

WESTERN TANAGER

Los Angeles Audubon Society

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Kimball Garrett

Whimbrel at
Malibu Lagoon

**Annual Members'
Photo Contest Winners**

Our sixth annual photo contest once again produced a number of back-seat judges among the audience at the January meeting, but the official judges prevailed. Out of the selection process emerged the following distinguished winners.

First prize went to Kimball Garrett for his picture of a Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus*, taken at Malibu Lagoon. Don Hoechlon of Norco, Calif., won second prize for his Black-crowned Night Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*, taken at Swan Lake.

And third prize was another win for Kimball for his picture of an Antarctic Skua at Port Lockroy.

Black-crowned Night Heron
at Swan Lake

SECOND PLACE

Don Hoechlin



Antarctic Skua at Port Lockroy

THIRD PLACE

Kimball Garrett

Ballona Wetlands

Jesse Moorman

The Wetlands

The remains of Ballona Wetlands, along Ballona Creek south of Marina del Rey, are almost the last coastal wetlands in Los Angeles. Marina del Rey itself consumed a large part of the original wetland area. Most of the remaining wetlands, and some drier open space to the East, once belonged to Hughes Aircraft and served as a buffer zone for the Hughes Airport. That land now belongs to Howard Hughes Properties, a subsidiary of Summa Corporation. Summa Corporation is trying to develop the property as the Playa Vista Project.

The Playa Vista Project

Playa Vista would be a very large development of housing, marina, and commercial space on both sides of Lincoln Boulevard and on both sides of Ballona Creek. Several hundred acres of this land is properly considered wetlands. Its wet character has been somewhat masked by the blocking of tidal flows and by drainage and agricultural use. Yet pickleweed, seasonal flooding, shorebirds and other indices of coastal wetlands have not been completely repressed. Coastal areas, and wetlands in particular, are under the protection of the Coastal Commission, which approved plans for Playa Vista in 1984.

Friends of Ballona Wetlands have sued the California Coastal Commission (and others) to invalidate the Ballona Land Use Plan whereby the wetlands would be irretrievably lost to development. The suit was filed in December, 1984, and has not yet been resolved. There is a possibility that the parties will settle it soon, but they will not disclose their bargaining positions.

The Ballona Wetlands Project

Many of us have heard that National Audubon Society is developing a wildlife area in the Ballona Wetlands, but nobody in L.A. Audubon seemed to know the plan or what was happening. Audubon's Ballona Wetlands Project has recently opened an office in Ocean Park. Eric Metz, of Audubon's regional office, is developing the detailed plans. At some point in the process of developing Playa Vista, Summa conceded the wettest land to environmentalists. Summa agreed to give National Audubon 200 acres at the mouth of the creek, to give \$5 million for restoration of the wetlands, and to give a \$3 million endowment for management of the area. This offer is contingent upon the final certification of the Local Coastal Plan for the Playa Vista project. It is possible that environmental lawsuits could scuttle Audubon's big project. Watch for future developments.

Wetlands Studies

Assuming that the 200 acres will become a wetland sanctuary in the not-distant future, Audubon Society is preparing to restore the land. Even if the Local Coastal Plan were certified today, regulatory red tape would delay major activities for about two years. Yet there is plenty of work to do while waiting. The vision of a restored wetlands has rested on assumptions about the condition of the soil, water and other factors in the area. At this point, the soil seems to be normal, considering that it has long been cut off from tidal action, with resulting salt accumulation. There are no signs of toxic dumping. Field studies with several consultants will investigate the soil, vegetation, insects, invertebrates, water and other factors.

Restoration

Although the remaining Ballona Wetlands are much larger than the restoration project, the 200 acres are enough to provide a viable wetland ecosystem. The Summa development does not seriously threaten the quality of the remaining habitat. There is not yet any construction schedule, but once started, the restoration should take about two years. Existing flap gates let only a small fraction of tidal flows into the wetlands. When the gates are open, the tides reach the eastern boundary of the Ballona Project. (Audubon's studies have not looked into the reach of the tides beyond the project's boundary. This question might be of some importance to more ardent conservationists, who would preserve all of the wetlands.) Once work begins, the flap gates will be replaced with large, concrete-pipe culverts.

The Clean Water Act requires a permit from the Corps of Engineers for dredge and fill in wetlands, and the issuance of the

permit requires an Environmental Impact Statement. The project will create a nesting island (about two acres) and some freshwater ponds.

The island should provide a good nesting site for the endangered Least Tern and other birds. The tern requires a long line of sight to nest. Where it has been protected on Venice beach it has done very well, but it needs protection from foxes, cats and kestrels.

Ice plant grows thick in some areas. It will be removed. Eric expects that other exotic plants will be destroyed by tidal action.

A small amount of fresh water will come from Centinela Creek. This stream is mostly urban runoff, but it seems to be reasonably clean.

Public Access

During restoration, there will probably be limited visitation programs. Where there are experimental areas, they will be off limits to most visitors. Audubon will provide information and guides.

Call for Information

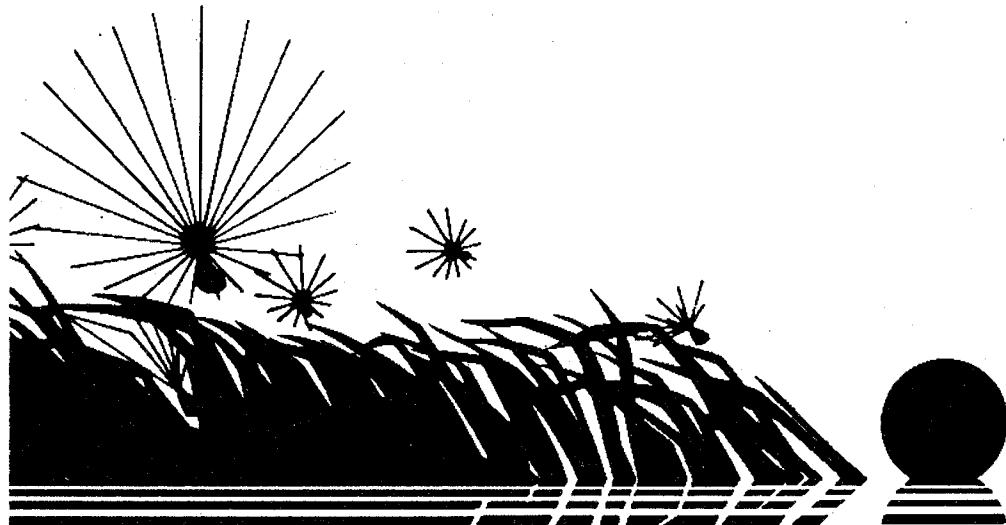
Eric Metz invites you to call for information. The office may be only temporary, but they should retain the same phone number.

The Ballona Project is distributing two items to the public.

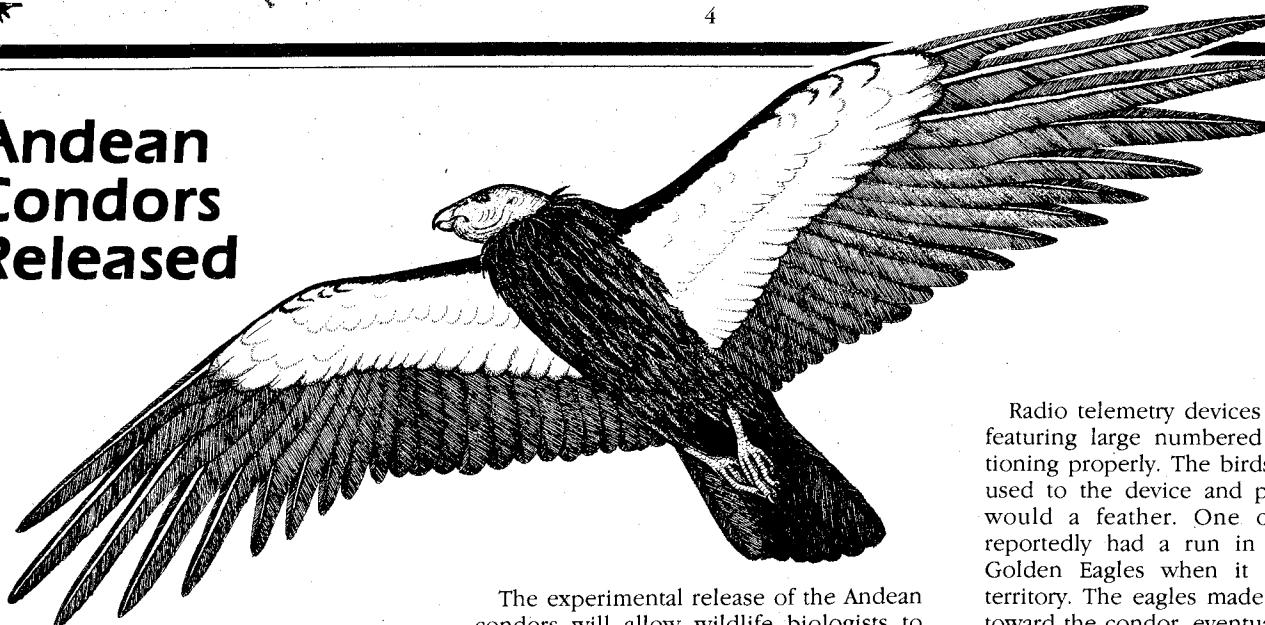
One item is a list of birds of the wetland. It is the work of some students at U.C. Davis. It lists 185 upland and marsh species, but no pelagics. It follows AOU classifications and includes bird profiles and the seasonal sightings of the species. There are a limited number available now, but not formally distributed. If there is enough interest for another printing, they may be for sale.

The second item is an informational brochure (one page) about the Ballona Wetlands Project.

Call Eric at (213) 450-5551 for these items, or for further information.



Andean Condors Released



Six young Andean Condors have now been released into the wild of the Sespe Condor Sanctuary and the nearby Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge as a test run of what is eventually planned for the California Condor.

Reports from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service California Condor Recovery Program, so far, indicate the birds are doing well. By late January all of the first three condors released had begun flying and two had taken lengthy flights.

"We're elated and excited that it's begun. It's another successful step toward the eventual release of the California Condor," said Sandy Wohlgemuth, LAAS conservation chairman.

"We're still vitally interested in this tremendous gamble — which is what it is."

The experimental release of the Andean condors will allow wildlife biologists to learn release and monitoring techniques and to look for possible unexpected hazards which may face the California

Condors when they are released. A current optimistic estimate for reintroduction of California Condors, now being bred in captivity, is 1993.

When the nets were removed from the release towers for the first release on Dec. 17, one of the chicks took its first flight within a few hours. It traveled 100 feet downhill, but spent the next day making its way back up the hill, mostly on foot.

Only female birds are being released to prevent accidental introduction of the exotic species. Also, the Andeans are sexually dimorphic and the females more exactly resemble the California Condors in size. Male Andeans are much larger. In two years, the birds will be gathered back up and eventually released in Colombia.

Radio telemetry devices on their wings, featuring large numbered tags, are functioning properly. The birds apparently get used to the device and preen it as they would a feather. One of the condors reportedly had a run in with a pair of Golden Eagles when it flew into their territory. The eagles made aggressive dives toward the condor, eventually forcing it to the ground. The bird was unharmed, and biologists viewed it as one of many lessons the Andeans will have to learn.

Food, generally in the form of stillborn calf carcasses, is being provided by the Fish and Wildlife Service and it is expected that 95 percent of the Andean's diet will be supplied in this way.

The second group of three Andeans was released Jan. 21. The birds in this experiment are from the San Diego and San Antonio zoos and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland.

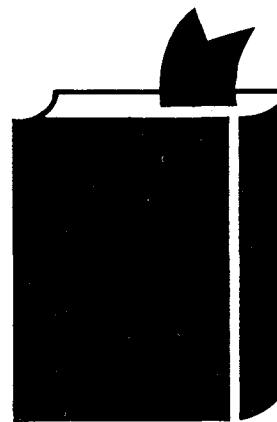
As of February 1st, a seventh, younger bird was not yet ready for release.

The experiment is a cooperative effort of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Los Angeles Zoo, the San Diego Wild Animal Park and the California Department of Fish and Game.

News From the Bookstore

by Olga L. Clarke,
sales chairman

Now in stock are **Zeiss 10x40 B/GAT Dialyt** rubber-armored binoculars considered by most experienced birders to be the ultimate choice among the myriad binoculars on the market. They are rugged and waterproof, and deliver an image with excellent contrast and color fidelity. They have been factory adjusted for close focus at no extra charge.



Also available is the **Kowa TSN-4** spotting scope, which has taken the birding world by storm. The clarity and brightness delivered by this scope outshines the other brands — even higher-priced models.

Perhaps the finest tripods are by **Bogen**. Several sizes are currently in stock, along with a selection of heads. These are sturdy, lightweight and easy to use.

We continue to stock a wide range of fine **Bushnell** and **Bausch & Lomb** binoculars and spotting scopes along with the lighter-weight **Velbon** tripods.

All of these products are competitively priced, and please remember: all profits help support the operation and conservation programs of your Society.

SPECIAL MENTION

Inadvertently omitted from last month's salute to our Bookstore volunteers was **Marian Helmcke**, a retired housewife, who assisted in the bookstore for over five years.

Often the only volunteer available for weeks at a time, she was there whenever needed, rain or shine. She not only saw to it that all the book orders were shipped each day, but was helpful in securing boxes and bags for packaging material, which saved the Society money.

Because of volunteers like Mrs. Helmcke and the others mentioned, the Bookstore has been able to operate efficiently, without interruption, and provide an outstanding service for the membership.

Environmental Education Fair

Sixty-five exhibits at "Partners in the Environment," an upcoming environmental education fair, will feature videos, games and hands-on experiences to encourage young people to take a closer look at the natural world.

The fair runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on March 11 at the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum, 301 N. Baldwin Ave. in Arcadia.

People of all ages will have a chance to cut logs with a lumberjack's "misery saw"; touch live sea creatures in tide pools; and see live animals such as raccoons, owls and reptiles. Members of the Greater Los Angeles Teachers of Science Association will also be on hand inside a tent to guide youngsters in making take-home science projects.

Scheduled nature games at 9:15 a.m. and 2 p.m. will illustrate concepts such as food webs and animal perception. And at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Arboretum docents will guide visitors on free, narrated walking tours of the garden.

Funding for the fair comes out of the California Environmental License Plate Program.

Parking and admission is included in the Arboretum entrance fee of \$3 for adults, 75 cents for children ages 5 to 12, and \$1.50 for senior citizens and students. Children under 5 are admitted free. Group rates are available. For more information call 213-446-8251.

Volunteer Reader Sought

Mr. Richard Jastrow is looking for someone to read for him occasionally on subjects dealing with the outdoors, birds and wildlife in general. He is blind and disabled from arthritis. Please call Audubon House, (213) 876-0202, for contact information.

Volunteers Always Needed

For members who feel they would like to contribute a small amount of their time and talents to the Society: there is a continuing need for volunteers at Audubon House, for there are always things that need doing.

The most active day-to-day operation is bookstore sales, and extra hands are always a blessing in trying to keep up with the orders that come in. The atmosphere is informal and congenial, and the conversation witty and stimulating.

Currently, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays could use a volunteer, so if you find that you have one of these days regularly free from 10 to 3-- or a part of these hours-- and would like to take a more active part in your Society, come on down!

Mono Lake Update

A visit to Mono Lake shows dramatically how fragile and vulnerable the ecosystem has become. Water levels at the lake are desperately low.

Thanks to all who wrote to the Forest Service about the Mono Lake Scenic Area Management Plan. Dick Warren in Bishop

is analyzing all letters postmarked by January 19. The Final Environmental Impact Report will issue in late summer.

A most important part of management is the use of Mono Basin water. The City of Los Angeles controls water rights. Despite a long legal battle, in which Audubon Society was a leader, and despite continuing negotiations between the Forest Service and the City, that issue is not resolved.



1962: The tops of the two tufa towers are barely visible above Mono Lake's surface (photograph taken with telephoto lens)



1982: The same two towers high and dry, and nearly a mile from Mono's shore.

Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

The lucky people who filled the meeting room at Plummer Park on Dec. 16 will long remember the excitement and enthusiasm of Dave Pearson's program. In a year when the walls seemed to be closing in on us, when gloom-and-doom was the environmental dirge heard 'round the world, when we were battered by fears of perpetual drought, of a perforated ozone layer, of an ominous greenhouse effect — we heard a message of hope.

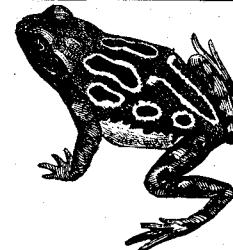
Pearson is in the midst of a struggle to save tropical rainforests. By now many of us are perhaps a bit numbed to the sad plight of these forests. We have been told ad infinitum how the hungry peasants in South America and elsewhere have been forced to slash and burn their impossibly rich "jungle," so they can grow food on land that is paradoxically unproductive, necessitating more of the same in just another year or two.

We know how Brazil, determined to exploit its natural wealth (and pay off its staggering debt to us), is destroying incredibly large chunks of forest every year. We are familiar with the predicted loss of hundreds of animal and plant species — some yet undiscovered, and with the probability that sources of medicine and nutrition of great benefit to mankind will be lost forever. The wholesale loss of all this greenery, we are told, will reduce the planet's oxygen and increase unwanted and dangerous carbon dioxide. And we wonder what will happen to our migrant songbirds when their winter homes disappear.

Pearson says that many of us have been so "inundated by the distressing message of imminent . . . destruction of these forests that [we] have unconsciously been driven to the conclusion that there is no hope." [Quotes are from Pearson's article in *Nature Society News*, May 1988.] And he admits that he too shared in the pervasive despair, until recently.

"What changed my mind was akin to a religious conversion. A two-week association with Latin American colleagues in northeastern Peru was not a shallow exchange of ideas, but became a profound experience . . . It forced me to climb down out of my ivory tower of research for the first time and become involved with a homegrown and sophisticated Latin American conservation effort."

Pearson, the only North American, and about 50 others spent two weeks traveling by boat along the fringes of Pacaya-Samiria, a vast national reserve, larger than the state of Vermont. The reserve is bound by two



rivers that eventually join to form the Amazon. They visited towns and villages along the rivers and talked with local people about their relationship to the reserve. (Pacaya-Samiria reserve was established in the 1940s to study fish production. Some of these valuable fish reach 300 pounds.)

According to Pearson, some areas in the reserve are open to licensed fishing and tree cutting, while others are restricted to scientific study or serve as buffer areas between totally protected areas and large communities living along the river boundaries.

As the boat traveled between villages, classes were held daily on deck with instructors who included government officials and professors, each having expertise in areas such as biology, sociology, economics, psychology and law enforcement. The students on the trip were park guards, forest police, local politicians and school teachers from villages surrounding the reserve. They were taught about conservation laws, resource management, economics and forest ecology — and all with respect to instilling in them the value of the reserve and the importance of its preservation.

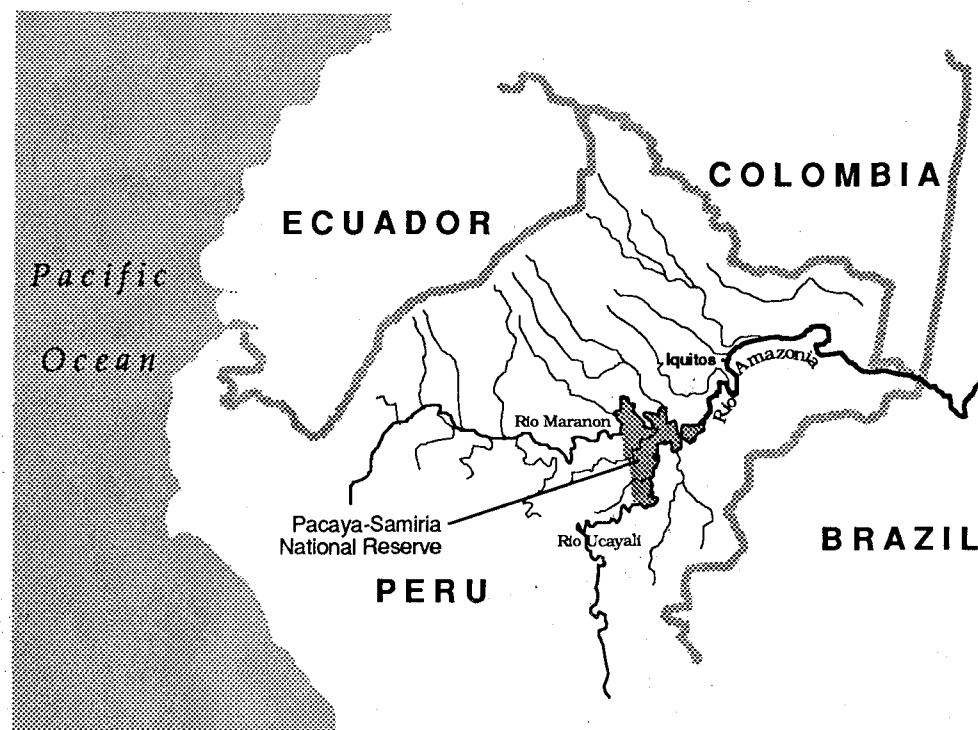
Then, when the boat reached a village, they would invite everyone to come to a meeting — children included. Students who were from that particular village led two-hour presentations and an open forum. Visiting instructors gave short talks on the reserve and on how it affected the local people.

"We quickly learned that they were very well aware of the economic and social impact of the reserve," said Pearson. Feedback came fast and furiously.

The reserve was off limits to them and they were mad about two things: rich folks from out of town seem to have licenses to tap the resources of the reserve, especially wood and fish; and others are out-and-out poaching, illegally making off with the goods while locals watch helplessly from across the river. The villagers were afraid that nothing will be left in the reserve for themselves, their children and grandchildren.

Miracle of miracles, the government not only listened but acted. "At the end of our two-week seminar, students and instructors integrated these local concerns . . . into a master plan. The plan included direct help from the government to form cooperatives at each village. Established as legal units, licenses could be issued, quotas determined, and financial help for initial equipment and training could be provided by the various government ministries involved."

Now there would be an economic interest in curbing illegal fishing and



woodcutting. And the new cooperatives had the "political clout to ensure that infractions would be properly reported and prosecuted," said Pearson. As he pointed out at the meeting, there were no longer just eight rangers patrolling the reserve, but 2,000! The villagers, previously apathetic about the reserve because it was closed to them, suddenly found a powerful incentive—fish and wood. These were the adults.

The children were another story. When the local teachers returned to their villages, said Pearson, they would be "introducing a conservation ethic to the children... that went beyond the purely economic factors that were the primary motivators of their parents. The importance of more subtle aspects of forest conservation such as aesthetics, species diversity and long-term ecological ramifications will be taught to the youth so that they will have a broader basis than their parents had upon which to judge the merits of the reserve."

So there's hope in a government that seems to care and in the young researchers eager to learn and ready to work all hours employing their knowledge to help their people. But what about the money? After all, this is impoverished Latin America. World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy and the Smithsonian Institution are the angels here. To LA Audubon, which has been contributing \$1000 annually to WWF and TNC for years, it is gratifying to learn from Dave Pearson that our gifts are doing good work.

It was a stirring program. Pearson showed slides of birds and animals and gave us some interesting thoughts on rainforest ecology:

- The abundance of species is phenomenal. He spoke of entomologists stunning insects with a spray in a small area of trees, then collecting a hundred species when they fell to the ground; moving on to an adjacent site, the same process would produce another hundred species—not specimens, but species!
- The most numerous animals in the forest are ants and termites.
- Green Moths migrate in a large circular path. Because the larvae are so devastating, the plants they feed on develop more-potent toxins. Then the larvae cannot consume them, so the moths move on to previously untouched areas.
- Beef cattle do not thrive on native vegetation and produce inferior meat. Indigenous tapirs do thrive, and they are delicious. Why not raise tapirs for animal protein?

Without a doubt this was one of the finest programs we have ever had. We were given the flavor of the rainforest, a taste of the human dilemma there, and the promise that significant change is a reality. We await the news of further success.



NOTE: As a result of Dave Pearson's presentation, the LAAS Board of Directors has decided to seek out a Peruvian organization that is involved in this kind of affirmative environmental action, and offer to become associated with it as a "sister society." If, for instance, a necessary piece of equipment were unobtainable or unaffordable, perhaps we could help. We certainly do not have enough funds to underwrite their operations, but in a

modest way we would like to become friends with admirable people pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps.

Carrizo Plain Trip

By Rob Hansen, Trip Leader

If "plain" means "ordinary," then December's trip to the Carrizo did not live up to its name! Splendid winter weather and a congenial group conspired to produce a memorable day of birding. And as a wintering area for raptors, Carrizo certainly did live up to its reputation-- nine species of the orders Falconiformes (diurnal raptors) and Strigiformes (owls) were sighted.

Carrizo has always attracted birders, especially in winter months when Sandhill Cranes and raptors congregate on the wide-open scrub and grasslands.

Most of the southern and western San Joaquin Valley once looked like Carrizo and supported a similar avifauna. However, as the Valley's remaining wildlands are converted to agriculture and oil development, protection of the Carrizo Plain ecology becomes more urgent.

Our trip began in the *Atriplex* (saltbush) scrub habitat on the northern outskirts of Maricopa, an oil town in southwestern Kern County. Our quarry at this site was the locally rare Le Conte's Thrasher, once the characteristic songbird of this part of the valley. No thrashers were found, but a couple of Burrowing Owls and a Sage Sparrow rewarded our diligent effort.

We entered Carrizo Plain at Reyes Station, off Highway 166, south of Maricopa. We decided first to drive north along the Elkhorn Plain, unexplored country for most of the group.

The Elkhorn Plain is a narrow, uplifted valley lying along the southeastern edge of the Carrizo Plain. The San Andreas Fault separates Elkhorn Plain from the larger Carrizo Plain. With so little rain yet this season, the Elkhorn Plain presented a very stark, dusty panorama.

There was almost no greenery to complement the overgrazed landscape, where cowpies were outnumbered only by Horned Larks. About half the group saw a Rough-legged Hawk. Then, a distant Ferruginous Hawk was spotted atop a rounded ridge to the west. This light-morph (more accurate than light "phase") bird finally took off with a few labored wingbeats that revealed the dorsal white patches at the base of the primaries, and the striking white tail.

As we proceeded north we suddenly found ourselves in the midst of a huge flock of Mountain Plovers -- about 350 in all. These subtly colored, Killdeer-sized birds were feeding all around us, seemingly undisturbed by our tiny line of cars amid the vast plain.

Mormon Tea (*Ephedra*) shrubs began to dot the landscape as we continued north.

San Joaquin Antelope Squirrels, rare chipmunk-sized natives of this desert area, were fairly common here. Unlike the larger, more common California Ground Squirrel, these squirrels seldom strayed far from the safety of their underground burrows.

We soon passed the turnoff to Crocker grade, a scenic access road over the Temblor Range to the Kern County oil town of Taft. We ate lunch at the edge of the Elkhorn Plain on a hillside overlooking the Carrizo. Loggerhead Shrikes and Say's Phoebes kept us company. The only sounds were our own and the occasional rattle of dry seeds in the inflated pods of locoweed.

As we began to cross toward the Soda Lake Road on the west side of Carrizo, we saw a Golden Eagle fly from its perch on a utility pole. Also, unseasonably warm weather yielded a few Side-blotched Lizards out and about on the sun-warmed road.

Just south of the turnoff to Painted Rock, we watched a flock of Long-billed Curlews foraging in a grainfield. A dozen Mountain Bluebirds were also feeding in the area, many of them exhibiting their fine hovering ability. Two more Ferruginous Hawks (the common light morph) were also seen here.

Near the south edge of Soda Lake, where a line of tall wooden utility poles crosses the plain, we located a much-publicized (and rightfully so) dark morph of the Ferruginous Hawk. This almost-legendary bird was a striking figure with its burnished-umber back, belly and leggings (like its close relative, the Rough-legged Hawk, its legs are feathered to the toes), and darker charcoal-gray head. A hint of rust highlighted the wing coverts and a bright yellow cere set off the darker beak. Unlike the more common dark morph of the Red-tailed Hawk, the undersides of this bird's tail and flight feathers are nearly immaculate white. It soared leisurely on its narrow, tapering, up-tilted wings. This was truly an aesthetic feast for raptor-lovers and all who appreciate a handsomely marked bird.

At Painted Rock we were treated to an excellent view of a perched Prairie Falcon. It appeared to be interested in a nearby flock of several hundred House Finches. A ridge just north of Painted Rock appeared to be popular with soaring birds -- a Golden Eagle, several ravens, two Rough-legged Hawks and another falcon were all enjoying the updrafts and thermals there. A Rock Wren and a flock of Savannah Sparrows added a passerine flair to the lichen-crusted walls of Painted Rock.

At about 3:45, we walked out among the iodine bushes in the alkali sink scrub habitat at the south edge of Soda Lake. A handful of Sandhill Cranes was already standing quietly in the white bottom of the now-dry lake, where these tall wintering birds sleep at night.

Other noisy flocks of cranes began to fly in from a day feeding in one of the valleys

west of the Caliente Range. Between November and February, the wild-sounding call of the Sandhill Crane is an unforgettable part of the Carrizo Plain experience. As darkness approached we made a quick visit to Saucedo Ranch. This old cattle ranch sits on a gently sloping hillside overlooking Soda Lake. At dusk, the ranch buildings and various shade trees are alive with large flocks of House Finches, starlings, Brewer's Blackbirds and Lark Sparrows, which congregate there to roost for the night. A Yellow-billed Magpie, more common in the oak-and-juniper scrub to the west of Carrizo Plain, was a nice surprise.

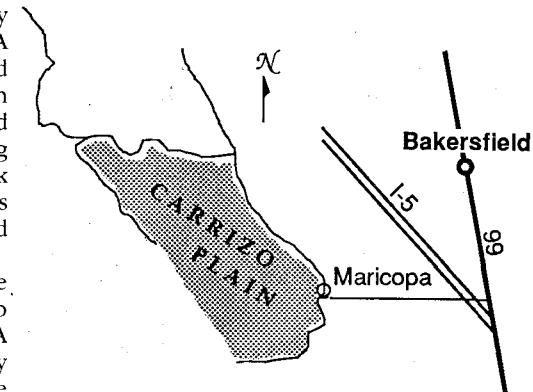
Just after sunset, a cooperative barn-owl, roosting in the rafters of a picturesque, old red barn, took off and circled the ranch for all to see.

Carrizo Plain is one of relatively few untouched places in California where conservationists still have an opportunity to protect an entire watershed. I look forward to a day, hopefully in the not-too-distant future, when I can take my two young daughters to the Carrizo Plain to see herds of Pronghorn Antelope and Tule Elk (recently introduced after a 75-year absence).

As these herds of native herbivores grow, Carrizo will be a place where California Condors can feed on the same large carcasses that graced these valleys before cattle arrived.

We all appreciate the efforts of The Nature Conservancy, Bureau of Land Management, and California Department of Fish and Game, which have already protected close to 90,000 acres of this valuable ecosystem. Even though we identified only 32 bird species by the end of the day, everyone departed with a new affection for this place. Carrizo Plain . . . a quality experience.

NOTE: This year's LAAS trip to Carrizo was so popular that two trips will be scheduled next year.



In Search of the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker

by Gerry Haigh

It was Christmas in Alabama and I wanted a life bird. We were on holiday with my wife's parents in Auburn, and I cleared it with her to leave the family for a day.

I began by calling the nearest Rare Bird Alert, which is in Georgia. When I phoned, I was momentarily disconcerted at hearing a person rather than a taped message. After I recovered sufficiently to make my request, the person informed me that there had been no rare birds reported for several months. He then referred me to Dr. Greg Jackson in Birmingham, who, he said, might know more about recent Alabama sightings. When I called Dr. Jackson, he told me about a Mountain Plover down on the Gulf coast.

I decided not to inquire further about rare transients in the region, but instead thought of a resident bird I had never seen, the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. When I mentioned that bird to Dr. Jackson, he referred me back to Auburn, whence I had started, specifically to Julian Dusie. Dr. Dusie suggested Fort Benning as the nearest site where I might have a fair chance of finding the species.

I called Fort Benning and discovered that it has its own Fish and Wildlife Department. But the secretary told me that because of the legal holiday, there was only one naturalist on duty, and he was in the field putting out Wood Duck nest boxes. Although she failed to reach him by radio, I told her I would come down to the base anyway in the hope of catching him at lunchtime.

At the Fish and Wildlife building two hours later, I was greeted by secretary Faye McCoy, who had postponed going home for the day because she knew I was coming. We were still unable to locate the naturalist, but she showed me a large wall map pinpointing the locations of over 800 past and present nest trees of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker.

I was speculating on my chances of finding any of these sites among the thousands of acres of woodland constituting Fort Benning -- it impressed me as far more like a nature preserve than a military base -- when a young man, Steve Kerlin, arrived, and said he could probably find the bird for me. Though he had come in for lunch, he settled for a Coke and set off with me on a three-hour search.

Steve grew up on a South Carolina farm. There he developed a passion for the outdoors which he translated into a career as a forester. I grew up in the Bronx and, strangely perhaps, also developed a passion for the outdoors and a desire to become a forester. But I found little support for my

career choice at the City College of New York and soon relegated my interest to the status of a hobby. I envied Steve his success.

Steve was studying the Red-cockaded Woodpecker as part of an agency effort to protect this endangered species. He told me as much as he could about the bird as we moved along.

At the first site we visited, he showed me a nest tree and pointed out the sap running down from the hole, which makes a colony conspicuous from afar. Unlike most other woodpeckers, the Red-cockaded always nests in live trees, where sap is available. This provides protection from various species of Rat Snakes that commonly raid the nests of other birds in the area.

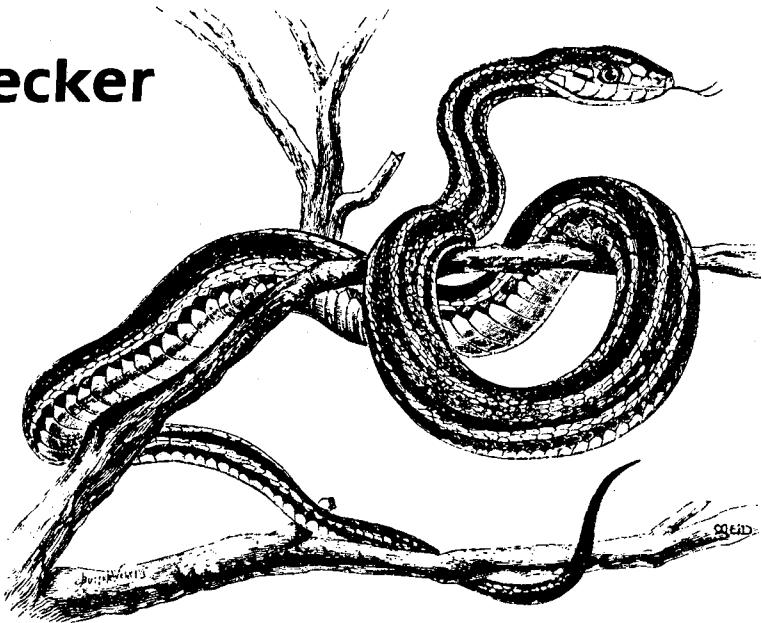
If a snake tries to climb above the flowing sap, it is burned by the turpentine in it, loses its grip, and falls. Although the bird selects a live pine, it nevertheless picks one whose heartwood is dead through age and disease. This facilitates digging the nest hole.

Unfortunately, with this preference, the woodpecker may have specialized itself to extinction by coming into conflict with the forest industry.

These trees are usually at least 60 years old, and, for economic reasons, the forest industry harvests them before the disease process begins to affect the heartwood. Only in nature preserves are any appreciable number of pines allowed to reach 60.

At the second site, we heard the tapping of our first woodpecker. We followed the sound carefully until Steve spotted the bird and I glassed it. My heart was beating wildly, but it turned out to be a Downy. At the fourth site, we heard another woodpecker, but it turned out to be a Red-bellied!

As we approached the sixth area, I was beginning to feel pessimistic about finding the bird, but was still enjoying this search



with Steve. He was clearly as involved in finding the bird for me as I was in seeing it and adding it to my life list.

Also, I was eating up all the information he fed me. Steve was an optimist -- he still expected to find one.

At the seventh site, we were greeted with the crashing blows and loud, high-pitched calls of the Pileated Woodpecker. We soon discovered we had come upon a mixed-species flock in which we identified Brown-headed Nuthatches, Carolina Chickadees, Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers, and Pine Warblers. Suddenly Steve raised his arm to claim my attention, then pointed toward the distant edge of the flock. Though I could not see or hear the bird of our quest, I followed along behind Steve like a child trusting his father to lead him to the candy store. And Steve turned out to be trustworthy: we found the candy!

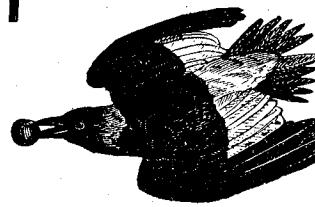
After gliding quietly over the pine needles for about 200 yards, Steve signaled me into a crouch and pointed at a nearby treerunk.

When I spotted the bird clinging there, I saw the white cheek patches and barred back that mark a Red-cockaded Woodpecker! We spotted two more birds, and watched all three until they drifted away with the rest of the flock.

I was exuberant as we headed back to the pickup. Partly it was from finding the bird, but also it was from the connection I felt with my guide. In the Georgia pinewoods, a southern farm boy and a northern city boy set out together in search of an endangered species. He was as eager to share his lore as I was to learn it. I felt as close a bond with him during our half day together as I have felt with my friends of much longer standing. Thank you Steve, for a great field trip!

Birds of the Season

by Hank Brodkin



Records of rare and unusual bird sightings reported in this column should be considered tentative pending review by the American Birds regional editors or, if appropriate, by the California Bird Records Committee.

Congratulations to our friends in Santa Barbara for once again recording the highest number of species during the national Christmas Count. Though results are still unofficial, Santa Barbara reported 218 species from its Dec. 31 count.

Highlights of this count, as reported by Paul Lehman, include **Least Bittern**, **Olive-sided Flycatcher**, **Hammond's Flycatcher**, **Eastern Phoebe**, **Pine Warbler**, **Hepatic Tanager**, **Great-tailed Grackle** and **Scott's Oriole**.

The **Red-headed Woodpecker** and six (!) **White-winged Doves** in Goleta, just outside the count circle, would have made the count even higher.

This stands in stark contrast to our two Los Angeles-area coastal counts, which were disappointing this year in both numbers of species and of individual birds. According to Roger Cobb, the Dec. 18 Malibu Count had 145 species — an all-time low.

Outstanding news, however, was the discovery of a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (varius)** in Westlake Village by Judy Rothman.

Bob Shanman reports that the Jan. 1 Los Angeles Count had 138 species with only about half as many individuals as were reported last year. For the second year in a row no Burrowing Owls were seen in the Hughes/Ballona Wetlands area. Urbanization marches on.

Some of the more interesting species for this urban count include **Wood Duck**, **Merlin**, **Peregrine Falcon**, and **Yellow Warbler**. Bob also disclosed a resident population of **Cactus Wrens** at the back of Holy Cross Cemetery in Baldwin Hills and a flock of **Tri-colored Blackbirds** that winter in Westchester Park at the corner of Lincoln and Manchester.

Other winter reports include a **Tricolored Heron** at Point Mugu on Dec. 11 (Jim Royer). This may be the same bird that later showed up at the mouth of the Santa Clara River.

An impressive 1,000 **White-faced Ibis** were seen near Brawley on Nov. 20 (Janet Cupples). A male **Eurasian Wigeon** was found on Lake Serranos in Chino by Hank

Childs on Dec. 7 and a male **Tufted Duck** was discovered at Castaic Lake by John Alderfer and Kimball Garrett on Dec. 3.

On Jan. 14, 30 **White-winged Scoters** showed up at Marina del Rey (Ian Austin), and Steve Ducatman found a pair of **Hooded Mergansers** on Saticoy Ponds in Ventura County.

An **Osprey** was seen on the north section of Ballona Lagoon on Jan. 3 by Pat Lindquist and has been seen in the marina area off and on since.

David Blue, who keeps track of things avian in the Ridgecrest/China Lake area, reported a **Red-tailed Hawk** of the **Harlan's** race in Ridgecrest on Nov. 21 and again on Dec. 30.

During strong Santa Ana winds, a **Ferruginous Hawk** and a **Prairie Falcon** were seen Dec. 9 and 11 respectively in the Chatsworth area by Roger Radd. **Merlin** were reported from the San Gabriel Valley on Dec. 3 by Daniel Cooper and on Dec. 6 by Barbara Cohen. A **Peregrine Falcon** was seen in Cerritos by Bill Lowe on Nov. 30.

On Dec. 18 Norm and Maggie Mellor found four **Sora Rails** on a pond in Garner Valley at 4,345-feet elevation (uncommon in winter at that altitude). And on Nov. 26, Chuck Bernstein found a **Black-legged Kittiwake** at Lancaster Sewer Ponds — one of the few reported this year and very rare inland at any time.

There were two more reports of the **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** this season — one at Huntington Beach Central Park on Dec. 11 (Daniel Cooper) and one at China Lake on Dec. 18 (according to David Blue).

More **Eastern Phoebes** have been sighted, including one at East Bluff Park in Newport Beach on Nov. 28 and one at Huntington Gardens on Dec. 11 by Dan Cooper and a third on the Salton Sea South Christmas Count on Dec. 18 at Red Hill by Bruce Broadbooks.

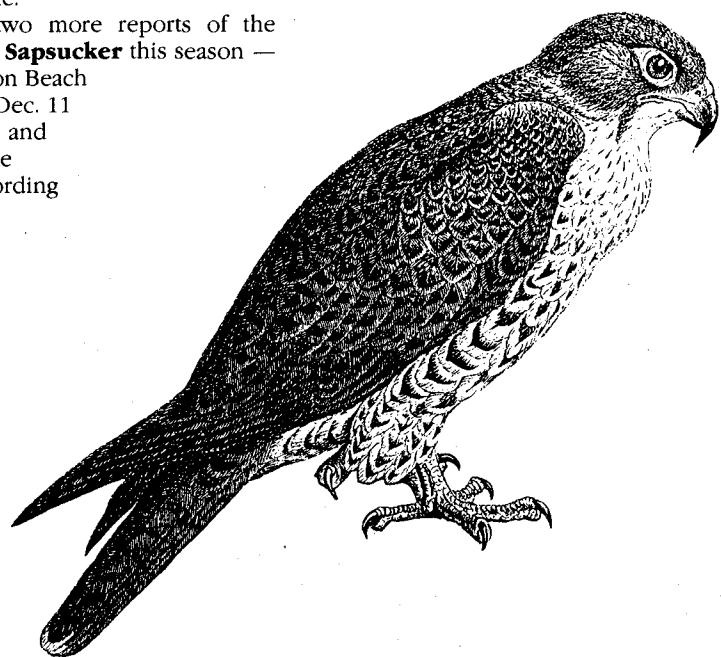
Charles Hood found a **Vermilion Flycatcher** on Nov. 19 at Seeley in Imperial County.

Sean Lin reported four **Mountain Bluebirds** — quite uncommon on the coastal slope in winter — in Rosemead on Jan. 16 and a **Varied Thrush** was seen Solstice Canyon Park near Malibu on Nov. 15 by Barbara Elliot.

Sage Thrasher, also rare away from the desert, was reported Dec. 22 from Alta Loma by K. Elsworth, according to Hank Childs. And the **Northern Shrike** is still at Galileo Park, California City, at this writing.

A **Warbling Vireo**, rare this time of year, was found by Barbara Cohen at the L.A. Arboretum on Dec. 6. A **Chestnut-sided Warbler** was seen on the Salton Sea South Christmas Count Dec. 18 at Red Hill by Bruce Broadbooks. David Pearson found a **Black-throated Blue Warbler** on Nov. 17 in Sierra Madre, and another **Pine Warbler** was discovered at Yorba Regional Park, Yorba Linda, on Jan. 14 by Matt Heindel and John Wilson.

A **Summer Tanager** was at Huntington Gardens on Dec. 11 along with two **Western Tanagers** (Daniel Cooper) and a female **Lark Bunting** was seen at Quail Lake on Dec. 3 (Steve Molonoff).



Sepulveda Basin Spiffy-Up



One of the most unusual birds seen anywhere in California this winter was a **Le Conte's Sparrow** found at China Lake by Rick Hallowell on Nov. 27. While looking at this bird on Dec. 4 Jon Dunn turned up a **Rusty Blackbird**.

* * * * *
By the time this issue of the Western Tanager is distributed, spring migration will already be underway. In mid-January the migrant race, sasin, had begun to swell the number of **Allen's Hummingbirds** along the coast, adding in their passage to the numbers of the resident population, sedentarius.

February will have brought **Rufous Hummingbirds** and flocks of swallows, and March will bring the first orioles. It is interesting to keep track of the first individual of each species one sees each spring. If according to your copy of Garrett and Dunn's Birds of Southern California, an individual seems early, make note of it for reporting to American Birds as well as to this column.

Good birding!

* * * * *
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

By the time you read this, we hope the 11-acre wildlife lake in the Sepulveda Basin in Van Nuys will be filled and the birds will have discovered it. In fact, a small amount of rain in January attracted Green-winged Teal, dowitchers and 300 Canada Geese. Not bad for a start.

To show the public agencies that we care about Sepulveda and want it to remain an open-space refuge for people and birds, we're organizing a cleanup project in April.

Please come out and help.

WHAT? A basic basin cleanup

WHEN? Saturday April 1
8 a.m. to noon & 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
(take your choice)

WHERE? Meet in the parking lot at Woodley Park. Take the 405 Freeway to Burbank Boulevard offramp, go west to the second stop light (Woodley), turn right (north) to the Woodley Park sign (also the Tillman Water Reclamation Plant & Japanese Garden turnoff).

WEAR: Old clothes and especially old shoes and work gloves.

BRING: Lunch and water. We'll provide plastic bags, etc. (and goodies).

The cleanup is being jointly sponsored by members of Los Angeles and San Fernando Valley Audubon Society chapters, Sierra Club and the California Native Plant Society. Equipment and supplies are being provided by Los Angeles Operation Cleansweep.

Ornithologist's Bird Species Search to Raise Funds for Hall of Birds

Noted ornithologist and LAAS member, Dr. James Clements is three months into an ambitious yearlong quest to locate 4,000 bird species around the world, more than a thousand over the previous record.

But his real mission with Bird Quest '89 is to raise money to see the Ralph Schreiber Hall of Birds completed. He has challenged the birding community to pledge per species donations to raise the \$500,000 needed to complete the \$4.9 million exhibit hall, named for the man most credited with saving the Brown Pelican from extinction. Clements plans to travel 250,000 miles in his search for species.

Pledge forms are available at the LAAS Bookstore.

Reservation Policy and Procedures:

Reservations for LAAS 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.

If you desire to carpool to an event, the reservations chair can provide information for you to make contact and possible arrangements.

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

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



ANNOUNCEMENTS

March 1989

EVENING MEETINGS

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

Tuesday, March 14 - Ron Akeson will present **Alaska the Natural**. Ron is an accomplished wildlife photographer and active skindiver who holds a degree in marine biology from CSU Long Beach. He has recently spent his summers in Alaska traveling extensively through the state.



Ice Wedge Polygons — Photo by Ron Akeson

His program will highlight four areas: the North Slope and Fairbanks, the Denali Highway and National Park, the Kenai Peninsula, and the Pribilof Islands, with perhaps some examples of his unusual underwater photography as well. Each of these areas is a prime destination for birding and mammal viewing against the splendid backdrop of the Alaskan wilderness. Please join us for a look at the real Alaska -- Alaska the Natural.



Willow Ptarmigan — Photo by Ron Akeson

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 IAAS bird tape (213-874-1318) the week prior to the meeting. Coming up in April: **Richard Webster**

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.

Sunday, March 5 - Topanga State Park. Leader **Gerry Haigh** will show us around this nearby scrub oak / chaparral habitat. This is a good trip for beginning birders and those new to the area. Meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot of Trippet Ranch. From Topanga Canyon Blvd. in the Valley, 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, March 5 - Whale Watching at Pt. Dume.

A National Park Service ranger will give a 10 a.m. presentation on the California Grey Whale, and help people look for migrating cetaceans. If a seabird wanders into your field of view, that's O.K. too. Take PCH north to the south end of Zuma Beach, turn left on Westward Beach Rd. and park in the lot at the end. Proceed up the trail to the bluff, veering right at the "T" in the trail. Bring optics. One scope will be provided. \$4 parking fee is not usually collected in winter.

should be seen, as well as Pinyon Jay, Long-eared Owl, Sage Thrasher and Snipe winnowing (quite a spectacle!). Reserve with Audubon House with \$10 check, as per policy. 7:30 a.m. meeting location and possible accommodations disclosed upon receipt of reservation.

Saturday, April 15 - Spring Seabird Watch.

Come out to Pt. Dume with leader **Kimball Garrett** to scan rafts of seabirds and migrating fly-bys. Loons and scoters should be abundant, Brandt being hopeful. Meet at 1 p.m. at the end of the parking lot as described in the March 5

Saturday, March 11 - 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 at the end. Street parking is usually available.

Sunday, March 12 - Descanso Gardens.

Join experienced leader **Warren Peterson** of San Fernando Audubon on his regular walk through the gardens. Located below the hills of La Canada, the park features oak, chaparral and numerous flowering exotics. This should be a good trip for passersines and other birds of woodlands and chaparral. Take the Glendale Fwy north, exit east on the Verdugo Blvd. offramp before the 210 Fwy junction, then turn right on Descanso Dr. The park is on the right about 2 blocks down the street. We will be meeting at 8 a.m. before the park opens to the public.

Saturday, March 18 - Pelagic Trip to Santa Barbara Island is CANCELLED.

Saturday, March 18 - Whittier Narrows Regional Park. **David White** will lead a morning walk looking for 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, off Fwy. 60 between Santa Anita and Peck Drive exits, west of Fwy 605.

Sunday, March 19 - Hansen Dam. **Dustin Alcala** of S.F.A.S. will guide our party through the largest riparian / streamside habitat in L.A. County. Meet at 7:30 a.m. for a morning of birding. From the 170 Fwy north, take the 118 Fwy (Simi Valley Fwy) east to the Glenoaks Blvd. offramp, continue south for 3-4 miles, turn left on Osborne St., then right on Dronfield St. Park in the lot there. Plan to bird until lunch.

Tuesday, March 21 - L.A. State and County Arboretum. **Barbara Cohen** will lead a morning walk through varied habitat looking for quail, owls, herons, raptors and early migrants. Meet at 8 a.m. in front of the gatehouse in the parking lot on Baldwin Avenue, Arcadia, just south of Fwy 210, on the west side of the street. No admission fee.

Sunday, April 2 - Topanga State Park. See Sunday, March 5 for details.

Saturday, April 8 - Ballona Wetlands. See Saturday, March 11 for details.

Sat. & Sun., April 8 and 9 - Owens Valley Grouse Trip. Resident leader **Earl Gann** will show us around his favorite spots including Glacier Lodge and Dias Lake. Sunday morning we will meet Sage Grouse biologist **Robert Gibson** for an informative field chat out on the Crowley lek. Both Blue Grouse and Sage Grouse

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Whale Watch Trip. Latecomers meet at the top of the bluff. Bring scopes if you have them.

Sunday, April 16 - Whittier Narrows. See Saturday, March 18 for details.

Sunday, April 30 - San Antonio Canyon. Leader **Dan Guthrie**. A good locale at a good time with a good leader. Migrating passersines in riparian habitat will be the emphasis. Take Fwy 10 east to Indian Hill Blvd., to Memorial Park parking lot between 8th and 10th streets. Bring a lunch. Scopes probably not necessary.

Saturday May 6 - Starr Ranch. Details later.

Sat. & Sun., May 20 & 21 - Death Valley. Spend a late spring weekend birding this desert oasis for local specialties and eastern migrants with **Steve Gustafson**. More info. next month. Meet early Saturday in Death Valley. Fee \$25.

See Page 7 for Reservation Policy