WESTERN TANAGER

Los Angeles Audubon Society Volume 53 Number 5 January/February 1987

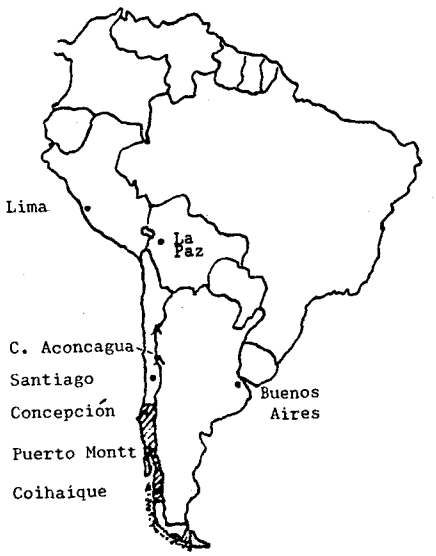
Through Southern Chile With Hipwaders and Binoculars

Article and photographs by Andrew Starrett

Part 1

V. Villarrica (9940'), looking S. from Pucón (39°20'S)

During January and February of this year I was afforded an unexpected and very welcome opportunity to spend three weeks in southern Chile with my good friend and colleague Charlie (Dr. Charles L.) Hogue, Curator of Entomology at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. Charlie was embarking on a six-week study of net-winged midges in southern South America, with the support of a grant from the National Science Foundation, and was looking for a field assistant for the first three weeks in Chile prior to joining up with entomologists in Argentina. Since he and I have worked together in the field of Costa Rica and Peru on a number of occasions, he suggested that I might become part-entomologist for three weeks and accompany him as his field assistant. Needless to say, I accepted enthusiastically (after making the necessary arrangements at C.S.U.N. for me to spend the first week of spring semester classes in the field); as a vertebrate biologist interested in rainforest, I had for some time harbored a desire to experience first-hand the temperate rainforest of southern Chile. The Chilean austral forest, which includes the wet Valdivian Forest characterized by Formas (1979, pp. 341-347 in *The Herpetofauna of South America: Its Origin, Evolution and Dispersal,* W.E. Duellman, Ed., Mus. Nat. Hist. Univ. Kansas Monograph No. 7.) had additional facination for me because of the well-known taxonomic affinities of some of the families and genera of plants occurring there with related groups in subtropical and temperate forests in eastern Australia and New Zealand where I have also been fortunate enough to spend some time. Similar affinities are also seen in some of the more ancient groups of animals, such as amphibians and reptiles, as well as insects, including the Blephariceridae (net-winged midges or "blephs") which were the reason for the expedition. These close ties to relatives on the other side of the Pacific Ocean rather than in geographically closer floras and faunas represent biogeographic evidence of a postulated Mesozoic southern hemisphere supercontinent, known as Gondwanaland, which broke up at about the time that the dinosaurs were relinquishing their reign and the mammals were getting into shape for theirs. By some 100 million years ago (or so) the surface of the earth is thought to have begun to look similar to what we now learn in Geography class, and the movements of the earth's crust (frequently referred to as continental drift) which fragmented Gondwanaland and realigned the land masses was also responsible for the fragmentation of essentially continuous floras and faunas and the isolation of separate and unconnected groups of related plants and animals in Africa, South America, Antarctica and Australia. (The current bird and mammal faunas of South America, on the other hand, are almost entirely derived from ancestors which postdate the breakup of Gondwanaland and consequently these two groups tend to have relatives to the north or to have connections with relatives in the Old World by way of North America.) Further crustal movements throughout the remainder of the Tertiary Period until, perhaps, as recently as two million years ago, were responsible for the uplifting of the Andes which in turn drastically changed the climate of southern South America by wringing the water out of the cool moist winds of the southern Pacific Ocean. On the western side of the mountains this provided the conditions necessary for the survival of moisture-loving elements of a previously more widespread flora, while the area in the rain shadow to the east of the Andes was then able to support only the grasslands and scrub which characterize Patagonia. Thus, packed into a relatively tiny area near the tip of South America is a limited but rather unique and fascinating biota which holds clues to geologic events with world-wide significance!

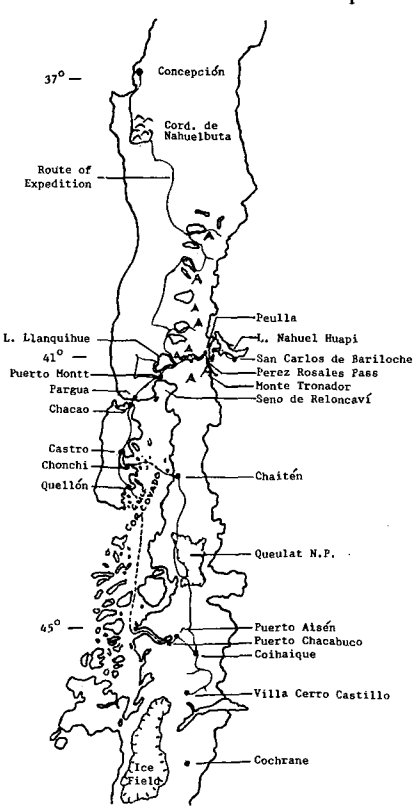


Charlie "bleph hunting," Austral Hwy between Chaitén and Pto Cardenas.

My good fortune was that the mountainous terrain and abundance of rainfall which were responsible for the forest associations and interesting vertebrates which were behind my desire to see the austral forest region of southern Chile are also the conditions necessary for the existence of the flies which were the reason for Charlie's visit to the area. The larval and pupal stages of blephs live in oxygen-rich, fast-moving waters of permanent rocky rivers and streams; the adults remain close to the same streams. This meant that our field time would be spent mostly going from stream to stream collecting specimens of all developmental stages, as possible, and gathering ecological data which might help to explain the presence or absence of blephs in the streams sampled. In addition, as always when I go *anywhere*, I planned to take my binoculars and spend available time birding as a means of becoming acquainted with the ecology and natural history of the area. I also like the excitement of seeing new species (and families!) in places that I have never been and I enjoy learning more about familiar species in places that I revisit. In this case, I had no expectations as to what I might do or see beyond functioning as an assistant in gathering specimens and data. I just considered myself extremely fortunate to be able to spend time in that area at almost no personal expense, and I reckoned that whatever I did get to see would be "icing on the cake." So, to prepare for whatever birding might come my way on this trip I put together a "quick and dirty" field checklist of birds likely to occur south of the 37th parallel in Chile by annotating and supplementing Olga Clarke's *Checklist of the Birds of Chile* (1981, L.A.A.S.) in conjunction with R.M. De Schauensee's *A Guide to the Birds of South America* (1970, Livingston Publ. Co., Lynnewood, PA). The numbers: about 240 species in continental austral Chile, south of 37°S, including pelagic species and migrant shorebirds (out of a Chilean total of 400-450 species which is about the same number to found at *one* "good" locality in Amazonian Peru!) Excluding the extras mentioned, I could expect about 170 species of terrestrial and fresh water birds, with an additional 40+ potential species of pelagic and not-so-pelagic marine birds to add excitement to the trip.

Our field expedition started in Concepción, at the northern limit of austral forest, after a flight of about 6,000 miles (35 hours including more than 22 hrs. ground time at intermediate airports and overnight in Santiago). There we enjoyed the hospitality of members of the Department of Zoology at the Universidad de Concepción. In particular, we were most graciously hosted and assisted during the two days of preparation for the trip by Dr. Albert Larrain and Sr. Tomás Cekálovic K. and their families. By prior arrangement Tomás, who is Curator of the Museum (Dept. of Zoology), went along with us as guide and driver, in his vintage Peugeot 404, and together the adventuresome trio covered 1500 miles by car and ferry and made it as far south as 46°S at the end of the Austral Highway. We left Concepción on January 14, in a light rain, and spent the first five days sampling rivers and streams in the coastal Cordillera de Nahuelbuta and then along the edge of the Andes on the east side of the Central valley as we worked our way south to Puerto Montt. Along the Andean side of the valley the scenery was often spectacular, punctuated by snow-capped volcanic cones, some of which have been active as recently as the 1970's, rising 7,000-9,000 ft. above the valley floor and mirrored in a number of scenic lakes that have formed behind glacial moraines and lava flows. Color was provided by a variety of native plants including climbing daisies (*Mutisia* spp.), lilies (*Alstroemeria* spp.), several kinds of vining gesneriads with tubular orange or red flowers and bush fuchsias. The fuscsias (*Fuchsia magellanica*, sold here in our area in hanging pots), heavily laden with bright red flowers, were visible everywhere along roadsides, streamsides and on hillsides (sorry!).

Although virgin forest was not much in evidence during this part of our travels, stands of second growth forest were occasionally seen and farm woodlots contained mixtures of native and exotic species. Thus, in spite of the large numbers of exotic trees and other plants that are used in urban and suburban plantings and around homes and farm buildings, we did get to see a fair sample of the native flora, including many textbook-famous remnants from ancient Gondwanaland. I was interested to see, for example, that species of southern hemisphere beech (genus *Nothofagus*, also found in New Zealand and eastern Australia) were common dominant elements of native forest leftovers, even though they are valued for their wood and have been overexploited.



Native forest is often replaced by plantations of rapidly-maturing Monterey Pine or, less frequently, Douglas fir or eucalyptus.

Chile is a country of physical extremes. It is long and narrow, extending some 3300 miles from the Peruvian border at 17½°S to the tip of the continent at 65°S and, on Chilean maps, continuing to the South Pole as a pie-shaped slice of Antarctica. For most of its continental extent the country ranges between 60 and 12 miles in width, expanding to 375 miles across the continent near the southern tip. In the short distance from the Pacific coast to the Andean backbone in the northern half of the country, the relief rises from sea level to five of the six highest peaks in the New World, all of which surpass 22,000 ft. (the sixth is in Peru). The massifs of these giants, the two tallest of which are Aconcagua on the Argentine side at 22,831 ft. and Ojos del Salado on the Chilean side (No. 2 by some 300 ft.), straddle the boundary between Chile and Argentina. The Andes of central and southern Chile and Argentina become progressively lower: south of the level of Concepción (37°S) less than a dozen peaks exceed 11,000 ft. (one to 13,000+), and passes across the divide are below 4,000 ft. A second range of mountains runs along the coast, reaching an elevation of 5,000 ft. in the Cordillera de Nahuelbuta, south of Concepción, and in the southern part of Chile the two ranges are separated by a Central Valley which disappears under the Seno (Sound) de Reloncaví and the Golfo de Ancud south of Puerto Montt. In that region Chiloé Island represents the Cordillera Costal and its foothills. As could be expected, the permanent snow line on the mountains (Andes) lowers with increasing latitude; by 43°S glaciers are frequently seen and south of about 46°S sea level ice fields persist. Chile has a Mediterranean temperate climate, with monthly temperatures averaging 65-70°F in the north, in the 40's to mid-60's (°F) in the region of the austral forest. However, it varies from some of the driest desert in the world at the northern end to the rainforest climate in the south with annual precipitation of 90 in. or more, exceeding 150 inches in some local areas. Talk about extremes!

Our field time was divided between careening along dirt roads at breakneck speeds and maneuvering cautiously in hip-waders in rocky watercourses and lifting large rocks out of 40°+ F. water. Birding was therefore limited to before, sometimes during, and after stream sampling, and to photostops and occasional instances when we wanted to check out plants or birds which had special interest. As our sampling routine evolved, I came to be the last one into the water, entering only when and if Charlie had decided it was worth an all-out effort. Consequently, I logged more binocular time once this pattern had been established, although the variety of habitats sampled tended to be somewhat limited. As it turned out, some 25+ species were seen commonly, a half dozen of which were inevitably and predictably encountered

Smiljam's Slender-billed Parakeet ("Andy") from market at Angelmo (Puerto Montt) — *Photo: T. Cekalovic.*

(seen or heard), sometimes in numbers, every time the appropriate habitat was at hand. Bird habitats "sampled" included: open country (fields, pastures, croplands), hedgerows (fieldsides, farmlots), second growth fields and pastures, open woodland, cane thickets (tall species of *Chusquea*, near water — seeps, trickles, streams), watercourses, farmyards and towns; we never really got into forest on this leg of the trip, nor did we spend time at lakes or ponds. Few species were restricted exclusively to one habitat type, but most were predictably encountered in greatest abundance in one in particular. The baker's half-dozen of "everywhere birds was:

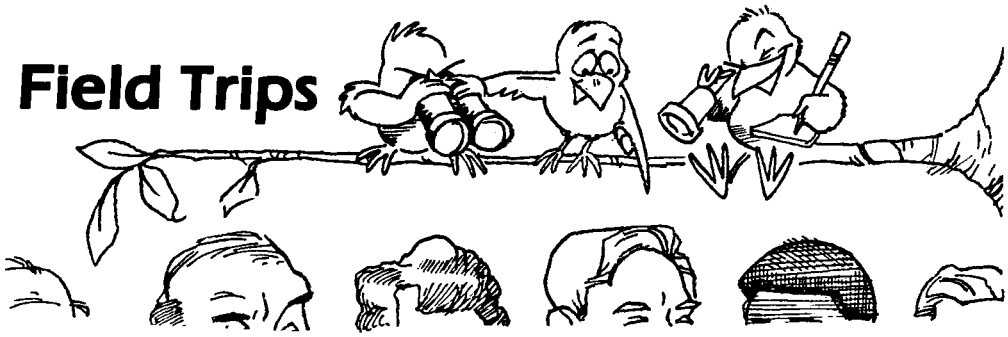
White-crested Elaenia — the most abundant and widespread native species that we encountered; vireo-like actions, this small tyrant flycatcher was found in streamside thickets, second growth and forest edge habitats, never far from water. Chimango Caracara and Southern Lapwing — open country, often in numbers. Chucao Tapaculo — a picture-book tapaculo, secretive but curious, seen or heard wherever there were cane thickets or other thick cover near water; easily located by rapid series of low-pitched ringing notes "chor-chor-chor," then equally easily seen by approaching the thicket and waiting for the bird to appear. Green-backed Firecrown — common in shrubby second growth, from my experience must reproduce asexually; I never saw a male hummingbird on the entire trip! Austral Thrush — a washed-out robin with behavior, vocalizations and choice of habitat all very suggestive of our bird. Common Diuca Finch — the first one I saw was hopping around with House Sparrows by a door at the Santiago airport; also hedgerows, farmyard; song made me think grosbeak. Black-chinned Siskin — the goldfinch of towns and open country, in trees and hedgerows.

The rest of the top 25: Buff-necked Ibis —open country; characteristic tooting heart overhead almost anywhere, including over downtown Puerto Montt! Torrent Ducks —a pair on just about every river on the Andean slopes with enough water for them to submerge to feed. Turkey and Black Vultures — one or a few birds at a time (not together). American Kestrel — almost ignored due to familarity. Chilean Pigeon — singly, where trees occurred; like band-tails. Cinclodes — two or three species; Gray-flanked and Dark-bellied seen frequently enough to allow some familiarity (not an easy genus); commonly along streams, in farmyards, always on the ground. Thorn-tailed Rayadito — creeper-like, in remaining native trees; first awareness often due to emphatic, white-crown-like contact notes or strange reeling rattle such as might be made by a wooden fishing reel (?!). Chilean and Blue and White Swallows — at times seen flying together, often over roads, the latter species somewhat less common. Rufous-tailed Plantcutter — in tall bushes of hedgerows and second growth, song a strange insect-like wooden buzzy trill; like the tapaculos, a Chilean speciality. House Wren — a familiar face in hedgegrows and brushy second growth. Chilean Mockingbird — farmyards and hedgerows with trees. Rufous-collared Sparrow — the ubiquitous Andean Sparrow, in Chile as well. Long-tailed Meadowlark (red-breasted blackbird) — handsome!; locally common in fields, open country. Austral Blackbird — in flocks of 10-20 birds in farmlands; appeared to forage in trees rather than on the ground; announced by strange electric/metallic contact notes.

A partial list of also-rans, seen, at most, infrequently: Chilean Tinamou — occasionally seen running along the roadsides next to grassy fields, looking more like large quail than relatives of the tropical rainforest birds of my previous experience. (Introduced California Quail also seen in the same habitat.) Cinereous Harrier — open country. Andean Gull — here and there in flocks, not always associated with water. Eared and Picui Doves - in suburban and farmland areas with some trees, at northern end of route. Austral and Slender-billed Parakeets — seen or heard from a distance frequently near native forest; difficult to discriminate at a distance; tame Slender-billed Parakeets sold in numbers at the market in Angelmo, near Puerto Montt. Burrowing Owl — on fence posts. Ringed Kingfisher — along watercourses. Striped Woodpecker — wooded areas; heard more often than seen. Rufous-backed Negrito — in pairs in open country. Fire-eyed Diucon, Spectacled Tyrant and Tufted Tit-tyrant — hedgerows, streamsides. Patagonian Sierra-finch — second growth. Grassland Yellow-finch — open country.

to be continued . . .

Field Trips



Morro Bay

2-3 November, 1985

Kimball Garrett

The L.A.A.S. field trip to Morro Bay on 2-3 November began with a stiff Santa Ana wind whipping around Morro Rock as the group assembled on the first morning, and quickly settled into a beautiful weekend with a whirlwind of bird sightings.

Some highlights enjoyed by the twenty participants: The confiding Canyon Wren in the boulders at the foot of Morro Rock, amused, no doubt, by the trip leader's attempts to whistle its song. Mid-bay shoals with their teeming shorebirds, pack of White Pelicans, and the perennial lone flamingo. The immature Broad-winged Hawk perched so obligingly at the south end of the bay while a male Eurasian Wigeon swam with other ducks just offshore. Leisurely 'scope views of a Merlin atop a cypress. Bright red beaks and pink-flesh legs shuffling around the wave-battered rocks at Montana de Oro, apparently attached to Black Oystercatcher bodies. The bobcat that ran across the road . . . briefly. The unsuccessful sunset watch for the "green flash," completely compensated for by the cliff-level evening sojourn of a Peregrine. The Great Horned Owl chorus and ghostly Barn-Owl at Cerro Alto Campground after a bay side seafood dinner. The unexpected sight of a female King Eider landing on the bay, prompting a heroic half-mile scurry for telescopes. The hide-and-seek Tennessee Warbler and Winter Wrens in the Santa Rosa Creek willows at Cambria. That endless mixed flock of Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Pygmy Nuthatches, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Hutton's Vireos, and friends responding to a disembodied Pygmy-Owl voice at the Cambria cemetery. Three Pectoral Sandpipers busily feeding on small insects in the washed-up kelp above San Simeon. The "find-that-speck" telescope vigil for Black-vented Shearwaters off Shell Beach which yielded several hundred such specks. And a fitting closing: three stunning Wood Ducks in a small slough at Oceano Campground.

The author thanks the participants for their enthusiasm, good cheer, and tolerance for bad puns and claims of Fulmars on the horizon . . .

San Joaquin Valley Trip; Winter Contrasts

Jan 11-12, 1986

Robert B. Hansen

Winter in the San Joaquin Valley is a season of contrasts. Diverse habitats and fickle fog make for challenging but productive birding. Eight LAAS members and an enthusiastic birder from Delaware (he joined the tour after calling the tape) met trip leader, Rob Hansen, at The Nature Conservancy's 3280 acre Creighton Ranch Preserve (CRP) on Saturday, January 11 at 9:00 a.m. Unyielding gray overcast and a chilling breeze made for bitter cold birding but a good diversity of birds warmed the group's spirits (if not their noses, toes and fingers). Avian response to the cold was intriguing. One Red-tailed Hawk, with its head tucked deeply into its fully-fluffed contour feathers, sat as still as a museum mount as the group eyed it from about 30 feet. The group birded for an hour and discovered that the bird had not moved; a few taps on the trunk of the willow it slept in finally roused the bird, allaying fears that it was dead. After an orientation talk which introduced the group to Valley habitats, Rob pointed out native plants as we looked for birds in riparian habitat along the Tule River, in iodine bush scrub and in freshwater marsh.

A Golden Eagle flushed most of the ducks from CRP's marshes as it winged over on its way to prairie and pasture south of the Preserve. 3 Marbled Godwits and 2 Lesser Yellowlegs were notable winter shorebirds at CRP. Marsh Wrens called from the cattails, rushes and tules but only offered brief views to a couple of quick observers. Our Delaware birder, who'd never seen a Lincoln's Sparrow, had been confidently assured by Rob that he'd add it to his list before leaving CRP. No such luck! Not one of the ten birders ever got a satisfactory glimpse of this common but retiring winter denizen of brushy areas in the Valley. Despite the cold, a few tiny insects were noted just above the water in the marsh; hors d'oeuvres for the wintering flock of Tree Swallows that nimbly nabbed the aerial morsels on the wing.

After lunch we stopped to scan some pre-irrigated Kings County farmland near the Boswell Company's El Rico Ranch Office. Hundreds of geese and dabbling ducks, shorebirds and gulls were feeding and resting in the shallow water. 63 Marbled Godwits at these fields on Redding Avenue is a notably large number of this species at this locality in winter. 2 Rough-legged Hawks were seen in this area. A distant flock of white geese, probably Snow Geese, flew briefly into view then were lost in the fog. The Corcoran Irrigation District reservoir, NE of Corcoran on Nevada Avenue in Kings County, was host to a large raft of Canvasback, Common Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Northern Shoveler and a few Clark's Grebes. A male Mountain Bluebird fluttered about the muddy edge of the reservoir, flycatching from a dead tumbleweed. This was an incongruous vignette for the day's most strikingly colored passerine.

At day's end, the group made a mad dash for Pixley National Wildlife Refuge, a grassland preserve in Tulare County to look for Mountain Plover and to listen for Sandhill Crane. A small flock of plovers (species?) flew across Road 88 but by then it was too dark to identify them. This is a good area to find these winter inhabitants of native Valley grassland. No Sandhill Cranes were noted but they are usually absent from the southern San Joaquin Valley when it is socked in by fog and overcast. It turns out that the cranes, as is usually the case, were at nearby Carrizo Plains where Tulare County and Santa Barbara Audubon chapters were basking in warm sunshine on field trips they took on the same Saturday. At day's end, the group noticed a Great Egret sitting on its haunches in an alfalfa field. This is not their typical sleeping mode so Rob picked up the weak bird and took it to a veterinarian in Visalia. Unfortunately the bird had been exposed to some kind of toxic biocide and had to have euthanasia; a sad end for the regal looking bird on the Audubon logo.

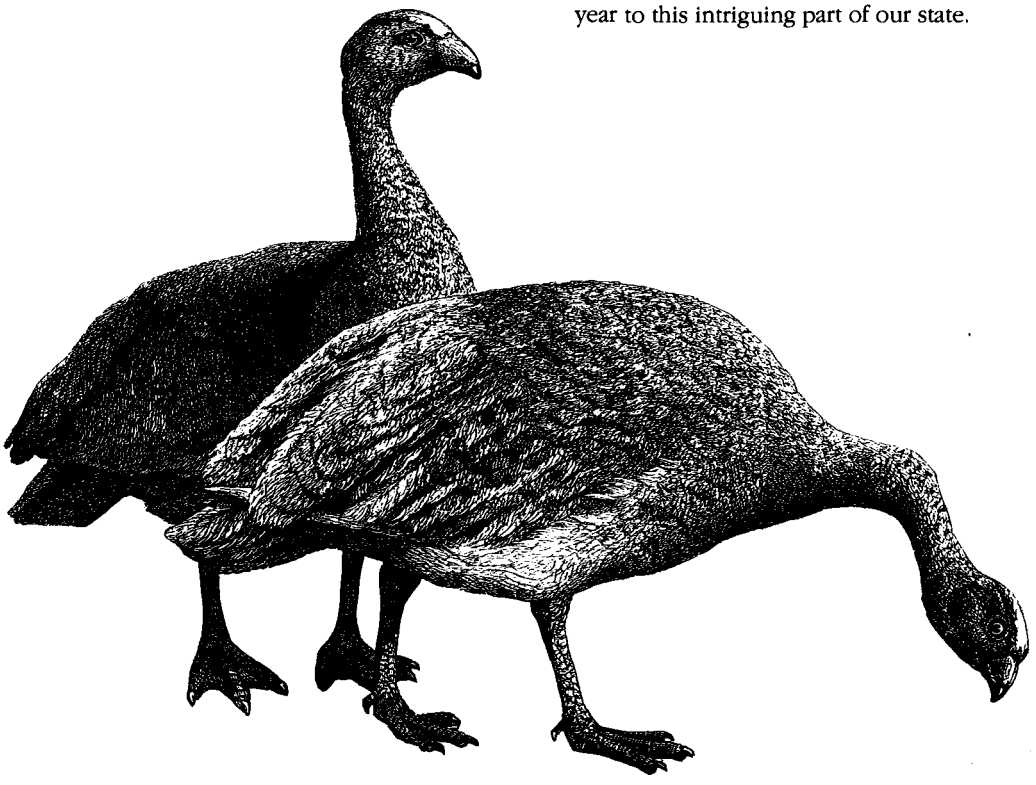
The second day of the trip began grayer and even more dismal than the first so the original itinerary was quickly modified to permit a "run to the sun." We bypassed the fog-shrouded Kaweah Oaks Preserve and made a brief visit to Bravo Lake in the Tulare County town of Woodlake. This waterfowl haven is where many Canada Geese, dabblers and diving ducks (including Hooded Mergansers) spend the winter months. They may have been there but poor visibility kept the lake's birds hidden so we headed east to higher ground.

We took a drive up scenic, pastoral Dry Creek Road (Tulare County Road J21). Dry Creek is a tributary of the Kaweah River just below Kaweah dam. When the sun broke through, the experience was revitalizing. It also made it possible to see two immature Bald Eagles. Most of Sunday was spent in

Yokohl Valley, a little-traveled grassy valley that has more than its share of pleasant countryside and wintering birds of prey. The raptors were so numerous, it was like wading through a thick soup (slight literary embellishment). Red-tails were most numerous but Ferruginous Hawks (4) came in second. One of these allowed us a leisurely study as it sat in a snag near the road. Another gave brief chase to a passing Bald Eagle and a breast-on view of a third Ferruginous was so white in the bright sun that it could have passed for an egret. Two Prairie Falcons and a Golden Eagle spiced up the raptor soup. A cooperative Vesper Saprrow (the kind that comes up and sits on a fencewire next to the road), a flock of Tricolored Blackbirds and a covey of 40 preoccupied California Quail were other Yokohl Valley highlights. The quail were feeding and socializing leisurely in a cattle corral; one male sentry kept a lookout while at least one pair copulated. Perhaps that explains their seeming indifference to the 6 observes gawking at them from 40 feet away. The quail was a lifer for our Delaware friend. As we left Yokohl Valley, an adult Bald Eagle flew over the road.

Sunshine was on the lunch menu when the group stopped at the Milo Fire Station (closed for winter) at the top of Blue Ridge. A flock of 11 "spring" migrant Turkey Vultures soared north along the ridge as a Sharp-shinned Hawk thermaled higher and higher aloft. After lunch, the route took the group through blue oak woodland where they garnered excellent views of an adult Red-shouldered Hawk and several Phainopeplas. One male Phainopepla even gave its strange, quiet trilling song.

A drive up Blue Ridge (5000 feet plus) was the trip's grand finale. Even though the group never encountered snow, this Sierran habitat was like a quiet ghost town when compared to its summer glory at the height of colorful songbird nesting activity. Relatively few species and only small numbers of birds occur in the Sierra in January; a sharp contrast to winter in the San Joaquin Valley when species numbers and diversity are high compared to summer months. At one stop on the Blue Ridge road were huge aggregations of ladybird beetles. At certain favorite spots, like this one, they assemble together to hibernate. A little further up the road were two Townsend's Solitaires, a highlight of the afternoon. One of them fed on mistletoe in a leafless black oak. From the top of Blue Ridge, we looked down on Yokohl Valley, Kaweah Lake, Visalia, the Kaweah Oaks Preserve, and the fog-blanketed Valley. The songbird species mixture at 5000 feet elevation on Sunday afternoon was entirely different from the mixture of waterbirds seen at 200 feet elevation underneath foggy skies on the previous afternoon down in the Valley. Highly diverse habitats and variable weather on this trip generated a trip list of 118 species highlighted by 13 species of waterfowl, 15 diurnal and nocturnal raptor species and 12 species of shorebirds. The group of birders was very congenial and several participants expressed an interest in future visits at various times of year to this intriguing part of our state.



Southern San Joaquin Valley — Southern Sierra

Summer 1986

Robert B. Hansen

Los Angeles Audubon Society's Southern San Joaquin Valley — Southern Sierra birding trip began when the trip leader, Rob Hansen, met the group at the HQ of the Kern NWR in Kern Co. Lesser Nighthawks finished their dawn foraging as sunrise illuminated the Sierra skyline, 40 miles to the east. Rob started the trip with a visit to The Nature Conservancy's Paine Preserve, a remnant saltbush habitat that is representative of the desert conditions at the south end of the San Joaquin Valley. As is typical in July, the area was silent, almost devoid of birds. We did see one of the rare San Joaquin Antelope Squirrels. Our second stop, wetlands at the south end of Tulare Lake, provided a sharp contrast to desert scrub vegetation. Tule patches along the marshy shoreline echoed with the calls of Marsh Wrens and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Western Grebes and "Clark's" Grebes dove and tended their young. Along the banks of the Kern River, where it enters the south end of Tulare Lake, are a number of live willows and willow snags. Over 1000 swallows (mostly Cliff Wwallows and Tree Swallows), including one Bank Swallow, crowded together on the willow branches and on nearby utility wires. From our levee-top vantage point we watched an immature female Peregrine Falcon as she half-heartedly hunted a coot by chasing it, harrier-like, near the ground. The battered coot managed to stumble off to protective cover. This gorgeous falcon was very dark brown above and creamy-colored below. En route to a series of evaporation ponds we saw several family groups of Burrowing Owls. A nervous adult Snowy Plover paced a levee road near its well-camouflaged nest. The nest held two large eggs, a typical clutch-size for this species.

One of the evaporation ponds contains an old levee, now an island, which serves as a breeding site for a colony of several hundred Caspian Terns and smaller numbers of Forster's Terns. As we arrived to observe the noisy colony, we were met by a group of local birders who had some exciting news. They had just discovered a pair of Black Skimmers, the first ever recorded in the San Joaquin valley. One adult, which had been sitting on the island, stood up to reveal two white eggs. Not only was this a newly-arrived species; it was breeding as well! The eggs hatched and two young were first noted on July 26. On Aug. 13 observers realized that there must have been another

unseen egg because the two adults with three half-grown juveniles were still at the tern colony doing their best to beat the August heat.

At the northern edge of this marshland, part of the group saw an adult flamingo in flight. A single flamingo has been noted in the area for 2 to 3 years, likely an escapee from a zoo collection; probably the Fresno Zoo. The lead car was treated to a brief view of a Least Bittern as it flew from one tule patch to another. While Rob waded barefoot through the shallow water to relocate the bird in the tule patch, the rest of the group watched a large flock of Cattle Egrets feeding where irrigation water was being turned out in a nearby cotton field. The Least Bittern lived up to its reputation as a shy skulker and avoided Rob's determined search so the tour leader returned to his car wetter but with a better appreciation for the ambience of a tule patch's interior.

During lunch at Creighton Ranch, we were serenaded by two of the five Blue Grosbeaks that were seen at that diverse Nature Conservancy preserve. Following a brief but much-needed siesta we visited a raucous rookery where Great Blue Herons, Double-crested Cormorants, and Great Egrets were nesting. This was the first recorded nesting of Great Egret in Tulare County . . . certainly a noteworthy event for all Audubonners who cherish the symbolic egret logo. After leaving Creighton Ranch, we stopped to look at a female Swainson's Hawk (dark morph) in a flood-irrigated alfalfa field. We then made our way through farmland SW of Tulare to a row of eucalyptus trees beside a small rural dairy. An immature Swainson's Hawk eyed us from a branch high in the tree. The youngster was soon joined by a very cooperative adult Swainson's Hawk (light morph) which called and glided about so that all observers were offered field guide-perfect opportunities to study this increasingly rare Buteo.

Saturday's itinerary was topped off by dinner at a Mexican restaurant in Tulare where Rob gave a slide show on birds and Natural History of the Tulare Basin (southern San Joaquin Valley).

On Sunday, the highlight of our visit to The Nature Conservancy's Kaweah Oaks Preserve was a small flock of Wood Ducks that flew from a willow-lined pond. A drive up the Tule River canyon took us up to cooler elevations and our destination at Quaking Aspen meadow. Where Saturday was a day for waterbirds, on Sunday we were inundated with Passerines. Dusky Flycatchers and a family of juvenile and adult Red-breasted Sapsuckers fed and moved about in the clear sunlight near the campground. Earlier in the summer, the underbrush near this meadow rings with the rich songs of Green-tailed Towhees. All we saw on our visit was one silent, spotted juvenile. During a walk through the shady woods, Rob's rendition of a Northern Pygmy Owl call attracted mountain Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, House Wrens, Golden-crowned Kinglets, and Yellow-rumped Warblers. A couple of furtive Evening Grosbeaks called from the forests and treated us to unsatisfyingly brief in-flight glimpses.

Dome Rock was our scenic lunch stop with an excellent view east toward the North Fork Kern River canyon. The sequoia grove at redwood meadow was where we heard a Goshawk and got to see Hammond's Flycatcher. For some of the birders, the tour ended auspiciously as two adult Golden Eagles soared close by as we descended the highway through the straw-gold grasslands of the Sierra foothills.

Despite July's heat, the southern San Joaquin Valley and southrn Sierra provide for tremendous avian diversity. *136 bird species* were recorded on this summer's tour.

Palos Verdes

November 15, 1986

Rusty Scalf

On the Palos Verdes Coastal trip of November 15, trippers saw Surfbird. Wandering Tattler, Whimbrel, Spotted Sandpiper, Black and Ruddy Turnstone casually comingling on a single pile of washed-up kelp.

Bolsa Chica

November 22, 1986

Rusty Scalf

Sometimes things go your way. Participants in the Bolsa Chica trip of November 22 watched an Eared Grebe battle with its lunch (a long pipefish), two Common Loons chasing their lunches (seen through clear water) under the boardwalk, a feeding frenzy of Red-breasted Mergansers in the tidal surge at the dike, a Brown Pelican with a large fish kicking in its pouch, three White Pelicans, Western & Clarke's Grebes together, Sandpipers seemingly close enough to touch, a Harlequin Duck busy diving for *his* lunch, and an adult Peregrine Falcon obligingly perched on a close telephone pole for so long that we all grew tired of watching (she out-stared us).

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.

Please Note — The first five reservation trips in this issue are being announced with very little time to spare. If you are interested in one or more of these trips *please* let us know immediately by calling Audubon at 876-0202 or Rusty Scalf at 213 587-4516. We must hurry to make arrangements if the trips are to go forward.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14 — Spend a day birding the **Salton Sea** with **Andy Sanders**. Andy has been the compiler of the Salton Sea North Christmas Count for seven years an knows the area extremely well. Andy, in addition to being an excellent and experienced birder, is the curator of the UC Riverside Herbarium and is an expert botanist. Anyone interested in the natural history of this unique area mustn't miss this one. $18 per person. **Please respond immediately**, there is no time to lose!

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15 — Pelagic trip off San Pedro. $22 per person.

WEEKEND, FEBRUARY 28-MARCH 1 — In past years the **San Joaquin Valley** trip has been one of the most exciting special trips sponsored by LA Audubon. Naturalist **Rob Hansen** will once again lead this adventure through the wildlife areas of the southern valley. Some highlights: A wide variety of ducks geese and raptors, including Rough-legged and Ferruginous Hawks, and Golden Eagle plus Mountain Plover and Sandhill Cranes. Mr. Hansen is manager of two Nature Conservancy Preserves — Creighton Ranch and Kaweah Oaks. He works closely with local Audubon chapters giving programs and heading Christmas Bird Counts. He is regarded as an expert on the status and distribution of birds of the Southern San Joaquin Valley. $25 per person.

SATURDAY, MARCH 7 — Spend a morning birding **Pt. Mugu Naval Air Base**. Enjoy this rare opportunity to view shorebirds, raptors and waterbirds of fresh & salt marsh as well as open ocean. White-faced Ibis has been seen before. You will be led by **Joe Zell** who knows this area well. As the base desires ensured participation, a $6 fee will be charged, $5 of which will be refunded at the beginning of the trip. A list of participants and

their citizen status must be submitted to the Navy two weeks in advance. Please no children or cameras and if not a U.S. citizen, please give date and place of birth with reservation.

SUNDAY, MARCH 8 — **Pelagic** trip off San Pedro. $22 per person.

SUNDAY, MARCH 22 — Come participate in a docent tour of the **South Coast Botanic Gardens** in Palos Verdes. From open pit mine to land-fill operation to a beautiful botanical garden, this place has seen quite a transition. This garden is an excellent place to watch hummingbirds including the Channel Islands race of Allen's Hummingbird which is resident there. The gardens are a fine birding spot during migration as well. **Rusty Scalf** will provide some bird I.D. assistance prior to the docent tour. Fee $1.50 (75¢ children & seniors). Let us know by the end of February.

WEEKEND, MARCH 28-29 — Spend a spring weekend enjoying nature in the unique **Anza-Borrego Desert State Park** with **Stephen Gustafson**. The wildflowers should be in bloom and some migrants are expected. We'll look for the typical desert birds; Phainopepla, Verdin, Gambel's Quail, Prairie Falcon, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher and migrating Rufous and nesting Costas Hummingbirds. We'll learn about owls, their habits and ecology, and we'll look for them Sat. evening. Gustafson is Asst. Curator of Mammals and Birds at the San Diego Natural History Museum. For his Masters Degree he studied raptor ecology specializing in the owls of Anza-Borrego. $25 per person.

ANNUAL BANQUET

Tuesday, February 3rd, 1987

at the
FISH SHANTY
8500 Burton Way
at La Cienega

Cocktails 6 p.m., Dinner 7:30 p.m.
Cost: $19.00 per person

Speaker: **Robert Dickson**
UCLA Special Film Maker
will present the film —
THE APLOMADO FALCON IN VERA CRUZ
with some other short bird films

ADVANCE RESERVATIONS REQUIRED!
NO TICKETS SOLD AT DOOR

Send check with stamped self-addressed envelope to LAAS no later than January 23rd.

Specify Fin or Hoof
(Fish or Beef)

From the Editor

by Fred Heath

A few editorials ago, I jokingly mentioned that we were thinking of having a "Typo-of-the-Month" feature in the *Tanager*. Unfortunately the December issue contained a whopper which gets the award hands down. This time I did it to my ex-friend, Kimball Garrett in the *Birds of the Season* column. As you may be aware, Hal Baxter collects most of the records and Kimball usually supplies the verbage. I supply the gaffs (rhymes with laughs).

Looking at their December column we find the following sentence: "Two **Painted Redstarts** were apparently nominate *rubra*;". The problem is that there is no *rubra* race of the Painted Redstart! Thus Kimball Garrett, world renowned professional ornithologist, appears to be creating his own nomenclature. The error comes about because a few lines were missed in typesetting. In my proof-reading I simply noted that here was a sentence that was correct English and I overlooked the erroneous taxonomy. The correct version should read "Two **Painted Redstarts** were at Morongo Valley in early October (*fide* Herb Clarke). Several **Summer Tanagers** were present on the coastal slope; most were apparently nominate *rubra*;".

The mention of Herb Clarke reminds me of another problem we had in the December *Tanager*. A lot of Herb's pictures which he used to illustrate his article on the Pantanal were printed too dark. The picture of one of the *Tanager's* most famous authors, Hank Childs was also too dark. This comes about because I switched printers and really didn't give the new printer time to do a decent job. I'm assured by the printer that the photos wil be right on the next time. Sorry Herb and Hank.

Enough negativism. One of my faithful readers from Illinois, Don Johnson thought the use of a Dodo would be most fitting. He sent me a terrific patch from The Dodo Club. The Dodo Club is involved in the protection of Wildlife on the Isle of Jersey in the U.K. Thanks a bunch Don, it made my day.

One last item before I make my usual plea for more *Tanager* articles to be sent to:

Fred Heath
6218 Cynthia Street
Simi Valley, CA 93063

concerns a small item I ran in the December *Tanager* on the Least Bell's Vireo. Tom Keeney of the Corps of Engineers called to let me know that piece contained a misstatement that he'd like to correct. Once an area is designated as *critical habitat* it is protected year round even if the vireos are not present in winter. Tom promises a full blown article for the March *Tanager* giving the latest information on the Least Bell's Vireo. Oh, one other thing — there was one tiny little typo at the end of the article: Gordon Ruser's phone number is not (714) 541-9044, but (714) 541-0944. Sorry about that.

And now my final word — send articles, drawings, photos, etc. for the *Tanager* to the above address. Thanks.

Conservation Conversation

Beyond Acid Rain: The Nitrogen Overload

Special Guest Contributor: Hartmut Walter

A recent article in a German biology journal jolted me out of lethargy and complacency about acid rain and its effects on forest ecosystems in the northern hemisphere. What I had known about it had seemed rather convincing: acid precipitation (fog, rain or snow) creates unnaturally low pH level in solid and water systems which directly or indirectly impairs or kills trees, fishes, amphibians and other life forms.

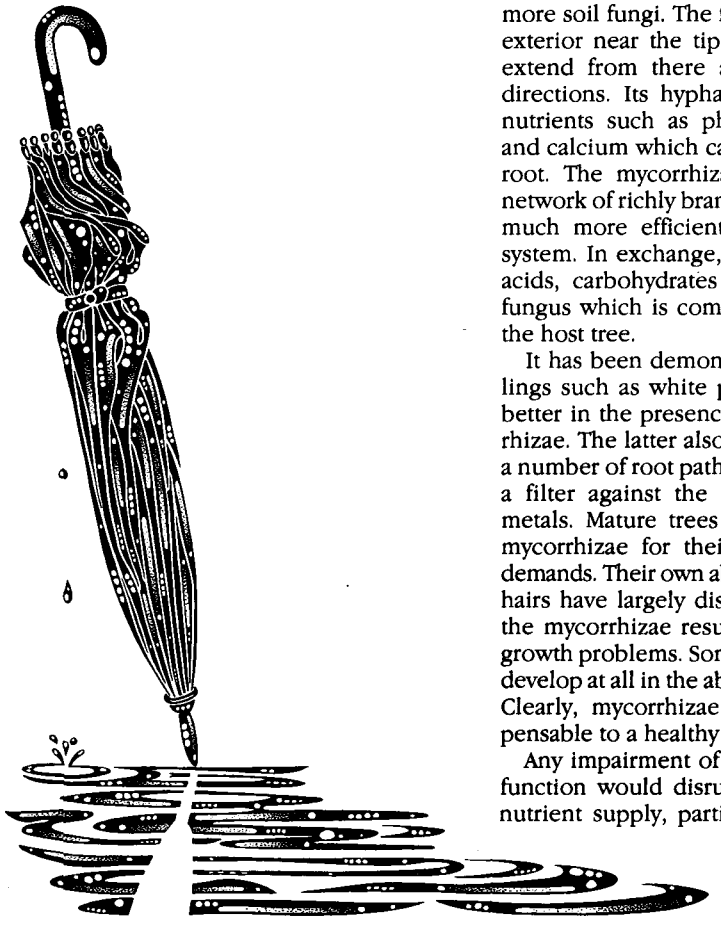
It appears, however, that at least some of the massively damaged forests of central Europe have not been victims of acid rain. And these forests are dying at a fast rate: in September, the West German government released new figures indicating a 12% annual increase in the damaged broadleafed forests (mostly oak and beech) of the Federal Republic. In most of southern Germany, all forested areas show damages between 20-50%, and in the northern Alps, more than 50% of the acerage is affected. This is a grave situation not only from the forester's point of view. Damaged trees are being cut leading to long-lasting changes in the forest habitat and the alpine ecosystem; this affects sedimentation rates, recreational resources and the availability of mature forest habitat for bird communities.

In California, we have been spared such massive damages to our forest resources so far, particularly with regard to the much treasured Sierra Nevada. But it is an established fact that air pollutants are regularly reaching the conifer forests of Sequoia National Park and other Sierra districts. Intensive research on the effects of ozone and other pollutants on the yellow pine stands is being conducted at that park. We know very little about pollution effects on other Sierra conifers.

In July 1985, I happened to spend a week in a summer camp near Highway 50, in the midst of the beautiful red fir stands to the southwest of Lake Tahoe. Scanning the ridge lines for snags and damaged crowns I counted one or two dead or dying trees for every eight healthy-looking ones. Question: is this a normal rate of tree mortality? Nobody has been able to give me an answer so far. It sems as if we have no baseline data on this issue so important for the future of the Sierra.

The article by Prof. Hans Mohr from the University of Freiburg has greatly increased my anxiety over the health of the Sierra Nevada. Because of the complexity of the biotic and chemical processes involved I shall transcribe relevant sections of Prof. Mohr's paper beginning with a review of the many factors that have been identified as causing "traditional" and "novel" damages to forest trees.

Forests may suffer greatly from localized factors such as excessive game populations (deer), drought episodes, frost, diseases and pests, high winds and from incorrect forest management. Since the Middle Ages it has been known that high emissions of SO_2 near ore-processing plants will kill trees. To avoid damages to sensitive conifers in natural ecosystems the mean annual exposure should not exceed 50 μg SO_2/m^3 air. Some forested regions in Chechoslovakia, NE Bavaria and in East Germany are literally dying at this very moment because of very high emmisions of SO_2 and other substances. The former reached maximum values of over 1000 $\mu g/m^3$ air. In the Black Forest, however, SO_2 emissions have always been low and decreased over the past 15 years. Yet, this famous forest has been a showcase of dying trees in the last five years.



Acid rain was thought to be the main cause of this catastrophic tree mortality. While all rain and fog is slightly acid (pH 5.4 - 5.6) some precipitation in Europe as well as in the Los Angeles basin has been measured at pH 3 and below (Pasadena had a pH of 2.25 on January 17, 1982). This high acidity causes comparably little damage to needles and leaves but has profound effects on the presence of cations in the soil. Most plant nutrients are cations; they dissolve and are leached out of upper soil horizons if the soil water becomes too acid. In addition, aluminum ions are dissolved having a potentially lethal effect on forest trees. But Prof. Mohr disputes the validity of the acid rain and aluminum hypotheses in explaining the observed forest mortality in the Black Forest and in the northern Alps. A variety of experimental and other observations from Sweden and central Europe leads him to conclude that none of the much discussed factors mentioned up to now can explain all "novel" foest damages and their severe magnitude. Instead he carefully develops another hypothesis pinpointing both the root *of* the problem and the root *as* the problem.

Most of the common forest trees in the northern hemisphere exhibit mycorrhizae (singular, mycorrhiza). This is a symbiosis of the tree roots with the hyphae of one or more soil fungi. The fungus covers the root exterior near the tip of the root and may extend from there as far as 8 m in all directions. Its hyphae take up water and nutrients such as phosphorus, potassium and calcium which can be absorbed by the root. The mycorrhiza consists of a huge network of richly branched hyphae which is much more efficient than a normal root system. In exchange, the root gives amino acids, carbohydrates and vitamins to the fungus which is completely dependent on the host tree.

It has been demonstrated that tree seedlings such as white pines grow faster and better in the presence of these ectomycorrhizae. The latter also protect the tree from a number of root pathogens and function as a filter against the penetration of heavy metals. Mature trees rely largely on their mycorrhizae for their nutrient and water demands. Their own absorption-capable root hairs have largely disappeared. Damage to the mycorrhizae results in root decay and growth problems. Some forest trees will not develop at all in the absence of mycorrhizae. Clearly, mycorrhizae appear to be indispensable to a healthy forest ecosystem.

Any impairment of the mycorrhiza's vital function would disrupt a tree's water and nutrient supply, particularly on soils with

little humus and microbial content. This is exactly where most of the dying forests occur. Prof. Mohr believes that all observed phenomena of the "novel" forest damages can be understood in the context of anthropogenic impairment of the mycorrhiza — root symbiosis.

The principal factor causing the decay and absence of mycorrhizae is an excess supply of atmospheric nitrogen which falls on our forests in the form of wet or dry deposition. Unpolluted air basins in Scandinavia and northern North America show an annual deposit of less than 1 kg N/ha. Densely settled countries such as the Netherlands, however, exhibit values of over 60 kg N/ha.

Under natural conditions nitrogen is a limiting factor for plant growth; a deficit of available nitrogen exists in the soil. Plants use nitrogen fixation to increase the amount of organic ammonium. There are many data indicating the presence of excess nitrogen in central European soils. In the Black Forest, NO_3^- and NH_4^+ deposits yielded annual totals of up to 40 kg N/ha. This is much more than the local spruce forests need (5 kg N/ha).

Initially, young trees grow faster under the fertilizing effect of high nitrogen concentrations. Over time, however, the stem/root ration shifts in favor of the stem reducing the absorbing root system and increasing the assimilating and transpiring tree crown. Within the stem and branches the normal development of woody substances is altered leading to mechanical instability and heightened sensitivity to frost, wind and parasites. These factors alone can lead to an undersupply of water and nutrients. But an excess of anorganic nitrogen damages mycorrhizae as well thereby compounding the metabolic supply problems of the tree.

While the most pressing task for the German landscape as a whole appears to be a quick and radical reduction in anthropogenic nitrogen deposits, questions have arisen in my mind about the impact of nitrogen on our California ecosystems. We all know about the hideous nitrogen oxides that are part of our smog. We have become aware of dry deposition in the mountain slopes of southern Califonria. With the first fall rains, much of this nitrogen flows into the groundwater reservoirs creating very high but temporary nitrate concentrations. But what about the huge amounts of nitrogen-rich fertilizers spread over the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys? How much of that nitrogen ends up in the Sierra Nevada? What do we know about the mycorrhizae of yellow pines, sequoias, red firs, etc.? for that matter, is the decline of oak woodland in California perhaps related to impaired mycorrhizae?

There are few if any answers. For centuries, foresters have looked from the ground up to evaluate a tree. Then the ecologists came along and began to study the forest environment above ground level. Now, we have reached the dawn of the age where what matters occurs below the surface in a highly complex soil system.

My fervent hope is, of course, that these things will be scrutinized and understood one of these days even if we should find our precious forests to be safe for the moment. In the meantime, as an ornithologist and biogeographer, I am impressed by mycorrhizae. In fact, looking out my window, I can see not only magnolia and sycamore trees but imagine an incredible network of fungal hyphae underlying the entire street and giving sustenance to flowers, insects, hummingbirds and other life. Hail to mycorrhizae!

Further reading:

Mohr, H. 1986. Die Erforschung der neuartigen Waldschaden. *Biologie in unserer Zeit* 16 (3):83-89.

Nihlgard, B. 1985. The ammonium hypothesis — an additional explanation of the forest dieback in Europe. *Ambio* 14:2-8.

Remember the Dodo

Don't forget the dodo or at least the envelope with a picture of one in the last *Tanager*. Please use it to send a contribution for the L.A. Audubon Society's Conservation Fund.

Black Brant Banded

Pacific Black Brant were color banded during the summer on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Alaska. Bands are yellow with a single black digit (number or letter) repeated 3 times around the band. Each bird is carrying 2 color bands on the same leg producing a 2-digit code. Any sighting of these birds, preferably including a description of the code, will be appreciated.

James S. Sedinger, Institute of Arctic Biology, 211 Irving Bldg., UAF, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-1780.

License Plates

If you or someone you know has a personalized automobile license plate with the English or scientific name of a bird, or some bird-related term, could you please drop me a card with your name and address, and the name on the plate?

James R. Hill, III, P.O. Box 178, Edinboro, PA 16412.

Color-Marked Brown Pelicans

You are being asked to cooperate in studies of the California Brown Pelican by reporting your sightings of banded and tagged birds to UCD researchers. Brown Pelicans have been leg-tagged to study their movements, migrations, and interactions with man. The tags vary from plain aluminum bands to bands plus plastic leg markers of various colors. Each configuration has a meaning, so a good, accurate description of what is seen yields the most information. If you see one or more of these birds, please report the following information:

1) the configuration (what is on what leg),
2) the color (and number if possible),
3) the date and location of sighting,
4) the situation,
5) any other comments you'd like to make that might be important (was the bird sick or injured, was it being a nuisance, etc.),
6) your name and address.

Please do not remove the tags or bands unless the bird is dead. If the bird is sick or injured and captured, notify the nearest DFG warden. If the bird is hooked, remove the hook and line carefully so as not to injure the bird or rip the skin or pouch. If the hook is imbedded in the skin, push the barb through the skin, cut it off, then back the cut hook out. If the bird is dead, we'd appreciate the tags back so we can check them for wear and longevity. We will inform you of the birds' origins, age, etc., so send your sightings to:

Pelican Research Project
Dept. of Wildlife & Fisheries
University of California
Davis, CA 95616

Your help will be much appreciated.

Your Help Is Needed

Ornithologist Tom Keeney is involved in a major effort to save the California race of Bell's Vireo. It has become obvious that we need to understand more not only about this tiny vireo but also about the Brown-headed Cowbird which is its parasite. Mr. Keeney has been working with the largest known California population of this vireo in the Prado Basin off Hwy 91. In March Mr. Keeney will be attempting to band and color mark hundreds to Cowbirds at nearby dairies in Chino. He needs *your* help. Weekend assistance will be useful as well as during the week. Call him at 213-693-1504 (home), or 213-894-3681 (work).

Birds Of The Season

by Hal Baxter and Kimball Garrett

Bird sightings reported in the "Birds of the Season" column have generally not yet been reviewed by the American Birds *regional editors or by the California Bird Records Committee. All records of rarities should be considered tentative pending such review.*

November and early December brought a modest invasion of certain montane and boreal winter birds and a trickle of unusual vagrants in the southern California area. But, once again, the most outstanding rarity of the season was in northern California, where Humboldt County birders found the "lower 48's" first **Oriental Greenfinch** on 4 December at the oxidation ponds in Arcata. This Asiatic species had been detected several times in migration on the outer Aleutians in recent years; since it winters in Asia at the latitude of northern California, it's appearance there was not totally unexpected. Since many cardueline finches are popular cage birds, the possibility that the bird might have escaped from captivity should certainly be investigated.

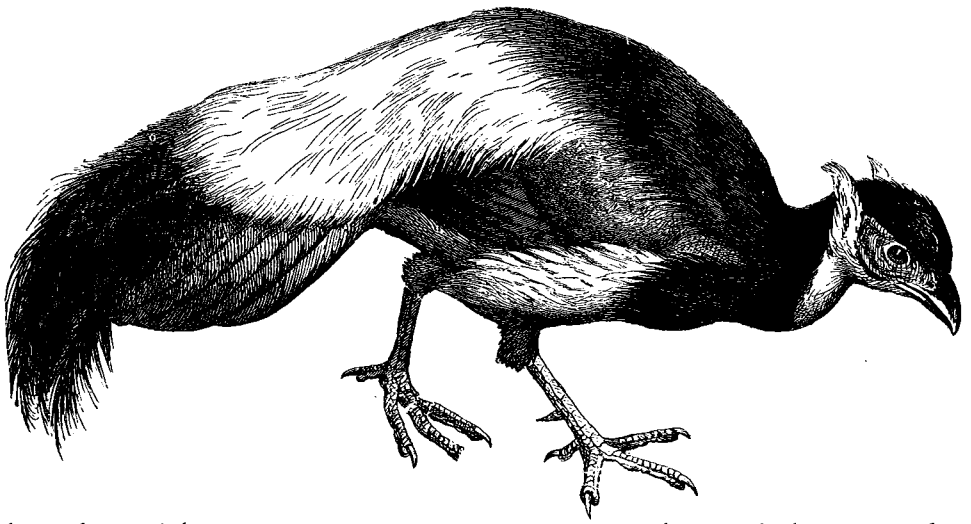
Locally, the situation with irruptive montane and boreal species was fairly routine, but most observers felt that finch numbers were generally high. Several **Evening Grosbeaks** were reported in addition to the handful mentioned in the December *Tanager*, but the very small numbers reported in our local lowlands and in the San Gabriel Mountains were overshadowed by the several hundred birds seen by Jon Dunn on Mt. Pinos in late November. On the deserts one was at Linda Mia Ranch east of Lancaster on 14 November (Bruce Broadbooks). **Pine Siskins** were common through much of the region, with the largest flocks reported being in the weed fields in the western Antelope Valley. **Purple Finches** also seemed to be more plentiful than usual in the coastal lowlands, with large flocks in such places as Tapia Park; Exposition Park's first Purple Finch was recorded on the 7 November "First Annual Dick Davenport Memorial Bird Walk" (Kimball Garrett, Jean Brandt, et al). **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were widespread in the lowlands, but in small numbers (e.g. one in Jerry and Laurette Maisel's Tarzana yard around the first of November). The handful of **Brown Creepers** reported in the lowlands included one in Huntington Beach Central Park through late October, and two together in Tapia Park on 27 November. **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were widespread through the region, with better than average numbers through most of the wooded areas of the Los Angeles County lowlands and foothills. Among the **Lewis' Woodpeckers** reported were two flying over Tapia Park on 27 October (Arnold Small) and one in upper San Francisquito Canyon on 6 December (Kimball Garrett and Jonathan Alderfer).

Cal Yorke studied a loon he felt to be a **Red-throated** on Lake Palmdale on 15 November; there are very few records of this species on our deserts. Flocks of **Canada Geese** in our area are certainly worth scrutinizing for subspecies composition. Doug Willick writes of a flock of about 75 birds present at Huntington Beach Central park on 8 November that contained seven small, dark "Cackling Geese." On 28-29 November there were some 125 typical, large Canada Geese on Castaic Lagoon, below Castaic Dam; but there were also five smaller, darker birds (which kept apart from the main flock of Canadas). Two showed conspicuous broad white neck rings and were felt to be Aleutian Canada Geese (an Endangered subspecies which normally winters in the central Valley of California). The other three appeared to show the characters of Cackling Geese (Kimball Garrett, Jon Dunn). **Red-breasted Mergansers** are quite unusual in the inland parts of Los Angeles County, so one at Castaic Lagoon on 28 November (Loren Hays) and one at Pyramid Lake at the end of November (Jonathan Alderfer) were of interest.

A **Lesser Golden-Plover** which stopped by Malibu Lagoon on 27 October (Arnold Small, Burce Broadbooks and Jonathan Alderfer) was of the race *dominica* (it is the *fulva* race which winters on the California coast). One of the most outstanding records of the period was an extremely late **Solitary Sandpiper** found by Nellie Gryk along Malibu Creek in Tapia Park; the bird was present to 27 November (when photographed by Jerry Maisel). A **Rock Sandpiper** was present in early November at the Union Oil facility in Avila Beach, San Luis Obispo County (John McDonald); this is the same locality where one was present last winter. The movements of gulls in the greater Los Angeles area are always a source of great interest to birders. Will some enterprising birder discover, for example, where the gulls which roost at night on Castaic Reservoir spend the day feeding (presumably at some landfill!)? The masses of **California Gulls** there always contain a sprinkling of **Herring Gulls**, and last winter Western, Glaucous-winged, and Glaucous Gulls were all recorded at Castaic. This year the gull list for Castaic Reservoir grew when Jonathan Alderfer found an adult **Mew Gull** there at the end of November; a first-winter Mew Gull was there on 6 December (Kimball Garrett). A first-winter **Franklin's Gull** was at Malibu Lagoon 16-23 November (Kimball Garrett et al), and another was at the Redondo Beach Pier after 3 December (Nancy Spear, who felt it to be a different individual from the Malibu bird which she also saw). A **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at the south end of the Salton Sea in late October may have been a different individual than the one at the north end a little earlier in the month (Roger Higson). An exceptionally late **Common Tern** was at Malibu Lagoon on 27 November (Jon Dunn and Curtis Marantz). Two **Ancient Murrelets** were in the Newport area: one off Newport Harbor 10-12 November (Martin and Mildred Litke) and one off the Newport Pier 10-22 November (Chet McGaugh).

A **Spotted Owl** has been calling near Mike San Miguel's Arcadia house for much of the fall; this may or may not be the same bird that had been reported earlier at neigh-

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



bor Hal Baxter's house. A **Common Poorwill** was flushed out of the marsh at Huntington Beach Central Park on 25 October, and one was there earlier on 13 October (Doug Willick). A migrant **Lesser Nighthawk** was seen at Malibu Lagoon on 23 November (Art and Janet Cupples). A **Red-naped Sapsucker** has been present in the ash trees near the Tapia Park parking lot since 27 November. A male **Williamson's Sapsucker** was in a wooded canyon on the Palos Verdes Country Club from 31 October (Arnold Small) to 8 November (Bruce Broadbooks). An exceptionally late **Willow Flycatcher** was at Huntington Beach Central Park 12-16 November (Loren Hays). The Arcadia arboretum's **Gray Flyctcher** had returned to its wintering spot on 2 November (Barbara Cohen). Another returnee was the Petre's Canyon **Thick-billed Kingbird**, which also was back by 2 November (Loren Hays). An **Eastern Phoebe** was in Malibu Creek State Park after 12 October (Russ Stone, *fide* Lou Falb), and another was in the willows at the north end of Harbor Lake after 25 October (Don Sterba).

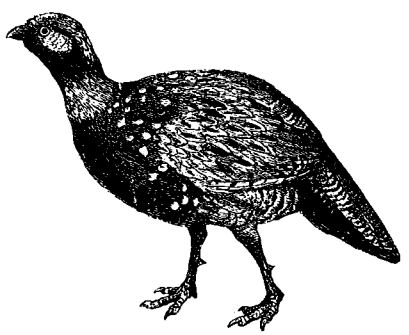
A **"Plumbeous" Solitary Vireo** was at the arboretum in Arcadia on 2 November (Lou Falb). A **Yellow-throated Vireo** at Huntington Beach Central Park 23 October to 1 November was the third one to be found at that well-worked locality (Doug Willick). A **Northern Parula** was at the Turtle Rock Nature Center on 22 October (Doug Willick). Chuck Bernstein found a bright male **Cape May Warbler** at Tapia Park on 26 October, beginning a streak of warbler sightings there which continued for several weeks. On 15 November Bruce Broadbooks and Hank Brodkin found a dull female **Blackburnian Warbler** in the same group of trees where the Cape May had been. The Blackburnian was present to at least 23 November. On 17 November Arnold Small had a warbler he felt might have been a **Cerulean** in the same group of trees; it was glimpsed in poor light by a few other observers later that afternoon, but not seen again. A **Black-and-white Warbler** was in Pat Nelson's Verdugo Hills yard on 27 November. The Murdoch's **Kentucky Warbler** was last seen in its La Crescenta yard on 18 October, after 38 days! in the yard. An immature male **Scarlet Tanager** was at the Palos Verdes Country Club 30 October to 2 November (Doug Willick). The **Hepatic Tanager** at Turtle Rock Nature Center was back for its third winter on 17 November (Doug Willick). A **Summer Tanager** was on the Pomona College Campus 18-26 November (Dan Guthrie). A **Sharp-tailed Sparrow** was on the edge of Morro Bay after early November. **Harris's Sparrow** sightings included one at Linda Mia Ranch on 14 November (Bruce Broadbooks) and one at Furnace Creek Ranch on 9 November (David Koeppel). Plano Trabuco, above El Toro in Orange County, had at least nine **Chestnut-collared Longspurs**, two **Lapland Longspurs**, and a **McCown's Longspur** 28-29 November (Jon Dunn, Cutis Marantz, and Chuck Bernstein). A **Great-tailed Grackle** was in Apollo Park, Lancaster, on 11 November (Cal Yorke).

As you read this, the Christmas Counts are over, and all of the good birds discovered on the counts or during the pre-count scouting are old news. This doesn't mean it's time to relax, however! Late January and February is an excellent time to observe waterfowl in the region; peak witner populations of most species remain, and some species are beginning to move northward. Try carefully censusing birds on your "local" lakes and reservoirs; in recent years we are increasingly finding that certain "deep-water" species that were always assumed to be coastal (such as Horned Grebe) are not as scarce on inland reservoirs as we have believed. Careful study of these bodies of water can continue to yield new information.

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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Subscription to THE WESTERN TANAGER separately are $12 per year (Bulk Rate) or $17 (First Class, mailed in an envelope). To subscribe, make checks payable to Los Angeles Audubon Society.

Los Angeles Audubon Headquarters, Library, Bookstore and Nature Museum are located at Audubon House, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90046. Telephone: (213) 876-0202. Hours: 10-3, Tuesday through Saturday.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

Bird Identification Workshops — Beginning in November, Los Angeles Audubon Society will begin offering a series of bird identification workshops. These workshops will be held one-half hour before the regular monthly program, from **7:30 to 8:00 p.m.** A variety of topics are planned and we intend to continue the workshops as long as members are interested. Because of time constraints each workshop will focus on a single species, a small group of species or some other aspect of birding. The workshops will be geared for the begining to intermediate birder, but should be of interest to just about everyone. The programs will be led by some of our best local birders, many of whom are familiar as field trip leaders. If you were at the September program given by Kimball Garrett and Jon Dunn, that will give you an idea of what we are aiming for. So come a little early to the regular monthly meeting and catch-up on some of the finer points of bird study.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 13 — Join **Arnold Small** for this month's workshop at 7:30 p.m. before the regular meeting. His topic *Female Dabbling Ducks* will be liberally illustrated with some of his wonderful slides.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 13 — Annual Members Photo Contest. Bring your three best bird slides to be judged by the experts (??). First three winners will receive book store prizes. Bring your slides before 8:00 p.m. This annual event has proven to be one of the most popular programs of the year. Cheer your favorites, boo the judges.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3 — Annual Banquet. The Aplomado Falcon in Vera Cruz by **Robert Dickson.** See page 7 for the details of this exciting evening.

TUESDAY, MARCH 10 — To be announced.

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.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 4 — In cooperation with the Santa Monica Mountain Task Force, meet leader **Gerry Haigh** for his monthly morning walk through **Topanga State Park** at 8 a.m. Spend the morning birding in lovely oak woodlands, meadows and chaparral. From Topanga Canyon Blvd. take a very sharp east turn uphill on Entrada Dr. (7 miles So. of Ventura Blvd., 1 mile No. of Topanga Village.) Keep bearing left on Entrada Dr. at various roadforks to parking lot at end. $3 fee.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 10 — Join **Bob Shanman** for a morning at the unique **Ballona Wetlands**. This is an excellent marshland site practically in our back yard. Take Marina 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: call (213) 545-2867 after 6 p.m.)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 10 — Join **Bob Pann** for a morning at **Malibu Lagoon State Beach**. Ths is a popular spot for viewing waterbirds of all types. Excellent opportunity for beginners. **Tapia Park** is a second target time allowing. 8 a.m. at State Beach entrance.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 17 — 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, water fowl, and wintering birds. 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, JANUARY 17 — Meet **Joe Zell** for a morning of birding at **McGrath Beach State Park**. This is an excellent stream mouth estuary location (which last summer produced a Mongolian Plover). We will try to arrange access to sewege treatment ponds. Bring your scope, warm clothes and sharp eyes. Go north on Ventura Frwy 101 past Oxnard to Victoria Ave. exit. Go left under the Frwy. approx. 1 mile to Olivas Park Dr. and go right to Pacific Coast Hwy. Turn left and shortly after crossing bridge turn right into the day parking lot. 8:00 a.m. Fee $3.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 24 — **Loren Hays** will lead a walk at **Bolsa Chica Lagoon**, an outstanding place to view waterbirds of all types. (No where else can you get so close!) Take Seal Beach Blvd. exit from Frwy 405 to Coast Hwy, then south past Warner to marked parking lot across from state beach (between Warner and Golden State). 8:00 a.m. Bring scopes.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1 — **Gerry Haigh** at **Topanga State Park**. See January 4 trip for details.

SATURDAY, FERUARY 7 — **Upper Newport Bay** is a magnificent expanse of tidal *Salicornia* marshland whose channels and mudflats are winter home to thousands of ducks, herons and shorebirds. **Jerry Tolman** knows the Bay well (he compiles the local Christmas Count) and will lead us through this priceless refuge. Newport Bay is conspicuous on any Orange County map. Take the 405 Freeway south to Jamboree Blvd. off-ramp, go west (R) on Jamboree (nearly to Pacific Coast Hwy.) then turn right to Back Bay Dr. Stop at the first wide area in the road past the Newporter Inn. Bring telescopes. 8 a.m.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14 — Ballona Wetlands with **Bob Shanman**. See January 10 trip for details.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15 — Whittier Narrows with **David White**. See January 17 trip for details.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21 — Bolsa Chica Lagoon: Meet **Tim Peddicord** and **Rusty Scalf** for a walk through what might be the best place in So. Cal. for close up looks at water birds of all types. Black Skimmers are now resident. Hardy souls will follow leaders to Newport Bay afterwards. Take the San Diego Fwy. to Seal Beach Blvd. west to Pacific Coast Highway. South on PCH to just past Warner. Parking lot and boardwalk are on the east side of the Highway. 8 a.m.

SUNDAY, MARCH 1 — Topanga Canyon State Park with **Jerry Haigh**. See January 4 trip for details.

SATURDAY, MARCH 14 — Ballona Wetlands with **Bob Shanman**. See January 10 trip for details.

TUESDAY, MARCH 17 — L.A. State and County Arboretum. Join **Barbara Cohen** for a morning walk through varied habitat looking for quail, owls, herons, raptors and early migrants. Admission is free on this third Tuesday of the month. On Baldwin Ave., Arcadia just South of Frwy. 210, on the West side of the street. Meet in front of the gatehouse in the parking lot at 8 a.m.

SATURDAY, MARCH 21 — Take advantage of a unique opportunity of **free bird sketching instruction** with **Jonathan Alderfer** (213-828-6568). Alderfer is the talented artist and illustrator of the forthcoming Dunn & Garrett Field Identification Manual. Bring pencils, erasers and sketchbook or drawing pad along with your usual birding equipment (bring your scope if you have one). This outing is designed for birders with no previous drawing experience. Emphasis will be on basic drawing skills and the recording of field marks through drawings. Come participate in an educational and entertaining experience. Meet at 8 a.m. at the kiosk at **Malibu Lagoon**.

SATURDAY, MARCH 21 — Whittier Narrows with **David White**. See January 17 trip for details.

RESERVATION TRIPS
See Page 6 for detailed Information

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