



WESTERN TANAGER

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The Thrashers of Cottonwood Spring

*Article and photographs
by George L. San Miguel*

There's no doubt about it. I love thrashers. It has something to do with their formal posture and angry facial expressions combined with their beautiful, complex songs. It's also their secretive nature and infrequency of observation which makes finding them such a thrill. But some thrasher species have become more scarce in California in recent times as a result of man's negative impacts on the desert. Important habitat is protected within public lands, but the level of protection will likely decline if government land management agencies continue to suffer from reduced funding. When I accepted a ranger position at Joshua Tree National Monument I knew there would be opportunities to study some rare desert thrashers and determine their local abundances. Cottonwood Spring proved to be a fine location for doing just that.

Encompassing about 560,000 acres, Joshua Tree National Monument protects parts of two deserts and a transitional zone in between. The eastern third and southern edge of the monument is part of the Colorado Desert. Further inland and below 3,000 feet, this area experiences higher temperatures with less precipitation. The Mojave Desert environment occurs in the western third of the monument which receives much more moisture, including regular winter snows, and supports a denser vegetation cover. This section of Joshua Tree receives year round cooler temperatures due to altitudes which generally exceed 4,000 feet and range well above 5,000 feet along the crest of the Little San Bernardino Mountains. There is a very definite coastal influence on the biota of this part of the monument.

Fall and winter of 1984-1985 were much colder than usual in the 4,200 foot high Hidden Valley area where I lived in the monument. Visits by Red Crossbill, Cassin's Finch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Bohemian Waxwing and Lapland Longspur are exceptional events here. Their presence was a further indication of an unusually cool season. The local growth of scrub oak, juniper and pinyon pine warned me of the winter chill the Mojave Desert can experience. Much like the chaparral west of the Pacific Crest, this cooler, wetter part of the monument sustains resident populations of Mountain Quail, Scrub Jay, Rufous-sided Towhee, Bushtit, Plain Titmouse, and even California Thrasher. In fact California Thrasher occurs above 4,000 feet eastward in the monument to the longitudinal line of Twentynine Palms. At 4,400 feet, the Jumbo Rocks Campground area provided the eastern most breeding habitat for this species.

It was so cold out there in my mobile home that I received with great pleasure the news that I would be moving to Cottonwood Spring in early February of 1985. Situated at 3,000 feet in the south central section of the

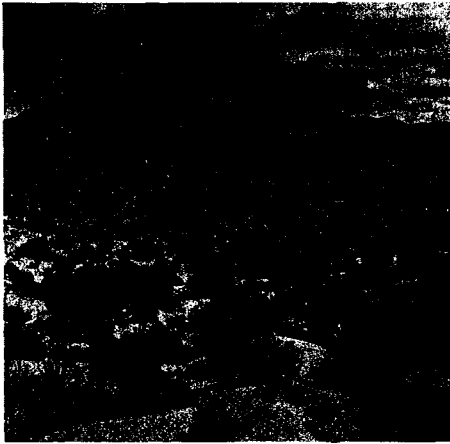
monument in a Mojave Desert-Colorado Desert transitional area, Cottonwood Spring stays a few critical degrees warmer during the winter than Hidden Valley. The local vegetation consists mainly of yucca, creosote bush, ocotillo and various cacti as well as mesquite, palo verde and desert-willow growing in the washes. The move not only allowed my bones to thaw, it provided me with easy access to one of the finest desert oasis birding spots. This small area boasts a bird checklist of over 200 species, 80% of which are migrants and vagrants. In addition Cottonwood Spring has a long history as a good place for finding thrashers.

Of the six thrasher species which have been recorded at Cottonwood Spring, Bendire's Thrasher, Le Conte's Thrasher and Northern Mockingbird nest locally. While Sage Thrasher is a regular migrant, Crissal Thrasher and Brown Thrasher have each been seen here only once.

An immature male Brown Thrasher was collected at Cottonwood Spring on 22 October 1945 (Miller). Certainly not a typical bird in the area, but this is not the only record for this species in the monument.

Le Conte's Thrasher bringing a caterpillar to its nestlings





Open desert scrub east of Cottonwood Spring provides habitat for many desert birds including thrashers

Though small numbers of Crissal Thrasher are resident to the south in the Coachella Valley and to the west in Morongo Valley, this desert thrasher has only been seen in Joshua Tree National Monument a few times. There is one spring record (April) for Cottonwood Spring, during the late 1950's.

Unlike the Brown and Crissal Thrashers, Sage Thrasher is a regular visitor to the area from mid-September to early April. However, Sage Thrashers are only seen individually and in small numbers over a season. In some years they have apparently been absent. On 5 April 1985 I saw one at Cottonwood Spring and was able to point it out to a large group of birders on a field trip sponsored by the Point Reyes Bird Observatory. All were excited even though this was not a rare sighting.

Joshua Tree National Monument's rarest nesting thrasher is the Bendire's Thrasher which resides here from early March to August. Besides Cottonwood Spring, this rare species has only been recorded at a handful of other sites within the monument. A male Bendire's Thrasher has been consistently observed each season near the highway at the Cottonwood Visitor Center since 1982. In 1985 he was first observed on 28 February and was already in full song. During this spring there were three males singing in the area between the visitor center and Cottonwood Campground. Though their song is not as musical as that of Northern Mockingbird and Le Conte's Thrasher, I measured the duration of one of the song's at 26 seconds in one breath!

The male Bendire's Thrasher at the visitor center was heard singing sporadically until 1 April. He was usually seen perched at the top of tall junipers across the road. On 30 April I watched a Bendire's Thrasher foraging in open sand behind the visitor center and flying back across the road with insects in its beak. After observing several trips I was able to locate the nest which was constructed four feet off the ground inside a large juniper. Two small nestlings were sharing the nest. Further activity was easily monitored with binoculars from the visitor center. The two young birds were still in the nest

on 3 May, but they had fledged by 6 May. A sterile egg remained in the nest after fledging.

A second pair of Bendire's Thrashers centered their territory about a third of a mile to the southeast next to the ranger residences. The male was first heard singing on 16 March. Afterwards one of the birds was frequently seen running on the sand or singing from a perch among the four residences. Its short beak was seen used as a digging tool. This male also ceased singing at the start of April and the pair suddenly became very secretive.

On 29 and 30 April one of the pair was seen picking red berries off a low shrub. The next day much activity among the pair was noticed in dense shrubs growing 100 feet south of the residences. For the next five days both birds were seen busily foraging for insects on the ground and bringing them to a large abrojo thornbush, but no matter how hard I tried, the nest was too well concealed to see. As with the other



Bendire's Thrasher pauses in cottonwood before bringing a grub to its nestling

pair, whenever I approached the nest site, one would stay close by and produce a low, raspy wren-like buzz. Though the nest or young were never seen, the behavior of the adults clearly indicated that there were young being fed in a nest.

The third male Bendire's Thrasher staked out a territory from the eastern edge of the residential area east as far as Cottonwood Campground. He was heard singing by my home every few days from 27 March to 7 May (my last day living in the area). The fact that he continued singing five weeks after the other two males had stopped (during egg incubation) suggests that he had no mate or was a late arrival and had started the breeding process later. Let's hope he found a mate since this species is not a common one, not just in the monument but throughout the birds' California range where there are under 200 breeding pairs (Remsen). Thus the nesting efforts supported at Cottonwood Spring are of real consequence.

Such is not the case with Northern Mockingbird which is easily the region's most common "mimic thrush." Sometimes people forget that mockingbirds are very close kin to thrashers and that these birds are not restricted to suburban habitats where we are most accustomed to seeing them. After all, where did they live before towns were built? At least some of them were living in the deserts. Like Bendire's Thrasher, Northern Mockingbirds migrate into Joshua Tree National Monument early in spring and spend the summer. A few fall transient Mockingbirds may continue passing through to the south as late as November and some are resident in the town of Twentynine Palms.

In 1985 the first Mockingbird seen in the Cottonwood Spring area was recorded on 24 March. Eleven days later there were still only two around, but both were males singing in the same location near the oasis. By 6 April they had spread themselves out along an adjacent wash. Within the next two weeks the influx of Northern Mockingbird to the Cottonwood Spring areas was astonishing. On 17 April there were so many singing mockingbirds in the area that I gave up trying to keep notes on them. These birds were by no means solely associated with the campground or residences; many Northern Mockingbirds were observed singing in distant, rugged desert canyons.

Except for the higher mountains, Northern Mockingbird is a summer resident species throughout the monument. There is even a nesting record for Pinto Basin, the hottest, driest and most sparsely vegetated part of the monument. Territory density seemed fairly high in the Cottonwood Spring area. Despite the ample opportunities, I could not take time to locate a nest. There were too many other desert birds nesting at this time, including some rare desert thrashers.

I had always understood that Le Conte's Thrasher occupied the harshest, sparsest stretches of desert. So it was to my great surprise when I finally added this elusive bird to my life list in the northwestern section of the monument. He was observed

The nest and egg of a Bendire's Thrasher located inside a large juniper





Year-round surface water and shady cover make Cottonwood Spring an outstanding place to look for migrants

on a cold rainy day in December just west of Sheep Pass where, at 4,500 feet, the thick growth of blackbrush, juniper, Joshua Tree, scrub oak and pinyon pine was not exactly what I imagined as their habitat. I would not have noticed the bird had it not been singing. Like the California Thrasher, Le Conte's Thrasher is a permanent resident in its range and sings outside the breeding season. In the northwestern part of the monument the two species can be found side by side. As with most permanent residents their nesting season begins sooner than related migratory species.

My first day at Cottonwood Spring was 9 February 1985 and what better welcome can a naturalist receive than having a Le Conte's Thrasher sing his best from a yucca 100 feet from the front door? Unfortunately the Le Conte's Thrasher was not nearly as likely to forage among the residence as were the Bendire's Thrashers. This Le Conte's Thrasher lived up to its reputation for being shy and inconspicuous. My experience with this species here, and an investigation of the monument's records, suggest that they occur throughout the monument except in mountainous terrain. Their numbers are fairly high, but well spaced. The key to finding these birds is to simply cover a lot of ground in open country.

If the rule about Le Conte's Thrasher is that they are shy and elusive, then remember that there is always an exception to the rule. In 1985 a pair of these thrashers set up a nesting territory on the outer edge of Cottonwood Campground. The nest was discovered on 13 April, barely visible deep within the shady interior branchings of a large pencil cholla cactus. The adults were seen boldly running through "B" loop in the campground like tame, miniature road-runners slashing their bills into the sand and leaf litter under shrubs. Insects and grubs were brought to the nest at about ten minute intervals. Perhaps the supply of insect prey in the campground was so abundant that these birds would temporarily endure limited human company to raise a brood. Le Conte's Thrasher are ordinarily most intolerant to human activity and the resultant changes in their habitat (Remsen).

Tragedy struck the Le Conte's Thrasher nest on 15 April when a four foot long gopher snake scaled the spiny cholla fortress. The over-matched adults were seen forcing the two surviving nestlings from the nest onto the ground and leading them away. I transported the snake a long distance from the campground where it swallowed the already suffocated nestling. The other two nestling thrashers were so young they could hardly walk, but managed to find shelter after I extracted a few cactus spines from their delicate bodies. Throughout the incident the parent birds never left the area and one was seen searching the nest site for several minutes in an apparent search for the missing nestling. The ultimate fate of the brood was never determined, but this species typically lays a second clutch over the summer as does the Bendire's Thrasher (Bent).

Though widely spaced and difficult to locate, my experience with the Le Conte's Thrasher indicates its population is relatively high and healthy in Joshua Tree National Monument. Not so elsewhere in California where their range is shrinking due to the expansion of agriculture, urbanization, mining and other developments as well as from the destructive effects of off-road vehicle use. Similarly, our society's consumptive use and abuse of the desert threatens the Bendire's Thrasher (Remsen). It is important to protect their remaining breeding areas in California. Both species have limited ranges and small overall populations which make them sensitive to further losses. Even in the monument the Bendire's Thrasher is rare and local. The two or three pair that nested near Cottonwood Spring in 1985 were a special blessing. Hopefully the Cottonwood Spring area will continue to nurture these and a full variety of other desert birds for a long time to come.

For thousands of years thrashers have been able to handle a few losses to nest predators. To survive the threats of the modern age, these fascinating birds only need undisturbed desert in which to live.

However, even the 467,000 acres of designated wilderness area within Joshua Tree National Monument may not be protected as well in the future. Ongoing budget and staff cuts among agencies overseeing the public lands continue to undermine the protection we have grown to expect. Fewer rangers patrolling the monument will probably invite increases in off-road vehicle abuses and over violations. Thrashers are very sensitive to even temporary disturbances by these machines especially during the breeding season. Of long term concern is the damage inflicted on the habitat including the leveling of large cholla cacti and other nest-supporting shrubs.

Places like Joshua Tree National Monument represent our nation's commitment to preserve remnants of America's natural landscape and the unique biotic communities they sustain. We must not allow today's short-sighted, political decisions to compromise what has been held sacred by concerned Americans for so long. We not only owe it to ourselves, but to the rare desert thrashers and the other inhabitants of our surviving wildlands.

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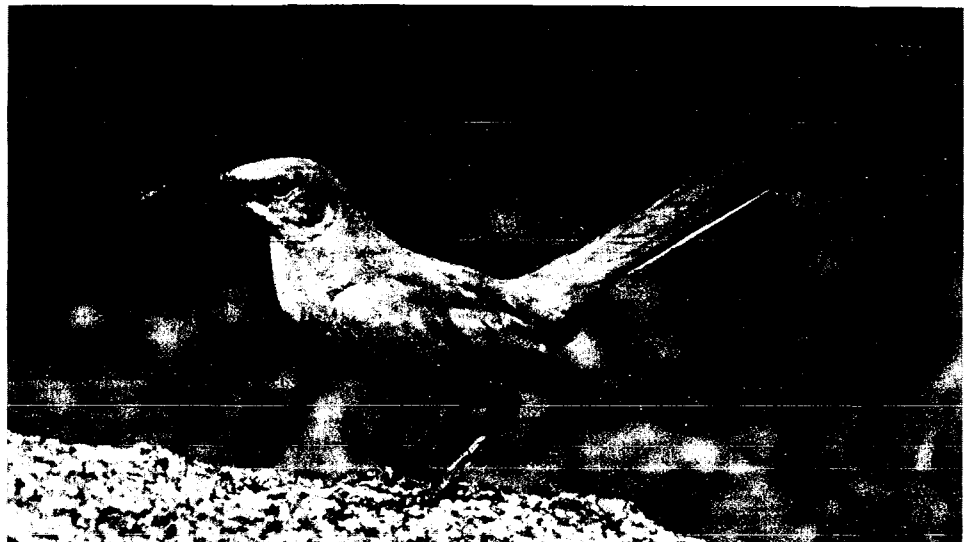
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FIELD TRIPS

(cont'd from back page)

SUNDAY, APRIL 27 — Meet Birder/Artist **Mary Carmona** for a morning walk in **Tujunga Wash/Orcas Picnic Area**. Look for Cactus and Rock Wrens, Roadrunner, Phainopepla and a variety of warblers, and other migrants. Take the 210 Fwy. toward the Hansen Dam Recreation Area; exit at Osborne St. turning north and immediately right on Foothill Blvd. Go approximately 1½ miles and left on Conover (in front of Lakeview Terrace homes) to dirt parking area just before Big Tujunga Wash Bridge. Meet at 8 a.m.

SUNDAY, APRIL 27 — Meet **Harold Bond** at **Mohave Narrows**, a marvelous oasis for spring migrants. Also look for Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Gambel's Quail and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Take I-15 towards Victorville, exit Bear Valley Rd. Go east 3.9 miles to Ridge Crest Rd. Turn left 2.6 miles to park entrance (\$3 fee-day or weekend camping). Meet at 8:00 a.m. at boat house. Approximately 2 hours from L.A. Bring lunch.

SATURDAY, MAY 3 — Join **Warren Peterson** at the **Placerita Nature Center** at 8 a.m. This is peak migration time for warblers, orioles, vireos and flycatchers. Bring water and picnic for possible early lunch; then either hike the two miles through riparian habitat looking for more migrants or drive to the **Walker Ranch** to spot a few cars for return trip, and bird this area. Take the Antelope Valley Fwy #14, then at first exit take Placerita Cyn. Rd. right to entrance on right in approximately 2 miles.

SUNDAY, MAY 4 — Spend a morning birding **Malibu Lagoon State BEach** with **Dennis Morgan**. This should be a good time to see a wide variety of migrating waterbirds possibly in breeding plumage. Beginners welcome. Bring scope if possible. Meet at entrance to parking lot at 8:00 a.m. Call (818) 883-1413 after 6 p.m. for more info.

MONDAY, MAY 5 — **Ojai Loop Trip** with **Guy & Louise Commeau**. Search for migrants along the Ventura River riparian area; W. Flycatchers, Hutton's Vireos and Purple finches in the live oak grove and a wide variety at other stops including Matilija Lake and Lake Casitas. Bring lunch and plan to carpool for a full day of birding. Those able to carpool closer to home, meet under the overpass at the Valley Circle offramp of Fwy. 101 in Woodland Hills by 6:30 a.m. Go north on Fwy 101 toward Ventura, turning inland on Rte. 33, exiting at Foster Park. (Camping available.) Meet beyond bridge of Ventura River in Park at 8 a.m.

CARPOOLING: 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.

RESERVATION TRIPS:
(Limited Participation)

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, LAAS, 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 pelagics) 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.

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

WEEKEND, MAY 3-4 — **Morongo Wildlife Nature Preserve** and **Joshua Tree National Park**, at the height of spring migration with Ornithologist **Stewart Janes**. At Morongo, we will be looking for a variety of migrants that typically breed north of our area including Hermit and Townsends Warblers, vireos, flycatchers and Western Tanager. Eastern vagrants such as Brown-crested Flycatcher, Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, are also a possibility. Other species likely encountered in our visit to Joshua Tree will include Gambel's Quail, Scott's Oriole, and LeConte's Thrasher. Janes has recently received his Doctoral Degree from UCLA with a specialty in avian ecology. He has conducted studies with birds of prey in the Great Basin for more than 10 years. More recently he has studied insectivorous birds in the forests of the northwest in addition to his experience in the Joshua area.

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.

WEEKEND, JUNE 28-29, JUNE 30 optional — Join this perennially popular trip to see a great diversity of species in four distinctly different habitats of the **Kern River/Greenhorn Mt. Area** with local leader **Bob Barnes**. Some of the possibilities are: Summer Tanager, Indigo Bunting, Blue Grouse, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Pinyon Jay, Gray Flycatcher, Williamson's Sapsucker. Enthusiastic teacher Bob Barnes has birded this area over 13 years and probably knows the regions' birdlife and their secret haunts best. \$25/person. Monday, June 30 option for an additional \$10.

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The California Condor: History, Biology, and Conservation of an Endangered Species

*A Special Conference on the Future of the California Condor
Co-Sponsored by the Los Angeles Audubon Society
For the General Public Saturday, April 19*

1986 is the critical year in the battle for survival of the California Condor. The fierce discussion about the best practical ways to save this magnificent raptor of Southern California from extinction has become more intense than ever before. Between September 1984 and September 1985 the number of wild condors diminished from 15 to 6. Should the remainder be brought into captivity to avoid further losses on the range?

Ornithologists and conservationists have worried about the California Condor for almost 50 years. None of the applied policies and programs have stopped the steep decline of this symbol of the American West. What went wrong, and what must go right in the near future to preclude extinction?

The case of the condor offers an important lesson about the goals, successes, and failures of the American conservation movement. What happened to the condor may very well happen to other species and biocommunities in the future. If you want to know more about the biology, the history, and the future of the California Condor, enroll in this one-day conference. The conference lecturers are key researchers and wildlife managers whose heroic efforts have permitted us to learn more about condors and their habitat in the past five years than in the preceding forty. All participants at the program receive a special conference publication, *100 Questions and Answers About the Past and Future of the California Condor*.

COORDINATOR:
Hartmut Walter, PhD,
Professor of Geography, UCLA

When: Saturday, April 19, 8:30 am-9 pm
Where: UCLA, 2160E Dickson Art Center

Fee: \$50.00
\$40.00/LAAS members
Also available as credit course.
Call Audubon House for application.

MORNING LECTURE SESSION:
8:30 am-12 noon

New Data on the Breeding Biology of California Condors
Noel F.R. Snyder, PhD,
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Censusing and Identifying Condors in the Wild
Eric Johnson, PhD,
California State University, San Luis Obispo

New Data on the Ecology of Wild California Condors
Jesse Grantham,
Condor Research Center, Ventura, CA

History of the California Condor in North America
Lloyd Kiff,
Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology

AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS:

1:30-5 pm
(Select Workshop 1 or 2)

WORKSHOP 1: THE CAPTIVE CONDOR PROJECT

Introduction: Successfully Breeding Raptors in Captivity

Brian J. Walton,
University of California, Santa Cruz

Studying Captive California Condors
Cathleen R. Cox, PhD,
Los Angeles Zoo

Hatching and Rearing of California Condors in Controlled Environments
William D. Toone,
San Diego Wild Animal Park

WORKSHOP 2: CONDOR HABITAT, RECOVERY, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Introduction: Endangered Raptors of the World

Hartmut Walter, UCLA

The Next Five Years: Demographic Status and Future of the California Condor

J. Michael Scott,
Project Leader, Condor Research Center,
Ventura, CA

Releasing Captive Condors to the Wild: Experiences with Andean Condors and Prospects for the California Condor

Michael P. Wallace, PhD,
Coordinator for the Captive Propagation of the California Condor

PANEL DISCUSSION:

7:30-9 pm

Does the Condor Have a Future in Calif?

Moderator: Hartmut Walter and panel members selected from the program speakers

Santa Monica Recreation Area Seeks Wildlife Sightings Info

The National Park Service is currently seeking information on wildlife sightings in the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

"Recording these wildlife sightings is extremely important and assists our Resource Management Division in their research," stated Superintendent of the National Recreation Area Daniel R. Kuehn. "Wildlife such as mule deer, mountain lions, bobcats, rabbits, badgers, the gray fox, coyotes, weasels, racoons, an abundance of raptors (birds of prey), migratory birds, reptiles and amphibians exist in this 150,000 acre Park mountain range and are an integral part of the diversity of natural resources within this Mediterranean-type ecosystem of the Santa Monica Mountains."

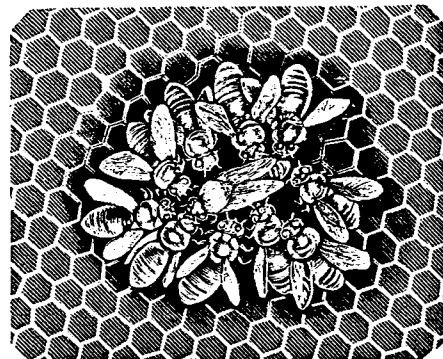
These wildlife populations are unique in respect to their existence next to one of the most urbanized areas of the world. It is an area becoming restricted to biogeographic islands, habitats surrounded by freeways and residential developments, habitats that are becoming more tenuous and complex within this expanding urban development every day.

"The National Park Service is continuing its research into many aspects of the natural resources of the Santa Monica Mountains," said Forester Bob Plantrich. "Wildlife sightings is one area in which the contributions of the public can be of great value in assisting us with our research."

If you have sighted wildlife in the Santa Monica Mountains, the NPS asks you to answer the following questions on a post card:

Description, behavior, number, sketch, map, etc. Location, Time of Day, Date (Mo., Day, Yr.), Weather, Park, Observer (include name, address, phone number).

Information should be mailed to Resource Management, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, 22900 Ventura Blvd., Woodland Hills, CA 91364.



From The Editor

by Fred Heath



If you look through this April issue of the *Tanager* you can plainly see that except for the poem by Glenn Cunningham there is none of the silliness associated with an April's Fool's issue. That is not the way I intended it to be. It was an April issue three years ago in which I devoted four pages to April foolery entitled *Knot, the Western Tanager*. That issue generated a ton of mail which kept my editorial column going for months. I thought we were ready to do it again. Unfortunately, because of time constraints I just couldn't pull it together in time. Maybe next year.

One thing I never did is acknowledge the people that helped put that issue together. I figure that after three years the statue of limitations has expired and these people won't be getting any hate mail. The idea was conceived during a birding trip with Tom Frillman, Kimball Garrett, and Mary Thompson. I don't remember what bird we were chasing, but we had stopped at Harbor Lake which is always enough to put one in a weird mood. The more we got into it the funnier it became. I got home with sore sides from laughing so much.

We divided the task up with Kimball doing a self-parody of one of his identification articles while poking fun at the fact that I can never remember the latest (and correct) A.O.U. names for various birds (and I still don't like Moor hen . . . with or without Tom Howell's lucid explanation). For those of you that are new readers, Kimball explained how to distinguish between the American, Common and Great Egrets. I now call them the Great American Common Egrets just to cover the A.O.U. changes. Mary essentially did the recipe column entitled *Seasoned Birds*, Tom did most of the Calendar page, while I put together the piece on getting rid of starlings. Bob Pann, a language teacher, got a fellow teacher to help put

together the take-off on overly scientific articles by writing it entirely in latin with bird names in italicized English. It sure was fun. Definitely next year!

Sometimes fun things don't turn completely the way you intend. Harold Swanton and I have a little trouble with the increased commercialization of birding. His article poking fun at Bob-O-Link in the December *Tanager* was a reaction to this commercialization. Unfortunately, it also poked fun at Bob Odear, the originator of this unique service. Bob called me to express his unhappiness with the article. He had written a rebuttal letter while his anger was still strong. Because Bob is very much a gentleman, he wrote a second letter which I've agreed to publish in this *Tanager*. The first letter was actually quite funny, but the satire was a bit strong, and although I like controversy, I really would not want to foster a feud between two fine people.

In addition to Bob's letter I've also published two other letters defending Bob and Bob-O-Link. The one from Jerry Maisel is especially critical of me. Luckily I have broad shoulders and I'll still call him when I find that Ross' Gull at the Lancaster Sewage Ponds (right after I call Bob-O-Link and get my \$25, that is).

Letters to the Editor

Dear Mr. Heath:

Perhaps the article by Harold Swanton re: Bob-O-Link, Inc. was written tongue-in-cheek. Perhaps not. If not, you have accepted many inaccuracies for publication. It might be wise to check the source before such a vituperative article is printed.

First, I met Bob only once (on a June, 1985 pelagic trip off North Carolina's Outer Banks). He was using Sears binoculars and still does (I checked) and I recall discussing the merits of them versus the Swift Audubons that I use. There is a lot of time to talk on a pelagic trip and we discussed many things, some of which I will bring up later.

I wonder also how Harold arrived to see the Buff-breasted Flycatcher. Was it by automobile (GM and their ilk are Big Business) or does he only travel on foot? Did he learn about the bird via telephone (really BIG business), modern printing, or by tom-tom? Did he view it through binoculars or spend an inordinate amount of time hoping to get close to it to identify naked eye?

Bob doesn't even remember talking with Harold at the flycatcher site, let alone discussing what he did or did not do for Wrangler. He was wearing a jacket with Wrangler on it because it is part of his wardrobe. I hope Harold doesn't have any "alligator" or other emblem showing as

there may be a lot of speculation as to why it is being displayed.

During the June trip we also discussed computers as we have an Apple look-alike. He has an IBM PC and if that is state-of-the-art then I pity our Defense Department, most Big Businesses, etc., because there are certainly limitations with a home computer. However, what he has done has been to utilize his computer in that most basic of U.S. institutions, private enterprise. He took a chance, has operated in the red for 1985, hopes to turn the corner in 1986, and I for one sure hope he makes it.

Bob and his wife Pam, deserve a lot of credit for their endeavor. My husband Frank, and I were made to feel that we were the most important people on the pelagic trip . . . and I'm sure that everyone else on that boat felt the same way by the time the trip was over. Perhaps the Odears (it would have been appropriate to mention Bob's last name somewhere in the article) had been in big business and learned a lot of marketing skills, but I feel they have utilized their skills in a most effective way. They are charming and intelligent people who are working very hard to make this enterprise go. Their monthly publications are a delight to read. Try it for only \$16.50. At the very least, Los Angeles Audubon Society should subscribe to this service.

I have a modest life list (565) and really concentrate on Pennsylvania birds (an excellent list of 312) but still subscribe to Bob-O-Link on a Gyrfalcon II basis, if for no other reason than to vicariously enjoy a birding trip we cannot afford. We have contributed

two birds to NARBA (Jackdaw and Tufted Duck) and many birders outside our state were glad to travel here to find them as lifers. We were not the first to report them for 1985 so did not receive \$25.00 . . . who cares.

We subscribe to *Western Tanager* and have only spent a total of 14 days in California, four days in November 1972 and ten days in April 1983, because of air fare bargains hard to refuse. Have you or Harold ever taken a Wings, Victor Emanuel, Peregrine Tours, etc., tour? We have not. If so, you certainly had to pay dearly for those birds seen.

Maybe there is some sour grapes that someone else came up with an idea that may take off. Years ago whoever thought that people would pay to see birds.

I would appreciate a response.

Sincerely,

Barbara M. Hass
Media, PA

Dear Fred:

I was most distressed to read in the December *Tanager* the "cheap-shot" article by Harold Swanton savaging Bob Odear, the man behind NARBA and Bob-O-Link. I have the utmost sympathy for the hurt Bob must have felt from this public character assassination. I must add that in my opinion you yourself bear a degree of responsibility for allowing the pages you control to be used for a personal attack — and no — the lame excuse that it was all tongue-in-cheek does not justify this kind of vicious diatribe. 'Taint funny! It is also no excuse that he did

not mention Bob Odear by name, but made a snide little joke by continually referring to him as "Mr. Wrangler." This is sleazy journalism, and it should have been beneath the dignity of the *Tanager* to print it.

Bob Odear does not *need* a defense from me. But for those who do not know him (which I daresay is perhaps 99+% of your local readership) I would like to say that Bob Odear is a gentleman (a *Southern* gentleman, in the best connotation of the term!) . . . a gentle man and a delightful birding companion. His intention in setting up NARBA was one of service to the birding "community." He does not broadcast it, but I know for a fact that he has put somewhat in the neighborhood of \$150,000 into this venture, and if he should ever just recoup his investment he would be deliriously happy . . . not so much for the money, but because it would indicate that his idea was successful and did in fact answer a need.

Harold Swanton does not like the idea of NARBA. Fine. He is entitled to his opinion. And a serious criticism (or even a humorous one) would be a valid subject for the *Tanager*. But he is not entitled to use the *Tanager* to heap ridicule on a decent person (and about whom he knows practically nothing) who is attempting to respond to what he perceives as a need of a segment of the birding community.

As you know, I am an enthusiastic birder, but I do not like to have people "show" me birds. Therefore, I do not choose to go on commercial birding trips. For me, birding is the most absorbing and exciting avocation in the world, and I regret the amount of commercialism which has crept into "my" hobby. But people who seek birds on commercial trips have a right to do so, and other

birders have a right to make a profession out of leading these trips without being subject to ridicule for this activity, so long as it is conducted in a responsible manner.

Bob Odear does not show people birds. He provides a service for those of us (yes, I subscribe to his Laysan service) who are interested. And I can tell you that the service is superb! I have not kept track of the dozens of times Bob or his gracious and lovely wife Pam have phoned me to report sightings of birds I have listed with him. I resent Mr. Swanton's gratuitous implication that I indulge in "lunatic listing and rankings and institutionalized competition." I presume Mr. Swanton would go to Malibu to see a rare bird if a friend called him to report one (since I doubt he would lower himself from his "leisurely, edifying, peaceable" perch to call the LAAS tape, which he must also consider a participant in the despised "crazy game"). *He* would go to Malibu? So I would go to Texas! Big deal!

Spare us more personal attacks from Harold Swanton.

Sincerely,
Jerry Maisel
Tarzana, CA

Dear Mr. Heath:

I have just read the article "Bob-O-Link, Inc." by Harold Swanton which appeared in the December '85 issue of *The Western Tanager*. Although I do not wish to take the time to address all thirteen actual errors in fact contained in the article, I would like to provide one example and then correct some of the erroneous impressions which Mr. Swanton gives the reader pertaining to the North American Rare Bird Alert.

As an example of the distortions of fact in the article: In his effort to paint me as a big-time businessman (and therefore evil), Mr. Swanton put expensive Leitz Trinovid binoculars in my hands; actually I was using a pair of Sears 7x35's, but reality would just not have served Swanton's purpose.

My wife and I both left very successful careers to fulfill a dream and contribute a service in the area of my main passion — birding. This was not an easy decision to make; we made the change with full knowledge that we would never equal our previous income levels. It is surprising to me that anyone could object to the nominal fees we charge for a service which is so extensive and which enhances the flow of rare bird knowledge throughout the continent.

One of the main pleasures of operating NARBA has been the opportunity to know our subscribers personally. We believe that birding is an individualistic pursuit which requires us to give the most personal service possible. In fact, at year-end many wonderful notes came to us from subscribers who expressed satisfaction for the degree and quality of service provided.



Illustration by David Mooney

As to the birds and their well-being, it is the first principle of our operation to protect them and their surroundings. We have often chosen not to distribute information of rare sightings when we had reason to be concerned for the safety of the bird or the property where it was found. The Swallow-tailed Gull near Monterey is an example.

We believe that the timely offering of rare bird information to those birders who are interested in "chasing" or listing is a legitimate service to the birding community. We find it unbelievably presumptuous of Mr. Swanton to criticize the way other people enjoy birding unless he can show that either he is being harmed or has good evidence that "The Swanton Way" has divine endorsement.

No matter what Mr. Swanton's views about birding are, he does not have the right to print material that is misleading or untrue about someone to help advocate his point of view.

Sincerely,
Bob Odear
Jamestown, NC

Ough, Ough!

by Glenn Cunningham

A big black bird sat on a bough.
"Oh," someone said, "I see a chough!"
It did appear like one, although
Some others said it was a chough.
Before the argument was through
Still others claimed it was a chough.
But of this silly verse — enough.
Quoth the bird, "I am a chough."

Illustration by David Mooney



Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth



Is the measure of our sensitivity toward wildlife and its habitat a measure of our maturity and, indeed, our degree of civilization? Before we grew up environmentally we had time only for survival. In our headlong dash across this continent we cut down whole forests of trees. We plowed the grasslands of the vast prairies and wiped out millions of bison that had prospered there for thousands of years. The last wild American Indian stumbled out of the forest in northern California in 1911, weak with hunger, his habitat invaded by white men looking for gold. Wolves and mountain lions were dangerous critters that killed deer and sometimes people and must be exterminated. Passenger pigeons and shorebirds were shot not only for food but for fun, at a time when the concept of a sportman's "limit" was unheard of. A common sight, not too long ago, was the stretched-out carcasses of "chicken hawks" nailed to farmyard fences and barns: a warning not only to accipiters but to beneficial buteos feeding on destructive rodents. There are ranchers who will swear on a stack of Bibles that they (or a friend, or a friend of a friend) have seen eagles fly off not only with lambs, but with human babies.

Have we come a long way since our days of ignorance? A short way? Today we have a clutch of environmental laws on the books and environmentalists in force pressing for compliance. That's all to the good. But the message hasn't gotten through yet to a sizeable army of stubborn souls who insist that they have the right to tear up the desert in their off-road vehicles or shoot endangered eagles from helicopters. Or build condominiums, office buildings and shopping centers in verdant valleys. (Goodbye Las Virgenes Canyon, goodbye Summit Valley in Topanga.)

Since the land was settled, it has been the practice in North Dakota and other prairie states, to drain and fill in the potholes and sloughs — wet areas left by the retreating glaciers — for additional farmland. Though these are the prime nesting sites for most of our native waterfowl, the state game departments today continue to permit drain-and-fill operations. In California, the wetland story is different but perhaps even more devastating. It is a case history of implacable development. There were once 300,000 acres of wetlands on the 1100-mile coast of the Golden State. Today there are only 79,000 acres left. Seventy-five percent of the original wetlands south of Point Conception have become marinas, pastures or multimillion-dollar homes. Mission Bay in San Diego, Newport, the harbors of Long Beach and Los Angeles were once rich marshland. There

are many of us still alive and kicking who remember the wetlands at Huntington Harbor and Marina Del Rey before the boats and the habitations moved in to stay. But like the coastal Indians who could paddle their canoes through the marshes from Redondo Beach to San Pedro, we must bow to history. Nostalgia for the good old days will not bring back the thousands of ducks and shorebirds and long-legged waders that once graced these shores and estuaries. They are not all gone. Considering the assault on their feeding and resting places, it is remarkable that it is still possible to see so many wetland species. Within an hour's drive from Los Angeles, a birder can get his fill of water birds.

Upper Newport Bay and Bolsa Chica offer everything from rails to Osprey. By present-day standards these are large generous wetlands with marshes and mudflats, deep and shallow water, and a grand sense of openness and distances. At the highest tides of the year at Newport, Soras, Virginia and Clapper Rails are pushed close to shore and may even be seen on the road. With a great deal of luck the quasi-mythical Black Rail can be glimpsed as an instantaneous blur crossing a small inlet. In addition to its other waterfowl, Bolsa Chica has a remarkable colony of sixty (or so) Black Skimmers. (The older field guides to western birds — Peterson and Hoffman — do not list skimmers at all. The extension of the range of these attractive birds in the last few decades is a bright light in what seems to be a dark tunnel of extinction.) Visitors to Bolsa Chica this winter were treated to a rare Harlequin Duck, a male in spectacular breeding plumage.

The 200 acres of Ballona Wetlands, despite the abuse of many years, remains a productive marsh. It is expected that when National Audubon acquires it as a sanctuary, problems of tidal flushing will be solved and that there will be better public access with discrete blinds and view sites. Ballona Creek and the Marina provide deep water for grebes, loons and sea ducks. The rock jetty is one of the few places in southern California where Surfbirds can be reliably seen in winter.

Moving right along northward we come upon an interesting experiment in marsh restoration — Malibu Lagoon. A few years ago, the pickleweed marsh was suffering from the effects of too much beach traffic, the presence of Little League fields and a mess of storm debris dumped by Caltrans. After much citizen persuasion, State Parks and Recreation tore everything down, put in channels and a boardwalk — and waited. The vegetation has come back nicely and so have many of the birds, ducks and shorebirds

are rather sparsely represented so far, but waders, gulls and terns are doing well. Water quality may be a problem. A few more years may be necessary before the lagoon population returns to what it was twenty years ago.

The Navel Missile Range at Pt. Mugu is a huge installation, bordered on one side by the ocean and on the other by duck ponds belonging to private gun clubs. Happily, the Navy realizes the wildlife values of Mugu. It welcomes interested groups and provides a knowledgeable naturalist to lead the field trips. The lagoons and water channels teem with bird life: gulls, terns, ducks, shorebirds, egrets and geese. The tour skirts the gun clubs and the birds can be seen there at fairly close range. White-faced Ibis can usually be found in this area, one of the few places left in southern California where they still occur. This winter the gun-club ponds were full of brilliantly-plumaged puddle ducks, including two male Eurasian Wigeon. A Mugu field trip may produce 80 species and more.

Those of us who are turned off by the hunting phenomenon must agree that, under the present dispensation, these affluent private groups have done much to guarantee the continued presence of the birds we love. In the perfect world of our dreams, no one would be allowed to destroy a Wood Duck. Duck ponds would be created by an enlightened people for the sheer joy of esthetic appreciation. In the hard world of reality, some beauty, apparently, has to be sacrificed for survival. There are Audubon members who buy duck stamps each year to preserve habitat though they would shrink from touching a shotgun.

The Santa Clara River runs down to the sea at McGrath State Beach in Ventura. It rarely breaks through the sand barrier, but forms a lagoon that varies in size according to rainfall upstream. It attracts many shorebirds in migration and at times unusual species turn up, including Mongolian Plover, Wilson's Plover, Semipalmated Sandpiper and Rufous-necked Stint. A stretch of sand has been roped off for breeding Least Terns and it is delightful to watch them feeding their young and dive-bombing would-be intruders.

We have traveled almost a hundred miles from Newport to McGrath and we have seen the remnants of our wetlands. The birds at Pt. Mugu, we feel, are in good hands and will always be protected by a benevolent Navy. Bolsa Chica is threatened by ruinous development but is being defended by the determined Amigos de Bolsa Chica. Newport is doing well under the watchful eye of the Friends of Upper Newport Bay who saved it from the powerful Irvine Company some years ago. And Malibu Lagoon, it must be recalled, was originally destined to become a picnic ground with a parking lot for hundreds of cars. Only the protests of aroused residents and environmentalists changed the minds of park planners in

Sacramento. Nor is the lagoon home free. Effluent from the Tapia Reclamation plant and run-off into Malibu Creek from the projected massive development of Las Virgenes Canyon may adversely affect the habitat and the wildlife of the lagoon. Ballona Creek continues to reel from mysterious oil spills and sewage diversions. The Summa Corporation originally planned on permitting 72 acres of wetlands to remain in their huge complex of office buildings, hotels, condominiums and marina. Pressure from the Friends of Ballona Wetlands has changed the size to 209 acres and their lawsuit is attempting to enlarge it even more.

It can be seen that things ain't what they used to be. In the closing years of the twentieth century we have learned that the wild places of America are not without limit. The loss of wetlands in our region — and all over the country — has reached a critical point. Once lost, they are gone forever. *What we have now is simply all there is.* Further losses would be catastrophic. It is up to the present generation to take a stand and say to the developers and the decision makers in government: "This far and no further!" If not now there may be no tomorrow.

Brian Watson, the Coordinator of the UC, Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group (SCPBRG) sent the following memo to all interested parties. since the Peregrine Falcon discussed in the memo was one of the birds which was hatched at Boney Ridge under LA Audubon sponsorship we are a very interested party.

Memo
Subject: Oiled Big Sur Peregrine Falcon, notes on related activities.

While I was waiting to testify before the Bay Conservation and Development Commission meeting in San Francisco on 6 February I received a message that someone had picked up an oiled hawk or falcon on Highway One north of Big Sur. After that meeting I went to Carmel and picked up what turned out to be a Peregrine Falcon. It was picked up on the shoulder of the road near where the Little Sur River crosses Highway One by a Mrs. Doris Wilson of Oregon. She knew of SCPBRG via newspaper articles about our work at Crater Lake.

The bird is an adult female, band number 987-57777. It was born at SCPBRG from a captive bred female we call Strawberry who was originally born at The Peregrine Fund facility at Fort Collins and given to us for breeding stock. It was hacked in 1983 at Boney Ridge in Los Angeles/Ventura County, approximately 230 miles southeast of the point where it was picked up.



The bird had what I would describe as a tar ball near the tip of its right wing that effectively glued the wingtip together so the bird could not fly. It also had oilstained feathers of the stomach and right side of its torso. It had some tar on its beak, which seemed to be from attempting to preen the oiled or tarred feathers.

I got some of the solution being used to clean oiled seabirds from the recent spill. I was able to get the bird clean quite easily without disturbing most of the body and flight feathers. The bird appeared to be very strong and healthy. It weighted 39 ounces, which is heavier than I might have expected, so I suggest it had only been oiled and on the ground a very short time. We kept it in a dark chamber over night. During that time it defecated six times, all droppings appeared normal. It also threw up a casting of feathers. The casting included a bright red foot which I have preliminarily identified as a Pigeon Guillemot. We could not find any traces of oil in the casting material. I still suggest that guillemot is the tar source.

I decided that she would be best released quickly. Friday morning, 7 February we had to attend the Fish and Game Commission meeting in Monterey, so we transported the bird back to Big Sur. I was unable to reach any Wildlife Protection or Wildlife Management personnel prior to 8:00 am on 7 February. At that time I reached several CDFG people and told them of the situation and pending release. The bird was released that morning. We attached a telemetry device to the center tail feathers with cotton thread. The bird flew strongly from the Little Sur River to the north. We tracked her to a currently active nest cliff where she landed. Within 5 minutes she took off and attacked a **Red-tailed Hawk** that flew below her. She returned to the cliff and preened her feathers for several hours. On Sunday, 9 February she was still in the same vicinity, and was able to preen the telemetry device off her feathers as we had hoped would occur. It seems likely to conclude that she is the nesting female in that territory and we will

try and keep track of her with that idea in mind. She was not observed to successfully hunt from Friday to Sunday, but she was seen eating on both Saturday and Sunday so we are not anticipating any other problems.

This might be an important example of secondary effects of problems that can stem from situations like the current oil spill. I might mention that sea otters and grey whales were common in the waters where this bird was found and released. This can be considered a rare event affecting a rare bird, its occurrence could not be predicted or monitored very accurately. Man's activities do present a real risk to rare or endangered species, but many times the odds of human observation of such events are so small that the risk is belittled or not considered.

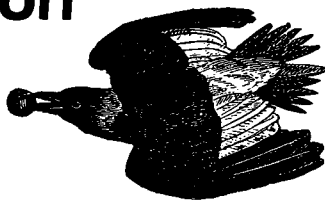
It might be worthwhile mentioning here that presumably this bird bred in Big Sur this year at the age of first possible breeding, 2 years old. The area is quite wild and remote, yet the bird still suffered from DDT-induced eggshell thinning to a degree that resulted in her eggs breaking. One addled egg was salvaged, possibly the "best" egg in the clutch, and it was 18.2% thinner than eggs collected prior to the DDT era. We were able to substitute two captive young for the addled egg so she did fledge two young in spite of her pesticide problem. If you add to this the other environmental and human related problems these birds face, it is easy to see how they became an endangered species.

A final note, one of the three birds that were hacked from Boney Ridge in 1983, went an entirely different route. It was attracted to the Union Bank Building in downtown Los Angeles after the untimely loss of the nesting female just prior to the 1985 nesting season. That bird became the resident female and appeared ready to breed this spring, but she also suffered an untimely death just prior to this nesting season. It may also be of interest that even though this Big Sur female has moved from the Los Angeles area to Big Sur, the bird that successfully bred on the Cal Fed Building at the La Brea Tar Pits in Los Angeles originally was born at SCPBRG but then fledged from a wild nest site in Big Sur, later moving to Los Angeles.



Birds Of The Season

by Hal Baxter
and Kimball Garrett



In coastal southern California late January and early February continued the trend of late winter dryness which was so marked during the previous two winters. Springtime, such as it was, began to emerge — nourished by rainfall totals somewhat less than normal. Sara Orange-Tip butterflies were on the wing by late January, and coastal stands of Giant Coreopsis were sporting tentative splashes of yellow by the third week of the New Year. Swallows (mostly Tree, Violet-green and Cliff) were trickling northward by early February, our surest avian reminder of true spring's approach. Then, in the second week of February, heavy rains thrust us back into winter (a season which is characterized in this region more by rainfall than by cold temperatures). Soaked hillsides, swollen streams and oozing mud reminded us once again of conditions experienced in some of our wetter winters. Relatively warm temperatures kept the snow level high during these storms, and a record heat spell quickly followed, ushering in the second springtime in less than a month.

What effects do these weather patterns have on our wintering birds, and what will they mean for our spring migrants and our breeding birds? The nice thing about short columns like "Birds of the Season" is that we can pose questions without feeling compelled to answer them. But we can always reiterate that the way to answer such questions is to get into the field and to carefully and systematically record your observations — what better way to celebrate spring?

Late winter birding is often dominated by the art and sport of gull-watch. Arguments continue to rage concerning the identity of the gull widely believed to be an **Iceland Gull** which was present at the Otay Dump near Chula Vista, below San Diego, from 17 to 26 January (and occasionally seen during this period along the Silver Strand north of Imperial Beach). Virtually all experts agree that the bird matches a first-winter Iceland Gull in almost every respect, but the confusing patterns of variation and intergradation among the large pink-legged gulls militate, in the opinion of some, against absolute certainty. This bird was extensively photographed, and repeatedly compared side-by-side with Glaucous, Thayer's, Herring and other gulls. The matter will soon be in the hands of the California Bird Records Committee (which recently welcomed first-time members Stephen F. Bailey and Curtis Marantz); the expertise of prominent gull buffs throughout Europe and North America will certainly be drawn upon during the

analysis of this interesting record. Whether or not this Iceland Gull is ultimately "accepted," few birders present will forget the sight of the battery of spotting scopes and cameras, the crowds of several dozens of observers, and even Arnold Small's busload of students — all intently studying the avian guest of honor as it methodically picked through the garbage with its *larid* cousins.

In addition to the **Glaucous Gull** which was present, along with the Iceland Gull, at the Otay Dump, another first winter Glaucous was found at Dockweiler Beach, south of Playa del Rey, on 4 February (Jonathan Alderfer). Jonathan then photographed a first-winter Glaucous Gull at Malibu Lagoon on 12 February. This latter bird was possibly the same one which had been seen on two different dates earlier in the winter by Arnold Small. The Malibu Lagoon Glaucous Gull was the last reported on 15 February. Then, on 16 February, Kimball Garrett and John Karges found an identically plumaged Glaucous on Castaic Lagoon, below Castaic Dam. It's anybody's guess how many individuals were involved in this "rash" of sightings; an answer to this question would require, first, a far more complete understanding of gull movements in the coastal southern California area than we currently have. Where within the Los Angeles area do the various species of gulls travel on a daily and seasonal basis? We know that there are large-scale daily movements of coastal roosting California Gulls to inland garbage dumps (and other prime feeding areas) throughout the winter. The morning and afternoon flights of this species are a characteristic sight through much of the Los Angeles basin. Interestingly these flights rarely include Ring-billed Gulls; that species is relatively rare in garbage dumps and seems more sedentary through the winter (remaining along the coast or on

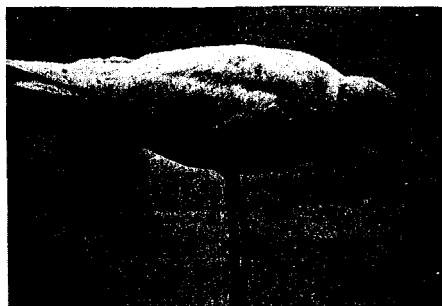
inland lakes, but not normally commuting between the two). Also of interest is the fact that these flights of California Gulls occasionally contain very small numbers the various large, pink-footed species. It would be interesting to gather more precise data on "inland" occurrences of normally coastal species such as Western, Glaucous-winged, and Thayer's Gulls — how regularly do they venture into the inland valleys? Furthermore, it appears that there are additional groups of California Gulls which remain on inland reservoirs for the night, rather than commuting back to the ocean to roost. These groups often contain small numbers of Herring Gulls, which themselves are of great interest. Herring Gulls are quite uncommon along most of the Los Angeles County coast through the winter, but fairly common as spring migrants (reflecting the large numbers which winter along Baja California and at dumps in San Diego County); Herrings are very common in winter at the Salton Sea, but we do not know the spring migration route these birds take.

What stimulated all of this rambling about gull movements (*not* the kind of gull movements we were all avoiding at the Otay Dump)? Perhaps it was the visits, on consecutive weekends, to the lagoon below Castaic Dam, in which single immature **Glaucous-winged** and **Thayer's Gulls** (Jon Dunn, Bob McKernan and Kimball Garrett; 9 February), and **Glaucous, Glaucous-winged** and **Western Gulls** (Kimball Garrett and John Karges; 16 February) were recorded, along with numerous **Herring Gulls** and several hundred California Gulls. Or perhaps it is just our practice of exhorting observers to tackle specific distributional problems, such as the gull puzzle, to add to their enjoyment of field ornithology. Mainly, it's the fact the Hal Baxter is of the Thailand and there isn't much else to write about this month.

Now for some of the interesting sightings through the late January and February period. Unusual inland was a **Red-throated Loon** along the Santa Ana River in Anaheim (12 February: Doug Willick). The **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** which has chosen the eucalyptus trees near the snack bar at Scripps Institute in La Jolla as its daytime roost remained easy to see through the month of February. Very small numbers of **Greater White-fronted Geese** were noted at the south end of the Salton Sea (e.g. L.A.A.S. field trip on 25 January); eleven spring migrants were at the Piute Ponds near Lancaster on 22 February (Fred Heath and L.A.A.S. field trip). Two **blue-morph Snow Geese** were at the south end of the Salton Sea during the L.A.A.S. field trip on 25 January. Imperial County's first **Tufted Duck** was at the fish hatchery at the south end of the Salton Sea on 1 February (Gene Cardiff et al). A male Tufted Duck was at Puddingstone Reservoir on 10 February (Milt Blatt). An **Oldsquaw** was at San Mateo Lagoon, San Onofre, in late January (Dan Guthrie). **Common Mergansers** seemed exception-

Glaucous Gull at Malibu Lagoon
Photo by Jonathan Alderfer





Glaucous Gull at Malibu Lagoon
Photo by Jonathan Alderfer

ally numerous on many inland reservoirs, with several hundred at the east end of Big Bear Lake on 22 February (Kimball Garrett).

A **Harris's Hawk** was at the south end of the Salton Sea on 25 January; this is assumed to have been a released or escaped bird; a reintroduction program is underway along the Colorado River. The **Zone-tailed Hawk** on Plano Trabuco in Orange County was not seen after early January, but what was presumably the same individual was present on Starr Ranch after mid-January (Jeff Froke). An albino **Red-tailed Hawk** was seen on 1 February along Western Avenue between El Segundo and Imperial (Russell Shokman). The sighting of two **Chukars** at Adobe Mountain in the extreme northeast corner of Los Angeles County (22 February, Art and Janet Cupples) suggests the establishment of this introduced species in the county.

An impressive count of 225 **Sandhill Cranes** was made south of Brawley on the 25 January L.A.A.S. field trip. One of the more reliable spots for the species in southern California, the Marina del Rey breakwater produced a **Black Oystercatcher** on 2 February (Jean Brandt, Phil Sayre, and Bert Mull). **Stilt Sandpipers** were quite numerous at the south end of the Salton Sea through late January and early February. One of the few reports of **Common Murre** this winter came from Gene Cardiff who had one off Malibu Lagoon on 8 February.

An **Inca Dove** in Covina (Jo Garth, 7-18 January) was likely an escapee, but twelve birds in Calexico, Imperial Co., on 26 January represented an established population of this adaptive species. Four **Long-eared Owls** were roosting in the evergreens along the dirt road leading to Linda Mia Ranch, east of Lancaster (Chuck Murdoch, 30 December). Ten **Cassin's Kingbirds** in a small area within the Santa Fe Dam Basin (Hal Baxter, 16 January) was an impressive mid-winter count. **Tree, Cliff and Violet-green Swallows** were all widespread by the middle of February, and the first **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** were noted at Malibu Lagoon in mid-February by Don Galli. At an interesting locality was a **Le Conte's Thrasher** singing at the south edge of Salton City on 26 January (Nancy McMahon, et al).

Several "pockets" of interesting wintering landbirds were reported. A small drainage ditch at Legg Lake, El Monte, had a **Hermit**

Warbler and a **Black-and-White Warbler**, along with a number of other birds, in January (e.g. 16 January, Nellie Gryk). Doug Willick found a **Green-tailed Towhee**, a **Black-throated Sparrow**, a **Harris's Sparrow** and a **Palm Warbler** in an especially productive weedy area along the Santa Ana River in Anaheim on 21 January; these birds were all present well into February. The two **Harris's Sparrows** at Linda Mia Ranch were still present on the L.A.A.S. field trip on 22 February (Fred Heath). The **Hepatic Tanager** at Turtle Rock Nature Center, Irvine, was present to at least 12 February (Doug Willick). **Pine Siskins** were almost entirely absent in the lowlands this winter, so a flock of twenty birds with goldfinches along the Lake Hughes Road (Kimball Garrett and John Karges, 16 February) was of interest.

Up north, California's first "seeable" **Common Redpolls** of the twentieth century disappeared from Tule Lake in January, but a flock of 27 was being seen at the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge into February.

While experiencing the crescendo of spring migration through the month of April, observers should be aware that nearly every species has its own unique migration strategy and phenology, and that careful recording of dates and abundance of migrants can yield some fascinating insights. Keep track of these events, and see how weather patterns affect migration in your favorite birding spots. April is also the prime month for observing the spring migration of seabirds past coastal promontories. Pt. Dume and the points along the Palos Verdes Peninsula are especially productive, as is Goleta Point to the west.

Send any interesting bird observations to:

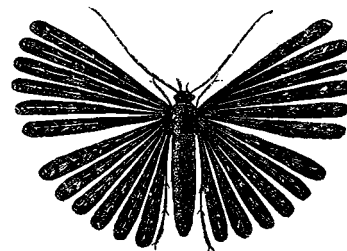
Hal Baxter
1821 Highland Oaks Drive
Arcadia, CA 91006
Phone # (818) 355-6300



Cactus Wren — Illustration by Steven Hartman

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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.



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CALENDAR

April '86

EVENING MEETINGS

Meet at 8:00 P.M. in Plummer Park

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

TUESDAY, MAY 13 — David Garcelon, president of the Institute for Wildlife Studies has been working for the last few years for the Santa Catalina Island Conservancy in a project to **Return the Bald Eagle to Catalina**. He will share the details of this unique project with an illustrated program.

CALL THE TAPE!

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

FIELD TRIPS

SATURDAY, APRIL 5 — Look for a variety of migrants and chaparral birds with **Lou Falb** at **Vogel Flat** (where he found a Hepatic Tanager Jan. 85). From Foothill Blvd. in Sunland, turn north at Jack-in-the-box onto Mt. Gleason Rd. This becomes Big Tujunga Cyn. Rd. and after approximately 4 miles turn at Vogel Flat, then left at bottom of hill. Meet in parking lot just before crossing creek, at 8 a.m.

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 one 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.

SATURDAY, APRIL 12 — Join **Bob Shanman** for his last morning walk til August at the unique **Ballona Wetlands**. This is peak season for viewing migrating shore and water birds, possible passerines and residents. Take Marina Fwy. 90 west to Culver Blvd., turn left to Pacific Ave., then right to footbridge at end.

SUNDAY, APRIL 13 — **Spring Wildflower Outing in Antelope Valley** with **Fred Heath**. The wildflower display should be spectacular this year and Fred will have the best areas on the agenda. Also birding along the way seeking desert specialties such as LeConte's Thrasher, Ladder-backed Woodpecker and Scott's Oriole. Bring lunch and plenty of water for a full day in the desert of viewing flowers and birds. For those able to conserve by carpooling, meet across the street from Denny's at the Roxford exit of Fwy. 5 and be ready to leave by 6:45 a.m. Be at the Fwy. 14 Lamont-Odet Overlook (of Lake Palmdale — about 45 min. north of carpool location) at 7:30 a.m.

SATURDAY, APRIL 19 — Bird **Chantry Flat and the Santa Anita Canyon** with **Jean Brown**. Be prepared to do some hiking to possibly above and into the canyon with some stream rock-hopping. Look for resident Dippers, Canyon Wren, possible Summer Tanagers and other migrants. Lunch optional. Meet in the parking lot at end of Santa Anita Cyn. Rd. (about 5 miles north of 210 Fwy.) at 8 a.m.

CONDOR SEMINAR

SATURDAY, APRIL 19 — An all day seminar on the **California Condor**. Details on page 5.

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

SUNDAY, APRIL 20 — Meet **David White** at **Whittier Narrows Regional Park** for his monthly morning walk through a good diversity of habitats. Look for waterbirds, chaparral birds, and probable migrants — warblers, vireos, flycatchers and orioles. Meet at the Nature Center, 1000 Durfee Ave., So. El Monte, off Fwy. 60 between Santa Anita and Peck Dr. exits, west of Fwy. 605 at 8 a.m.

SUNDAY, APRIL 20 — **Zoe Zell** will lead a morning walk for beginners at **Malibu Creek State Park**. Expect a good variety of chaparral birds at this former movie location; also look for a variety of migrants including Western Bluebirds and Phainopepla. Meet in the parking lot (\$3 fee) just off the Las Virgenes/Malibu Cyn. Rd., 200 yards south of Mulholland Hwy. at 8 a.m.

FRIDAY, APRIL 25 — Join **Allan Keller** at 8 a.m. for prime migration birding in **Chatsworth Park South**. In addition to resident chaparral species, look for warblers, orioles, grosbeaks, etc. Take Topanga Cyn. Blvd. from either Fwy. 118 or 101 in west San Fernando Valley to Devonshire Blvd.; turn west continuing to end and into parking lot near the Rec. Center.



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FUTURE FIELD AND RESERVATION TRIPS

See page 4 for detailed information.

SUNDAY, APRIL 13 — Migrating Seabird Workshop — Jon Dunn

SUNDAY, APRIL 27 — Tujunga Wash/Orcas Picnic Area — Mary Carmona

SUNDAY, APRIL 27 — Mojave Narrows — Harold Bond

SATURDAY, MAY 3 — Placerita Canyon/Walker Ranch — Warren Peterson

WEEKEND, MAY 3-4 — Morongo Wildlife Preserve/Joshua Tree National Park — Stewart Janes

SUNDAY, MAY 4 — Malibu Lagoon — Dennis Morgan

MONDAY, MAY 5 — Ojai Loop Trip — Guy & Louise Commeau

SATURDAY, MAY 31 — Alcid/Shearwater Pelagic — Kimball Garrett & Louis Bevier

SATURDAY, JUNE 14 — Nestbox Project/Chilao Area — Rusty Scaff (details May issue)

WEEKEND, JUNE 28-30 — Kern River/Greenhorn Mt. Area — Bob Barnes

WEEKEND, JULY 19-20 — Breeding Shorebirds/Sequoia Forest — Rob Hansen (details May issue)

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

(Details in Future Tanagers)

SATURDAY, AUGUST 2 — Pelagic from San Pedro to Santa Barbara — Herb Clarke

LATE SUMMER — Shorebird Workshop — Jon Dunn

WEEKEND, SEPTEMBER 5-7 — Yosemite National Park — David Gaines

SEPTEMBER 26, 28 — Pelagic Workshop — Arnold Small