



# WESTERN TANAGER

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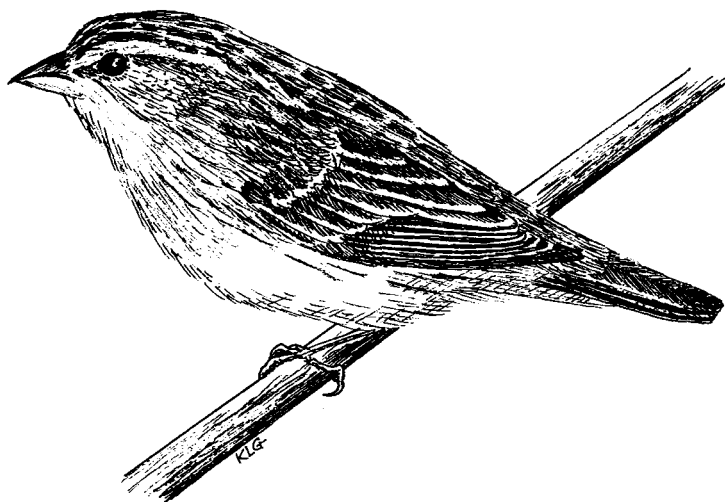
July/August 1986

## Field Tips: The Bishop Test

By Kimball L. Garrett

Written descriptions of birds we have observed form a record that can be important to us personally, as part of our birding "education," and scientifically, as a documentation of natural history. In these pages Jon Dunn and I have dwelt heavily upon the importance of documenting sightings with detailed and accurate descriptions. Several articles (see, for example, Chuck Bernstein's "Details on Details" in the March 1984 *Western Tanager*) have discussed the parts of birds and their relationship to accurate description, and all standard field guides give at least a cursory treatment of bird topography.

Even armed with an appreciation for the importance of written documentation, is the average observer able to write an *accurate* account of a bird's characteristics? A recent get-together of several Los Angeles area birdwatchers presented an opportunity to crudely test how well descriptions of a single individual bird might agree with one another. This is not just a point of idle curiosity. The California Bird Records Committee (and other similar bodies), in reviewing sight records of rarities, frequently must juggle multiple descriptions which contain differing, even opposing, interpretations of a bird's appearance and behavior. Which descriptions are "right"? Are there recurrent kinds of inaccuracies in bird descriptions? This was tested in a casual and not altogether scientific way by presenting to nineteen birders a caged female Yellow-crowned Bishop (*Euplectes afer*). This species was selected because: (1) few California observers are familiar with it (thus reducing the likelihood that descriptions are biased by preconceived ideas of field marks), (2) the female plumage is sufficiently complex to require some detail in description, and (3) one was available for rent from a local pet shop (thank you, Jonathan Alderfer). The nineteen participants ranged from acknowledged regional and international



Female Yellow-crowned Bishop, Subject of the Bishop Test — Illustration by Kimball Garrett

experts to casual birders who had rarely, if ever, written a description of a bird. The bishop was placed in a one cubic meter mesh cage under incandescent light. Observers could stand as close as 0.5m and were given ten minutes to observe and write. Descriptions were then "tallied" and analyzed component by component for accuracy and inter-observer variability.

**Descriptions of size.** Sixteen of the nineteen observers gave an absolute estimate of the size (total length) of the subject. These estimates ranged from 3.0" to 5.0", with a mean of 3.9". Standard African field guides give a length of 12 cm (about 4.7") for this species, but do not distinguish between the males and the slightly smaller females. We get the impression that we're dealing with a small bird here, but the estimates of length help little beyond that. When writing a description in the field, one would, of course, compare the bird's size to that of a nearby individual of an appropriate familiar species. Had this bishop been squeaked up out of a local weedy field, we might have compared its size to that of a House Finch, a Song Sparrow or a Savannah Sparrow.

**Comments on general shape and appearance.** Most observers (14) chose to begin their descriptions with a short, general statement of the bird's general appearance or presumed taxonomic affinity. Three of

the remaining five persons drew crude sketches which perhaps were intended to convey this type of information. General comments included:

"small finch reminiscent of a North American grassland or marsh sparrow (*Ammodramus*)"

"small finch-like bird"

"Passerine, finch-like"

"seed-eater type"

"bishop, sp.?: overall a small and very short-tailed passerine"

"weaver finch; female type"

"little brown bird; looks just like the one in the book"

The most common reference seemed to be to the bird's finch-like appearance; this is helpful, as we immediately know we are not talking about a small insectivorous bird, a small sandpiper, etc.

**General comments about behavior, conditions, circumstances.** Such comments can be of utmost importance in a bird description, and I include this category near the beginning of the analysis to stress how critical their inclusion can be. Under what conditions was the bird observed? For how long? With what optical equipment? By whom? What was the bird doing? In what habitat was it seen? Such background information does not, of course, take the place of a detailed description of the bird's appearance and voice, but still yields valuable

insights. In the present case, the bird's confinement and the standardized conditions of observation diminished the importance of the category. A few choice comments were offered anyway:

"active, often 'scrunching' like a meadowlark"

"first seen flying over Encino"

"very nervous; twitches wings and tail — could be due to confinement"

"observer operating with two glasses of wine on empty stomach"

"Priscilla did not find; I saw it first"

**Tail.** Fifteen of the nineteen observers mentioned something about the tail, and thirteen of these fifteen mentioned that the tail appeared short. A particularly detailed comment was "[tail] short, rather stubby; square-tipped; brown, darkening toward tip." There was less agreement on the exact shape of the tail tip, as the following responses indicate:

"square-tipped"

"square"

"minutely notched"

"roundish"

"slightly forked"

"tail tips irregular"

Tail color descriptions ranged from "blackish" to "dark brown" to "chocolate" to "dark."

**Legs.** Mentioned in all nineteen responses, leg color was described as "pink" or "pinkish" by 13 observers, "yellow" by two, "yellow-pink" by one, and simply "light,"

"pale" and "flesh" by the remaining three. Failure to count toes was an inevitable result of the unanimity of opinion that the bird was a passerine.

**Bill color.** Again there was a fine line between pink and yellow in the description of bill color. All nineteen observers commented on bill color; ten used the term "pink" in their description, while five mentioned "yellow," three mentioned "flesh," and three mentioned "pale." Numbers add up to more than nineteen because many used these terms in some combination. One observer employed that nebulous buzz word "horn color."

**Eye color.** Twelve persons mentioned eye color, three calling the eyes "black" and nine merely saying "dark."

**Bill shape.** Twelve observers made some specific mention of bill shape (and bill shape was perhaps implied by others who mentioned the general finch-like appearance of the bird). The variety of responses is indicated below:

"culmen slightly decurved"

"thick, conical; 1.5 times long as wide"

"small pointed bill"

"thickish"

"short, conical, finch-like"

sharp-pointed, small, finch-like; shorter than head"

"proportionately quite large and conical shaped"

"relatively long and heavy; sharp"

"finch-like, but more slender"

"fairly long, pointed, finch-like"

The conflicting information here would certainly confuse one who was analyzing the record, but again it is important to point out that observers were describing the bird in a vacuum, without reference species from which the bird was being distinguished.

**Crown and hindneck pattern.** Fifteen of the observers mentioned some feature(s) of this area of the bird. Eleven of these fifteen mentioned "streaks," but, interestingly, there was disagreement as to whether the streaks were dark or pale. This points out how important it is to discuss streaks and other fine patterns in terms of feather structure (are markings on feather shafts? tips? outer webs? inner webs? subterminal? etc.). How do we reconcile these six comments:

"crown brown, thinly and rather densely streaked blackish; hindneck also brown with dense, sharp, blackish streaks"

"brown crown (lightly streaked with beige)"

"fine black streaks"

"forehead pale, shading to dark on crown and nape with fine, pale streaking"

"very prominently streaked with black and rich buff, the streaking being uniform from the crown through the nape . . ."

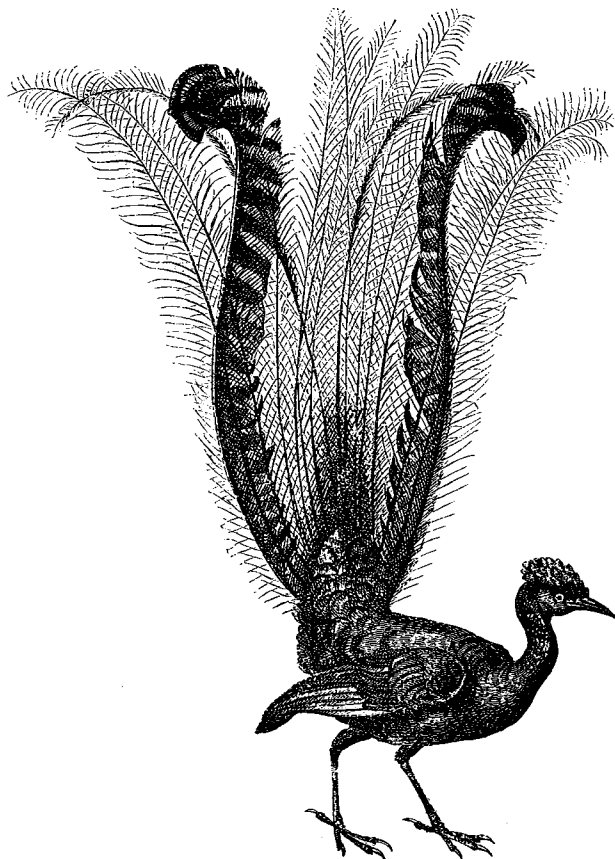
"streaked with slate from crown . . ."

Who is right? An examination of specimens shows, in fact, that the crown and nape streaks are formed by the contrast between dark brown shaft streaks and rich buffy lateral edges to the individual feathers. This brings up an important point. Our descriptions generally reflect the impressions of pattern which we note in the field; rarely can they reflect actual distribution of pattern on individual feathers. In many cases, however (juvenile stints, for example) such details of feather pattern may be critical for identification. This should sell a lot of Questars and Criterions!

**Face pattern.** Seventeen responses paid some attention to face pattern. All seventeen of these mentioned the presence of a supercilium. This mark, however, was variously referred to as "supercilium," "superciliary," "line above eye," "line over eye," "transocular," and "eyeline." The last two are incorrectly used, as they refer to markings which pass through, not over, the level of the eye. The color of the supercilium was given as "pale," "pale buff," "buff-white," "buffy," "tan," "beige," "whitish-buff," "yellow," and "white." Whew! The most detailed comments on face pattern read:

"strong pale buff superciliary, curving up over eye and back; no strong auricular — rear of auricular slightly darker than fore part"

"face pale with dusky auricular area; distinct pale superciliary, broadening posteriorly; dark eye distinct in pale face"



"there was a prominent buffy-white supercilium that extended well behind the eye; the lores were pale, and this and the pale brown auricular (behind the eye) combined to give a big-eyed appearance"

**Upperparts.** All but one of the observers referred to streaking on the back, but as in the descriptions of the crown, it was unclear whether there was dark streaking on a light background or light streaking on a dark background. [The streaking is, in fact, due to broad dark brown shaft streaks on the back feathers contrasting with buffy or tan lateral edges.] Descriptions of the underparts were variable, with fine streaking on the breast mentioned in about half of the descriptions; several observers noted a hint of a breast band, attributed by some to a wash of brownish or buffy color and by others to a series of streaks.

### CONCLUSIONS

It should be stressed again how the exercise described above differs in many important

respects from the process of writing a description of a rarity encountered in the field. First, viewing conditions can be frustratingly variable in the field, and differences found in descriptions often signify little more than the differing conditions experienced by the observers. This "experimental design" (I use that term loosely) minimized this factor. Second, our usual approach in describing a rarity is to weed out similar possible species through the course of the description. This is important, as any documentation of a rarity must convince reviewing bodies or editors that similar species were considered and reasonably eliminated. Having in mind the species one needs to eliminate, one becomes selective about the aspects of the bird under scrutiny which are emphasized in the description. When describing a vagrant *Myiarchus* flycatcher, for example, one might take great pains to observe and describe the exact pattern of color on the tail feathers and the relative size and shape of the bill, while perhaps placing less emphasis on the pattern of the wing coverts and the color of

the belly. In the present case, as I noted above, our bird was viewed in a sort of "identification vacuum." However, an accurate and detailed description of the individual under study is the necessary basis for any conclusions about identification, so describing a bird in this sort of vacuum may actually be a worthwhile intellectual exercise. Third, the most convincing elements of a description often pertain to the behavior and vocalizations of the subject; these were necessarily eliminated from the present exercise (the bird never called, and it behaved like any neurotic bird in a small cage).

I don't pretend to draw any startling conclusions from this game, but I certainly learned that I, for one, needed to brush up on the care with which I write descriptions of birds. We could probably all use some practice, and our own backyards are the logical starting places (try describing a Song Sparrow or a House Sparrow!). On a parting note, I would like to thank the nineteen observers who unknowingly became the players in this exercise.

### 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.

All refundable reservations contracted and then cancelled (except by LAAS) will be charged a \$5 handling fee.

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.



**SATURDAY, AUGUST 2 — Pelagic** from San Pedro to Santa Barbara Island. Leader: **Herb Clarke**. Expected species: Sooty and Pink-footed Shearwaters, Black Storm-petrel, Pigeon Guillemot, Cassin's Auklet. Possible species — Black-vented Shearwater, Ashy and Least Storm-petrel, Red-billed Tropic bird, Pomarine, Parasitic and Long-tailed Jaegers, South Polar Skua, Sabine's Gull, Arctic Tern, Craveri's and Xantus' Murrelets. \$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 13-14** — Spend a fall weekend birding the Crane Flat/Tioga Road area of beautiful **Yosemite National Park** with **David Gaines**. Evening (Friday also) and early mornings

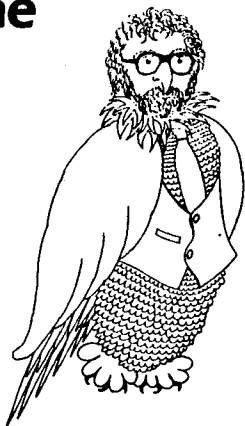
will be spent looking for the Great Gray Owl. Other specialties to be included in daytime searches: Black-backed Woodpecker, Red Crossbill, Pine Grosbeak and Williamson's Sapsucker. Gaines is a naturalist with a Masters Degree in Ecology. He founded the Save Mono Lake Committee, teaches ornithology classes 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 meeting 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. Dr. Small has extensive experience and knowledge in the birding world and is widely known for his marvelous collection of outstanding bird slides. Dr. Small has been President of both L.A. Audubon and the American Birding Association. He contributed many slides for the "Audubon Master Guide," authored "The Birds of California," co-authored "Birds of the West," and is a Biology Professor at L.A. College in addition to teaching three different UCLA extension classes on California birds each year. (Maximum 38 persons — boat limitations.) \$45/person. Lecture/Slide show only \$15/person.

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

## From the Editor

by Fred Heath



I'm going to start right out with an apology to Kimball Garrett. I had promised not to use his Field Tips article, which appears as the lead article in this issue of the *Tanager*, as the lead article. However, I had the choice between putting his article or my editorial on the front page. If I had put my editorial on the front page then everything I've written to this point would not have been necessary (it probably isn't anyway), and thus my editorial would have been too short to put on the front page.

The basic problem is that I have finally run out of material for the *Tanager*. All my recent pleas for articles have gone unheeded. Luckily, Wanda Conway has persuaded many of the field trip leaders to write up their trips and I've been able to use a few of them to fill out this *Tanager*. My plan was not to publish the field trips until a few months in advance of the trip being repeated in the next year. Unfortunately, because of the dearth of material, those who might be interested in such a trip will just have to eat their hearts out for almost a full year waiting for a repeat of the trip. Of course for those of you who like to plan their lives out far in advance, these articles published at this time may be beneficial.

The bottom line is that I need articles . . . quickly. Send them to Fred Heath, P.O. Box 5036, Chatsworth, CA 91313.

In my continuing quest to save the Ringed Turtle-Dove, I would like to direct your attention to the May/June issue of *Terra*, the members magazine of the L.A. County Natural History Museum. As an aside, if you don't belong to the Museum, I would highly recommend you join if for no other reason than to receive *Terra* magazine and support a worthwhile institution. At any rate the May/June *Terra* has an article entitled *Southern California's Exotic Birds* written by no less an authority than Kimball Garrett

with paintings in full color by Jonathan Alderfer. Naturally, Kimball discusses the many species of parrots and other birds which unnaturally live in our area. Inevitably he gets around to our favorite exotic, the Ringed Turtle-Dove. You can tell just from the tone of Kimball's writing that it is a favorite of his also. And the lovingly rendered portrait by Jonathan speaks volumes of his great respect for this species. Kimball in his article corrects some bad information contained in my May editorial. I used the Latin name *Streptopelia risoria* for the Ringed Turtle-Dove, but Kimball suggests it shouldn't have that name because it is "in fact a semidomesticated form of one of the collared turtle-doves of southern Eurasia or Africa, *S. decaocto* or *S. roseogrisea*." This is very disturbing to me. First we find out they have no homes (because their nest trees have been cut down at Union Station) and now we find out they don't even have a Latin name of their own. Maybe we can't fight city hall and get their trees back, but we sure can come up with a Latin name for them. If I get enough names maybe I can put together a lead article and get Jonathan to provide another wonderful illustration.

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

I'd like to share with you a sad scene I witnessed while birding in a local park recently . . .

My neighbor, Mrs. Will (wife of the late Charles Will), and her niece Linda were sitting on a park bench. In a flash, a teenager with bright yellow shoes ran swiftly by, coming veery close to them. I heard screams.

"Help, I've been robin'd," shrieked the dowitcher, thrashing about.

"Now don't go stork raven mad," soothed Linda, the niece, "I'll wren after that yellow-footed gull."

So she wren and wren. Soon she returned to her aunt.

"Are you dun, Lin? Owl did you do?" asked Chuck Will's widow, anxiously.

The gull replied, "I'm sora. I hawk you're not too grebe'd, but I gnat-catcher."

"Oh my, why knot? And sparrow me no details."

"Well, auntie, she tern'd by the red poll and scoter'd onto the passerine black railway car."

. . . And so it went. But as I relate this story, a question lingers — Willit be too ruff for your readers to swallow?

Sincerely,

Stephanie Singer

Sir:

Why not change the name of the Mockingbird to the Grey Suited Thespian.

Yours,

Karen May



# Warblermosts, and Sundry Other Facts

by Dave Grindell

Even the most dedicated "warbleer" finds it difficult to say anything new and bright about this family. He is even saddened that they have now been demoted to the rank of a subfamily, *Parulinae*. To say that they are the "butterflies of the bird world" is merely to repeat a commonplace. Short of going out to find these woodland sprites in their native habitat, the best one can do is to celebrate them as they deserve, namely, with superlatives. Here are a few.

**HARDIEST:** The Yellow-rump has been found as far north as Point Barrow, Alaska, and Greenland; and some individuals — uniquely among warblers — can withstand all the winter months in Maine. Driven thus to feed on berries and seeds, this is one of the most vegetarian of its kind, while being at the same time a highly accomplished flycatcher when circumstances permit. Also, the bird has been bold and inventive in finding different ways and places to feed itself and might qualify as our most versatile warbler. More on this species below.

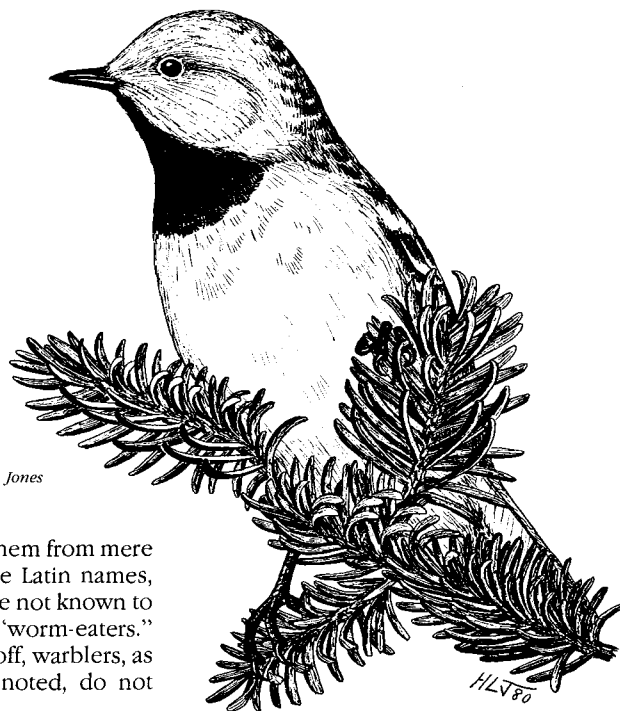
**MOST MYSTERIOUS:** Carbonated Warblers appear on number sixty of Audubon's plates, painted allegedly from two specimens taken at Henderson, Kentucky in May 1811. This is a mystery. Elliott Coues wrote: "A strongly-marked bird, the like of which has never been seen since . . . Perhaps it is an offspring of the imagination of its originator . . ." Other ornithologists speculate that this bird represents some kind of hybrid.

**RAREST:** Bachman's, of course. Even Roger Tory Peterson, the last I knew, has never seen this variety, and the 1983 edition of the Golden Guide laments "May be extinct." But in 1907, only four years after the discovery of its nest, Kirtland's could be called by Frank M. Chapman "the rarest of American warblers."

**SEXES MOST UNLIKE:** The female Black-throated Blue shares little or nothing in pattern or coloration with her mate save for that whitish wing-patch which RTP calls the "vest pocket handkerchief." And even this she may coyly hide. As with Williamson's Sapsucker, the female passed for a time as a separate species, the "Pine Swamp Warbler" of Audubon and Wilson.

**MISNOMERS** are many: Prairie Warbler is a gaffe. Wormeater Warbler says nothing about the bird's dietary preferences. Palm and Magnolia Warblers breed in the north woods. Tennessee and Connecticut, Nashville and Cape May simply designate localities through which the birds may pass in

Hermit Warbler — Illustration by Lee Jones  
from *Birds of Southern California*



migration, the names given them from mere accidents of discovery. Some Latin names, too, are inept: *Vermivoras* are not known to be, in any special sense, "worm-eaters." And, to cap the whole thing off, warblers, as has more than once been noted, do not really warble!

**FARTHEST PENETRATION INTO EUROPE:** Black-throated Green has turned up in Germany, on the island of Helgoland; American Redstart and Northern Waterthrush (another misnomer!) have done so in France. All in all, thirteen species of American warblers have been found in Europe, including Iceland, but the British Isles are where they mainly appear. They are listed under "accidentals" in all the standard field guides.

**LEND-LEASE TO THE USSR:** Various old-world warblers occur in Alaska and some of our "wood warblers" reciprocate by winging their way westward across the Bering Strait. Back in 1879 the notable Vega expedition, under captain — later Baron — Nils Nordenskjöld, took specimens of both Yellow-rumped Warbler (found also in Europe) and Northern Waterthrush. This was on Siberia's Chukchi Peninsula, just across from Alaska's Seward Peninsula. The Russian terms for these birds are, respectively, "Yellow-headed American Warbler" and "Northern Yellow-bellied American Warbler." Writing in 1954, Dement'ev and Gladkov in their authoritative *Birds of the Soviet Union*, could note that no other species than these "casual stragglers to northeast Siberia" has been recorded. But it is a safe conjecture, I suppose, that in time other species will be found. Our wood warblers are called by the Russians *amerikanskije slavki*.

**MOST ATYPICAL** is the Yellow-breasted Chat. In behavior above all, but also in vocalizations and in other features known better to the anatomist than the bird watcher, this bird is delightfully distinctive. It is, furthermore, our largest warbler (Lucy's is perhaps our smallest). Long suspected of standing outside the *Parulinae*, the chat seems now to have produced valid credentials for inclusion, whereas . . .

AN ACCOMPLISHED WARBLER IMPERSONATOR would seem to be *Peucedramus taeniatus*, alias Olive Warbler. Present-day scientific thinking sees this species as more closely related, perhaps, to the old-world warblers. Fine discussions on a non-technical level of the problems of the chat and of this warbler may be found in Hal H. Harrison's 1984 *Wood Warblers' World* (Simon and Schuster). My thanks to Hal for having inspired, in large measure, this present article.

## President's Corner

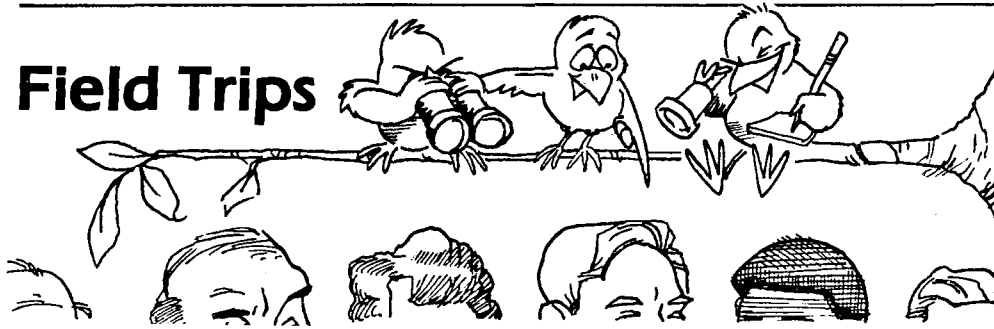
by E.H. "Ken" Kendig Jr.

I was greatly heartened by the excellent turnout at our June meeting to hear Bob Barnes tell us and show us about the Kern watershed. It was just one of a series of superb programs we have enjoyed this year. Unfortunately, our attendance at the several preceding programs was abysmal.

Bob Van Meter has done a fine job as Program Chairman and will be assisted in the Fall by Johnathan Alderfer, the noted wildlife artist, and Liga Auzins, our new Field Trip Chairperson; so, we expect even greater things, if that is possible. These dedicated people deserve our strong support and I urge you to give it by the simple act of attending meetings.

We also expect to precede the regular meeting with one-half hour's instruction in bird identification about which you will be further informed elsewhere.

# Field Trips



## Anza-Borrego Desert State Park

March 22-23, 1986

Stephen Gustafson

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, at 600,000 acres the largest state park in the continental United States, encompasses such a diversity of habitats that it would be impossible to cover them all in one outing. From alkali sinks to coniferous forest over 5000 feet in elevation, Anza-Borrego offers a wide variety of birding areas.

This two day trip concentrated on the low desert areas of the park, with stops in higher desert and pinyon-juniper habitats. Our group of 25 left the Visitor's Center Saturday morning and had a very picturesque drive to Mountain Palm Springs, located in the southern region of the park. The weather was clear and quite warm, giving the morning's hike a definite desert quality. Hiking up a wash about one mile brought us to a large bowl with a spectacular palm grove. Here we found a pair of Hooded Orioles, several White-winged Doves that called and showed off their namesake plumage and Orange-crowned Warblers. Black-tailed Gnatcatchers, Phainopepla and Costa's Hummingbirds seemed to be everywhere, but the Gray Vireo found a week earlier

eluded us. The hike through the wash produced Rock and Canyon Wrens, Mourning Dove, Lesser Goldfinch and a Prairie Falcon that was in too much of a hurry to be observed by everyone.

After lunch, a stop at Vallecito County Park yielded many of the same birds as were found earlier. A Phainopepla nest next to the road gave us a superb view of the red-eyed female incubating eggs, while the sun incubated her! A final stop at Box Canyon, situated in the pinyon-juniper zone, had little to offer save for a few Lesser Goldfinch and Black-throated Sparrows.

The spring wildflower bloom was early this year, and even though the peak had passed, we were still treated to a wide variety of flowers such as brittlebush, chuparosa, indigo bush, desert lavender, creosote, lupine, larkspur and many species of cactus. The ocotillo was in full bloom and offered the abundant Costa's and Anna's hummers plenty of forage.

After dinner and some rest, about half the group did a bit of owling. Armed with a spotlight, we drove the roads around Borrego Springs through abandoned agricultural fields looking for the resident species (Barn, Great Horned, and Long-eared). We found only one Barn Owl, but it was very cooperative and everyone had a good look at it. We were surprised to find a Common Poorwill that flew up from the road and out into the fields. Just about everyone saw it but some

weren't sure what it was. When I walked back to tell the group it was a Poorwill, I was greeted by two Fish and Game officers (a *real* surprise). It seems they had been following us for some time to see if we were "jacklighting," using the light to find animals and then shooting them. After explaining our intent, we were on our way again.

Cactus Wren — Illustration by Lee Jones from *Birds of Southern California*



Common Poorwill — Illustration by Lee Jones from *Birds of Southern California*



Earlier in the evening I had set out some Sherman live traps in the hope of getting a few rodents for us to look at. Unfortunately none were caught, but while picking the traps up we heard a Long-eared Owl calling from a palm grove across the road. Live trapping, tagging and releasing rodents is an important technique for studying the population dynamics of a species. Data from these types of studies allows one to make comparisons with food data collected from owls and thus investigate the relationships between predator and prey.

For those who wanted to get up at four o'clock in the morning, the view of Halley's comet was breathtaking in the clear desert air.



Sunday morning we met early at Christmas Circle in downtown Borrego Springs. Say's Phoebe, Greater Roadrunners and Cactus Wrens entertained us while we waited for the group to assemble. Then it was on to Yaqui Well which we found to be alive with birds. Mourning Dove, Anna's and Costa's Hummingbirds, Western Kingbird, Verdin, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, a flock of Cedar Waxwings, Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped Warblers, Black-throated and White-crowned Sparrows and Lesser Goldfinch were all seen within the small area. Two of the more exciting birds found were several Lawrence's Goldfinch and a Warbling Vireo. House Finches were abundant and so red they were reminiscent of Vermilion Flycatchers. Several species were nesting and we found a Lesser Goldfinch nest with eggs, and Black-tailed Gnatcatcher and Anna's Hummingbird nests with young.

The trip produced a total of 42 species, including a Brewer's Sparrow that was seen as the last cars pulled away from Yaqui Well. The weekend provided a nice glimpse of what the Anza-Borrego desert has to offer.

## Sage Grouse Trip

April 12-13, 1986

by David Gaines

Saturday morning dawned blustery and cold in Bishop, and snow flurries quickly enveloped the sheer peaks of the eastern Sierra Nevada. A flock of 25 hardy birders braved the inclement weather to enjoy what turned out to be a fine day. Near the meeting place on a scrub-covered alluvial fan west of Bishop, Brewer's Sparrow, Black-throated Sparrow and Sage Thrasher blew by, and we actually garnered a perfect view of the male Mountain Bluebird aglow with the color of the Sierran sky. In verdant Round Valley we spied a Great Horned Owl and watched a male Black-throated Gray Warbler glean among the fresh greenery of an apple tree. Journeying up a couple thousand feet to Swall Meadows, Pinon Jays and Pygmy Nuthatches joined us for lunch during a brief respite from the wind. We even spotted a Western Bluebird near Paradise, the third record for Mono County. We left Swall Meadows just in time, for it was enveloped in snow flurries by early afternoon. Heading for the sunnier climes of Fish Slough, displays of wildflowers made up for the paucity of birds. Still, an adult Golden Eagle swooped within a hundred yards of our caravan, and Horned Larks lit along the roadside. In Chalfant Valley we lucked upon a light phase Swainson's Hawk that allowed us to approach to within 20 feet! Then we drove back to Bishop, and stopped by a pond to enjoy the chorus of Yellow-headed Blackbirds and watch the setting sun color the mountains and clouds. A drake Blue-winged Teal dabbled with the other ducks, a fitting conclusion for a wonderful if chilly day in this awesome landscape.

Sunday we struggled out of bed hours before dawn to see the Sage Grouse struttin' their stuff. We were rewarded by 218 males strutting about a meadow while the dawn sun slowly colored precipitous, snow-covered peaks. For over an hour we watched the males droop their wings, spread their tails and strut about comically while emitting cackling, rumbling and popping sounds. As William Leon Dawson wrote in 1923, "do you suppose — now do you suppose we ever make such fools of ourselves?" But that was just the beginning of a day which included White-faced Ibis, an adult Peregrine Falcon, an immature Bald Eagle, Dunlin in spiffy nuptial plumage, and on and on. In all we tallied 115 species, and a memorable time was had by all!

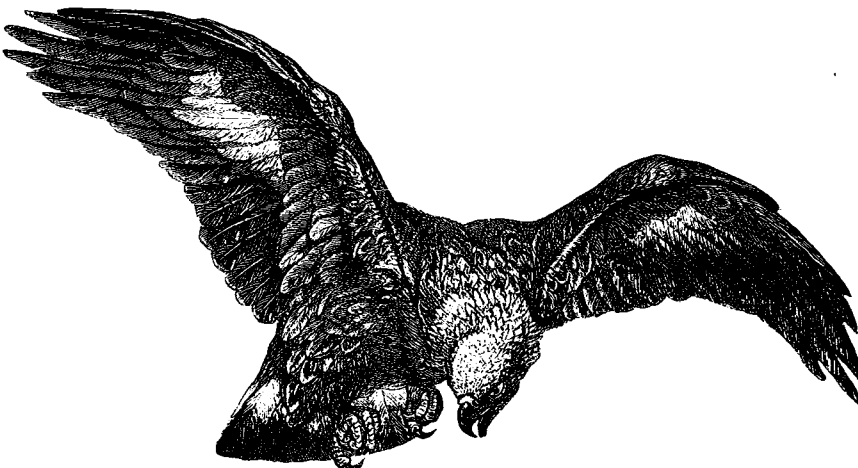
## Morongo Valley Wildlife Preserve and Joshua Tree National Monument

May 2-3, 1986

by Stewart W. Janes

Spring migration was in full swing at the Morongo Valley Wildlife Preserve. Warblers, vireos and particularly tanagers were in abundance. Both Western and Summer Tanagers became so abundant that they almost interfered with the search for other birds. We observed 10 species of warblers including all the regular migrants plus a female Myrtle Warbler. An eleventh species, Lucy's Warbler, eluded our group but a single individual was seen during the day by others. In addition to the Summer Tanager and Lucy's Warbler, all the desert oasis specialties were present including Bell's Vireo, Brown-crested Flycatcher, and Vermilion Flycatcher. Empidonax flycatchers were uncharacteristically scarce for this date, and only 2 Western Flycatchers were identified. The Long-eared Owl and her lone fledged young made a good showing. The wind, so common, in this area came up by 10:30 a.m. and hampered birding for the rest of the day.

The following day on Joshua Tree National Monument we found ourselves amid a major movement of both Barn Swallows and Vaux's Swifts moving at shrubtop level through the passes coming up from the low desert. Spring migrants were evident in every shrub and tree. A male Hermit Warbler in a Joshua tree is an unusual sight. The desert wildflowers were at their peak at about 5000 feet, and the summer birds were breeding at this elevation; nests of both Black-throated Sparrows (young) and Costa's Hummingbirds (eggs) were located. We were also fortunate enough to find a pair of LeConte's Thrashers. The wind that plagued us at the lower elevations was left behind, and the birding was excellent on the Monument.



# Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgenuth



It has become a grim cliché to say that the ultimate environmental disaster is a nuclear holocaust. The litany of horrors we recite here — vanishing wetlands, acid rain, pesticides in our food, rainforest destruction, polluted water supplies — pales into insignificance when we consider the awful possibility of the end of the world. When World War II was over, atomic energy was hailed as the harbinger of a glorious new era just over the horizon. Technology was going to solve all our problems. Electricity would become so cheap that no one would bother to read the meters. Nuclear-powered space ships would propel man to the farthest reaches of the solar system. A brave new world was opening before us. Gone was the fear that dwindling oil, coal and natural gas would leave us without power to drive the mighty machine of twentieth century humanity. And the miraculous breeder reactor was going to create more radioactive fuel than it started out with; a perpetual motion device that would give us a free energy ride to the end of the line.

In the decades that followed, billions of dollars, francs, marks and rubles poured into nuclear power plants. They worked but they weren't cheap. Cost over-runs were staggering, with the consumer usually paying the bills. And they seemed to come down with a lot of technical ailments. Even the best of them had to shut down now and then for repairs. If one read the newspapers it appeared that some plants spent more time shut down than operating.

Safety was always a question. The utility companies and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission assured us and reassured us that there was nothing to worry about, that any little difficulties could easily be contained, that all systems were backed up with redundant controls. The public began to accept the official statements and concern seemed to go underground. Indeed, we did enjoy a long period when nothing occurred to stir our hidden fears, when we could dismiss the occasional "No Nukes" demonstrators as a passel of unstable eco-freaks. And yet . . . and yet the financial community began to get cold feet. The astronomical costs weren't paying off. The electricity was far more expensive than the conventional product. Between 1974 and 1984, 83 ordered nuclear-power plants were cancelled. In the state of Washington, two partially completed plants were abandoned and another was indefinitely halted, resulting in the largest bond failure in American history. Utility stocks, heretofore solid conservative investments, developed alarming losses in companies that had gone nuclear.

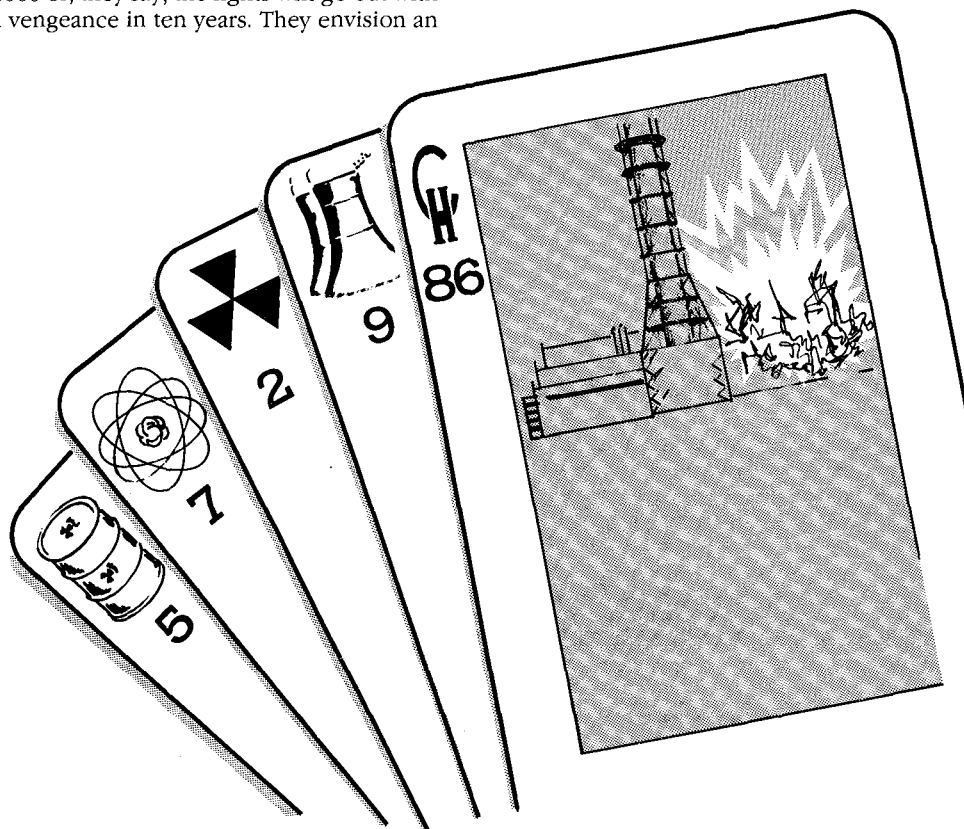
After the Three Mile Island accident in 1979, public disenchantment with nuclear power escalated dramatically. We learned that the Engineer was human after all. We were told that Three Mile Island was only the tip of the volcano, that there had been *hundreds* of smaller and less-publicized "incidents" that had occurred in the industry and had scared the hell out of a lot of utilities and their employees. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission began to get a bad press. Charges of over-friendly relations between the regulators and the regulated surfaced and the suspicion grew that safety was not the Commission's top priority. Trust in the NRC has not been encouraged by its recent decision to hold most of its meetings in secret. For a panel that is involved in the most serious life-and-death decisions a nation can take, it is unconscionable to close out the public which is vitally at risk. And the inability to solve the pervasive problem of radioactive wastes kept feeding our anxieties. In short, the people began to lose their confidence in the government's ability to protect them.

The Administration is only too aware of the sagging fortunes of nuclear energy in this country. The Department of Energy is working on a plan for a "second coming" of nuclear power. Officials are calling for 200 new nuclear and coal plants by the year 2000 or, they say, the lights will go out with a vengeance in ten years. They envision an

all-out effort of vast proportions, emphasizing development of new, more efficient reactors with 60-year life-spans to replace current models that last only 30 years. They would revive the plutonium breeder reactor. They want legislation to make licensing of plants easier — without citizen intervention. The Price-Anderson Act of 1957 limits liability for nuclear accidents and so lowers the risk for utilities; the Energy Department is recommending extension of the Act. The Department is in favor of restructuring the Nuclear Regulatory Commission under a single all-powerful commissioner, a move that might make the Commission more amenable to Energy Department goals. Secretary Herrington said last November, "As we move forward to meet this challenge [of our future electricity needs] I want all of you to know that we do so with a President of the United States and a Secretary of Energy that are irrevocably committed to nuclear energy as an option for our future."

\*\*\*

And then came Chernobyl. As this is written, 19 Russians have died with some 25 hospitalized in critical condition. An American bone-marrow specialist is returning to the Soviet Union to resume his efforts to save lives. Over a month after the accident no one seems sure that there is no possibility of another explosion on the site. As Pravda put it, eloquently, "The rebellious nuclear giant has not yet surrendered. It is still dangerous." Most of eastern Europe and Scandinavia have had some serious radio-





active fallout and much of the rest of the world is showing increased radiation. Scientists are predicting thousands of cancer deaths stemming from Chernobyl in the next decades. What caused the explosion and the near-meltdown is still unknown. The Russians say it was human error. Perhaps. Perhaps not. We are dealing with complex, intricate apparatus with many parts. Valves malfunction, pipes crack, controls break down. One thing we know for sure: this was not an ordinary accident. If the brakes on your car go out or you fall asleep at the wheel and plow into a telephone pole, that's technical failure and human error. The consequences are limited. A Chernobyl may affect everyone on the planet. Utility spokesmen and government officials hasten to say that it can't possibly happen here. We have concrete containment domes and flawless emergency systems. And we're smarter. It is a question how many Americans were reassured by these soothing statements.

Where does all this lead us? Face to face with the conclusion that there will always be human error and there is no such thing as infallible technology. Which means it is only a matter of time before we have our own Chernobyl. How many plants are out there waiting for a major accident to happen? How many Diablo Canyons, built from reversed blueprints on an earthquake fault? The utilities and the government are willing to gamble that it won't happen. After all, say our nuclear philosophers, there is no free lunch; sacrifices must be made for progress, for the common good, for maintaining our way of life. We seem to be willing to pay the cost of 50,000 lives a year for the privilege of driving automobiles. Without nuclear plants, they say, the lights will go out in ten years. But we are not forced to own a car (except, perhaps in Los Angeles); we drive one out of choice. We did not choose to live with nuclear power, it was thrust upon us.

Is this the time, then, to ask a simple question? WHY NUCLEAR POWER? Can we afford it? Not the hundreds of billions of dollars, but the potential for destruction we harbor in our midst. Is it worth the throw of the dice? We already live with an undercurrent of fear that an earthquake of great magnitude might wipe us out in seconds. We accept that as a fact of life like the Stone Age man who knew he might succumb to the next cave bear. There is nothing we can do about it so we accept it and hope our luck doesn't run out. Must we accept Chernobyl? Is there anything we can do about it? *We can do without it.* There are renewable sources of energy available: solar, wind and biomass. (Biomass is plant material and animal waste used for fuel.) There is co-generation, the use of steam in an industrial plant to run the machines and generate electricity at the same time. Conservation and efficiency programs can conserve great quantities of energy. Since the oil crisis of the 70s we have saved millions of barrels of

## Help Protect Our State Parks

The California State Park System has been growing in acreage and visitor attendance while the number of staff members to care for these increases has remained almost constant since 1977. The California State Park System is suffering from a serious lack of staffing to adequately care for the precious habitat and historical resources that the parks were originally intended to preserve.

The State Park System exists to protect the natural value of California's lands for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Unfortunately, staff shortages are causing the Park System to deteriorate. Programs that help to enhance the Park System are becoming extinct. For example, educational programs like evening campfires, ranger led nature walks and school presentations are no longer possible in many parks. Staff are no longer available to carry out basic park duties that preserve habitat, enhance wildlife, correct erosion, and prevent poaching of native species.

These staffing deficiencies have resulted in a failure to adopt general plans, provide adequate security, and protect the natural qualities of the parks. While as much as 82% of crime in State Parks occurs between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m., many parks are unable to have any night patrol on duty to protect visitors (ie: San Diego Coastal Park).

The world's finest State Park System urgently needs your help. Please write Governor Deukmejian today and ask him to include necessary staff increases in the 1986-87 budget. Write to: Governor Deukmejian, State Capitol, Sacramento, CA 95814.

oil through conservation alone. Homes have been insulated, gas mileage has increased, home appliances are now rated for energy consumption. Does this sound visionary, impractical, hopelessly insufficient to our needs? It is, for today. The technology for most of these alternatives is in its infancy. Government and big business have shown only half-hearted interest in these new forms of energy. More frequently there has been active opposition to them. As the Secretary of Energy said, (we) "are irrevocably committed to nuclear energy as an option for our future." Case dismissed. Are there any other serious options if they're planning 200 more plants? It doesn't seem likely.

Two hundred more plants will multiply the odds a hundredfold that we will experience Chernobyl Revisited in our own backyard. If we closed down all our nuclear facilities tomorrow our economy would not grind to a halt. We still have coal-fired and

## L.A. to Mono Lake Bike-a-thon, August 25-30

Whether old or young, beginner or expert cyclist, you are invited to bicycle in the Seventh Annual Los Angeles to Mono Lake Bike-a-Thon.

The 6 day, 350 mile bicycle tour departs from the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power headquarters on August 25 and arrives on August 30 at Mono Lake, the jewel of the recently established Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area. Support vehicles transport cyclists' gear and provide water.

Each rider's bicycle will carry a vial of water from DWP's reflecting ponds and will return the water to its natural destination, Mono Lake. Some of this water once flowed through streams feeding Mono Lake, but was diverted to supply Los Angeles with cheap water. The diversions are destroying the lake.

Money raised through the Bike-a-Thon will support efforts to protect Mono Lake. All cyclists secure at least \$100 in pledges from sponsors. A KHS Montana Sport all-terrain bicycle will be awarded to the cyclist who raises the most money. Other cyclists can earn PLUMLINE clothing and Kangaroo Baggs bicycle touring equipment by achieving fundraising goals. Last year 64 people from as far away as Florida raised \$25,000 to help save Mono Lake, while enjoying spectacular scenery and great company.

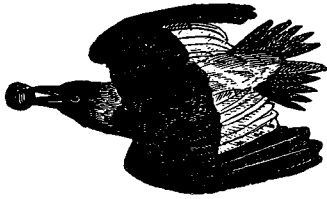
To sign up, to volunteer the use of a support vehicle, to pledge support, or for more information, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) to: Mono Lake Bike-a-Thon, 1355 Westwood Blvd., #6, Los Angeles, CA 90024. Or call (213) 477-8229. Act soon, as only 100 riders can participate. Registration deadline is August 8.

oil-fired plants and the hydroelectric dams that together produce the lion's share of our electricity. Suppose we actually did shut down all nuclear plants. With the billions it cost to run and maintain them, plus the untold billions the projected 200 new plants would cost, we could launch a crash program for alternate technologies. We did it during World War II when we marshalled our treasure and scientific talent for the Manhattan Project that created the atom bomb. Our determination and hard work defeated the enemies that threatened to storm our battlements. If we have the will we can defeat this enemy within the gates — the nuclear time-bombs we have inflicted upon ourselves.

### References:

*Nucleus*, journal of the Union of Concerned Scientists, Vol 5, Number 4, Winter 1984  
*Resources*, journal of the Environmental Task Force, Vol 6, Number 2, Spring 1986

# Birds Of The Season



by Hal Baxter  
and Kimball Garrett

As usual, birdwatching activity in southern California during late May was concentrated on the northern deserts, and consensus had it that the season's activities in that area were fairly routine. With both "Birds of the Season" authors having been out of the state for parts of the May and early June period, we make no claims of completeness in what follows. We also repeat the caution that virtually all of these reports have come to us without details, and therefore the records are provisional. Those with ample and convincing supporting evidence will eventually be published in the Southern Pacific Coast Region report of *American Birds*.

Reports from the Inyo County deserts and adjacent areas during the latter half of May are summarized below. **Wood Ducks** and **Blue-winged Teal** were noted at Furnace Creek Ranch. Reports of **Swainson's Hawks** included one at a Highway 395 rest stop near Little Lake (23 May; Phil Sayre); such reports give hope that breeding populations persist in this part of the state. A **Solitary Sandpiper** was at Little Lake on 12 May (Dan Guthrie). For several consecutive years **Chimney Swifts** have been noted at Big Pine in the Owens Valley; one was seen there on 24 May (Jean Brandt *et al.*). Unusual flycatchers reported from Furnace Creek Ranch in Death Valley included a **Tropical Kingbird** (Jean Brandt) and an **Eastern Phoebe**, both on 24 May. One of the most unusual birds of the spring was a **Veery** at Deep Springs College on 17 May (Tom Edell). A **Tennessee Warbler** was at Furnace Creek Ranch on 23 May (Jean Brandt, Phil Sayre and Bert Mull) as well as one at Scotty's Castle on 24 May. A female **Hooded Warbler** was at Furnace Creek Ranch on 24 May (Bert Mull). A male **Painted Bunting** near Oasis Ranch on 23 May was undoubtedly a wild bird. Exceptionally late was a **McCown's Longspur** at Furnace Creek Ranch on 21 May; a couple of **Lapland Longspurs** were noted on the golf course there in May as well. **Bobolinks** were reported several times, including a male at Indian Ranch in the Panamint Valley on 16 May (Harold Ericsson) and a male which hung out with House Sparrows at Scotty's Castle on 24 May. An **Orchard Oriole** was at Mesquite Springs in Death Valley on 24 May (Jean Brandt *et al.*).

California City's Central Park took top honors for vagrant production in late May. A single **Black Swift** was flying overhead there on 22 May (Dan Guthrie). A male **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** there on 11

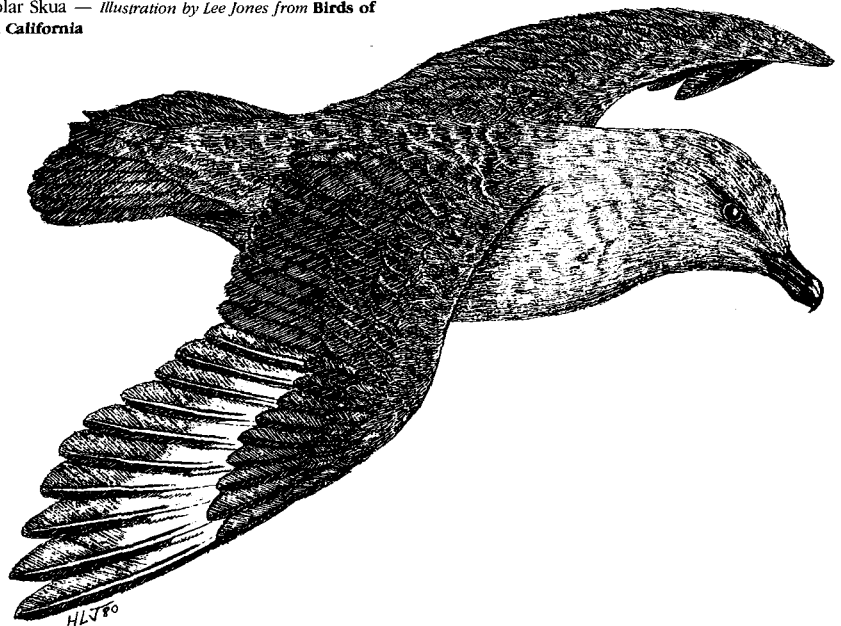
May (John Wilson) was an unusual migrant for that part of the desert. A **Vermilion Flycatcher** was there on 17 May (Art and Janet Cupples). Quite unusual was a **Yellow-throated Vireo** seen well but briefly in the park on 18 May (Wanda Conway). Unusual warblers included a **Tennessee** on 22-23 May (Brian Daniels), a **Northern Parula** on 18 May (John Wilson), a singing male **Bay-breasted** on 23 May (John Wilson), a male **Mourning** on 16 May (John Wilson), and female **Hoodeds** on 11 May (John Wilson) and 16 May (Gayle Benton). A remarkably late **Harris's Sparrow** was seen there on 18 May (John Wilson). Three **Fulvous Whistling-ducks** were on one of the golf course ponds on 16 May (John Wilson). The keys to California City's productivity included isolation (from extensively wooded, well-watered areas), good cover and water, and, increasingly, excellent coverage by birders. This last factor is perhaps most important.

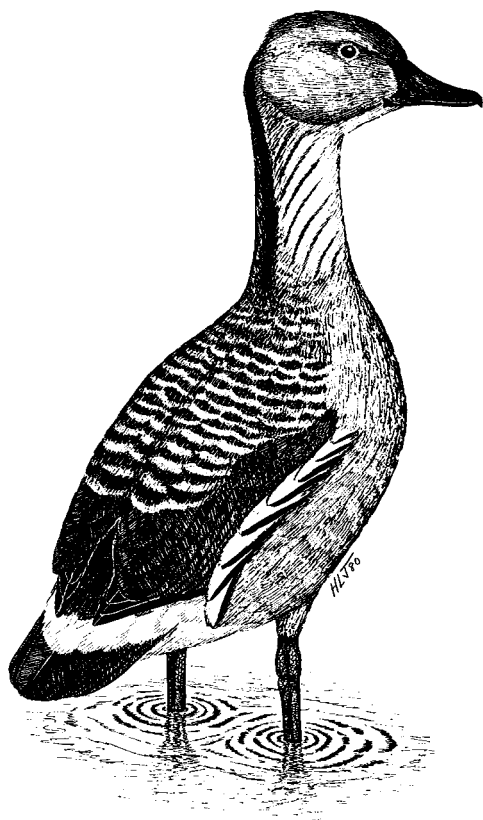
The intensive coverage by Gayle Benton and others at Descanso Gardens has certainly paid off this spring, again pointing out the importance of this factor in "vagrant production." In addition to the Black-throated Green Warbler mentioned in the last *Tanager*, Gayle found a stunning singing male **Hooded Warbler** on 12 May which obliged numerous observers until 18 May. A female **Summer Tanager** was seen briefly at Descanso on 20 May (Jon Dunn).

Of course birds were not limited to these few well-worked areas through the period. The "best of the rest" are discussed below. A **Little Blue Heron** was at the Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge on 11 May (Loren Hays). **Virginia Rails** were apparently nesting at Mill Creek in the Prado Basin in mid-May (Loren Hays) and four adults and two young were at Morongo Valley on 20 May (Gayle Benton). Remarkable was a report of a tight flock of 27 **Pomarine Jaegers** at the north end of the Salton Sea on 4 May (Miles Wheeler). A **South Polar Skua** was seen on the 17 May pelagic trip out of San Diego. An adult **Laughing Gull** was at Bolsa Chica on 29 May (Charlie Collins). Two adult **Franklin's Gulls** were at Malibu Lagoon from 30 April into early May (Chris Floyd), and several were at the Lancaster Sewage Ponds later in the month. Quite out of place was a **Gull-billed Tern** hanging around the Elegant Tern breeding colony at the south end of San Diego Bay during May; this species is accidental in California away from the Salton Sea. Excellent numbers of **Elegant Terns** continue to be seen in the Orange County lagoons, with nesting evidence still awaited. Quite early was a pair of **Least Terns** at Bolsa Chica on 6 April (Loren Hays). Ten to fifteen pairs of **Caspian Terns** were nesting at Bolsa Chica in May (Charlie Collins). Fifteen **Black Skimmers** were at the Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge on 11 May (Loren Hays).

A **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** in breeding habitat along Temescal Creek in the Prado Basin was first seen on the exceptionally early date of 8 May (Loren Hays). A migrant **Black Swift** was over the Prado Basin on 21 May (Loren Hays). Two singing **Willow Flycatchers** in the riparian habitat at Prado Basin on 8 May increased to four birds by 21 May (Loren Hays). A migrant **Dusky Flycatcher** (scarce along the coast in spring) was at the Newport Beach Environmental

South Polar Skua — Illustration by Lee Jones from *Birds of Southern California*





Fulvous Whistling Duck — Illustration by Lee Jones from *Birds of Southern California*

Nature Center on 11 May (Loren Hays). The first **Swainson's Thrushes** arrived on territory in the Prado Basin on 23 April, and increased to ten birds through May (Loren Hays). A **Brown Thrasher** was in Mojave, Kern Co., on 4 May (Jon Dunn).

An encouraging seventeen pairs of endangered **Bell's Vireos** were on territory in the Prado Basin in May (Loren Hays); large numbers of **Brown-headed Cowbirds** have been trapped and removed from this area in an attempt to give the vireos a fighting chance of raising young. Two pairs of **Gray Vireos** were at Bob's Gap, near Valyermo, on 21 April (Hank Childs). A vagrant **Red-eyed Vireo** was at Huntington Beach Central Park on 12 May (Steve Ganley).

A **Tennessee Warbler** was at Santiago Oaks, Orange County, on 18 May (Loren Hays); a **Northern Parula** was there on 20 May (Steve Ganley). A female **Black-throated Blue Warbler** was reported from Malibu Creek on 24 May (Roger Swanson); this species is very rarely found in spring in California. **Northern Waterthrushes** were in Mojave (4 May, Jon Dunn) and at the Newport Beach E.N.C. (12 May, Steve Ganley). **Yellow-breasted Chats** were reported as being abundant in the Prado Basin (Loren Hays). In addition to the male **Summer Tanager** along Big Rock Creek, near Valyermo (Hank Brodtkin, Rick Clements), a female was found at the same locality on 18 May (Hank Brodtkin). A **Dickcissel** visited Jan

Tarbles Tecopa feeder on 31 May and 1 June.

One of the most unusual birds of the season was a singing **Cassin's Sparrow** at Bolsa Chica 10-18 May (Brian Daniels and Loren Hays). This was the first record of this species from Orange County, and the bird was seen by numerous observers.

After numerous attempts, on consecutive weekends, to get a boat off Bodega Bay to the area where **Solander's** and **Murphy's Petrels** had been reported (see last month's *Tanager*), success came on 1 June . . . or at least qualified success. *Pterodroma* petrels were observed, but most observers were somewhat baffled as to how the similar Murphy's and Solander's Petrels were separated. It is likely that both species were seen on the 1 June trip.

Late July and August will see the peak of the southbound movement of adult shorebirds through the region. Any well-worked wetland locality should turn up some interesting species at that time. We use the term wetland in a very broad sense, to include sewage ponds, oxidation ponds, and the like. The mountains will offer the coolest birding through the late summer; July is an excellent month to obtain breeding evidence (e.g. adults feeding young) for many of our late nesting mountain species. And perhaps July and August will offer another opportunity to observe the remaining few California Condors.

Send any interesting bird observations to:

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



## Renew Your Membership Through LAAS

When you receive your annual renewal notice from National Audubon, we strongly urge that you complete the form and send it along with your dues check to Audubon House rather than directly to National Audubon. National has been having difficulties with the data processing firm handling membership. This has led to 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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**ORNITHOLOGY CONSULTANT** Kimball Garrett  
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# ANNOUNCEMENTS

July/August '86

## EVENING MEETINGS

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



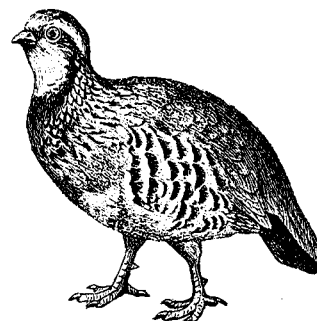
Mystery Bird - What species is this? Find out at the September Evening Meeting — Photo by Herb Clarke

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9** — Sharpen your birding skills with help from the experts! **Kimball Garrett** and at least two other speakers (TBA) will each give a short illustrated talk and answer questions about some tough bird **identification problems**. Join us for an educational and entertaining evening. Then, starting in October, we will begin a series of identification seminars to be held a half an hour *before* the regular monthly meeting. More about this in the next *Tanager*. In the mean time test yourself with our "mystery photo" which will be identified at the September meeting.



## REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

The California Department of Fish and Game is initiating a survey of Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*) nesting ecology in California. We need data on Bank Swallow nesting colonies for an analysis of current and historical statewide distribution. Please submit information on colony location as precisely as possible (include map if possible), date, colony size (number of burrows and birds), historical swallow use if possible, current and historical land use practices, and any other pertinent information. Please include your name, address, and phone number. Send information to Joan Humphrey, 733 M St., Davis, CA 95616, (916) 756-9531.



## BOOKSTORE NEWS

Recent limited acquisitions, only one of each. All out of print and difficult to find.

BIRDS OF ISLA GRANDE, TIERRA DEL FUEGO, Humphrey .....	\$ 25.00
BIRDS OF THE WEST, Clarke/Small .....	40.00
EAGLES, HAWKS AND FALCONS OF THE WORLD, Brown/Amadon .....	160.00
HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN, Compact Edition, Ali/Ripley ...	160.00
LIFE HISTORIES OF NO. AMERICAN BIRDS, <i>Complete set</i> , Bent .....	350.00
OCEANIC BIRDS OF SOUTH AMERICA, Murphy .....	175.00
RAILS OF THE WORLD, Ripley/Lansdowne .....	140.00

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## 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

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 24** — Join **Fred Heath** for what will probably be a scorching hot day in the **Antelope Valley**. An attempt will be made in the cool (?) of the morning to look for desert specialties such as Le Conte's Thrasher and Ladder-backed Woodpecker (although Fred's luck with the thrasher has been lousy on recent trips.) The balance of the day will be spent looking for various waterbirds: ducks, shorebirds, herons, etc. which can be found in the Lancaster Sewage Ponds and Puite Pond on Edward's Air Force Base. Even Fred can usually find Baird's and Pectoral Sandpipers. Bring gallons of water, suntan lotion, lunch (you'll be able to toast your sandwich on your car hood), and a sense of humor. Meet at the Lamont-Odett Overlook (of Lake Palmdale) on Highway 14 at 7:30 a.m.

## FUTURE FIELD TRIPS AND RESERVATION TRIPS

See page 3 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 13-14** — Yosemite National Park — David Gaines

**SEPTEMBER 26, 28** — Pelagic Workshop — Arnold Small

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11** — Pelagic — (Leaders TBA)