

WESTERN TANAGER

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Champion Lodgepole Pine (center with rounded crown)

Photographs by Eileen Manning

Bluff Lake: A 'New' Montane Birding Locality

by Brian W. Keelan

I. Introduction

Bluff Lake offers, in my experience, the finest montane birding in southern California. Located at 7900 ft. on the moist, north-facing slope of the San Bernardino Mts., it is strikingly Sierran in aspect. Not only are a number of local and uncommon montane species easy to find here, but it is a very quiet, scenic spot, with delightful camping. Located near several other excellent birding locations, it is only a two and a half hour drive from Los Angeles.

I first visited this area three years ago to see the Champion (world's largest) Lodgepole Pine, a truly magnificent specimen. Although other birders may have visited this spot at one time or another, I have not seen or heard reference to it ornithologically. I have made a total of 14 trips to Bluff Lake,

including several overnight trips, spanning the dates 24 April — 3 November. I have recorded over seventy species of birds here, of which about fifty probably breed locally.

II. Bluff Lake Specialties

There are a number of locally uncommon montane species which may be reliably found at Bluff Lake between mid-May and July, despite the difficulty of locating these species elsewhere in the southern California mountains. Included in this category are Common Nighthawk, Williamson's Sapsucker, Dusky Flycatcher, and Calliope Hummingbird.

One of the delights of camping at the end of 2N11 (see Section IV) is watching and listening to the courtship flight of Common

Nighthawks, starting in the late afternoon and lasting well past dusk. These birds fly well above the treetops and suddenly twist sideways and plummet toward the earth with partially folded wings. Upon pulling out of this dive a noise reminiscent of the sound of a speeding race car passing by is produced, apparently by air rushing through the primaries. Even more commonly the birds are heard giving their woodcock-like "peent" call, which I have heard even in the middle of the night. At times a bird will alight in a Jeffrey Pine, revealing its odd habit of sitting lengthwise along a branch. Note that this is one of our latest migrants, not arriving until late May.

Williamson's Sapsucker is the commonest woodpecker at Bluff Lake, occurring in densities comparable to the best Sierra Nevada locations. They are found throughout the area described in Section V. On 24 April 1985 I carefully counted 13 of these birds in a two mile hike, with as many as four drumming simultaneously. This is probably close to the peak of the drumming season, and certainly the easiest time of year to detect woodpeckers in general. Sapsucker drums are recognized by their irregular rhythm; all other woodpeckers have a regular rhythm. Depending on snow conditions, this area may not be accessible this early in the spring. Nonetheless, the birds can always be found through July, as they are reasonably vociferous (the commonest call is a burry descending "churr," vaguely reminiscent in quality of Gila Woodpecker). Photographers would do best to search for nests with young in early July. The birds become very difficult to find in the fall. It should be noted that Red-breasted Sapsucker, with its higher-pitched, more "scream-like" call (very similar to Red-naped and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers), are very uncommon at Bluff Lake, no doubt due to the absence of deciduous trees, e.g. Black Oak. Although Williamson's males seem to be easier to find, it is almost always possible to find one or two females in a morning. This is especially noteworthy given the amount to taxonomic splitting recently, as males and females may someday again be separated into two species.

Those individuals interested in *Empidonax* flycatcher identification will find Bluff Lake a fine location at which to study Dusky Flycatcher. About four pairs occur along the Champion Lodgepole Pine and Siberia Creek



Bluff Lake

Trails (see Section V). On 3 July '83 I found a nest with two young just above eye level in a White fir. The song of this species is composed of three phrases: an ascending sibilant "sillip," a high thin "peweeet," and a descending burry "jeroint," accented on the second syllable. These are given in a random sequence with long pauses in between. Sierran Hammond's Flycatchers have only one phrase, analagous to the Dusky's "jeroint" but explosively accented on the first syllable. Dusky Flycatcher prefers open coniferous forest with considerable room for foraging in the understory, unlike Hammond's Flycatcher, which prefers denser fir stands (especially Red Fir, *Abies magnifica*) where the two species breed together in the Sierras.

Calliope Hummingbird is very common around Bluff Lake, especially along the Siberia Creek Trail. It is particularly attracted to blooming wildflowers along the creek beds. The only other expected hummingbirds here are migrant Rufous and Allen's, so nearly all June hummingbirds are Calliope. Anna's Hummingbird regularly occurs near Big Bear Lake as high as 6900 ft., and may occur sporadically at Bluff Lake. Male Calliope Hummingbirds depart from the breeding grounds during July and are reliable only during June. The distinctive chipping notes are soft, thin, and usually run together in a rapid series.

III. Other Birds and Mammals

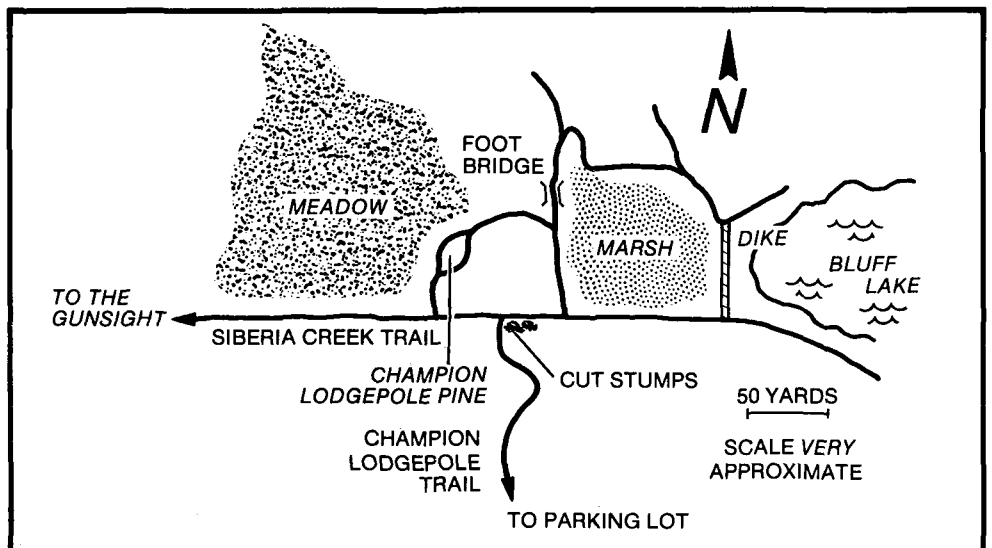
Other reliable breeding birds at Bluff Lake which are hard to find elsewhere include Hermit Thrush, Brown Creeper, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. It is enchanting listening to the haunting song of the Hermit Thrush, so cherished by New Englanders (we Virginians are partial to Veery). The song of this species, which is most often given at dawn and dusk, differs from other thrushes in having a pure whistled introductory note preceding the organlike notes.

Although not legendary songsters like the thrushes, both Brown Creeper and Ruby-crowned Kinglet have marvelous songs, and can often be heard at Bluff Lake.

The most abundant breeders at Bluff Lake are Cassin's Finch, Dark-eyed Junco, Mountain Chickadee, Western Wood Pewee, Violet-green Swallow, Fox Sparrow, and Steller's Jay. Surprisingly common are Townsend's Solitaire and Pine Siskin, while MacGillivray's Warbler and Green-tailed Towhee are less common than I would expect from the habitat available. The most conspicuous absence is Mountain Quail, which occurs at just slightly lower elevations nearer Big Bear. Black-chinned Sparrows and Wrentits utilize open manzanita chaparral at higher elevations here than I normally encounter them. Species present during the breeding season, but not necessarily breeding, include Sora, Virginia Rail (Garrett and Dunn list only two records for District M), Cedar Waxwing, Red Crossbill, and Lazuli Bunting.

A variety of warblers can be seen at Bluff Lake during fall migration. Hermit Warbler can be very numerous, e.g. 15 in one mile of hiking on 2 September '84. A female American Redstart on 17 July '84 and a female Summer Tanager on 3 November '85 (no District M records listed in Garrett and Dunn) show that even vagrants may be encountered. Transient and wintering waterfowl often alight on Bluff Lake, and can also be seen flying overhead. Due to its relative inaccessibility in winter, I know little of the birdlife of Bluff Lake at this season. The presence of several flocks of Evening Grosbeaks (totalling 45 birds) in late April 1985 suggest that this may be an especially good area for this southern California rarity. Golden-crowned Kinglets are regular in fall, but do not seem to breed. Red Crossbills are present throughout the year, at least some years, and numbers are probably augmented in winter. Cross-country ski enthusiasts might try skiing in to Bluff Lake in winter; the 800 ft. gain over five and a half miles is nowhere steep, and the roads should be easy to follow.

There are five mammals that are likely to be encountered during the day around Bluff Lake: Coyote, Mule Deer, Western Gray Squirrel, Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel, and Lodgepole Chipmunk. Western Gray Squirrel, a tree squirrel, is large and dark gray, with a fluffy tail. Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel, which has a fairly restricted distribution in southern California, has bold black and white stripes on the sides but not on the golden-colored head (it does have a white eye-ring). It is only slightly larger than Lodgepole Chipmunk, which has a striped head. Lodgepole Chipmunk differs from the other widespread chipmunk in southern California, Merriam's, in being smaller, with more distinct side stripes, and bright rusty (not sooty gray) sides. Lodgepole prefers high elevation coniferous forests, Merriam's lower elevation chaparral. California Ground Squirrel occurs at slightly lower



elevations nearer Big Bear; it is fairly large, brownish-gray, and has a contrasting broad gray collar (frequently causing it to be confused with Clay-colored Sparrow).

IV. Access, Camping, and Lodging

The best map of this region is the AAA San Bernardino Mountains Map; the directions given here do not require more detail than shown on a county map. Motels are available in the city of Big Bear Lake; camping spots are noted below.

Bluff Lake is about a mile and a half SSE of the dam at the west end of Big Bear Lake. Turn south on Tulip Rd. opposite the stables, about three miles east of the dam. On your right you will see Coldbrook Campground, a National Forest facility, which is the most conveniently located civilized camping for birding at Bluff Lake. After 0.5 mi, turn right on Mill Creek Road, Route 2N10. In another 0.8 mi bear left as the pavement ends, avoiding the Cedar Lake turnout. The road hereafter is well-graded dirt, passable to any vehicle when free from snow. After 0.8 mi more bear right; immediately visible on your right is Mill Creek Medaow (7100 ft.), a good birding location that is often accessible in winter when Bluff Lake (7600 ft.) is not. Continue 0.7 mi and bear right and left in rapid succession, avoiding 2N52Y and 2N10B, staying on 2N10. In another 1.5 mi bear left, and 0.4 mi later avoid the alluring-sounding right turn to the Bluff Lake YMCA. In 0.4 mi 2N10 T-intersects 2N11; bear right on 2N11 here and go 1.0 mi to the small parking lot on the right (there is a small plaque with some lodgepole pines drawn on it at the edge of the parking lot by the trailhead). This is the starting point for the hike described in the next section.

It is possible to camp any number of places on the way, just along the side of the road; my favorite location is just past this parking lot. The road goes 0.3 mi further (this short section is a bit rough, but still passable) and forks; both forks dead end and have several level, clear spots suitable for camping. I usually camp along the right fork, about fifty yards past the fork, on the crest of the hill. Common Nighthawks perform their courtship flights right in this campsite, and Bluff Lake is within easy walking distance.

V. An Annotated Hike Around Bluff Lake

This hike will familiarize you with the trails and best birding areas around Bluff Lake, as well as introduce you to the more noticeable plant species in the vicinity of the lake.

Starting at the Champion Lodgepole Parking Lot (see last section), a quick perusal of the nearby coniferous trees will reveal the presence of several species. The pines with the long (5") needles, large (4") cones, and platy reddish bark (which smells of vanilla) is Jeffrey Pine (*Pinus jeffreyi*), often called yellow pine, as are several similar species. The conifer with the short



Champion Lodgepole Meadow

(1") needles is White Fir (*Abies concolor*), which has deeply furrowed gray bark, and does not drop its cones (they self-destruct while still on the tree). A third conifer, Lodgepole Pine (*Pinus contorta*), with intermediate needles (2"), pine cones (1"), and scaly yellow-brown bark, becomes common as one approaches the meadow, described below. If you don't spot any of these beforehand, you'll certainly have no trouble seeing the Champion itself. Just to the left of the trailhead is a Scouler Willow (*Salix scouleriana*); the shape of the leaf (widest near the tip) is diagnostic of this high altitude species. Several species of willows are the only deciduous trees in the immediate vicinity of Bluff Lake.

Proceed straight down the Champion Lodgepole Pine Trail to the bridge which crosses a small creek. Watch along the creek for blooming wildflowers, which often attract Calliope Hummingbirds. The remarkably structured crimson and yellow Columbine (*Aquilegia*) flowers are especially striking, and yellow Monkey Flowers (*Mimulus*) are common. At post #3 (there are numbered wooden posts every hundred feet or so) there are fine Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos*), with their flat, leathery, grass green leaves, and reddish branches. Just before post #7 on the streamside there is a stand of White-thorn (*Ceanothus cordulatus*) with spines and bluish-green foliage; just after this post, both sides of the trail are lined with Bush Chinquapin (*Castanopsis sempervirens*). The yellow-green, leathery leaves and 1" brown burrs are very distinctive. These three species are by far the predominant shrubs in this area, and may be distinguished even at a distance by their different colors: blue-green (*Ceanothus*), grass green (Manzanita), and yellow-green (chinquapin). Some less common shrubs occurring along this trail are Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos*) and Currant (*Ribes*). At post #9, there is a fine stand of Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) ferns on the right. This widespread species is said to grow as tall as a man and form veritable forests in some other parts of its range.

At the T-intersection with the cut stumps (see map), bear left on the Siberia Creek Trail and go 100 ft. to the Forest Service trail sign. If you go straight at this juncture, the trail passes through a coniferous forest and meadow ecotone that is a prime area for many of the breeding birds, e.g. Dusky Flycatcher, Williamson's Sapsucker, and Calliope Hummingbird. Further down this trail are dense willow thickets that harbor a few MacGillivray's Warblers. The Gunsight, a one mile hike down this trail, provides fine views of the Mojave Desert; those hiking this far will enter the realm of the Red-breasted Sapsucker, Wrentit, Black Oak (*Quercus kelloggii*), and several new conifers.

Usually I will slowly bird the first quarter mile portion of this trail, as it parallels the meadow edge, then retrace my steps to the Forest Service sign and take the other trail to the Champion Lodgepole Pine. As the trail breaks out onto the open meadow, several large wildflowers appear: Corn Lily (*Veratrum californicum*; pleated leaves), Lupine (*Lupinus*, purple flowers), and Cow Parsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*, huge maple-like leaves). although quite wet in spring, this small meadow offers fine birding opportunities. The Champion Lodgepole Pine is prevented from wandering by an enclosure on the right. This tree, one of a small remnant population, is 100 ft. high and, judging by the symmetrically split trunk, may have been struck by lightning fairly early in its life.

On both sides of the trail encircling the tree there are clusters of an unusual reddish-brown saprophytic orchid, Coralroot (*Coralorhiza maculata*), with tubular flowers. Continue past the tree to the trail juncture by the marsh. Bear left over the foot bridge, and watch for another reddish-brown saprophyte, Pinedrops (*Pterospora andromedea*), which has nearly spherical flowers. In 200 ft. bear right at the trail fork; 300 ft. later bear right again to the dike along Bluff Lake. From here you can look back to your right (away from the lake) and see the top of the Champion clearly. Nutcrackers, finches, raptors, and ravens often fly over this dike, and

sapsuckers are sometimes in evidence here. Carefully check the lake for water birds. Finish crossing the dike and turn right (the area to the left is private property); this trail will take you back to the T-intersection with the cut stumps. At this intersection, a left turn will take you back to the parking lot.

I usually take about two hours to do this roughly one mile hike, spending a lot of time just standing still and listening. By thoroughly birding this small area, I can normally find almost all of the bird species typical of the habitat. This strategy seems more successful than random, extensive

hiking, because so many species are attracted by the meadow, lake, and forest-meadow ecotone.

VI. Conclusion

Bluff Lake is conveniently located near a number of other fine birding localities in the San Bernardino Mountains. Baldwin Lake, Upper Arrastre Creek, and the Pioneertown Road can all be birded on the same day as Bluff Lake, and reliably produce Gray Vireo, plumbeous Solitary Vireo, Gray Flycatcher, Mountain Bluebird, Pinyon Jay, Black-chinned Sparrow, and, some in the eastern

San Bernardinos that prompted John Parmeter and I to start a big day at Bluff Lake this spring (we finished at the Salton Sea with 185 species despite gale force winds).

For those desiring a scenic and adventurous return to Los Angeles, try taking 2N11 east past 2N10 (the return road to Big Bear) to the Clark's Summit Road. There are many fine views, though the road is rough with considerable dropoffs in some places. You will (hopefully) emerge several hours later near Barton Flats with an entirely new concept of this superb mountain range.

A Letter

To close the loop on the Bob-O-Link I offer the following letter a copy of which Harold Swanton was kind enough to give me. —
Editor

Dear Bob Odear:

Oh, dear!

I have the new *Tanager* in hand with responses from the faithful to my Bob-O-Link piece.

Please know I agree with them that you are a charming and likeable gent. I intended no disparagement in calling you "Mr. Wrangler." I had assumed your name would be in the brochure you handed me and it wasn't. I did remember your telling me about your career in Wrangler Jeans and perhaps unwisely chose the appellation for want of anything better.

End of apology.

I deplore what is happening to an avocation I have happily followed for almost sixty years, namely its metamorphosis into a competitive game. The 700 Club, the 600 Club, Big Days, Big Years, Birdathons, the World Series of Birding, Jim Vardaman, the rankings of World-Class Birders, the chasing to the tip of the Aleutians to add a bird to the ABA list when same can be easily seen on its home ground — all this seems to me a trivialization of something very close and precious to me.

Alas, Bob-O-Link takes the process another step down the road. You and a host of listers consider birding a sport. I like to think it's something more.

You don't need my support to guarantee the success of Bob-O-Link. A swarm of competitive listers has already assured it.

Next time we meet I'll buy you a drink. I ain't a bad guy when you get to know me.

Sincerely,

Harold Swanton

Review of J.S. Borthwick: *The Case of the Hook-Billed Kites*. Penguin Books, 1983. 348 pp.

by Roger Lebow

Mystery writers have long sought out the exotic venue, whether it be the Orient Express, the race track or the opera house; not only does this provide color but affords an opportunity for the jaded reader to meet a new occupational class — and at worst it enables the lesser writer to graft a diverting setting onto his tired old plot rootstock. It was inevitable then that we birders would get our own mystery, and it has arrived in J.S. Borthwick's *The Case of the Hook-Billed Kites*, published in Penguin paperback. Borthwick (and that *has* to be a pseudonym, doesn't it?) has clearly devoted plenty of observation to both birds and birders, because this novel is loaded with enough ornithological detail to satisfy the most hard-core listers among us and at the same time is exquisitely attuned to the entire pantheon of bird-watchers from the archetypal Little-Old-Lady-in-Tennis-Shoes to the compulsive Spouter-of-Latin-Binomials.

The bird-loving reader is immediately won over by the setting in the fictitious Dona Clara National Wildlife Refuge (a thinly disguised Santa Ana NWR), located enticingly along the Rio Grande. We meet the appealingly neurotic professor, Sarah Deane, a novice bird-watcher en route to her finance Philip Lentz, a squirrely party who probably reads himself to sleep studying the Empidonax complex, for a vacation of dawn-to-dusk birding in south Texas. Sounds thrilling to me, too, but Sarah isn't exactly swept away by Philip's lack of the romantic touch — all the more so when Philip, far too busy logging exotic species on his life list, sends his best friend, Alex McKenzie, to meet Sarah's plane in his place. This again sounds reasonable to me, but it soon becomes apparent that 1) easy-going Alex is a far more simpatico character than the compulsive Philip — and will probably Get the Girl; 2) everyone has ample reason to bump off old Philip, and that insufferable prig will be vulture bait before too many more pages have been turned; and 3) the solution to

the murder will hinge on a point of ornithological acumen.

The success of *The Case of the Hook-Billed Kites* lies in its rising above the formulaic, its evocative treatment of the birder's milieu and, through the eyes of the ever-skeptical Sarah, a wryly satirical view of the bird-watch fraternity. Borthwick isn't the most polished stylist — for style, turn to the work of Michael Gilbert, Ngaio Marsh, Geoffrey Household or others of that crowd — but she has a fine comedic touch, as when Sarah complains that "Philip is trying to make me keep a life list, but he wouldn't let me count a dead owl we found last week . . . the rules are stupid. I mean it was a perfectly good owl. I picked him up, and he was so beautiful. I saw him a lot better than I ever do those warblers bouncing around in the leaves." Amen.

For lovers of mystery novels *The Case of the Hook-Billed Kites* is a recommended addition to the genre. For bird watchers it's essential.

[BIO: Roger Lebow is a Los Angeles cellist whose greatest current conflict is that the upcoming birth of his first child will coincide with the height of Spring migration.]

[Editors Note — This is one of the few books on birds which *can't* be found at the Audubon Book Store. This is especially strange since it's a Penguin paperback.]



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.

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.

TUESDAY, MAY 13 — Zus Haagen-Smit will lead her second annual special access trip to the **Huntington Library Botanical Gardens**. This will be a beginners morning walk to see residents and search for spring migrants. Meet at the 1151 Oxford Rd., San Marino gate. Directions: (A) The Pasadena Fwy. 111, becomes Arroyo Parkway; continue north to Calif. Bl. & turn right to Allen Ave.; turn right 3 blocks to Orland Rd.; go left short distance to Oxford and turn right; (B) From the 210 Fwy. take the Hill Ave., exit south to Calif. Blvd. and turn east (left); pick-up remaining directions from above. Since this is a free, limited participation trip, please call Ms. Haagen-Smit at 818-796-8208 for reservations and meeting time.

SATURDAY, MAY 31st — Leaders Kimball Garrett and Louis Bevier will guide an *Alcid* and Shearwater trip through the **Santa Barbara Island Area**. 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.

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.

WEEKEND, JULY 19-20 — Southern San Joaquin Valley/Southern Sierra Forest with **Rob Hansen**. From White Pelican to White-headed Woodpecker, and everything in between, is what you can expect on this birding adventure. One of the Valley's top birding-naturalists, Rob Hansen, will lead this special weekend birding extravaganza. Hansen, manager of The Nature Conservancy's Creighton Ranch and Kaweah Oaks Preserves, and college bird identification instructor, will take you on a transect from Tulare Lake marshes and alkali desert to shady conifer forest and cool mountain meadows. He will also present a slide program on natural history of the Central Valley Saturday evening. \$22/person

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

FRIDAY EVENING/SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 30 — Shorebird Workshop with **Jon Dunn**. A slide show lecture will be held in Studio City Friday evening to study all the western shorebirds, from the most common to the rarities. The location of the field study will be dependent upon water levels to maximize viewing opportunity. Plumages will be carefully studied to differentiate juveniles from adults and various differences in peeps and other shorebirds. The approach will be gradual with lots of time spent looking at individual birds. Both beginner and more advanced birders are encouraged. Dunn is an acknowledged expert of Shorebird Identification, also a member of California Rare Birds Committee, and a Director/Leader of Wings, Inc., a professional bird tour group. He was the major consultant of National Geographic's "Birds of No. America," and co-author of "Birds of So. Calif., Status & Distribution," and the forthcoming "Field Identification of Difficult Species." \$30/person; Slide show/lecture only \$12/person.

WEEKEND, SEPTEMBER 6-7 — Spend a fall weekend birding the Crane Flat/Tioga Road area of beautiful **Yosemite National Park** with **David Gains**. Evening (Friday also) and early mornings will be spent looking for the Great Grey Owl. Other specialties to be included in daytime searches: Black-backed Woodpecker, Red Crossbill, Pine Grosbeak and Williamson's Sapsucker. Gains is a naturalist with a Masters Degree in Ecology. He founded the Save Mono Lake Committee, teaches ornithology classes and is author of "Birds of the Yosemite Sierra" (available at Audubon House). \$25/person

FRIDAY EVENING & SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 28 — Pelagic Workshop with **Arnold Small**. Take advantage of this great opportunity to study, then actually view pelagic birds. A seminar in Studio City Friday Evening will feature slides and discussion on the observation and identification of pelagic birds of California, followed by a full day pelagic trip to Santa Barbara Island Sunday. Arnold Small has extensive experience and knowledge in the birding world, has considerable expertise in pelagic birds and is widely known for his marvelous collection of outstanding bird photographs. Dr. Small has been President of both L.A. Audubon and the American Birding Association. He contributed many photographs for the "Audubon Master Guide," developed and hosted the videotape "Techniques of Birding," authored "The Birds of California," co-authored "Birds of the West," and is a retired Biology Professor at L.A. Harbor College in addition to teaching three different UCLA extension classes on California birds each year. \$45/person

The Winners

by *Sharon Milder,*
Education Chairperson

We would like to congratulate the first winners of our Annual Los Angeles Audubon Society Research Awards.

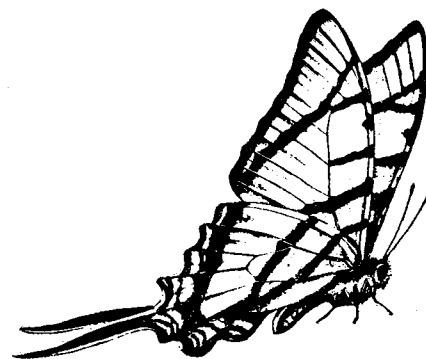
Jack Hayes: Energetic Consequences of Habitat Preferences of Marsh Roosting Blackbirds and Starlings.

Brian Henen and Patrick J. Mock: *In vivo* Determination of Body Lipid Content Using The Uptake of Cyclopropane Gas.

William Lemon: The Adaptive Significance of Flocking by the Turkey Vulture (*Cathartis aura*).

We would also like to thank all those who applied and encourage them as well as any others to apply for next year's award.

P.S. — I hope we can get a short article from each winner explaining what the heck they are doing in plain English. — *Editor*



Winter in Texas ... A Whooper of a Trip

by Helen Matelson

Just before dusk, at the side of the road, 7,000 White-fronted Geese fed in the fields. As we watched, noisily they lifted into the air above us to look for a safe resting place — what a sight on a winter day in South Texas!

Birders know what rare birding awaits them on the Gulf coast of Texas in Spring. Winter is just as exciting and rewarding in this state. The rare and endangered Whooping Crane winters in Aransas Bay near Rockport on the Texas coast. Fifteen birders from five states banded together to see the cranes and other Texas birds during a chilly December week under the leadership of Bret Whitney and Jan Pierson of the newly formed Field Guides, Inc., Austin, Texas.

Boarding the famous *M.V. Whooping Crane*, accompanied by Laughing Gulls and Bottle-nosed Dolphin, we sailed through islands and estuarine marsh. The Intracoastal Waterway cuts through this remote section of Aransas National Wildlife Reserve, winter feeding ground for the stately Whooping crane. This year there were 92 whoopers and 16 young in residence. We saw several families feeding and were close enough to see the golden iris of one whooper through the eye of the Questar. The Reddish Egret, not nearly as rare as the whoopers, but far more erratic in its feeding behavior, provided some entertainment for us as it lurched about in the marsh. Several times during our trip we saw the white morph of the Reddish Egret — this is not a *white phase*, but a true color morph, as the bird remains that color throughout its life. Sandwich Terns, Golden-eyes, Great Blue Herons, Pied-billed Grebes, Eared Grebes, and Forsters Terns were seen during the morning hours from our boat.

In the marshy grassland of Copano Bay, a Seaside Sparrow perched long enough for a good sighting. Cassin's Sparrow was finally seen in the same type of marsh habitat after much "swishing" and "pishing." Sandhill Cranes, Canada and Snow Geese fed in the surrounding farmlands. Our birding time was cut short here because of a "Blue Norther"; the sky blackened and in minutes a cold front dropped temperatures 30 degrees. This phenomenon was fascinating to experience but unfortunately drove us back to our van and forced us to speed south.

Couch's Kingbird, Green Jay, and Kiskadee were found on the King Ranch in an oak woodland. We watched the skies continuously as we drove south, spotting Crested Caracaras, Harris, White-tailed, Red-tailed, Red-shouldered and Sharp-shinned Hawks, Northern Harriers, Osprey, Black-shouldered

Kites, Chihuahuan (White-necked) Ravens, Black Vultures, and Turkey Vultures. Texas is a wonderful place to see raptors.

Laguna Atascosa and Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuges provided good birding despite the cold temperatures. Least Grebes, Green Kingfisher, Long-billed Thrashers, and Olive Sparrows were birds everyone had especially wanted to see, and all were seen very well.

All along the way we stopped to survey ponds and bays full of Redheads and Northern Pintails. Some of the ponds produced Gull-billed Terns, Sandwich Terns, Reddish Egrets, an American Oystercatcher, Piping Plovers, White Pelicans, a Stilt Sandpiper, and a few Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks. Sixty-five Snowy Plovers were found resting in the sand on one particular beach. A heartening sign for this declining species.

Further south in the Rio Grande valley, Plain Chachalacas, White-tipped Dove and Altamira Oriole are frequently seen, but the Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet is rare here, and especially in winter. Bret called this tiny flycatcher into view within a few moments. A Broad-billed Hummingbird with a striking

red bill surprised us all with an appearance, the only hummingbird we saw during the trip. Excited as we were to see the hummingbird, nothing could compare to the shrieks of delight at seeing the Hook-billed Kite. And as if that was not enough, a Northern Jacana produced further excitement.

Accommodations were comfortable everywhere we stayed, but in Rio Grande City we were treated to two nights at the LaBorde House, an old hotel authentically renovated with antiques and Audubon prints. Some rooms had red-velvet canopies over the beds and four-legged bathtubs to sink into after a hard days birding. The next day, at Falcon Dam, we saw Ringed and Green Kingfishers, Olivaceous Cormorants, Brown Jays, and Audubon's Orioles. On a side road near the dam, a Merlin hunted close to our van giving us all the best looks we have ever had of this small falcon. A very rosy-bellied Pyrrhuloxia foraged in clear view as well.

The once-plentiful White-collared Seedeater is now a very difficult find, but Bret managed to call up this tiny finch, so few in number due to the use of pesticides.

The well-known Brownsville dump is the only place to see the Mexican Crow; we spent an hour there studying the crows and hoping to spot a rare gull or two. A flock of Red-crowned Parrots, (breeding in the wild here), and a Grey Hawk flew overhead as we paraded through a neighborhood in Brownsville. This would have been a good beginning for a more-southerly birding trip, but it was the end of a very satisfying Southern Texas excursion.

Illustration by Teri Matelson



Seeing No. 600

by Dorothy Dimsdale

Jim Lane's (*A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley of Texas*) words — "You will never forget that last four miles down from Pinnacle Pass," and Helen and Teri Matelson (*Western Tanager*, April '85) — "Slip and slide down the shorter, steeper, more difficult, switch back trail of Boot Springs Trail," had occupied my mind and I could see myself — the only one of the group — pleading to be left on the trail to expire. Anything rather than scramble on further.

These nightmares notwithstanding, I knew that one day I would go. Like a number of other birders I decided to make the climb to Boot Springs in Big Bend, Texas just prior to reaching my dotage. At the age of 58 (or is it 85?) I increased my daily exercises to four touch toes instead of two, four push-ups instead of two and by fast walking in the Hollywood Hills. I was serious!

I knew the hike was ten miles in the hot sun. Just before I left I was accomplishing two miles, and that in the cool of the day, though I was going up and down the hills at a fair clip.

All this effort was, in part, because I was nearing 600 on my life list, and there were birds in Big Bend which I had never seen, including, of course, the Colima Warbler. The way I was counting, the Colima Warbler would be my 600th bird. However I like to be *sure* so I gave myself a handicap of one or two more birds — my mathematics leave something to be desired and keeping lists is not my favorite occupation.

The first day in the Chisos mountains we hiked two and a half miles to the Window Gap, downhill in the morning. It was not difficult and the view from the Gap was glorious. However it was two and a half miles to come back also, and the sun was shining brightly and hot. I reached the top with a face purple with exertion and the thought that I was certainly at the end of my rope. Only the lovely Lucifer Hummingbird seen that day, a life bird, sustained me as I fell into bed for an afternoon siesta (siesta sounds better than 'nap' to me).

The next two days were easier with short periods of marching in the sun and a couple more life birds, the Varied Bunting and the really beautiful Pyrrhuloxia to restore body and soul. I was checking them off on my list and suddenly getting interested as I appeared to have 599!!

The Window Gap had been only five and a half miles and I knew the Big Climb was twice that. My anxiety was building. I slept fitfully before the Big Climb morning dawned. In our group there was a very cheerful older man who had had two heart attacks but was eager to attempt the climb.

There were also two really elderly ladies who were positively relishing the thought. Unfortunately this had no effect on my own negative feelings. The plan was for us to go up by Pinnacle Pass and return the same way.

With a heavy heart I filled my metal thermos with ice cubes and water. At least I would not be found dehydrated with a tongue swollen from thirst. Knowing how hot it could be I carried no light jacket as I felt that the hard climb would keep me warm early in the day and I wanted to travel as lightly as possible for the ghastly descent.

We left at 6:30 a.m. and drove about a quarter of a mile in the vans to the start of the trail; which is a rather steep crumbly rock incline for about two hundred feet. It then becomes a gentler slope and easier to make steady progress as the path is well maintained. As we got up to 6000 feet it was necessary to pause periodically for breath and to look at the views which were stupendous. I had to pause more often because the ice in my metal thermos gave a loud 'chink' with each step and it was difficult — nay, impossible — to hear the birds. It was a comfort knowing I would not get lost. 'Chink, chink, chink, chink' up the hill. No one complained, I can't think why not, though we were all rather concentrating on the climb. Then we saw our first Colima Warbler. It is a truly elegant little bird, not flashy but unmistakable and singing lustily on its territory. Oh, joy! A really special lifer but I felt I couldn't shout about it as I *might* be wrong and maybe there'd be no more life birds on this trip. However I had a very warm glow inside!

The next thought that came to me was that I could now turn back and 'Chink, chink' my way downhill. However to my surprise, and because of the adrenalin from seeing the Colima Warbler, I wasn't really tired, and we seemed to be very near the summit so 'Chink, chink' on I went. We reached the top and went over into Boot Canyon where the Boot rock formation stands — picking up two more Colima Warblers on the way. I was thrilled to see the Boot and could see Boot Springs only a half mile away. The group moved down to have lunch at the springs.

You may not believe this, but after all that exertion, standing overlooking the Boot, I was cold. There was a cool breeze and a heavy cloud cover and we were over 7000 feet up. I opted with three others to start back as it looked like rain and I had no wish to get soaked as well as cold. Just on the peak we came upon others climbing up towards us looking for the top. We stopped and looked in amazement. A youngish man carrying a child of about three years on his shoulders, followed by his wife and a daughter of about nine years. They had just made the climb and seemed to think it nothing out of the ordinary.

We took our time and retraced our steps, stopped for lunch and finally returned to

the motel about 2:30 p.m. The others arrived an hour later.

The sun was shining on the way back but as the trail was down hill and the trees provided shade, there was no problem.

Perhaps other climbers had the sun going up — I don't want to minimize their efforts, but to anyone in reasonable health in the 58-85 year old group, if you leave early and take your time, you'll be glad you made the effort. Apparently the last half mile to the Springs, which I missed, posed no problem.

I would have enjoyed telling you of the agony of it all, and the sense of achievement on reaching the Boot, but there you have the truth of it for 1985. Maybe so many people have trundled up and down the trail, that it has had many of its hazards smoothed away. Maybe, like child birth, it was agony at the time, but now two weeks later, I've forgotten all about that side of it.

The next evening we drove out to Rio Grande village and in no time at all I had two more lifers, the Western Screech Owl and the Elf Owl. By now I knew that I had to be over 600 so I mentioned it to my roommate. "What?" she cried, "Which bird?"

"Well — er — I suppose I'd better say the Western Screech Owl to be sure, but it might have been the Colima Warbler."

"You mean you don't know?" she asked incredulously.

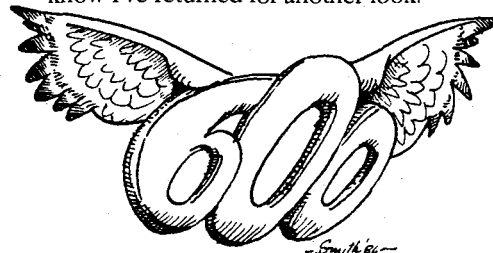
"Well, not absolutely — but I do know I'm over the top."

We did our little ritual dance reserved for these occasions and had some good wine with dinner.

Later back home, I sat myself down for the (for me) tiresome task of counting up and entering my sightings and after much input on my hand calculator and even using my head, it became obvious that the lovely Colima Warbler was number 600 and I was delighted all over again!

I love to bird and to read up about the birds I'm hoping to see and have seen as well as keeping notes where I think it will be useful, but listing has for me been a bore as I can find no use for the endless day and year lists. They had been cluttering my shelves for years and so recently I gave them the old "heave ho" and felt gloriously free!

Now I can relax, 700 is a long way off, thank goodness. And I've climbed the dreaded Boot Springs Trail. One last word if you haven't made it yet. Yes, it's a hard climb, mainly because it's a long climb. Difficult? No. Worth it? Yes. Go and enjoy. If you hear a 'Chink, chink' behind you, you'll know I've returned for another look.



Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth



How do we cope with the world we have made for ourselves? Can we cope?

"Better Living Through Chemistry" is a nifty slogan and in earlier days we nodded approval. Life-saving drugs, Formica, cellophane, nylons, Miss Clairol, Teflon, Styrafoam cups, Astroturf, brilliant fabric dyes . . . The innocent Norman Rockwell high school student in his smudgy lab coat and smelly test tubes had matured into the efficient computer-based scientist synthesizing thousands of new jaw-breaking compounds every year. We relish the benefits: the convenience, the easier living, the new experiences. But we tend to forget the cost.

In a hungry world, the more food per acre the better. Kill off the bugs and you'll get a bigger crop. To kill the bugs throw on the pesticides. If the bugs change genes in midstream and thrive on the poison, change poisons. Keep this dizzy merry-go-round going long enough and the soil takes on a scary burden of chemical venom. Why scary? The surviving, thriving bugs have the junk in their bodies, birds eat the bugs and sicken and die or don't reproduce. The food crop may take up the pesticides, people eat the crop and get a dose of poison that may not make them sick right away, but accumulates in organs and tissues, waiting a decade or so to get in its licks. We're not so sure at this point what this stuff does to us but we're pretty sure it's not improving our health.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch. When the rains come or the irrigation valves open, the pesticides may percolate into the ground water. They are also washed into the nearest lake or stream. Fish absorb the chemicals, bigger fish eat littler fish, birds and mammals eat the bigger fish, concentrating the poisons as they rise to the top of the food chain. Somewhere up there is us. When Rachel Carson taught us all this in "Silent Spring" eons ago (at least the early sixties seem that far back), it got a lot of us fired up and hollering, and in ten years DDT was banned in the United States. Hot dog, we said, we got it licked! Sadly we were wrong. Most of the powerful pesticides are long-lasting — virtually indestructible — and there seems to be enough around yet to cause trouble. In fact double trouble: a chemical boomerang. The United States is the world's largest exporter of pesticides and 30% of the total is unapproved or banned outright in this country. Now, 25% of all our fruit, 6% of our vegetables and 98% of our coffee is imported. Many of the countries that grow these crops use the pesticides whose use is

prohibited here — DDT, lindane, aldrin and chlordane — and they're coming right back to our dinner tables. Endangered peregrines in North America are feeding on contaminated shorebirds that migrate from Latin America, so sixteen years after DDT was banned here, peregrines are still crushing their thin-shelled eggs.

And then there's dioxin. The herbicide Agent Orange was used in Vietnam to destroy the forest cover that was protecting the elusive guerrillas. Dioxin was an unwanted but inseparable part of Agent Orange. Many GIs and unknown numbers of Vietnamese developed cancer and other serious diseases that are believed to have been caused by the herbicide. A town in Texas became a ghost town almost overnight when government investigators found such high levels of dioxin in the ground that the entire population had to be relocated.

But pesticides and herbicides are only a part of the chemical albatross around our neck. Thousands of industrial processes have toxic by-products we simply don't know what to do with. Like flies stuck in the flypaper, industry can't get free of the stuff. Wastes are stored in underground tanks are sealed into metal barrels that are carted off to toxic dumps. With the passage of time, the tanks and barrels corrode and leak and

the poisons seep into the ground water. Communities that depend on underground aquifers for their water supply are in jeopardy. Several wells in the San Fernando Valley were condemned when they were found to contain unacceptable levels of carbon tetrachloride, chloroform and trichloroethylene — suspected carcinogens. Finding the source of the contamination is a tough job. And no one knows how to get the toxics out of the water supply. Congress created the Superfund several years ago in an effort to clean up the thousands of neglected toxic dumps all over the country. The understaffed Environmental Protection Agency has been able to handle only six dumps since the program began.

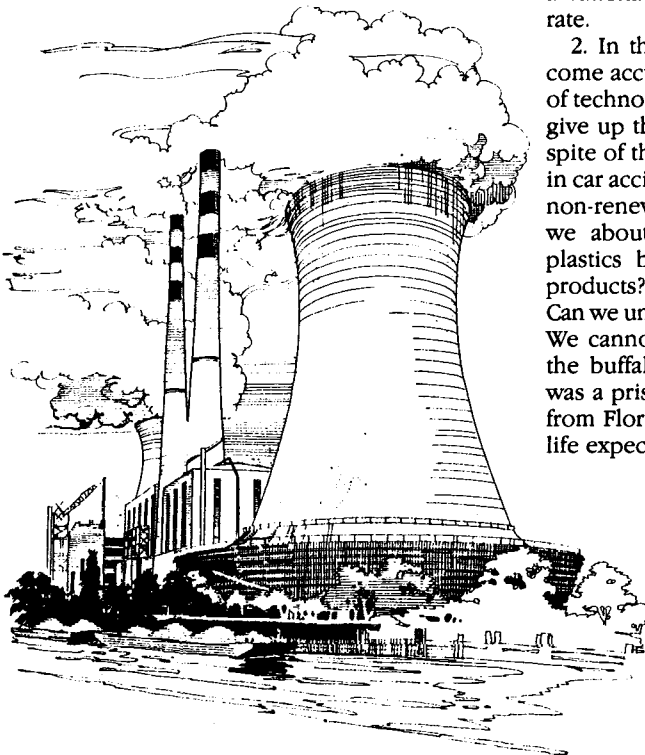
We haven't mentioned the Bhopal tragedy in India where close to 2500 people died or the similar Union Carbide plant in West Virginia that is still nervously making methyl isocyanate. Nor have we touched on the disposal of nuclear wastes, an unsolved problem since Los Alamos. Nor acid rain, God help us. As this is written, the Canadian prime minister is meeting with Mr. Reagan one year after they met for the first time, and still the United States has done nothing positive about solving the acid rain situation. The Canadians, whose conifers are dying and whose lakes and streams are being sterilized by our smokestack industries are not exactly happy with Uncle Sam. Neither are our northeastern states which are trying futilely to make their own laws to eliminate this environmental insult.

And so forth.

What are the realities, as we see them of life at the close of the twentieth century?

1. There are too many people in the world. Religious and cultural reasons prevent a rational solution to reducing the birth rate.

2. In the industrial nations we have become accustomed to the clouded blessings of technology. We are not likely to willingly give up the internal combustion engine in spite of the smog it creates or the lives lost in car accidents or the enormous amount of non-renewable petroleum it consumes. Are we about to forego the convenience of plastics because they generate toxic by-products? "Progress" is rarely reversible. Can we unlearn the secrets of nuclear fission? We cannot return to a simpler time when the buffalo roamed, when the Mississippi was a pristine river and the condor ranged from Florida to British Columbia. Or when life expectancy was 45 years.



3. There is no place to hide. We're stuck in our cities; if we move away from the center, development crawls inexorably after us. Though the air is cleaner in the wide open spaces, there are few jobs and many failing farms. There are pesticides in the antarctic ice and the fatty tissue of polar bear.

4. There *is* a growing public awareness of the value of green fields and hills, of clear skies, wildlife, clean water and uncontaminated food.

5. The present Administration has demonstrated in its five years of leadership that, given a choice, it comes down on the side of powerful economic interests rather than preservation of the environment or the health of the people.

The Evidence:

A. It has stalled on acid rain.

B. It has appointed militant anti-environmentalists to head agencies most concerned with conservation of our natural heritage: James Watt, Department of the Interior; Anne Burford, Environ-

mental Protection Agency; John Crowell (former chief counsel for a giant timber company), the U.S. Forest Service.

C. It has proposed the sale of federal lands to private parties.

D. It has waived the mileage standards for Ford and General Motors, undermining the national determination to cut oil imports.

E. It has dragged its feet on Superfund toxic clean-ups.

F. The watchdog agencies that protect our health have been seriously underfunded: the Environmental Protection Agency, the Food and Drug Administration, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

If there is an infallible prescription for change it is hidden in the arcane alchemy of the future. What are the possibilities? Education: a more enlightened public that will be aware and will move the nation positively toward environmental sanity. International cooperation: acid rain and Canada; saving tropical rain forests. Voting: for an environ-

mentally humane government that will reverse the trend toward debasement of this land and deterioration of the health of its people. Does this seem like pretty thin gruel? It is. Can we seriously expect a surge of "People Power" to stem the destructive forces at work? We know the polls show that most of us want to preserve the land and the wildlife; we want a cleaner nation — and we're willing to pay for it. But is there any evidence of an irresistible groundswell of feeling rising to depose the Marcos of anti-environmentalism? It doesn't look that way from here. Perhaps it remains for the good guys to keep plugging away, fighting each encroachment, creating new ideas, trying to engage more of the unengaged, pounding on the doors of government.

Pray for us.

Addendum: Since this was written, Mr. Reagan has at last agreed to go forward with Canada in a campaign against acid rain. We wish him well and are waiting breathlessly for his first substantive steps in that direction.

From The Editor

by Fred Heath



I was getting worried that I would have nothing to write about in this editorial. I haven't started any new controversies lately. No nasty letters to the editor. Either the typos have diminished or people have given up and stopped writing to me about them (probably the former). My deadline was looming closer and I still had a blank sheet of paper in front of me.

But just in time, the Los Angeles Times came to my rescue. There on the front page of the Metro section staring me in the face were a pair of Ringed Turtle Doves. The ominous headline jumped out "End of the Line for Turtledove?" The subtitle of the article: "Tree Cutting at Union Station Seen as a Threat to Rare Birds" as well as a photograph of the remains of the cutdown ficus trees completed the bleak picture. I knew I had a significant issue for my editorial. One which demanded that my editorial be put right along side of Sandy's Conservation Conversation column.

It seems that all of this tree cutting at Union Station will reduce by half the nesting

sites for the Ringed Turtle Doves (*Streptopelia risoria*) which hang out in the Old Plaza. This according to Dr. Cathleen Cox. Why this population is so vital we'll get to shortly.

As with most newspaper articles, this one had a few factual errors (unlike *Western Tanager* articles, of course). It said that the Ringed Turtle Dove was a native of Sub-Saharan Africa. This mistake is understandable since the African Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia roseogrisea*) looks somewhat like the Ringed Turtle Dove and may be the ancestor from which the Ringed Turtle Dove is derived. You see the Ringed Turtle Dove has no known wild populations. I went to the authority on such matters: *Introduced Birds of the World* by John L. Long, an indispensable book for Hawaii and Florida birders. (That will generate me a few letters). Mr. Long talks about the Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) and the Ringed Turtle Dove like they were the same species. Again, like the African Turtle Dove they look alike and the Collared Dove may be the ancestor.

At any rate the only established Ringed Turtle Dove populations in North America are in St. Petersburg, Florida where the birds hang around a shuffleboard court, and Los Angeles. The Los Angeles birds are split into two gangs . . . I mean . . . groups; one at Pershing Square and the endangered one at the Old Plaza. According to Dr. Cox, the birds won't (or can't) fly the 1½ miles that separates these populations. Probably because they've eaten too much popcorn. The L.A. population is visited by birders from far and near. As a matter of fact, our own Kimball Garrett and Van Ramsen wrote the definitive bird finding article on the L.A. Turtle Doves, complete with helpful hints such as checking the waste barrels and disguising one's self as cotton candy.

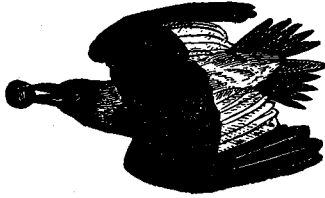
Poor Dr. Cox. She works at the Los Angeles Zoo and also has a lot to do with the California Condors when not studying Ringed Turtle Doves. It must be very frustrating for her, since both birds are endangered. (Although she was bravely quoted as saying the doves won't go extinct.) There are many other amazing similarities. Both are scavengers, and there are more birds in captivity than in the wild.

I do not want to let the experience of the Passenger Pigeon be repeated with the Ringed Turtle Dove. We have to draw the line somewhere. I haven't brought this to the attention of the L.A. Audubon Board of Directors, but I am thinking we should start a fund raising campaign to save the Ringed Turtle Dove. If every member of LAAS gave a penny we would have the money to buy enough loaves of day old white bread (the preferred bread of Ringed Turtle Doves) to feed those little guys for a month. Maybe we can get Mayor Bradley interested. It would help in his race for governor to have the conservationist vote behind him. He'd probably volunteer to give them Mono Lake water to drink.

Please let me know what you think of my idea. Write to me, Fred Heath, P.O. Box 5036, Chatsworth, CA 91313.

P.S. — The *Western Tanager* will also become an endangered species this summer if I don't get some more material quick.

Birds Of The Season



by Hal Baxter
and Kimball Garrett

Early spring (late February and March) seems to be a time that birders reserve for just about anything but birding. Highlights of the period this year included Halley's Comet, spring wildflowers, the NCAA Basketball Tournament, and a number of other pursuits peripheral, at best, to the study of our birdlife. This diminishing interest in birds through the early spring period is understandable, as winter bird populations slip away from us and spring migrants and summer visitors are slow to arrive. The antics of our resident species and our first spring arrivals (swallows, hummingbirds, Western Flycatchers, Warbling Vireos and others) are fascinating to those who get into the field, or their backyards, in the early spring, but such observations don't tend to generate reports for this column. This leaves us with little to write about at this time of year.

Varied weather conditions, from torrential rain and mountain snows to hot Santa Ana conditions, were with us in March. Add one other condition: dense fog. Those aboard the 23 March pelagic trip out of San Pedro got some practice locating **Xantus' Murrelets** by their high, whistled calls, since visibility was under 100 yards for parts of the trip. As the Vantuna crept across the San Pedro Channel, aided by radar and frequent fog horn blasts, it became evident that the destination of Santa Barbara Island would not be reached. Instead we circled the back side of Santa Catalina Island, and under clearer conditions had spectacular studies of Risso's Dolphins (also known as Grampus) and Bottlenose Dolphins. Birdlife was not abundant, but the exceptionally calm conditions allowed for excellent views of Xantus' Murrelets, **Northern Fulmars**, **Black-vented Shearwaters**, and a **Common Murre**. Additional shearwaters included only a single **Pink-footed** and a single **Sooty Pomarine Jaegers** were numerous. Of interest was a single, basic-plumaged **Red-necked Phalarope**, swimming, then flying, next to a **Red Phalarope**. This is a very early date for the Red-necked Phalarope (which perhaps wintered locally), and is an almost exact repeat of the sighting on last year's March trip.

An interesting occurrence each spring is the overland migration of certain coastal species, and the occasional "fallout" of such birds on the lakes and reservoirs of San Diego and Riverside Counties (and elsewhere). For example, on 18 March Bob

McKernan counted 18 **White-winged Scoters**, 90 **Brant** and 500 **Horned Grebes** on Lake Perris. Similar records of large numbers of Brant, Surf Scoters and other species have occurred in past years on lakes such as Cuyamaca and Henshaw. These sightings suggest that large numbers of coastal birds may migrate overland from the top of the Gulf of California, probably cutting across to the coast of San Diego or Orange Counties. Occasionally, especially during inclement weather, flocks may touch down on inland bodies of water. The fact that there are few records of large flocks of such species on the lakes of San Bernardino County or Los Angeles County, and relatively few records even for the Salton Sea, indicates that the movements are indeed mainly restricted to the extreme southwestern corner of the state. Gauging the magnitude of this overland migration is understandably difficult; as we frequently remark in this column, further studies are needed. A fruitful area for study, besides the head of the Gulf of California itself, might be the Laguna Salada, some 25 miles south of Calexico. This intermittent lake has been full of water for several years and has attracted large numbers of birds.

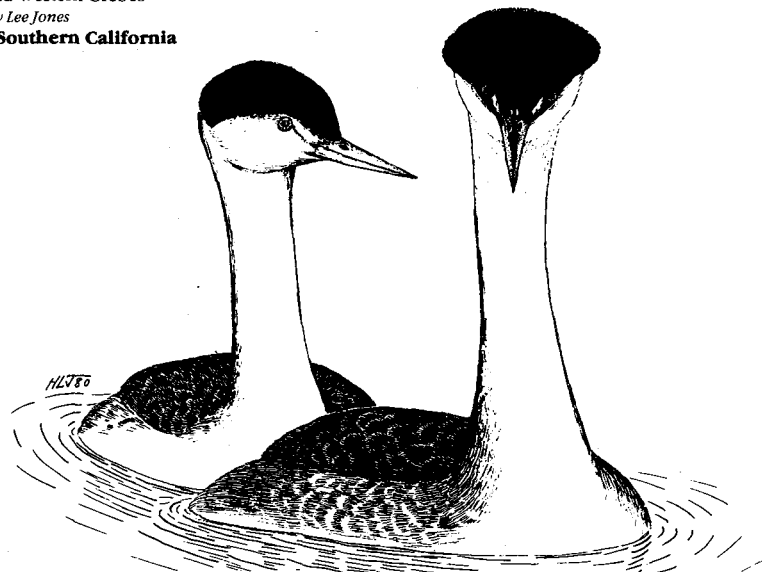
Our list of bird sightings for this month will be a rather short one, reflecting the doldrums described in the beginning of the article. **Clark's Grebes** are being reported

with greatly increased frequency, a situation which can be entirely explained by this form's recent "elevation" to species status. Of interest was a single bird present on the small pond at the Arboretum in Arcadia after about 22 February (Barbara Cohen *et al*). Reservoirs in the northwestern part of Los Angeles County appear to have the highest concentration of Clark's Grebes in the county. Virtually nothing is known of the summer status of Clark's Grebes in the county. Virtually nothing is known of the summer status of Clark's in our region, so we ask observers to pay special attention this summer. Western Grebes regularly summer (as non-breeders) along our coast; do these flocks contain Clark's? When do wintering Clark's leave, and when do fall birds arrive? We look forward to printing some answers to these questions in future Birds of the Season columns.

The male **Harlequin Duck** was still present at Bolsa Chica on 11 March (Charles Hood). The female **Hooded Merganser** at Turtle Rock Nature Center was still being seen after 6 March (Doug Willick). Shorebirds of note included two **Lesser Golden-Plovers** (presumably of the race *fulva*) at Seal Beach Refuge (Doug Willick, 8 March), and a **Ruff** at the Pt. Mugu Gun Club (Arnold Small and Bruce Broadbooks, 4 March).

A **Short-eared Owl** was flushed from the ground at San Joaquin Marsh, Irvine, in early February (Bill Bretz). Of interest was Eric Brooks' report of **White-throated Swifts** nesting at a six-story apartment building near Fountain and Sweetzer Avenues in West Hollywood in March; as these swifts are crevice nesters, one wonders what this observation says about the structural integrity of the building! A **Hammond's Flycatcher** was identified by voice and appearance at the Newport Harbor Environmental Nature Center on 9 March (Doug Willick). This

Clark's (left) and Western Grebes
— Illustration by Lee Jones
from **Birds of Southern California**

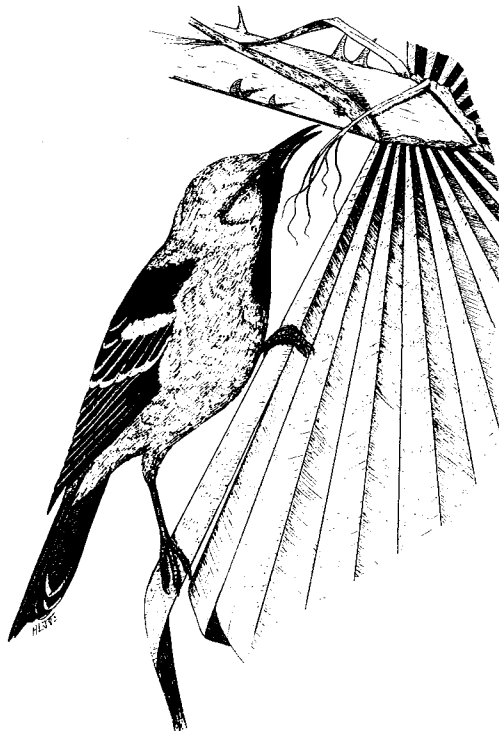


would be exceptionally early for a spring migrant, and may represent a bird that wintered locally (which would also be exceptional). The wintering **Gray Flycatcher** was still at the Arboretum in Arcadia on 12 March (Barbara Cohen). **Western Flycatchers** are typically early spring arrivals; birds were calling on territories in Monte Nido, off Malibu Canyon, by 9 March (Kimball Garrett). The wintering **Thick-billed Kingbird** was last reported in Peters' Canyon, near Tustin, on 9 March (Doug Willick).

Thought to be long gone, the **Chestnut-sided Warbler** at the Arcadia Arboretum was resighted from 17 to 19 March (Hal Baxter *et al*), and thus became one of the first records of a wintering bird for the region. A **Yellow Warbler** along the Santa Ana River in Anaheim on 23 February (Doug Willick) was clearly wintering locally. One of this winter's major celebrities, the **Pine Warbler** at El Dorado Park in Long Beach, was still present on 8 March (Brian Daniels and Doug Willick). The **Palm Warbler** at Doheny State Beach, originally found by Candy Dean, was last seen on 28 February. The **American Redstart** at Huntington Beach Central Park was still present on 1 March; it was originally found by Jerry Oldenettel. The **MacGillivray's Warbler** there was still present on 11 March (Charles Hood); the first spring migrant MacGillivray's usually arrive about two weeks after that date.

Richard Hubacek's Palos Verdes yard proved a mecca for spring migrant *Zonotrichia*. In mid-March he had separate visits from a **White-throated Sparrow** and a **Harris' Sparrow**. A White-throated Sparrow was at the Newport Beach Environmental Nature Center on 9 March (Doug Willick). The Harris's Sparrow and other birds mentioned last month from the Santa Ana River in Anaheim were still present at the beginning of March (Doug Willick). **Hooded Orioles**, our most reliable harbinger of spring, were widely reported by the last third of March. Jean Brandt's resident male Hooded arrived on 21 March, a few days after the traditional arrival date. **Scott's Oriole** males were singing on territory at Lovejoy Butte in the Antelope Valley on 22 March, and a male was higher up, at Devil's Punchbowl County Park, on the same day (Kimball Garrett).

Every square inch of habitat in southern California will prove rewarding for birding in the month of May. Though we might predict that abundant late winter rains, and the resultant lushness of desert vegetation, will cause migrants to be less concentrated at desert oases than in drier years, such simple correlations rarely hold. Birding activity will be focused on these desert oases in May, as they have typically produced the largest numbers of vagrants. Coastal points and adjacent canyons have proved most productive for vagrants during overcast spells from about 20 May to 10 June. But all areas and all parts of the month will produce



Hooded Oriole
Illustration by Lee Jones
from *Birds of Southern California*

migrants and the chance of rarities. Our closer "vagrant traps" should not be ignored. Linda Mia Ranch, along 170th Street East in the Antelope Valley, frequently concentrates migrants. This area should be birded. For example, the central park in California City, north of Mojave, has been very productive in recent years. Again we point out that the residential areas on the east side of this park are off limits to birders. Small ranchyards in the Antelope Valley are always worth a check, but again private property should be respected. Our closer riparian areas should also not be ignored. Try the Santa Clara River on both sides of I-5 near Magic Mountain, San Francisquito Canyon at the old dam site (ten miles north of Bouquet Canyon Road), the Santa Ana River in several area of Orange and Riverside Counties, and Big Rock Creek in the Valyermo area.

Send any interesting bird observations to:
Hal Baxter
1821 Highland Oaks Drive
Arcadia, CA 91006
Phone (818) 355-6300

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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 many 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



May '86

EVENING MEETINGS

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

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.

TUESDAY, JUNE 10 — **Bob Bonds** a conservation expert and teacher who has worked for the Bureau of Land Management and the Nature Conservancy will give an illustrated talk entitled: **Birds — Research and Conservation in the Kern River Watershed**.

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, 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.

SATURDAY, MAY 10 — Meet **Jean Brown** at the **Tapia** parking lot at 8 a.m. for a day of birding variety — residents and migrants and optional shorebirding at **Malibu Lagoon** afterwards. May wish to bring picnic lunch. Tapia is located on Las Virgines/Malibu Cyn. Rd. about half way between 101 Fwy. and Pacific Coast Highway.

SATURDAY, MAY 10 — **Harold Bond** will lead his third annual morning walk through the little used **O'Melveny Park**, where many typical migrants have been seen. From Simi Fwy. 118 in Granada Hills, exit at Balboa, go north about 2 miles to Sesnon St., turn left (west) to parking lot at end. Meet at 8 a.m.

SATURDAY, MAY 17 — 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.

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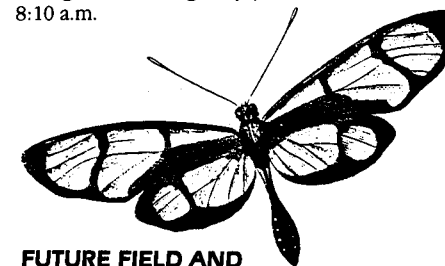
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SATURDAY, MAY 24 — Join Santa Monica City College Bird Identification Instructor **Roger Cobb** for a beginner's walk through the canyon at **Big Sycamore, Pt. Mugu State Park**, ending by mid-afternoon. Wear comfortable shoes and bring knapsack with lunch and water. Meet at the dirt parking area outside the entrance, about 20 miles north of Malibu, on Pacific Coast Highway, at 8 a.m.

SUNDAY, JUNE 1 — In cooperation with the Santa Monica Mountain Task Force, meet leader **Gerry Haigh** for his monthly morning walk through **Topanga State Park** at 8 a.m. These oak woodlands and meadows, overlook the canyons and sea. In addition to chaparral residents, warblers and other migrants are expected. From Topanga Cyn. Blvd., take a very sharp east turn uphill on Entrada Drive (7 miles so. Ventura Blvd., 1 mile no. Topanga Village.) Keep bearing left on Entrada Dr. at various roadforks to parking lot at end. \$3 fee.

SATURDAY, JUNE 14 — Join **Rusty Scalf** for a full day of general mountain birding in the **Chilao area** of the San Gabriels. The highlight will be to observe the results of his **Western Bluebird next box project**. We'll also be looking for Ash-throated Flycatchers, Mountain Chickadees, nuthatches, Mountain Quail, Violet-green Swallows, Red-breasted Sapsuckers and

other mountain birds. Bring lunch and meet at the Chilao Visitors Center at 9 a.m. or preferably carpool location, off the 210 Fwy. on the east side of Angeles Crest Highway, just north of the exit by 8:10 a.m.



FUTURE FIELD AND RESERVATION TRIPS

See Page 5 for detailed information

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

TUESDAY, MAY 13 — Huntington Library — Zus Haagen-Smit

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

SUNDAY, JUNE 15 — Whittier Narrows — David White

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

WEEKEND, JULY 19-20 — So. San Joaquin Valley/So. Sierra Forest — Rob Hansen

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 — Herb Clarke

FRIDAY EVENING/SATURDAY, AUGUST 29/30 — Shorebird Workshop — Jon Dunn

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

SEPTEMBER 26, 28 — Pelagic Workshop — Arnold Small

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11 — Pelagic — (Leaders TBA)



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MAY 1986

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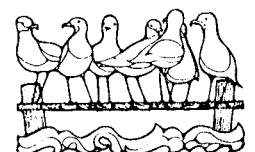
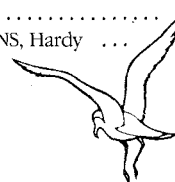
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