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La Selva – Ecuador's New Amazon Birding Destination

by Hank Brodkin

On March 15, 1988, our T.A.M.E. turboprop dropped from the Ecuadorian Andes down to the Amazon Basin, our favorite part of the world. My wife and I were on our way to La Selva, the new forest lodge of California writer Eric Schwartz. We landed on the bank of the Rio Napo at Puerto San Francisco de Orellano, nicknamed "Coca". Coca is a typical river town of the Amazon Basin, its population swollen by the oil industry. It is quite a way downstream from the legendary Limoncocha birding area. We wondered what birds we would find in this practically unworked region.

From Coca we embarked in a large motorized dugout canoe. For two hours we sped, spray cooled, to a dock on the north bank of the river. A palmwood boardwalk through forest swamp brought us to Garzacocha (Heron Lake) in a setting like a botanical garden. As we were paddled out onto the large lake (the proprietor of the lodge allows no motors on this cocha), a **Black-capped Donacobius** (Mocking-thrush) scolded us from the shrubbery.

An **Osprey** made a futile swoop at a fish; a pair of **Swallow-tailed Kites** dipped down to drink from the surface of the lake. **Red-capped Cardinals** and various **neotropical flycatchers** and **swallows** fed on the abundant insect life along the shore. We looked at each other. "I feel like I'm coming home," Priscilla said.

The lodge complex sits on a knoll at the lake's shore. Twin circular buildings, the lounge and dining hall, dominate the La Selva complex. They are connected by walkways to the dozen or so cabins. It all fits nicely into the forest surroundings. Eric Schwartz, the founder of this lodge, met us at the dock. He and his multi-national staff were charming hosts and proved to be excellent naturalists and guides.

At lunch Eric told us an interesting story of bird behavior. **Cuvier's Toucans** had been raiding the hanging nests of a large colony of **Yellow-rumped Cacique**. A baby cacique, dislodged during one of the raids, fell near the kitchen. Luche, one of the cooks, took the bird in and fed it. Luche reported that later, when the youngster fluttered down to the ground, four adult birds flew down under the baby and manipulated it up into the nest tree.

In the late afternoon Isabel and Cynthia guided us along the trail to beautiful Mandicocha, a small lake of clear water ringed by water hyacinths and a species of small spiny palm. **Violaceous Jays**, **Purple-throated Fruitcrows** and **Scarlet Macaws** were among the birds feeding in the fruiting trees along this trail. At Mandicocha's shore, **Pale-vented Pigeons** flew back and forth, and flocks of **Eastern Kingbirds** joined a few **Fork-tailed Flycatchers** in the treetops. The common lakeside flycatchers—**Tropical Kingbirds**, **Sulphury** and **Social Flycatchers**, and **Greater** and **Lesser Kiskadees**—were active in the late afternoon light. **Wattled Jacanas**, **Purple** and **Azure Gallinules**, and **Black-capped Donacobii** skulked in the water hyacinths. We watched a **Rufescent Tiger-Heron** slink into the spiny palms and disappear. The sunset over this enchanted body of water was magnificent. We agreed to come back early the next morning to paddle a canoe around the cocha and down the Mandiyacu to the Napo. (Yacu is "stream" and cocha is "lake" in Quichua.)

Nothing prepared us for the spectacle in the morning. As the sun started to rise over Garzacocha, the air was filled with the squawks of dozens of **Red-bellied Macaws** and **Mealy Parrots**. The Mauritia Palms in back of the lodge were in fruit and these parrots were in a feeding frenzy. Close by was a pair of **Black Caracaras**. On the Rio Apoporis in Colombia I have seen these falcons associating with woolly monkey troops. I would venture to guess that this species feeds on fruit opened, then dropped, by monkeys and parrots—fruit too hard-shelled for the Caracara to open.

We paddled around Mandicocha studying the numerous **Greater Anis** and



Hoatzins. As we made our way along the water hyacinths we flushed a small tan bittern with black stripes on its back—and none of the contrasting black-and-ochre colors of the Least Bittern. **Stripe-backed Bittern!** Our first full day at this place and already we had found a bird never before reported from Ecuador! The bittern flew a short distance, then dropped back into the hyacinths. We saw the bird several times during our stay, but could not get a photograph.

We made our way down the Mandiyacu. **Silvered** and **Plumbeous Antbirds** along the edge responded to an imitation of a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, as did a **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl**. A **Sungrebe** swam before us. Cynthia pointed to a large wasp nest hanging on some branches low over the water. "Marching wasps. Listen!" she said, as she rapped one of the supporting branches with her paddle. A rather loud rhythmic sound, like the marching of a tiny army, emanated from the nest.

We came to the house and garden of Jose Jualinga, who, from the following day on, was to be our constant birding companion and guide. Jose, one of the Qui-

chuas who live along this part of the Napo, really knows the birds! According to Eric, the indigenous Indians of the area left for some unknown reason—probably in pre-Columbian times. Over the years, the Quichuas filtered down from the Andes. They live in loosely-federated “communes” somewhat tribal in nature, but have been in contact with the so-called civilizing influences of the region for some time.

After lunch we relaxed on our cabin porch and watched **Black-billed Thrushes** feed newly-fledged young. Some of the more interesting birds seen at the lodge during our stay included **Blue-and-Yellow Macaw**; **Variable, Chestnut-bellied and Black-and-White Seedeaters**; **Lesser Seedfinch**; **Green-and-Gold Tanager**; **Yellow-billed Dacnis**; **Chestnut Woodpecker**; **Straight-billed Woodcreeper**; **Greater Yellow-headed Vultures** and an occasional **King Vulture** overhead.

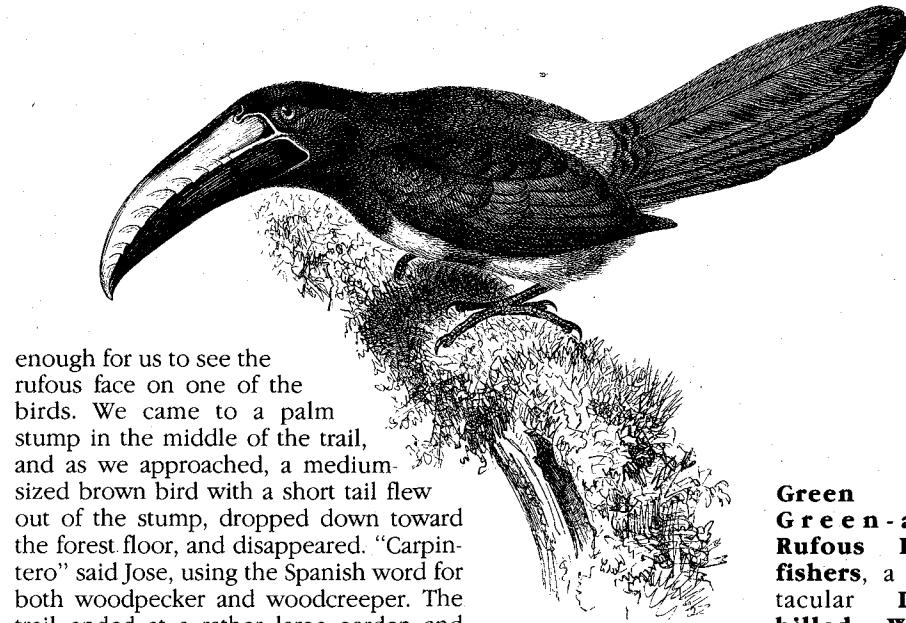
In the late afternoon we heard a song that might have belonged to an anthrush of the *Chaemeza* genus—a genus that we had heard often in many parts of northern South America, but had never seen. I used up the last of the daylight trying to find the persistent vocalist. Although I got as close as eight feet, I saw nothing! Both Jose and Hilty and Brown's *Birds of Columbia* say that the *Chaemeza* here should be the **Striated anthrush**.

We returned to the cocha at dusk. Numerous bats of various sizes were hawking insects above the water. A **Bat Falcon** with a bat in its talons flew by.

The following days were spent birding the nearby habitats. We crossed the Napo to see the salada (salt lick) on a bluff over the river, where we were treated to a fantastic sight. Hundreds of parrots in the following order of abundance blanketed the bluff: **Mealy Parrot**, **Dusky-headed Parakeet**, **Blue-headed Parrot** and **Yellow-crowned Parrot**.

On the hilly trail near the salada, a mid-level bird party featured **Fasciated Antshrike**, **White-flanked Antwren** and **Chestnut-winged Hookbill**. In the undergrowth were **Cinereous Antshrike** and **Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner**. **Red-stained Woodpecker** and **Ocellated Woodcreeper** worked the bare branches. We came to a stream with many animal tracks—peccary, tapir and capybara. A **Golden-green Woodpecker** tapped overhead, and a **Lawrence's Thrush**, perhaps the western hemisphere's best mimic, was heard from a nearby tree. A **Maroon-tailed Parakeet** flew up from the water. Off the trail, we got a good look at a **Slaty-backed Forest-Falcon**, while a **Musician Wren** serenaded us with its haunting song.

We went again on the trail to the Napo to look for the Striated Anthrush. A pair of **Marbled Wood-Quail** flushed close



enough for us to see the rufous face on one of the birds. We came to a palm stump in the middle of the trail, and as we approached, a medium-sized brown bird with a short tail flew out of the stump, dropped down toward the forest floor, and disappeared. “Carpintero” said Jose, using the Spanish word for both woodpecker and woodcreeper. The trail ended at a rather large garden and house on the Napo. Parrots, toucans, aracaris and barbets fed in the trees. On the way back, as we passed the palm stump, the bird flushed again. “That is not a carpintero,” Jose said in Spanish, “that is the bird you are looking for!” We thrashed about in the undergrowth to no avail; the Striated Anthrush would have to wait for another day.

Sometimes in the late afternoon we would take a dugout along the shore of Garzacocha. On one trip we saw a kingbird that looked different from the numerous Tropical Kingbirds. This bird had a pure white throat that met an intense yellow breast, instead of a gray throat blending into the breast, characteristic of the race of Tropical Kingbird here. Also, the head was a much paler gray and the call was clear, not wheezy. I am convinced we saw a **White-throated Kingbird**—a bird reported in Ecuador only once before, at Limoncocha (Robert Ridgely, personal communication). Some intensely-red **Masked Crimson Tanagers** and a **Ladder-tailed Nightjar** could be counted on near the outflow of the cocha.

The palm walkway toward the river yielded some interesting species. Once after a rain shower **Spot-winged Antbirds**, **Collared Trogons**, **Chestnut-eared Aracaris** and a **Blue-throated Piping-Guan** were seen. Here too, we watched two tayras, large members of the weasel family, hissing angrily at each other—or was it love?

Our most exciting day was spent on an excursion to Panacocha and its yacu, about two hours down river. When we arrived at the mouth of the Panayacu there was enough cloud cover to keep the birds active. There are some cabins and gardens along the lower reaches of the yacu, but virgin forest was not far beyond. Birds were numerous. A partial list would include **Crested and Russet-backed Oropendolas**, **Black-fronted Nunbirds**, **White-cheeked Jacamars**, **Ringed, Amazon,**

Green and Green-and-Rufous Kingfishers, a spectacular **Long-billed Woodcreeper**, a **Double-toothed Kite** and an **Ivory-billed Aracari**. Suddenly Fausto, our motorista, let out a yell, shifted the outboard engine into reverse and pointed up a large riverside tree. There, some fifty feet up on a horizontal limb was a **Harpy Eagle**, largest bird of prey in the world. This immense raptor looked disdainfully down at us as if to ask, “What the hell are you looking at?” Like the jaguar, this bird is a symbol of the unspoiled lowland rain forests that we love so well and that are disappearing so fast. After studying us for awhile, the eagle launched itself into the forest, revealing the black patch on its upper breast.

At a stop along the yacu, we walked into the forest to trace down the cricket-like call of a tiny (2.9-inch) **Short-tailed Pygmy-Tyrant**. We found it without much trouble. Thus, in the space of an hour, we had seen both the world's largest eagle and what may be the world's smallest passerine. In the beautiful Panacocha, birds for some reason seemed scarce. We were able to see a **Barn Swallow**, a **Lettered Aracari**, an extremely handsome male **Scarlet-crowned Barbet** and a **Cocoi Heron**.

The morning of our last full day at La Selva found us going across the Napo with Jose—again to bird the high trail near the salada. Rain clouds threatened. After a dull hour or so of birding, we could hear the rain start on the canopy above us. Suddenly Jose stopped and pointed with his machete. There just off the trail on a stump—its streaked underparts plainly visible—was a **Striated Anthrush**! Then the rain came down with a vengeance—and ended our last day's birding.

One final note about books for the area. We cannot say enough good things about Hilty and Brown's *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. The few birds not reported from Colombia but seen in Amazonian Ecuador are covered by notes. I have used this guide in Amazonian Colombia also. It is the best!

Mono Lake Alert



Mono Lake, a large salty lake at about 6,400 feet in the Eastern Sierra, is at a crisis now. It supports millions of migratory waterbirds, but maybe not much longer. In 1941 the city of Los Angeles began diverting water from the streams tributary to Mono Lake. The loss of water has lowered the surface and increased the salinity of Mono Lake so that the entire ecosystem is near collapse. There is also air pollution from alkali dust, wind-blown off the exposed lakebed.

Two studies (one last year by the National Academy of Sciences, and a report this year to the State Legislature) foresee serious damage in 1989 if Los Angeles continues to export Mono Basin water at its accustomed rate. The algae, the base of the food chain, will decline if the lake's salinity increases. The brine shrimp and brine flies, which depend on the algae, are also at the limit of their salt tolerance. The birds in turn feed on the shrimp and flies. The lake's level now is at 6378 feet. The latest study establishes 6382 feet as the minimum level at which the ecosystem can be protected in the long run. A "level of 6372 feet sacrifices substantial portions of gull habitat . . . and adversely affects the breeding biology of plovers." Lower levels are extremely dangerous to the ecosystem.

It is not safe to assume that the migrating birds, deprived of food and habitat, can relocate successfully. California gulls, which nest there, will become easy prey when the nesting islands form land bridges to the mainland. Eleven percent of California's Snowy Plovers nest at Mono Lake; their productivity is threatened. The lake is a critical feeding and molting area for 750,000 Eared Grebes, 30% of the world's population. Likewise 80,000 Wilson's Phalaropes and 60,000 Red-necked Phalaropes depend on the lake in their migrations.

Audubon Society, which has a great interest in Mono Lake, sent members a small "Mono Lake Alert," late in October. The alert urges Audubon members collectively to write thousands of letters to comment on plans for the Mono Lake basin. The U.S. Forest Service's draft management plan for the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area was released in September; it is now open for public comment before adoption of a final plan. A good plan could lead to **permanent protection** for both Mono Lake and the

millions of migratory waterbirds that depend on it for survival. After Audubon's "Mono Lake Alert," the Forest Service extended the comment period by thirty days. Comments on the Draft Comprehensive Management Plan must reach the Forest Supervisor in Bishop by January 19, 1989. Your letter could play an important part in protecting a vital resource.

The Forest Service has studied several alternative plans for managing the Mono Basin. They are designated by five abbreviations as: INT ("interpretive" facilities), AMN ("amenities"), CUR ("current" practices), DEV ("developed" recreation), and PRO ("protection").

The Forest Service recommends the INT alternative. The Mono Lake Committee (an independent organization, not an organ of Audubon Society) has studied the Forest Service's plans in detail; it favors the AMN plan. The Committee has provided much of the information in this article. If any one wishes to do original research, Audubon House has requested a copy of the Draft Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for its library.

INT, which the Forest Service has preferred, would provide interpretive facilities and would favor wildlife & visual values. It calls for the lake to be maintained at a level between 6390 - 6377 feet. The Mono Lake Committee objects that this plan leads to too much development too quickly. It provides for extensive paths and new roads, which would produce greater impacts on the lake from visitor traffic. The net effect may be irreversible and unacceptable impacts on the Scenic Area's natural values. Although interpretation is an important educational tool, it should not be emphasized at the expense of sensitive natural values.

AMN is favored by the Mono Lake Committee. AMN is preferred because the projected lake level is higher (6390 - 6380), salinity levels are lower, air quality problems (blowing alkali dust) are reduced, and it affords greater insurance against the lake falling too low in series of dry years. This plan also provides highest stream flow for restoration of riparian habitat and fisheries within the scenic area. CUR, the current management practices, amount to taking no action. Water levels of 6385 - 6372 are too low to protect lake.

DEV, the most intense development of recreation and interpretive facilities, doesn't provide enough protection for wildlife and scenic values. The lake level would be 6390 - 6384.

PRO (protection) allows natural processes to shape and form the Scenic Area, but does nothing to enhance wildlife and vegetation resources. The projected lake level of 6390 - 6370 is too low to protect the lake.

Letters are urgently needed to support the Forest Service position on water levels,

and to urge adoption of AMN rather than INT. There are several important issues in each of the management plans:

WATER - This is the most important issue for Mono Lake, but it is also not directly under the Forest Service's control. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power must first leave more water in the streams. This has been the point of a long legal fight, which is not yet over, but the Forest Service's plan should have significant influence in resolving the problem. Letters might praise the Forest Service for its commitment to preserving Mono Lake at a viable water level and to rewatering Mono Basin streams. Ask the Forest Service to maintain Mono Lake in the upper reaches of the AMN lake level range of 6390 - 6380 to provide an adequate buffer against dry years when the lake will shrink. (The Mono Lake Committee recommends a management level of 6388.) The higher lake level is vital to the Committee's wet year, dry year water plan, whereby L.A. would divert water only in dry years when it may not have alternative water supplies readily available. Request in your letter that the Forest Service do everything possible to obtain the lake levels of the AMN plan.

RECREATION AND INTERPRETATIVE FACILITIES - The familiar environmental conflict is between Mono's wilderness values and intensive recreational development. The Forest Services will soon construct a \$4,300,000 Visitors' Center for the Mono Basin Scenic Area. It could be used as a focal point of interpretive activities without creation of activities in new areas. You might also ask that the Forest Service close roads that are redundant or that provide access to sensitive areas.

PLANT COMMUNITIES - The Forest Service does plan to monitor and protect sensitive plant species. Request that it also place the highest priority on the maintenance and enhancement of all native plant communities.

RIPARIAN - Ask the Forest Service to eliminate grazing from the scenic area by closing allotments as permits expire.

WILDLIFE - The Forest Service plans for healthy and diverse wildlife populations. Maintenance and enhancement of wildlife populations should have highest priority in the Forest Service's plans.

Write to Dennis Martin, Forest Supervisor, Inyo National Forest, 873 N. Main, Bishop, CA 93514. (619) 873-5841 (There is also a public hearing January 7, at 2:00 in the American Legion Hall in Lee Vining.)



Conservation Conversation

Sandy Wohlgemuth



It seems that greenhouses are the in concept this year. How does a greenhouse work, anyway? After scrabbling around in my kids' 25-year-old World Book and a 40-year-old dust-laden physics text, I found the answer in the dictionary. Visible and ultraviolet solar radiation zooms through the greenhouse glass, stimulating plants to manufacture their food. Some of these powerful short rays bounce off whatever is inside and pass back through the glass. But light that is absorbed by plants and things inside the greenhouse produces heat, which is low-frequency light called infrared. The infrared heat rays can't pass through the glass, are trapped inside, and the greenhouse gets hot. Like your car when it sits out in the sun with the windows closed.

A slight detour to review our high school biology. In photosynthesis green plants use the energy of light to make carbohydrates: they take the hydrogen from water and combine it with carbon dioxide from the air. Oxygen, as a waste product, is released as part of this miraculous chemistry. Cellulose is a carbohydrate; the wood in a tree is a carbon warehouse. The burning of wood and fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas) releases carbon dioxide to the atmosphere again.

Each year—worldwide—28 million acres of tropical forests are destroyed for fuel, cattle ranching and food production. Commercial logging elsewhere takes 11 million acres more. This massive depletion of stored carbon in trees releases the carbon as carbon dioxide when the wood burns or decays. The combustion of fossil fuels added to this tree-bound carbon creates a vast invisible cloud of carbon dioxide that forms the "glass" in our global greenhouse. So not only are we increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere with our timber-cutting, at the same time we are crippling our life-support system: the oxygen generated by all those trees.

Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is like the glass in the greenhouse; it traps infrared radiation in the atmosphere, not letting heat escape into space. Up to a point that's good. If the heat kept on going into space, we'd all freeze to death. As we all know now, for the last hundred years or so we've cooked up too much of a good thing by pumping more and more carbon dioxide into the air. Scientists have been warning us for some time that if we continued to burn wood and fossil fuels at an ever-increasing rate, the temperature

of the entire globe would get warmer. Not too many of us were taking it seriously. It seemed pretty far out—maybe it was right and maybe not; were we being scared by some crackpot theory? Well, the evidence is piling up now that those scientists could be right. The level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased by 25% since 1860; from 1958 to 1987 alone it has gone up by 10%! In 50 to 75 years the average temperature of the earth may increase by 3 to 9 degrees Fahrenheit according to our scientific prophets.

At first glance that might not seem too bad. If our northern states begin to approach the climate of southern California—good for them. But these climatic changes could be overwhelming for most of us. Although a longer growing season could increase food production in northern states and Canada, the rest of the lower 48 states may suffer from erratic patterns of extended drought, intolerable heat and profound loss of water. Adapting to these incredible changes will take new irrigation and drainage systems, new crops that will survive the new climate—and vast amounts of money.

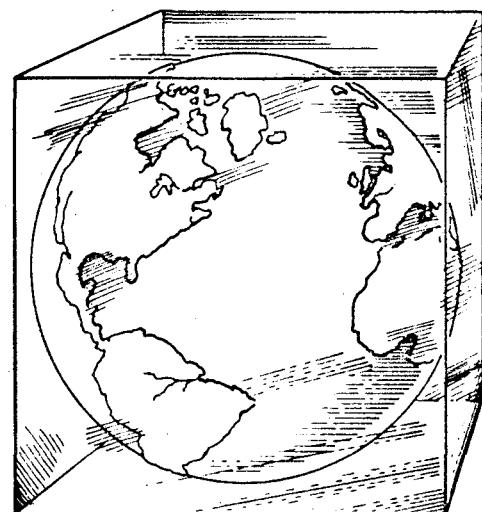
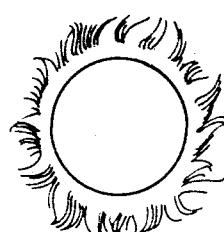
Has the Greenhouse Effect really begun? In June 1988, James Hansen, head of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, told a Senate committee, "The rate of global warming in the past two decades has been higher than at any earlier time in the record." He went on to say, "the four warmest years in the past century all have occurred in the eighties . . . the first five months of 1988 are so warm globally that we conclude [that this year] will be the warmest on record." Since that predic-

tion in June, intense heat waves around the world, the drought-induced crop failures in the United States and some other countries, and the incredible shrinking of the Mississippi River illustrate Mr. Hansen's theory with a vengeance.

Local drought and heat are only part of our problem. The science-fiction plot is even more bizarre and catastrophic. Warming of the atmosphere will melt glaciers and the polar icecaps, causing the oceans to expand and rise. Rising sea level will flood the coastal cities of the world and produce unbelievable calamity. Populations will have to be relocated to higher ground. Cities will be abandoned or giant dikes will have to be built to save them.

As we have been told many times, the ruthless attack on tropical rain forests is playing havoc with their plants and animals. In the next century loss of habitat may result in the extinction of more than 100 species *a day*, a terrifying prospect. Particularly sobering is not just the estimated loss of new medicines and new food sources, but the human arrogance that would permit the disappearance of thousands of plants and animals that have taken millions of years to achieve an exquisite harmony with their environment.

The question before the house is: what are we going to do about it? This has been a tough year for optimists. We seem to have been given a gift subscription to a diabolical "Disaster-of-the-Month Club". At the moment we're entangled in "Radon in My Home Sweet Home". Last month's blockbuster was "Greenhouse Gaieties". A bit earlier we were scared to death by "The Hole in the Ozone Layer". When the ducks in the Kesterson National Wildlife Refuge hatched with one wing and three legs, we were treated to "The Selenium Murder Case". Most of us still get goose-bumps when we're reminded of Chernobyl or the Bhopal chemical explosion, of acid rain destroying lakes and forests in New England and Germany.



Sixty-five million years ago some unexplained catastrophe wiped out all of the dinosaurs and many other forms of life. *Homo sapiens* had nothing to do with it, it was before our time. Unfortunately, the responsibility for all of the perils listed above belong to us. Our ignorance, our blindness to consequences, our insularity, our political disunity have enabled the world to head down the road to hell in a hand basket. For a hundred years and more we have been preparing our own grave, until recently quite unaware of our plight. Now, slowly, the word is getting around. Not only scientists but governments are beginning to move. The recent Montreal conference on the ozone problem was a start in the effort to cut back production of CFCs (Chlorofluorocarbons e.g. the coolants in refrigerators and air conditioners), the industrial gases that destroy the protective layer in the stratosphere. Feeble and inadequate as it was, like the INF treaty on missiles, it was a first step. President Reagan, who for years has resisted significant action on acid rain, agreed in August to freeze nitrogen oxide emissions to 1987 levels. Though freezing is hardly cutting down on pollution (sulfur dioxide was not even mentioned) his action for the first time recognizes the problem. The Brazilian government, feeling international pressure on its headlong drive to "civilize" the Amazon, conceded that it ought to be a little more concerned.

Returning to our greenhouse, a partial solution has been offered. The World Watch Institute, a small but highly influential environmental think-tank, suggests: plant billions of trees. Deforestation, especially in poor Third World countries has had a devastating consequence. Where two-thirds of the people in these countries use wood to cook their food and heat their homes, the scarcity of trees has meant that women and children spend between 100 and 300 days a year gathering wood. Trees hold the soil in place, they help the soil retain moisture, they form a forest cover that benefits both man and wildlife. When trees disappear rain runs off the hard ground, removing valuable topsoil and reducing productivity to the point of desertification.

An all-out planting program would restore wildlife habitat and provide wood for construction and fuel. Though people would be motivated by the immediate goal of firewood and more wood for building, the world would ultimately gain from the capture of carbon and the release of oxygen. Can this be done on the scale that is needed? We won't know unless it's tried. As a matter of fact, here and there it *has* been tried with moderate success. International relief agencies like CARE have stimulated a great deal of reforestation. The National Council of Women of Kenya has recruited thousands of farmers and half a million school children to plant two

million trees. China and India have set national agendas to greatly increase their forests—again by using native labor, the people who will benefit directly. If the advanced countries could supply the money and the expertise, planting trees in their own disturbed areas as well as in the poor nations, miracles might be wrought.

In a recently televised conversation, Bill Moyers asked Isaac Asimov, the eminent scientific philosopher, what he would say if the next president asked him to write his inaugural speech. What would be his one main point? Asimov said (and I

paraphrase), "Our world is in grave danger. The frightful environmental crises cannot be solved by one nation, however rich and powerful. Only global, international cooperation can save the ozone layer, the rain forests, the lakes, rivers and oceans poisoned by acid rain and toxic dumping. If the human race cannot agree to work together to cure these terminal illnesses we may not survive."

Source: *World Watch*, Volume 1, No. 5, Sept-Oct 1988, pp. 29-36

Area Classrooms to Participate in Audubon Adventures

The Los Angeles Audubon Society is pleased to announce that nearly one hundred classrooms in the Los Angeles area will be participating in the 1988-89 *Audubon Adventures* program.

Audubon Adventures is a widely acclaimed, environmental education program developed by the National Audubon Society for students in grades 3-6. Through a series of educational materials supplied to participating classrooms, the program introduces children to the natural world around them. Suggested field trips and classroom activities take advantage of students' immediate surroundings, such as playgrounds and neighborhoods, to promote a knowledgeable and caring attitude toward the environment.

An enrolled class receives six issues of the *Audubon Adventures* newspaper for children (up to 32 copies per subscription), a companion teacher's guide with background information and activity ideas, as well as student membership cards and decals. Each April, *Audubon Adventures* celebrates Audubon month with a poster and activity guide focusing on an issue of particular importance.

This year's program covers a wide range of environmental topics. The first issue of the newsletter, "The World of Goldenrod and Other Wayside Plants," explores the interdependence of wildflowers and insects. Upcoming issues include:

October-November Falling Fast in Fall—Deciduous Trees

December-January Zoos

February-March Urban/Suburban Wildlife

April-May Snakes

June-July Butterflies/Moths

Audubon Month will be devoted to Rivers.

Audubon Adventures is modeled after the successful Audubon Junior Clubs organized in 1910, which introduced more

than 60 million children to the wonders of the natural world. Begun in 1984, *Audubon Adventures* is now in use in 7,200 schools and reaches more than 216,000 children nationwide.

Sponsors are needed to bring this exceptional program to more schools in Los Angeles. It costs only \$25.00 to provide *Audubon Adventures* to a classroom for one year. If you would like to sponsor a class—perhaps your child's or grandchild's—please return the form attached, or contact Melanie Ingalls, Education Chairman, at Audubon House.

YES, I want to sponsor an *Audubon Adventures* classroom!

SPONSOR

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

SCHOOL

Teacher _____

School _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Number Students _____ Grade _____

Please make check (\$25.00 per classroom) payable to the Los Angeles Audubon Society.

Birds of the Season

by Hank Brodkin



Reports of rare and unusual bird sightings in this column should be considered tentative until they have been reviewed by the regional editors of **American Birds** or, if appropriate, by the **California Bird Records Committee**.

It's Christmas Count time! This is the largest of all bird censuses, encompassing North and Central America, the Caribbean, Hawaii and Guam. Last year 1,544 counts involved 41,249 participants. We have *three* local counts and every birder, whatever his or her level of experience, is not only welcome, but needed!

December 17 is the date of the *Lancaster Count*. Fred Heath is the compiler, and his phone number is (619) 484-8709. December 18 is the date of the *Malibu Count*. The co-compilers are Liga Auzins, (213) 828-2936, and Roger Cobb, (213) 396-4160. January, date to be decided, is the time of the *Los Angeles Count*. Why not sign up for all three counts? If you can get your count area assignment early enough, you might scout it beforehand to stake out any interesting birds. Of course, please call Jean Brandt or me as soon as possible if you find anything good!

The fantastic fall of '88 continued unabated. The first **Gray Wagtail** for the contiguous U.S. was found by David Sibley on 10 October at the Salinas River mouth, the third **Groove-billed Ani** in California was found by Gary Rosenberg and John Wilson on 15 October near California City, and the state's third **Northern Wheatear** was found on 13 October by Steve Leyman in southern Tehama County. These birds were all seen by many observers.

Now for the more mundane. A **Red-billed Tropicbird** was reported at the south end of Cortez Bank on 14 October by Paul Canner, who was on a diving boat at the time. The L.A. Audubon pelagic trip to Santa Barbara Island on 15 October turned up scores of Common Dolphins and several Minke Whales [but only flightless specimens, Ed.] as well as a **Brown Booby** off the Island (Phil Sayre). Nine **American White Pelicans** at Hansen Dam 9 through 11 October were reported by Dustin Alcala. Russell Stone saw a flock of nine **Greater White-fronted Geese** over Malibu Creek State Park on 8 October—a rare sight around here.

Daniel Cooper reports a **Laughing Gull** off Oxnard on 17 October, seen from a fishing boat, and a juvenile **Sabine's Gull**

was found by John Alderfer's L.A.S. field trip to Lake Palmdale on 8 October.

Furnace Creek has another **Ruddy Ground-Dove** at this writing (21 October; Richard Webster). This observation should end all doubts that these birds in eastern California in the fall are wild. As of 20 October the **Red-headed Woodpecker** was still in Goleta.

A **Tropical Kingbird** was found on 19 October by Jim Royer at the mouth of the Ventura River. A **Mountain Chickadee** at El Dorado Nature Center on 6 October (Brian Daniels) was the only lowland record reported so far this fall. A **Gray Catbird** was seen at Furnace Creek on 21 October (Richard Webster).

A **White Wagtail**, possibly the same bird as last year, was found at El Rio, Ventura County, by Randy J. Moore on 16 October. While looking for a suspected Long-toed Stint on the Oxnard Plain sod farms, Gary Edelman came across a **Red-throated Pipit** on 11 October. On 19 October, the much-traveled Richard Webster—one of California's finest birders, whom we are happy to welcome to Los Angeles—found a **Philadelphia Vireo** near California City.

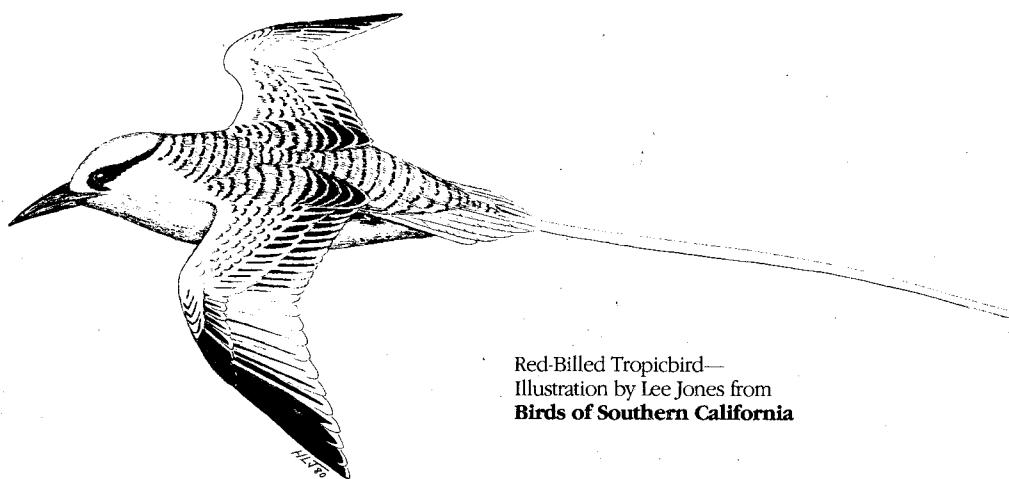
The wood warbler vagrants seem to be dwindling in number. Kimball Garrett found a **Tennessee** and a **Blackpoll Warbler** at Pepperdine Ponds on 15 October. The California City area produced a **Black-throated Blue** and a **Mourning Warbler** on 5 October (Dick Smith). We

have three **Palm Warbler** reports—South Coast Botanic Gardens on 7 October (Martin Berheimer), Pepperdine Ponds, also on 7 October (John Lewis), and Huntington Beach Central Park on 16 October (Russell Stone). Russell Stone also found a female **Canada Warbler** at the same place on the same day.

Lastly, the redoubtable Richard Webster identified **McCown's, Lapland** and **Chestnut-collared Longspurs**—all on 20 October at Furnace Creek.

Dick Smith reports that Galileo Hill Park, east of California City in Kern County, is an excellent place for **Chukar**, a bird often sought by newcomers to the California birding scene. On 5 October, for example, he saw 47 there. **BUT PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A PRIVATE PARK. KEEP OUT OF FENCED AREAS AND STICK TO ROADS.** There have been some problems with birders here recently—so don't ruin it for the rest of us by having this excellent birding spot placed off limits to birders.

Before I close I would like to recommend another book, *Eleanora's Falcon* by L.A. Audubon member, U.C.L.A. professor Hartmut Walter. This fascinating falcon breeds on rocky islets and cliffs around the Mediterranean Sea and the northwest coast of Africa. It times its breeding cycle to coincide with the fall migration of European land birds south to Africa—thus assuring the young falcons a dependable food supply. The book goes into every aspect of the birds' life, from their breeding biology to their wintering habitats in Madagascar. Hartmut, sometimes with his wife, Geraldine, risked life and limb (his and Geraldine's) visiting many of the wave-bound breeding sites. Whether you are a professional ornithologist (judging by the reviews in the scientific journals) or just a layman like most of us, with an interest in birds and the environment, this book is a joy to read. The love and enthusiasm Hartmut shows for his subject really shines through. Most of all I would



Red-Billed Tropicbird—
Illustration by Lee Jones from
Birds of Southern California

recommend this book to the high school and undergraduate college student who is thinking of going into field ornithology. *Eleanora's Falcon* will both inspire her and help give her that focus needed to succeed. From this layman's point of view, this is field work as field work should be done, and this is the monograph that will set the standard for some time to come! *Eleanora's Falcon* is available by special order through the L.A. Audubon Bookstore.

Good birding!

Help!

Volunteers are needed for Audubon bookstore and office assistance. Share in these enjoyable and worthwhile endeavors.

Part-time employment in Audubon House, about 25 hours per week at \$5.50 - \$6.00 per hour. Bookkeeping experience and typing required; candidates should be willing to learn word processing on computer. Duties include assisting with book store operations. Call Audubon House for details.



Send your bird observations with as many details as possible to:

Hank Brodkin
27-1/2 Mast Street
Marina del Rey, CA 90292
Phone: (213) 827-0407

OR

call Jean Brandt at (818) 788-5188

Membership Note

Membership in The National Audubon Society is computerized, so it is no longer advisable to renew through the Los Angeles Audubon Society. However, if your membership has lapsed, you will receive the next Western Tanager sooner if you renew through IAAS.

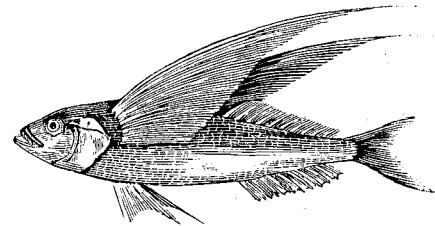
The national computer system sends multiple notices commencing four months before your membership lapses. Please excuse notices that may have crossed your check in the mail.

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

If you move out of the IAAS membership area, you are **automatically** changed to the chapter in whose area you moved. If you wish to remain in IAAS and receive the Western Tanager please indicate this to the National Audubon Society. You may also subscribe to the Western Tanager separately (see below.)

Christmas Count!

Make a commitment to assist us in the Annual Christmas Count this December and January. Be a part of this important survey and help us track ornithological trends in our changing environment. Call us — See the Birds of the Season Column in this issue for details.



RESERVATION TRIPS continued from pg. 7

Sunday, December 11 - Malibu Lagoon State Beach. National Park Service leads an instructive look at migrants on the lagoon. On Pacific Coast Hwy., mile W. of Malibu Pier, 1 miles E. of Malibu Cyn Rd. 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, January 14 - Ballona Wetlands. Leader **Bob Shanman/Ian Austin**. 8 a.m. See Dec. 10 trip for details.

***Sunday, January 1, 1989 - Topanga**

Sunday, January 18 - Lake Norconian. **Pat and Paul Nelson** are our leaders to this limited access military depot known (by those who know) for its large numbers of wintering ducks. 25 of us will meet at the gate at 8 a.m. No fee, but \$5 check / person to hold reservation with Audubon House will be refunded at the gate.

Saturday, January 21 - Whittier Narrows. Leader **David White**. Meet at 8 a.m. See Dec. 4 trip for details.

Saturday, February 4 - Lakeview—Lake Perris Area. Leader **Monte Taylor** will show us around this excellent winter birding area in search of buteos, Prairie Falcon, Golden Eagle, various longspurs and possible Mountain Plover and Sage Thrasher. Take Fwy 60 east past the 215, exit south on Gilman Springs Rd., and meet at the Bridge Street intersection at 8:30 a.m. at the side of the road. Bring lunch, scopes, warm clothing and durable footwear.

Saturday, February 11(&12) - Gull Mini-Workshop at Malibu/McGrath (with Morro Bay extension Sunday). Join our ever-congenial and frequently-knowledgeable gull mini-expert, **Larry Allen**, for a short discussion with handout on gull I.D. followed by one (or two!) afternoons of field I.D. Bring a picnic lunch, Nat'l. Geographic Field Guide and any others you like, scope if possible, and warm

clothing. Meet at the Malibu Lagoon parking lot kiosk at **8 a.m.** Free parking is usually available on Cross Creek Rd. (first Rt. west of lagoon bridge). After honing skills at Malibu, Larry will lead the party to McGrath State Park in Oxnard in hopes of seeing nine or ten species of gulls in various plumages. We may take a peek at other birds, too. And that's not all! Those developing an insatiable desire to bird the weekend away are welcome to accompany Larry up the coast Saturday afternoon (5ish?) on an informal camping/birding trip to **Morro Bay** and surrounding environs. We will attempt to see whatever the locals have been seeing, maybe last year's Rock Sandpiper, and more gulls, including the northern nominate race of Western Gull. Camping reservations should not be necessary. Wimps will find hotels plentiful.

PELAGIC TRIPS IN 1989

We have seven trips scheduled aboard the MV Vantuna:

Feb 26, Sunday 6:00-4:00, Santa Barbara Island.	\$28
Mar 18, Saturday 6:00-4:00, Santa Barbara Island.	\$28
Jun 10, Saturday 6:00-6:00, Santa Barbara & Osborne Bks.	\$32
Aug 13, Sunday 6:00-6:00, Santa Barbara & Osborne Bks.	\$32
Sep 24, Sunday 5:30-7:00, San Clemente.	\$35
Oct 14, Sunday 6:00-6:00, Santa Barbara Island.	\$32
Nov 12, Sunday 6:00-4:00, Santa Barbara Island.	\$28

Thanks to PHIL SAYRE for organizing this schedule. Dates will be re-announced as they approach. We recommend that you book your spot a month before the sailing date. 876-0202.

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Audubon membership (local and national) is \$30 per year, Senior citizen \$21, and at present new members are being offered an introductory membership for \$20 for the first year, including AUDUBON Magazine and THE WESTERN TANAGER. To join, make checks payable to the National Audubon Society, and send them to Audubon House at the above address. Members wishing to receive the TANAGER by first class must send checks for \$5 to Los Angeles Audubon Society.

THE WESTERN TANAGER received the 1987 Special Conservation Award and 2nd place honors for Newsletter, Chapter with more than 900 members from the National Audubon Society.

Subscriptions to the 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.

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



ANNOUNCEMENTS

December 1988

EVENING MEETINGS Meet at 8:00 p.m. in Plummer Park

Tuesday, December 13 - DAVID PEARSON will present **The Amazon: New Hope for the Future**. David Pearson is an ornithologist at Arizona State University and has travelled and studied extensively in the Amazon basin. His experiences in the Peruvian Amazon region over the past year and a half have rekindled his hope for the continuing survival of one of the world's most important ecosystems. We've all heard the horror stories of rain forest destruction around the world and most of us have felt helpless in the face of such a huge problem thousands of miles away. David will present some recent experiences which have given him hope for the future. Please join us this evening for a fresh look at the Peruvian Amazon, its wildlife, and some good news about its continuing survival.

Tuesday, January 10 - Annual Members' Photo Contest. Bring your five best slides to be judged by the experts (??). First three winners will receive bookstore prizes. Bring your slides by 7:45 p.m. You must be present to enter. This annual event is one of the most popular programs of the year. Cheer your favorites, boo the judges! HERB CLARKE monitors the contest.

We hold five unclaimed slides from last year's annual slide contest. One is labelled Noel Snyder. Three are unlabelled: a red-cockaded woodpecker, a pair of Franklin's gulls, and the profile of a grizzly bear. Owners can have the slides returned by mail if they contact Audubon House with their addresses. Alternatively they can exchange new slides for old in January.

February 2, 1989 - annual banquet at the U.C.L.A. Faculty Center, 405 Hilgard Av, across the street from Sorority Row. Details will be in the next issue of the Tanager.

IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOPS Precede the regular evening meetings, 7:30-8:00 p.m.

Everyone is invited to attend these workshops dealing with various aspects of bird identification. The topics and speakers will be announced on the LAAS bird tape (213-874-1318) the week prior to the meeting. See you there.

FIELD TRIPS Call the Tape!

Before setting out on 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. (Some of the trips listed here are conducted by other organizations.)

Sunday, November 27 - Malibu Lagoon. **Abigail King** of the Santa Monica Mountains National Park Service will lead a trip to the Lagoon, and to Malibu Creek if time permits. Winter birds should be settled in, with a variety of gulls possible. Meet in the Lagoon Parking Lot at 8:30 a.m.

Saturday, December 3 - Antelope Valley. **Jean Brandt** will lead eager birders from Quail Lake along the length of the Valley. Winter birding should be in full swing; Tufted Duck, Prairie Falcon, Merlin and Ferruginous Hawk might repeat from last year; Rough-legged Hawk and Mountain Plover among the possibilities. Expedition limited to five cars. No fee, but send S.A.S.E. to Audubon House as described for reservation trips. Please include info. on comfortable, available seating in your car for carpooling, and willingness to be assigned as a passenger. We will try to make reservations

first-come-first-served, but we may fudge a bit to include as many people as possible.

Sunday, December 4 - Topanga State Park. Leader **Gerry Haigh** will show us around this nearby habitat of Scrub Oak and chaparral. This is a good trip for beginning birders and those new to the area. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot of Trippet Ranch. From Topanga Canyon Blvd. take a very sharp turn east uphill on Entrada Dr. (7 miles so. of Ventura Blvd., 1 mile no. of Topanga Village.) Follow the signs to the state park, and meet in the parking lot. \$3 parking fee.

Sunday, December 4 - Whittier Narrows Regional Park. **David White** will lead a morning walk. Expect a variety of birds, including the many wild ducks that winter at the Park. Meet at 8 a.m. at the Nature Center, 1000 Durfee Ave. in south El Monte. Exit Pomona Fwy. (Route 60) at Peck Road, just west of Interstate 605, the San Gabriel River Fwy. Go south a short distance to Durfee Road. Turn right about 1/4 mile to the nature center.

Saturday, December 10 - Ballona Wetlands. Join leader **Bob Shanman** or **Ian Austin** for a pleasant morning of shorebirds and waterfowl. Meet at 8 a.m. at the Pacific Ave. Bridge. Take the Marina Fwy. (90 West) to Culver Blvd., turn left to Pacific Ave., then right to the footbridge

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at the end. Street parking is usually available.

Sunday, December 11 - Corrizo Plains. **Rob Hansen** of the Nature Conservancy will guide us in our search for the wintering birds that this area is perhaps most famous for. Among the birds we will likely see are Sandhill Cranes, Rough-legged and Ferruginous Hawks, Golden and Bald Eagles, Prairie Falcon and Merlin, and LeConte's Thrasher. Hoped-for birds include longspurs (rare), Short-eared Owl, and dark-phase Buteos. We will meet near the plains at 9:00 a.m. When writing for reservations, please include information for carpooling as described in the Antelope Valley trip. We will also be experimenting with walkie-talkies to improve communication between cars. Directions and further information will be sent to those signing up. Fee: \$10. Bring a lunch, warm clothes, durable footwear, and - if possible - a scope. Please sign up soon to ensure a successful trip.

RESERVATION TRIPS:

Reservation Policy and Procedures:
Reservations for IAAS trips 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 Chair, LAAS, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90046.

If there is insufficient response, the trip will be cancelled two weeks prior to the scheduled date (4 weeks for pelagics) and you will be so notified and your fee returned. Your cancellation during that time will bring a refund only if there is a paid replacement.

Sunday, December 11 - Cold Creek Canyon. Bird walk led by Cold Creek Canyon Docents to see the wonderful variety of winter birds in this lush canyon. From Topanga Canyon go west on Mulholland Drive about 3/4 mile, left on Mulholland Hwy., about 5 miles, left on Stunt Road, 1.2 miles to lower gate of preserve. Meet at 7:30 a.m., 3 hours. **RESERVATIONS REQUIRED** (818) 888-9363.

RESERVATION TRIPS continued on pg. 7