



# WESTERN TANAGER

Los Angeles Audubon Society

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## YUCATAN Land of the Maya

by Helen and Teri Matelson

**M**ayan Gods, mystical stone skyscrapers, and the Grey-throated Chat beckoned to us . . . year after year after year . . . we really *should* go. It's so close! Finally all that beckoning struck a spark. We went to the Yucatan for 12 days, and are we glad we did.

The Maya inhabited this land around 600 B.C., building a civilization of great cities that endured until the Spanish conquest in 1542. No one knows what destroyed the rich culture developed there, perhaps overpopulation, drought, or disease. The sophisticated Mayan calendar was used to record the important agricultural cycles. Their elliptical houses with cane roofs are still in evidence and used by Mayans today. The great Mayan stone cities are now quiet, except for the padding of tourist feet and working archeologists. The remains of these cities stretch from southern Mexico, through the Yucatan Peninsula, Guatemala, and into Northern Belize. So close, and yet so far away. In those twelve April days we had only a peek at a portion of the Mayan landscape, but a most exciting peek.

Aeromexico, Mexicana and Western Airlines, fly to the Yucatan Peninsula cities of Merida, Cancun, and Cozumel. We chose to fly into the colonial capital of Merida, where renting a car was the most convenient. The price of a rental car is high. We had a new and reliable four-door Nissan to drive. Bus tours to most of the ruins are plentiful making a car unnecessary if your plan is simply to visit the major ruins in the area. Our plan, however, consisted on simply seeing as many birds as possible before, during, and after our visits to a variety of Mayan ruins.

Our reference material for the trip included maps of two of the three peninsula provinces, Yucatan and Quintana Roo. The maps we purchased in Merida were the



most complete. The *AAA Travel Guide* was helpful in finding accommodations in the larger towns. Peterson's *Guide to Mexican Birds*, Ridgeley's *Birds of Panama*, and bottled water were kept close at hand.

Our hotel in **Merida**, the Merida Mision was interesting, as well located. We enjoyed walking in the community surrounding the hotel, stopping at a sidewalk cafe, and passing through busy shops and parks.

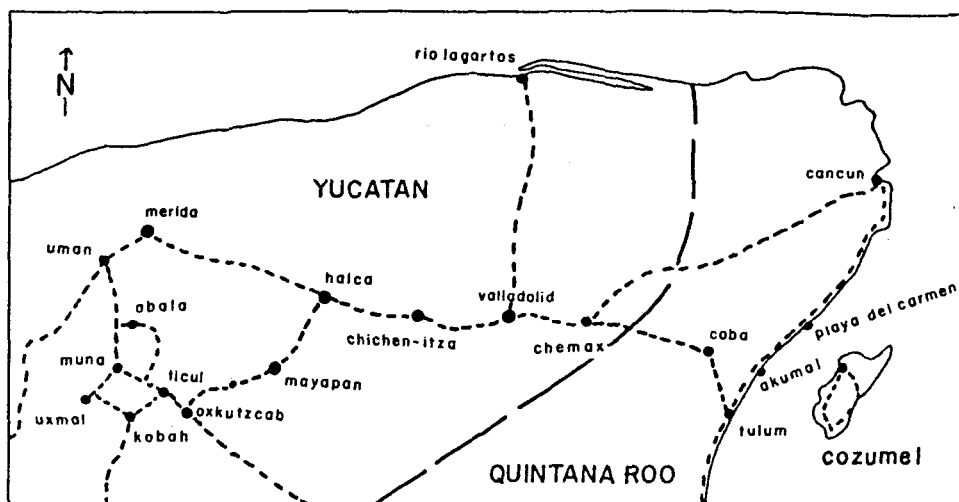
**Uxmal**, 40 miles from Merida on Rte. 261, was our first destination. After a closer look at the map we decided to leave the larger road and travel by way of smaller, yet still paved roads. Slowly we made our way, stopping frequently along the road to look for birds. Only a car or two had to squeeze by us; bicycles and pedestrians easily skirted our often hastily-parked car-with-the-doors-flung-wide-open . . . lucky for us.

The birds we hoped most to see were Yucatan's resident birds. In early spring and late fall, many North American migrants are passing through. In April, we were still in time to meet some of these old acquaintances. At this time of year, the end of the dry season, the temperature was very warm, and we experienced no rain until the final day of our trip. Even in rainy season, showers are usually in the late afternoon and not incapacitating. On route to Uxmal we found Long-billed Starthroat, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Olive Sparrow, White-throated Flycatcher, Spot-breasted Wren, Mangrove Vireo, Olive-throated Parakeet, Rose-throated Becard, Yellow Warbler, Orange Oriole, White-eyed Vireo, Grey-breasted Martin, Yucatan Jay, and Yucatan Flycatcher (which is difficult to separate from Dusky-capped Flycatcher).

Hotel Mision Uxmal is one of three hotels surrounding the Uxmal ruins. Nearly a mile of open scrub separates this hotel from the ruins; the view of the Uxmal temples from most rooms is mystical. In the hotel gardens we watched Grey-breasted Ground Dove, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Green Jays, Orange Oriole, Clay-colored Robin, Altamira Oriole, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Fork-tailed Emerald Hummingbird, Painted Bunting, Blue Grosbeak, Yellow Warbler, Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Yellow-billed Cacique, and Bronzed Cowbird.

Directly across the road from the ruins is the Hotel Hacienda Uxmal. We spent a lot of time during the hot afternoons sitting in their gardens (sipping an occasional iced tea) comfortably watching a wonderful assortment of birds; Social Flycatcher, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Orange Oriole, Green Jay, Yucatan Jay, Catbird, Rose-throated Becard, Black and White Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and White-eyed Vireo.

The structures at Uxmal are considered to be some of the finest examples of Mayan design. Many of the temples there are well restored, with most of the relief carving



intact. Cave Swallows swarmed in and out of the Palace of Governors buildings. Dispersed in the surrounding woodland are large rocky mounds many with trees and shrubs covering the surface. These piles of stone are fallen Mayan buildings yet unsorted by archeologists. It's difficult to decide which to investigate first . . . temples or woodland? Birds first . . . Blue Bunting, Lineated Woodpecker, Black Throated Green Warbler, Grayish Saltator, Red-eyed Vireo, Groove-billed Ani, Melodious Blackbird, Western Tanager, Scrub Euphonia, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-faced Grassquit, Tropical Kingbird, White-winged Dove, Rose-throated Becard, Orange Oriole, and Pale-billed Woodpecker.

Ticul, Oxkutzcab, Mani, Teabo, and Mayapan. We passed through towns large and small with busy outdoor markets, orange and banana groves, old churches, beautiful cemeteries . . . and birds, like the Lesser Roadrunner, and Yellow-tailed Oriole. Everywhere we went we passed flames and billowing smoke. This was the season, just prior to the wet season, when fields and bush are burned to prepare for planting. On two occasions we rushed by flames leaping alarmingly close to the road.

At **Mayapan** we stopped in a small store for something to drink. This stop was the first of several where we were introduced to the Mayan language. The Mayan ladies, in their embroidered blouses, had an amusing break in their shopping while Jim negotiated for soft drinks. At the edge of this little town we ventured onto our first dirt road. It looked rough but passable. A 15 mile dirt gap between paved segments of the road would probably have stopped us in the wet season. The hours between Mayapan and Cantamayec were some of the best.

Alternating between low brushy scrub and scrub woodland, the road covered some of the hilliest terrain we had found. Up and down, stopping the car on high points in the road to see across the top of the brush; stopping the car in the low spots

and staring deep into the tickets. Two Grey-throated Chats fanning their tails red-start style and foraging in the brush . . . the highlight of our trip, without a doubt. Hook-billed Kite, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Yucatan Jay, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Prothonotory Warbler, Mangrove Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, and Yellow-tailed Oriole.

Sotuba, Tobolon, Halca, Xtogil, Yokdzonot, and destination number three, **Chichen-Itza**. Chichen is impressive, and the most heavily visited of the ruins. Three hotels about the ruin grounds. The Mayalan Hotel has comfortable cabins, and a fair amount of garden. In an unkept area on the edge of the gardens we found a pair of nest-building White-bellied Wrens.

Destination number four? **Rio Lagartos**. Where is that? A town on the Northern coast of the peninsula where very few tourists go, unless they are very anxious to see American Flamingos. We were, and did. Rio Lagartos is a small, picturesque fishing town. Lots of boats and fishing nets, but only one Hotel. The Hotel Maria Nefertiti looked like a dream that didn't come true; and why it didn't we don't know for certain, but it probably had something to do with finances. The architects model of the luxurious hotel sat on a small table pushed into a dusty corner on the first floor. Through a filmy plastic cover we could make out a miniature Hotel Nefertiti. In actuality only two floor of the four-story hotel had been completed . . . but not completely. We agreed to stay the night, had Manta Ray hash for dinner in town, a beer outside the hotel disco, and gazed out at the Gulf of Mexico before turning in. No one showed up at the disco until about 10:30 pm . . . no one went home until nearly 2:00 am. The next morning we set out to see Flamingos. Luis Caamal loaded us in his boat and took us on a tour of the inlets along the edge of Rio Lagartos. The tour was superb, lasting from eight in the morning until after noon (cost was approximately \$40 for three people).

Within an hour and a half we approached a group of well-over a thousand American Flamingos wading in the shallows. A large section of the flock flew within a few feet of us. Motoring and paddling in and around the Mangroves we came across Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Mangrove Swallow, Least, Gull-billed, Caspian, and Royal Terns, Common Black Hawk, White Ibis, Louisiana Heron, Magnificent Frigate, American Oystercatcher, Reddish Egret and Yellow-crowned Night Heron.

On the southern edge (the entrance to) Rio Lagartos is a road that goes to **Coloradas**. This road was trafficless and bordered by miles of scrub and marsh. We would have like to have spent more time in this area. Great Egret, Northern Jacana, Purple Gallinule, Least Grebe, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Little Blue Heron, Blue-winged Teal, Neotropic Cormorant, Vermilion Flycatcher, Caracara, and thousands of Barn Swallows.

Outside of Rio Lagartos on our way to Valladolid we found White-fronted Parrot and, sadly, a Common Potoo road-kill. **Valladolid** was not so much a destination as it was a convenient stop, and we enjoyed our visit there. This quaint town established by Spaniards in 1543 is 100 miles south of Rio Lagartos, and 25 miles east of Chichen-Itza. Our hotel, the Mision de la Marques, once an old colonial home, was a fine place to relax. The hotel restaurant was excellent.

The fifth destination was **Coba**, in the province of Quintana Roo. The proximity of the Caribbean and the emergence of the wetter tropical forest contrasted greatly with the arid scrub of the Yucatan province. The roads to Coba have very dense foliage along their edges. It was difficult to find a place to pull off the road. Occasionally we found a small spot to squeeze the car off the road. On one short walk we happened on a small cenote. Cenotes are inland ponds, considered sacred by the Maya, formed in limestone topography by the caving-in of the earth's crust at points crossed by an underground water current. This small turquoise cenote was densely surrounded by trees and shrubs except for the spot where the path found it. Here we found noisy Red-throated Ant Tanagers, Lesser Greenlet, Squirrel Cuckoo, and Keel-billed Toucans.

The ruins at Coba are very extensive. Many of the pyramids have not been reconstructed or even uncovered. The second largest Mayan pyramid is here at Coba. One half of the structure is uncovered, the other half looks like a steep forested hill. The climb was tricky, and the view from the top breathtaking. These amazing ruins are surrounded by excellent woodland filled with birds. Yucatan Woodpecker, Yellow-billed Cacique, Yellow-backed, Black-cowled, Yellow-tailed, Altimira, and Orange Orioles, American Redstart, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Red-eyed Vireo, White-eyed Vireo, Yucatan Jays, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, White-bellied Wren, Green Jay, Brown Jay, Northern Bentbill, Paltry Tyrannulet, No. Beardless Tyrannulet, Bright-rumped Attila, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Citreoline Trogon, and Black-headed Saltator.

Coba has several lakes. Next to Lake Coba

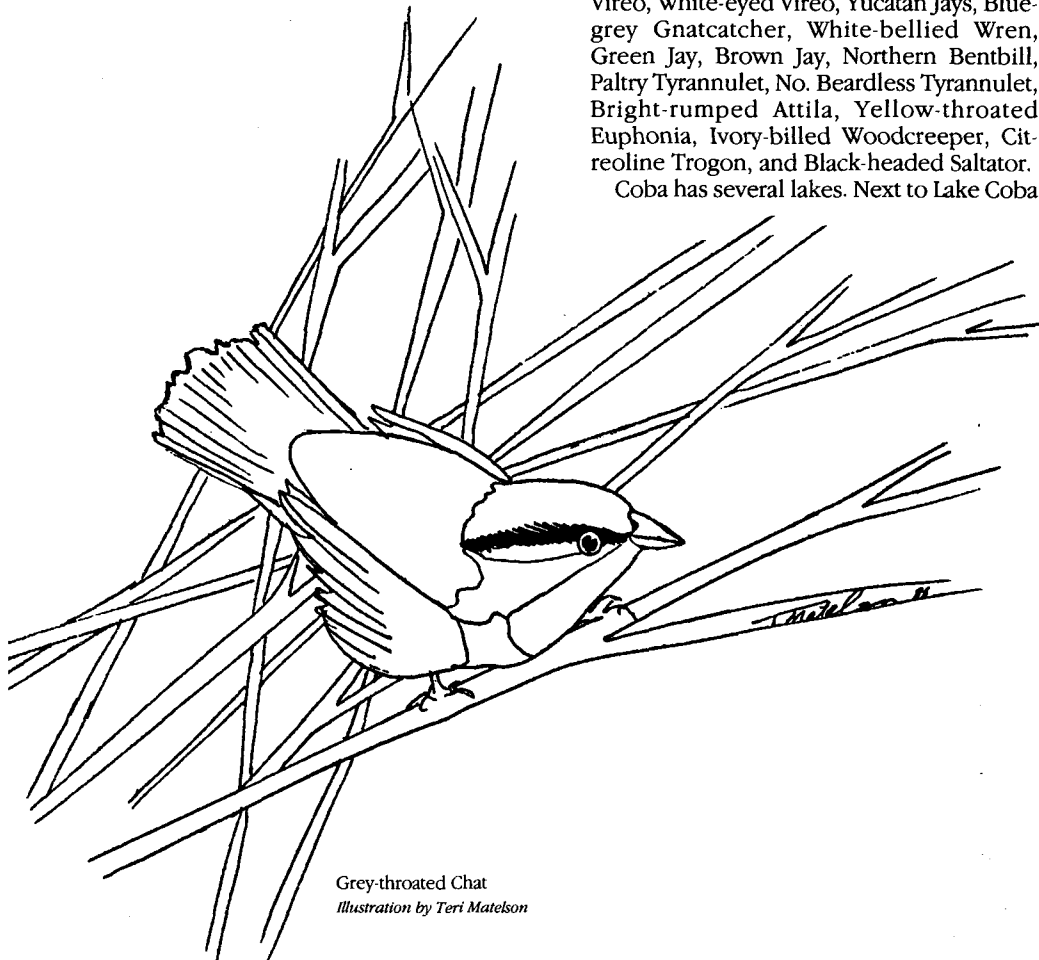
is the Hotel Villas de las Archeologicas (a Club Mediteranee resort hotel and somewhat costly). It is the only hotel in the area, and very comfortable. Unlike most of the guests there, we spent a good deal of time walking the marshy edge of Lake Coba. Because of our persistence, we were able to see Spotted Rail, and Ruddy Crike. More easily, we found Grey-crowned Yellowthroat, Grey-headed Tanager, Osprey, Least Bittern, Northern Waterthrush, Solitary Sandpiper, and Buff-collared Nightjar.

Destination six, snorkling in the Caribbean. Development of the Quintana Roo coastline is well underway. We stayed at Akumal, one of many resort hotel dotting the coast between Tulum and Cancun. The ruins at **Tulum** are considered post-classic, and are indeed very different from Uxmal, Chichen, and Coba. The ruins at Tulum perch on the edge of a cliff. Some of the structures have remnants of decorative painting still visible. This is also a very heavily visited spot by tourists as well as bus-loads of school children. We spent a couple of hours at Tulum and only one afternoon snorkling at **Akumal**, as we were beginning to run out of time. Around Akumal we saw Collared Aracari, Aztec Parakeets, and Bright-rumped Attila.

At the last moment we decided to make a dash to **Cozumel**. A ferry leaves from **Playa del Carmen**, 22 miles north of Akumal. Playa del Carmen has two fine hotels at the beach, adjacent to the ferry landing. There are several ferry trips every day, the first of which leaves at 5:45 am . . . that's the one we got on. The trip was about an hour, and the ferry was crowded with commuters going to work on Cozumel. Upon our arrival we had a quick breakfast, rented a well-used Volkswagen bug, and drove for 20 minutes to the center of the island, parked the car on the edge of the road and proceeded to walk up and down a 1/4 mile of stretch looking for birds. Short, but sweet; we saw Yucatan Parrot, Yucatan Vireo, Cozumel Thrasher, Black Catbird, Stripe-headed Tanager, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Caribbean Elaenia, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Bananaquit, and White-tipped Pigeon.

Do we have to go now? Yes! With so little time left, we flew by the plane from Cozumel back to Playa del Carmen. Seven dollars for a very worthwhile 7-minute scenic flight. There are six flights a day . . . a good way to go. Aside from the plane, and the passenger ferry, there is also a car ferry that leaves from Puerto Moreles. It is advisable to book that three hour ferry trip a day in advance.

Unfortunately destination seven was a straight shot back to Merida. We left Playa del Carmen in the early afternoon and arrived in Merida just after dark. Early the next morning we were headed back to Los Angeles. We should go back to the Yucatan next year . . . it's so close . . . and it's so good.



Grey-throated Chat  
Illustration by Teri Matelson

## 1987 Audubon Camp in the West Programs

### Audubon Camp in the West for Adults

Geology speaks from the massive rock walls, and petroglyphs stir your curiosity in sessions on native American culture and wilderness values. Unique birds, mammals, insects, and flowers are tools in the art of understanding this rugged mountain environment. There is also time for hiking, rock climbing, square dancing, canoeing, and volleyball — plus an optional float trip down the spectacular Snake River in Grand Teton National Park. 3 two-week sessions and 1 one-week session are available.

Dates: Session 1 June 26 - July 3, 1987  
2 July 5 - July 17, 1987  
3 July 19 - July 31, 1987  
4 August 2 - August 14, 1987

Cost: \$425 (one week), \$650 (two weeks)

### Nature Photography in Wyoming:

The Wind River Mountains, Yellowstone National Park and Grand Teton National Park are the settings for this field seminar on the use of 35mm camera equipment. Professional photographers led by Perry Conway (producer of a dozen educational filmstrips) will guide you in photographing mountain scenery and wildlife. Five days are spent at the Audubon Camp, three days in Yellowstone and one day in Grand Teton National Park.

Dates: June 19 - June 28, 1987

Cost: \$750

### Wilderness Research Backback Trip

Participate in an extensive, ongoing research effort by Audubon biologists while backpacking in the spectacular Wind River Mountains and/or Absaroka Mountains. Learn the skills of bird and mammal censusing, bird banding, insect survey and collection, plant identification, and herbarium collection. Small groups of 10 persons (maximum) will accompany our research staff on 12-day expeditions. Moderate hiking ability needed to cover 5-7 miles daily.

Dates:

- Session 1A Wind River Mountains  
June 21 - July 3, 1987
- 1B Absaroka Mountains  
June 21 - July 3, 1987
- 2A Wind River Mountains  
July 5 - 17, 1987
- 2B Absaroka Mountains  
July 5 - 17, 1987

Cost: \$550

For more information, please contact:  
National Audubon Society  
4150 Darley, Suite 5  
Boulder, CO 80303  
(303) 499-5409

**SATURDAY, JUNE 24** — Join **Tom Keeney** for a birding hike up **Santa Ana Canyon** in the San Bernardino Mountains. This is the first of two canyon trips to be led by Tom to seldom visited canyons in this wonderful (and nerby) mountain range. A variety of habitats from chaparral to coniferous woodland and commensurate variety of birds await us. Meet at the San Bernardino County Museum at 8:30 a.m. Take the 10 Frwy to the California St. offramp in Redlands. The museum is clearly visible from the freeway. (July 25 we meet at the same time and place for a trip up Banning Canyon.) Bring lunch and hiking shoes.

Trips to anticipate this Summer:

**Mt. Pinos with Jean Brandt, July 18.**

**Banning Canyon with Tom Keeney, July 25.**

### 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 notified and your fee returned. Your cancellation during that time will bring a refund only if there is a paid replacement.

If you desire to carpool to an event, Ms. Lohr (usually in office on Tuesday) can provide information for you to make contact and possible arrangements.

**SUNDAY, MAY 10** — **Pelagic** towards **Santa Barbara Island**. 6:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Expected birds: Shearwaters — Sooty, Pink-footed; Jaegers — Pomarine, Parasitic; Storm petrels: Terns and Gulls — Arctic, Black-legged Kittiwake; Alcids — Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemont, Xantus Murrelet, Cassin's Auklet, Rhinoceros Auklet; Shorebirds — Black Oystercatcher, Surfbird, Red Phalarope, Wandering Tattler, Rarities (seen twice in 10 yrs.): So. Polar Skua, Puffins, Sabine's Gull. Possible mammals: Pacific Pilot Whale, Gray Whale, Dahl Porpoise, Risso's Dolphin, Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin, Pacific Common Dolphin.

**SATURDAY, MAY 16** — Join **Tom Keeney** for a vist to the **Lower Santa Ana River** and **West Prado Basin** in search of riparian forest specialties such as Yellow-breasted Chat, Willow Flycatcher and (with some luck) Yellow-billed Cuckoo. This area is not accessible to the general public. Take the 91 Frwy. to the 6th/Maple offramp and meet at the Denney's at the base of the offramp. 8 a.m. We will also visit some grassland and agricultural areas. No Fee. Limit of 15 people.

**WEEKEND, JUNE 27-28** — Join **Bob Barnes** on his annual extravaganza in the **Kern River/Greenhorn Mtn. Area**. Some possibilities: Summer Tanager, Indigo Bunting, Blue Grouse, Pinyon Jay, Gray Flycatcher, Williamson's Sapsucker. \$25 per person. A possible third day extension \$10 more.

**Pelagic Trip — Off Morro Bay — Sunday, June 7.** 7:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The trip is sponsored by the Morro Coast Audubon Society and led by **Brad Schram**. Possible sightings are Tufted and Horned Puffins, Black-footed Albatross, Shearwaters, Artic Terns and Sabine's Gull. For reservations send a \$20.00 check payable to the Morro Coast Audubon Society and a self addressed, stamped envelope to Curtis Marantz, 876 Ridgeway St., Morro Bay, CA 93442. (805) 772-4677

## Golden Trout Workshop

Three one-week Golden Trout Workshops will be held in the Sierra August 2 through August 22, 1987. It is sponsored by members of the Eastern Sierra, Pasadena, San Bernadino Valley, San Fernando Valley, Santa Barbara, and Tulare County chapters of the National Audubon Society. An informal field natural history program, consisting of naturalist-led hikes by resident naturalists, will be offered, with visiting guest naturalists at some sessions. The Camp is located in the Golden Trout Wilderness, in the southern portion of the High Sierra, on the eastern watershed, at an *altitude of 10,000 ft.* For details, write or call: Cindi McKernan, 40 Sherril Lane, Redlands, CA 92373, 714/793-7897. If interested, reservations should be made as soon as possible.

## Memorable Phone Calls to Audubon House:

*Compiled by Andrea Kaufman*

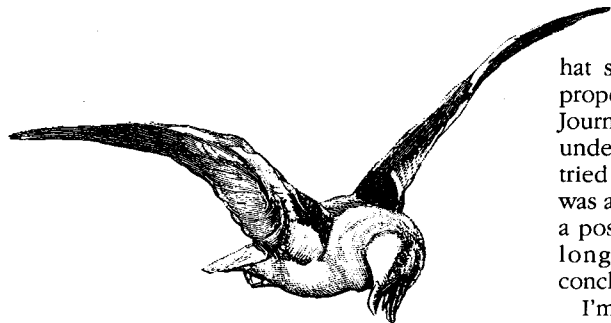
"I think it would be good idea to release condors in the Galapagos. Has anyone suggested this?"

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"There is this baby bird in a bush outside my window - he is too stupid to fly and the mother and father aren't doing anything about putting it back in the nest."

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"Where can I buy cashews, almonds and pecans at a better price - I feed them to the birds and they are too expensive in the supermarket." *Birdseed and peanuts suggested as an alternative.* "Oh no, I couldn't feed that cheap stuff to the birds."



## Bird Notes

by Dorothy Dimsdale

I was birding Malibu Lagoon when a woman approached and asked me what I was doing. After several minutes telling her the pleasures of birding, she said, "I'm going to give this to you because I know you'll care."

She bent behind a boulder and produced a very sick-looking Cliff Swallow. Having placed it in my unwilling hands, she gave a Dr. Schweitzer-like smile and strolled off, being careful not to tread on any ants.

Strong thoughts of "Let nature take its course" and "Put it out of its misery" were very much in the front of my thoughts, but I couldn't do either of those things. I took the bird to a vet who kindly agreed to take care of it. He thought it had been poisoned, but felt he could make it well. I went on my way much lighter in spirits.

Later, thinking over the incident, I realised it was my *responsibility* to take the bird. Birding itself is such a perfect escape from all and any problems as well as a glorious pleasure. One looks and leaves — that's it. However, it's also incumbent on us to care and involve ourselves when necessary.

Up on the Angeles Crest I was with an eastern U.S. lady looking at White-headed Woodpeckers when she called out, "What's this red bird in the top of the tree?"

There were trees everywhere and all close together. Not unreasonably, I thought, I asked, "Which tree?"

"This tree, here," she said, gazing through her bins into the distance.

"Could you be more specific?" I said, getting crankier by the minute.

Finally, she did her best; "It's here," she said, "in this wooden tree."

Another bird she described as "Just beautiful and covered with feathers." In retrospect I realised that all the birds we had sighted that day had been in wooden trees and each bird was covered with feathers, so it wasn't that she had been wrong, but just that she was a poor communicator.

When it comes to communication between people and birds, Professor Thomas Elsner of Cornell has put forth a novel idea.

Responding to the innumerable reports of birds attacking passers-by from the rear, he notes that birds avoid the eyes of a predator and suggests that is the reason they attack from behind. His idea is that large "eyes" painted or stuck on the back of the

hat should cut down the aggression. He proposed, in a letter to the New England Journal of Medicine, Nov. 7, 1985, that those under attack should try this method. He tried it for a period when in Australia as he was attacked by Magpies. It seemed to have a positive effect, but he wasn't in the area long enough to come to a definite conclusion.

I'm thinking about it:



On second thought, I think I'll wait for someone else to try it first.

I think the most perfect communicator regarding birds is someone I've never met. I bought a copy of "Bird Island" by Lars Jonsson, a Swede. I bought it because he is a superb artist, but oh, can he write! He just seems to look out from his soul and put down on paper all he sees there. How about this?

"Black little eyes, eager to observe, are turned towards the sky. This clear unending canopy is mirrored in and interpreted by thousands of small dark eyes. Our vast space is their roadway. What for us is air, endlessness and intangible is for them a plan of action, a chart covered with symbols. Up there, calls are heard and thousands of wings beat. Each movement and flight activity, each silhouette and call, forms a web of stimuli, a kind of diagram. When suddenly all coefficients coincide for the individual or the flock, they take flight. I can distinctly feel the suction, the draught, when twelve Grey Plovers in hurried flight describe a perfectly straight line southwestwards across the afternoon sky."

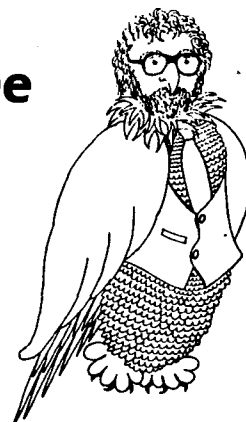
Take a breath and then look at his painting. At first glance the paintings look rough and unfinished, but pause for a second and there you are faced with a living bird, a nest, a landscape. Communication? Lars Jonsson knows it all.

I guess we can all try a little harder to express ourselves. Even the simple cry of "Good spotting!" can warm the heart of anyone who makes a first sighting.

The best communication of all, from my point of view, is on arrival at the location of a rare lifer to find an eager birding friend has the bird framed in a scope ready for viewing. There isn't the satisfaction of having found the bird for oneself, of course, and paradoxically the supreme satisfaction seems to come after a long weary search. However, my two best bets for this feat are Gerry Maisel and Guy Commeau. Each has provided me with perfectly scope-framed lifers on several occasions. To them I say, "Good Spotting!"

## From the Editor

by Fred Heath



Since I have to run off and catch a plane for New York City, this editorial will be short and sweet. By leaving at this point I can't take any responsibility for typos... not that I have in the past anyway.

To give an update on our L.A. County breeding bird survey I've got very few responses to date. The earliest record is technically last year's with Hank and Priscilla Brodtkin reporting on *Allen's Hummingbird* on a nest along Bonsall Road in Malibu on December 21, 1986.

Gary Brower turned up a bunch of records in San Gabriel:

*Antit* — March 29, pair building nest.

*American Crow* — March 31, three birds gathering nesting material from Date Palm.

The only other report is from Kimball Garrett of a pigeon (?) nesting at the L.A. Museum of Natural History. He provided no other details. You can see why he is our ornithology consultant.

I still need more breeding records, more articles and a replacement editor. Send any or all of the above to (address still good for one month):

Fred Heath  
6218 Cynthia Street  
Simi Valley, CA 93063

## Art Wanted

LA Audubon Society Wildlife and Environmental Art Show will be held September 11-18, 1987. Open to all U.S. artists, all fine arts media, except sculpture and photography. Show selections juried by slides. Awards juried from actual artworks in 4 categories: landscape, seascape, animals and birds. \$5,000.00 in Cash Awards, plus Merit and Special Awards. Entry fee \$5/slide, 3 minimum, no maximum. Slide deadline July 15, 1987. For information: send SASE to LAAS Art Show Prospectus, D.R. Kendig, 603 S. McCadden Pl., L.A., CA 90005.

## Book Review

by Kimball Garrett

### The Known Birds of North and Middle America

Authored and Published by Allan R. Phillips

*The Known Birds of North and Middle America: Distributions and Variation, Migrations, Changes, Hybrids, etc., Part 1, Hirundinidae to Mimidae; Certhiidae.* By Allan R. Phillips. 1xi + 259PP. Denver, Colorado, Published by the author, 1986. \$45.00.

Most active birders are familiar with the contributions of Allan R. Phillips (hereafter 'ARP'). "The Birds of Arizona" (University of Arizona Press, 1964) is a distributional classic - a careful synthesis of specimen-supported records placed into an informative ecological and taxonomic framework. Now Dr. Phillips has expanded his coverage to produce the first volume of a treatment of North and Middle American birds, including those from the region from Mexico south to Panama which have captivated his interest for long. With the 1983 publication of the Sixth Edition of the American Ornithologist's Union Check-List of North American Birds, covering essentially the same zoogeographic regions, one is compelled to ask three essential questions:

1. What is the rationale for this seemingly duplicated effort?
2. What does "Known Birds" offer that the AOU Check-List does not (and vice-versa)? And,
3. Where the works disagree, which should I trust?

I don't have answers to these questions, particularly the first and the last, but one can't come away from a reading of this work without some nagging questions about the recent past and the near future of field ornithology and in particular about the study of bird distribution, seasonal status and species-level taxonomy. These aren't esoteric questions; rather, they are at the fundamental root of what the keen bird-watcher can and should contribute to the broad field of avian biology. ARP asks over and over again, what distinguishes good science from bad, and acceptable records from unacceptable ones? Few readers will agree with all of his questioning of established "fact", or his "facts" which replace them. Some readers will vehemently disagree with a good number of them. And more than a few readers, in this age of litigation, are probably already summoning their lawyers to deal with the consequences of the author's treatment of their records or their methodologies.

"Known Birds" reads a bit like the ornithological equivalent of a veteran football player's account of the modern game in which he laments the invention of the forward pass and the development of modern salaries, recruiting, and drafting. ARP is not impressed by "newfangled" techniques in avian systematics, nor does he care to make anything other than highly selective use of the gigantic body of sight records data developed in North and Middle America over the last several decades. He rails vociferously against the establishment (read: AOU Committee on Classification and Nomenclature).

Nevertheless, ARP has made extensive use of the most fundamental resource of practitioners of his art: curated museum collections of bird skins. He correctly decries the insensitivity of permit granting agencies to the continued need to wisely and legitimately augment museum collections, and in word and deed he repeatedly makes a strong case for the validity and the usefulness of such collections. Scientific collecting is supportive of, not antithetical to, avian conservation, ARP maintains (and demonstrates again and again). Sounding somewhat paranoid, and perhaps legitimately so, the author refuses to identify the provenience and disposition of specimens, evidently to protect collectors and museum from legal repercussions stemming from current anti-collecting attitudes. [I should state that, despite ARP's protective approach to collections, no reputable curator will accession illegally collected

specimens into a museum collection].

So while the book smacks of a desparado's ornithology, with the author firing salvos at the American ornithological establishment from the outside, he is, in fact working within the system by using the same basis - systematic museum collections - as the rest. And while there is bitterness and, perhaps, hyperbole in his introductory sections (with their content tipped-off by their titles, "Apologia: ornithology today", "Why we can NOT trust our eyes in science", and "The tasks ahead - for all"), the book is, ultimately, an incredible astute vision of the distribution and geographical variation of North and Middle American birds.

Having said all of this, I'll briefly indicate what the book contains, and then attempt to address the questions I posed in the opening paragraph. I'll give away the bottom line right now, though. This book is a must for the serious birder who is interested in geographical variation of American birds. It isn't a "must" simply because I'm a sucker for any bird book that quotes Gilbert and Sullivan, but because it represents a very thorough and critical treatment of topics of fundamental interest.

The book contains some forty-five pages of introductory material which I have hinted at above, but which can hardly be summarized here. In short, these pages represent ARP's philosophies, and allow him to vent what evidently is a considerable furore of frustration with the past and the present ornithology. Species accounts treat the swallows, corvids, shrikes, tits, bushtit, verdin, nuthatches, wrens, dipper, bulbuls, wrenit, thrashers, and tree-creepers. ARP appeared not to be happy enough with our current state of knowledge to start his series anywhere else in the sequence. No, there isn't a companion "Unknown Birds . . ." volume in the works; the choice of title was meant to emphasize that much remains to be learned of our local North American avifauna.

Species accounts deal with various boldly headed topics concerning distribution, migrations, and geographical variation, as well as "Remarks", "Notes", and the ubiquitous "Erroneously Reported". There are no complete descriptions or discussions of "field marks", but subspecific differences are diagnosed, key measurements are often given, and dichotomous keys to many groups are provided. Color plates depicting three *Stelgidopteryx* swallows and *Microcerculus* wrens are unlabelled afterthoughts which seem not to fit in. There are no other illustrations, save for a number of useful maps. A number of new names and subspecies are proposed, and a great many scientific names will look unfamiliar, a legacy of the author's application of the rules of nomenclature. Appendices, some contributed by Amadeo Rea and J. Dan Webster, expand upon certain problems of geographic variation.



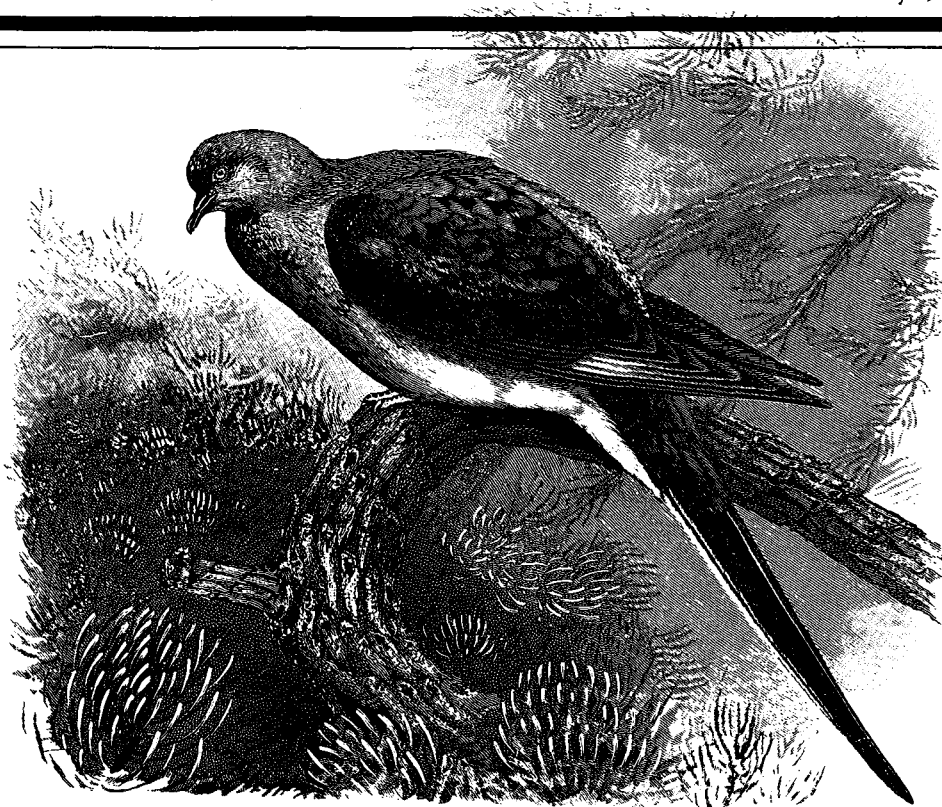


So what about my questions? First, the rationale for "Known Birds" becomes clear as one reads the introductory chapters and sees how disenchanted ARP is with the various schools of ornithological thought of the past and present. He spares little wrath in trashing certain individuals, museums, universities, and committees. He quotes, for example, a description of the British Rarities Committee as "a group of bird-watchers noted for their experience, eyesight, and imagination", and delights in recounting an instance in which that committee "identified three photographs of one *Calidris* sandpiper as two species"! He cites a litany of proven misidentifications, some being his own. I can't agree with the author's empirically derived case that sight records must thus be treated only skeptically, but his cautionary approach has considerable validity. It would perhaps not be far from the truth to say that Dr. Phillips wrote this book because the AOU's treatments were unsatisfactory.

This raises the next question, about the relative merits of the two works. I'm not an expert taxonomist, but I can recognize a difference of opinion when I see one. Science is done, ultimately, by committee - by a pendulum of progress. "Known Birds", insofar as it is one of man's assessment of distributional ornithology, cannot be the ultimate answer. I don't believe that the author intended it to be, for in a sense it is more a working document that points out what we do NOT know as much as what we do know. The AOU Check-List is likewise a working hypothesis, developed by a keen and experienced corps of ornithologists. "Modern" techniques so opposed by ARP are providing information that is being cautiously and critically assimilated by the AOU committee, yielding insight I believe he is wrong in rejecting.

"Known Birds" thoroughly treats subspecies while the AOU Sixth Edition does not. Right away this provides a reason to buy and study ARP's book. In fairness, it should be pointed out that the AOU intends to publish a treatment of geographical variation and, after all, they got from loons to the end, not just swallows to creepers! AOU relies heavily on sight records, while ARP is reluctant to include many of them. These various differences result in two works that complement each other as much as they clash. They're both essential documents.

Finally, on the questions of "Who is right, ARP or AOU?", I cannot provide an answer. These aren't matters of right and wrong so much as definition of methodology and philosophy. In its completeness and committee approach, the AOU checklist is, at present, the more fundamental reference document and should certainly be owned and constantly consulted by every birder. But "Known Birds" provides insight and, hell, good old fashioned ornithology, on every page. I wouldn't be without it.



## Book Reviews

by Olga Clarke

### Getting Started In Birdwatching (1986)

By Edward W. Cronin, Jr.

This is the first book designed to let the beginning birdwatcher in on the secret of knowing what to look for, how to figure out which birds are likely to be seen at a particular place and time, and which will never be seen there. It tells you how to become a competent birder in the shortest time possible. \$5.95

### Connie Hagar — The Live History of a Texas Birdwatcher

By Karen Harden McCracken, foreword by Roger Tory Peterson

For those of you who knew Connie Hagar, she needs no introduction, but for you who missed the pleasure, you will thoroughly enjoy reading about how she set the elite East Coast ornithologists on their ears as she sighted more and more species the experts claimed she could not possibly have seen. She earned the respect and love of birders from coast to coast as she shared her knowledge and discoveries with all who came to visit her in Rockport, Texas.

Such famed personages as Guy Emerson, Dr. Harry Oberholser, Stuart Keith, Ludlow Griscom, Dorothy Snyder, Richard Pough, Edwin Way Teale, Robert Cushman Murphy, Dale Zimmerman, Irby Davis, Edgar Kincaid, and many others signed in at the Rockport Cottages over the years.

You will delight in reading about this diminutive birdwatcher who gave such insight to the birding world.

\$18.95

### Birder's Life List & Diary (1986)

The *Birder's Life List & Diary* is a must for every birder. Updated to the 6th edition of the A.O.U. Checklist, the revision of this checklist provides space for recording sighting dates, location and remarks for 690 species found regularly in North America, north of Mexico, and 74 Hawaiian species. A listing of 156 accidental species and space for a numbered life list are included. The index functions not only as a locator, but allows for keeping other lists of sighted birds.

6"x9", 192pp, spiral-bound, laminated cover. (Cornell) \$6.95

### State Birds

By Arthur Singer and Alan Singer

A beautiful book illustrating the state birds in color with descriptions and behavior patterns, highlighting the birds' origins, characteristics, and significance, and shown in typical habitats. An excellent gift item. \$14.95

# Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

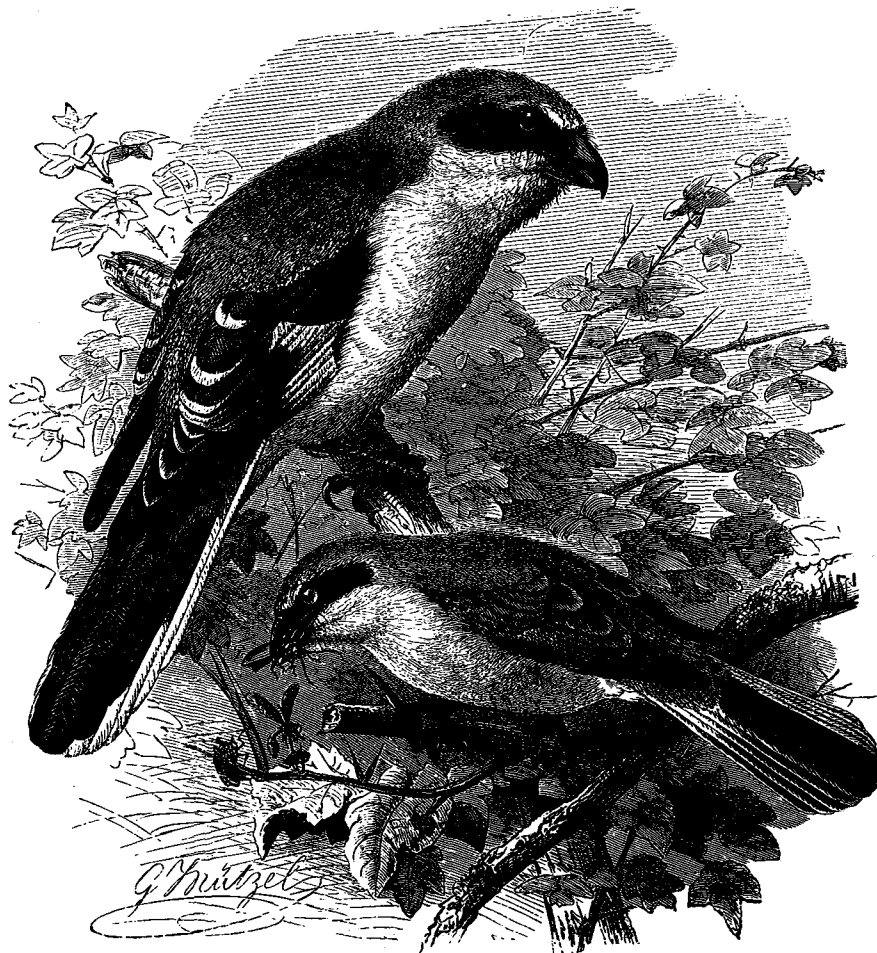


Last midnight, a sleek Cadillac draws up to a large sign planted on the edge of a patch of lush woodland. The sign announces that this is the future home of a commercial/residential complex of staggering proportions. A portly middle-aged man and a well-dressed sexy young woman get out of the front seat and open the trunk. Silent and business-like, they remove cans of gasoline from the car, slosh the volatile fluid liberally on the wooden posts of the sign and set it on fire. As the flames leap up in the darkness their faces show excitement and satisfaction. They drive off. The Monkey Wrench Gang has struck again! The climax of this wild and crazy book (Edward Abbey, 1975) describes the delicious demolition of a huge dam that has destroyed the scenic beauty of the Colorado River.

"The Monkey Wrench Gang" is a hilarious and deadly serious expression of an environmentalist's anger and frustration at the inexorable triumph of greed and bureaucracy over nature. The soul-satisfying chance to fight back, to DO something on an elemental level to stop the juggernaut of development, is a feeling that must be shared by millions of us. We all have murderous fantasies of destroying

our enemies, but despite our reputation as a handgun-happy nation, we rarely act out our anarchic feelings. Yet some of us do. Earth First! is a guerrilla group that drives spikes into trees to ruin chain saws, pours sugar into the fuel tanks of bulldozers, and chains itself to trees marked for harvesting. The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, unlike non-violent Greenpeace, buys old boats and rams whaling vessels to the bottom. Though deplored by responsible environmentalists, this direct action is sympathetic of an agonizing impatience and frustration with writing letters that don't seem to do any good or with politicians and agencies that apparently ignore our pleas.

And yet, an enormous growth of awareness of the threats to America the Beautiful and to the health and lives of the people cannot be denied. Congress just renewed the Clean Water Act, overwhelming Reagan's stubborn veto. Smokers have become furtive and self-conscious outside the sanctuary of their own homes. And anti-abortion Surgeon General is bravely touting condoms to kiddies on national television. Could all this have happened without the explosion of concern that produced remarkable movement of the 60s and 70s?



"Silent Spring," the Wilderness Act, "Earth Day," The Endangered Species Act, Clean Air Act, outlawing DDT, Superfund, EPA and much more. And most of the landmark legislation occurred during the less-than-enthusiastic Nixon Administration. Change was in the air, the powers-that-be got a whiff of it and were carried away on the wind.

It has been suggested at times that the environmental "fad" would pass, that the awakening giant of public concern would curl up and go back to sleep. This has not been the case. All environmental organizations have shown increased membership and wider support. The reactions to the Reagan Administration's attempt to down environmental laws has been powerful. The Environmental Protection Agency's Burford and Interior Secretary Watt were eventually seen as the bad guys and were replaced. Congress, following the opinion of polls, pushed ahead with the public's insistence on a clean place to live, clear skies, pure drinking water. Clean water has become the big issue for most people. The effect of toxic pollution on wells and lakes and underground aquifer storage has aroused the general public like nothing else. The shadowy memory of disease and death at Love Canal and Times Beach are scaring the hell out of a lot of people. Who wants to live near a toxic dump? There is considerable worry that EPA is taking much too long to clean up the dumps under the Superfund law. Action on the state level may well be a product of this feeling. Last November, California voters gave Proposition 65 (the Toxics Initiative) an overwhelming 1.7 million vote margin. This ordered the governor to list chemicals that cause cancer and forbids discharging them into drinking water supplies by November 1988. In Massachusetts, 73% of voters approved an initiative that would clean up hazardous waste sites not covered by Superfund. In New Jersey and New York bond issues to clean up toxics passed by large majorities.

The history of the environmental movement has been one of militant confrontation. The enemy was seen as agencies that were insensitive to the fate of wildlife or giant corporations polluting the air or drinking water. Conservationists still find themselves at sword's point with a Forest Service that destroys virgin wilderness with thousands of miles of logging and mining roads and then sells the timber below cost. Great industries with government backing refuse to recognize the acid rain effect of midwestern smokestacks on Canadian and New England lakes. An adamant Interior Department is determined to encircle our coast with oil rigs, blighting our view and threatening new Santa Barbara-like oil spills. Eternal vigilance is still the price of a lovable world.

But a new phase seems to be in the making. The Environmental Defense Fund



(EDF), a small but potent group of lawyers and scientists, has developed what it feels is a revolutionary concept for the 80s. As its director puts it, "As environmentalists enter a whole new stage . . . those groups that want to survive, prosper, and be effective need to become *solution oriented*." (Emphasis added.) The American public is fed up with environmentalists that walk around saying 'No, don't do this!' We are past the point as a nation where we can afford to have a fraction that is consistently negative."

EDF startled the world of conservation when it approached its arch-enemy of the battle of the Peripheral Canal, the Southern California Metropolitan Water District, with a plan to save water in the Imperial Valley. EDF convinced MWD, which supplies water for 13 million people in southern California, to consider lining irrigation canals in the Imperial Valley to prevent losses of water that seep into the soil. MWD would then buy this "new" water from the Imperial Valley Water District and increase its stock of Colorado Riverwater. EDF, by saving all this water would weaken any renewed demand by agriculture and MWD for another shot at a Peripheral Canal to divert more Sacramento River water. The voters handily defeated the expensive Canal initiative a couple of years ago, but there's no law against trying again.

More recently the fertile minds at EDF have come up with another creative suggestion. They are proposing a scientific investigation of the problems of water quality, particularly of chemical and toxic pollution. It is difficult to get rid of the chlorinated solvents widely used as degreasing agents in many industrial processes: aerospace, adhesives, electronics and textiles. Ordinary consumer dry-cleaning employs many of these same solvents. When drinking water is invaded by these cancer-causing substances wells are shut down, and removing these pollutants is a formidable and expensive job. Rather than wait for a water source to

become contaminated and then attempt to clean up the mess, EDF is proposing a joint effort with MWD to head 'em off at the pass. Much to the delight of EDF, MWD bought the idea almost immediately. The Source Reduction Research Partnership is already under way: a two-year, \$600,000 pilot project in a specific area in southern California. Industries will be approached to consider recycling and recovery of the solvents and the possible use on non-toxic chemicals. An experienced manager had been appointed and the scientific staffs of both organizations are ready to begin. The cost will be shared equally. Nothing of this sort has ever been done before and its success holds great promise for the future nationwide. MWD estimates that source reduction could reduce the volume of toxic solvents in the water supply by 75%.

Is this approach truly the wave of the environmental future? The Monkey Wrench solution, though attractive in a B-Western black hats versus white hats way, is a romantic and dangerous attitude that can only end in dead bodies and prison. Heaven knows there is still much room for legal confrontation. Picketing a nuclear plant may not be genteel, but it takes guts and it helps. Letters to California congressmen protesting oil drilling platforms every few miles along the coast - some of them in wildlife sanctuaries - produced an astonishing united front against the Interior Department. When the National Resources Defense Council scientists disclosed that the foremost drug-testing laboratory was riddled with incompetence and producing phony reports to industry and government, the company collapsed and executives went to prison. These are creative confrontations. The "solution-oriented" tactic of the Environmental Defense Fund is certainly a step upward and will undoubtedly be embraced by other organizations. But all problems cannot be solved by the buddy system.

Perhaps the most significant development in the environmental movement has

been its emergence from a strictly parochial interest to one of international concern. The destruction of rain forests does more than eliminate winter habitats for our North American migrants. An estimated 17,000 species of plants and animals are becoming extinct every year, some before they are even discovered. Massive environmental degradation follows the conversion of forests to meager agriculture and marginal livestock production. Poorly planned dams to provide energy for swollen cities in the Third World are flooding out aboriginal cultures and causing ecological ruin. Environmentalists are looking beyond this bulldozers to confront agencies like the World Bank that lends money for these huge projects without much concern for the consequences. Seemingly esoteric problems exist that might eventually be disastrous for all mankind. The burning of fossil fuels, increasing over time, causes warming of the earth with the strong possibility of climatic change and the disruption of global agriculture. Fluorocarbons in aerosols (shaving creams, deodorants, etc.) are suspected of rising above the earth and destroying the ozone layer that protects us from devastating ultraviolet rays. What is the significance of the high pollution levels found in uninhabited Antarctica?

It's a tough world. Most of the prominent environmental organizations have begun to think globally and are supporting indigenous conservation groups in less-developed countries. As the president of the World Resources Institute has said, "We will build a fool's paradise here in the U.S. if we focus only on *our* problems . . . It would be a huge mistake to continually work to improve environmental quality in the United States . . . and neglect environmental quality and the resource base outside the U.S." The environmental movement is growing up. In time, it is hoped, to save the world.

Reference: *The Christian Science Monitor*, Jan 13, 14, 15, 1987

## CALVIN AND HOBBS By Bill Watterson

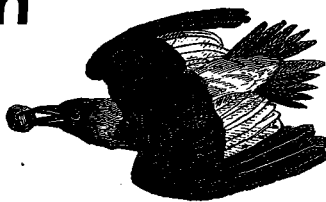
Reprinted from The Los Angeles Times



# Birds Of The Season

## May 1987

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.*

It's easier for us to muster up enthusiasm for predicting the exciting birding events of May than to report on the rather routine, if not downright dreary, birding picture of March. Migrant passerines will be everywhere in May, and late in the month a handful of those encountered will be out of range vagrants, those little feathered shots of adrenalin for birders. Year after year we extoll the virtues of desert oases, the mouths of coastal canyons, and coastal promontories for their productiveness for vagrants, yet annually we report on vagrants at places which do not fall into any of those categories. For example, one of the rarest finds last spring was the male Hooded Warbler at Descanso Gardens near Glendale, hardly an isolated spot. There is a recurring pattern, however, and as trivially obvious as it may be, it is worth repeating. Vagrants are found in well-worked localities, be they back yards, local parks, or desert oases. This can really be extended to a more fundamental statement: regular, repeated, and through coverage of ANY given locality will yield a wealth of interesting ornithological information. We hope this notion will guide you as you plan your birding efforts through the spring and summer.

The bird generating the most interest among southern California birders in February was not in our region, and, in fact, not even in California. This was the adult **Ross's Gull** present at Yaquina Bay, near Newport, Oregon from 18 February through the first of March (Eugene Audubon Society). Several southern Californians made the trek up there, and were rewarded by the sight of this dainty, arctic species. Many of you will recall the overblown publicity of Massachusetts's first Ross's Gull at Newburyport several years ago. Although there have only been a handful of records in the "lower 48" since then, we can now view such occurrences as infrequent, irregular, long-distance vagrancy, hardly front-page news. It would really seem more odd,

to us, if migratory birds DIDN'T occasionally wander far out of range.

The few offshore trips in late February and March were rather routine, but there was at least one highlight - a **Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel** well seen by Charlie Collins, Jon Atwood and numerous others between Port Hueneme and Santa Cruz Island on 2 March. **Black-legged Kittiwakes** have been very scarce this winter, but three were observed in the San Pedro channel on the Natural History Museum pelagic trip (Kimball Garrett, 1 March), and a first-winter bird at Malibu Lagoon was seen to at least 4 March.

An **American White Pelican** was at Buena Vista Lagoon on 14 February (Lorna Bitensky), and Bob Pann and Bob Van Meter estimated up to 4000 birds at the south end of the Salton Sea on 3 March. Three hundred and fifty **Snow Geese** were still in the Unit One area of the south end of the Salton Sea on 3 March (Pann and Van Meter). A sprinkling of **Ross's Geese** included one in Yorba Regional Park, Orange Co., on 8 March (Paul Egen). The male **Eurasian Wigeon** upstream in Tapia Park was seen again on 23 February (Ed Navojosky). Bernard Wilets reports an **Osprey** riding out the 21 March rainstorm in the tall trees at Will Rogers State Park, Pacific Palisades; the bird undoubtedly a migrant, and Bernard has seen migrant Ospreys doing the same thing in past years. The Bobs (Pann and Van Meter) counted 53 **Sandhill Cranes** south of Brawley on 3 March, not to mention 35 **Mountain Plovers** at the south end of the Salton Sea on the same day. Phillip Skonieczki sent us a convincing description of a **Solitary Sandpiper** at the south end of the sea; the bird, seen 15 February, was quite out of season.

The first-winter **Franklin's Gull** continued to play hide-and-seek at Malibu Lagoon through early March. A first-winter **Mew Gull** at Castaic Lake on 22 March (Kimball Garrett) was the third to be seen at that inland locality this winter. A pale "white-winged" gull at Malibu Lagoon through March had many observers thinking (wishing?) Iceland Gull, and though it had almost white primaries and a smaller than average bill, it still seemed to fit comfortably within the range of **Glaucous-winged Gull** (in this reporter's opinion). A **Black Tern** at the Newport Pier on 24 February (Charles Hood) was unusual at

that season, as were two **Common Terns** at Malibu Lagoon on 14 March (Kimball Garrett).

The **Common Gourd-Dove** was still present at the arboretum in Arcadia on 17 March; in Orange County, where the species is more common, three were at Huntington Beach Central Park on 6 March (Rob Hofberg), and five were at Mile Square Park, Fountain Valley, on 13 March (Gayle Benton). Absent, or at least silent, the last couple of winters, the **Whip-poor-will** in Bernard Wilets's Rustic Canyon (Pacific Palisades) neighborhood finally mouthed off 16 March, not to be heard again! Several **Vaux's Swifts** were over Whittier on 11 March, and several more were over Corona the next day (Monte Taylor). These, and a flock of twenty over Elysian Park on 22 March (Kimball Garrett) were undoubtedly wintering birds, as they they were three weeks or so early for spring migrants. Quite out of range was an **Acorn Woodpecker** in Jack Jasper's Torrance yard from 8 February through at least 19 March.

A **Willow Flycatcher** was studied by Phil Sayre, Bert Mull and Jean Brandt at Santa Fe Dam on 14 March, and one would suspect that it was a wintering bird at that early date. However, a **Western Kingbird** on the same date at Malibu Lagoon (Kimball Garrett) was certainly an early spring migrant. **Winter Wrens** were reported from Tujunga Wash (Lou Falb, 22 February) and Walker Ranch, Placerita Canyon (Michael McLaughlin, 14 March). A handful of **Varied Thrush** reports included one at Big Sycamore Canyon on 4 March (Ed Navojosky). The **Brown Thrasher** wintering near Huntington Beach Central park was present to at least 15 March (Brian Daniels). A first for Orange County was a **Grace's Warbler** on a private golf course in Newport Beach (Brian Daniels, 21 February); it is certainly only a matter of time until somebody finds one wintering in a grove of pines on the coastal slope of Los Angeles County! The wintering **Painted Redstart** on Pt. Loma, San Diego, was still present on 14 March.

**Western Tanagers** continue to winter in increasing numbers in coastal southern California, e.g. two in Canoga Park on 19 February (Wanda Conway), and one outside Jean Brandt's office window in Exposition Park in mid-March. Shortly after moving to Encino, Lloyd Kiff inaugurated his yard with a Black-and-white Warbler in the bird bath; now a male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** has made it onto the list, appearing in the yard on 8 March. **Gray-headed Juncos** were found at Malibu Creek State Park (Irwin Woldman, 25 February) and Temescal Canyon, Pacific Palisades (Rob Hofberg, 28 February). **Lawrence's Goldfinches** were beginning to appear in the region by early March, as indicated by Allen Keller's sighting of several birds at Chatsworth Park South and O'Melveny Park.

# First North American Record For the Blue-breasted Quail

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

Rarely does the birdwatcher have the opportunity to make a new contribution to the avifauna of North America. Exceptions to this statement may, perhaps, be made by participants on Aphesis Tours, Trails or similar groups in the Aleutians. Thus, it is with considerable humility (refer Mack Davis: Oh, Lord . . .) that I report the presence of a Blue-breasted Quail (*Coturnix chinensis fide de Schauensee*, 1984:pp:181,201) in north Claremont, Los Angeles County, on March 3, 1987. My was I excited!

The bird was captured by a local resident. His wife called me to identify the bird, probably due to my large life list (less than 2700). It was described as a young California Quail. I was immediately on the alert as Fred Heath had not listed any quail as breeding in Los Angeles County at this time of year (See Heath, F. 1987. *W. Tan.* 53(6):9). Little did I realize what a find was in store for me and the birding world!

A description of the bird is as follows: general body color, a silver grey. Length: 3+ inches (76mm). Chin white with a grey chin strap. Tail feathers short and worn. These last characteristics are important with regards to the matter of human interference or aid in transportation.

These quail, sometimes referred to as buttonquail by the uninformed, have little power for flight so that the means by which this bird made it to California from China must be explained.

It is well known fact that there is a jet stream moving from west to east from the Asian continent, the native home of this species. It is also known that the Chinese have the bomb and have been carrying out tests in the forbidden areas of northern China i.e. Inner Mongolia et al.

The logical supposition is that this bird was caught in the updraught of the test, caught in the jet stream and deposited a couple of days later in Claremont, along with the radioactive fallout. Extensive prior fallout in this area may explain the change in position of Claremontians on the 210 freeway extension through this suburban community.

A question has been raised about the survival of the bird during this period due to lack of food. This query may have been answered by the relatively large size of the crop in the gallinaceous birds allowing the storage of large quantities of seed. Rice is a common seed found within the normal range of this species. Certainly, the endothermic ability of birds to maintain body temperature during low temperatures is well established.

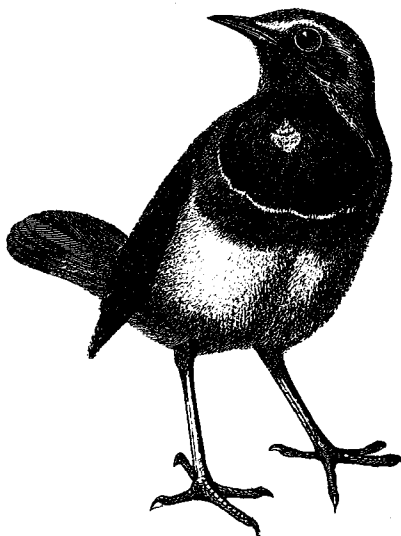
The exposure to radiation also explains the silvergray color. Strong radiation has a bleaching effect (indeed, blanching!), a fact noted in certain blood cells in humans. Surely, the worn tail feathers would indicate a not-too-pleasant ride in the jetstream.

The behavior of the bird also indicates its area of origin. The Claremont resident, who wishes to remain anonymous so as not to be overcome by birders rushing to the shrine, i.e. site, of capture, was working in his garage when the bird approached.

To prevent the bird from being caught in one of his mouse traps (mice are a endemic in this area), he placed a cage with bird seed in it near the bird. Obviously hungry and used to kind treatment by the natives in its country of origin, the bird almost immediately went into the cage allowed the door to be closed. Its reluctance to enter immediately is attributed to the different composition of the mix of bird seed used as bait as being different as that found in rural China. No pictures of the bird were taken as they might be used as propaganda on both sides of the nuclear arms issue. It is also regrettable that the specimen disappeared overnight and that the suspected cat slept all the next day.

The facts are irrefutable. all questions raised by the American Birding Association (see almost any issue of *Birding*) have been answered fully and completely. The birds arrival in North America was an accidental occurrence. No wise bird would intentionally get caught in an H-bomb blast.

Additional records of this species may be forthcoming. Evidence of nesting activities in Los Angeles County should be forwarded to the Editor. Unfortunately, this record occurred too late to included in the April issue. Action by the California Bird Records Committee of the Western Field Ornithologists is not expected in the near future.

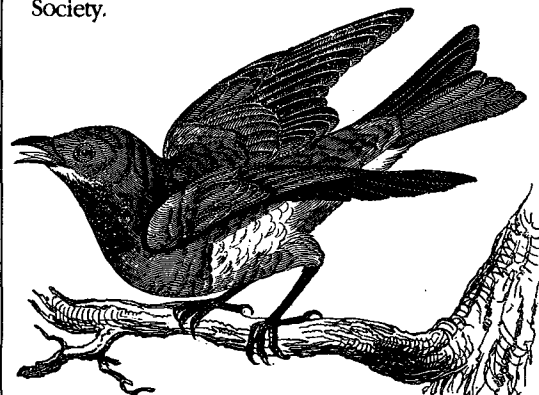


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The National Audubon Society is computerized through the Neodata Company in Boulder, Colorado, so it is no longer advisable to renew through the Los Angeles Audubon Society. The only advantage in renewing through the Los Angeles Audubon Society is if your membership has lapsed. At that time it would expedite receiving the next Western Tanager.

Neodata has a system of sending multiple notices commencing four months prior to your membership lapses. Frequently, there is an overlap from the time you mailed your dues and the next scheduled renewal reminder. Many people have received notices after they have remitted their dues because of this.

Subscribers who are members of another Audubon Chapter should not send their renewals to the Los Angeles Audubon Society.



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# ANNOUNCEMENTS

May 1987

## **EVENING MEETINGS** **Meet at 8:00 pm in Plummer Park**

**TUESDAY, May 12 — Arnold Small** will present **Birds and Beasts at the Bottom of the World**, the bird and mammals of Antarctica. Well known as a photographer, teacher and author, Dr. Small is also a past president of LAAS and the American Birding Association. He has made numerous trips to the Antarctic and travelled extensively in the region. His vivid photographs of the abundant wildlife in the starkly beautiful landscape of this area of the world will illustrate the program. Mark your Calendar!

King Penguin



Photographs by Arnold Small



Southern Elephant Seal

**TUESDAY, JUNE 8 — Gene Cardiff**, Curator of Ornithology at the San Bernardino County Museum will speak on **The Birds of Baja California and the Sea of Cortez**.

**Identification Workshop**, from 7:30 to 8:00 pm, will precede the regular program, please check the tape (874-1318) for details.

## **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, MAY 2 — Jean Brown** will lead a morning walk through the beautiful California Sycamores of **Placerita Canyon**. This is a lovely place with steep canyon walls and a babbling brook. Take the 5 Frwy. North to the 14 (Antelope Valley Frwy) and get off at Placerita Canyon Rd. Meet at the nature center at 8 a.m.

**SUNDAY, MAY 3 —** 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.

**MONDAY, MAY 4 — Ojai Loop Trip.** Join **Guy and Louise Commeau** in search of riparian species and migrants along the Ventura River

riparian area: Hutton's Vireos and other oak woodland birds in the valley's magnificent Live Oak stands and a wide variety of other stops including Matilija Lake and Lake Casitas. Go north on 101 then turn inland on Rte. 33 exiting at Foster Park. Meet beyond the bridge of the Ventura River in park. Bring lunch and plan to carpool. Camping available at Foster Park. 8 a.m.

**SATURDAY, MAY 9 — Morongo Valley Refuge — David Koeppel** will lead a walk through this wonderful Nature Conservancy refuge. We will search for specialties such as Lucy's Warbler, Brown-crested and Vermilion Flycatchers, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak and many migrants. Take Hwy. 10 East to Hwy. 62; go North 10 miles to park sign (in the town of Morongo Valley) and turn right to Covington Park. Meet at 7:30 a.m. near Park Rec. Center. Bring lunch. Camping/Motels available in Yucca Valley. Approx. 3 hours from L.A.

**SUNDAY, MAY 10 —** Meet **Zus Haagen-Smit** for a special morning walk through the magnificent gardens of the **Huntington Library**. You'll be privileged to walk and bird the garden before the place opens to the public. (In the past this has been run as a reservation trip, this time it's all comers.) Meet at the Oxford Rd. entrance. Take Frwy. 110 North till it becomes the Arroyo Pkwy. continue North to California Blvd. turn East (R) through Pasadena. Take Allen

Ave. South (R) to Orlando Rd. Turn East (L) to Oxford Rd. This goes to the entrance. On a map look for the town of San Marino. Say the secret password "Audubon" and the guard will let you in. 8 a.m.

**SUNDAY, MAY 17 —** Join **Wanda Conway** and **Rusty Scalf** for a birding hike at **O'Melveny Park** and **Bee Canyon** just above Granada Hills in the N. San Fernando Valley. Valley residents ought especially become acquainted with this lovely park and trail. Take either the 5 or 405 North to the 118 and then go West. Get off at Balboa Blvd. and go North. Follow the signs to O'Melveny Park. Meet at parking lot at 7:30 a.m.

**SATURDAY, MAY 23 —** Join **Rusty Scalf** for a visit to **Chilao** at 5000 ft. in the Angeles National Forest (or as proposed, Ronald Reagan National Forest). Chilao is a beautiful open park-like Ponderosa Pine area home to many mountain birds including a good population of White-headed Woodpeckers. We will visit several bluebird nestboxes which should be full of hungry young. Last year all of the 13 boxes contained an active nest (Titmice and Pygmy Nuthatches as well). Take the 210 Frwy. to the Angeles Crest Hwy. (2) and plan on an hour's drive through the mountains to the Chilao Visitors Center just off the Hwy. on the left. 8 a.m.

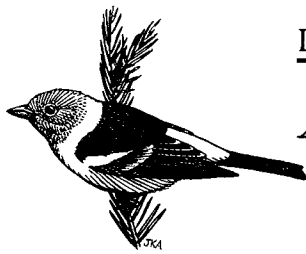
**SATURDAY, JUNE 6 —** Join **Jean Brown** for a walk through **Santa Anita Canyon**. This canyon is one of the loveliest birding spots in Los Angeles County. (As an adolescent the Canyon gave me one of my most memorable days with the 'life' Black Swift, Purple Martin and a day of pure magic.) Take the 210 Frwy to Santa Anita Ave. going North. This straight N-S Avenue eventually becomes the twisty, windy Santa Anita Canyon Rd. Go all the way to the end at Chantry Flats and park. Bring lunch and hiking shoes. 8 a.m.

**SUNDAY, JUNE 7 —** **Jerry Haigh** at **Topanga State Park**. See May 3 trip for details.

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**Continued on page 4.**



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MAY, 1987

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