



WESTERN TANAGER

The Los Angeles Chapter of
The National Audubon Society

Volume 56 Number 5 March 1990

D•E•C•E•M•B•E•R on

The Carrizo Plain

by Rob Hansen, trip leader

On December 9 and 10, two separate groups of birders visited the Carrizo Plain (16 birders on Saturday and 18 on Sunday) to see Sandhill Cranes, raptors and the other species that make this grassland such an exciting winter destination.

Three consecutive drought years have produced extremely dry conditions in this southeastern corner of San Luis Obispo County. Soda Lake was dry and there was almost no green vegetation to be seen. Most of the typical wintering bird species were at least present, but the numbers of individuals were notably low. In fact, no Sandhill cranes were seen on Saturday, and only 17 were seen on Sunday. The variety of raptors (and raptor plumages) was noteworthy. Participants on both trips had a chance to see Ferruginous Hawks (including one or two of the rarer dark morphs) and Rough-legged Hawks. Most observers had never seen a dark Rough-legged Hawk, but both days' tours had one or more views of this strikingly-contrasted arctic breeder.

The tour route was similar on both days. After meeting at Grapevine on I-5, we drove west through Maricopa and north through Taft. After a drive through the oilfields along Mocal Road, we veered west on Crocker Grade Road to the top of the Temblor Range. This scenic entrance to the Carrizo is by dirt road and should only be attempted in dry weather, but the birding rewards are often great.

The Saturday tour group got several looks at a furtive LeConte's Thrasher at the base of Crocker Grade (on the Elkhorn Plain side of the Temblors). Three times the thrasher allowed us to stand at the edge of the saltbush in which it had landed before it flew to the next cover. It finally ran to the

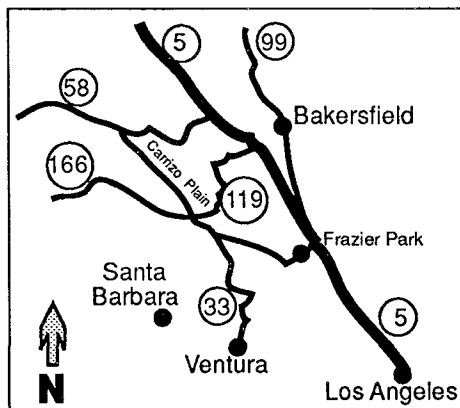
top of a hill before disappearing. Because this individual bird sported such a dark plumage, many of the group assumed that it was a California Thrasher. The sparse desert scrub of Crocker Grade and the Elkhorn Plain (areas where there are no published records of California Thrasher) supports small but documented populations of LeConte's Thrashers. Fall birds in this part of the species' range are darker than those from Antelope Valley and other parts of the Mojave Desert. The Sunday group saw two adult Golden Eagles just east of Crocker Summit.

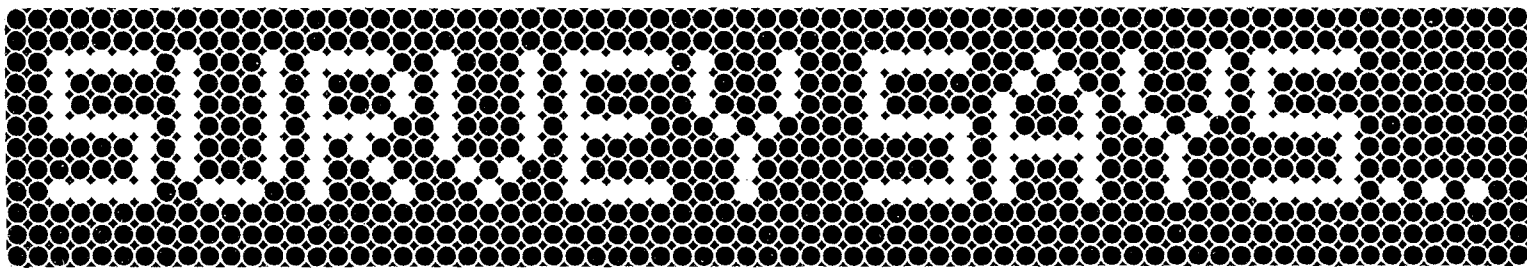
Both days' tours spent the morning on the Elkhorn Plain where we found a small flock of Mountain Plovers. The Sunday group went further north on the Elkhorn Plain and happened upon a group of Mountain Bluebirds, including one male that many said was the most intense azure blue individual they'd ever seen.

One highlight of the Saturday tour was a close-up view of a Greater Roadrunner at the parking area near Painted Rock. The bird walked right up to a blue VW bug (a Say's Phoebe had landed on the door of the same car earlier that day) then continued to

feed leisurely near our lunch stop there. Later, we saw it pick up and swallow (only after great effort and much gyration) the dry, shed exoskeleton of a large tarantula. After that crunchy morsel, it quickly found and captured a side-blotched lizard. One of the birders on Sunday caught one of these lizards (out "strolling" in the balmy December sun) and showed it to all those nearby. (After admiring birders had stroked the little lizard's back, this cold-blooded reptile appeared to be in absolute rapture and was in no condition to escape from raptors or Greater Roadrunners; the birders left the lizard under an improvised solar-oriented raptor baffle.) The Sunday group did not visit Painted Rock, so they missed the roadrunner. Instead, they crossed Belmont Trail (north of the Official Carrizo Plain Natural Area) where they watched Long-billed Curlews, saw a Burrowing Owl, and heard the distant call of a Sandhill Crane. A short while later, the Sunday group managed to find a small flock of 17 cranes feeding quietly along Soda Lake Road. Such low numbers testify to the extreme dryness of this year and to the fact that many cranes have been staying farther north this winter.

The final birding stop both days was the Saucito Ranch (just north and uphill from Painted Rock) where a Common Barn Owl was seen both days and a Great Horned Owl was found by Sunday's group. Although the species total was only 31 on Saturday and 34 on Sunday, most of the Carrizo specialties were seen. As farming on the Carrizo comes to an end and the number of cattle is reduced, the restoration of native vegetation will begin to accelerate. If enough rain comes this season, next year's Carrizo scenery should begin to recover from 100+ years of overgrazing, and conditions for next winter's birds may return to a more normal situation. 🐦





Thanks so very much to all who responded to our questionnaire in the last *Western Tanager*. The board of directors was generally surprised by the excellent response. If you didn't respond yet, we'd still appreciate your opinions. Oftentimes the open-ended comments prove to be most enlightening.

Somewhere between the harshest criticisms and the warmest pats on the back lay the feedback we were looking for: approval, direction, the specific needs of our members. If we are to maintain your support, expand and be effective, then we need to be responsive. And starting with this issue of the *Tanager* and the next general meeting, you will notice some changes toward that end.

One-sixth of the responses were from outside the Los Angeles County area. These out-of-towners included New York, Washington, D.C., Massachusetts, Louisiana, Texas, Illinois, Maryland and throughout California.

Now let's get to the results:

Birds and Birding

Two-thirds of respondents maintain at least one bird feeder. The same number keep a record of birds seen. Curiously, 51%, locals and out-of-towners alike, said they have participated in LAAS birding field trips. Pelagic trips are the most popular. Trips led by either Kimball Garrett or Jon Dunn were second in popularity. Eighty-five percent of readers look at the list of field trips in each *Tanager*. Although the workshops and meetings scored quite high, only about 33% of the people say their birding skills were sharpened by the ID workshops at monthly meetings (see Audubon House summary). One in five keep a pet bird; the most common are Parakeets. Museum and zoo exhibits of birds seem to intrigue 87% of us, with most visiting the San Diego Zoo. One reader would not patronize any place that kept birds in captivity or on display, yet admits to keeping a pet bird.

Books and Periodicals

The total number of bird books in an individual's library broke down like this:

- 43% own about 10
- 22% own about 25
- 19% own about 50
- 15% own about 100 or more

Not surprisingly, the most popular type of book owned is a field guide, 94% of us have at least one. Next on the list (even though they may not be books) were bird checklists.

Locals were split 50/50 for carefully going through the booklist included in the *Tanager* (twice per year), but more than two-thirds of the out-of-towners go through it. Oddly, 57% of out-of-towners visit the bookstore (somewhere between rarely and frequently) versus 67% of locals. Ninety percent say they usually can find what they want from the bookstore. Many people complimented the bookstore and staff. Suggestions were basically about expanding inventory, particularly on local birding. As for receiving an LAAS bookstore gift certificate as a reward for recruiting new members, out-of-towners didn't have much interest (as to be expected) and locals were split.

The *Western Tanager* ranked highest among the magazines and newsletters about birds. Next was *Audubon*, followed by *Birding*, *Birdwatcher's Digest*, and *American Birds*.

Of those who read the *Tanager*, the same number read it cover to cover as those who read some articles, a small number (8%) scan it quickly. It appears that the majority of out-of-town subscribers are reading it cover to cover.

A pleasant surprise was that 95% of our readers like the new look of the *Tanager*. Readers' wish list for the *Tanager* had quite a few interesting items — some good ideas for regular sections as well as some great ideas for articles. One particularly frequent

suggestion was to have more information about local happenings. Foreign birding seemed to be found interesting but less relevant.

Several responses were critical of the length and number of conservation articles and urged more orientation toward birding subjects in general.

Birds of the Season by Hank Brodtkin seems to be the most favored section of the *Tanager*, with **Conservation Conversation** by Sandy Wohlgemuth and the **Field Trips** portion of the Announcements section compiled by Nick Freeman tying for second.

About two-thirds of readers save back issues of the *Tanager*; while more than half save back issues of *Audubon*. On the subject of *Audubon*, 21% read it cover to cover, 58% said they read some articles, 15% scan it quickly, and 6% admit to not reading it at all.

Twelve percent of respondents subscribe to *Audubon Activist* and 5% to *Audubon Wildlife Report*.

Most people said they don't care if National Audubon Society sells their name and address to other conservation organizations, but the number of those who resent it ran a close second. Markedly smaller were those who think it's a good idea.

Audubon House

The monthly meeting received exceptionally high marks from respondents: 98% said they like the ID workshops before the meeting; 100% like the speakers; 100% like the topics selected and the format; 98% like the variety of programs. Still high was the 86% who said they like the bird photograph contests held annually. Only 40% liked the banquets. Since this year the plan is to have a picnic rather than the semi-formal banquet, it will be interesting to note the participation and popularity of this alternative.

Although almost half the respondents said they were comfortable attending eve-

ning meetings at Plummer Park, most weren't happy with the meeting room itself. Over one-half of those who responded have never attended a monthly meeting. Other comments/suggestions were: reluctance to come to the park at night (want a better, safer area); preference for a meeting place closer to downtown or the westside or in other locations to cut travel times and distances; use of an historic building; more comfortable seats and improved audio-visual facilities. We know the meetings themselves are good, so, should all else stay the same, attendance would probably rise if the facility was in a better location and better furnished.

Several members would utilize ride-sharing if it were available. We will make some efforts to get that started immediately.

Only one-third expressed a desire to meet on Saturday mornings following a bird walk. One frequent observation was that local respondents will travel hundreds of miles to see a rare bird but not even 20 miles to attend the monthly meeting.

The most heart-warming responses were from the disabled and the elderly who support LAAS totally in spirit, even though unable to attend meetings.

The Bird Alert Tape is a telephone service to birders that informs callers of recent sightings of species generally not common to either the area or season. Almost 75% of respondents said they use the taped message and, of those, 90% approved of the format. There were requests that the tape be updated more often than once per week, some would like to see: daily updates; slower speech rate; notification of seasonal arrivals of more "common" birds; and better directions including a Thomas Bros. map book page number and coordinates (which will also be added to the Field Trips section of the *Tanager*). Since the information on the tape is provided by persons calling in when they see a bird of interest in the field, perhaps more information can be given, particularly more explicit directions to the exact location.

Conservation

The first question in this section was designed to get a feel for our members' present conservation efforts and their priorities. Fortunately, it appears that 98% of respondents are recycling and conserving wherever they can. The next highest tendency is to donate to worthy conservation projects.


The last query was actually a series of value questions trying to establish where

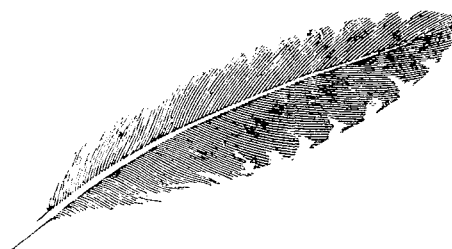
our members actually stand on some of the issues the board of directors spends a good amount of time debating. Consistent with feedback from the Books and Periodicals summary, 92% want more emphasis on local conservation such as creating a wildlife area at Sepulveda Basin. Less emphatic was a 78% response for increasing the contribution of funds toward international problems such as rainforest conservation. A habitat restoration project such as the "adopt a refuge" program should be started according to 96% of the respondents. Well over two-thirds wanted to increase political actions like the "Save Mono Lake" lawsuit. Collecting aluminum cans at Audubon House was about 60/40 for. Seventy-eight percent felt that letter writing campaigns to influence politicians' votes should be increased. The awarding of research grants to graduate students in bird biology and related fields should be increased (57%) or stay as is (39%). Awarding scholarships for study at Audubon's Ecology Camp of the West should increase (60%) or stay as is (35%). A strong 91% favored an increase in providing nature education programs to elementary schools. By a 2-to-1 vote, the annual Christmas Bird Counts should stay the way they are.

And finally on fund-raising drives such as the Birdathon, responses were split between increase and stay as is. This is a positive note because it shows we aren't asking for too much money too many times.

* * *

There is some minor correcting to do, but overall the organization's direction seems somewhat cohesive with its members as a whole. This survey has been extremely helpful in bringing those needs and desires of our supporters to our attention. The results of this effort are sure to have several long-range effects that will undoubtedly bring the goals of our members closer to fulfillment. Thank you for your participation.

Special thanks to Charles Schoettlin, Millie Newton and Kathy Hirsh for their help with the task of sorting out this questionnaire. 



At The Last Board Meeting

Fourteen members of the board of directors were in attendance (January 4, 1990). The meeting began with President Robert Van Meter bringing members up to date with announcements including a thanks from Whittier Narrows Nature Center and Associates for our recent monetary donation. In addition, our chapter received an Outstanding Education Achievement Award from National Audubon for our support of the Audubon Adventures Youth Program (along with only 10 other chapters). This is a direct result of the last Birdathon which Melanie Ingalls chaired; next Birdathon to take place from April 1 through May 15.

Discussion continued from last meeting about a possible book project our chapter may underwrite; negotiations are still in progress.

The board approved a grant of \$1,000 for student research of Brown-footed and Blue-footed Boobies.

The board allotted \$1,000 for student travel to the AOU/COU Convention in Los Angeles this June.

A decision was made to amend the bylaws to change the position of Registrar from an elected one to an appointed one.


California Wildlife Protection Initiative will be on the June ballot partly due to our signatures on recent petitions that Sandy Wohlgemuth and others circulated. The board contributed \$50 to promote the measure.

LAAS will try a plan with Union Federal Savings wherein LAAS members who have accounts there may designate LAAS to receive a small amount of interest on their accounts.

LAAS bookstore business is continuing to do well.

A contributor has now enabled us to purchase the new copy machine for the LAAS office.

We need a new answering machine for the office.

The "Picnic Committee" will pursue suggestions from the board for a membership birding picnic in early summer. 

Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

Migrating songbirds have never had an easy time of it. In this hemisphere, simply flying the thousands of miles from their breeding areas in Canada and our more northern states to winter in Latin America is a perilous journey. They run the gauntlet of predatory owls and accipiters. Long flights over open water may be too much for some individuals, particularly if the winds are unfavorable. Hurricanes, especially over the Gulf of Mexico, can devastate a fall migration. Many fly at night and in fog that obscures tall buildings and radio towers that become formidable obstacles. Even if none of these perils existed, the physical demands on a tiny bird covering all those miles on a thimbleful of fat are extraordinary.

And then there are cowbirds. We're all aware of the nest predation of these indolent invaders who trick smaller birds into raising cowbird offspring as their own. (A recent PBS nature film showed the gut-wrenching maneuver of a blind, featherless cowbird showing a warbler chick out of its nest to its death. The cowbird is hatched with a special structure on its back that gives it the leverage to perform the eviction. An evolutionary development that achieves this bizarre method of perpetuating the species is truly a marvel to behold.) Brown-headed Cowbirds can lay ten or more eggs and have parasitized 200 different species of birds.

These multiple pressures on migrants have been going on for millennia. The losses to these hazards are normal and, like mountain lions culling deer, weed out the weak and the old, keeping the populations vigorous. But recently there have been ominous changes.

A few years ago, dedicated birders began to experience an uneasy feeling that they were seeing fewer songbirds, especially in migration. As time passed, there seemed to be poorer birding days than we remembered. The occasional good day in the field with many warblers and vireos and an outstanding vagrant or two was clouded by a gnawing concern that things weren't really like the good old days. Some of the hot spots were cooling down, we thought, but we were never quite sure.

Perhaps, we said, it was just a local affair; next year would prove our worries to be baseless. There didn't seem to be any solid evidence to confirm or deny our fears.

Then in June 1989, the curtain of doubt was lifted and the unpleasant statistics were published. The National Academy of Sciences released the results of a study made by Chandler Robbins and Russell Greenberg. Populations of 56 species of birds were surveyed from 1978 to 1987. Seventy percent of the species showed a decline of 1% to 2% a year. Greenberg, a research scientist at the National Zoological Park, said, "It doesn't sound like much, but if it is a persistent loss, that percentage could be important." The number of Wood Thrushes has gone down by 40% in ten years, a frightening indication of what is happening to many of the 120 species of passerines that migrate between temperate and tropical America. So our worst fears have been confirmed; the graph line of bird populations seems to be downhill all the way with no promise that it will bottom out.

The assault on the tropical rainforests, where so many of "our" birds winter, seems to be the most obvious cause of the songbird decline. For several years, we have been told of the wholesale destruction of habitat to provide short-term cropland and pasture. The list of disasters — present and projected — has become too familiar: 25 million acres of forest lost every year; the extinction of little-known species and the consequent loss of biological diversity; sources of medicines that may never be discovered; the profound loss of trees that capture carbon dioxide, thus inhibiting excessive warming of the earth; the decimation of irreplaceable ecosystems. Many of the reasons for the decline can only be guessed at. Some migrant species, when

they reach the tropics, spend the winter in monastic isolation: males in one place, females in another. A biologist in Missouri noticed that in his area there were no nesting ovenbirds — only males could be found. Had the winter habitat of female ovenbirds been destroyed?

The cards seem to be stacked against wildlife as the century draws to a close. Lest we become holier-than-thou toward our Latin neighbors, remember that we North Americans are scarcely blameless. Ancient forests are under attack in our northwest and in British Columbia. The old benign policy of sustained growth is being replaced by the greed of take-over pirates who demand immediate liquidation of forest assets to pay off junk bond debt. The clearing of our eastern forests for the last 300 years has taken its toll on the hapless migrants. Although there appears to be considerable forest left in the East, it has been reduced to small fragments. Nesting birds no longer have the protection of a deep expanse of wooded habitat. Cowbirds can move easily from open fields nearby, penetrate the skimpy forest for hundreds of yards and lay their eggs in the nests of their victims. A survey in Illinois showed that 100% of the nests of thrushes and Summer Tanagers had been parasitized. The fragmentation also made it easier for predators like raccoons and snakes to raid the nests.

Far more devastating to bird habitat here at home is the explosion of land development: more people — more houses — more shopping centers. Nesting areas around cities have decreased by half over the last 30 years. Birders know perhaps more acutely than others what "development" can mean. The quiet wooded canyon with chattering woodpeckers and the scream of a Red-shouldered Hawk can be replaced with the wave of a zoning change by roaring trucks dumping garbage into the new landfill. The mountains of southern California are being paved over with a pattern of roads connecting expensive homes to fashion malls and ten-story office buildings. There is so much asphalt and concrete under foot that when the rains eventually come, the water cannot soak into the earth but runs off with a ferocity

"Birds are . . . indicators of our health and safety."

that carries mud and debris into bedrooms — sometimes taking the bedrooms with it.

What to do about all this? We are being told from many quarters that this is the Age of the Environment. Governments and citizens alike are becoming more sensitive to the accumulation of the sins of this overpopulated world. The media are full of stories of acid rain, ozone holes, the greenhouse effect, oil spills, toxins in the water, in the air and in our bodies. (Have we left anything out?) Will we have the guts to change our self-destructive ways in time to save the animals, the birds and our own souls? Will we increase the amount of wild areas here and everywhere that can still be rescued from destruction? We need more Nature Conservancies and World Wildlife Funds, more aggressive government action to set aside or buy wilderness, to forgive Third World debts in exchange for wildlife protection.

The metaphor is a little tired, but it still holds: birds are like the miner's canary, indicators of our health and safety. Although there are still millions of birds, their numbers and varieties are falling. Chandler Robbins of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says, "There are going to be big decreases in populations and some will vanish altogether." To prove him wrong will take a heap of doing. 🐦

REFERENCES:

- World Watch Magazine*,
January-February 1990, pp. 11-12
Smithsonian Magazine,
February 1990, pp. 28-36

Birdathon '90 To Raise Funds For Environmental Education

April 1 - May 15 are the dates for Birdathon '90, Los Angeles Audubon's annual fundraiser to support environmental education. Organizers have planned a variety of activities and hope to raise \$10,000 to support youth education programs in Los Angeles schools. The event is fun, and you don't have to be an expert birder to participate. There are many ways to get involved:

FIELD TRIP PARTICIPANTS have an opportunity to bird with an expert:

- **Sunday, April 29**, ornithologist Kimball Garrett (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County) will stage a "Loonathon/Scoterthon" at Point Dume to watch spring migration in full swing. Participants are asked to find sponsors who will pledge a few cents per bird. He estimates the group will see 500-1,000 Pacific Loons and about the same number of Surf Scoters.
- **Saturday, May 5**, author Chuck Bernstein (*The Joy of Birding*) will reprise last year's popular trip in Malibu for beginning birders. The group will bird at Malibu Creek State Park and Malibu Lagoon and will see approximately

50-80 species. Participants are asked to bring a minimum of \$25.00 in pledges.

For more competitive types, there are the **BIG DAY COMPETITORS** and **BACKYARD BIRDERS**.

• **BIG DAY COMPETITORS** form a team, sign up sponsors and challenge LAAS's board of directors for prizes based on the most species seen and most money raised during a single 24-hour period.

• **BACKYARD BIRDERS** pledge \$1.00 or more per species and then count the birds at their backyard feeding station. Prizes, including seed, feeders, and plants are given for most species seen and most money raised.

Everyone who participates in the event, and sponsors who contribute \$50.00 or more, will receive an official Birdathon '90 t-shirt.

"The Birdathon is a great opportunity to involve new people in Audubon's activities," says Melanie Ingalls, Birdathon Chairperson. "People are intrigued by the event and very willing to pledge when they hear where the money goes." Birdathon '90 will support LAAS's education programs, including teacher workshops, environmental education fairs, scholarships for teachers to Audubon Camp of the West, and the award-winning Audubon Adventures program for grades 3-6.

To register for Birdathon '90, return the form attached to this month's *Tanager* or call Audubon House at (213) 876-0202 for more information. 🐦

Anne Ehrlich To Speak

Anne Ehrlich, Associate Director for the Center for Conservation Biology at Stanford University, will speak on **THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF PREPARING FOR WAR**. She is national chair of the Sierra Club's Military Impacts on the Environment Committee.

Ms. Ehrlich will speak at the Santa Monica Unitarian Church, 1260 18th Street, Santa Monica, at 7:30 p.m., Friday, March 16, 1990. The event is sponsored by the Nuclear Issues Subcommittee of the Sierra Club's Angeles Chapter and by the Environment and Peace Committee of the Unitarian Church.

Ms. Ehrlich has written or co-authored many technical articles in population biology and has written extensively on issues such as environmental protection and the environmental consequences of nuclear war. She is co-editor, with John Birks, of a Sierra Club book to be published this year, *Hidden Dangers: The Environmental Consequences of Preparing for War*. She co-edited the article which appeared in the January-February 1990 *Tanager*, "The Challenge of Growth." In March, 1985 she received the Humanist Distinguished Service Award, jointly with Paul Ehrlich, from the American Humanist Association. In 1988 she was elected Honorary Fellow in the California Academy of Science. In 1989 she was selected for the United Nations Global 500 Roll of Honor for Environmental Achievement.

For further information, call Florence McKenna at (213) 395-6762. 🐦

Now On Recycled Paper



Starting with this issue of the *Western Tanager*, we are now using 100% recycled paper.

Ridesharing To Help Members

LAAS will promote ridesharing to our monthly meetings. The idea was suggested by the recent survey. A program will help coordinate riders and rides. Potential ridesharers can call Audubon House to try to connect with someone or can look for others from their part of town at the monthly meetings (areas will be noted on name tags).

Bookstore News

by Charles Harper

Many visitors at Audubon House ask about our pricing and service policies; so at the risk of boring some readers, I would like to outline our operations.

The bookstore is the greatest single fundraising mechanism for LAAS conservation programs. All net income after operating expenses goes to our environmental and educational efforts.

Unlike the LAAS share of your annual dues—which almost covers production of the *Western Tanager*—or the fees you pay for field and pelagic trips which are calculated to offset the cost of these services, monies raised from bookstore sales are meant to

produce funds needed to accomplish the Society's goals.

We operate on much the same principles as any retail store, but profits go to healing the environment, not into private pockets.

Because we are in competition with other nature shops and bookstores, we naturally try to keep prices as low as possible; but our size does not let us compete with such major marketing strategies as the Pathway Book Club or with the "camera warehouses" back east. Other small retailers have the same problem and must rely on other means to attract customers.

In our case, we try to do a much better job of getting you what you want when you want it. We pride ourselves on the completeness of our stock of birdfinding and identification guides, on our ability to advise you accurately on the best book or equipment for the task, and on the speed of our response to your needs. These abilities

are a result of the astoundingly dedicated team of volunteers that man our bookstore and office five days a week. And our steady growth over the last few years attests to the confidence birders all over the world have in us!

We do not have any discount differential between members (either local or national) and the general public. Because our customers are scattered so widely and most of our business is mail order, it would be extremely difficult to monitor current memberships and still be fair to all.

Please keep in mind that when you shop at Audubon Bookstore, you are not only getting value for dollar but are also helping save the Ballona Wetlands and the tropical rainforest, the Sepulveda Basin and the California Condor, educating thousands of Los Angeles school children on conservation issues, and participating as a member in the impact LAAS is making in solving some of our environmental woes. 🐦

Salton Sea Success

The February 4 field trip to the Salton Sea turned up a good assortment of wintering birds, local specialties and a couple of Arizona birds that had recently been "staked out."

Wintering birds included 150 Sandhill Cranes, thousands of White-faced Ibis, a Glaucous-winged Gull, Canada Geese, lots of Snow Geese and a smattering of Ross' Geese, about six Lewis' Woodpeckers, and Stilt Sandpiper.

Local specialties included Abert's Towhee, Vermillion Flycatcher, Gila Woodpecker, Verdin, and Yellow-footed Gull.

The proverbial cherry on top was a Curve-billed Thrasher recently located near Brawley and five Inca Doves in the same area.

Giant Kangaroo Rat
(endangered)
Drawing courtesy of
Alison Sheehy,
Kern Audubon Society



Bylaws Amendment

The board of directors proposes the following amendment to the bylaws of the Los Angeles Audubon Society to be voted upon at the meeting on April 10, 1990:

Article 4: OFFICERS

Section 1 (elective officers) would be amended to eliminate the post of Registrar of Members. Section 12 (duties of the Registrar of Members) would be stricken from the bylaws.

Article 7: STANDING COMMITTEES

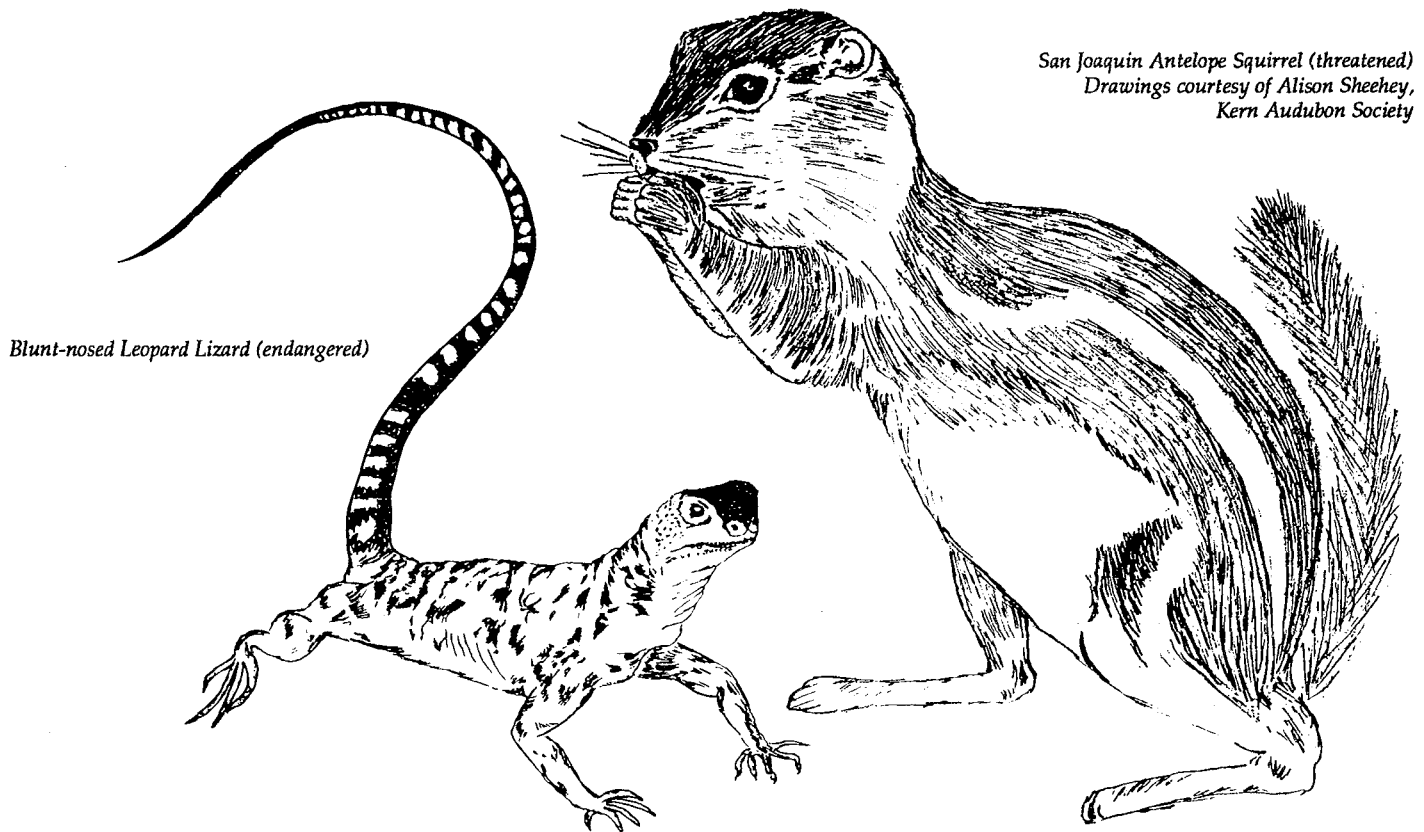
Section 2 shall add the word "Membership" to the list of standing committees. Section 4 shall add a "Membership" paragraph following the paragraph "Headquarters." The "Membership" paragraph shall read as follows: The Membership Committee shall maintain membership records of the Chapter and, by itself and in cooperation with the National Society, shall take all appropriate action to maintain the existing membership and to acquire new members. 🐦

Quality Birds at Mugu

The January 27 field trip to Point Mugu got off to a shaky start as birders arrived with pitted windshields, had their door springs sprung, and frequently refused to emerge from their cars to scan the wintering waterfowl, harriers and shorebirds that made up the majority of sightings. At times, the wind was so fierce that only our fearless leader Daniel Cooper braved the elements to be rewarded with a stunning male Black Scoter balancing that little orange ball on the base of his bill! In fact, we saw all three scoters during the day and a female Common Goldeneye and a Pelagic Cormorant to boot! The cormorant was as cooperative as the Black Scoter, swimming quite close to the shore and giving everyone a good look at its dark face, slender bill and long tail.

Easy \$\$\$ for LAAS

If you bank with Union Federal Savings, all you need do is register your account with "charity number 199" to generate an automatic donation of 15 base points to LAAS at no cost to you! This amounts to about \$30 for a \$20,000 account and could well generate thousands with a good response. A phone call to your local branch is all it takes.



Blunt-nosed Leopard Lizard (endangered)

San Joaquin Antelope Squirrel (threatened)
Drawings courtesy of Alison Sheehy,
Kern Audubon Society

Audubon Western Regional Conference

The 1990 Western Regional Conference will take place April 7-10 at Audubon's conference center at Asilomar, California on the Monterey peninsula. The theme will be "Protecting Ecological Landscapes." There will be a variety of workshops and discussions on conservation, nature study and Audubon chapter activities.

Conservation issues such as wetlands protection, water quality, state non-game programs, ancient forests, marbled murrelets and spotted owls, and Audubon's international conservation agenda will be the subject of workshops.

Chapter leaders will have sessions on organization and fundraising, computer applications and environmental education.

The conference offers top-flight workshops on nature photography and bird identification.

Seven field trips will explore a forest, field, ocean, aquarium, and the historic San Andreas Fault. Field trips have limited capacity and should be signed up for early.

National Audubon Ecology Camps

National Audubon Society offers a variety of ecology workshops that get glowing praise from alumni. The camps, at various seasons, are located in Yellowstone area of Wyoming, the Olympic Peninsula of Washington state, Big Bend National Park in Texas, the Chiricahua Mountains of southeastern Arizona, Muscongus Bay in Maine, coastal Connecticut, Sanibel Island in South Florida, and cloud forest and rain forest of Costa Rica. The camps and workshops last from one week to twelve days.

Audubon Camp of the West, in Wyoming's Wind River Mountains, is the most remote of the Audubon Camps, and the one best known in this part of the country. Week-long sessions begin on June 23, July 29 and August 5. Twelve-day sessions begin on July 1 and July 15. The cost is \$525 and \$725, respectively.

For information, contact Audubon Ecology Camps & Workshops, National Audubon Society, 613 Riversville Road, Greenwich, CT 06831, (203) 869-2017.

Trout Camp In The Sierras

Week-long Audubon Golden Trout Workshops will be held in the Sierras July 29-August 18, 1990. This is the fourteenth year of an informal field natural history program in the Golden Trout Wilderness of the eastern high Sierras, providing accessibility to these ecosystems for better understanding of these unique habitats. The camp is at 10,100 feet in the Cottonwood Lakes basin south of Mt. Whitney and is reached only by trail. The program is similar to the Audubon Camp of the West, with more hiking, and is flexible to suit the interests of each group. Most campers are adults, and interests are not confined to birding.

The camp is sponsored by the Golden Trout Committee, composed of members of several Audubon chapters in southern and northern California. Cost for the camp, Sunday through Saturday, is \$195 for adults, \$135 for children age 10-13, and \$110 for children age 3-9. For details, call or write Cindi McKernan, 1230 Friar Lane, Redlands, CA 92373, (714) 793-7897.

The Golden Trout Committee is now offering the David Gaines Sierra Scholarship. To apply, submit a 300-word essay regarding your interest in the Sierra Nevada (and its conservation) by June 1, 1990.

Back To Base

by Dorothy Dimsdale

"Can you tell me how many trees there are in California?"

"I'm afraid I don't know the precise number of species."

"No, not species. How many trees are there?"

"I have no idea."

"Well, how many bushes would you say there are?"

Charles, our only full-time worker at Audubon House, took this call. While he enjoys, and is excellent at finding answers to difficult phone questions, he needs time to get on with the overall running of "The House." As volunteer help is needed, I'm back into the fold after a respite of a few years, just for one day a week.

You may be surprised to learn that I'm not the most fascinating or knowledgeable person to work at Audubon House, but I'm the only one (at the moment) who is willing to write about my experiences there.

Of course, a part-timer can't know the answers to all the questions, but almost, if not all the people who call are pleasant and easy to talk to, and one can always holler to Charles for help. I fielded this one early in January 1990.

"What's happening to the environment?"

"In what way?"

"There's a Robin in my garden."

"How very nice."

"I've lived here for twenty years and this is the first time I've had a Robin. What's going on?"

My answer is too long to detail here but, I hope, satisfied the caller that the "greenhouse effect" had not yet singled out her yard.

A very important part of the services we provide comes from our bookstore—the

most comprehensive in the U.S. on the world's birds, and from which we mail books absolutely anywhere. The book department always needs help. We also have a small library which covers every area of ornithological interest.

Then there are our field trips. Even if you're not very interested in birds, the places we visit are often fascinating parts of California, from the desert to the mountains and the sea, including the Salton Sea. Best of all the people are friendly without being aggressively so, and with all our present-day scary feelings regarding the future of our planet, the Audubon Society is a very worthwhile place to give a hand, if only for a few hours.

It isn't necessary, but it helps to be a birder as there's great satisfaction in being able to help people identify their yard birds. They're so delighted to give that "new" bird a name. However, when I first volunteered I knew nothing at all about birds except that they were covered with feathers and flew and were nice to have around. It didn't matter. There were (and still are) plenty of jobs to keep me occupied while others answer the phone. At first, I thought the birders at Audubon House were a truly odd lot. Of course, like most people, I have always thought that singing birds are lovely, and very often pretty to look at, but why would anyone want to know every little sparrow species? What I discovered was that it's rather like doing a jigsaw puzzle—once you start, you want to see the complete picture. In fact, curiosity as to why people choose to pursue this weird hobby was the undoing of me, and now I'm as eager a birder as the rest of them.

Art Pickus, whose wife Jean also works one day a week at The House was telling me about his introduction to birding several years ago. Neither he nor Jean could tell the difference between a duck and an ostrich at that time (and I hope they'll forgive me for making that public), so they decided to go

on one of our field trips to try to find out how to watch and identify birds. During the trip a flock of specks flew across the sky and the leader of their group looked up and announced, "Cedar Waxwings!" Art said it was hard to tell they were birds, let alone what species. Then a single bird dived like lightening into a bush, and the leader called out its identity immediately. This happened on several occasions, though all Art saw were flocks of birds zipping by or a flash of a bird diving into a thicket, which was somewhat boring. As the bird or birds were almost impossible to see, let alone identify, he and Jean told me that they decided between themselves that the leader made up the identification just to impress the group—or to put it more bluntly, they thought he was lying. Only after a few field trips and questioning the leader as to how he/she knew what species they were seeing, did Art and Jean realize how it was indeed possible to name a fast flying and disappearing bird, and then to their great pleasure, finally finding they were able to do the same. This really got them into a hobby which now consumes most of their spare time.

Part of the attraction (and frustration) of birding is that it's almost impossible to know every bird in every situation. I have taken Arnold Small's superb classes and field trips at UCLA Extension, which are invaluable to all interested in birds and birding from beginners to those further along. Try one session and you'll find yourself eagerly looking forward to the following one. I have listened enthralled to Jon Dunn's lectures, held often at LAAS evening meetings, and then, having taped them, played them over and over at home. Yet out in the field it can be another story.

There was a Tree Sparrow in Fullerton in January 1990. It was in with a flock of Chipping Sparrows. When I arrived at the scene, Jon had found the bird (that's always a good start) and then for a brief moment

O'PINIONS

by MacArthur Wilson

For the past couple of winters, birders have been trooping to Death Valley to harass a small, marginal population of a gentle and innocuous species of ground-dove. There have never been more than a handful (unplucked) of individuals there, who seem to decimate over the course of the winter, only to be replenished the next fall.

Furnace Creek Ranch and its environs, a small green patch in the middle of 1,500 square miles of gravel, functions in the same way as an oceanic island. It attracts plants and animals flying over or swimming by because it stands out like a green thumb, and they stay because it offers certain amenities not available for a long way in any direction: food and shelter.

Because it attracts a lot of animals for its size, it gets relatively crowded, and just as there are inordinate numbers of surprising species arriving over time, there are (theoretically) equally inordinate numbers

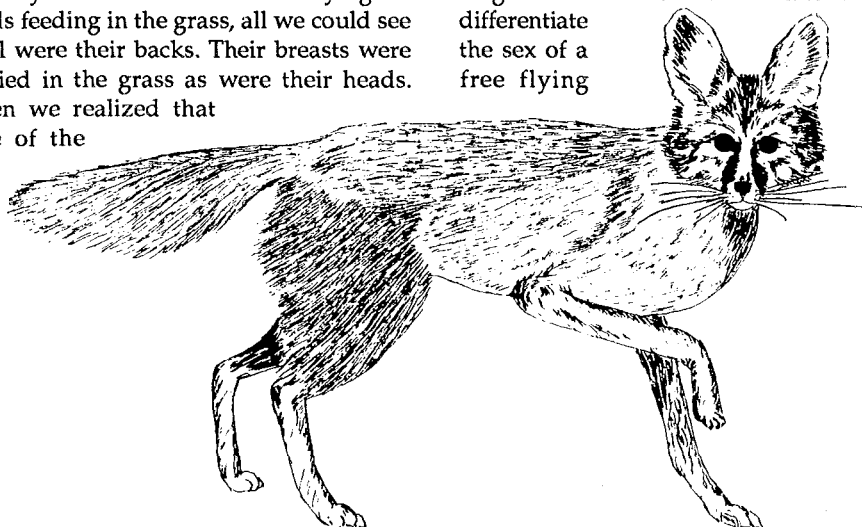
of species leaving Furnace Creek Island over the same length of time. In other words, in a mature biogeographic "island," species colonization rate equals species extinction rate, and both rates are higher than on the vaster continents.

During a visit one weekend in November, friends of mine saw an Eastern Phoebe and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, but missed a Lapland Longspur, a LeConte's Sparrow and a Bufflehead that had been seen there only a day or so previously; the following week's bird alert tape announced sightings of Harris' and White-throated Sparrows at

got it in the scope. I looked in the scope and saw three birds, all more or less alike, then they flew. With a strong feeling of inadequacy I knew I'd have to follow the flock until I was able to pick out the bird for myself. This was where the learning part came in.

At that moment my friend Millie arrived (also a House volunteer, that's how I met her), and as she hadn't yet seen the bird, she was just as eager as I to pursue and identify it for ourselves. After studying the birds feeding in the grass, all we could see well were their backs. Their breasts were buried in the grass as were their heads. Then we realized that one of the

be intimidating). However, I really felt for the newish birder on a recent field trip who gave away his newness while trying to cover it up. I think he was just eager to seem to be a knowledgeable birder and was very enthusiastic. Someone remarked that we hadn't seen any Northern Mockingbirds that morning. The newish birder said, "I saw one fly over when I arrived. It was a female." Those last four words gave him away, though no one was unkind enough to challenge him on the matter. There is no way to differentiate the sex of a free flying



San Joaquin Kit Fox (endangered)

Drawing by Alison Sheehy, Kern Audubon Society

birds had more prominent and much whiter wing bars. By keeping this bird in our binoculars we were able to follow it as it slowly moved out of the grass, then we saw the gray face and rufous smudges at the sides of the breast, and finally, the dark spot in the center of the breast. Yeah! We had it.

The good feeling was that we had been able to identify it for ourselves and not just taken someone else's word for it, even Jon Dunn's (though if he'd said it was a nestling Double-striped Thick-knee, I expect I'd believe him).

It's no shame to know less than everyone else in your group (though I agree it can

Northern Mockingbird. To be certain, I asked Kimball Garrett of the L.A. Museum of Natural History (who also gives really excellent lectures at our Society). He said that only in very special circumstances can the sexes be decided, and usually not in a free flying bird. Maybe our fellow birder did see a Mockingbird, but those last four words made his sighting suspect.

The main thing to remember is that you don't have to be a brilliant identifier of birds, you just have to enjoy trying to figure them out, and the ability to identify will come naturally in time. I've been birding seriously for fifteen years and I still know

disgustingly little. If you can tell a joke, share your lunch, or just keep quiet while the big birders have their say (and the last move is the best), you'll find that they get so used to seeing you around, the fact that your knowledge is bordering on zero is forgotten. I've been shuffling around the edge of the crowd for so long, even my paranoid fear of being ostracized for saying something like "Water Pipit!" when it's been decided that the bird's name is "American Pipit" has left me. Then, of course, there's always the possibility that they haven't even noticed your presence in the first place—and even that isn't all bad. Find a piece of information not yet universally known, e.g., "I had no idea that the Hoatzin is a ruminant!" and announce it as though you were the source of the information, and you're in! (Don't use the Hoatzin bit, every birder of note knows more than the Hoatzin itself about its functioning at the present time.)

So, it's a frustrating, time consuming, exhilarating and exciting way to spend time. When birding, one can find oneself among those who know so much more, as well as those who know less than oneself—and one learns from both groups. Seeing a new bird is wonderful for a birder, but being able to positively identify it as well, is the supreme high.

Perhaps I should apologize for all this chat about birdwatching and hope it has not taken away from the inside working of Audubon House. However, as we all know now, unfavorable trends from our carelessness in the treatment of the environment very often first manifest themselves in birds, e.g., DDT, Selenium, and ocean dumping of waste, to name only a few.

The nitty-gritty of this wandering diatribe is to say that Audubon House needs help. If you have some time, we can use it. I'm happy to say that I have been tolerated and accepted with all my faults and ignorance. So what are you waiting for?! 🐾

Furnace Creek, but no Eastern Phoebe or Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

Anyone familiar with the area will know that in birding it, one does not simply miss seeing these birds; with assiduity one should miss little or nothing, because the area is painfully finite and totally accessible. It is that the birds come and go.

Many of them fall prey to raptors and other predators. There is an unusually large number of birds of prey — obeying the same island rules above — including Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks. Last winter a Ruddy Ground-Dove was snatched

from before the eyes of its admirers by one of the bold roadrunners that strut the green-sward. This November, my friends found the remains of a Long- or Short-eared Owl, done in by a bird larger and fiercer than itself.

Other birds suffer the side effects of distraction caused by the great numbers of humans that Furnace Creek Island also attracts. Some of these people just talk loudly and drive golf carts about; others silently follow the birds around all day. Both kinds of people interrupt the birds' feeding, bathing and resting, and send them up with a

flutter likely to attract the eye of any accipiter hidden nearby. In a constricted environment, this effect too is exacerbated.

This unfortunate phenomenon will remain a contentious issue in birding circles and is a paradigm for the dilemma facing the human race as a whole. A rarity is discovered; if you get to see it, why shouldn't I, as a fellow member of this aggressively democratic society, get to see it too? So everyone flocks to see the bird until critical mass is reached and the rarity becomes an extinction, one way or another. 🐾

Bird Quest '89 Wind-Up

by James F. Clements, Ph.D.

December was an active finale for Bird Quest '89. After the frustrating overlaps of Kenya and Thailand, it was more like a fine surgical operation dragging out the last remaining birds of the year.

The Los Angeles Audubon rare bird tape was right on target with a small flock of Lewis' Woodpeckers at Malibu Creek State Park. Then Arnold Small and Bruce Broadbooks joined me for a day's birding in Orange County, which added five species . . . including California's second Sprague's Pipit (studied from 25 feet away in the scope).

I next flew to Seattle for a quick weekend, adding ten species on a long drive to Anacortes and Whidbey Island. Only a last-minute sighting of a Black-capped Chickadee at my son Dan's feeding station saved me the embarrassment of missing one of North America's best-known birds!

Fortunately the Evening Grosbeaks and Red Crossbills that regularly frequent Dan's feeding trays put in an appearance for me and my brother the following week in the mountains of central Mexico.

Bob and I spent a week birding the wilds of the state of Guerrero . . . adding some uncommon birds like Lucifer Hummingbird, Colima Warbler, Red-faced Warbler and the elusive Sierra Madre Sparrow.

We added a total of 30 species for our intense efforts in this wild and remote part of Mexico. We missed the quest bird of Guerrero, the rare Omilteme Jay, but at the Filo de Caballo study site Bob and I were treated to one of the most spectacular hummingbird displays I have ever witnessed.

In an opening in the pine-oak forest, a one-hectare field of flowers was in full

bloom. The blossoms were red, white, pink, yellow and purple, and no fewer than nine species of hummingbirds were feeding at the same time . . . without any apparent violation of one another's territory. Bob went out of his mind with this eye-level opportunity to photograph such elusive quarry . . . especially two incredibly cooperative male Bumblebee Hummingbirds.

I was reminded of Henry Walter Bates' remarks as he watched a hummingbird bathing in a heliconia patch along the Amazon River: "I thought, as I watched it, that there was no need for poets to invent elves and gnomes, whilst Nature furnishes us with such marvelous little sprites ready on hand."

I flew home for a quick two days for Christmas and then back to southern Mexico to end up with VENT's annual Christmas Oaxaca tour. The southern Mexican highlands adjacent to Oaxaca harbor an incredible 26 endemic species of birds and Kenn Kaufmann, Ted Parker and Rick Bowers did their best to drag out each of the skulking critters for the Bird Quest '89 tally. One by one they fell . . . Dwarf Vireo, Slaty Vireo, Boucard's Wren, Bridled Sparrow, Dwarf Jay, White-throated Towhee, Gray-barred Wren.

I was astounded by the lack of parrots and took two days off to drive to the coast at Puerto Escondido for the coastal and lowland birds that were not to be hoped for in the highlands. This added another ten species to the trip list, including the beautiful Orange-breasted Bunting and the Least Pygmy-Owl.

But the *piece de resistance* was provided on December 31, the final day of birding. Rick Bowers lent me a pre-recorded selection of the rare Oaxaca Sparrow's song, and

on the way up to the mountain, Kenn and Ted pointed to the spot where they had seen the bird the previous day.

No sooner had I played the tape than Karen and I were bombed by an angry pair of Oaxaca Sparrows . . . my 3,630th (and final) bird of the year, and a real skulking Mexican endemic for my 6,124th life bird.

It was quite an ending to 265,000 miles of circling the globe in my dual pursuits of raising funds for the L.A. Museum of Natural History and breaking the world record for number of bird species sighted in a calendar year.

Despite my not reaching my goal of 4,000 species, my brother Bob reminded me that on the dust jacket of the second edition of *Birds of the World: A Checklist*, I was described as "one of a handful of naturalists who has identified over 3,000 species of birds in their natural habitat."

Even more poignant, however, was the ABA's *Birding* magazine summary of May-June 1969, in which the top world list was Stuart Keith . . . at 3,170 species!

My fiancée and I spent the first week of the new year at Las Hadas in Manzanillo, while I re-involved myself in Hartmut Walter's Socorro Island Dove rehabilitation project. Watching the Brown Pelicans from my balcony each morning was a silent reminder of how much Bird Quest '89 would have meant to the person most responsible for it . . . Dr. Ralph Schreiber.

Postscript: This summary was delayed due to the necessity of having my failed hip replaced. The operation was successfully performed at St. John's Hospital in Santa Monica, and I am now home and healing according to plan. *Quo vadis?* 🐦

Raptor Workshop Revisited

by Nick Freeman

What makes raptors so popular among hardcore and casual birders alike? Is it something about their throne at the top of the food chain? Their regal demeanor as they soar, stoop and survey their domain? Or simply the ease with which they can be

spotted and observed perching on telephone poles or wheeling overhead? Whatever the answer, a healthy crowd of birders demonstrated their common fascination with taloned avifauna by showing up at Ned Harris' workshop on the diurnal raptors of California. The lecture was presented in an accessible format, stressing reliable fieldmarks but also hitting on the newer holistic methods. Ned's slides beautifully illustrated the characteristic markings of the 22 species discussed.

The next morning, the rainy cold snap snapped just in time to make for an unexpectedly pleasant, if cool, day for our bus trip into the Antelope Valley. The group got good-to-incredible looks at many of the raptors expected in the area, including plentiful Ferruginous and Red-tailed Hawks and a curious Golden Eagle wheeling overhead. Ned was also able to draw on the expertise of top raptor specialists Peter Bloom and his co-workers to make this trip a particularly memorable event. 🐦

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Continued from page 12

Saturday, April 14 - Ballona Wetlands. Until a new leader is found, this may be our last trip to Ballona. Wintering waterfowl and shorebirds should be giving way to early migrants. Black Oystercatchers are usually seen. Meet at 8 a.m. at the Pacific Ave. footbridge. Take the Marina Fwy (90 West) to Culver Blvd., turn left to Pacific Ave., then right to the bridge at the end. Street parking is usually available. [LA, p.55A, D-1]

Friday, April 20 - Chatsworth Park South. Join leader Allan Keller for a morning of prime migration birding. We will seek warblers, orioles, grosbeaks and others in this chaparral-oak woodland habitat. From Topanga Canyon Blvd. go west on Devonshire and continue into the parking lot by the Recreation Center. Meet at 8.00 a.m. [LA, p.6, B-2]

Saturday, April 21 - L.A. River Walk for Beginners. Daniel Cooper will lead this urban morning bird walk in coordination with the Friends of the Los Angeles River, in an effort to see some birds on less than a full tank of gas, and to show that there are still stretches of the river that contain enough wildlife habitat to enjoy and be concerned about. Take Fwy 5 to Los Feliz, head east over the river, then park at the cafe adjacent to the golf course on the north (left) side of the street. Meet at 8 a.m. [LA, p.25, B-6]

Saturday, April 21 - Whittier Narrows Regional Park. See March 18 for details.

Sunday, April 22, EARTH DAY - Placerita Canyon. Catch the migration with perhaps our most renowned birdsong aficionado, Kimball Garrett. The group will explore the oak woodlands and grasslands of the canyon and adjacent Walker Ranch. Take Hwy 14 to Placerita Canyon Road and drive east (right) about 3.5 miles to the Placerita Nature Center lot on the right. Meet outside

the chained lot at 7.00 a.m. and finish before noon. [LA, p.127, H-4]

Sunday, April 22 - Malibu Lagoon. See March 25 for details.


Sunday, April 29 - Mojave Narrows. Harold Bond will lead his band of merry birders through this prime birding oasis to see what spring desert specialties the lake, marsh, fields and woods of this extensive area can produce. Rails, Vermilion Flycatchers and wayward vagrants have been known to augment the more usual freshly molted migrants. Take Hwy 15 toward Victorville, and take the Bear Valley cut-off east (right) for about 4 miles. The entrance road to the park will be on the left. Bring a lunch and dress for the possibility of cold and wind. Bring a scope if you have one. Bird with Harold after lunch as well if you like. Overnight camping in the park and lodging in Victorville are available. Meet at 8.00 a.m. at the Mojave Narrows Boathouse.

Sunday, April 29 - Kimball Garrett leads a "Loonathon" at Point Dume for Birdathon '90. See attached flyer or call Audubon House for details and to register.



Saturday, May 5 - Chuck Bernstein will lead a trip for beginning birders at Malibu Creek State Park and Malibu Lagoon for Birdathon '90. See attached flyer or call Audubon House for details and to register.

Saturday, May 5 - Santa Anita Canyon. Leader Mary Carmona. Take the 210 Fwy east toward Arcadia and take Santa Anita Avenue north to the very end. Meet at the trailhead at the bottom of the parking lot at the end of the road. A moderately strenuous 4-mile round trip through oak and chaparral canyons. Good selection of breeding and migrant passerines. Bring a lunch. May be cool. Meet at 7.00 a.m. [LA, p.20A, F-1]

Sunday, May 6 - Topanga State Park. See March 4 for details. 

RESERVATION TRIPS (Limited Participation) Policy and Procedures

Reservations for LAAS trips will be accepted ONLY if ALL the following information has been 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 or changes
- (4) Separate check (no cash please) to LAAS for exact amount for each trip
- (5) SASE for confirmation and associated trip information.

Send to: Reservations, LAAS, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., West Hollywood, CA 90046

If there is insufficient response, the trip will be cancelled *two Wednesdays* prior to the scheduled date and you will be so notified and your fee refunded. Your cancellation within that time will bring a refund only if there is a paid replacement available.

WESTERN TANAGER

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Annual membership in both societies is \$35 per year, \$21 for seniors, and presently \$30 for new members for their first year. Members receive the *Western Tanager* newsletter and *Audubon* magazine, a national publication.

Renewals of membership are computerized by National Audubon and should not normally be sent to LAAS. New memberships and renewal of lapsed memberships may be sent to Los Angeles Audubon House at the above address. Make checks payable to the order of National Audubon Society.

Non-members may subscribe to the *Western Tanager* for \$12 per year. The newsletter is sent by first class mail to subscribers and members who pay an additional \$5. Make checks payable to Los Angeles Audubon Society.

DWP Employees?

Are any of our LAAS members employees of the Department of Water and Power? If so, please contact Steve Hirsh at (213) 255-5515. We'd like your help with a special project.

Research Volunteers Wanted

Breeding biology of Western American Crows ongoing research for UCLA Ph.D. dissertation, needs volunteers few hours per week mainly in April and May at Balboa Golf Course, Encino. Spotting scope helpful. Contact: Carolee Caffrey (213) 825-0087 or (213) 396-7882 before 10:30 p.m.

National Headquarters, New York
(212) 832-3200

Los Angeles Audubon Headquarters,
Library and Bookstore are open

Tuesday - Saturday

10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

(213) 876-0202 - office

(213) 874-1318 - bird tape

(updated Thursdays)

To report bird sightings,

before 9:00 p.m.

(818) 788-5188 - Jean Brandt

(213) 827-0407 - Hank Brodtkin

ANNOUNCEMENTS

EVENING MEETING

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

Tuesday, March 13 - Dr. Michael Wallace, Director of The Captive Breeding and Release Program for the California Condor as well as the Curator of Birds at our own L.A. Zoo, will present a program on **The California Condor**. This is a topic of national interest. His talk will include details about the current use of Andean Condors as experimental surrogates (female Andean Condors were released in the Los Padres National Forest this year). The Captive Breeding Program is moving ahead successfully and Dr. Wallace will give us a behind-the-scenes look at how it works. Please join us and get reacquainted with the magnificent California Condor and the struggle to bring it back from extinction.

IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOP

There will be no identification workshop. At 7:45 p.m., Birdathon chairperson Melanie Ingalls will present National Audubon Society's Birdathon slideshow and discuss plans for this years event which will support L.A. Audubon's education programs.

NEXT MONTH

Tuesday, April 10 - Don Roberson, "Birding the Bounding Main," seabirds and mammals of the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean

* * *

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 cancellations that may have occurred by the Thursday before the trip.

Notations in parentheses after trip listings refer to Thomas Bros. map page and grid coordinates (county, page number, grid coordinates).

Sunday, March 4 - Topanga State Park. Leader **Gerry Haigh** will guide participants through this beautiful nearby area. The group will look at wintering and resident species in the sycamores, grassland, scrub oak and chaparral. This is an ideal trip for a beginning birder or for someone new to the area. Meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot of Trippet Ranch. From Topanga Canyon Blvd. heading south, take a very sharp turn east (left if heading south from the San Fernando Valley) uphill onto Entrada Drive (7 miles south of Ventura Blvd. and 1 mile north of Topanga Village). Follow the signs to the state park. \$3 parking fee. [LA, p.109, D-4]

Saturday, March 10 - Ballona Wetlands - CANCELLED. See April 14.

Sunday, March 11 - Sepulveda Basin Natural Area. Leader **Dustin Alcalá** hopes to find fair numbers of the waterfowl and raptors that exploded into this area when the lake bed was finally filled with water. There should also be some grassland/riparian/shorebird activity. Meet at Woodley Park at 7:30 a.m. To get there,

take Burbank Blvd. west, turn right onto Woodley Avenue and continue to the Woodley Park entrance on the right. Meet in the first parking area. [LA, p.15, B-6]

Sunday, March 18 - Upper Bee Canyon. Leader **Dustin Alcalá**. A 6-mile strenuous walk through real wilderness, impressive, rugged oak-woodland habitat with a fair chance of seeing Purple Finch, Varied Thrush, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Band-tailed Pigeon, Nuttall's and Lewis' Woodpeckers, and deer and other mammals. Dustin is also familiar with the native plants and trees in the area. Not for lightweights, but not a forced march. Layered clothing, hat, long sleeves and durable lug-soled footwear suggested. Packlight, bring lunch and water. Take 405 Fwy north to 118 Fwy west; take the Balboa Blvd. offramp north, turn left onto Jolette Avenue then right onto Meadowlark Avenue. Park at the side of the street where Meadowlark dead ends at Van Gogh Street. Meet at 7 a.m. Call Dustin before the trip at (818) 767-0558 (before 9 p.m.) for recent sightings and more info. [LA, p.1, E-3]

Sunday, March 18 - Whittier Narrows Regional Park. **David White** will lead a morning walk to check in on their resident birds and renowned waterfowl. Meet at 8 a.m. at the Nature Center, 1000 N. Durfee Avenue in South El Monte, off Fwy 60 between the Santa Anita and Peck Dr. exits, west of Fwy 605. [LA, p.47, D-5]

Tuesday, March 21 - L.A. 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. [LA, p.28, C-4]

Saturday, March 24 - Bolsa Chica and Newport Back Bay. **Irwin Wolman** will lead this trip to the best-known estuaries in the L.A. Basin. Wintering and early migrant shorebirds should be looking dapper by now. Other birds to look for include scoters, rails, ducks, gulls and Belding's Savannah Sparrow. Meet at 8 a.m. in the Bolsa Chica estuary parking lot on the east side of the Pacific Coast Hwy. Take the 405 Fwy past the 605 Fwy to Valley View. Exit and follow Valley View south as it becomes Bolsa Chica Road, turn west at the end onto Warner, then left onto PCH. You will pass the small parking lot for the Bolsa Chica estuary on your left and will have to make a U-turn farther down to get back to the lot. A large turnout of participants may require some paid parking across the street. A fee may be charged at Newport Back Bay. Bring a lunch and scopes. [OR, p.25, D-2]

Sunday, March 25 - Malibu Lagoon. Fourth Sunday of each month. Meet at 8:30 a.m. in the lagoon parking lot (daily fee) on the ocean side of PCH, just north of the lagoon bridge. You can also turn into town for street parking. This walk is under the leadership of a member of the Santa Monica Audubon Society. [LA, p.114, B-5]

Saturday, March 31 - Starr Ranch Sanctuary. We will meet Park Ranger **Pete DeSimone** at adjacent Casper Park at 8:30 a.m. and carpool into park in private vehicles, heading north through Bell Canyon into Starr Ranch. We should glimpse Grasshopper Sparrows along the way. An un-strenuous walk through fairly untouched oak woodlands may be good for passerines and young raptors. Take Fwy 5 south to the Ortega Hwy (74), then head east out of San Juan Capistrano on Hwy 74 for about 8 miles to the Casper Park entrance on your left. Sign in at the gate and park in the lot immediately left of the gatehouse. Reserve by phone with Audubon House. Rain cancels. \$5 donation to Starr Ranch not mandatory. Do not send money to Audubon. Participation limited. [OR, p.66, O-3]

Sunday, April 1 - Topanga State Park. See March 4 for details.

Thursday, April 5 - Point Dume Seabird Watch. One of our masters of field I.D., **Jon Dunn**, will be watching the world (of seabirds) go by from this prominent promontory. Loons, scoters and gulls should provide the meat of the observations. Take PCH north past Malibu, turn left onto Westward Beach Road, which divides the bluff from the south end of Zuma Beach, and continue to the parking lot at the end of the road. Take the trail to the top of the bluff, veering right at the T in the trail. 1:30 p.m. to 5-ish. Dress warmly and bring a scope if possible. [LA, p.110, B-6]

Sunday, April 8 - El Dorado Park. **Jim and Betty Jo Stevenson** will show us around the extensive nature center and parkland that comprise their home turf. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the grassy area behind the Nature Center parking lot (major bucks to park here!) To get to the park and find free parking, take the 605 Fwy south to Spring Street; head west and make a U-turn, then park along Spring before the flood control channel. Take the sidewalk over the channel to the parking lot on your right, then proceed to the back of the lot. [LA, p.72, F-1]

Sunday, April 8 - Providence Mts. and Vicinity. Leader **Chet McCaugh**. If you are intrigued by the eastern Mojave Desert but wouldn't know where to start on your own, this trip may be of special interest. Chet has spent considerable time in these areas and hopes to find Crissal and Bendire's Thrashers singing on their nesting grounds. The far reaches of the desert are presently under severe legislative scrutiny. Aside from seeing early breeding and migrating birds, you can firm up your knowledge and appreciation of this very scenic desert area. Plan to do a lot of driving Saturday afternoon (and Sunday evening), as we will meet at 6 a.m. Sunday morning at Pike's Coffee Shop in Baker. Take Hwy 15 east 60 miles past Barstow; take the Baker turnoff (Hwy 127) into town, and Pike's will be on the left side of the road. Reserve with Audubon House. Fee: \$16. 20 maximum. Call Nick Freeman at (213) 596-6172 with your name, phone number and address for accommodation information as it becomes available.

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