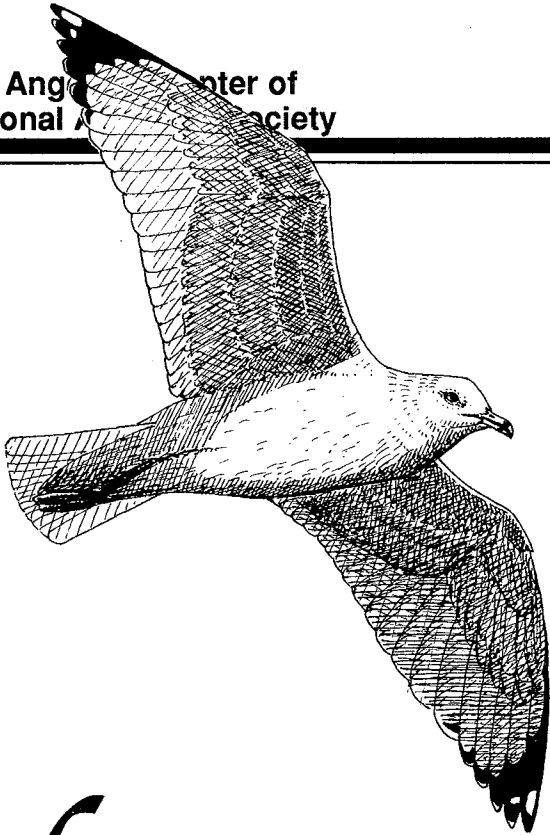




WESTERN TANAGER

The Los Angeles Chapter of
The National Audubon Society

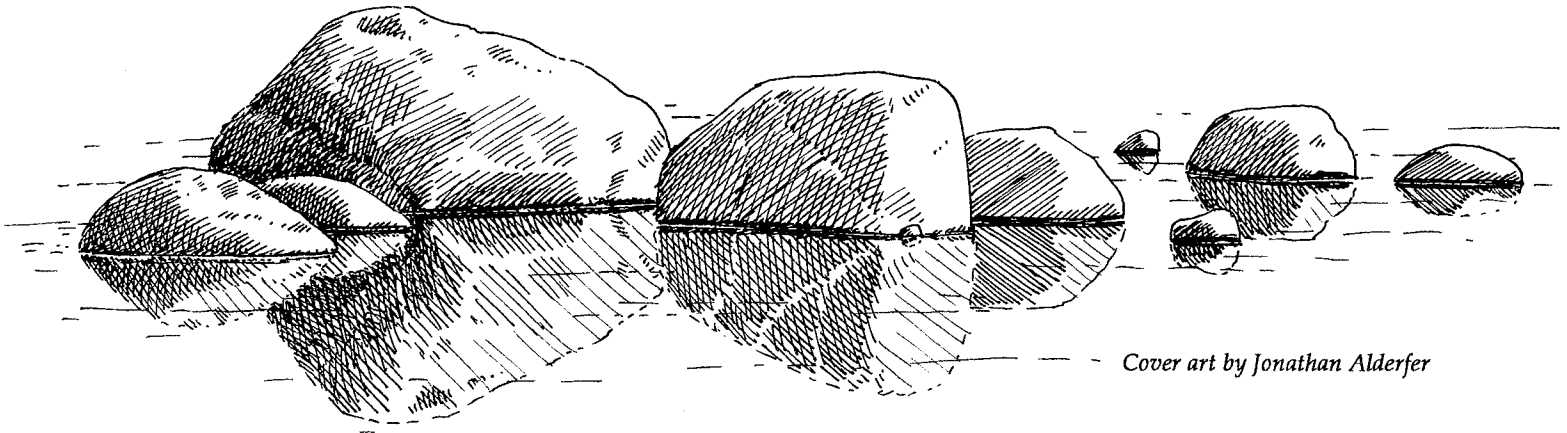
Volume 58 Number 5 Jan-Feb 1992



Gulls Over The Southland

by Larry W. Allen

New Year's Day. You've decided to commence the year with a "Big Day." You've started before dawn
owling in the mountains; you've scoured the foothills, and now you're heading across interior
lowlands toward the Salton Sea. Perhaps you're a tad behind schedule, but you're confident you'll get almost all
your target birds and a few others besides. ¶ You see a gull soaring in the distance. "Probably a California Gull,"
you mutter to yourself. Now what do you do? Do you take the time to check out the gull? Do you mentally "tick"
it as a California, knowing that this is the species you usually see in the L.A. basin? Do you ignore it, knowing
that you will see lots of gulls at the Salton Sea?



Cover art by Jonathan Alderfer

Average Numbers Mix of Gulls in Southern California, 86th through 90th Christmas Bird Counts

Count circle groups	Catalina Island	Coastal	Coastal Plain	Interior 0-40 mi	Interior 41-65 mi	Salton Sea
Counts x years	2	63	10	38	25	9
Gulls per count (mean)	2,275	5,419	2,186	1,710	22	10,764
Gull Species	Species as percent of total gulls reported per count circle group					
Bonaparte's	2.7	13.7	3.9	3.2		0.5
Heermann's	8.4	5.0				
Mew	0.2	2.6	—	—		
Ring-billed		25.5	17.3	69.4	76.4	95.7
California	44.3	31.7	77.8	22.8	22.7	1.1
Herring	1.0	1.3	0.8	4.5	0.9	2.5
Thayer's		—	—	—		
Yellow-footed						—
Western	43.4	19.9	—			
Glaucous-winged		0.3	—			

Numbers in lower 10 rows are the percent that each species represents in the total gulls reported for each set of count circles. "—" denotes reported numbers less than 0.1% of total. A blank or species not listed denotes reported numbers less than 0.01% of total. Columns may not add to 100% due to nonlisted species and rounding.

In order to answer these sorts of questions, I analyzed the five most recent Christmas Bird Counts for Southern California published in *American Birds*, using the definition of Southern California given in Garrett and Dunn (1981). I divided the counts into categories:

- Coastal, if any part of the count circle touched the coast of the Pacific Ocean;
- Coastal Plain, if any part of the count circle included an area under 500 ft. elevation which was not separated from the coast by areas of higher elevation;
- Inland, if all of the count circle was separated from the coast or coastal plain by mountains or hills;
- Santa Catalina Island and Salton Sea, which are atypical in many respects.

Two trends could be discerned in the data. First, the total number of gulls reported per count declined significantly for count circles whose closest boundary was beyond 40 miles from the coast, and became insignifi-

cant for count circles beyond 65 miles, except at the Salton Sea. Second, the mix of the species reported also changed, depending on count location. The data are summarized in the table above; however they must be interpreted cautiously (some obvious problems are discussed at the end of this article).

The vast majority of gulls reported away from the coast were either California or Ring-billed Gulls. On the average, in counts covering the coastal plain, California outnumbered Ring-billed by about 4.5 to 1. However, this situation changed dramatically for interior counts, with Ring-billed outnumbering California on the average by about 3 to 1, and at the Salton Sea by almost 100 to 1!

With these facts in mind, the answers to the above questions are clear. If you haven't already found a California Gull, planning on finding it at the Salton Sea is a high-risk option, given their relative scarcity at that locale. You know that if you assume it to be a California Gull based upon experi-

ence in the L.A. basin, you have about a 75% chance of being in error. Hence, you reluctantly conclude that the only realistic course of action is to stop and take the time to look at the bird.

As you bring the car to a halt, you try to recall how to tell a California from a Ring-billed when it is flying and too far away to see details of the bill or legs. You know that the "jizz" is different: California Gulls have slender, long wings, that are sometimes held forward and noticeably bent at the wrist when the bird is in a glide (Figure 1); Ring-billed Gulls have shorter, straighter wings which seem stubby in comparison (Figure 3). If the back-lighting isn't too severe, other visual differences may help. Obviously, if the gull has brown on the breast and belly, it cannot be a Ring-billed since, by wintertime, these birds have white undersides at all ages.

Other clues can be utilized. An adult Ring-billed (and Herring) Gull when seen overhead will often appear to exhibit a "window" in the inner primaries (Figure 3, and a hint of this

California and Ring-billed Gull Wings— Ventral Views

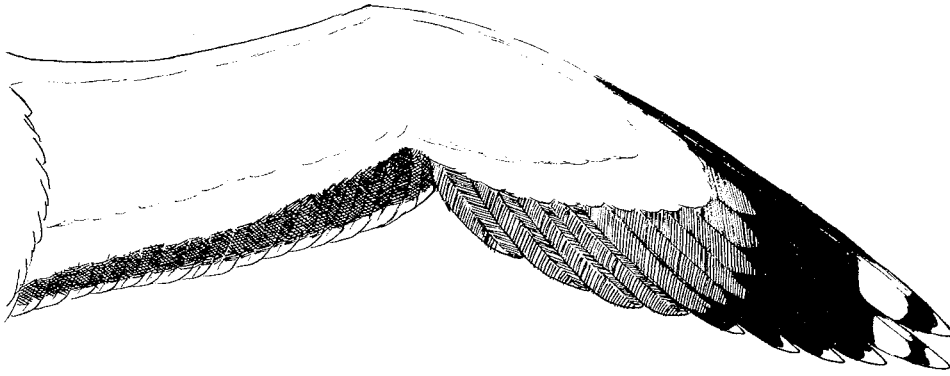


Figure 1.
California Gull, adult — active flight.

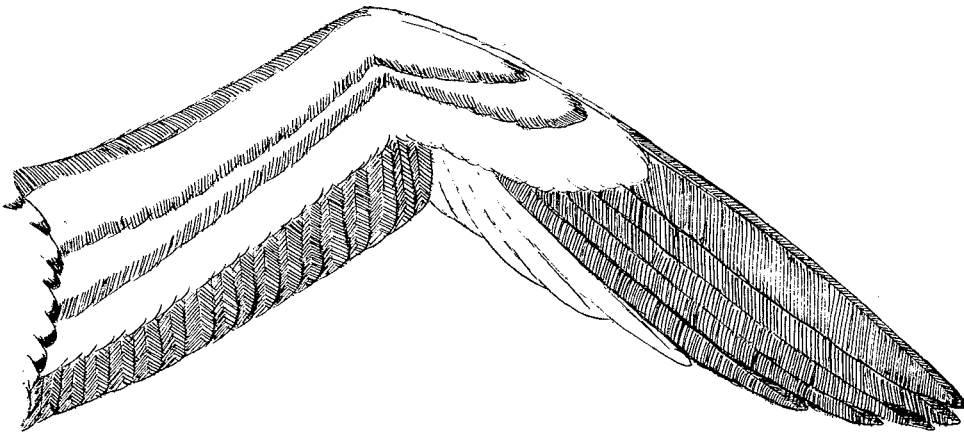


Figure 2.
California Gull, second year —
soaring or gliding.

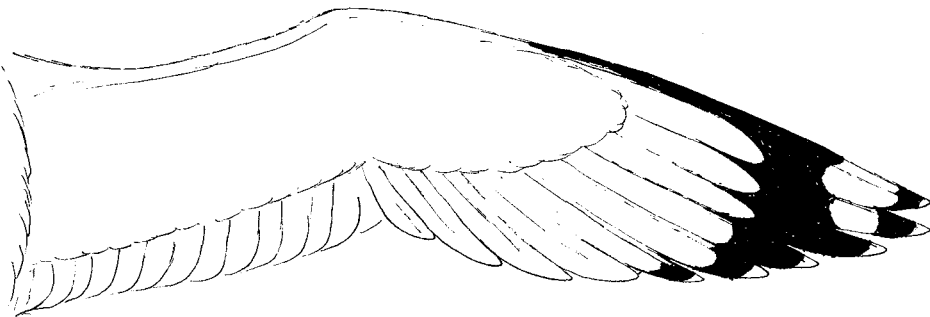


Figure 3.
Ring-billed Gull, adult — active flight.

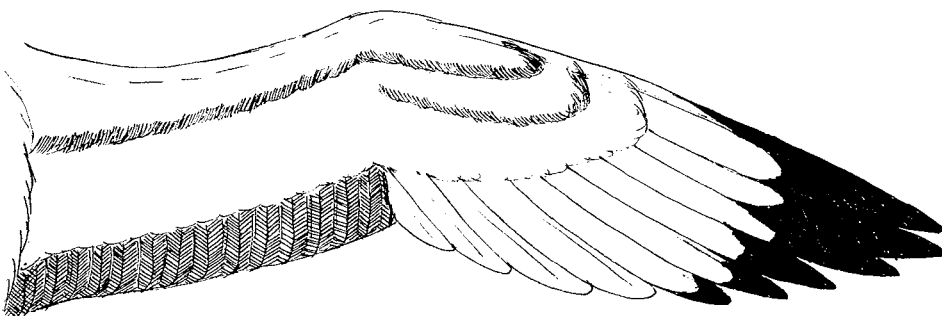


Figure 4.
Ring-billed Gull, second year —
soaring or gliding.
(First year similar, but primaries brown.)

can be seen in plate 145 in Grant, 1986), whereas the California Gull with its darker mantle does not share this feature. But the medium-gray mantle of the adult California Gull does have the effect of forming a gray subterminal bar at the trailing edge of the inner wing when seen from underneath (Figure 1 and plates 486 and 487 in Grant). (Subadults of both species also have dark secondaries, however, so if your gull has a tail band or lacks "mirrors" in the primaries, you can't use this feature— see Figures 2 and 4.) The Ring-billed also has slightly less extensive black in the outer primaries, but the difference is hard to describe, and there may be some overlap in this characteristic between the two species.

You clamber out of the car, binoculars in hand, and.. the bird has disappeared. You reflect on life's inequities as again you head into the desert, one eye on the road and one eye on the sky.

Methodological Caveats

Some authorities question the reliability of Christmas count data with respect to such hard-to-distinguish species complexes as gulls. Both observer error, and observer and compiler expectation as to what *should* be seen in the count area can color the results. In addition, the statistical significance of the distributional differences reported cannot be assessed. Statistical tests presuppose a random sampling of the population. Count circle locations are not random samples of an area but very carefully chosen with an eye to habitat variability, ease of access, etc. Hence, the preconditions for valid statistical testing are missing. Further, the coastal plain area is underrepresented in the data, since all but two count circles in this habitat also include seacoast, thus resulting in count data which intermingle populations from two habitats.

As a consequence, it is clear we cannot trust that slight differences in reported numbers represent true differences in populations. Large reported differences may mirror actual differences, but you will have to decide how much trust you wish to place in these reports. I am attempting to compile data on gull distribution, both summer and winter, throughout North America. If you would like to help, I would very much like to see field trip reports which include date, specific locations, and numbers of individuals of each species. Please send reports to: Larry Allen, 4797 Huntington Drive North, Los Angeles, CA 90032. 🐦

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Garrett, K and J. Dunn (1981) *Birds of Southern California: Status and Distribution*, LAAS

Grant, P. (2nd ed., 1986) *Gulls: a Guide to Identification*, Buteo Books, Vermillion SD.

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Conservation Conversation

by Martin J. Byhower

Harbor Lake Is Dying

It is being killed by apathy. The park has no official designation that provides protection for its wildlife, even though it is on the Los Angeles County's "Significant Ecological Area" list. It falls under multiple jurisdictions, which means that each party hopes that the others will take charge on matters involving work, money or public controversy. The park itself straddles the cities of Harbor City and Wilmington, yet falls mainly under the jurisdiction of the City of Los Angeles (administered by the Department of Recreation and Parks). For years a group called the Harbor Regional Advisory Board has existed for the purpose of managing the park's affairs and providing citizen input. How could they have let things get so bad?

Harbor Lake (more correctly known as Machado Lake) formed long ago as an "oxbow" of a much more extensive, meandering water system that included much of the lowlands of southern Los Angeles County.

It is one of the last remaining green spots with appropriate native vegetation for miles in either direction. After a two to four hundred mile night-long journey guided by the stars, the Pacific flyway migrants need to rest and feed before resuming their vital annual trip to the tropics. This is a matter of life or death for them. The willow forest, a distinct and valuable habitat type, extended 20 miles south-

ward from the area. A few early birders recall abundant Clapper Rails there; Yellow-billed Cuckoos, an endangered species, once bred there. Over 300 species of birds have been reported in the park. It was a lush habitat.

Not now. Most of the water and trees are gone due to development and the inevitable concrete rechannelization for flood control. Harbor Lake once received tidal influence, but if you were to go down to the

will not disclose; years of toxic dumping in and around the area; a faulty aeration system that nobody can seem to get around to fixing; feral and abandoned animals who, if they manage to survive at all, do so at the expense of native species; and, perhaps of most immediate concern, the loss of traditional sources of water for the lake.

What can you do? Political pressure works. Please get on the phone or get out your pen and write a few letters. Contact your representatives and

ask "why hasn't the Health Department gotten involved?" or "Why not pay those jobless folks, who have been provided a 'work pickup center' at the northwest corner of the park, to pick up the trash in the willows where many of

*What can you do? Political pressure works.
Please get on the phone or get out your pen
and write a few letters.*

park right now, you would see mostly dry, cracked mud where, after a prolonged drought and the diversion of traditional water sources, a thriving lake no longer exists.

The woods at the north end of the lake are disgusting. Trash — plastic bags, food containers, disposable diapers, clothing, and much much more — is strewn everywhere. Individuals, most likely homeless, sleep on the adjacent lawns and in the woods. Walking through the willows, amid trees plastered with pages torn from pornographic magazines, it is almost impossible to avoid stepping on human feces. This is no place for an innocent birdwalk.

Harbor Lake has other and perhaps even more serious problems than human refuse: pesticide and fertilizer use by the adjacent golf course; encroachment in the form of grading and brush removal by Harbor College for some mysterious purpose that they

them eat and sleep?" City politicians with enough power to get the INS to look the other way might just also have enough power to implement innovative, ecologically useful programs as well!

Right now the MWD has a surplus of stored water due to effective conservation programs. The Los Angeles County Sanitation District would love to construct a tertiary water treatment facility at their Carson plant that could supply sufficient water for Harbor Lake on a year-round basis if the funds were available. Neither of these options is likely without strong public input.

Finally, please give me a call at 213/374-7473 and let me know the results of your conversations and letters, be they with a Councilperson, Mayor, Assemblyperson, State Senator, agency official, Congressperson or County Supervisor — I'm keeping score. Thanks. 🐦

Birding Malibu Creek State Park

by Russell Stone

On the monthly bird walks that I lead in Malibu Creek State Park, newcomers are always amazed by the park's beauty and its variety of birds. Standing on the bridge near the Visitor's Center, you can see Golden Eagles soaring high above the volcanic crags and listen for the clear descending song of the Canyon Wren. The wrens can be seen along the Gorge Trail. In winter, the stream below is filled with ducks such as Bufflehead, American Wigeon and Gadwall. Eurasian Wigeon, Wood Duck, and Hooded Merganser have visited in the past two years in March and April. In March, you could see hundreds of swallows — Violet-green, Tree, Cliff, Northern Rough-winged and Barn — flying above the stream. Cliff Swallows nest under the bridge. In the elm trees around the Visitor's Center, Red-breasted Sapsuckers can be easily and reliably seen in winter.

If you were to return to this spot in late summer or early fall, you would probably find the creek to be bone dry, with the birds few and far between. I imagine that many a birder in this situation has mistakenly assumed that Malibu Creek is a place to bird only in the winter. To the contrary, a good birder who is familiar with the park could find over 60 species in a day of birding here in any month, with the possible exception of August.

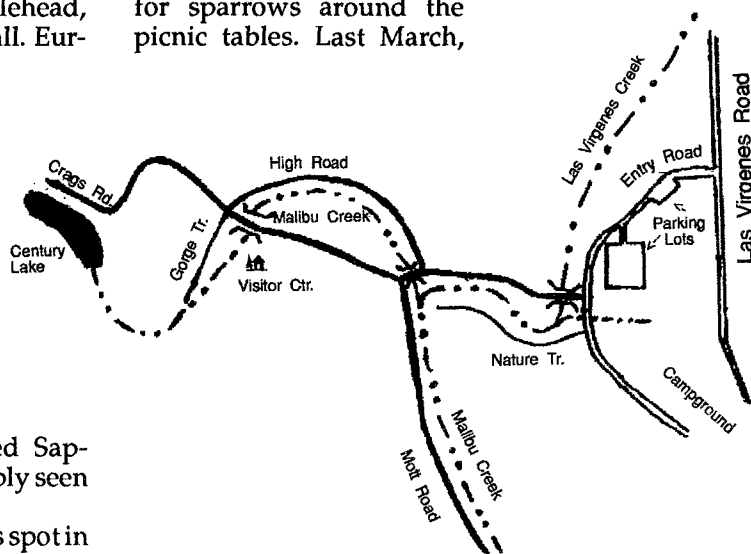
A basic understanding of the park's geography is the key to finding birds here. First of all, Malibu Creek State Park is NOT Malibu Lagoon. From the lagoon, it is six miles up Malibu Canyon/Las Virgenes Road. From the Ventura Freeway, it is three and a half miles down the same road (just south of Mulholland Highway).

The map on this page shows the roads, trails, and two major streams that are important to the birder. Las Virgenes Creek flows year-round.

Malibu Creek, controlled by dams at Century Lake and Malibu Lake (further upstream and off the map), goes dry in summer in the places where all the ducks were in the winter. But summer birding is still quite good elsewhere in the park.

In this article, I will describe the birding in different areas of the park, starting at the main entrance off Las Virgenes Road. The park opens officially for day use at 8:00 a.m., although the day-use parking lots are usually open by 7:45 a.m. Bring a \$5 bill for the self-service parking fee.

The map shows two parking lots. The main (lower) day-use parking lot appears as a square. In the winter, stop first at the upper lot to look for sparrows around the picnic tables. Last March,



ten species of sparrow were seen in the park: Chipping, Vesper, Lark, Savannah, Fox, Song, Lincoln's, Golden-crowned and White-crowned; plus Dark-eyed Junco. The first four species were seen around the upper lot. This and other grassland habitats of the park are also good for Say's Phoebe, American Pipit and Western Meadowlark.

The two parking lots can be a good place from which to see raptors in the trees, especially on winter mornings. Raptors seen regularly in the park include Turkey Vulture, Black-shouldered Kite, Northern Harrier (winter), Sharp-shinned (winter), Cooper's, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks, Golden Eagle and American Kestrel. Osprey, Merlin and Prairie Falcon have also been seen.

Malibu Creek is the best place that

I know for seeing Lazuli Buntings, especially in late April and May, when they are singing from the treetops. Just south of the main parking lot is a small, usually dry, stream with a thicket of willows and oaks. Look for the buntings there. If you don't find them, try the oaks just south of the campground.

The willows along Las Virgenes Creek, where it flows alongside the entry road, can be good for Blue Grosbeaks in summer and migrants in the fall. Birding along the year-round Las Virgenes Creek tends to be best when portions of Malibu Creek are dry.

The park's main hiking road from the parking lot, Craggs Road, crosses

Las Virgenes Creek and heads straight for the Visitor's Center. A better birding route is the Nature Trail, also known as the Braille Trail. (Note: None of these three trail names are on signs.) This trail takes you through a little oak woodland and around the edge of some grassland, chaparral and riparian woodland. With this variety of habitats, you can see a good selection of birds, such as California and Rufous-sided Towhee,

Acorn, Nuttall's and Downy Woodpecker, Scrub Jay, Black-headed Grosbeak (summer), House and Bewick's Wren, Fox Sparrow (winter), and White-breasted Nuthatch (especially in the Valley Oaks). I think of this as the quail trail, because I almost always see large flocks of California Quail here. Although the wood-bordered Nature/Braille Trail circles back, you can continue west on an unnamed trail which eventually ends in the stream bed.

Crossing the stream here is a little tricky. Follow the dry portion of stream bed to the right. There's a spot where the willows thin out a little, and you can cross Las Virgenes Creek just above the point (not visible) where it flows into Malibu Creek. You will come out at a culvert on Malibu Creek. The park doesn't get too many wading

ARMCHAIR ACTIVIST

Letter • of • the Month • Club



January, 1992
Volume 4, Issue 1

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ARMCHAIR NEWS

We are pleased to be able to provide an Armchair Activist newsletter to every member of the Los Angeles Audubon Society this month. We have included it with the *Tanager* so that every one of you could see first hand just how Armchair Activist works.

In just a few minutes you can get concise, accurate information on a conservation issue that is under consideration by a local, state, or national legislative body. You get the names and addresses of the legislators to write to, and a sample letter.

Your letters *can* make a difference. When combined with those of the other twelve Southern California Audubon chapters that are also members of the Armchair Activist network, we can influence our state legislators, U. S. Congress representatives, and U. S. senators.

The causes are important. This is your chance to say "Yes, I will get involved." Just write your letter and send it to Senator Seymour, then fill out the coupon on page four of this insert, and mail it to Armchair Activist at LAAS (or call 310/306-4889). Your next issue of the Armchair Activist newsletter will be free. Then, if you feel good about your involvement, you can continue to be an Armchair Activist by sending us \$6.00 to cover printing costs and postage for one year. Thank you.

The *Armchair Activist*, developed and published by Jeff Lippert, Conservation Chair, Thorn Creek Audubon Society, 1415 Braeburn, Flossmore, IL 60422. © 1992. All rights reserved.



PERSPECTIVES

California's deserts are vast and varied, the home of over 2,000 species of wildlife and plants, many of which are found no where else. Misunderstood by many who view them as a wasteland to be used as a giant playground or an unlimited resource, these fragile areas have suffered greatly from the impact of off-road vehicles, development, grazing, and other destructive uses.

Preserving California's Deserts

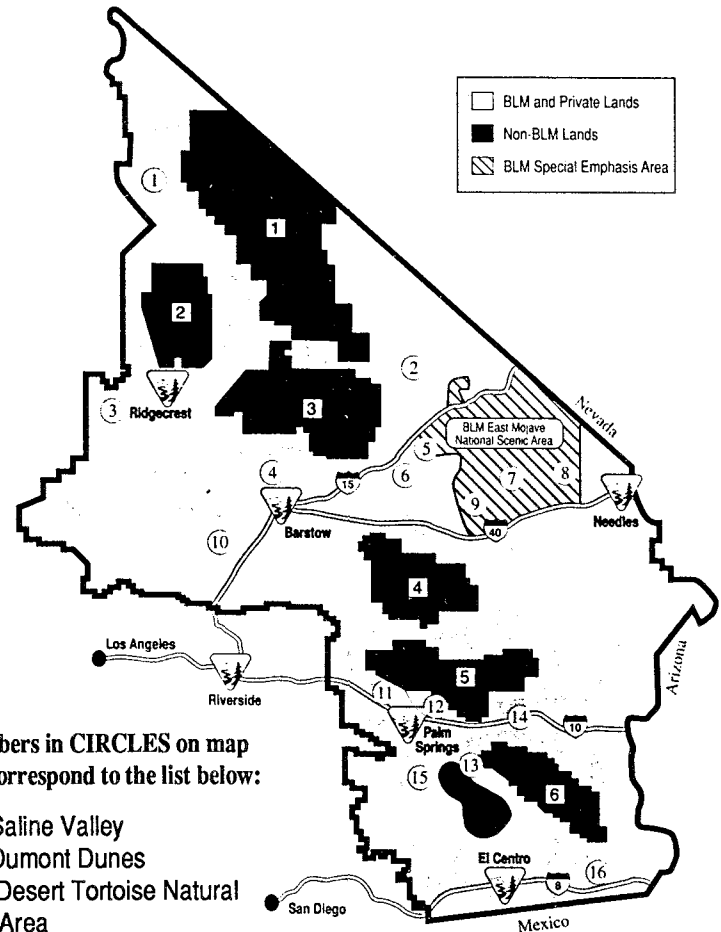
Senator Alan Cranston has campaigned long and hard for the protection of our deserts. Entering his last year in the senate, he is expected to make passage of The California Desert Protection Act a priority when that body reconvenes this month. An alternate Desert Protection Act (HR 2929) was approved by the House just last November, and momentum is gaining for passage of Senate bill S.21.

This bill will protect cherished desert areas in the following ways:

- **Death Valley** will be expanded by 1.3 million acres and will be designated a National Park;
- **Joshua Tree** will also be designated a National Park, and will be expanded by 245,000 acres;
- a new 1.5 million acre National Park, **Mojave**, will be created;
- the **National Wilderness Preservation System** will be expanded (81 areas, 4.5 million acres), including eight areas in Kern and Tulare Counties;
- **Red Rock Canyon State Park**, in Kern County, will be expanded by 20,000 acres by transferring Bureau of Land Management land to the state of California.

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California Desert Conservation Area



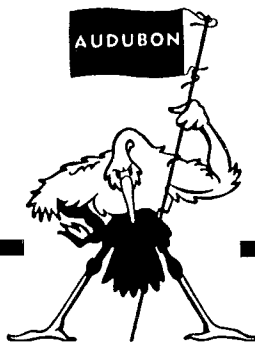
Numbers in CIRCLES on map correspond to the list below:

- 1-Saline Valley
- 2-Dumont Dunes
- 3- Desert Tortoise Natural Area
- 4-Rainbow Basin
- 5- Soda Springs
- 6-Afton Canyon
- 7-Hole -in-the-Wall
- 8-Fort Piute
- 9-Kelso Dunes
- 10-El Mirage
- 11-Big Morongo Canyon
- 12-Coachella Valley Preserve
- 13-Dos Palmas
- 14-Gen. Patton Memorial Museum
- 15-Santa Rosa Mtns. Nat'l. Scenic Area
- 16-Imperial Sand Dunes

Numbers in BOXES on map correspond to the list below:

- 1-Death Valley N.M.
- 2-China Lake Naval Weapons Center
- 3- Ft. Irwin Army Nat'l. Training Center
- 4-Twenty Nine Palms Marine Corps. Base
- 5- Joshua Tree N.M.
- 6-Chocolate Mt. Gunnery Range

ARMCHAIR
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In addition to the above major features, S.21 also provides for the protection of bighorn sheep, riparian corridors, the Pacific Crest Trail, and many species of plants.

This is the best opportunity yet for the long delayed passage of the California Desert Protection Act. Senator John Seymour appears to be willing to negotiate in order to pass the bill. This month we are asking all California participants of Armchair Activist to write to Senator Seymour in support of S.21.

ARMCHAIR ACTION

This month's action is to write a letter to Senator John Seymour at the address below. Your letter(s) must be postmarked by January 31, 1992. In the letter ask Senator Seymour to co-sponsor the California Desert Protection Act, S.21. Tell him that you support wilderness designation of the lands in Inyo, Kern, and Tulare Counties covered in S.21.

Below is a sample letter. Your letter can be made more effective by altering the topic sentence and/or adding a sentence of personalization. Legibly written letters in longhand are more effective than those printed by computer or typed.

The Honorable John Seymour
U. S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20500

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Senator Seymour:

California's deserts are an important and fragile area. Their protection is vital for the preservation of their beauty and as habitat for 2,000 species of wildlife and plants.

I urge you to join in the support of the California Desert Protection Act, S.21, as a co-sponsor.. As the population of California continues to increase, so will the pressures of development and overuse. Of particular importance is the designation as wilderness of the lands in Inyo, Kern, and Tulare Counties covered in S.21 Only by setting aside areas now will our children and grandchildren be able to appreciate them in the same way that we do today.

Please lend your support to this bill and to the future of our natural treasure.

Sincerely,

A U D U B O N
ARMCHAIR ACTIVIST
YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

*Los Angeles Audubon Society
7377 Santa Monica Blvd.
W. Hollywood, CA 90046*

**HOME BASED ACTION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION.
A PROJECT OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY.**



LETTER OF THE MONTH CLUB

Armchair Activist was created just two years ago, and is expanding rapidly across America. But we need more of us to stem the tide of enviro-political compormise. Make a New Year's pledge to enroll a friend. Just send in the form on the right. Thank you.

Join the *Letter of the Month Club*

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State, Zip: _____

Phone: (H) (____) _____

(W) (____) _____

Amt. enclosed \$6 (helps with postage & printing). Other amt. \$ _____

**Mail to: Armchair Activist
at address below.**

birds, but you could see one here if you are lucky. It's a good spot for Common Yellowthroat and Black Phoebe. In summer, look for Northern Oriole and Western Kingbird.

From this point, you have three choices. The main road goes directly to the Visitor's Center and bridge. The high road follows the stream in a less direct route to the bridge. The Mott Road follows Malibu Creek downstream toward Tapia Park. In winter, the high road offers the best birding. At other times of the year, I prefer to take the Mott Road, the least travelled of the three.

This section of Malibu Creek has water year-round. The lush riparian vegetation along the stream contains willows, along with some ash and sycamore trees. Along the trail, you'll find coast live oaks, a few sycamores, and chaparral to your right. Some of Malibu Creek's more interesting breeding birds are most easily found along the Mott Road. Seeing a Warbling Vireo in Southern California may not excite most local birders, but seeing Warbling Vireo nestlings excites those who realize the extent of the decline in local breeding populations due to cowbird brood parasitism. Western Tanagers, which do not commonly breed in the Santa Monica Mountains, have been seen here throughout the past two summers. I do not know if they are breeding here.

The Mott Road offers a good variety of nesting flycatchers. Look for Western Wood-Pewee and Pacific-slope and Ash-throated Flycatchers. In fall, they may be joined by Willow and Olive-sided Flycatchers. The Mott Road can be a good place to see warblers in spring and fall, although generally not as good as nearby Tapia Park. Standing between Malibu Creek State Park and Tapia Park is private land owned by the Salvation Army. Resist the temptation to trespass. I tried it once and found out that violators will be proselytized. Return the way you came, watching for Phainopeplas which can be abundant here in summer and fairly common in some winters.

The High Road provides good views of Malibu Creek. In winter, you should see a good variety of ducks, as described previously. Check the coast live oaks along the trail for Plain Titmouse and Acorn and Nuttall's



Malibu Creek State Park — Map and photo by Russell Stone

Woodpeckers. In winters when Lewis' Woodpeckers invade Southern California, Malibu Creek is a great place to see them. Seven Lewis' Woodpeckers spent the winter of 1989-90 here. Look for them, as well as Belted Kingfishers, in the sycamores across the stream.

Birding along the Gorge Trail (also known as the Rock Pool Trail) is generally hit or miss. In October, I saw a Red-breasted Sapsucker, a Red-naped Sapsucker, and a Summer Tanager in the same oak tree! Check the rocks along the trail for Canyon Wrens.

Century Lake can be reached by following Craggs Road up and over the hill. On the way, look for Golden-crowned and Rufous-crowned Sparrow. Take the trail that leads toward the dam, providing the only good view of the lake, where you can see Canvasback and Ring-necked Duck in winter. Check the cliffs for Canyon Wrens. The Forest Trail on the opposite side of the lake has some excellent oak woodland habitat. Varied Thrushes can be found here in some winters. To get to the Forest Trail, you just circle the lake.

Further upstream is the M*A*S*H site, where the popular TV series was filmed. You may recognize the scenery. This part of the park is largely chaparral, home to such California specialty birds as California Thrasher, Wrentit and California Towhee. Lazuli Buntings also breed in the chaparral.

Discussions of Santa Monica Mountains birding invariably contain the term "chaparral birds." Chaparral is a distinctive plant community consisting primarily of densely packed shrubs which are adapted to

California's hot, rainless summer. Other California specialties found at Malibu Creek, such as Acorn Woodpecker, Nuttall's Woodpecker and Hutton's Vireo, are primarily woodland birds. Chaparral can be found almost anywhere in the Santa Monica Mountains. A wider variety of species is found in Malibu Creek State Park precisely because it has so many habitats other than chaparral.

Malibu Creek State Park has a few weather-related peculiarities you should know about. In hot, dry weather, the state parks of the Santa Monica Mountains are often closed due to fire hazard. This occurs most often during the Santa Ana winds of fall, but I've seen the park closed in April. You can call (310) 454-2372 for recorded fire closure information. At the other extreme, I have seen fog in Malibu Canyon so thick that you could only see a bird if it perched on your nose! If any reader knows how to predict these fogs, please let me know. Finally, on winter mornings, Malibu Creek State Park can be colder than the Los Angeles basin.

I encourage all of you to visit Malibu Creek. I lead a Sierra Club bird walk that meets here on the third Sunday of every month in the main parking lot at 8:00 a.m. It's an easy walk, not a Sierra Club "Tiger Hike." If you come here on your own and see (or have ever seen) any noteworthy birds, please call me at (310) 479-8780, or write to Scott Harris at 4442 Kingswell Avenue, Apt. 4, Los Angeles, CA 90027. A bird checklist is being prepared for the park. Hope to see or hear from you soon. 🐦

Lens View

by Herb Clarke

A recurring problem in nature photography is how to deal with depth of focus or, as it is frequently called, depth of field. Depth of field is defined as that area in the photograph which appears to be in focus.

The human eye sees scenes sharply, in stereo, using two lenses focusing on curved eye surfaces. Everything appears to be clear, from close up to distant views. Normal cameras use one lens which creates images on flat planes. Thus, theoretically, a photograph should have only a narrow band which is in sharp focus. In response to a reader's request, here are some suggestions to help minimize this problem while not delving deeply into optical law.

The size of the lens opening, called aperture, affects two aspects of the picture. In conjunction with shutter speed, it controls exposure. Aperture also determines the extent of the photograph that is acceptably sharp.

Other variables affecting depth of field are focal length of the lens and closeness of the subject. The photographer frequently is faced with making quick, difficult choices. Depth of field diminishes as subject distance decreases. In other words, getting closer to a bird increases image size but loses focus area. Longer lenses also reduce depth of field, everything else being equal. It appears that first choice would be to use a smaller aperture which does improve depth of field but limits shutter speeds which in turn increases the likelihood of camera shake or subject movement resulting in a blurred picture. Using faster film helps but with drawbacks mentioned in previous columns. Flash sometimes can be used to supply more light. Decisions must be made quickly in the field, lest the opportunity be lost. All this may sound complicated, but with experience the best compromises can be made. When time permits, try different settings. It's a great feeling when, under pressure, you manage to get a good picture in spite of adverse conditions.

Choosing the ideal spot on which to focus is important. Try to have the subject lengthwise across the frame. If this is not possible, focus on the eye. The head of a bird or animal is usually the center of interest. The accompany-

ing picture of a Bendire's Thrasher illustrates this situation. A large lens together with slow film, target at close distance, fairly big bird not parallel to the film plane, all combined to make it impossible to get the entire subject sharp. By focusing on the eye, a pleasing image of this thrasher was obtained even though the body is not as acute as I would have preferred. Try to keep in mind that depth of field extends further behind the point of focus than in front by a ratio of about two to one. Maximum depth of field does not substitute for accurate focus but does help enhance a well-composed picture.

I stated in my last column that I would discuss photographic blinds next, but I believe the subject of depth of field is more pertinent at this time. Blinds will be described in the near future.

Illustrations appearing with these columns are taken from 35mm slides. Naturally, reproduction excellence suffers in converting color to black and white along with other factors concerning this publication's cost restraints. The original photographs are of good quality and do illustrate the point I am emphasizing. I hope the reader understands and is able to learn from the photographs as they appear. 🐦



Birds Of The Season

by Hank Brodtkin

The beginning of January marks the end of the Christmas count excitement. After birders have hunted down the rarities found during that period, there are trips to the Antelope and Owens Valleys and the Carrizo Plain for raptors, to the Central Valley and the Salton Sea for waterfowl, and to Big Bear Lake for the Bald Eagles.

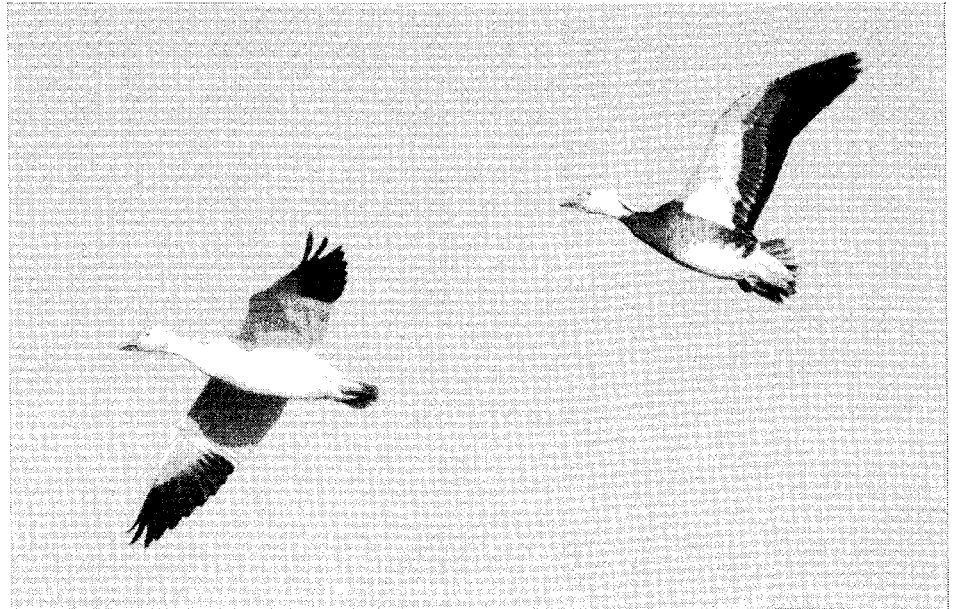
Then toward the end of January, even though most of the country is still locked in winter, the spring migration begins. Numbers of Greater White-fronted Geese and Allen's Hummingbirds, followed in early February by swallows, renew this age-old cycle.

Mid-October through mid-November saw the fall migration period winding down and populations of wintering species building. A **Little Bunting** on Pt. Loma, San Diego, on 20 October (Richard Webster) for a first U.S. record south of Alaska had to be the most exciting find of the year in California.

Inland **Common Loon** sightings include two at Sepulveda Basin on 3 November and seven at Stone Canyon Reservoir on 17 November.

Snow Geese are not too common along the coast these days. On 3 November, four were at the Ventura Sewer Ponds (Ken Youngleib) and two were at Malibu Lagoon (Ed Navojosky). One of the Malibu birds was a "blue" morph — a form that has not been seen at all on our coast in recent memory. A Mallard-sized *minima* **Canada Goose** was seen at Apollo Park, Lancaster, on 9 November (Mitch Heindel).

Ten **Blue-winged Teal** were at Hansen Dam on 11 November (Dustin Alcalá) and an astonishing number of 30 birds were on the L.A. River at Willow Street in Long Beach on 16 November (EN). **Eurasian Wigeon** are starting to show up again this fall with one at Hartwell Park on 8 November and another on the L.A. River on 10 November (Mary Ann Cook). A **Tufted Duck** was at Quail Lake again on 11 November (Jean Brandt, Phil Sayre, EN) and two **Oldsquaw** were



Snow Geese — normal (left) and Blue Morph (right)

reported from McGrath State Park on 4 November (Don Desjardin). The fall's first reported **White-winged Scoter** was seen at Malibu on 1 November (Barbara Elliott) and the newly filled lake at Sepulveda Basin featured a **Hooded Merganser** on 10 November (Sandy Wohlgemuth).

A **Broad-winged Hawk** was seen over Gardena on 5 November (MiH). A **Prairie Falcon** was found at Upper Newport Bay on 10 November (Mark Wimer) and another was at the L.A. Reservoir in Sylmar on 15 November (Mark Ossico).

A **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** was on the Oxnard Plain on 17 November (DD) and an **Ancient Murrelet** was found at King Harbor on 17 November (John Small).

A **Short-eared Owl** showed up at Banning Park, Wilmington, on 22 October and a **Williamson's Sapsucker** was at a Palmdale golf course on 19 October (both MiH).

An **Eastern Phoebe** and a **Vermilion Flycatcher** both were at Mason Park, Irvine, on 16 November (Doug Willick) and a late **Ash-throated Flycatcher** was at Sepulveda Basin on 10 November (DA). A **Sulphur-bel-**

lied Flycatcher was reported from Palos Verdes on 10 October (Bob Beckler). A **Cassin's Kingbird** was at the L.A. Reservoir on 17 November (MO) and a **Thick-billed Kingbird** was reported from Seal Beach on 7 November (Steve Mlodinow).

The first coastal report this fall of **Varied Thrush** comes from Nicholas Flat above Malibu on 3 October (Hank and Priscilla Brodtkin) and a **Brown Thrasher** was at Banning Park on 10 November (MiH).

Red-throated Pipits were still being reported — one at Harbor Park on 4 November and another in Palmdale on 9 November (both MiH) and a **Red-eyed Vireo** was at Huntington Beach Central Park on 20 October (Jim Pike).

Warbler reports include a **Tennessee** on the L.A. River near Elysian Park on 27 October (Wanda Dameron), a **Black-throated Blue** at Morongo on 29 October (David Benwick) and another at Galileo Park, Kern Co., on 3 November (Matt Heindel), a **Black-throated Green** on the L.A. River on 17 November (Jay Furman) and another at Redondo Wilderness Park on 18 November (Dave Moody), and a **Prairie** at the L.A. River on 26 October

and still present 23 November (Kimball Garrett).

A young male **Scarlet Tanager** was at this L.A. River spot (near Newell Street in the Elysian Park area) on 15 November (KG).

Sparrows include a **Clay-colored** at Sepulveda Basin on 10 November (Jon Dunn), a **Swamp** on the Oxnard Plain on 15 November (DD) and a **White-throated** in Reseda on 16 November (SW).

A **McCown's Longspur** was found in Palmdale on 9 November along with an impressive 24 **Chestnut-collared** (MiH). Almost unbelievable is a report of 30 **Chestnut-collared** at Irvine on 16 November (SM).

Reports of **Orchard Oriole** include one in West Los Angeles on 20 October (Bob Pann) and another at Mason Park on 16 November (DW).

One of the biggest difficulties in writing this column is obtaining the correct spelling of contributor's names (and I apologize for any names misspelled). My main source for this information is the directory of the American Birding Association, which claims some 8,400 members. I have really been surprised to see how many apparently active interested birders do not belong to this non-profit organization which "exists to promote recreational birding, to educate the public in the appreciation of birds and their contribution to the environment, to contribute to the study of birds in their natural habitats, and to contribute to the development of improved methods of bird population studies." Membership benefits include not only the really fine quality bimonthly magazine, *BIRDING*, but also the monthly newsletter, *Winging It*. This is an organization run by birders for birders. For membership information, call Gayle Benton at (818) 790-0996.

Good Birding!

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

Hank Brodtkin OR **David Koepfel**
27-1/2 Mast Street (213) 454-2576
Marina del Rey, CA 90292
(213) 827-0407

F I E L D T R I P S

CALL THE TAPE!

Before setting out on any field trip, call the Audubon bird tape at (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 pre-1992 Thomas Bros. map page and grid coordinates (county, page number, grid coordinates).

Sunday, January 5 - Topanga State Park. **Gerry Haigh** will lead participants through this nearby area composed of sycamores, grasslands, scrub oak and chaparral. This is an ideal trip for a beginning birder or for someone new in the area. From Topanga Canyon Blvd. heading SW from the Valley, turn E (uphill) on Entrada Dr. (7 miles S of Ventura Blvd., 1 mile N of Topanga Village). Follow the signs to the state park, and meet in the parking lot of Trippet Ranch at 8:00 a.m. \$3 parking fee. [LA, p.109, D-4]

Sunday, January 5 - Hansen Dam. Join **Dustin Alcalá** as he searches for birds in the mixed habitat surrounding the reservoir. Hooded Mergansers possible. Meet at 7:30 a.m. for a morning of birding. Take the 170 Fwy N from L.A., to the 118 Fwy (Simi Valley Fwy) E to the Glenoaks Blvd. offramp, continue SE for 2-3 miles, turn left on Osborne St., then right on Dronfield St. Park in the lot. [LA, p.9, C-2]

Saturday, January 11 - Whittier Narrows Regional Park. Leader **David White**. Numerous wintering waterfowl and other birds. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Nature Center, 1000 Durfee Ave. in South El Monte, off 60 Fwy between Santa Anita and Peck Dr. exits, west of 605 Fwy. [LA, p.47, D-5]

Saturday, January 11 - Lakeview Area. Leader **Monte Taylor** will show us around this excellent winter birding area in search of buteos, Prairie Falcon, Golden Eagle, longspurs, owls and myriad waterfowl. Take the 60 Fwy E past the 215 Fwy, exit S on Gilman Springs Rd., and continue about 6 miles to the Bridge St. intersection. Meet there at the side of the road at 8:30 a.m. Bring lunch, scopes, warm clothing and durable footwear. Small entrance fee (\$3) if we opt to enter the San Jacinto Wildlife Area in the afternoon.

Friday, January 17 - Raptor Workshop Lecture. Speaker **Ned Harris**. The raptor ID workshop will cover the 22 species of diurnal birds of prey which can conceivably be observed in Southern California, concentrating on the field identification of these raptors in their various age, sex and color morph variations. The recommend-

ed text is *Hawks* (Peterson Field Guide Series) by W. Clark and B. Wheeler. Binoculars helpful for slides. The lecture will be from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. on Friday evening at the Union Federal Savings ground floor meeting room at 8485 Wilshire Blvd. Limited parking is available around the corner in the lot off La Cienega. The lot will be locked during the lecture. Fee: \$8 for LECTURE ONLY. [LA, p.42, E-2]

Sunday, January 19 - Antelope Valley Bus Trip. Leader **Ned Harris**. Given in conjunction with January 17th lecture. The most likely raptors to be seen on Saturday's field trip are Red-tailed and Ferruginous Hawks, Kestrel, Prairie Falcon, Harrier and Black-shouldered Kite. Possible species include Rough-legged and Cooper's Hawks, Golden Eagle and Merlin. Fee: \$12 for BUS TRIP ONLY. Leave promptly at 7:30 a.m. Meet in the Valley near 5 Fwy and 14 Fwy interchange. Sign up with LAAS for exact directions.

Note: A preliminary pricing of \$7 and \$10 was accidentally circulated for the preceding lecture/bus activities. Registration at both the \$7/\$10 rates and at the official \$8/\$12 rates will be honored. A coffee can will be circulated at both events for anyone who wishes to anonymously upgrade their rate to \$8/\$12. I am very sorry about the confusion (NF).

Saturday, January 25 - Lake Norcconian. Leaders **Pat and Paul Nelson**. Limited access, limited participation. This area is usually thick with wintering birds. Meet at the gate at 8:00 a.m. No fee, but \$5 check per person to hold reservation will be refunded at gate. The sign-up list must be submitted in early January, so call Audubon House to make reservations. Bring a lunch. Directions with confirmation.

Saturday, February 1 - Gull Mini-Workshop. Field seminar on gulls given by this issue's cover author, **Larry Allen**. Includes a short discussion on gull identification and Larry's field-tested handout. Bring lunch, a coat, a National Geographic Field Guide, and a scope if you have one. **Thayer's Gull** if we're lucky. We will meet at the

Malibu Lagoon parking lot kiosk at 8:00 a.m. Free parking on Cross Creek Road (first road west of lagoon bridge). Trip will finish at McGrath State Park in Oxnard. [LA, p.114, B-5]

Sunday, February 2 - Topanga State Park. Leader **Gerry Haigh**. Meet at 8:00 a.m. See January 5 write-up for details.

Sunday, February 9 - Quail Lake Area. Leader **Louis Tucker**. Winter car-birding should be good, with a healthy selection of raptors. Possible eagles and Tufted Duck. We will leave from the front of Carl's Jr. in Gorman at 8:30 a.m. Bring warm clothes, lunch, scopes. [LA, p.D]

Saturday, February 15 - Chatsworth Reservoir. Leader **Dustin Alcalá**. Primarily an "old California" native grassland habitat with a large body of water and oak riparian woodlands in the adjacent arroyos. Geese, raptors and other wintering and sedentary birds. Finish up early afternoon. Take 405 Fwy N to Roscoe Blvd., head W to Fallbrook Ave., take this N to the DWP entrance at the end. Meet at the gate at 8:00 a.m. Bring lunch and water. No restrooms. [LA, p.6, A-6]

Saturday and Sunday, February 15 and 16 - Salton Sea. **Nick Freeman** will be your tour guide to this spectacular winter birding spot. Those wishing to see and hear hundreds of Sandhill Cranes and thousands of White-faced Ibis as they wheel and glide, gently descending on their roosting grounds, should meet up with Nick at Cattle Call Park south of Brawley to leave at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, February 15. Take Hwy 111 S to Brawley, head W through town on Main St., then continue S on Hwy 86 to a fairly quick right on Cattle Call Dr., continuing to the fenced grassy area by the arena. Sunday morning, the group will regroup (and welcome late-comers) at Carl's Jr. at Main and First Streets in Brawley, leaving there at 7:00 a.m. A good trip for Canada, Snow and Ross' Geese, Burrowing Owl, Gila Woodpecker, Stilt Sandpiper, Yellow-footed Gull and White Pelican. Anticipate mud. Bring lunch, scopes, warm clothes. Large group may be split. Please register with LAAS (no fee or limit).

Sunday, February 16 - Whittier Narrows Regional Park. Leader **David White**. Meet at 8:00 a.m. See January 11 write-up for details.

Saturday, February 29 - Palos Verdes Area. **Cliff Pollard** will meet people at Harbor Lake to maunder about, taking notice of water birds, gulls and wintering passerines, then continue on to a nearby coastal scrub community in search of California Gnatcatcher, Cactus and Rock Wrens and Lesser Goldfinch. Should wrap-up shortly after noon. Take the Harbor Fwy S to PCH, head W to Vermont Ave., and take the first left into the parking lot for the lake. Meet in the SE corner of the lot at 8:00 a.m. [LA, p.73, F-3]

Sunday, March 1 - Topanga State Park. Leader **Gerry Haigh**. Meet at 8:00 a.m. See January 5 write-up for details.

Saturday, March 14 - Whittier Narrows Regional Park. Leader **David White**. Meet at 8:00 a.m. See January 11 write-up for details.

Saturday, March 14 - Chatsworth Reservoir. Leader **Dustin Alcalá**. Meet at 8:00 a.m. See February 15 write-up for details.

Tuesday, March 17 - Los Angeles County Arboretum. **Barbara Cohen** will lead this morning walk through varied habitat in anticipation of the first days of spring. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in front of the gatehouse in the parking lot on Baldwin Avenue, Arcadia, just south of 210 Fwy, on the west side of the street. No fee on third Tuesday only. [LA, p.28, C-4]

Saturday and Sunday, March 21 and 22 - Owens Valley Grouse Trip. Leader **Mary Carmona** will orchestrate this road-intensive search to such widespread spots as Glacier Lodge, Lake Tinnemaha, Mono Lake and the Lake Crowley leks. Sunday morning we will meet very early to watch the Sage Grouse displaying on the lek. Sage Thrashers, Pinion Jays, Osprey and winnowing Snipe are all to be expected. Rosy Finches and Blue Grouse are hopefuls. Limited to 16. Reserve with a \$10 check (see policy). Include SASE for 7:30 a.m. Big Pine meeting location and lodging list. 🐦

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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 \$15 per year. The newsletter is sent by first class mail to subscribers and members who pay an additional \$7. Make checks payable to Los Angeles Audubon Society.

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(213) 876-0202 - office
(213) 874-1318 - bird tape
(updated Thursdays)

RESERVATION AND FEE EVENTS
(Limited Participation)
POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Reservations will be accepted ONLY if ALL the following information is supplied:

- (1) Trip desired
- (2) Names of people in your party
- (3) Phone numbers (a) usual and (b) evening before event, in case of emergency cancellation
- (4) Separate check (no cash please) to LAAS for exact amount for each trip
- (5) Self-addressed stamped envelope for confirmation and associated trip information

Send to Reservations Chairman Millie Newton, LAAS, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90046.

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

Millie Newton is available at Audubon House on Tuesdays 10 - 3 to answer questions about field trips. If you desire to carpool to an event, she can also provide contacts for you. Our office staff is also available Tuesday - Saturday for most reservation services.

C A L E N D A R

EVENING MEETINGS

Meet at 8:00 p.m. in Plummer Park
ID Workshop precedes the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

January 14 - The Best of Costa Rica. Olga Clarke, manager of LAAS's world-class bookstore, will present a beautifully illustrated program on this tiny jewel of a country. Olga's presentation will feature highlights of the more than 15 trips that she has led to Costa Rica. Habitats from lowland moist forest to subalpine paramo support an avifauna of over 830 species. We won't see them all!

February 11 - Annual Member's Slide Contest! A perennial favorite, this event brings out the art critic and art lover in all of us. Bring your friends... boo the judges... cheer your favorites. Photos must be of wild, unrestrained birds only. Submit up to five 35mm slides per photographer, with a dot in the upper right corner (for placement in slide tray) and your name on each slide. All participants must be present at the show to accept their honors and divulge their winning techniques. Bookstore gift certificates to all winners. The program will begin at 8:00 p.m. sharp! Slides must be in the judges' hands by 7:45 p.m. at the latest.

PELAGIC TRIPS

Saturday, February 8 - Palos Verdes Escarpment to Redondo Canyon; 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Cost \$20. Leaders: Mitch Heindel and Kimball Garrett.

Saturday, April 25 - Palos Verdes Escarpment to Redondo Canyon; 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Cost \$20. Leaders: Sherman Suter and Mitch Heindel.

Saturday, May 9 - San Miguel Island and beyond, on the *Jeffrey Arvid*, out of the Ventura Marina; 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Cost \$68. Leaders: Arnold Small and Herb and Olga Clarke.

Sunday, May 31 - Santa Barbara Island and Osborne Banks; 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Cost \$32. Leaders: Mitch Heindel and Kimball Garrett.

Saturday, August 15 - Santa Barbara Island and Osborne Banks; 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Cost \$32. Leaders: Bruce Broadbooks and Kimball Garrett.

Saturday, September 12 - Seaward side of Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz Islands, via Anacapa Island, on the *Jeffrey Arvid*, out of the Ventura Marina; 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Cost \$60. Leaders: Herb and Olga Clarke and Arnold Small.

Sunday, October 18 - Santa Barbara Island and out to sea; 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Cost \$32. Leaders: Herb Clarke and Mitch Heindel.

Saturday, November 21 - Palos Verdes Escarpment to Redondo Canyon; 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Cost \$20. Leaders: David Koepfel and Mitch Heindel.

NOTE: Marine Mammal Expert Linda Lewis will be one of our leaders when her schedule permits.

Destinations may be changed by leaders to optimize bird sightings. All LAAS pelagic trips are on the *Vantuna*, out of San Pedro, unless otherwise noted.

Paintings and Prints by Jonathan Alderfer

December 8, 1991 — February 7, 1992
at National Audubon Society
200 Culver Boulevard, Playa del Rey, CA
(310) 574-2799
10:00 a.m. — 5:00 p.m. Monday — Friday

Jonathan Alderfer, designer of this issue's cover, is a local artist and member of the Los Angeles Audubon Society. His work features the birds and landscape of California. 🐦

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