



WESTERN TANAGER

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Birding the Inland Passage

by Henry E. Childs Jr., Ph.D.

with advice and consent
of Helen C. Childs

Birding along the Inland Passage of Alaska is not the greatest place to see numbers and variety of birds. It is a fine place to cruise and relax and see a lot of interesting historic and scenic areas. This article was our way to see the sights, enjoy the scenery and maximize the bird sightings.

1. We flew from Seattle to Juneau, returning south via the Alaska Marine Highway (ferries!) staying at Bed & Breakfast places at Juneau, Sitka, Petersburg and Ketchikan, two nights at each stop.

2. All you need to know and more to plan your trip is to be found in the excellent paperback by Ellen Searly "The Inland Passage Traveler" published by Windham Bay Press, Box 1332, Juneau, AK 99802, \$7.95. All the critical information on ferry reservations, B&B addresses, what to see and do, is to be found in this booklet.

3. The ferries were very comfortable (good as the cruise ship we took in the Caribbean in March!) Cabins, when needed, were very comfortable. Food was reasonably good although we both admit to feeling that we would not like to see a French fry for quite a while.

4. We can't speak highly enough for the bed and breakfast method. It's cheaper — \$45/couple, excellent accommodations and you meet the nicest people. It's like visiting relatives without having to put up with them! Two nights at each stop was adequate with, perhaps, the exception of Juneau. Another day or two (and \$450) and we could have gotten over to Glacier Bay.

5. An excellent map of the Tongass National Forest and a checklist are available from the Forest Supervisor, Box 1980, Sitka, AK 99835 (map \$1).

6. Besides your NGS Field Guide, a copy of Armstrong's "Guide to the Birds of Alaska", available at Audubon House, is a must.



Harlequin Duck — Photo courtesy of Chaffey College

7. If your object is birding, don't take a cruise ship. You may be able to see all the touristy places and shops but don't plan to see a Winter Wren.

8. For better birding I recommend early June. There are fewer people. Weather was generally overcast but it never rained hard, mostly drizzle which did not interfere with our activities. A light jacket, a plastic raincoat and suitable footwear (plus insect repellent) will suffice to handle the environmental problems.

Juneau. Our B&B was about a mile north of town. Robin, Varied, Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes, Winter Wren and Golden-crowned Kinglets were our backyard birds. At the Mendenhall Glacier, White-crown Sparrows, Yellow and Wilson's Warblers provided a backdrop to the Glaucous-winged and Mew Gulls while Arctic Terns nested on the sandbar in front of the visitor's center.

In our Ugly Duckling Rent-a-Car we were able to cross over the bridge to Douglas.

Towards Outer Point, numbers of murrelets were seen, primarily Marbled, but some showed the white belly of the Kittlitz', a lifer. Common Murres and Pigeon Guillemots were just that. A Black-backed Woodpecker flew across the road and gave us a nice view. It was said that this was not a good time for Bald Eagles but we had them in view most of the time, even in the center of town! Harlequin Ducks were abundant as were the scoters.

A couple of touristy things we did which we recommend were: The Lady Lou Review, a melodrama in the Robert Service tradition and the Gold Creek Salmon Bake. The latter had to be the most tasty fish meal (all you can eat of alder-smoked salmon or Halibut) I have ever eaten. Don't miss it!

Sitka. Enroute Red-throated, Pacific and Common Loons were seen fairly commonly as well as many murrelets, mostly appearing as small black projectiles and therefore probably Marbled Murrelets. We were met at

the ferry by the owner of the tour bus company whom we later learned was also the funeral director! He gets you coming and going. The Sheldon Jackson Museum at the Junior College, the New Archangel Russian Dancers and St. Michael's Russian Orthodox Cathedral are well worth visiting. Rufous Hummingbirds were common but the birding was pretty poor otherwise. The rain didn't help.

Petersburg. There is not much for the tourist here in this town proud of its Norwegian traditions. Our B&B was exceptional and they loaned us their extra car so we could bird the entire island! From their home we could see the "Devil's Thumb" which is a mountain peak located on the Canadian border, 30 miles away. South-east Alaska is pretty thin at this point. Chestnut-backed Chickadees in the Sitka Spruces, Common Mergansers in the coves and Blue Grouse hooting (but not seen!) were the best birds for Mitkof Island although it was fun to watch a pair of Red-breasted Sapsuckers (sp. ruber) flycatching like Acorn Woodpeckers.

Bald Eagles at Ketchikan Dump — Photo by Hank Childs



Common Murres — Photo by Chris Suarib

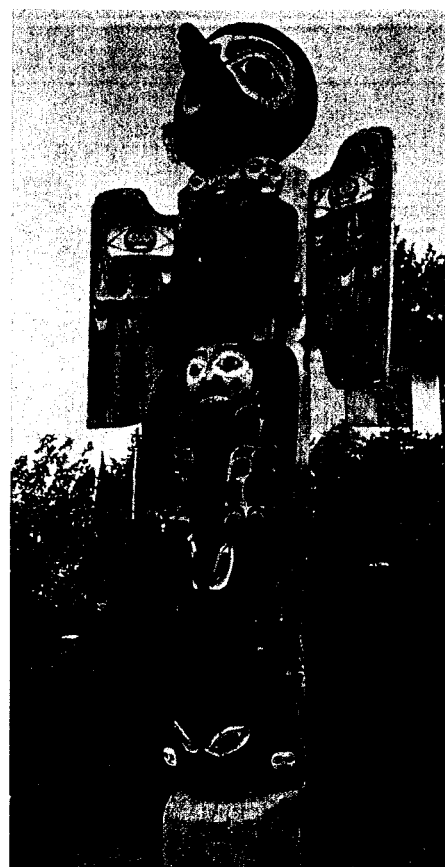
Wrangell. A two-hour stopover allowed us to walk to the petroglyph area, do some intertidal invertebrate observing with the U.S. Forest Service Guide and find a Belted Kingfisher nest under construction.

Ketchikan. We will remember Ketchikan for its dump. Located in a valley above the town, it is the local gathering place for the Bald Eagles, Ravens and North-western Crows. If you want to study eagle plumages, this is the place. We counted over 75 in all but the juvenile age class ... and this is the low time of year for them! Tree and Barn Swallows also seemed to find food here.

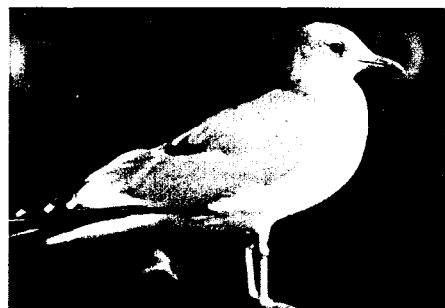
The collections of totem poles are extensive. At Totem Bight north of town, there is also a Council House. At Saxman to the south, there are many more totem poles. Take plenty of film.

Perhaps with more time and familiarity with the areas, we could have seen more birds. 56 species was the best we could do. However, we had a restful, enjoyable time, saw some lovely country and had fun. Some may not be aware of it but you can have a good time and not bird every minute! Next fall is southeast Brazil.

Pigeon Guillemot — Photo by Chris Suarib

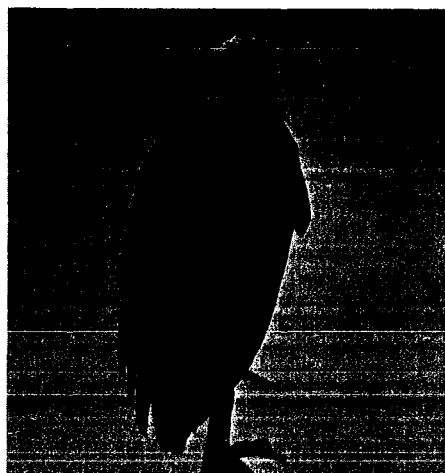


Totem at Saxman — Photo by Hank Childs



Mew Gull — Photo by Hank Childs

Bald Eagle — Photo by Hank Childs



Spring Birding in the Matanuska

by Frederick Machetanz

Spring careens into the Matanuska Valley in Alaska with a wild flourish. In just six weeks this stark, silent, leafless winterland of hypnotic white explodes into a verdant, vibrant place that is Alaska in the early summer. Birds sing everywhere, insects abound, and flowers bloom in abundance.

I wish to share with you some of my impressions of the drama and beauty of spring's coming in the North Country. I'll also mention some Alaskan bird behaviors which I have not seen in Southern California. Most of my observations were made in the Matanuska Valley fifty miles from Anchorage near the town of Palmer, where I have visited relatives for six of the last seven springs. I stayed in a cabin in the center of a forest of mixed spruce, birch, and cottonwood. The cabin overlooks one of the many beautiful lakes in the valley which were gouged out long ago by the mighty Knik and Matanuska glaciers. Here majestic mountains, rising 6000-7000 feet can be seen in every direction.

In this setting, as I rambled through the woods almost daily, I noted dramatic changes occurring with a remarkable regularity. The voices of silence so evident in the winter were gradually replaced by the noisy yapping of countless skeins of Canada Geese crossing the cloud-flecked blue sky in all directions. Occasionally a different note intruded, and a vee of Whistling Swans appeared. Later in the spring, there was the distant hoarse croaking of high flying Sandhill Cranes. Finally smaller migrants, like the thrushes and warblers arrived in the woods to stake out their territories. The eerie, burry,

whistle of the Varied Thrush, and the faint buzz of the Blackpoll Warbler were exciting to hear for the first time.

Then each year in a two-week period, about the first of May, the purple winter buds of the birch and cottonwood trees burst, and shimmering young yellow green leaves added new life and color to the drab woods. Simultaneously, mosquitos magically appeared and new waves of migrant birds arrived daily. The synchrony of natural events here was startling. The day I heard the first Northern Waterthrush I saw several. When the Tall Lungwort finally bloomed, it was seen everywhere. So it was with other flowers, the leafing of the trees and the arrival of various other species of birds.

Of special interest to me were new and unusual behaviors. I'll probably never see a Northern Waterthrush in Southern California. Its skulking, secretive, bog-dwelling behavior here precludes that. What a change on the northern breeding grounds. Clear, ringing Waterthrush notes filled the woods, and the bird was easy to see.

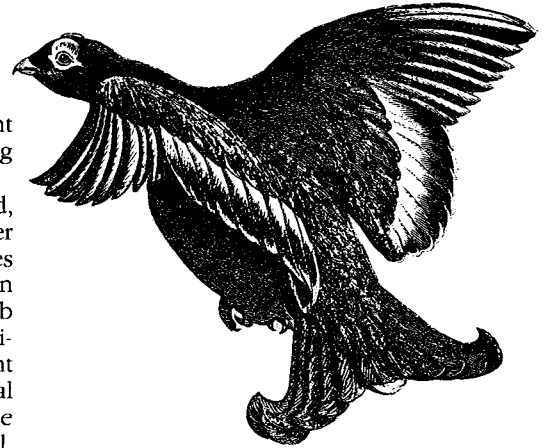
My first spring I puzzled over a small spruce-top vocalist whose loud 15-20 note song sounded like it was generated by a wind-up spring. Finally, I realized that the busy, flicking, scolding Ruby-crowned Kinglet of the southland oaks sheds its querulous mien and proclaims its northern territory with ringing class.

Other behaviors were strange to me. While taking our venerable malemute on his daily constitutional, I noticed a small creature with head down streaking across the lane with rodent quickness. Perhaps it was a bird. After a couple of later sightings, and a bit of research, I found it to be a White-crowned Sparrow on its "mouse run", a behavior shown in vicinity of the nest to distract potential predators.

Later in the season on a nearby lake, I saw a female Barrow's Goldeneye conveying her young first class on her back. This behavior I'd heard about and seen in grebes but not in ducks.

Territorial displays were common. On one walk I encountered a hypothyroid Spruce Grouse twenty feet away on a fallen, rotting spruce log. I froze as it walked in full display down the log toward me, stopped, and after a significant pause, turned and continued its "lecture". A more active exhibitionist was the Common Snipe. On one balmy evening, a snipe repeatedly dove from several hundred feet in the air, with rapid flight, its wings producing a striking whinnying sound.

A dramatic event was my close encounter with Trumpeter Swans. I was able to approach this pair that were feeding in the

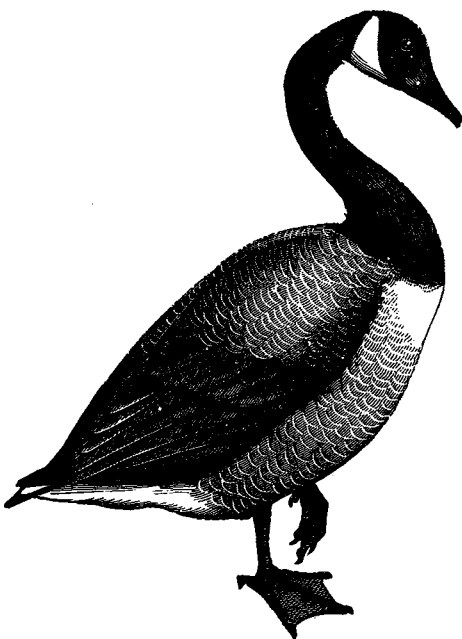


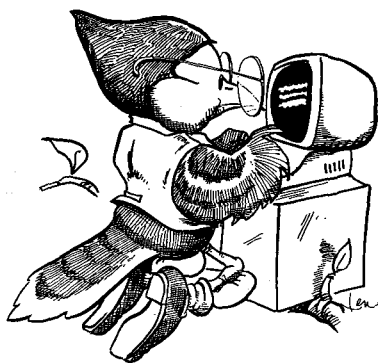
thawed inlet of a large frozen lake. As they extended their long necks far down into the water for thirty-second intervals, I moved progressively closer. Finally I became too close, and since they were unable to take off toward the woods at the end of the lake, they zoomed past me about 20 feet away. Their huge wings generated an unforgettable hum.

A final behavior though not spring related was so unusual that I'm compelled to relate it to you. I was watching a chickadee one morning and saw a behavior which left me wondering whether I should believe my eyes. This bird had taken a sunflower seed to a twig and was pecking the shell open as was its wont. Suddenly the seed dropped. Remarkably the chickadee flew down and caught it before it had gone 3 feet. The memory of the quickness and dexterity of the maneuver still astounds me. Such is the magic of Alaska.

I hope to have conveyed my feeling that spring birding in the Matanuska Valley was exciting. New birds for me like the Northern Shrike, the Hawk Owl, the Harlequin Duck, and the White-Winged Crossbill were relatively easy to find. This coupled with the spectacular scenery, the dynamic but regular changes of spring, and the unusual bird behaviors — Well, as Robert Service said of the north Country:

*There's a land-oh it beckons
and beckons
And I want to go back
and I will.*





Computers Are For The Birds

by Steven Hartman

Part 2 — Graphic Examples

In the last issue, when I introduced the use of computers for recording bird data with an example of a *yardlist* which my wife Leslie and I have maintained since 1981, I demonstrated how computerization makes the task of record-keeping easier and more accurate. Of equal importance is the ability to use the functions of a computer spreadsheet program to "pull-out" information that might not be readily visible otherwise. The one drawback, however, to a yardlist where one merely marks an "X" if a particular species is seen during a month is that one gets no statistical information as to the *abundancy* of a particular species.

But there is still a great deal of numerical information that *can* be derived from a yardlist like the one described in the last issue. For example, in our home we have what is known as the "big" month. Although our records pale when compared with persons living in the country or in the mountains or along the coast, we still get excited with the prospect of winter visitors and spring migration in the hopes that we might better our previous record for most birds seen in a month.

Create A Spreadsheet. Each month we tally the number of species we have seen and enter the total into a spreadsheet as shown in Figure 1. By setting up a few simple formulas I was able to calculate the *Average Per Month* for the year (the sum of the monthly totals divided by 12), as well as the *Average* for each month (for example, the January average is 19, or $18+17+18+22=75$, 75 divided by 4 rounds to 19). I also entered the highest and lowest totals for each month (which will change as the years go by).

The results yield interesting patterns that would otherwise be lost when looking at the vast array of checkmarks that an unsummarized yardlist presents. First off, by observing how the number of species increases as the

YARDLIST SPECIES OF BIRDS SEEN BY MONTH												AVERAGE PER MONTH
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
1982	18	16	16	17	14	10	13	11	13	8	19	19
1983	17	22	13	18	15	9	7	9	15	18	19	21
1984	18	24	22	17	21	15	10	11	18	27	21	26
1985	22	28	18	21	13	12	14	16	20	20	20	20
AVERAGE	19	23	17	18	16	12	11	12	17	18	20	22
HIGHEST	22	28	22	21	21	15	14	16	20	27	21	26
LOWEST	17	16	13	17	13	9	7	9	13	8	19	20

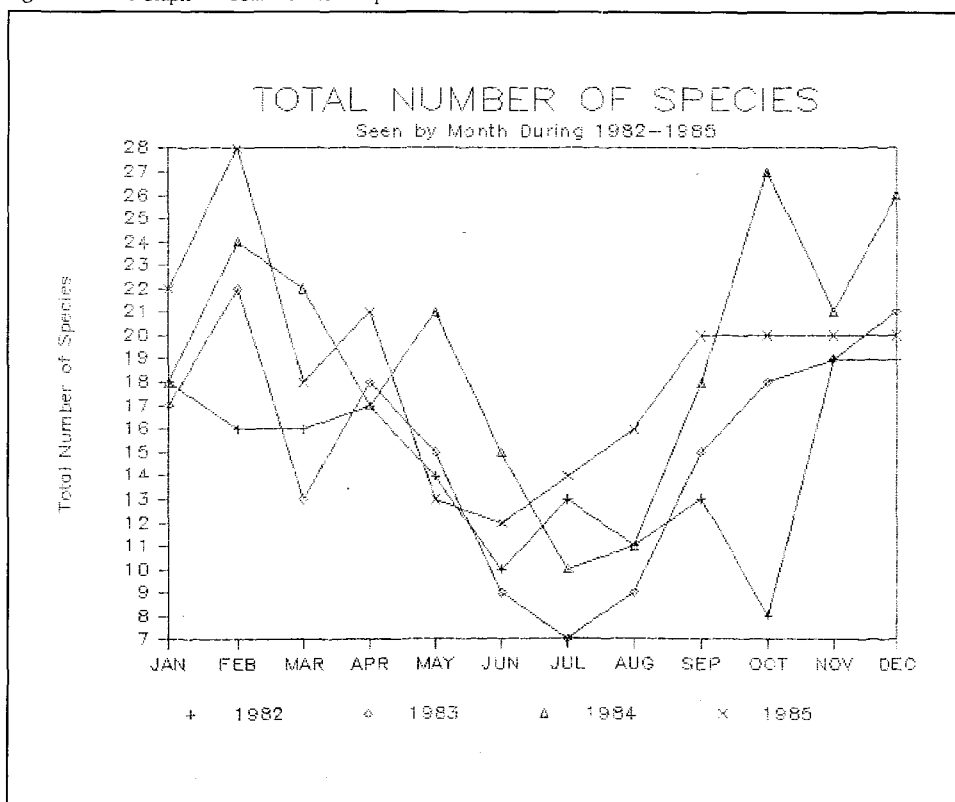
Figure 1 — Spreadsheet — "Yardlist Species of Birds Seen By Month"

years go by, I wonder if this is because the number birds one finds is to some degree a function of one's birding experience: Leslie and I started keeping this list in October 1981, and one can see that during the entire first two years we didn't see more than 20 birds except during two months! Whereas during the last two years, twenty or more in a month was attained more than half the time. On the other hand, I must admit that nearly every bird recorded on the list we had seen before (except the following birds which were lifers when seen in our yard: Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes, Pine Siskin, and Savannah Sparrow). Therefore, it seems equally possible that this summary *is* accurate and there might be some other reason why the average per month jumped from 15 in 1982 and 1983 up to 19 during 1984 and 1985.

Line Graphs. One of the neat things that a computer spreadsheet program can do is to create graphs. The *line* graph in Figure 2 plots total number of species seen during each month for the four years on the spreadsheet. It took me less than an hour to enter the data for the spreadsheet and specify and print these graphs. Once the data for the spreadsheet is entered, all one has to do is to go into the graph portion of the program and specify what data will be plotted against each axis, enter the titles and legends, and the program *automatically* prints the graph on a regular printer ... in other words, even though this looks pretty fancy, it is available for everyone!

The lines on the graph in Figure 2 connect the monthly totals for each year, and each year's line is distinguished by a different symbol (cross, triangle, "X", etc.) — the

Figure 2 — Line Graph — "Total Number of Species"



program takes care of assigning the different symbols to each year and denotes each in the legend at the bottom. What becomes easily visible is that the months of June thru August are definitely the duller months for birding in our backyard, and November thru March are best. Although one might have presupposed that the spring migration months are best, in fact they are consistently below 20, with only two exceptions. October, the fall migration month, has the greatest range of totals — from 8 to 27 — but I think we were on vacation during October '82 when we only recorded 8 species (which demonstrates another variable: the total is a function of the amount of time one spends outside looking and listening).

Although the general pattern is recognizable in Figure 2, by graphing the *average* only as seen in Figure 3, one gets a much better picture of the fluctuations in the number of bird species seen during each month. The obvious patterns stand out, but the March "dip" is not apparent when all four years are plotted together, and certainly the gradual increase from September to December is shown much clearer. An interesting feature provided by the graph program is its ability to internally modify the *scale*. Observe the Y-axis (vertical) of Figure 2; note that the scale is from 7 to 28, with increments of one. Now observe the Y-axis of Figure 3 and note that the scale is from 11 to 23. The graph program automatically adjusts the scale for easy reading.

At this point I would like to stop and point out what has been accomplished by using a computer: First we entered our monthly bird sightings onto a yardlist generated by the computer, as described in the last issue. From this data we totalled the species seen each month for four years and entered the totals into a spreadsheet program (Figure 1). The data was averaged for each month and from this average we can print a graph (Figure 3) which in one picture summarizes what goes on in a yard year after year! This is truly amazing, if you ask me, and it can open the door to greater understanding — more than that, greater involvement by allowing *anyone* to actively and accurately record valuable information which depicts the status of bird populations in a place of great importance — one's home.

A Bar Graph. Another interesting comparison is that between the highest and lowest number of birds seen each month. For this application a *bar* graph is the best method of presentation, as seen in Figure 4. Each month is represented by two "bars" as defined by the legend, the highest total on the left and the lowest on the right. This graph gives us a rough idea of the range of totals that have been recorded (since this sample covers only four years, the mathematical validity of true standard deviation would not be applicable). Here again we can see the huge deviation in October, but now it can be contrasted with the narrow range for November.

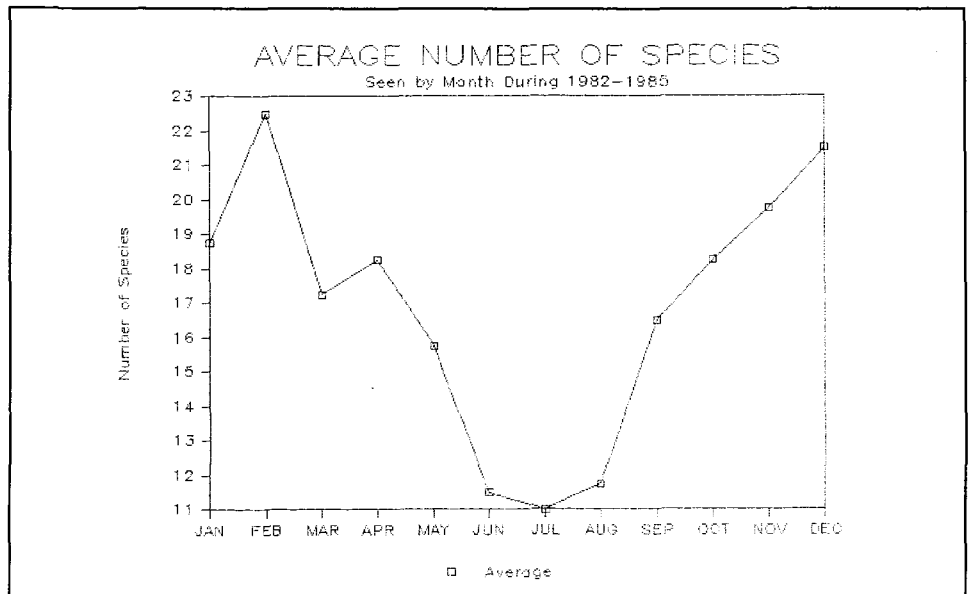


Figure 3 — Line Graph — "Average Number of Species"

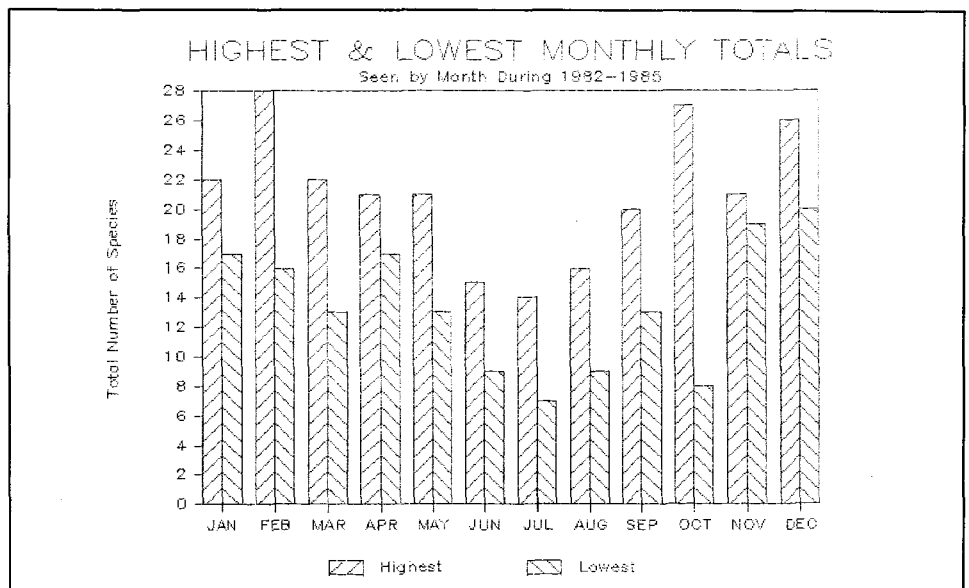


Figure 4 — Bar Graph — "Highest & Lowest Monthly Totals"

It is important that one views his data in as many ways as possible, and using a computer allows one to try different kinds of graphs to create a "picture" which describes the stored information. For example, one might get the impression from Figure 3 that one can expect to see "approximately" 11 or 12 species during the month of June. But by reviewing our Highest and Lowest graph in Figure 4, one can be more accurate by estimating June's totals to be 12 "plus or minus 3". Of course, the more years' data are accumulated, the more accurate the statistics become, and thus more valuable in extrapolating trends or determining populations and ranges.

Speaking of ranges, the other night Leslie and I were listening to the hooting of a Great

Horned Owl and we began to speculate about the range of these birds in the L.A. area. Do they inhabit all areas with a consistent density, or, we hypothesized, are they more prevalent near the foothills and mountains? In fact, the kind of information needed to answer a simple question like this is not available! Certainly it would be easy enough for interested birders to keep a yardlist and record the ap'hear'ances of the Great Horned Owl, and then send copies to a computer database which could compile the data and report the results. If this seems appealing, send a letter of support to me care of L.A. Audubon — if enough interest is generated perhaps this can be accomplished.

Memoirs of an Amateur Naturalist: One Day in North/East Mexico

By Marcyn Del Clements

It had been cold, down to 2°F, those last few days of the year. In the lower Rio Grande Valley, the coldest temperatures of the century were recorded. And as we drove south from the border, with John Arvin, our Victor Emmanuel Nature Tour leader, we could see the sad effects of the freeze. 50 year old Organ Pipe cactus, that had stood tall as trees, drooped limp and brown on dead stalks.

We had descended through Tropical Thorn Scrub, and crossed the Tropic of Cancer. It was these more sensitive, tropical type plants that were knocked out by the cold. The "hennequen" (sisal) crop lay flat on the ground. The papaya, bananas and sugar cane were mostly dead. We passed a young mango grove, zapped by the freeze.

John was very distressed, worried that the vegetation would be harmed at Rancho Cielito, adversely affecting the birds. But when we arrived at that delightful homestead called "Little Sky" on the Rio Sabinas, he cheered up considerably. The Research Study Area was protected by its location against the hills which form an insulating layer of clouds. George M. Sutton describes this (in: *At A Bend in A Mexican River*) as a "northern most tip of the New World's true tropics." The Rancho was a lush green forested island in a sea of frozen sugar cane and slash-and-burn farms. And the birds! They were fantastic!

Now it was New Year's Day, 1984. A special day. Last night we had a low key "Pachanga," a quiet party, highlighted by John's famous "fajitas" and margaritas made from wild limes we had picked in the woods.

As we loaded sleepily into the van, at first light, we heard the Collared Forest Falcon away across the river and up the hill. It's a strange call, very distinct, and makes you laugh when you hear it.

We drove up into the mountain, towards Rancho del Cielo (another scientific research facility.) As soon as we got out, we had the Questar on my first Life Bird of the year!! — a White-crowned Parrot! And then, — Wow!! Back-to-back Life Birds!!! Yellow-billed Cacique! A very hard bird to see! We tried to get a better view of this skulker.

"Be careful! That's 'Mala mujer'. She'll leave welts on you for a month!"

Duly warned we skirted the large-leaved stinging nettle. On the other side of the road, a Black-headed Saltator squeaked. He coyly turned his bright olive back to us, in the sun, in the leaves, at the top of the tree! But when John got a conversation going with him, he came down to get a better look at us — which worked both ways.

As we walked further up the jungle road, I added a Smoky-brown Woodpecker, two Spot-breasted Wrens, and a Yellow-throated Vireo to my Life List. We saw the Ivory-billed Woodcreeper and heard its laughing call. And then we saw a big female Pale-billed Woodpecker, a close relative to the American Ivory-billed. She was agitated by the playback of a recording of her call, and filled her brilliant red crest with sunshine. It seemed to glow from within. A Grey Hawk rose from its calling perch and chased a Red-tailed Hawk from its front yard. The Red-tail was twice his size! J.A. got a tape of a Bronze-winged Woodpecker. There were a pair. We saw them briefly! He said that may be a very rare tape of them! Before we got back in the vans, three Fan-tailed Warblers displayed their waggle-tail behavior as they worked beneath the ferns in the dark, flashing their tail fans among the damp leaves by a road-side seep.

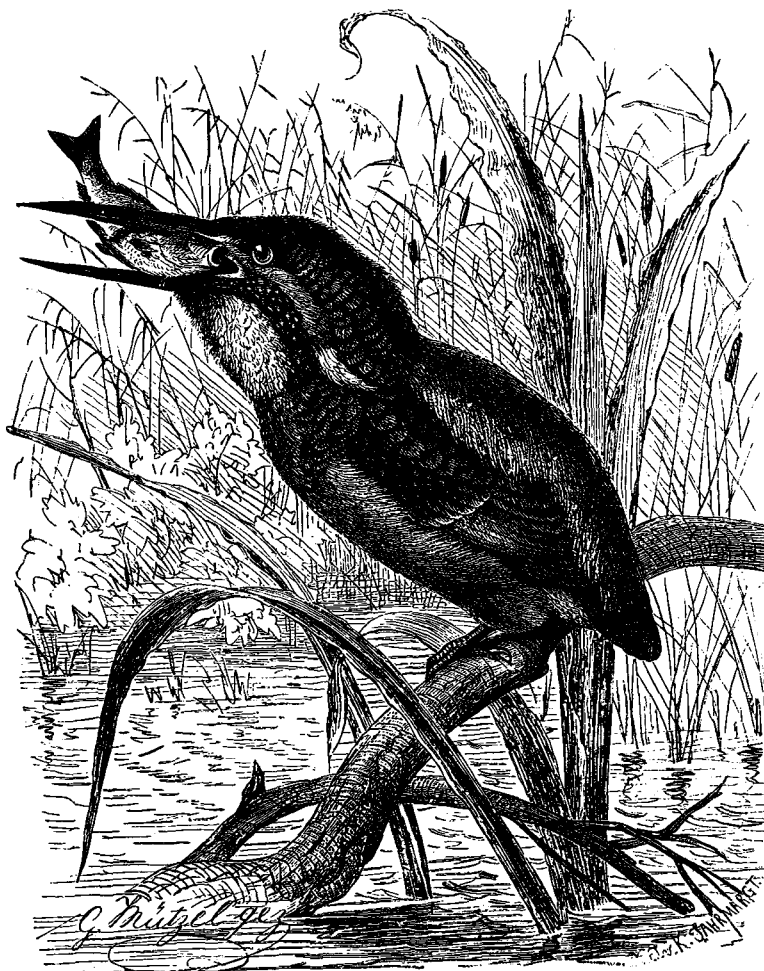
At a waterhole on a cactus farm, quite a few birds collected. A Lifer Blue Ground Dove was there.

"It used to be abundant, but now it's a hard bird to see," pointed out our leader. The female was a warm brown; the male, a gentle blue-grey. Two Painted Buntings sat, backlit in the morning sun. "Muy hermosa!" A Greater Pewee and a Boat-billed Flycatcher sat side by side on the same branch! (Owen Pettingill took a picture of a similar amicable roosting between Kiskadees and Social Flycatchers when he stayed with Sutton on the Rancho Rinconada, just a few miles from Rancho Cielito on the Rio Sabinas.)

The cactus were being raised for making "nopalitas," a delicious vegetable, popular during Lent. Only the tender, new growth is harvested. These were all destroyed by the frost. Other fatalities in the freeze were butterflies. I found them along the road: Admirals, Malachites, the small blue periods, and zebra longwings. One unusually patterned butterfly was named for the swirls of red and black lines in the wings, the "88."

As we snacked on "Champinones" (chile loaded mushrooms) before heading back for lunch at the Rancho, I ticked off another Lifer! — a Yellow-winged Tanager! He looked just like the Palm Tanagers (*Tbaupis palmarum*) we saw in Trinidad, only with a yellow head.

After a tasty lunch, prepared by our Tour Leader, a gourmet cook, we rested a bit, and then headed for The "Nacimiento" — the "birth place" of the River. An icy spring



wells up out of the rocks, creating a deep clear lake, and the actual beginnings of the Rio Sabinas.

Maybe we were all still sleepy from siesta; because as we pulled to a stop at the lake trail head, a Bare-throated Tiger-heron rose out of the tules and melted silently into the mangroves, and only two of us saw him.

In the pot holes above the lake, some of the ichthyologists in our group identified mollies, Montezuma swordtail, and cyclids.

An uncommon Belted Kingfisher fled, rattling, away from the lake as we approached the dark clear waters. A Ringed Kingfisher patrolled the shallows. Yellow-crowned Night Herons, still at siesta, roosted. Some Brown Jays chased a Grey Hawk. A Sharp-shinned hawk bombed into the trees. We saw the remains of his breakfast on the rocky shore. One wing we felt sure was from a Black-throated Green Warbler. The second wing was later identified by Gene Cardiff (San Bernardino County Museum), as a Tufted Flycatcher. Both these birds we had seen here, but more especially we would see them in the state of San Luis Potosi, following ant marches.

After dark, and a "muy delicioso" dinner, we went out to see the night birds. We followed the dancing eyes of the Common Parakeet in the Q beam; and found the level, unblinking stare of a Common Potoo.

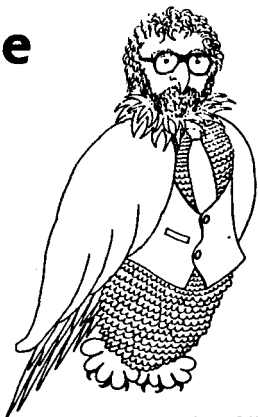


What a wonderful day! A special day for me! My 44th Birthday. I climbed, bone-weary, into my little bed on the sleeping porch. Already dreaming, I was seeing that elusive Collared-Forest Falcon, full frame! Suddenly, someone banged open the door and stomped in! A Mottled Owl was calling, close! I pulled on stiff, dirty jeans, and swung my old down jacket over my long red

night dress. But who cared how I looked?! The Mottled Owl was there! Right in the Oregon tree! Right outside our house! And he stayed for the Q beam! And he was wonderful!

From the Editor

by Fred Heath



As you can see, I've managed to fill up twelve pages this month, but as you can also see, this was done with a lot of drawings, photos and graphs. You've also noticed that my *favorite* author, Henry Childs is represented with the lead article no less. I finally opened the big fat envelope and found it contained not just one article, but two. Thus there will be a November *Tanager* of more than four pages.

Speaking of Henry Childs, a number of people have expressed their dismay with my constant picking on the gentleman in my editorials. Let me say that luckily for me Hank is good natured and doesn't take my teasing to heart. As a matter of fact, his article on a birding trip to South America with which I had so much trouble because it read like a checklist, is the exception rather than the rule. Both his current article, as well as

the one on India a few months back are full of interesting side lights and practical tips for getting around. But I will stop picking on Hank and start picking on the rest of you who are *not* writing any articles for the *Tanager*. Especially those of you have just returned from that exciting trip to Brazil or Kenya or Australia. I promise not to make fun of your article even if it is not much more than a checklist of your visit. Many of my readers seem to enjoy that kind of an article.

In searching for new articles or features I've had a number of suggestions. The latest one is the "Typo of the Month" contest. Everyone sends a list of their five favorite typos from an issue of *Tanager*. The person closest to average response of all our readers wins. This would be a funny suggestion except that it came from Tony of Etcetera Graphics (our typesetter). Do you suppose he's trying to tell me something?

The September issue of the *Tanager* had a beauty of a typo. The announcement of the Richard Ives talk on October 11 had the title of *Birds of Malaysia*. This sounds more like the title of an X-rated movie playing at the Pussycat theater. Of course, if the attendance at this meeting is much better than some recent ones, we might start making more of these errors in the future. I don't know if Mr. Ives had seen the September *Tanager* but he asked that we change the title of his talk to *Birds of Southern Asia*.

Another recent suggestion was to revive and revise the series on birding locations in and around the Los Angeles area. This seems

like a good idea and I will contact some of the people who have done these in the past. In the meantime, if you have a favorite birding location and would be willing to write a description of where and when to bird the area and what birds might be expected, let me know. My mailing address as always is: Fred Heath, P.O. Box 5036, Chatsworth, CA 91313.

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.

Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth



When the talk drifts around the environmental campfire, one of the chestnuts that is likely to be pulled out sooner or later is The Quality of Life. For perhaps 60 or 70% of the 5 billion inhabitants of this shrinking planet the quality of life is unspeakably low. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse — war, famine, disease and death — are at full gallop. Poverty, war, drought and disease give these unfortunate world citizens a choice between a life of dismal quality or no life at all. The next meal is somewhat more important than the acid rain problem in Scandinavia. The rest of us, the lucky minority who have enough to eat and a reasonably decent place to live — *we're* the ones sitting around that campfire. We have the education and the leisure to examine the world around us, to chart the graph of the quality of our lives.

Most people live in cities. Years and years ago, a city was fairly well-defined; there were "city limits," with a sign that told you so. (If you go back far enough, the city boundary was a wall around the perimeter with fortifications to repel upstart invaders.) Beyond the city limits was a smattering of homes and then you were in "the country" where there were farms or undeveloped land: forests, prairies, mountains. The rich folks lived in their mansions in the center of town, close to the shops, the restaurants and the the-

aters. The poor lived on the wrong side of the railroad tracks. The middle class, as ever, somewhere between.

With time and the influx of people, the distribution of classes underwent a great transformation. The once-elegant homes downtown wore out, were carved into miniscule flats and were taken over by the poor — usually minorities of assorted colors. The rich found their own privileged enclaves elsewhere in what became the secure, exclusive part of town. The middle class reached out for the country and — voila! — the suburbs were born. Dozens of "Golden Valley Estates" materialized: tract homes with a bit of open space, a cluttered view and maybe a swimming pool. Important old-line business remained downtown surrounded by skid rows and slums of various degrees of repair, discomfort and despair.

As the suburbs began to fill up, the shopping mall was created, a born-again village green. Mom and Pop stores were replaced by chains, and downtown business sent out branches in all directions. Before we knew it, the branches coalesced into a newer entity: the Business and Industrial Park. Formerly limited to their downtown habitat, the skyscrapers (extending their range) slipped out of the central core of the city and turned up in the new Parks, but as brighter and shinier slabs of glass and stainless steel. The ration-

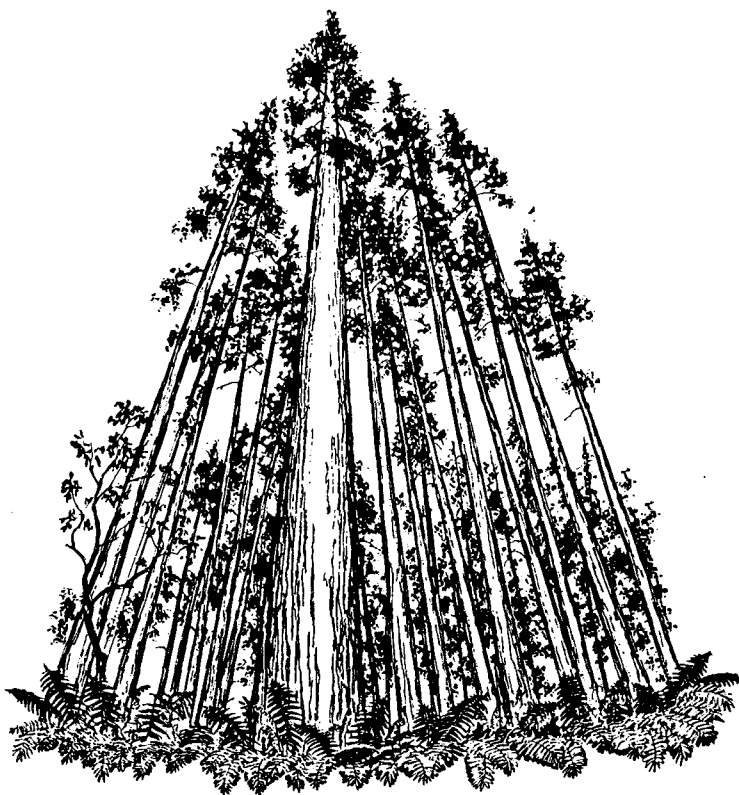
ale for these vast developments is to bring the offices and the light industries close to the employees. But the employees can't afford to live near their jobs anymore so they find themselves moving out into the exurbs and again commuting long distances to work. On the freeways.

Ah, the freeways. Those billion-dollar, indispensable, maddening, ulcer-generating tributes to the automobile are primary factors when we consider the quality of life. If your horoscope is favorable today you can zip along at a normal ten-miles-per-hour-above-the-speed-limit and cover great distances in a remarkable short time. However, if Sagittarius has scored a Bull's-eye, beware. You are destined for the bumper-to-bumper condition, burning up gallons of gasoline, inhaling Diesel exhaust from the truck ahead of you, fuming as you estimate how late you'll be, blood pressure rising with the temperature. In the old days, you knew about the Rush Hour and you learned to avoid the freeways (if you were lucky enough not to be a 9 to 5er) at the crucial times. No longer: the Rush Hour has outgrown its former confines and has preempted all civilized travel time.

Drowning in this morass of freeways, the suburbanite, if he has time to really look around, might make a startling observation: he no longer lives in the suburbs! He may have moved out to escape the noise and smog and crowding of the city, but the city has slithered out to reclaim him. The quiet residential tract he moved into ten or twenty years ago is under siege. The once-narrow through streets have been widened, decked out in glaring floodlights, and transformed into busy "arteries" that pulse with traffic. Traffic has spilled over from the freeways and the major boulevards into the back streets. The freeway commuters, desperate to avoid gridlock, take small surface streets in an attempt to forge new, tortuous paths to and from work. City transportation planners frantically pursue the traffic dilemma with restriped streets, manipulated signals, additional lanes and ride-sharing programs. To no avail. Every new lane added to a busy street is more than cancelled out by a thousand apartments going up nearby.

Where are the vacant lots of yesteryear? Almost as scarce as antelope in the Antelope Valley. The weedy untidy lots may have been eyesores to some but they were evidence that there was still some space out there, still room to wiggle an elbow. Like the plow that broke the plains and doomed the buffalo and the plains Indians, the bulldozer blade is once and for all erasing the suburbs. And more. Follow any freeway outward bound from the metropolitan center and the hills and woodlands echo to the whine of the chainsaw and the rumble of the earthmover. Megalopolis is upon us: Gigantic supercities that extend from New York to Washington, from San Francisco to San Diego.

As we watch the overgrowth of people and condos and business parks and mini-malls we mourn the decline of the amenities that



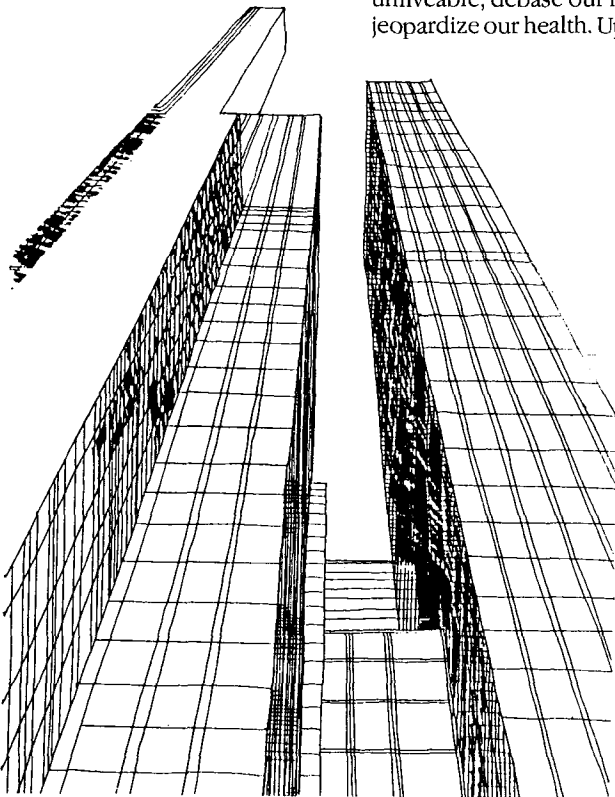
make up the quality of life. More automobiles, more air pollution. More people, more water shortages. More people, more overflowing landfills and sewage plants. (Do we dump the stuff in the bay or incinerate it into the atmosphere?) More noise to jangle our nerves while the soothing open spaces are disappearing. Parks offer a respite, places to re-create the spirit, but they are so few and becoming so crowded that a measure of quiet solitude is almost impossible to achieve. (More people, too many people. Old stuff, maybe, but over-population remains the root cause of our troubles, the whole world's troubles. Do we wait for the Chinese solution: one child or else?) Perhaps the most subtle and devastating effect of urbanization is the feeling of being trapped in a stone and steel and glass cage with no escape. We haven't reached that nightmare yet but we can see the signs and portents along the way. Our view of the mountains invaded by the sharp edges of an office building. Worn but comfortable, one-of-a-kind old homes on acre-sized lots, with a horse and a handful of chickens, torn down to make room for a cluster of soulless condominiums. An incomparable valley, deep into "the country," with gentle hills, oak savanna and winding stream, chewed up by construction equipment and spat out as sites for industry, business and houses.

What to do about it? Ah, if only there was a magic formula for salvation. Enlightened planning may be the answer, limiting density and building heights, protecting open space, preserving farmland and wetlands, making it tough and expensive for developers to do as they please. Is it too late, have things gone

too far? Perhaps. In the large metropolitan areas there is precious little room left for improvement. The tall buildings, the business parks, the commercial strips are for the most part already in place. If the city and county lawmakers and planning boards were by some overnight miracle changed into incorruptible environmentalists, there isn't much they could do to reverse the momentum of development. Can you tear down Wall Street or Century City and build urban wilderness areas? In smaller communities that are just beginning to feel the pressure of "big is better" there have been some hopeful signs of revolt. Yet every ordinance attempting to control inordinate growth faces powerful opposition. Developers call on the Constitution and the sacred right to make a buck. Their opponents are labeled no-growth doomcriers, selfish elitists whose private motto is, "----- you, I've got mine!"

Men and women of good will are faced with a question of freedom in America. In the popular mythology freedom is equated with free enterprise. This may become a license to be as greedy as you can get away with. It sounds terrible but it makes our world go round. It's the American Way. We tell ourselves, "This land is your land, This land is my land" yet we permit someone to own a mountain and do with it as he pleases — as long as he gets a zone change. If we put our minds to it we can keep him from getting his zone change, deciding that the best use for the mountain is to be there, to be loved rather than as a shaven platform for a hundred homes.

The American Way also includes the right to oppose tyrants who would make our cities unliveable, debase our natural wonders and jeopardize our health. Up the Quality Of Life!



Designed by Nature vs. Designed by Man

Dr. Paul MacCready
Saturday, November 8, 2 p.m.

The idea of flying like a bird has captivated man's thoughts, dreams, and imagination since time began. History and literature are full of tales of people obsessed with the power and freedom of flight.

One man, Paul MacCready, has made remarkable strides in duplicating what Mother Nature has designed with man-made materials and technological innovations. Known as the father of human powered flight, he built the 'Gossamer Condor', an ingenious airplane that made the first sustained flight by a human-powered, heavier-than-air craft. In 1979, a bicyclist pedalling the engine of his 'Gossamer Albatross' made the first and only human-powered flight over the English Channel.

Three years later, his 'Solar Challenger' flew from Paris to England powered only by solar cells. His latest project is a replica of a large prehistoric flying reptile *Quetzalcoatlus northropi* (affectionately known as QN). This model made its public debut recently at Andrews AFB outside Washington, D.C. and is featured in the film, "On the Wing".

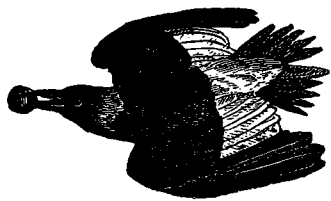
In a special lecture, Dr. MacCready will discuss the interrelationship between nature's blue prints and man-made inventions to achieve flight. He will describe the remarkable similarities between the aeronautical designs of man and the shape and size of birds, how both have converged in response to environmental pressures and functions, and the importance of studying the natural world to gain insight into engineering.

The lecture is scheduled for 2 p.m. in the Jean Delacour Auditorium. Following a coffee break, join us for a special screening of "On the Wing" at the Museum of Science and Industry's Mitsubishi IMAX Theater at 4 p.m.

\$4 museum members, \$5 nonmembers, \$3 children.

Natural History Museum
of Los Angeles County
900 Exposition Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90007
For further information,
please call: (213) 744-3534

Birds Of The Season



by Hal Baxter
and Kimball Garrett

The brevity of our roster of bird sightings from late July and August reflects the lack of attention bestowed upon our region by local birders through that period. Travels out of the country, or out of state (such as to the American Birding Association convention in south-eastern Arizona) kept the number of bird-seekers low, and the number of reports received by us even lower. Two birdwatching events of note did take place locally, however. During the weekend of 2-3 August the fourteenth annual Condor Watch and Tequila Bust in the Mount Pinos area yielded a good turnout of watchers/busters and the sighting of two **California Condors** (two-thirds of the remaining wild population) at "The Sign" on the Hudson Ranch. Capture of these remaining birds is now imminent. Also on 2 August, the L.A.A.S. pelagic trip aboard the Vantuna yielded a **South Polar Skua**, but very little else. We welcome hypotheses from readers which attempt to explain the paucity of pelagic birds on our local trips over the last few years!

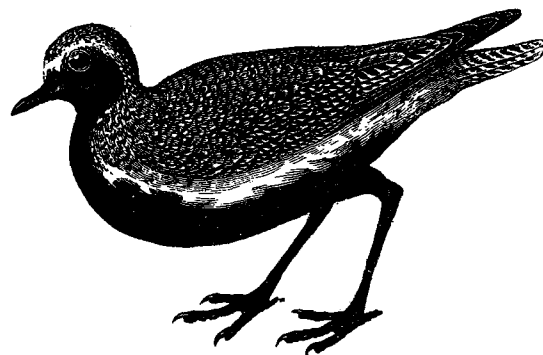
Nesting of the **Clark's Grebe** was documented for Los Angeles County when Kimball Garrett and Jonathan Alderfer *et al* found twenty adults with at least eight downy young on Piute Pond on 27 July. All the field marks of the adults were noted, including the drawn-out single call; the downy young are easily differentiated from Western Grebes of the same age by their pure white down. We have a great deal to learn about the nesting status of the Western and Clark's

Grebes in southern California, and all observations of nesting birds (identified to species) should be passed on, with documentation, to the *American Birds* editors.

White-faced Ibis were moving through our region (south, presumably) late in July. At least ten birds were at the Piute Ponds north of Lancaster after 26 July (Fred Heath); two birds were at Malibu Creek on 30 July (Bob Pann); and one was along the Santa Ana River in Anaheim on 8 August (Doug Willick). A single **Wood Stork** was seen in the Prado Basin (Loren Hays). A **Snow Goose** summering at Upper Newport Bay was probably sick or injured. Quite unseasonal was a male **Greater Scaup** spending the summer at Bolsa Chica (Loren Hays). Up to four immature **Cooper's Hawks** were seen together at the Arboretum in Arcadia 16-23 July (Barbara Cohen), indicating local nesting. While the Cooper's Hawk is by no means rare as a breeding species in southern California, it is undoubtedly declining and nesting should be monitored. A dark **Peregrine Falcon** seen along the San Gabriel River in Long Beach (26 July; Ed Navojosky, Phil Sayre and Jean Brandt) was unbanded.

An alternate plumaged **Lesser Golden-Plover** was at the Santa Clara River Estuary on 20 July (Sandy Wohlgemuth); it was not identified to subspecies (the "American" form *dominica* and the "Pacific" form *fulva* may, in fact, be separate species). A **Solitary Sandpiper** was along the Santa Ana River in

Anaheim on 10 August (Doug Willick). On 7 August Bruce Broadbooks and Arnold Small found a **Sanderling** (scarce on the deserts), three **Baird's Sandpipers**, and a **Semipalmated Sandpiper** at the Lancaster Sewage Ponds. Semipalmateds, rare migrants in southern California, were also along the Los Angeles River in Long Beach (one on 2 August and three on 4 August; Brian Daniels) and at the Santa Clara River Estuary (one on 10 August; Doug Willick *et al*).



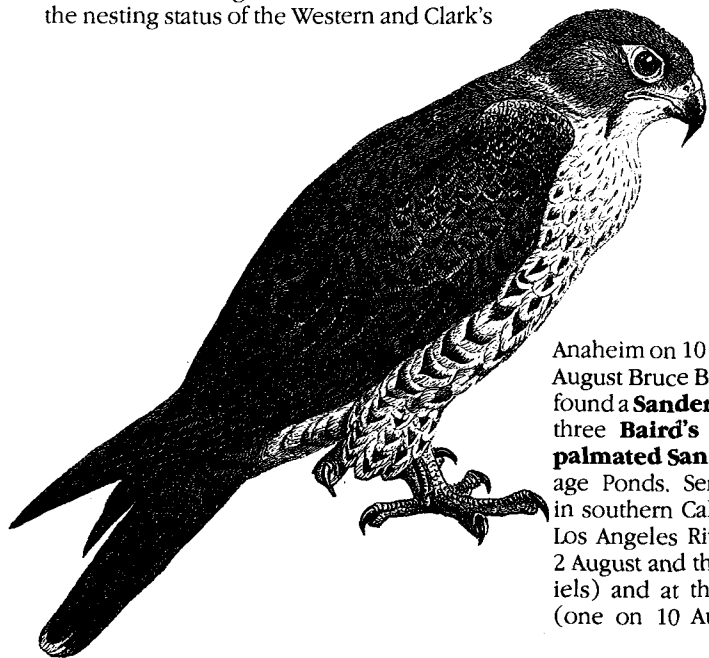
As expected, concentrations of **Wilson's Phalaropes** were reported during July, including at least 350 (about 40% juveniles) on the Lancaster Sewage Ponds on 27 July (Kimball Garrett *et al*). Scarce coastally, an adult **Laughing Gull** was at Upper Newport Bay 22-24 July (Loren Hays). Up to 75 **Yellow-footed Gulls** were seen near Red Hill at the south end of the Salton Sea on 1 August (Hank Childs). Hank also counted at least 100 **Black Skimmers** there (to go along with good numbers on the Orange and San Diego County coasts). Entirely unexpected was the discovery of a breeding pair of Black Skimmers on Tulare Lake in Kern County (*vide* Joe Jehl).

Little is known about the geography and magnitude of migration of our common western passerines during the late summer, although we are certainly accustomed to seeing species like Western Tanagers well away from breeding areas as early as the first of July. A single **Western Wood-Pewee** and **Olive-sided Flycatcher** at the Arboretum in Arcadia on 24 July, for example, were either migrants or wanderers from nearby breeding areas (Barbara Cohen). Similarly, a **Western Tanager** at Huntington Beach Central Park on 13 July and a **Warbling Vireo** there on 19 July (Brian Daniels) were away from the breeding grounds). Small numbers of migrant **Bank Swallows** were seen at the Lancaster Sewage Ponds in late July, and one was at Upper Newport Bay on 21 July (Doug Willick).

When reporting the birding highlights of September and October we don't expect to have to make apologies for any dearth of interesting sightings. These are the months when something new, unusual, or unexpected can be uncovered just about every day. Every area should be covered thoroughly, and every bird should be scrutinized carefully. Those who routinely discover rarities do so through patience, exhaustive thoroughness, and a complete familiarity with the characteristics of the "expected" species. Fall is a great time to hone these skills.

Send any interesting bird observations to:

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



Research Awards

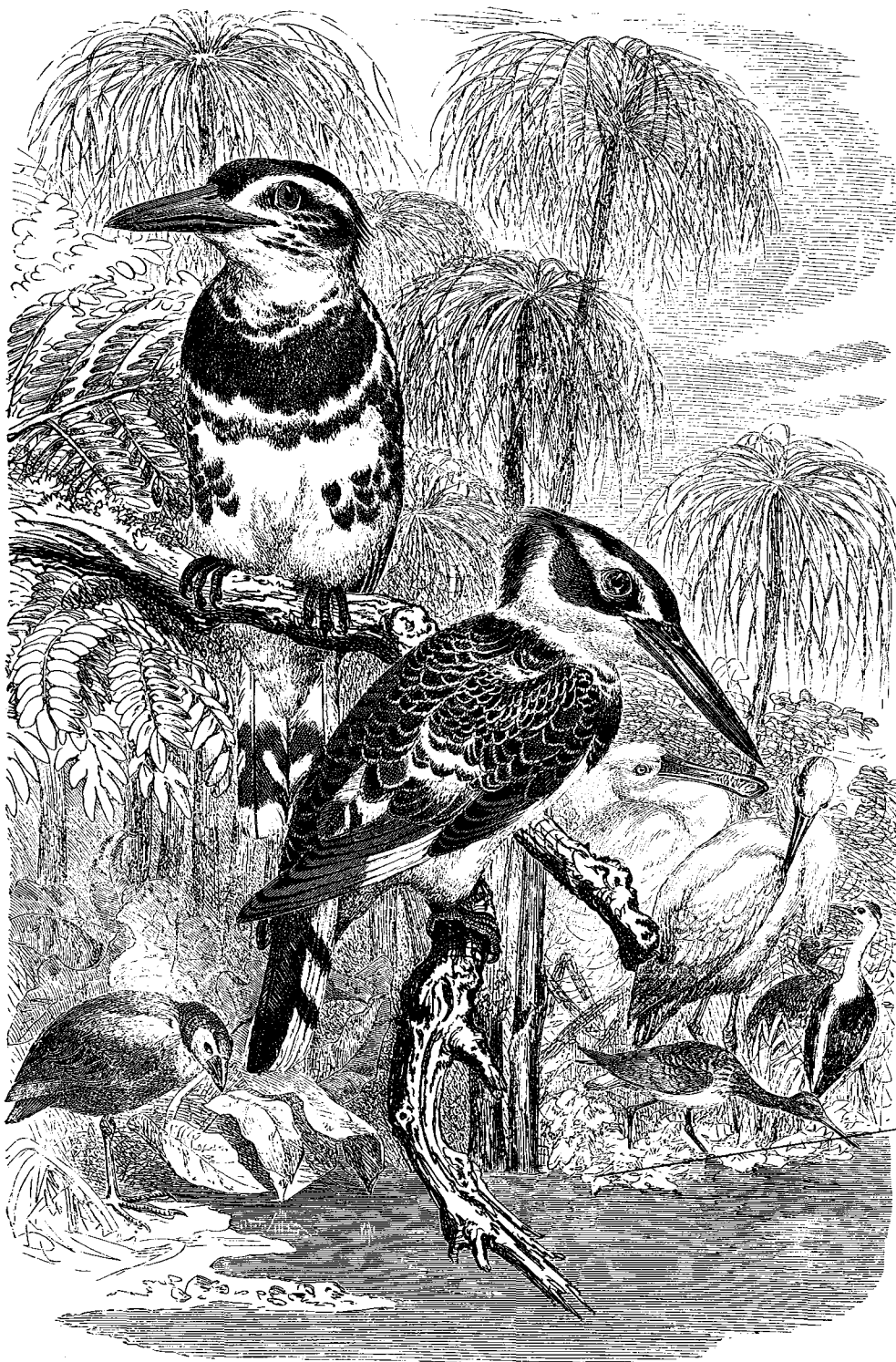
The Los Angeles Audubon Society will again be giving annual Research Awards beginning in February, 1987. Award recipients will be limited to students, amateurs and other with limited or no access to major granting agencies. The Awards shall be given for research relevant to the biology of birds. Applicants must reside in southern California (from San Luis Obispo, Kern and San Bernardino Counties south) or be currently

enrolled in a southern California academic institution; there is no geographical restriction on the research area. One or more awards will be given. The total amount to be awarded will be approximately \$2,000.

The application deadline for the 1987 Research Award is 30 November 1986.

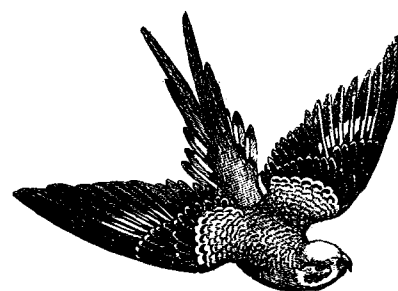
For applications, write:

Sharon Milder, Education
Committee Chairman, L.A.A.S.
Los Angeles Audubon Research Awards
134 Greenfield Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90049



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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CONSERVATION EDITOR Sandy Wohlgenuth

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

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Oct. '86

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

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14 — Richard Ives, a native Californian, has had a lifelong interest in nature and travel. He has travelled widely and has lived in Japan, Greece and Britain. He is at present collecting data for a projected "Guide to the Natural Areas of Asia". During a trip in the winter and spring earlier this year he took the pictures which he will use to illustrate his talk entitled **The Birds of Southern Asia**.



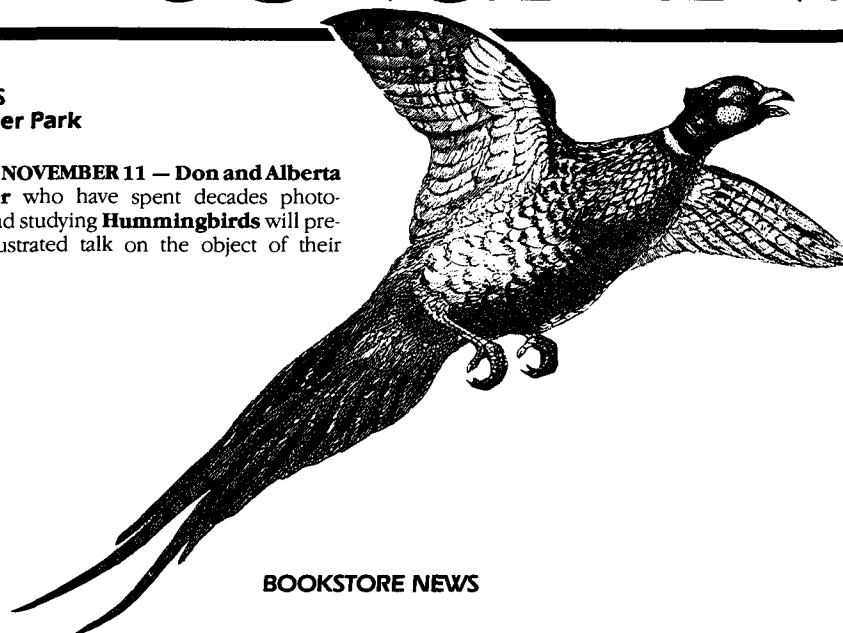
Hoopoe

Sample of the birds to be shown at the October meeting. Photos by Richard Ives.

Eurasian Griffon



TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11 — Don and Alberta Shoemaker who have spent decades photographing and studying **Hummingbirds** will present an illustrated talk on the object of their studies.



BOOKSTORE NEWS

In stock:

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF MEXICO & CENTRAL AMERICA, Irby Davis (out of print, limited quantity)	\$ 25.00
THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE BIRDS OF CALIFORNIA, Grinnell & Miller	\$ 18.00
AUDIBLE AUDUBON WESTERN BIRD CARDS, (2 sets)	12.50

On order:

THE KNOWN BIRDS OF NORTH & MIDDLE AMERICA, Part 1, Phillips	40.00
GUIDE TO BIRDS OF HAWAII (due October/November)	TBA

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FIELD TRIPS

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.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11 — Join Bob Shanman for a morning walk at the unique **Ballona Wetlands**. This is peak season for viewing shore birds. Also see water birds and residents. Take Marina Fwy. 90 west to Culver Blvd., turn left to Pacific Ave., then right to footbridge at end. Meet at **8 a.m.** \$3 parking. (More info: 213-545-2867 after 6 p.m.)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 19 — Meet David White at **Whittier Narrows Regional Park** for his monthly morning walk through a good diversity of habitats in search for a variety of residents and Fall migrants. Meet at **8 a.m.** at the Nature Center, 1000 Durfee Ave., So. El Monte, off Fwy. 60 between Santa Anita and Peck Dr. exits, west of Fwy. 605.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8 — Fred Heath will lead a trip to the **Antelope Valley**. Meet at Lamont-Odett Overlook (of Lake Palmdale) on Highway 14 at **8 a.m.**

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8 — Bob Shanman. Ballona Wetlands. See October 11th trip for details.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15 — David White, Whittier Narrows. See October 19th trip for details.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13 — Bob Shanman. Ballona Wetlands. See October 11th trip for details.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14 — David White, Whittier Narrows. See October 19th trip for details.

RESERVATION TRIPS

See Page 7 for detailed information

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26 — Pelagic from San Pedro to Santa Barbara Island - \$24 — Kimball Garrett. Will see Cormorants, Shearwaters, Alcids, Jaegers, Gulls and other goodies which are difficult to see except from a boat.