanically; it is an excellent place to see such plants as knobcone pine, chaparral pea, California redbud and Coulter pine — to say nothing of a Mediterranean fig tree growing perfectly wild at a little spring above the road half way up. I have no idea how it got there; perhaps someone dropped a bit of lunch with a fig seed in it, but more likely a sird provided the seed, packaged in fertilizer! The bird life is diverse in response to the botanical variety on City Creek, and the drive into the mountains provides a cross-section of California's plant communities.

Chaparral and coastal sage scrub must be the most underappreciated habitats in southern California. Most people simply dismiss

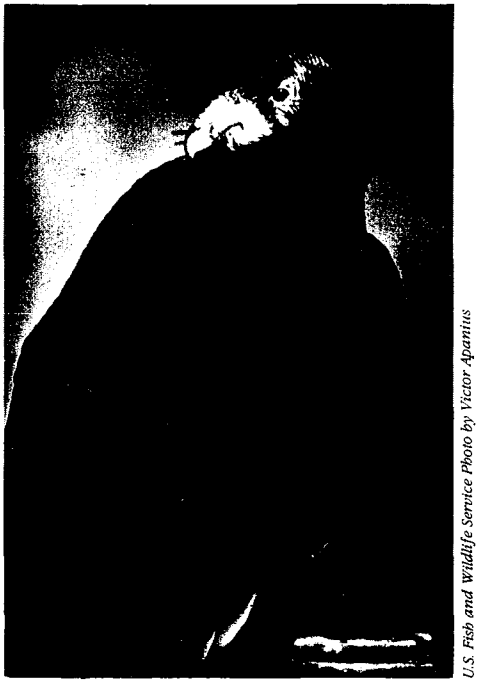
them as "just brush," and never take the trouble to find out about the intricate, ever-changing, soft beauty of the scrublands. The incredible variety of plant species (many of them rare and local), the strange lives of the vocal but oft-invisible birds, the striking geology, and the diversity of ecological subtypes make the chaparral-sage scrub world one of the most interesting in North America to the open-minded naturalist or ecologist. The loveliness of the countryside usually requires an eye attuned to subtle shadings and low-key, understated beauty for full appreciation; but the floral displays of spring can be truly spectacular. The world can have few sights lovelier than City Creek Grade on a cool clear day in May, with the whole mountain slopes covered in flowers and the visibility extending to Palomar and the Cuyamaca ranges. Recent burns, especially in the Santa Monica Mountains, can become floral displays so fantastic and spectacular that the world can hardly equal them. The burns of the early 1980's were followed by wet winters, and produced such sights as hundreds of acres of scarlet larkspur —great spikes six and eight feet high, covered with incandescent bloom — rising above lilies, gentians, poppies, phlox relatives of many sorts, and dozens of other species. Other slopes were covered with blue phacelias, white forget-me-nots and much more.

Much chaparral is protected in state parks and national forests, but some of the finest and most unique areas are unprotected. Many of the best are included in the proposed Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area — voted into existence but denied funds by the Reagan administration. The project was a pet hate of James Watt, former Secretary of the Interior, who viewed it as more a city park than a national scenic resource. In fact it is an area of such ecological distinctiveness and scientific interest that it deserves preservation on that ground alone — to say nothing of the value of a major scenic area at the very edge of a huge city. I believe the area has the distiction of being the only genuine wilderness actually included *within* a multi-million-person metropolitan area.

Yet it is only the most salient of several conservation proposals that should have high priority. Others include the Puente Hills, with their unique walnut-oak-toyon woodlands, a last hope for open space in the rapidly urbanizing eastern part of Los Angeles County; Temecula Canyon, a little-known but spectacular gorge of the Santa Margarita River in the southern Santa Ana Mountains; the strange redshank-chaparral country around the Santa Rosa Mountains; the coastal terraces of San Diego County, with rare endemic plants on the bluffs and at the vernal pools; and on and on... All are threatened by urbanization. There is urgent need for more awareness of these areas, and above all for more appreciation of their beauty and ecological uniqueness. We tend to go thousands of miles to see the sights, forgetting or not realizing that we have equally beautiful and more ecologically distinctive scenery here at home. The Nature Conservancy has finally done what every conservation organizatin should do: set priorities, such that the most limited, threatened and scientifically important areas are saved first. The University of California has followed suit, and save several scientifically important chaparral areas for research. This new attention to priorities in land-saving seems to me to be the great hope for the chaparral, and for many other habitats threatened by urbanization and pollution.

A Good Day at the Sign Part II

by Eric V. Johnson



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Photo by Victor Apanius

Back in 1981 we had this place pretty much to ourselves. A few locals stopped by to ask us what we were looking for, and an occasional birder in transit between Mount Pinos and the LeConte's Thrasher joined us for a while, but it was pretty lonely work. How things have changed! The birders' grapevine has to be one of the most efficient forms of cross-country communication ever invented. I guess I am partly to blame. In August, 1981, I brought a group down here after the "Condor Watch and Tequila Bust," a yearly celebration of the Condor held at Mount Pinos. As luck would have it, we got some extremely close encounters, and the word spread from there. We wonder what it will be like in 1984, when thousands of people come to California to view the Olympics.

No one could have designed a better, more convenient place to look for and photograph condors, not if they had actually planned for it. Our perch is against a ridge that lies between a major foraging area and the mountains to the south which most condors call home. Deep canyons extend northward from the ridge out into the rangelands, and the road winds along the north side of that ridge, skirting the heads of the canyons. Condors leaving the grasslands tend to travel the canyons, then soar up on deflection currents along the edge of the ridge. The prevailing northwest wind makes this the most energy-efficient route, and it puts the birds right over the road. We now know the travel routes the condors follow so well that, by driving up or down the road a short distance, we can usually intercept and photograph them as they leave the area. Many have full crops, so they are a bit slow in gaining altitude. I suppose some people worry that we might be disturbing the birds, but we doubt that very much. They are there this year as they have been for the past two. We haven't scared them off. If you want to be convinced, stay a few days with us at the sign and watch a condor or three come 100 feet over our heads, checking us out. They do not have to do that; there are alternate routes open to them for leaving the area. They actually seem curious.

* * *

Someone calls our attention to a bird far out over Juniper Knoll, and when we check it out, it proves to be another condor. As it soars up counterclockwise I try to remember if I've ever seen one soar clockwise. The Coriolis effect in our hemisphere makes rising air circle against the clock; it makes sense that condors should comply with that.

When the bird sets out on a glide, it is difficult to tell whether it is going away or coming on. Perspective plays tricks with you, and telescopes only give a two-dimensional view. No one sees head color, so the consensus is that the bird is going away, until Gayle points out that the image is getting bigger. It's coming on, probably a juvenile since we do not see an orange head. By the time it is a mile away there is no question where it is going, and we even know who it is. As it stops to soar to gain altitude, it reveals large gaps near the wrists on both wings. This is a yearling from the Santa Barbara pair with the dubious appellation of "Bosley." We didn't name it; Jan Hamber's daughter did. Jan watches the Santa Barbara pair, has for years. When Bos was a nestling last year, her daughter hung that name on it. The zoos and the Condor Research Center try to keep condors' names historical, referring to special condor places or harking back to the Native American heritage, but "Bosley" has stuck. A kind of homely name, but then it's kind of a homely bird.

Reaching the top of its soar, Bos heads out on a glide directed slightly to our right. We know the flight patterns of this family all too well, and Tracy and I chime together, "Time to chase."

She grabs the camera, and we both pile into the truck. It faces the wrong way, as usual. With a prayer for no traffic, I turn around and head down the road to the east, confident that the bird will stop to soar again in it's usual place. A half-mile from the sign, I pull over at a turnout. Tracy has been watching the bird, and it is nearly upon us, low. We pile out as Bosley begins soaring for altitude above the hill across the road. I reach for the camera, but Tracy already has it. She is sitting on the dirt, her back braced against a tire, camera pointed. "That's what she's here for," I decide, and proceed to enjoy the bird. Now it is going away from us, now it banks, swings around, comes at us with all its fingered primaries extended. "Now!" my mind says, and I hear the camera shutter click. "Good girl — timing is right on."

Each time it presents itself in a "full spread" position, the shutter clicks decisively. Must be half-frame, maybe better. Four, five times it poses, and the shutter records each opportunity. Then it sets its wings and is gone over the road, heading back toward its birthplace, its cradle in the mountains. We climb back into the truck and return to the sign feeling very self-satisfied.

Why, you may ask, do we bother wasting film on a bird whose identity we know? Because we are trying to document molt sequences and rates of feather loss and replacement. Condors are strange. They do not necessarily molt symmetrically, as most small birds do. We need more information on molt sequence, both for juveniles and for adults, if we are to be able to keep track of birds from year to year, place to place. The irregularity of molt in these giants is the very reason we can distinguish individuals, but there does seem to be a pattern, however peculiar. Time will tell. For now, we need data, and Bosley has cooperated nicely.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Photo by Noel Snyder

Back at the sign, we open the notebook to "Film Exposure Sheets." A paper headed "FS 12" confronts us. The "FS" indicates that we used the Forest Service camera, the "12", the twelfth roll of film exposed in that camera this year. We record the date, the time, the location, the photographer, the identity of the bird, the number of frames taken. We started at 7, and the counter on the camera now indicates that the next frame to be shot will be number 15. Did Tracy really take eight pictures? It didn't seem like that many, but that's the beauty of today's cameras. They can count (and do a lot of other things) when you are too busy to pay attention. Somewhere in those eight pictures there should be at least one that shows us exactly what we need to see. People ask why we don't use a camera with an automatic winder, and my reply is this: condors in a soar generally give only one ideal pose per circle, and an automatic winder would encourage us to waste film. I want every photographer to take his or her pictures as if it were going to be the last or only opportunity. For our work, an autowinder would be a needless extravagance. This is a bootstrap operation; we make do with the minimum necessary to get the job done.

It is now 12:42, and time for lunch. Aside from a few Red-tails and Ravens, the skies are empty. The noon-day meal varies as much as my students do. It can be anything from crackers and beer (my professed staple) to bagels and cream cheese, to avocado, tomato, lettuce, and mayonnaise sandwiches. If Noel were here, he'd accept chocolate in any form, and smoked cheddar cheese if you offered it. Tom prefers fresh fruit and (you guessed it) peanut butter. Tracy likes apple and peanut butter, Gayle sides with me. When the occasion warrants it, Jim brings up steaks from a cow raised on the ranch and barbeques for us right here at the sign. He claims grass-fed beef is best, and we tend to agree. Who are we to argue with an expert?

While we feed our faces, Jack Ingram arrives. I haven't seen him in over a month; he has a real-life job that keeps him busy. Some of us are lucky enough to be living here in the twilight zone, this never-never land, this timeless land of condors. Jack lives in that people-populated land to the south, Los Angeles. He'd rather not admit it. Anyway, he's not a native. Jack's a Britisher, who, despite 10 years of Americanization, stills holds onto a delightful British accent (or is it we who have the accent?) I think of Jack as a protegé, even though I'm not really responsible for him. Jack's life and mine came together about a quarter-mile from here in February of 1981. I was out checking on condor activity by myself, and I saw a car parked up the road with an obvious birder in attendance. I introduced myself, and we watched for condors together the rest of the day. Jack is an excellent observer. An acoustic technician who once worked for a rock band, he discovered condors on his own.

He found not only my favorite place, but he had homed in on a nest site as well. Six months later I introduced him to Noel on the summit of Mount Pinos, and subsequently Noel had him hired on the condor project as a nest-watcher for the following spring. Jack is a superb photographer; he has produced a disproportionate number of useable photographs of condors. This spring he out-did himself by finding a nest site the Condor Research Center knew had to be there, but could not locate. As his reward, he got to name the chick — "Cuyama."

Jack is as cheerful as ever. He's got a day off from Universal Studios, where he works now, and is devoting his off-time to the birds. We exchange "Good to see you's", and he immediately hauls out a set of newly-processed slides. His pictures are excellent, prize-winners all. He is especially proud of an adult perched near a nest site; you can count the feathers. We could use more volunteers like Jack. After the photo session, in which we also show off our latest attempts, Jack decides to move up the road to Apache Potrero, one of his favorite spots. It must have his name on it; no one else gets pictures from there, but he has great luck.

The 1:30 telemetry shows AC2 still far out beyond Oak Knoll, but we get nothing from IC1. He may be down in a canyon feeding, or passing the mid-day lull perched in a tree on the side of a hill. There are limitations to line-of-site transmitters. The next few hours are downright dull for us. Very few raptors are up, just an occasional eagle or red-tail, and the telemetry is routine. Several visitors leave, and no new ones show up.

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A certain urgency underlies all of our work; the fate of the condor really hangs in the balance right now, because there are so few birds with which to work. Considering the fact that there are only four reproducing pairs in the wild, the genetic diversity of new generations is going to be limited. At least all four pairs are now represented by birds in captivity. A single gunshot could wipe out a productive pair forever, the genes of the survivor short-circuited for want of a mate. I cannot understand the vocal minority who still call for long-term studies on 1080 poison and habitat degradation before we start manipulating the birds. How much time do they think we've got? These birds could be functionally extinct in less than a decade. No one wants to put condors in cages just to have them in cages. We need to augment the natural productivity, both through captive-breeding and double- or triple-clutching of wild pairs. We know from experience with Andean condors that captive production can work, and we know now that California condors can double- or even triple-clutch. Look at this year. From four reproductive pairs, how many offspring could we reasonably expect to fledge in one season? Since condors are thought to normally lay an egg every other year if they are successful in rearing the chick, then only two or three pairs should even have tried this year. Of those, only one or two could be expected to fledge a chick successfully. But what do we have? From four pairs we have six live, healthy chicks. Thanks to manipulation, the expected productivity has been at least tripled. Yes, five of the six are in captivity to form the core of a captive-breeding population. The sixth is, at this writing, still in the wild, but there are those of us who wish he'd been taken too. Why? Because he hatched from the third egg laid, and will not fledge until December. Since he will be so late, it is unlikely that his parents will attempt to nest next year, because they will still be caring for him. And that female laid three eggs this year! In the opinion of many of us, to leave a chick in the wild this year means we lose up to

Photo by Eric Johnson

three potential condors next season. We need all the condors we can get! It is unlikely, from a population biologist's point of view, that the loss of one year-class in such a long-lived bird will have a significant affect on the future. And we have been losing condors at an uncomfortable rate. Of the two two-year-olds that should be out there, only one survives. The other was last photographed on August 7, 1982, from the summit of Mount Pinos, and it has not been seen since. Furthermore, the Condor Research Center knows of two pairs which have lost a member in the past few years. One individual found a new mate, but the two have been unproductive since 1979; they haven't yet figured out how to copulate. Are they inexperienced, or are they perhaps of the same sex? We don't know. The other who lost her mate has been alone since March of 1982. She has yet to find a replacement, and there can't be a whole lot to choose from. The thought of losing another pair or two is chilling, to say the least, but I suppose it is bound to happen sooner or later. The birds aren't immortal. Let's hope we have a good producing captive stock by the time that happens. In the future, there should be enough birds to release to keep up the numbers in the wild and keep the year-classes well represented. That should give us breathing room to get a handle on the mortality factors. We still don't really know what they are.

* * *

At 4:10 Gayle picks up two condors soaring high against the smog to the right of Scar. A telemetry check reveals that neither is a radioed bird. Intense viewing through the 'scope tells us that both are probably adults. We cannot get head color, but when they bank away and show us their backs, we pick out strong wing bars on each one. The ends of the greater upper secondary coverts are broadly tipped with white in adults; juveniles show no bars, or indistinct ones. Dick Smith, a Santa Barbara naturalist who spent a lot of time viewing condors in the San Rafael Wilderness, calls the bars "sergeant's stripes." Both of these birds are first-class.

When they reach the top of their soar, they set out directly toward us on a glide. We see brilliant orange heads in the 'scope. The images grow at a remarkable rate — these guys are hauling! As they approach they seem to be heading to our right and dropping; by the time we realize we should have driven down the road, it is too late to intercept them. But wait — about a half-mile to our east they catch rising air, circle up for three turns, then head straight for us. They travel on the deflection current our ridge provides, and as they approach they are also descending. We grab cameras, check everything, get ready. A female voice behind us says it all: "Oh, my God!"

The birds are about 75 feet up, but their immense size makes them seem a lot closer. Their heads are angled down; we can see them looking at us, checking things out as they swing heads from side to side. We must be funny-looking cattle to them. We can imagine them asking, "Anybody dead? Anyone giving birth down there?"

As if they realize why we are here and want to cooperate, they soar a time or two directly over us. Cameras click wildly. Frame-fillers, these, Then, as suddenly as they arrived, they leave on a flat glide east. Gayle expresses all our feelings with a cowgirl's "Yee-haw!" The bird's departing profiles are characteristic only of condors: wings bowed down, then up at the tips, bodies slung beneath these airfoils like high-winged aircraft. From what I can tell, they are going to ride the ridge crest right over Jack. I hope he's still there.

We do our paper work on the frames exposed (both cameras were going this time) then resume scanning. We missed the

4:30 telemetry check in favor of photographing birds, but that's o.k. John understands. The five die-hards who have stayed most of the day now take their leave, but not before thanking us for help in identifying the birds and for providing current information on the recovery program. They even thank us for the birds, as if we had something to do with the close approach. And so, at 4:50, we are back to just the four of us, Gayle, Tracy, Tom and me. It's been kind of a hectic day, and we welcome the peace that descends.

* * *

I have been truly impressed by the people who come to watch condors with us. For the most part they are extremely intelligent, thoughtful folk who are sincerely concerned with the plight of the birds. Most are already familiar with the recovery program, and just ask to be updated on recent developments. How many are radioed now? How many are in captivity? Yes, there are a few "listers" who see a speck, take our word that it is a condor, check it off their life lists, and depart for other birds, other places. But they are a minority; there's not much we can do for them. Most spend hours, some even days, watching, photographing, and eventually even helping us. Last year Rich, from Juneau, Alaska, came to spend a day, fell in love with the area and the birds, became fascinated with our work, and stayed nearly a week. He camped with us, ate with us, sang to my guitar around our campfire in the evenings, and left, we like to think, at peace and enriched. This year Doug, an electronics technician from Santa Barbara, came to our campground to get away from the city for a few days, and left a condor enthusiast. He's come back at least twice, and he's getting very good at condor identification. He too has become a convert, a believer. And then there's Curt. He came on Labor Day weekend in 1981, a family man with his little dog, left alone while his wife and children visited relatives in Ohio. He stayed three days, then we put him in touch with birders on the coast, so he spent a few days there as well. Last year he showed up again, with his dog and, this time, his son as well. This year he brought his son and wife too, and even provided a large tarpaulin which provided shade for ten or more people on one of our busiest weekends. Curt's Labor Day visit is now a tradition, and we really enjoyed meeting his family. I have a hard time trying to decide which is the best part of our work, the birds or the people. We enjoy them all.

* * *

The 5 o'clock telemetry check is silent as to the whereabouts of IC1, but locates AC2 in the vicinity of Oak Knoll. When we check with the 'scope, we find three condors soaring over its summit. They are almost five miles away, but still leave no doubt as to their species. If nothing else works, simple size does it. No eagle could look that large at this distance. Jack's vehicle approaches from the east, and I go over to meet him. "Did they come over you?"

"Oh, beautiful. Right over my head! And you?"

"Same here. An excellent show."

"Did you see the nicks in the primaries? About 5 and 8?"

"No, we were too busy photographing."

"You know who that is don't you? The sanctuary female." Jack is very familiar with all the breeding birds from his time spent back at the nest sites.

"Who was she with?"

"I'm not sure. It may have been the Lady of the Lake."

A few more exchanges and Jack leaves for Los Angeles. He came late today because he stopped to check a nest site where the birds have been missing for over a month. He saw nothing there, but now feels that his time was well spent because he photographed the two birds here. Noel gets to pick the best of all the photos. Ours will be technically acceptable, showing everything we need to see. Jack's will be works of art as well as technically correct in every aspect. Our crew's best photographer is Dave — we should start a competition between those two. We commiserate with Jack's need to return to the city, then wish him a safe trip back. I never know exactly when I'll see him again, but I'm sure it will be at the sign.

No sooner does Jack leave than we spot a small white compact car coming down the hill from the west. Gayle identifies it as if it were a condor. "All right — Martha!" And that is who it is. Gary is with her. Martha is a graduate student of mine who tracked radio-tagged Turkey Vultures for the Condor Research Center for 6 months. She was gone most of last winter and spring in Arizona, a nest-site attendant for a pair of bald eagles on Forest Service land. Gary I lost to the peregrine project last year and this. He's been a nest-site attendant for a pair of newly-established peregrine falcons for the San Luis Obispo County coast. I wish others would quit luring my people away! Brian Walton, director of the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group, got Lee two years ago, and has sent him all over the state cross-fostering and hacking peregrines. Well, that's what makes room for trainees at the sign, and I have several this year. Tracey (not Tracy), Jan, John, Art, Terriann, Melissa, Carol are all new; I wonder who will join us next year, who will move on and where they will go. The condor survey is a training ground as well as a field station.

Martha and Gary are here because they want to be. Martha says she needs a condor 'fix.' They will stay the weekend and help out, even though neither is officially 'on duty.' The interest they show is one of the major reasons I wish they would stay around indefinitely. Motivation is one of my prime criteria for recommending who will work "condor crew." But there is no profit here, at least not financially. Someday these young people will have to find real, paying employment to meet the rent, food costs, and other necessities. Right now most of them get help from parents, and our work is part of their education as well as good field experience.

The three condors have been soaring beyond Oak Knoll and now, at 5:40, they are beginning to disappear behind Blue Ridge. The telemetry tells us that the second to go out of sight is AC2, because the signal goes from clear to fuzzy when he passes from view. The third condor follows suite, and the skies are now empty.

The last visitor of the day arrives in a tan pick-up, with his dog sharing the cab. From the condors' point of view he is the most influential person of all at this location. Bert is the owner of the Santiago Ranch, over which our birds spend so much time foraging. He is elderly, but I can't guess how old. Over 60 certainly, under 80. He has reached a timeless stage, and carries his years well, like a suit of comfortable clothes. He is wiry, weathered, quite bow-legged from years on horseback punching cattle. He nearly always wears a smile, and I've never seen the man really angry. He asks what kind of a day we've had, and we fill him in. A good one, busy, good photo opportunities. He tells of a letter he's just received from someone asking permission to get on his property to see condors. He has told him what he tells everyone who asks: go sit at the sign with the rest of the condor-watchers. It's the best place to see them, and it doesn't bother the birds. Bert has

Photo by Eric Johnson

been watching condors longer than any of us; he grew up with them. His family homesteaded this country a century ago, and he has watched condor numbers decline slowly but steadily, year by year. Like most of the ranchers hereabouts, he has his own theories as to why the birds are disappearing. Among other things, he blames too much human disturbance. He doesn't invite condor-watchers onto the property to see birds, and he doesn't want the birds trapped or otherwise harassed on the ranch. That's o.k. with us. We know his feelings, and respect them. We also feel better knowing that foraging birds will have a place to go where they are not disturbed. Only once has any one of our crew asked to go on the property, and that was when the observer thought he had a condor in trouble. It turned out to be a dead black calf that had fallen part way down a cliff.

Bert is a caretaker of this land rather than an exploiter. The ranch has been in the family for years, and he plans that it should stay that way, so he treats the land well. Preferring to undergraze rather than stretch the land to its limits, he keeps fewer cattle than others might. The range looks healthy. I am always surprised to realize, when spring comes to this country, that the greenest hillsides are those that have been the most over-grazed. Pastures that have been treated well the previous year still hold an abundance of last year's dried grass, and thus the spring flush of green is somewhat muted. In this case, looks are deceiving.

Bert is very much aware of the plants and animals with which he shares his range. None of us can match his knowledge of range grasses. He has no love for rattlesnakes and coyotes; they pose a direct threat to health and livelihood. But the remainder he welcomes and enjoys. He frequently tells us anecdotes from the past, yesterday or yesteryear, that involve wildlife.

He chuckles at the number of people who asemble with us to view condors. Birders are a new breed in this country, a new species of humans. It used to be that he saw only fellow-ranchers, neighbors, trespassers, and poachers. Now city dwellers, in fact people from all over the world, are attracted to his piece of the countryside. All because of about 20 incongruous birds. I suspect Bert thinks we're a bit nuts, but we are harmless nuts. We do all we can for him because we do not want our crew or other birders to become a new problem. We try to dissuade trespassers, both by our physical presence and known rapport with him and his foreman, and by asking people not to hop fences when they are in need of a pit stop (the bushes down the road are fine, folks.)

Like his foreman, Bert doesn't stay long. He's busy. Sometimes, at the end of the day, he will accept a cold beer, but not often. Not today. He pulls off the turnoff and heads home up the road. While I have been passing the time with him, the crew has been disassembling our field station. The tarp is down, rolled up, and stowed. Cameras have been stashed, literature packed up. The 6 o'clock telemetry fix has been completed; no news from IC1, a fuzzy signal from AC2 beyond and behind Oak Knoll. The birds have gone to bed. Gayle, Tracy, Tom, Martha, and Gary head back to the campground, and I tell them I'll follow in a minute.

* * *

I stand alone at the sign, as I have done many times before, drinking in the open spaces, the peace, the quiet. I police the area, pick up a few scraps of paper and cigarette butts. It no longer looks like a field station. It simply looks like a turn-off on a country road, home for a sign that announces the National Forest boundary. That's all it used to be, that's all it was. No one passing now would guess that it is the best observation point from which to see one of the world's most endangered birds. There is no obvious roadside attraction here.

The air is still and cool; the low sun casts long shadows through and across the canyons. A lone Raven slides by at eye-level, croaks his "Good evening," and disappears into the shadows below me. A cricket chirps hesitantly, warming up for the nightly chorus. We started our watch July 11 this year, and will continue until the end of October. We are now about half done. I reflect on how much we owe to various people and groups who support us, encourage us. We try to run an economical operation, but expenses have to be met. This year we are indebted to the U.S. Forest Service, Los Angeles Audubon, Van Nuys Charities, Morro Coast Audubon, Kern and Tulare Audubon, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, and so many people who have made individual contributions because they wanted to help, to feel a part of the effort. There is so much concern for this bird and what it stands for.

I wonder how many years of this work stretch before us. The photography is so important, we will probably be here as long as there are free-living condors to watch. I hope I never see the day when I have no reason to be here, no condors to watch. I would come anyway, I think, but I would leave with an empty, hollow feeling. Personally, I need these birds, and so, I think, do a lot of others. There are now people scattered all across this planet who will always remember "The Sign" and those magnificent vultures. I think we all feel better about living in a world that still has room for condors.

One last check, then I climb into my vehicle and head back to camp for supper. It's been a good day.

* * *

Winter High Tides at Upper Newport Bay

By William C. Bakewell

November, December, January, and February are the best months for searching for rails and other birds at Upper Newport Bay. American Bitterns, Clapper, Virginia, and Sora Rails are most often seen during these months; and the rare Black Rail is a possibility. These birds are by far most easily found near the times of the highest high waters during the spring tides of this season. There are no tide gauges in Upper Newport Bay, but most local biologists seem to agree that the times and heights of higher high waters at Upper Newport Bay and Los Angeles Outer Harbor may be about the same.

The heights of the tide for the times given below are all at least 6.3 feet. On 23 November 1984 the height of the higher high waters reaches this season's maximum of 7.0 feet. Jean Brandt, in her earlier article on Upper Newport Bay *(Western Tanager,* October 1977), advises birders looking for rails to be on station a half hour before the time of higher high water and to stay for at least one hour. For that reason the times given below all are for higher high waters that occur more than a half hour after sunrise.

In November 1984 the times of higher high water are 0721 on Wednesday the 21st, 0755 on Thursday the 22nd, 0832 on Friday the 23rd, 0909 on Saturday the 24th, and 0950 on Sunday the 25th. The highest high water during this entire season of good birding occurs on the 23rd, its height being 7.0 feet.

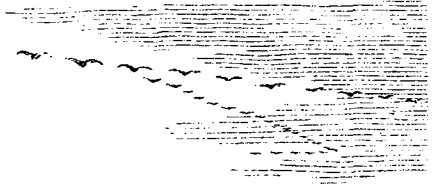
In December 1984 the times of higher high water are 0737 on Friday the 21st, 0816 on Saturday the 22nd, 0857 on Sunday the 23rd, and 0938 on Monday the 24th.

In January 1985 the times of higher high water are 0800 on Sunday the 6th, 0836 on Monday the 7th, 0918 on Tuesday the 8th, 0729 on Saturday the 19th, 0811 on Sunday the 20th, and 0850 on Monday the 21st.

In February 1985 the times of higher high water are 0749 on Monday the 4th, 0832 on Tuesday the 5th, and 0913 on Wednesday the 6th.

All of these data were obtained from the 1984 and 1985 editions of *Tide Tables West Coast of North and South America.* These books were published by the National Ocean Survey of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Good birding!



Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

What Ever Happened to Mr. Clean?

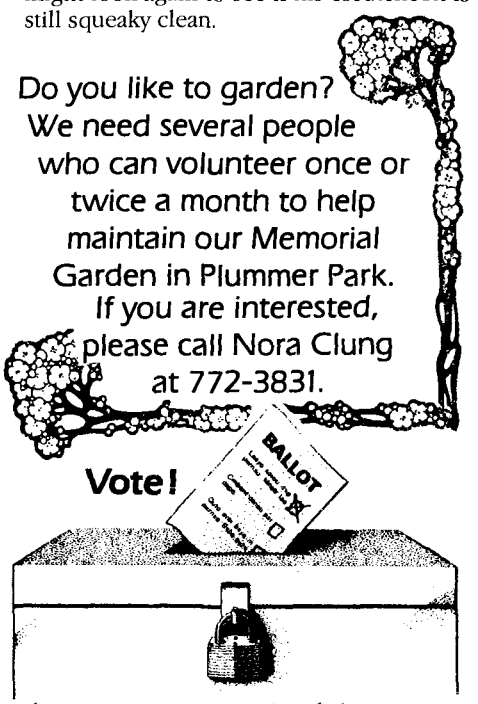
This September a controversial report on acid rain was issued by the White House Office of Science and Technology. Acid rain, it said, was severely damaging lakes, forests and soil and no more time should be wasted in addressing the problem. "If we wait until scientific knowledge is definitive, recovery time may have increased to decades or a century or more." The Democratic congressman who released the document charged that the Administration was keeping the June 1983 report under wraps until after the November election. The White House has been calling for as much as ten years of further research on acid rain before cutting emissions of sulfur and nitrogen oxides, so when its own science office made recommendations for immediate action, it was most embarrassing.

Enter William D. Ruckelshaus, the successor to Anne Burford as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. Mr. Ruckelshaus "came aboard" as the fair-haired boy of the environment who would straighten out the impossible mess at EPA left by his discredited predecessor. In a television interview shortly after the acid rain report made the headlines, Ruckelshaus rejected the recommendation of the scientific panel. "What the scientists have... done is to go from the assessment of the risk — what the nature of the problem is — and jump in and start telling people what to do about it. That is a mixed scientific-social-political kind of judgment which is up to Congress, the President and the policy-makers to make." But William A. Nierenberg, director of the prestigious Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego, has said that the White House specifically asked his panel to make policy recommendations.

Mr. Ruckelshaus denied that the Administration had held up the report because it would be politically unpopular with environmentalists in an election year. Then he opened a rather startling can of worms: he advised environmentalists to stay out of politics. "Many of the groups... stood in the Rose Garden in September 1980, and endorsed President Carter's reelection. They're still mad at the President. I think it's unfortunate; I don't think they ought to do that. I think it denigrates from (sic) their own credibility." As Jack Benny used to say, after an indignant, pregnant pause, 'Well!!!'"

Environmentalists are citizens with all the rights and privileges of free Americans. If they kept their mouths discreetly shut they would in truth be denigrating their own credibility. Legitimate, concerned, responsible environmentalists have a *duty* to criticize, to point out assaults on the air we breathe, the water we drink, and vulnerable wilderness. It is our *function* to sound the warning when the quality of life is threatened by pork-barrel water projects, nuclear hazards, bargain-basement coal giveaways. These are *political* statements. Certainly we try to influence legislation. We urge our members to write to Congress. We have lobbyists in Washington and state capitols to convince our representatives that a measure is good or bad for the land, the waters, the health of the people. It is true that a tax-exempt organization cannot endorse political *candidates.* (Since most environmental groups are tax-exempt, we wonder what was actually said in the Rose Garden in September 1980. If Carter was really endorsed by "many of the groups," they would have lost their valuable tax-exempt status. There was no such loss.) We don't say: vote for X or vote against Y. If the balance sheet of an administration shows an overwhelming bias against the environment, who else is there to point it out but environmentalists? If the voters agree with us we hope they will cast their ballots accordingly.

Mr. Ruckelshaus was the first Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and did an excellent job. He is considered a man of integrity. It was Mr. Reagan who dubbed him "Mr. Clean." But he was put in an impossible position by the President and the Office of Management and Budget cutting his funds by more than 25%. He is up against an OMB and a White House staff that apparently would rather see more lakes and rivers die than force industry to initiate acid rain controls. Mr. Ruckelshaus must feel uncomfortable attacking the scientists for simply doing the job they were recruited for: studying a problem and coming up with a solution. He must be aware that Canadian scientists, working on the same project as the Americans, emphatically recommended a 50% reduction in sulfur dioxide emissions. He must know that Japan has already cut back its emissions by 50%; in Japan chemical scrubbers, which remove the main cause of acid rain, increased from 100 to 1970 to over 1000 in 1975. Is Mr. Ruckelshaus speaking from the heart or is he just being a loyal member of the Reagan team? As the heroic Deputy General who resigned during Watergate after refusing to fire the Special Prosecutor, perhaps Mr. Ruckelshaus might look again to see if his escutcheon is still squeaky clean.



When you vote on November 6, three important bond issues merit your support:

Proposition 25: Clean Water Bond Law of 1984. Provides funds for water pollution control, water conservation and water reclamation projects.

Proposition 27: *Hazardous Substance Cleanup Bond Act.*

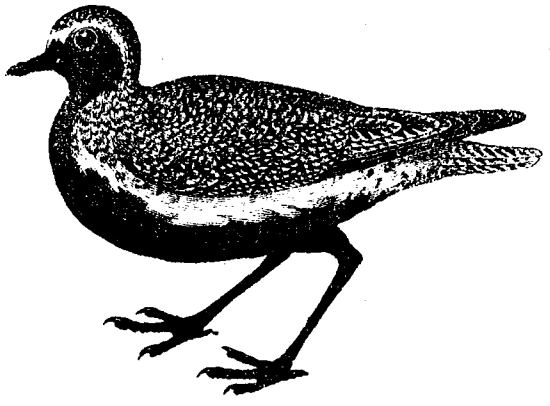
Proposition 28: California Safe Drinking Water Bond Law of 1984. Provides funds for improvement of domestic water systems to meet minimum drinking water standards.

All three of these measures were approved by an almost unanimous vote in the state Senate and Assembly.

Birds of the Season

by Hal Baxter and Kimball Garrett

The latter half of August and the first half of September comprise a period in southern California which conjures up to the birdwatcher one dominant image: The shorebird. While shorebirds of many species may begin passing through our region by the end of June, the bulk of the passage of the year's crop of juveniles takes place during the August to September span. Because the inexperienced juveniles are on the move, this is also the period when vagrant, out of range shorebirds are sought with particular fervor. This was beginning to develop into one of our duller recent falls for unusual shorebirds until Louis Bevier birded the Santa Maria coastal plain on 16 September and discovered a juvenile **Curlew Sandpiper**, only the fourth for southern California. A quick call to Paul Lehman in Santa Barbara set off a chain of events which led to the discovery by Paul and Tom Wurster of a **Little Curlew** *(Numenius minutus,* also known as a Little Whimbrel) that same afternoon. The curlew, an Asiatic relative of the ill-fated Eskimo Curlew, remained in the flooded pastureland west of Santa Maria until at least the 19th, and was seen by scores of birdwatchers. This constitutes the first record



of this species for North America, and represents an unusual case in which an Asiatic vagrant was recorded in the "lower 48" without any prior records from Alaska. This tiny, short-billed curlew associated with Long-billed Curlews and with blackbirds during its stay.

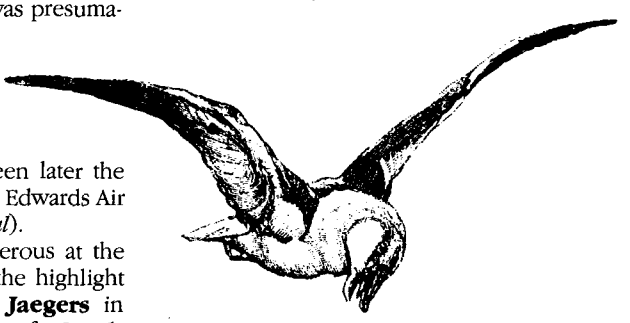
Other shorebirds during the period were, predictably, more mundane. **Lesser Golden-Plovers** were numerous in the fields west of Santa Maria (e.g. 20+ on 17 September), and two were at a small pond in Long Beach in early September (Brian Daniels). Possibly as many as six **Solitary Sandpipers** were around Doug Willick's Orange County birding haunts between 24 August and 14 September; three Solitaries were at Harbor Lake on 15 August (Don Sterba); finally, a single Solitary was at the mouth of Zuma Creek on 16 September (Art and Janet Cupples). **Baird's** and **Pectoral Sandpipers** were too numerous to list here, with the largest numbers coming from the Lancaster area. Unusual (but apparently regular at this locality) was an inland **Red Knot** at the Lancaster Sewage Ponds on 15 September (Brian Keelan and John Parmeter). What was presumably the same individual was seen later the same day at Piute Ponds on the Edwards Air Force Base (Kimball Garrett *et al*).

Jaegers were unusually numerous at the Salton Sea in September, with the highlight there being two **Long-tailed Jaegers** in mid-month (north end). A report of a **South Polar Skua** (currently unrecorded inland) at the south end by two visiting British birders remains unconfirmed at this time. A juvenile **Little Gull** was found at the southwestern corner of Lake Elsinore in Riverside County by Guy McCaskie on 3 September. The only **Franklin's Gull** report was of one at Salton City, along the western shore of the Salton Sea, on 2 September (Paul Fox). An adult **Sabine's Gull** was seen in the Lucerne Valley, north of the San Bernardino Mountains, on 5 September (Michael McCrary), and a juvenile was at King Harbor, Redondo Beach, on 15 September (Hal and Nancy Spear). **Black Terns** are uncommon fall transients along our coast; one was at the Santa Clara River estuary on 29 August (Barbara Elliott and Dorothy Dimsdale). Two **Black Skimmers** were discovered at the Santa Clara River estuary on 13 September (Rob Hofberg), and five were seen there three days later (Bob Pann).

For seabirds, Monterey Bay remained the most productive area through September, the highlight there being a **Streaked Shearwater** seen on Labor Day weekend. Locally, **Black Storm-Petrels** were sighted from shore at several points along the coast (e.g. five off the mouth of Zuma Creek on 16 September (Kimball Garrett and Hank Brodkin). There was little indication of any exceptional northward postbreeding movements of herons and related birds, but an immature **Reddish Egret** along the Santa Ana River near Anaheim (Loren Hays, 10 September) was unusual.

Our first report of a **Broad-winged Hawk** came from Brian Daniels, who spotted one while playing basketball (Brian, not the hawk) in El Dorado Park, Long Beach, on 13 September. A transient **Osprey** was at the Lancaster Sewage Ponds on 15 September (Brian Keelan and John Parmeter).

The southward migration of landbirds was in full swing during the late August/early September period; this is a peak period of movement for many of our western species, but since it is a tad on the early side for "guaranteed" vagrants, observer effort is, unfortunately, less than what it should be.



Mid-September always brings a sharp upswing in the quantity and "quality" of passerine vagrants, and, consequently, brings many birders out into the field (just in time to catch the tail end of the main migration of western species). Somewhat out of range was a **Gila Woodpecker** in Mecca, at the north end of the Salton Sea (Brian Keelan, 3 September). Los Angeles County's long overdue **Least Flycatcher** was finally uncovered by Lee Jones at the patch of willows at the western end of the Ballona wetlands (16 September); the bird was seen by several observers through at least 19 September. A flock of 20 **Cedar Waxwings** in Bea Gordon's Pasadena yard on 11 September was somewhat early.

Vagrant warblers were few and far-between in early September. By mid-month, the only reported **American Redstarts** were in Santa Barbara (1), San Diego (1), and east of Lancaster (one on 15 September, Kimball Garrett *et al*). A few **Northern Waterthrushes** were reported, including one under a small hedge adjacent to the Natural History Museum in Exposition Park (Kimball Garrett, 5-6 September), and one at Turtle Rock Nature Center (Doug Willick, 29 August). **Black-and-white Warblers** were at Turtle Rock Nature Center (Doug Willick, 30 August) and east of Lancaster (Fred Heath *et al*, 15 September). Much more unusual were two **Prothonotary Warblers**; one on the Oxnard Plain (Art and Janet Cupples, 16 September), and one at Pt. Fermin Park

(Brian Daniels, 19 September). The only **Blackpoll Warbler** reported as of this writing was one along Bonsall Drive, near Zuma Beach, on 16 September (Art and Janet Cupples). Among the **Indigo Bunting** reports was one at the arboretum in Arcadia on 13 September (Barbara Cohen). Two sparrows of the arid interior were found along the immediate coast: a **Black-throated Sparrow** at the San Joaquin Marsh, Irvine (Doug Willick, 9 September), and a **Black-chinned Sparrow** at Pt. Fermin (15 September (Brian Daniels). **Bobolinks** were reported in small numbers form the Goleta area and, farther south, from the mouth of Zuma Creek (Kimball Garrett, 8 September), Playa del Rey (two on 17 September, Kimball Garrett), and the San Joaquin Marsh (Brian Daniels, 16 September). Two **Red Crossbills** were near the Visitors' Center at Chilao in the San Gabriel Mountains on 17 September (Gayle Benton), and a local ranger reported that others had been present earlier.

African bishops of the genus *Euplectes* are being increasingly widely reported. The female in the Sepulveda Basin which was impersonating a Grasshopper Sparrow could not be identified for certain to species; the situation is obviously complicated, since Arthur Howe found males of three different species there! (Red Bishop, Black-winged Bishop, and Yellow-crowned Bishop). Another female bishop (species?) was at the mouth of Zuma Creek on 16 September (male Red Bishops have been seen there in the past), and a Black-winged Bishop was reported by Bob Row in Palos Verdes. Observers would do well to monitor all such "exotic" species; it is only with such information that we may chart their population trends and potential harm to crops and to native birds.

Birding trips in November and early December will be dress rehearsals for the Christmas Bird Counts which begin on 15 December. Be in touch with your local count compilers about signing up for their counts, and about specific bird sightings within the count circles. Though by no means all unusual birds found in November will stick around for the count period, it is a good bet that many will. Repeated coverage of favorite birding areas through November will also help give us a picture of the movements of our erratic visitors from the montane and boreal areas. You owe it to yourselves (and your count compilers!) to keep tabs on these birds.

Send any interesting bird observations to:

Hal Baxter
1821 Highland Oaks Drive
Arcadia, CA 91006

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.

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Birders have suffered long enough from aching necks at the end of a day's birding. A new binocular/camera strap, the Windsong MINISTRAP, takes the weight off the shoulders and distributes across the shoulders. NO MORE GUILLOTINE NECK.

The MINISTRAP also keeps the binoculars from swinging when leaning over or jumping the creek. I've field tested the MINISTRAP for six months now, including all day, every day for 45 days, on a recent trip around the U.S.

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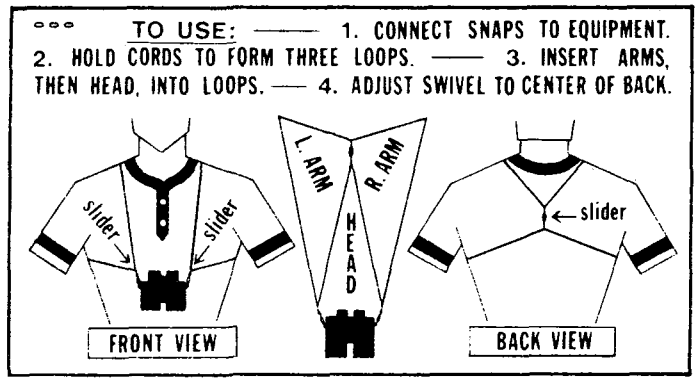
— *Henry E. Childs, Jr.*



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WESTERN TANAGER

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

Southern California Breeding Bird Atlas Project

A breeding bird atlas project is being organized in southern California to run during the 1985-89 breeding seasons. We are trying to notify all birders in the region to inform them of the project's existence and to enlist their aid in surveying blocks.

We are also searching for a project director. This person will have the day to day responsibility of running the project. The main duty will be the coordination of the activities of hundreds of field volunteers. Other responsibilities will be the publishing of a newsletter, the organization of volunteer training sessions and some analysis of data. Qualifications include an ability to communicate well, experience in making decisions and meeting deadlines, and an intention to remain in Southern California for five years. Being an expert birder is not a requirement, though having an interest and enthusiasm in birding is. A small stipend will be available.

If the excitement and responsibility of this position interests you, please contact either Fred Heath at 10025 DeSoto, Apt. 152, Chatsworth, California 91311, or David King at 13464 Portofino, Del Mar, California 92014. We will send you all the particulars.

CALENDAR

CALL THE TAPE!

Before setting out for any field trip, call the Audubon Bird Tape
(213) 874-1318
for special instructions or last-minute changes that may have occurred by the Thursday before the trip.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3 — See a wide variety of shorebirds with the **Amigos de Bolsa Chica** at the diminishing **Bolsa Chica** wetlands. Birding walks start periodically from 9 a.m. with the last at 10:30 a.m. Picnic facilities available across the street at the State Beach or nearby Huntington Central Park. It is worth a visit to the nearby Sea Cliff shopping center to see their unique and beautiful handling of a shorebird motif. (Their famous "Running is for the birds" 10K run will be held 10/20; also a 5K walk or run; for more info 714-897-7003.) Take Fwy 405 south to Bolsa Chica and continue south to Warner; turn right to PCH, then left to parking lot about middle of Ecological Reserve.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4 — Meet **Gerry Haigh** at 8 a.m. for a morning walk in **Topanga State Park.** Look for resident chaparral birds and late fall migrants. From Topanga Cyn. Blvd. make a sharp east turn uphill on Entrada Dr. (7 mi. so. Fwy. 101); continue bearing left at each road fork to entrance ($2 parking fee).

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10 — Join **Bob Shanman** (545-2867 after 6 p.m.) for his monthly walk in the unique **Ballona Wetlands.** Ducks, shorebirds, gulls, terns and other water birds will be in evidence. 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)

WEEKEND, NOVEMBER 10-11 — Morro Bay. Reserve a special weekend with the marvelous **Kimball Garrett.** We'll view shorebirds and waterfowl, look for Peregrines and late fall and winter vagrants, and do some owling Saturday night. Depending on timing, we may make some birding stops in the San Luis Obispo area enroute home. Maximum participants: 20; $20 per person.*

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 13 — Evening Meeting at 8 p.m. in Plummer Park. Diver and Cave Explorer (Spelunker) **Allan Heller** chronicles his adventures in **A Spelo-Montage in and Around California, Death Valley to the Channel Islands.**

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 16 — Deadline for December Western Tanager. Send Material to Editor, Dexter Kelly c/o Audubon House.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17 — Join **David White** at the **Whittier Narrows Regional Park** in search of a wide variety of both land and water birds. Meet at 8 a.m. at the Nature Center, 1000 Durfee Ave., So. El Monte, near crossing of freeways 60 and 605.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 28 — Reserve a morning tour, led by **Bruce Broadbooks,** through the natural habitats of **Pt. Mugu Naval Air Base.** (Optional date Sat. Feb. 2—attend only one). Shorebirds and other waterfowl will be the highlight with White-faced Ibis a probability and a chance for rarities in this great locale. To avoid unused reservations, which annoy the Navy, a $5 deposit will be charged, to be refunded to those who show up. (If not a U.S. Citizen, please give date and place of birth with reservation.*) Carpooling on the base required.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1 — Reserve your space on an all-day charter bus trip (leader to be announced), to the **Carrizo Plains** in search of thousands of wintering Sandhill Cranes. The area is also known for raptors; up to 11 species have been seen on one December day. $22 per person.*

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.

Some Forthcoming Events:

Sat., Dec. 15 — Antelope Valley Christmas Bird Count — Fred Heath

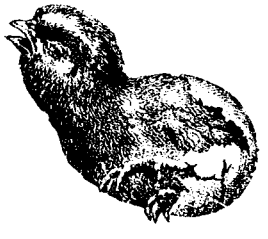
Sun., Dec. 16 — Malibu Christmas Bird Count — Jean Brandt & Kimball Garrett

Sun., Dec. 30 — Los Angeles Christmas Bird Count — Bob Shanman et. al.

Sun., Jan. 6 — Lake Norconian — Pat and Paul Nelson

Sun, Jan. 13 — Long Beach Urban Parks — Jerry Johnson

Sat., Jan. 19 — Santa Barbara — Paul Lehman



***RESERVATION POLICY:** Priority will be given to those including ALL the following criteria in their trip request. (1) Event desired; (2) Names of people in your party, (3) Phone numbers — (a) usual and (b) evening before event, in case of emergency cancellation, (4) Check to LAAS for exact amount for each event, unless fee not required, (5) Self-addressed stamped envelope for confirmation and associated event information. Send to: Reservations Chairman Ruth Lohr, LAAS, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90046.

If there is insufficient response, the event will be cancelled two weeks prior to the scheduled date (4 weeks for pelagics) and you will be so notified and your fee returned. No refunds during these periods unless there is a paid replacement.

If you desire to carpool to an event, Ms. Lohr (usually in office on Tues.) can provide information for you to make contact and possible arrangements.

Renew Your Membership Through LAAS

When you receive your annual renewal notice from National Audubon, we strongly urge that you complete the form and send it along with your dues check to Audubon House rather than directly to National Audubon. National has been having difficulties with the data processing firm handling membership. This has led to may errors in chapter records across the country, including ours. It has also resulted in some of our members missing issues of the WESTERN TANAGER. By sending your renewal directly to us, many of the problems should be avoided.

Before forwarding your renewal to National, we will photocopy your form and check, and make sure that our records are current. By renewing through L.A. Audubon you will be sure not to miss any issues of the TANAGER. We will also be able to confirm that National has placed you in the correct membership category.

We care about your membership, and are willing to make this extra effort to serve you better.

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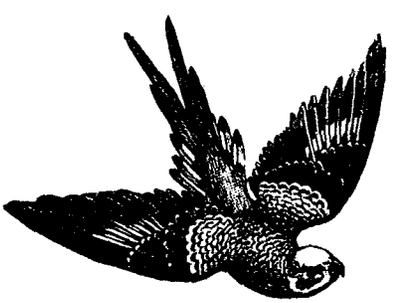

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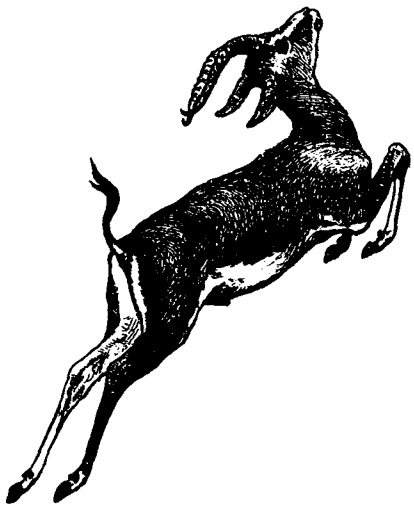

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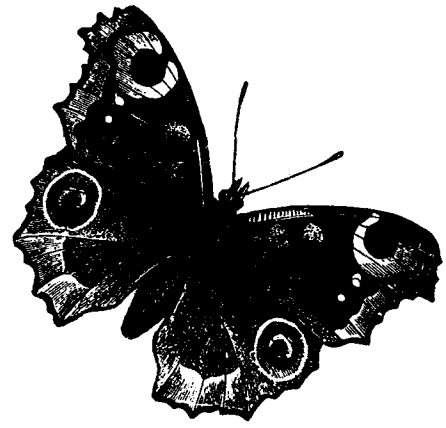

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