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## Phainopepla Nesting in Sequoia National Park

by Larry L. Norris and  
George San Miguel

### Introduction:

The hot, dry summer of 1984 brought an unprecedented number of Phainopepla (*Phainopepla nitens*) to the foothills of Sequoia National Park; with a concentration of possibly twenty pairs scattered along the Middle and Marble Forks of the Kaweah River from Potwisha Campground (elevation 2100 ft.) down canyon four miles to the park entrance (elevation 1400 ft.) near Ash Mountain. Prior to this summer influx only twelve Phainopepla observations had been recorded in the area with an early date of 14 May 1965 and a late date of 3 November 1965. A curious record exists of a female staying at Ash Mountain Park Headquarters from 17 January to 5 February 1975, however, the species is usually absent from the foothills of Sequoia National Park.

During June and July of 1984 three Phainopepla nests were discovered within the park. Two nests were located in the Park Headquarters area; one near the Administration building and the other at the Southern Sierra Research Center. The third nest was located at Potwisha Campground, three miles up canyon from Park Headquarters. The two nests located at Park Headquarters were situated high up in the dense foliage of Blue Oaks (*Quercus douglasii*). The Potwisha nest was placed on a sparsely leaved low branch of a small Interior Live Oak (*Q. wislizenii*), and was easily observed at a distance of thirty feet. A records check of the park files turned up only two prior nesting records for Phainopepla in Sequoia National Park, 1 July 1945 and 19 June 1967, both in the Ash Mountain area.



Male Phainopepla — Photo by Herb Clarke

Phainopeplas are conspicuous birds in their showy plumage (Phainopepla means "shining robe" in the Greek), and are highly visible while making flycatching sorties from high perches. Although their nests may be well hidden in foliage, such is not always the case, and the locations of nests are often given away by the frequent calling of the adults around the nest trees. With this species' visibility in mind we believe that the three nests of 1984 represent an unusual influx of Phainopepla into the area, and that nesting normally does not occur in the park except in extremely hot, dry years when the species moves higher up canyon into the slightly cooler foothills where food is more plentiful.

This idea may be corroborated by the fact that three other species associated with hot,

arid habitats were observed in the Middle Fork Kaweah River drainage during this period. These species are not usually found in the park: Black-chinned Sparrow, an immature on 1 August 1984; Black-throated Sparrow, an adult male on 16 May 1984 (possibly nesting in the park because a juvenile was found dead at Park Headquarters on 23 July 1985); and a first park record of a probable nesting Summer Tanager, an adult male was observed on 7 June and 12 July 1984, and a molting juvenile male on 3 July 1984 all in riparian habitat along two tributaries of the Kaweah River. We assume the Summer Tanagers were of the *cooperi* race. The hot, dry summer seemed to have caused a slight altitudinal shift upwards for some species or perhaps allowed for a more northerly expansion of some populations.

**Phainopepla Ecology:** Populations of Phainopepla spend winter and early spring along the washes and canyons of the Colorado Desert where suitable habitat is found. In late spring some Phainopeplas apparently migrate to coastal southern California. The preferred habitat here is Oak-Savannah and riparian/chaparral ecotones (Garrett & Dunn 1981). In summer the species can range through the interior of the state as far north as the head of the Central Valley and coastally to about San Francisco (Small 1974).

Several kinds of berries make up the majority of their diet: elderberries, manzanita, juniper, and especially mistletoe berries. However, mistletoe berries did not constitute a major food source for the nesting Phainopeplas in Sequoia National Park. In this case the berries of Redberry (*Rhamnus crocea* ssp. *ilicifolia*) were most often seen being harvested. Adults do become insectivorous in the breeding season and feed nestlings both insects and berries (Weathers 1983).

The male Phainopepla does most of the nest building and incubation (Sumner & Dixon 1953). Five weeks typically elapse between clutch completion and fledging (Weathers 1983), however, this may be shortened by a week in the Sierran foothills. The nest of a Phainopepla can often be found by watching the male bird as it moves through an area calling the single ascending mellow "whoip" or "whoit" note. Eventually the bird settles on the nest which is usually built on a small, forking branch. At the three park nests the adults were often seen shading the eggs and young against the afternoon sun and heat.

**The Nests:** Activity around each of the three nest sites was noted in the first week of June, however, in two instances, the nests were not actually located until weeks later. An account of the observations at each of the three nests follows. Observations were generally conducted by the authors as their other duties allowed, so a complete report of Phainopepla nesting activity is not presented here.

**The Headquarters Nest** — On 1 June we observed a male Phainopepla in the top of a Blue Oak near the Administration Building at Ash Mountain Park Headquarters (elevation 1700 ft.). For the following eight days a pair were seen coming and going from the same Blue Oak, often calling their single mellow note. We knew that a nest was in the making. On 10 June the female flew out of the tree, and the male quickly flew in to replace her. As San Miguel watched the male bird alight on a nest he realized this was only the third Phainopepla nest recorded in the park during a span of 39 years. Now the nest location was finally known.

During the middle weeks of June the male did most of the incubation, through frequent exchanges did occur. The weather became increasingly hot, on 22 June the

male was observed panting while incubating at mid-day. The female seemed less tolerant of disturbance than the male while incubating. If the next tree was approached within about 40 feet the female would fly to the next tree. The male was more tolerant and just stayed on the nest.

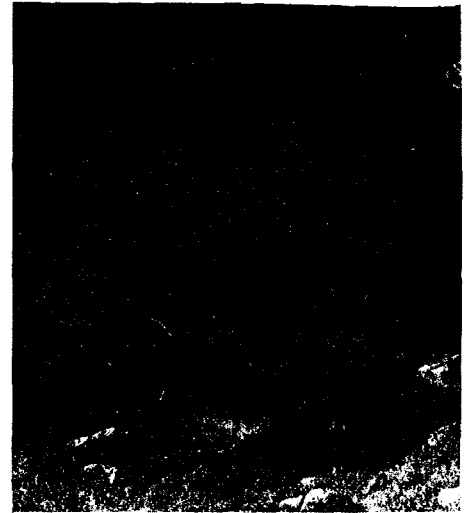
On 23 June two nestlings were observed, their heads just extending above the rim of the cup nest. Both adults vigorously chased away two Scrub Jays that came too close to the nest. The female was observed bringing a damselfly to her young, and then produced some red berries from her throat to feed to her young. While the female brooded, the male perched on the edge of the nest and spread his wings. Perhaps this was to cool himself, or to shade the nest, or both.

The first week of July had daily highs well over 100°F. On 5 July the two nestlings were observed to be "panting" rapidly while they faced away from the sun. Both had a crest and their wing feathers were developing rapidly, so we knew they would fledge soon. On 7 July the Los Angeles Audubon Society field trip to Sequoia National Park observed the young as they stood alert at the nest. By 9 July both young were seen standing on the edge of the nest and walking along the major limb next to the nest. During the late morning of 10 July the two young Phainopeplas fledged. We could find no trace of them, although an adult was heard calling close by the nest area. Seventeen days had elapsed between the time the young were first observed to the day they fledged. No photographs were taken of this nest since it was high in the tree and well protected with dense foliage. A male Phainopepla was observed at this nest site as late as 16 September.

**The Potwisha Campground Nest** — The earliest observation of Phainopepla at Potwisha in 1984 was a group of three birds, two males and a female, on 20 May. On 3 June a pair were seen flying over the Potwisha Bridge. On 10 and 11 June a pair were observed again in the area. San Miguel suspected a breeding territory was being established.

San Miguel located the nest on 23 June in an Interior Live Oak near Potwisha Campground (elevation 2100 ft.). The nest was positioned about eight feet above the ground in the crotch of a small limb offering very little foliar protection from the intense sunlight, or camouflage from predators. The Phainopepla pair were at the nest. On 26 June the male was observed incubating or shading the nest. On 28 and 29 June the female was observed incubating on the nest while the male "stood guard" and would react if we approached within fifty feet of the nest.

The first week of July experienced daily highs of well over 100°F. The male and female appeared to be more or less equally sharing the incubation duties. On 10 July, two weeks after we noted the pair sharing incubation duties, two interesting behavioral



Interior Live Oak Nesting Tree  
for Potwisha Phainopepla — Photo by Larry Norris

actions were observed. The female would not sit still in the nest, but kept moving around a lot, and kept sticking her bill down into the nest, perhaps rolling eggs. While the female was on the nest an Acorn Woodpecker landed on the trunk of the small nest tree. The male Phainopepla kept itself positioned between the woodpecker and the nest, but did not show any aggression towards the woodpecker. Finally, on 15 July, the female was seen perched at the edge of the nest, and one small nestling stretched up to her. The female had a red berry in her bill. The male was perched higher in the tree.

The days continued hot and on 17 July three young were observed gaping in the nest. Thundershowers had been occurring in the high country all afternoon and at dusk a flash flood came down the Marble Fork of the Kaweah River next to the campground trapping one swimmer on a rock in mid-stream. With the water rising the park rangers had to effect a river rescue. All this commotion occurred right next to the nest tree. Both Phainopeplas were seen frantically flying around the nest tree, and we confess having as much apprehension concerning this nesting attempt as we had for the rescue of the stranded swimmer.

The swimmer was successfully rescued, the waters abated, and the Phainopeplas apparently left the nest unattended for two days. During this time the female was not seen and the male kept a distance from the tree. The three young were seen gaping straight up into the air. We feared the young had been abandoned. On 21 July Norris photographed the young as they begged from the nest. During the time the photographs were being taken the female remained within view near the river. On 22 July the female was back on the nest and the next day a feeding exchange was observed with the female relieving the brooding male and feeding the young. The young were feathered with down sticking out. Seven

days later, on the afternoon of 30 July, the three young were still in the nest, but at dusk the next day all three well developed juveniles were perched in a huddle near the top of the tree. The female parent was nearby.

On 1 August the young were still perched at the top of the nest tree. They had spent their first night outside the crowded nest. One was able to fly around in the crown of the oak. Sixteen days had elapsed from the first observation of the young to fledging. Harrison (1978) says that young leave the nest at 18-19 days old.

The Southern Sierra Research Center Nest — Phainopeplas were first noted at the Southern Sierra Research Center on 1 June as they called throughout the day from several Blue Oaks near the laboratory (elevation 1700 ft.). The Research Center is only 1/4 mile from the Administration building at Park Headquarters. On 4 June, from the workroom on the second story of the laboratory, Norris observed a male Phainopepla that had molted a few of his tail feathers. The bird appeared to be establishing a breeding territory centering on the large Blue Oak on the lawn near the parking area of the Research Center. Through the remainder of June this male was the only Phainopepla observed in the area immediately around the Research Center. It called frequently throughout the long, hot days.

On 6 July Norris observed the male Phainopepla fly into some dense foliage about 20 feet up in the top of the Blue Oak and perch at the side of a nest. Looking closer, Norris saw the heads of two nestlings appear over the rim of the nest. They showed red mouths with yellow gape flanges as they begged food from the adult male. Later the same day, the female Phainopepla was seen flying from the nest. 8 July was very hot; the adult female and both nestlings were observed "panting." This nest was the third discovered in Sequoia National Park during the summer of 1984, and the fifth on record in the park.

On 20 July the young fledged, taking fourteen days since the time they were first observed. Since the nest tree was the main shade tree on the Research Center lawn there was a lot of human disturbance during the daylight hours. A hummingbird feeder was hung from a lower branch of the tree, and a pair of American Robins raised young in a nest nearly equal in height and about 12 feet away from the Phainopepla nest. This third nest was in the least wild setting of the three, but two young were still fledged. With all the cars coming and going during the day, the Phainopeplas, in this case, proved to be quite tolerant of noise and motion below the tree; not at all protective or aggressive as the other two nesting pairs.

**Other Observations:** During the summer of 1984 we observed Phainopeplas in other drainages of the southern Sierra. The Los Angeles Audubon Society field trip to Mineral

King on 7 July recorded several Phainopeplas at Oak Grove along the Mineral King Road in the East Fork of the Kaweah River drainage. On 23 July Norris found a male Phainopepla calling from the top of a Blue Oak in the Middle Fork of the Tule River drainage at an elevation of 2000 ft. This area is south of Sequoia National Park.

As fall migration began Phainopeplas started to appear in the riparian growth along the rivers at lower elevations. Norris observed a number of Phainopeplas of both sexes moving downcanyon through the riparian habitat at his house in Three Rivers (elevation 800 ft.) noting that the species first appeared there on 7 August and was more or less continuous through 26 October. A female Phainopepla was observed at the edge of the riparian forest below Terminus Dam, Lake Kaweah (elevation 500 ft.) on 11 September. In the foothills northwest of Sequoia National Park, at Squaw Valley, Fresno County (elevation 2000 ft.) a pair were calling from a Blue Oak the evening of 11 September. This seemed a little late for maintenance of a breeding territory.

**Conclusions:** We delayed this report until the end of summer 1985 to see if a Phainopepla "invasion" would occur again. Since seven young were known to fledge and San Miguel estimated up to 20 breeding pairs in the foothills of the park there might be enough birds to return to the area for the 1985 breeding season. This was not the case. In fact, only one male returned to Ash Mountain in June and July 1985. He called throughout the long summer days, but never gained a mate or established a nest. He was last seen on 21 July.

It must be concluded that the cause of this extension of Phainopepla nesting into the foothills of Sequoia National Park in 1984, where the species previously had nested only twice, was due to the unusually hot, dry spring and summer that year. Fewer plants flowered and produced berries at the lower elevations. It is likely that the species had to move further up into the foothills to find enough food to sustain a breeding attempt. The idea of an irruptive cycle of this species being coincidental with one of the hottest summers on record for the park (over 20 days in a row exceeded 100°F.) is discounted. It may be a long while before this hot, dry spring and summer is repeated and Phainopeplas are again commonly observed in the foothills of Sequoia National Park.

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Nesting Potwisha Phainopeplas — Photo by Larry Norris

# The Dance Of The Sage Grouse

by Joan Easton Lentz

Throughout the sagebrush range-lands of western North America the Sage Grouse can still be found, although its protective coloration and secretive habits make it difficult to observe. It is the largest grouse in the world, excepting the *Capercaillie* of Europe. The Sage Grouse is famous for its strutting nuptial display in which the male grouse performs a dance to entice the females of the species to the breeding ground. For Southern California birders, the best spot to view this courtship ritual is north of the town of Bishop on the eastern escarpment of the Sierra Nevadas. The high plain that surrounds Lake Crowley was our destination late last March when my friends and I set off with the hope of seeing the Sage Grouse and its remarkable dance.

*Bishop, Inyo County — March 25, 1985, 4:30 a.m.:* We rise and bundle ourselves, smothered in layers of clothing, into the cold car. A waffle breakfast at Jack's should help stave off the chill. Early morning light reveals fresh snow on the high mountains all around. Remnant snatches of cloud hang in a gray sky.

Riding up the Sherwin grade, the astonishing sight of the eastern Sierras covered with new snow dominates the landscape. To the east the White Mountains are snow-capped, too. Clouds and mist obscure the highest peaks and canyons, hidden in their mid-winter solitude. We knew them only as places to backpack in the summer, familiar sunny trails and meadows filled with wild-flowers. Now all is covered in white. A fierce wind whips the car. As the weak morning sun peeks between intermittent clouds, the vast sagebrush flats of Long Valley surrounding Lake Crowley come into view before us.

The Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) was first discovered in 1806 by Lewis and Clark, who named it "Cock of the Plains." In those days, it was seen in flocks of thousands, particularly around water holes on the arid western plains. During the mining booms of the nineteenth century, the numbers of this once abundant grouse were depleted by ruthless hunting. Also, due to livestock grazing and agriculture, the sagebrush and grassland habitat the birds require has been reduced, thus limiting the range of the grouse today. In fact, the presence of Great Basin Sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) is necessary for the survival of the Sage Grouse, and its distribution is delineated by its need for this and other sages (e.g., *Artemisia cana*) to provide food and concealment. In winter, the birds subsist entirely

on the blossoms and leaves of sagebrush; in summer, they feed on grasses and forbs. Their digestive tract is not adapted for hard seeds and grains.

*Lake Crowley, Mono County, 8:00 a.m.:*

We turn off onto a dirt road and bump and bounce through the sagebrush, winding our way on this high plateau. The elevation is over 6000 feet here, and a dusting of snow tops the sage. When we stop and get out, the wind is freezing, absolutely cutting through every layer of wool and down. Stiff fingers grip the binoculars. My boots crunch through the coating of snow on the ground. We spot a head — a single dark head — poised in a curve above the low bushes, its chicken-like thick bill pointing in silhouette. The dark, dead sage twigs and white snow camouflage perfectly the black and white head pattern of an adult male Sage Grouse. As we set up the scope, both birds, for there were two, flush directly back over the car.

Before we can register our chagrin, a flock of 15 or 16 grouse appears, flying low over the hill. Through the binoculars, we note their rapid wingbeat and glide, and the way they rock from side to side in flight. Their long, pointed tails stick straight out behind stiffly. Both males and females show black on the belly in flight, but the females are much more drab, a grayish-brown plumage with a naked-looking plain head.

The male Sage Grouse is the size of a small turkey and weighs five to seven pounds, being almost twice as large as the female. In breeding plumage, the male bird has a black belly and throat, the latter set off with a small white necklace. On each side of the black throat and bib, pure white elongated breast feathers drape down to the upper belly. The rest of his plumage is a mixture of mottled black, white and brown, culminating in the speckled, pointed tail feathers. A yellow comb highlights the bare skin above his eye. When startled, the bird gives a "kuk-kuk-kuk" alarm note.

The Sage Grouse is a classic example of a bird that uses an arena or lek, meaning a collective display ground, where males gather to parade in the breeding season,



Displaying Male Sage Grouse — Photo by Herb Clarke

usually the period from late march to late May. The arena may vary in size from several hundred feet to a few acres. Within this communal courting arena, individual males maintain small display areas of their own, which they defend against nearby males or newcomers. The females visit the lek to select and breed with a male; usually the most successful cocks are those with territories closest to the center of the lek. One dominant male grouse may mate with numerous females, after which the females disperse, forming no pair bond. The male does not participate in either the choice of the nest site or the raising of the brood.

*Lake Crowley, Mono County, 9:00 a.m.:* All of a sudden, one male grouse appears to be changing before our gaze into a black and white Indian head-dress! His black head plumes stream out in the morning wind; his white breast feathers are extended to the full. He is puffed up to twice his normal size. But his tail undergoes an even more incredible alteration. With wings spread and drooping down on either side nearly to the ground, he spreads his tail in a perfect arc, framed by the longest first layer of tail feathers, but supported by the black-and-white tipped under-tail feathers. It is an Indian head-dress that moves! It is a black and white and gray fan that has strutted the plains of the west since before the earliest settlers. It is the beginning of a stately courtship ritual, one that has taken place on this spot for generations of grouse.

And so the minuet begins. As he moves slowly, dipping ever so slightly from side to side, he bares the most amazing yellowish-colored air sacs on his breast, which he jiggles and shakes rhythmically to make a resonant popping sound. And as he curves sedately with mincing steps, he will ruffle up, draw back his head and neck, inflate his grapefruit-like sacs, and then pop them again with a wiggle of his white ruff, so they seem to bounce and expand at his command. The resulting sound is somewhere between a pop and a thud, as it carries to us on the whistling wind. The primitive fierceness of this wild animal contrasts with his pompous mein, as he slowly, ever so slowly, "dances" for the benefit of the two plain brown females nearby; they, of course, are busily ignoring him as they search for food hidden in the sage scrub.

The longer we wait and watch this fellow, the more we realize that other males, at various distances all around us, are performing their fan-tailed strutting dance, wings held low to the side to enable their enormous ruff to reveal the yellow orbs of skin. Each bird has a space for himself, a place where he can show off amidst the gray sage. Surely no courtship ritual can compete with this fearless cock's display of confident beauty!

At some localities it has been reported that the male Sage Grouse will lower his



Female Sage Grouse — Photo by Jon Dunn

breast to the ground and push it along during the display. Or he may roll in the dust in his enthusiasm. Also, he can produce a peculiar rattling sound with his quills. Often, rival males will fight viciously among themselves.

After mating, the female grouse travels some distance away from the lek, where she lays seven or eight greenish-brown eggs in a slight hollow under the shelter of the sagebrush. Her cryptic coloration gives her excellent protection. The young birds are able to run fifteen minutes after they leave the shell.

During the summer months, the female and young grouse are more approachable, as they search for food on the flats near water holes or streams. At this time they are often easily observed near the ghost town of Bodie, a State Historic Park to the north of Highway 395.

The Sage Grouse is a permanent resident of the sagebrush plain. However, sometimes groups may wander upslope into the Sierras in summer. In fall and winter, mixed flocks will migrate short distances in search of food at lower elevations free of snow.

The Sage Grouse, like the pronghorn antelope, has been associated with the great sagebrush expanses of the intermountain west. Unfortunately, its range is being curtailed by loss of habitat, and its numbers threatened by hunters. The young birds are evidently preferred as game, because they feed largely on insects; the flesh of the older grouse has too strong a sage flavor. In 1970 the estimated total annual hunting kill in North America was 250,000. California has an annual two-day hunting season, which

occurs around Labor Day, and helps further diminish the already small population of Sage Grouse in the state.

The present distribution of the grouse is as follows: southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, Washington, Oregon, eastern California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Wyoming, Southwestern North Dakota, extreme western South Dakota, to western and central Utah and Colorado. It has been extirpated from British Columbia and New Mexico, as well as western Nebraska and Oklahoma.

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[Note: A trip to observe Sage Grouse is being led by David Gaines. See the Calendar page for details.]

# Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth



The celebrated Global 2000 Report to the President predicted that, if current practices continue, the planet would lose 500,000 species of animals and plants by the end of the century. An incredible figure. You blink your eyes, hold your head and wonder if you've heard right — or are losing your sanity. If the number is only half right it would still be staggering.

Species have vanished since the beginning of life on earth. Conditions change and some life-forms cannot cope. Cataclysmic events — earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, falling sea levels, presumed encounters with heavenly bodies — have destroyed uncounted species over the eons. But in recent millennia, extinction became a kind of steady-state phenomenon. During the 3000 years of the Pleistocene Ice Age in North America it is estimated that only three species died out every 100 years. But then *Homo Sapiens* became the dominant species. Our numbers increased and our demands went far beyond the basic needs of food and shelter. As the centuries passed, these demands brought on the age of exploration, opening new horizons and new hemispheres for exploitation. Colonies were carved out of the undeveloped world to supply Europeans with gold and ivory, spices and tobacco. The Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism accelerated the headlong race for raw materials to feed the busy new factories of England and the Continent. Native peoples were sources of cheap labor and became essential markets for the products of the whirling machines.

It was an exciting time for a vigorous entrepreneur. He could say with the Count of Monte Cristo, when he discovered the fabulous treasure, "The world is mine!" And like the count's, the treasure of the world's natural gifts seemed unlimited. Nor were America or Europe spared this zeal for development. Burgeoning populations demanded more land for grain, more wood for houses more fish and meat and furs. Cities grew into nightmares of grungy slums and smoking factories. The great rivers of the western world — celebrated in song and story — became sluggish trenches of human and industrial waste.

The helter-skelter changes of the last two hundred years have had a formidable effect on the health and welfare of the world's plants and animals. The large mammals have disappeared from the European continent, birds are almost non-existent in some countries where they are shot or trapped for the table. The bison has vanished from the American plains and Eskimo Curlew has gone the way of the Passenger Pigeon.

The Bible said that God created man to have dominion over the birds and the beasts. So it is not surprising that our ancestors blithely accepted their role as masters, with little concern for lower forms of life. But after two destructive wars in 25 years and the growing fear of a third (and last), there came a subtle change in attitude toward this exploited natural world. Perhaps it was a sense of guilt for the uninterrupted devastation of the world's ecosystems and its inarticulate inhabitants that nurtured a new outlook. The culmination was the environmental awakening of the 1960s in the United States and most of the western nations. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1970 was the clarion call for this brave new world. For the first time, the United States Government was declared *responsible* for the quality of the environment. All federal agencies were required to prepare an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) on any project that would affect the environment. Any citizen could sue to halt any project that had no adequate EIS. Other laws followed on the heels of NEPA: the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the law establishing the Environmental Protection Agency.

In 1973, Congress passed the Endangered Species Act. This was truly an epochal event. It officially recognized that we could no longer squander our natural wealth and that other organisms also had the right to life. The Act was precedent-making in many ways. Protection was extended to *all* living things: invertebrates, crustaceans, mollusks and plants. Exceptions were made for insect pests that were harmful to man and his food supply. (No bumper stickers, please, reading "Save the Med-fly!") an endangered species was defined as one that is threatened with extinction throughout all or a significant part of its range. A category of "threatened" species was created that gave notice to all, that here were plants and animals not yet in extreme danger, but under sufficient pressure to warrant federal concern. All federal agencies were required to take "such action necessary to insure that actions authorized, funded, or carried out by them do not jeopardize the continued existence of such Endangered species and Threatened species or result in the destruction or modification of habitat of such species which is determined by the Secretary . . . to be critical." ("Secretary" refers to the Secretary of the Interior or the Secretary of Commerce in the case of marine species.) So, before any federal projects are started, the agencies must consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Interior) or the National Marine Fisheries Service (Commerce). If a federal

agency fails to do this, the law invites citizens' suits to stop the project.

The authors of the Act were solid environmentalists who knew what they were talking about. Eloquent language shines through the necessary legal jargon.

"SEC. 2 (a) FINDINGS. — The Congress finds and declares that —

(1) various species of fish, wildlife, and plants in the United States have been rendered extinct as a consequence of economic growth and development untempered by adequate concern and conservation;

(2) other species of fish, wildlife, and plants have been so depleted in numbers that they are in danger of or threatened with extinction;

(3) these species of fish, wildlife, and plants are of esthetic, ecological, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the Nation and its people;

(4) the United States has pledged itself as a sovereign state in the international community to conserve to the extent practicable the various species of fish or wildlife and plants facing extinction . . ."

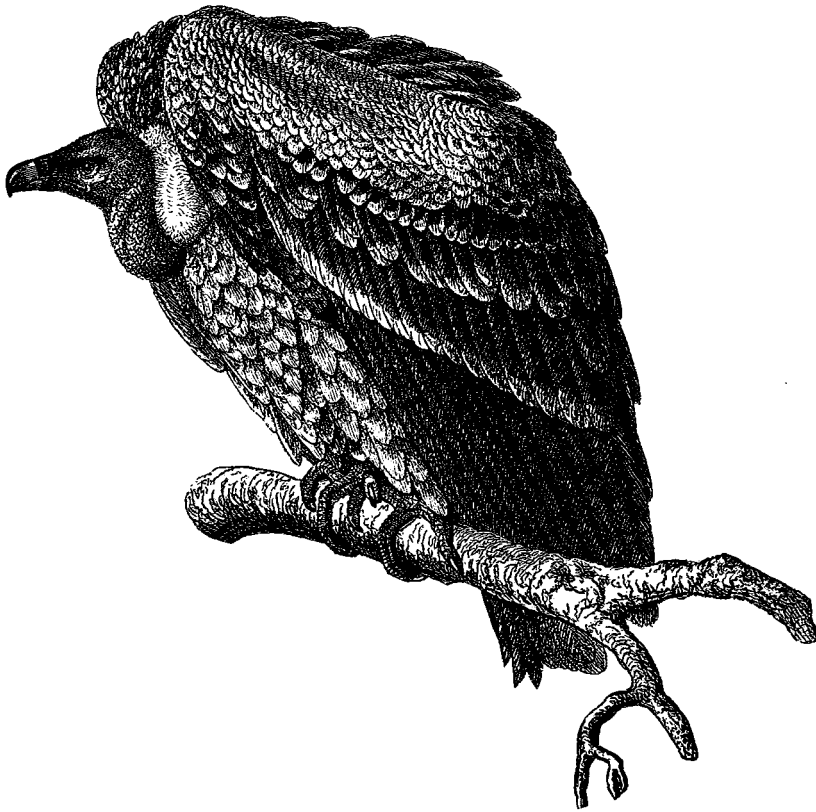
A list of international agreements follows, including migratory bird treaties with Mexico, Canada and Japan and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

The most visible element of the Act is the List of Endangered and Threatened Species. This is the magic domain that grants full protection. The status of the species is broadcast to the world. It designated critical habitat. It authorizes a Recovery Program. Not only federal agencies but private individuals and corporations must now walk on tip-toe. A private developer on his own property must get a permit to alter the habitat if an endangered species is part of the ecosystem. Listing prohibits any "taking" of a species, defined as capture, pursuit, killing, or any form of harm or harassment. Importing, exporting, buying or selling in interstate commerce is forbidden.

How does a species make the list? To illustrate this process, let us take the interesting case of *Vireo bellii pusillus*, the Least Bell's Vireo. As most of us know, this is a small gray bird with a rather charming ascending and descending song — and was one of the special reasons for birding Morongo in the spring.

Our text is the May 3, 1985 issue of the Federal Register, the official Government daily publication. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published its argument that day for formally listing this species. Section 4 (a) (1) of the Act says a species may be determined to be endangered or threatened when one or more of five factors are involved. Let us take them in order.





**1. The present or threatened destruction of habitat or range.** The Least Bell's Vireo prefers dense riparian habitat in California and northwestern Baja. Over 95% of its historic riparian habitat has been lost in the Central Valley which may have accounted for 60-80% of the original population. In southern California riparian habitat continues to be lost to agriculture, grazing, urban development and water projects.

**2. Overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific or education purposes.** Not applicable to the vireo.

**3. Diseases or predation.** The most serious threat is cowbird brood parasitism, the notorious practice of cowbirds that lay eggs in the nests of smaller birds. Not only do cowbird eggs usually hatch sooner, but the cowbird nestlings are prone to shove the hosts' young out of the nest and get most of the food. Also, the vireo builds its nest only three or four feet above the ground where it is excellent prey for household pets and feral cats. (A born loser?)

**4. The inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms.** Although the bird is protected by California and federal laws, the habitat is not.

**5. Other natural or man-made factors affecting its continued existence.** The intensive expansion of irrigated agriculture in California in the 1930s resulted in the explosive extension of the cowbirds' range. (Before 1900, the Brown-headed Cowbird was rare in the state.) There are an estimated 300 pairs of Least Bell's Vireos remaining in California. USFWS in the Federal Register: "The four largest remaining populations: the Sweetwater River (34 pairs), Prado Basin-

Santa Ana River (25 pairs), Santa Margarita River (69 pairs) and Santa Ynez River (60 pairs), representing about 65% of the extant U.S. population; each is imminently threatened by major urban development and water control projects in the near future."

What happens if a species makes the coveted list? Again we use the Least Bell's Vireo as an example. The USFWS speaks of land acquisition. A recovery plan would be developed with the combined efforts of the California Fish and Game and the USFWS. "Recognition through listing encourages and results in conservation actions by Federal, State, and private agencies, groups and individuals." It can be imagined that a gung-ho developer might cool off fast and give up his ambitious plans when he discovered he was blessed with a federally-listed endangered species on his site. Federal money would be available for management actions aiding the protection and recovery of the vireo. A vital management action could well be the cowbird traps which have been successful in protecting the Kirtland's Warbler in Michigan.

The Federal 1973 Act authorized cooperative agreements with the various states that developed their own Endangered Species Acts and included federal grants to help maintain them. California has its own list of endangered and threatened species, which now numbers over 250. Apparent discrepancies between federal and state listing reflects the fact that, though local populations are in trouble, there may be flourishing populations of the same species or subspecies in other parts of the country. So the Great Gray Owl and Belding's Savannah Sparrow are

endangered in California but are not on the Federal list.

Everyone is not overjoyed with the goals of the Endangered Species Act. It is another program that stimulates the laissez-faire grumblings about "getting the Government off our backs." Oil companies drilling offshore are not enthusiastic about measures that would prevent loss of wildlife and habitat resulting from inevitable oil spills. Mining and timber companies would like nothing better than to avoid an Environmental Impact Statement that is expensive, consumes their time, and might prevent them from making the most of their investment.

There are political pork-barrel projects where the local honcho gets his brownie points and maybe gets re-elected. We won't get into the sorry saga of Tellico Dam very deeply, but the little snail darter became a very big fish indeed when it held up a \$120 million recreational project for years. The media jumped all over the juicy story but failed to tell the public that rich Tennessee farmland, superb fishing rivers and valuable archeological sites would be wiped out along with that three-inch fish. The Supreme Court upheld the environmentalists' suit citing the Endangered Species Act. But Congress was pushed into amendments to the Act in 1978 that provided for a committee of federal agency heads that would resolve "irresolvable conflicts." TVA and Senator Howard Baker got their dam.

One of the most frustrating elements in the listing process is the length of time it can take to get a species protected. The boundaries of its habitat must be described, an EIS made, comments solicited and a public hearing held. Certainly extreme care must be taken in these determinations and the work is time-consuming. But the first request for listing the Least Bell's Vireo was in 1979, yet the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's May 1985 document still asks for further commentary. Will the bird get its full protection in 1986? (A recurrent nightmare in this area is the triumphal announcement in the Federal Register of a species listed as endangered the very day the last individual expires.)

Nothing is perfect. The Endangered Species Act remains a magnificent attempt by the American people through its representatives to say loud and clear that it values its wild heritage, that the mistakes of past ignorance must not be perpetuated. We have the knowledge, the awareness, the scientific skill and, above all, the growing desire to hold on to our incomparable unspoiled places and the fragile life that inhabits them.

#### References:

- The Federal Register*. May 3, 1985. Vol. 50, No. 86 pp 18968-18975 "Endangered Means There's Still Time," Dept of the Interior, USFWS, January 1981
- Outdoor California*: Nov.-Dec. 1984, published by California Fish & Game
- Ehrlich, Paul and Anne, "Extinction"

## Reservation Trips

(Limited Participation)

(cont'd from back page)

**WEEKEND, MARCH 22-23** — Spend a spring weekend enjoying nature in the unique **Anza-Borrego Desert State Park** with **Stephen Gustafson**. The wildflowers should be in bloom and some migrant warblers are expected. We'll look for the typical desert birds — Phainopepla, Verdin, Gambel's Quail, also Prairie Falcon, Black-tailed and Gray Gnatcatchers, Hummingbirds, particularly nesting Costas. We'll learn about owls, their habits, food supply, etc. then look for them Saturday evening. Gustafson was recently appointed Asst. Curator of Birds and Mammals at the San Diego Natural History Museum. He received his Masters Degree ('83) in Raptor Ecology, specializing in Owls (Great Horned, Barn, Long-Eared) with Anza-Borrego his study site. \$25/person.

**WEEKEND, APRIL 12-13** — Take advantage of an opportunity to see the memorable displaying **Sage Grouse** with local leader **David Gaines** of "Save Mono Lake" fame and author of "Birds of the Yosemite Sierra." We'll meet Saturday at 9 a.m. for a day of birding in the Bishop area (5 hours from L.A. — easy driving conditions) to look for Crossbills, Blue Grouse, Mt. Birds, Black-billed Magpies, and others in a diversity of habitats from the Owens Valley floor to 9,000 feet. We'll meet before dawn Sunday to see the Sage Grouse display then look for singing Sage Thrashers, northward migrating waterfowl, White Pelicans and possibly Whistling Swans, ending around noon. You have the option of birding either day for \$12.50 (be sure to specify Sat. or Sun.) or the weekend for \$20/person.

**SUNDAY, APRIL 13** — **Migrating Seabird Workshop** with **Jon Dunn**. Spend a few hours learning to identify loons, cormorants, brant, scoters and gulls in flight, using shape, flight and flocking patterns as well as coloration and other identifying methods. Dunn is co-author of "Birds of So. Calif., Status & Distribution," the major consultant of National Geographic's "Birds of No. America," a member of the California Rare Birds Committee, and a Director/Leader of Wings, a professional bird tour group. \$7.50/person

### PELAGIC TRIPS

**SUNDAY, MARCH 9th** — **Bruce Broadbooks** and **Kimball Garrett** will lead an *Alcid* and Shearwater Trip around **Santa Barbara Island** and out to Sea on the MV Vantuna. Expected species — Shearwaters: Sooty, Pink-footed, Black-vented; Jaegers: Pomarine, Parasitic; Terns & Gulls: Sabine's, Black-legged Kittiwake, Arctic Tern; *Alcids*: Rhinoceros Auklet, Pigeon Guillemot, Xantus Murrelet, Common Murre, Cassin's Auklet. Rareties and other Possibilities: Black-footed Albatross (March), Short-tailed Shearwater, No. Fulmar, So. Polar Skua, Puffins. Meet at USC Dock in San Pedro. Departure at 7:00 a.m., return at 6:00 p.m. 38 spaces available, \$20 per person.

**SATURDAY, MAY 31st** — Leaders **Kimball Garrett** and **Louis Bevier** will guide an *Alcid* and Shearwater trip through the **Santa Barbara Island Area**. See Sunday, March 9th for expected species. Meet at MV Vantuna, USC Dock in San Pedro for 6:00 a.m. departure. Return, 6:00 p.m. 38 spaces available, \$20 per person.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

(Details in Future *Tanagers*)

**JUNE WEEKEND** — Our annual jaunt to the **Kern River Area** with **Bob Barnes** that includes Sequoia National Forest and desert areas for a wide variety of birds.

**JULY 28-AUGUST 4** — **American Birding Association Convention** in **Tucson, Arizona**. This is a program packed with field trips for local bird specialties, identification workshops, evening programs with the exciting daily specie count-down, meetings, and optional pre- and post-convention trips. Contact ABA, P.O. Box 4335, Austin, Texas 78765 for detailed information.

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 2** — **Pelagic** from San Pedro to Santa Barbara Island. Leader: **Herb Clarke**. \$20.

**LATE AUGUST WEEKEND** — **Shorebird Workshop** with **Jon Dunn**. A slide show/lecture Friday evening and field trip Saturday. \$30/person; slide show only \$12/person.

**EARLY SEPTEMBER WEEKEND** — **Yosemite** with **David Gaines** to look particularly for Great Gray Owl and Black-backed Woodpecker.

**WEEKEND, SEPTEMBER 26-28** — **Pelagic Birds Workshop** with **Arnold Small**. A slide show/lecture will be held either Friday evening or Saturday morning and an all day pelagic to Santa Barbara Island on Sunday. \$45/person.

**CARPPOOLING:** IS encouraged to reduce gas consumption and air pollution whenever possible. While the IRS allows business to reimburse car expense at the rate of 20¢ per mile, a recent study shows that the average cost *per mile* to own and operate a new subcompact car was 34.6¢ and a standard car was 55.4¢. One suggestion has been for riders to at least share the 4-5¢ per mile gasoline expense.

## Code of Ethics for Trips

by **Wanda Conway**  
*Field Trip Chairman*

(Courtesy **Tucson Audubon Society**)

Our leaders have guidelines they use to make your outings more enjoyable, so as we begin a new year of activities it, seems appropriate to share the following code as an introduction to beginners and a reminder for more experienced birders.

Always let the Leader go first.

Follow the Leader's instructions and requests.

Keep conversations to a minimum, so that all members of the group will be able to hear birds and the Leader.

"Pishing" by Leader only.

No Pets.

Children must be under adult supervision.

Wear suitable shoes and quiet clothing.

Have a jacket available.

Leave tape recorders at home.

Avoid pointing and quick movements; move slowly.

Stay on established pathways; many habitats are fragile.

Respect owner's privacy and property.

Use common courtesy for the good of the group.

Most of the above rules are really ones of common sense and courtesy. None of them should be a burden on any individual and the observance of the rules should make the group experience more pleasant for all members and improve the chances to observe more birds and learn more about them.

Best wishes for a good year with lots of great birding!

## Deadline for Los Angeles County Bird Sightings

March 7th is the deadline for sending unusual sightings, numbers, early or late dates, etc; for the *American Birds* Winter Season Report (January 1, 1985 through

February 28, 1986). Send all such sightings for L.A. County to Kimball Garrett, Natural History Museum, 900 Exposition Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90007.

## California Rare Bird Alerts

	Phone Number	Updated
Los Angeles*	213-874-1318	Thursday
Monterey	408-449-6100	Wednesday
San Bernardino	714-793-5599	Friday
San Diego	619-435-6761	irreg. w/rarities
San Francisco	415-843-2211	Wed. & rarities added
Santa Barbara	805-964-8240	irregular
Wildflower Hotline	818-768-3533	Thursday
Santa Monica Mt. Area	213-477-2153	Monday
(info includes birdwalks, other outings)		

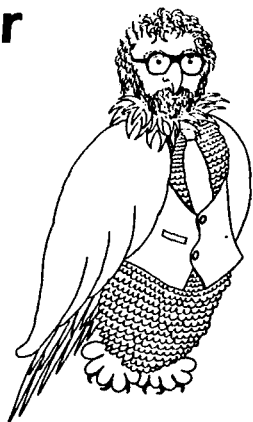
\*Kudos to Becky Belkin, our bird alert gal, for the high ratings she earned for L.A.A.S. when RBA tapes were discussed in a recent ABA "Birding" magazine article. Your help

in sharing information with other members by calling it to Audubon House (213-876-0202) along with your name and phone number would be *greatly appreciated!*



## From The Editor

by Fred  
Heath



I had decided after my last editorial that I would not use all the mistakes that appear in the *Tanager* as the basis for my next few editorials. Well, that plan has gone down the tubes because of a recent communication I received on the January-February issue.

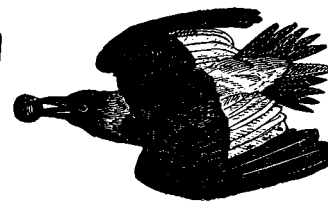
It was from a Larry Steinberg. Mr. Steinberg is a lawyer and sends me notes using envelopes from his law firm. Since I am still fighting some messy legal battles related to my divorce, I cringe every time I see a letter from a lawyer. A week later, when I finally opened the letter, I was relieved to find a nice note complimenting the *Tanager* with a suggestion that it could be a better newsletter without all those mistakes. Larry (I hope I'm not getting too familiar) then volunteers to proofread the galley to cut down the number of errors. As I've explained before, because of the tight schedule I am under I generally have to proofread them the night that they are ready from our typesetter to get them back early the next day.

Anyway, Larry provided a xeroxed copy of the *Tanager* with all the errors he found circled. In the January-February issue he found ten and a half errors. I only give him half credit for one error I deliberately made in my column. I had "no ture" in place of "not true" at the end of a paragraph where I denied making deliberate errors. Normally I would think Larry was a bit slow not picking up on my little joke. However, since he found four other unintended errors in my column, I won't mention it. He did miss the fact that I spelled deliberately wrong, although it wasn't deliberate . . .

My pleas for articles has brought me riches that should keep me going for several issues. So keep them coming. Unfortunately I have not had such luck with getting drawings. Please send those little filler drawings which can jazz up the *Tanager*. You'll get full credit and there is a 50% chance I'll spell your name correctly. Send to Fred Heath, P.O. Box 5036, Chatsworth, CA 91311.

## Birds Of The Season

by Hal Baxter  
and Kimball Garrett



This winter, really just a fleeting transition period from fall to spring, was perhaps best characterized by the birds which were NOT present in our region. Absent, or nearly so, were lowland Red-breasted Nuthatches, a species which frequently "invades" lowland conifer plantings in good numbers. The only lowland report of a **Pine Siskin** came from the Arroyo Seco of Pasadena (Hal Baxter, 30 December); this species is often quite abundant in winter in our lowlands. A single **Red Crossbill** in Monte Nido, Malibu Canyon (Kimball Garrett, 17 January) could possibly have been a holdover from last winter's major flight, as no such flight materialized this winter. The only **Varied Thrush** in our region that has come to our attention was a single bird near Westlake on the Malibu Christmas Bird Count (Barbara Elliott, 22 December). It's been 13 years since a good "invasion" of corvids into our lowlands; Steller's Jays, Clark's Nutcrackers and Pinyon Jays were unreported once again. Also unreported were our rarer cardueline finches: Evening Grosbeaks and (lowland) Cassin's Finches. However, northernmost California did experience its first flight of **Common Redpolls** in eighty-six years with the appearance of a flock of up to 18 birds after 28 December in the Tule Lake refuge area of Siskiyou County (numerous observers). As the only "twitchable" redpolls to appear during the lifetime of California's birders, these birds definitely became the event of the season.

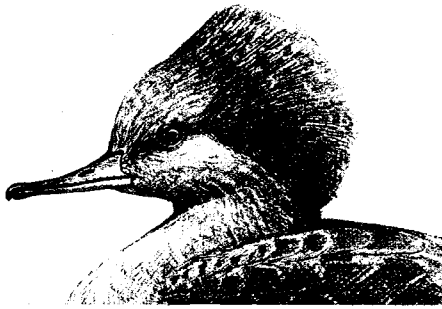
Adding insult to injury, most observers agreed that our regular wintering species were present in below-average numbers, and most of the local Christmas Bird Counts reflected this.

The most unusual local landbird was the **Pine Warbler** found on 1 January by Jeff Boyd in the pines and sycamores of El Dorado Park, Long Beach. The bird obliged scores of observers and was still present at this writing late in January. A rather bright male, it showed a number of traits (longish tail, dark auricular patch, pale yellow partial collar, unstreaked green back) which distinguished it from Bay-breasted and Blackpoll Warblers. This constitutes the second record of Pine Warbler for Los Angeles County (the first being an April bird in the lower San Gabriel Mountains).

No winter can go by without at least one controversial gull. This year's model was a very pale first-winter bird below San Diego tentatively identified as an **Iceland Gull**. The bird, which commuted between the Otay dump and the Silver Strand, was found

by Dale Delaney on 18 January. Many experienced gull-watchers suggest that there is a near continuum of plumages between typical Thayer's Gulls and "Kumlein's" Iceland Gulls (with aberrant Herrings, Glaucous, and other gulls providing additional potential confusion), and that extralimital sight records must remain open to question. As a footnote, we point out that last year's Iceland Gull candidate from Bodega Bay has not yet been resolved by the California Bird Records Committee.

Inland wintering **Horned Grebes** still appear to be on the increase as they exploit artificial deep water habitat (reservoirs). Birds were present again this winter on Lake Castaic (Jean Brandt and Phil Sayre, 12 January), and Jonathan Alderfer and Brian Keelan found two on Silver Lakes (along the Mohave River between Victorville and Barstow) on 11 January. As more and more observers become aware of the identifying marks of the **Clark's Grebe**, more localities are added to the roster of wintering areas. Four were on Puddingstone Reservoir on 21 December (Pomona Valley Christmas Bird Count), at least four were on Quail Lake in the extreme western Antelope Valley on 28 December (Jean Brandt, Phil Sayre and Bert Mull), and one was present on Bouquet Reservoir on 5 January (Grass Mountain CBC). A tight flock of 700 **Western Grebes** just off Las Tunas Beach (west of Topanga) on 29 December had only a couple of Clark's Grebes with them (Kimball Garrett). A **Greater White-fronted Goose** flying with Canada Geese near Lake Castaic (Jean Brandt and Phil Sayre, 12 January) may have been an early spring migrant. **Ross's Geese** were present at widely scattered localities, but in small numbers. Two were easily studied at the duck pond off Studebaker Road in El Dorado Park, Long Beach (Jim Rounds, Tim Peddicord, numerous other observers). A female **Wood Duck** was found on Harbor Lake during the Palos Verdes CBC on 29 December. Male **Eurasian Wigeon** were at the Brookside Gold Course in Pasadena (Gayle Benton and Hal Baxter, 30 December to present) and at Silver Lakes on the Mohave River (Jonathan Alderfer and Brian Keelan, 11 January). A **Greater Scaup** was with the flocks of *Aythya* ducks on Quail Lake on 28 December (Jean Brandt et al). Also present there were two **Common Goldeneyes**; another goldeneye was at Piute Ponds (Edwards Air Force Base) on 14 December (Brian Keelan), a female was on Bouquet Reservoir on 5 January (Grass Mountain CBC) and five were at Silver Lakes on 11 January (Jonathan Alderfer and Brian



Female Hooded Merganser  
Illustration by Jonathan Alderfer

Kelan). Doug Willick found his share of **Hooded Mergansers** in Orange County: three females along the Santa Ana River in Anaheim (24 November), a female on the Mission Viejo Golf Course (after 3 December), and a female near the Turtle Rock Nature Center (after 11 December). Additionally, a female was on Holiday Lake on 28 December (Jean Brandt *et al.*), and a pair was on Pyramid Lake, south of Gorman, on 15 January (Jonathan Alderfer). **Common Mergansers** were numerous on many inland reservoirs, e.g. 83 on Quail Lake (Brian Keelan, 14 December), 325 on Lake Serranos (Hank Childs, 27 December), 44 near Oak Canyon Nature Center (Doug Willick, 28 December), 100+ on Silver Lakes (Jonathan Alderfer and Brian Kelan, 11 January, and several 100 on Bouquet Reservoir on 5 January (Grass Mountain CBC).

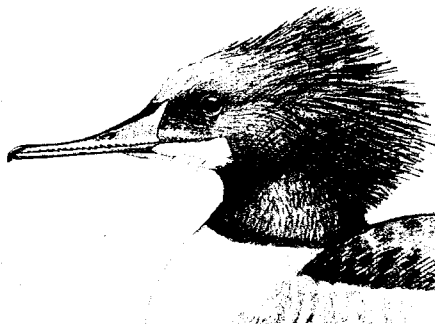
**Ospreys** were reported at several local reservoirs, and one was observed catching a fish in Malibu Lagoon on 15 January (Kimball Garrett *et al.*). An adult **Bald Eagle** was at Quail Lake on 28 December (Jean Brandt *et al.*). An immature **Broad-winged Hawk** was seen briefly over Doheny State Beach on 11 December (Jon Dunn and Guy McCaskie). An adult **Zone-tailed Hawk** was present after 22 December on Plano Trabuco in Orange County (Doug Willick); a "**Harlan's**" **Red-tailed Hawk** was also in this area (Richard Webster, 29 December). **Ferruginous Hawks** were widely reported in the interior portions of the region, and this was a banner winter for **Rough-legged Hawks** (with fourteen recorded on the Lancaster CBC). Coastally, a Rough-leg was northeast of Bolsa Chica on 12 December (John Hamilton *et al.*). At least seven different reports of single **Merlins** were received (away from Santa Barbara, where several were recorded on the CBC on 4 January).

Reports indicate that up to 4000 **Sandhill Cranes** were on the Carrizo Plain this winter. Flocks of **Mountain Plover** in the Antelope Valley included over 100 along 110th St. West near Avenue G on 14 January (Gayle Benton *et al.*). Reports of first-winter **Glaucous Gulls** were received from north of the Seal Beach Pier (Jeff Boyd, 11 December), the Santa Clara River Estuary (Arnold Small, 13 December), and Malibu Lagoon (Arnold Small, 22 December and 9 January). The only **Black-legged Kittiwake** reported was

one at Malibu Lagoon on 9 January (Arnold Small).

Winter roosts of **Long-eared Owls** were noted at Harper Dry Lake, west of Barstow (Paul Fox, 2 January) and at Adobe Mountain northeast of Pearblossom (Brian Keelan, all winter). Up to a dozen **Short-eared Owls** were also at Harper Dry Lake. Up to seventy **Vaux's Swifts** were noted in the Whittier Narrows area (e.g., 30 December, on the San Gabriel Valley CBC). A male and female **Williamson's Sapsucker** were noted at Chilao on 12 January (John Parmeter); this species appears to winter regularly at this locality.

A **Willow Flycatcher** in the willows south of Prado Regional Park was one of the few ever to be found in winter in California (Brian Daniels, after 17 November). A **Tropical Kingbird** was present after 7 December behind the Cabrillo Beach Museum in San Pedro (Mark Kincheloe). Up to four **Cassin's Kingbirds** were wintering behind Santa Fe Dam (Phil Sayre, after 30 December), and a single Cassin's in Calabasas was the first for the Malibu CBC in over a decade (Jean Brandt, 22 December). Doug Willick had two unusual winter swallows at San Joaquin

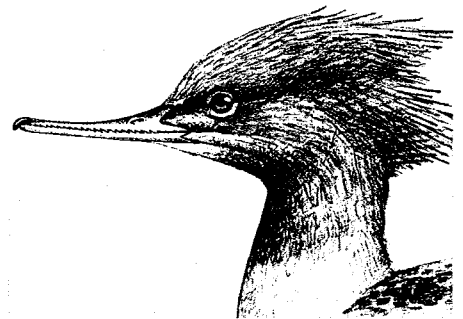


Female Common Merganser  
Illustration by Jonathan Alderfer

Marsh on 27 December: a **Northern Rough-winged** and a **Barn**. Among the localities at which **Winter Wrens** were noted were: U.C. Irvine campus (Doug Willick), Huntington Beach Central Park (Brian Daniels and Jeff Boyd), near Bonita Canyon, Irvine (Doug Willick), Cold Creek Preserve in the Santa Monica Mountains (Tim Thomas), the UCLA Botanical Gardens (Andy Kratter), and Descanso Gardens (Kimball Garrett). Unlike last winter, **Mountain Bluebirds** were restricted this year to the desert slope, most notably in the Antelope Valley. **Solitary Vireos** were at Newport Back Bay (*cassinii*; Doug Willick, 24 December); the 19th Street Willos in Huntington Beach (race?; Jerry Tolman, 4 January); Whittier Narrows (*cassinii*; Phil Sayre, 14 January); and the Los Angeles Country Club (*plumbeus*; Kimball Garrett and Ken Kendig, 5 January). A **Warbling Vireo** at the Arboretum in Arcadia was very unseasonal (Hal Baxter and Barbara Cohen, 10 January). **Nashville Warblers** were in San Clemente (Doug Willick, 3 December), at the Newport Environmental Nature Center (Doug Willick, 24 December),

and on the Los Angeles Country Club (Kimball Garrett and Ken Kendig, 5 January).

**Palm Warblers** were wintering at Doheny State Beach (Candy Dean) and at the Pt. Vicente Interpretive Center on the Palos Verdes Peninsula (Charles Collins). An immature male **American Redstart** was at Huntington Beach Central Park (Jerry Oldenettel, after 7 December). A **Kentucky Warbler** played hide and seek with Art and Mary Schroeder in Rustic Canyon, Pacific Palisades, 20-29 December. **Wilson's Warblers** were at San Joaquin Marsh (Doug Willick, 27 December), the Arboretum (San Gabriel Valley CBC, 30 December), and the UCLA Botanical Gardens (Andy Kratter, all winter; two birds). The wintering **Painted Redstart** remained in San Clemente through January.



Female Red-breasted Merganser  
Illustration by Jonathan Alderfer

The female **Hepatic Tanager** was back at Turtle Rock Nature Center on 9 December, but was seen only occasionally (Doug Willick). Though many observers commented on this winter's scarcity of **Western Tanagers** and orioles (we have become accustomed to expecting increased numbers every winter), there were five Western Tanagers at the Arboretum (San Gabriel Valley CBC) and ten on the Los Angeles Country Club (Kimball Garrett and Ken Kendig, 5 January). A **Clay-colored Sparrow** was wintering at a cemetery in Pomona (Hank Childs). Two **Grasshopper Sparrows** were on Portola Road, Plano Trabuco, on 28 December (Richard Webster and Guy McCaskie). A **White-throated Sparrow** was found across from the west side of the Brookside Golf Course, Pasadena, on 11 January (John Parmeter). A **Harris's Sparrow** was present after 14 December at Pine Bluffs Park, Capistrano Beach (Brian Daniels), and two were present at Linda Mia Ranch in the Antelope Valley (Fred Heath, 15 December; one present into January).

An immature male **Orchard Oriole** was present after early December at Doheny State Beach (Guy McCaskie). Four **Hooded Orioles** were noted on the San Gabriel Valley CBC on 30 December (divided between the Arboretum and Huntington Gardens). Up to thirty **Great-tailed Grackles** were at Silver Lakes along the Mohave River (Jonathan Alderfer and Brian Keelan, 11 January); is the Antelope Valley next?

In the odds and ends department: Two **Black-hooded Parakeets** (Nanday Conures) were in Steve Hartman's Sherman Oaks yard on 6 December, and the small flock in Temescal Canyon, above Sunset Blvd., remains healthy (Jonathan Alderfer, 19 January). Doug Willick *et al* were startled to find two **Whopper Swans** in the Surprise Valley in extreme northeastern California in early December . . . surprise tempered by their discovery that the birds had clipped wings!

As we always point out at this time of year, March is the peak of the breeding season for many of our resident species, and an excellent time to begin developing one's "atlassing" skills [as in Breeding Bird Atlas]. It's also a good time to brush up on local bird calls and songs, as birding by ear is essential for the running of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service "Breeding Bird Surveys," a worthwhile (and fascinating) endeavor which all of you should consider for this year. Migration will be slow through the month of March, though flights of seabirds (particularly Red-throated Loons and Brant) will be evident from coastal promontories. And if your gambling urges remain with the passing of the Super Bowl, you can always start a pool as to the date the Hooded Orioles will return to your local palm tree. Our money is on 15 March.

Send any interesting bird observations to:

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1821 Highland Oaks Drive  
Arcadia, CA 91006  
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## Note of Appreciation of Field Trip Leaders

by Wanda Conway  
Field Trip Chairman

I want to publicly acknowledge and thank the many field trip leaders that have made this portion of our Audubon Program a continuing success. So often it is the morning walk looking for birds, being out in our natural surroundings, that helps raise the awareness and need for conservation, from not trampling and littering to saving open space and helping wildlife continue in their natural habitats and perhaps find a spiritual resource we humans need.

We in L.A. Audubon, are very lucky to have so many really top notch birders and ornithologists that graciously share their time, effort and expertise.

These people have led trips in all habitats, from San Diego to Lee Vining and the coast to the Colorado River, undoubtedly seeing a good share of the hundreds of bird species recorded for the southland. They do the fun annual trips to special spots, others know a particular area inside-out and just where to look for all the resident and special birds. Then there are the wonderful regular monthly trips by David White and the Shanmans, the great field workshops & special trips, and the marvelous cooperation of the others that have been agreeable to lead trips to whatever area needed covering at that particular time or to try someplace different!

A very special thank you to all of you for helping these last two years: Jonathan Alderfer, Onick Arian, Bob Barnes, Hal Baxter, Harriet Bennish, Harold Bond, Jean Brandt, Bruce Broadbooks, Jean Brown, Gene Cardiff, Mary Carmona, Roger Cobb, Barbara Cohen, Guy & Louise Commeau, Brian Daniels, Jon Dunn, Harvey Fischer, Paul Fox, David Gaines, Kimball Garrett, Zus Haagen-Smit, Gerry Haigh, Rob Hansen, Loren Hays, Fred Heath, Bruce Henderson, Jim Huffman, Stewart Janes, Jerry Johnson, Lee Jones, Brian Keelan, Tom Keeney, Allan Keller, Abigail King, David Koeppel, Paul Lehman, Ruth Lohr, Gerry Maisel, Robert McKernan, Wayne & Judy Moore, Dennis Morgan, Elton Morel, Ed Navojosky, Pat & Paul Nelson, Larry Norris, Marge Pamias, Bob Pann, Warren Peterson, Paula Rooney, Shirley Rubin, George San Miguel, Bob and Roberta Shanman, Arnold Small, Caryol Smith, Jacob Szabo, Richard Webster, David White, Sandy Wohlgemuth, and Joe Zell. And I hope I didn't miss anyone!

The 64 people mentioned above led 85 trips last year not counting the pelagics scheduled by Phil Sayre or the Christmas Bird Counts. That is pretty incredible when most Audubons have very few leaders and between 8 and 30 field trips per year! So leaders, thank you again. As a spokesman for your followers, we think you are neat and VERY SPECIAL!!!

## President's Corner

by E.H. "Ken" Kendig Jr.

**T**hose of you who have contributed to our annual drive to raise funds for saving the California Condor have probably followed the published reports on the situation and are already aware of the problems and conflicts. National Audubon remains in favor of leaving at least three birds in the wild and has gone so far as to file a legal action against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seeking, among other things, the preparation and filing of an environmental impact report and further hearings relating to the same.

In the face of this fluctuating situation, your Board of Directors has decided to hold all contributions to the Condor drive in a Condor Fund in an interest bearing account until the situation is clarified. Substantial amounts of money will be necessary for saving the condors regardless of what finally happens and we encourage further contributions on an ongoing basis. Future needs will include among other things, money to assist in Condor releases (i.e. close monitoring of the birds for an extended period). Other possible uses of funds includes assistance to such organizations as the Nature Conservancy in acquiring particularly critical Condor habitat.

We will keep you informed of developments as they occur. If you have an interest in the California Condor, I strongly recommend attending the seminar on the Condor which we are co-sponsoring with UCLA in April. See the Calendar page for details.

## Help Conserve Wildlife and Habitat at Tax Time!

For people who enjoy nature, most lines are no fun . . . except one: Line 90 on your State Income Tax Form. Checking off Line 90 with a federally deductible contribution puts dollars right into California's Rare and Endangered Species Preservation Program — which is working to help preserve the state's endangered wildlife species and vanishing habitat. Do something that makes you *feel good at tax time*: Fill out Line 90 . . .

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.



# CALENDAR

March '86

## 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.

## FIELD TRIPS

**SATURDAY, MARCH 1** — **Loren Hays** says to "expect the unexpected" while viewing shorebirds, ducks, gulls, terns and raptors during a morning walk at **Bolsa Chica**. (Even Peregrine & No. Fulmar have been seen there.) Take the Seal Beach Blvd. exit from Fwy. 405 to Coast Highway, then south to marked parking lot across from State Beach, between Golden West and Warner. Meet at 8 a.m. Scopes helpful.

**WEEKEND, MARCH 8-9** — The **Friends of Madrona Marsh** will sponsor a Bird Walk Weekend, Saturdays 8-11 a.m. and Sundays 2-5 p.m. The **Madrona Marsh** is in Torrance bordered by Madrona, Monterey, Maple Avenues and Sepulveda Blvd. Parking is on Monterey with walks starting at the corner of Monterey and Madrona. You may see the resident fox who have endured loud heavy machinery past their den recently. Bring cameras, binoculars, field book and scope and enjoy this "Quiet City Sanctuary" as described by Nancy Pearlman on ECO NEWS television. Please call 32MARSH to volunteer to help. Walks will be repeated on the weekend of April 12, 13.

**SATURDAY, MARCH 8** — Join **Bob Shanman** for a morning walk at the unique **Ballona Wetlands**. This is peak season for viewing shorebirds, waterbirds and residents. Take Marina Fwy. 90 west to Culver Blvd., turn left to Pacific Ave., then right to footbridge at end. Meet at **8 a.m.** \$3 parking. (More info: 213-545-2867 after 6 p.m.)

**SUNDAY, MARCH 9** — **Trudy Siptroth** leads a birdwalk in **San Joaquin Freshwater Marsh** (Orange County). Expect many ducks, egrets, herons. Other walks will be on April 13, May 11, and June 8. Meet at 7 a.m. (or 6 a.m. after Daylight Savings) at the Arboretum gate, U.C. Irvine north campus, near the corner of Jamboree and Campus. (More info: Charles Hood (714) 673-0572).

**SATURDAY, MARCH 15** — **David White** will lead his monthly trip at the **Whittier Narrows Regional Park**, in search of a good variety of residents in addition to waterbirds and raptors. Meet at **8 a.m.** at the Nature Center, 1000 Durfee Ave., So. El Monte, off Fwy. 60 between Santa Anita and Peck Dr. exits, west of Fwy. 605.

**TUESDAY, MARCH 18** — **L.A. State & County Arboretum**. **Barbara Cohen** will lead her third annual morning spring walk for LAAS through varied habitat looking for quail, owls, herons, raptors and early migrants. Meet at 8 a.m. in front of the gatehouse in the parking lot. Admission free as this is a third Tuesday of the month. On Baldwin Ave., Arcadia, just south of Fwy. 210 on the west side of the street.

**SUNDAY, MARCH 23** — Join **Warren Peterson** and the San Fernando Valley Audubon for an early spring beginners walk through the lovely **Descanso Gardens**. In addition to towhees, raptors, herons and kingfishers, look for 3 species of hummers, orioles, Western Tanagers, early migrants and nesting birds — at least 12 species nested here last year. Meet promptly at 8 a.m. in parking lot off Descanso Dr., La Canada.

**TUESDAY, MARCH 25** — See the birds of the **Los Angeles Zoo** with Docents (and LAAS members) **Guy and Louise Commeau**. Meet at Zoo entrance at 10 a.m. Option: Bring a lunch and join them for a visit with the mammals in the afternoon. Exit freeway near the intersection of Golden State and Ventura Freeways. Entrance fee \$4.50

**SATURDAY, APRIL 5** — A docent from the **Wm. O. Douglas Outdoor Classroom** will lead a morning walk into **Franklin Canyon** looking for chaparral birds and early migrants. From intersection of Coldwater Cyn. and Beverly Dr. follow Beverly north on mile turning right on Franklin Cyn. Dr.; continue .8 mile to Lake Dr. turning right for 1 mile to only ranch house on left side. Meet at 8 a.m.

**SUNDAY, APRIL 6** — Join the **Pomona Valley Audubon** for a morning walk through the lovely **Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Gardens** in Claremont at 8:30 a.m. Look for residents and early migrants. East on Foothill Blvd. three blocks east of Indian Hill Blvd. turning north on College Ave. to parking lot.

## CONDOR SEMINAR

**SATURDAY, APRIL 19** — An all day seminar on the **California Condor** co-sponsored by LA Audubon and UCLA will take place at UCLA. Cost is \$50 for the general public and \$40 for LA Audubon Society members. Call Audubon House for further details.

Los Angeles Audubon Society  
7377 Santa Monica Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90046

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## WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE

Make plans now to attend the upcoming Western Regional Conference of the National Audubon Society at Asilomar Conference Center on the Monterey Peninsula March 22-25. Presentations and workshops will draw special attention to Wetlands and Protection of Old Growth Forests.

## RESERVATION POLICY AND PROCEDURE:

Reservations will be accepted ONLY if ALL the following information is supplied: (1) Trip desired (2) Names of people in your party, (3) Phone numbers (a) usual and (b) evening before event, in case of emergency cancellation; (4) Separate check (no cash please) to LAAS for exact amount for each trip; (5) Self-addressed stamped envelope for confirmation and associated trip information. Send to: Reservations Chairman Ruth Lohr, IAAS, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90046.

If there is insufficient response, the trip will be cancelled two weeks prior to the scheduled date (4 weeks for pelagies) and you will be so notified and your fee returned. Your cancellation during that time will bring a refund only if there is a paid replacement.

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

If there is insufficient response, the trip will be cancelled two weeks prior to the scheduled date (4 weeks for pelagies) and you will be so notified and your fee returned. Your cancellation during that time will bring a refund only if there is a paid replacement.

**For the list of and details on specific reservation trips please see page 8.**

## EVENING MEETINGS Meet at 8:00 P.M. in Plummer Park

**TUESDAY, MARCH 11** — **Steve Laymon** will be giving an illustrated talk on the **Yellow-billed Cuckoo in California**.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 8** — **Eric Metz** will give us details on the **Ballona Wetlands Project**.