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Can Ancient Maya Wisdom Save Our Favorite Birds From The Cows?

by Gene Anderson

Few Anglo-American birders and environmentalists know the word *ganaderizacion*. All of them should, and it should make them worry.

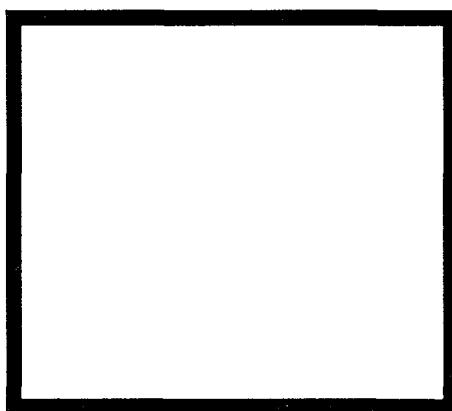
Literally, it means "cattleization." In fact, it means clearing away natural vegetation to make pasture. Millions of acres have been "cattleized" in Latin America in the last few decades. This is the main reason for the destruction of the rain forest, to say nothing of the thorn forests, pine forests, oak forests and indeed all natural habitats to the south of us. If it is not stopped, virtually all the forests of Latin America will be gone in a few years.

This not only means the disappearance of most of the native species. It spells trouble for most North American migrant birds. Most of them winter in the forests and brushlands, not in pasture country. In particular, south Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean islands and coasts are the major destination area, with the Amazon forests probably second. John Terborgh, in his book *Where Have All the Birds Gone?*, reviews the problem. He and many others believe that forest disappearance in these areas may be one of the major reasons for the recent decline of migrant bird numbers in the eastern United States. He points out that many North American birds winter in relatively small areas of Mexico and the Caribbean, where clearing for cattle and other purposes has been particularly extensive.

From February through early August 1991 I lived in Mexico. Most of that time I stayed in Chunhuhub, a Maya Indian town out in the lush forests of Quintana Roo, the southeastern corner of Mexico. These forests are not quite rain forests—they have a short spring dry season—but they were close enough; they had the incredible wealth of birds, plants and other life

few cows; the Maya make their living from raising corn and fruit, and from forest products (selectively extracted—no clearcuts except for small cornfields). The situation is utterly different in such areas as southern Veracruz and Tabasco. Here one drives for mile after mile through "cow deserts" that were rich rain forests within living memory. Now they have no life except introduced grasses and the cattle—often ill-managed, thin, poor-quality beasts that do not even produce any consequential value per square mile of ruined land. No significant tracts of forest exist. Tabasco has been essentially 100% deforested, except for small woodlots.

Why *ganaderizacion*? Because most people in the U.S. and Mexico set a high cultural value on beef, and because Mexican ranchers have far more political power than village Indians. Mexico produces most of the beef for its internal market, but about a million cattle a year cross the border heading north to a fate as hamburger or steak. But there is more than economics here. Ever since Cortez conquered Mexico for the Spanish crown, ranching has been European and thus high-status, while raising corn and fruit has been identified with the conquered and oppressed Native peoples. Ranchers are heroic figures; Native Americans are the victims of prejudice and racism. Thus it happens on occasion that Native peoples suffer not only steady encroachment on their lands by ranch-



Ganaderizacion

forms that one associates with a true rain forest. The Maya of Quintana Roo are true guardians of the forest, managing it well and working hard to make that management sustainable. Quintana Roo has remained relatively free of *ganaderizacion* so far, since it is blessed with enough natural grassland to supply its cattle needs. (In the savannahs, the Maya have become horse-riding cowboys—and excellent cheesemakers.) Chunhuhub has very

ers, but also not-so-subtle pressures to take up ranching themselves. Sometimes this is done so they can be more "civilized." (The Maya were building great cities governed by highly literate priests and nobles when the ancestors of the English, Spanish and most other Europeans were dressing in skins and living in brush huts.) My friend, Sergio Medellin Morales, has described in detail how this process affected the Totonac people in Veracruz. They used to make a good living producing the world's best vanilla; they struggle to survive at all; most of the vanilla went when the rain forest did.

If we are to save the world from global warming, save the forest villages of the Americas from having their resources destroyed, and save the wildlife, we have to stop the advance of the cows. The question is: how can we do this and still save the economy? These are poor areas whose people can't live on noble principles

After seeing the
"cattleized"
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beef again.

alone. Ecotourism is a real hope, but is limited and unpredictable. Urban industry is far away. The soil is too poor to support intensive row-crop farming.

The viable alternative is to modernize the traditional way of making a living: small-scale corn farming for subsistence supplemented by tree cropping, especially in mixed or-

chards. This is the system by which the Mayas, Totonacs and others supported their great cities long ago. It is still successful. Old World crops, particularly oranges, have been introduced, greatly extending the range and value of production. However, oranges alone cannot solve the problem. The vast orange plantings of Mexico have the usual problems of monocrop cultivation: pest and disease buildup, overproduction, and susceptibility to the vagaries of wildly fluctuating markets overseas. Moreover, many forest soils are not ideal for oranges.

One idea—I believe the key idea—is mixed orchard plantings. A Maya village, from the air, appears to be simply another part of the forest. The houses are hidden under orchards: coconut, banana, mango, sapota, mamey, papaya, cashew, cherimoya and dozens of other species. Most of these are fruit trees, but trees are also

grown for local use as timber, thatch, shade, fibre, flowers, and so on. Significantly, this picture is about the same as what I have seen in Malaysia, Indonesia and Polynesia, and similar scenes are reported from tropics around the world. Almost every tropical peasant village has its economic forest cover, and even the species are very much the same everywhere. Some started out in America, some in Asia, some in Africa, but the most productive are now established worldwide.

Consider the advantages of a tropical mixed orchard:

1. It bears moderate quantities of varied fruit all the time, instead of producing a glut of one thing at one time only.

2. It provides many nutrients over the whole year cycle. You can't live on oranges.

But you can live on fruit if you choose your species well. Moreover, the Native peoples raise staple foods in small plots, and raise animals—yes, even cattle—in the gardens under the fruit trees where they eat shade-tree leaves and cull fruit. Thus you get full nutrition from a garden.

3. It reproduces the tropical forest: high diversity, many-layered struc-

ture, ecological complementarity. This makes it more reliable for humans. If the oranges all die, there are 30 other species to use. The high incidence of pests and diseases in the tropics is thus handled.

All these advantages apply to migrant and wintering birds as well as to humans. Thus, not surprisingly, a tropical mixed orchard is alive with northern birds in winter. Monocrop tree plantations, on the other hand, are rather barren. If they are sprayed—as they often are—to counteract the pest problems of monocropping, they become death traps rather than wintering grounds for the birds.

The list at the end of this article records all migrant and wintering birds recorded in Chunhuhub in early 1991. From the list, I can single out the following birds as wintering in the orchards to an important degree:

Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Least Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Northern Parula Warbler, Yellow Warbler (probably wintering), Magnolia Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Prothonotary Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Hooded Warbler, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Orchard Oriole, Northern Oriole.

Among these, the following clearly preferred the orchards and associated "unnatural" habitats: Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Least Flycatcher, Common Yellowthroat, Hooded Warbler, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, and Northern Oriole. The last of these was, in fact, seen only in the town. Most of the warblers seemed commoner in town, but were also very common around flowering and fruiting forest trees, so the numbers per unit area were not very different.

Most of these were actually more common in town than in any forest habitat. The reasons seem clear: Above all, more insects (due to human and animal activity), more fruit and more flowers (nectar sources). Secondly, fewer predators. Cats and children—the latter trap Indigo Buntings for pets—were no problem compared to the striking number of hawks, falcons and predatory mammals in the forest.

In addition, and for the same reasons, migrant birds invaded the town in vast numbers during the spring. Many migrants—especially those that like semi-open habitats—clearly preferred the orchards to the forest.

In other parts of south Mexico, other birds winter. For instance, the Northern Waterthrush, absent from Chunhuhub because of lack of water, abounds wherever a pond or lake provides suitable habitat. Farther afield, the Townsend's Warbler is one of many species that winter in the pine-covered highlands, and there too Maya orchards are important resources.

In short, most if not all the northern migrants not only use but often prefer the well-grown mixed plantings of traditional villages. This is not true of most of the native breeders, which usually prefer the forest and do not come into the villages, but many native species do breed in the villages as well. Few of them use the monocrop orchards.

The traditional tropical way of making a living—small grainfields, mixed orchards, and intensively cultivated gardens—is not only sustainable and economically optimal. It is also the *only* hope, in a world of expanding population, for wintering birds.

What can the temperate-zone birdlover do? The most important thing is to create a demand for tropical fruits, especially the "less known" ones, instead of beef. Buy more fruit and less hamburger. (After seeing the "cattleized" wastelands of Mexico, you may never eat beef again.) What is really needed is development of sophisticated marketing for these fruits. Beef is viable because there is a huge market with sophisticated advertising and proliferating fast-food franchises. Developing a market for fruit and for other forest and garden products is the most important thing we can do. Mail-order firms such as Pueblo to People and Equal Exchange are actively doing this.

Second, follow the political and conservation events in the tropics. Support any local action that promises to help. Mexico has its own active and effective conservation movement, which needs support. Helping the people who are on the ground is, in my experience, infinitely preferable to the



Typical Maya house compound with its fruit trees at the forest edge

all-too-common approach of going in, taking over, and forcing a temperate-zone agenda on people who have their own (often better) ideas. For instance, in Felipe Carrillo Puerto (near Chunhuhub), a dynamic young couple, Arturo Bayona and Adriana de Castro, have set up a fledgling organization, Econciencia. They are actively working for ecological goals, and I have profited greatly from discussions with them. If they had as much money as they have enthusiasm, I'm sure they would save all Mexico! Several of the big international conservation organizations, such as World Wildlife Federation and Audubon, have realized the need to work with local people and work on sustainable development.

Unless we all cooperate, the cattle ranchers will win. Working together for sustainable development will provide not only security for the birds but, more importantly, a better living for millions of rural humans. 

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Chunhuhub Migrants

Names and order follow R. T. Peterson and E. Chalif, *Aves de Mexico: Guia de Campo* (Mexico: Diana, 1989).

See "Chunhuhub Bird List" for usage etc.

Plumbeous Kite (*Ictinia plumbea*). Rare migrant; one flew over on April 5. (Two observed slightly south of Chunhuhub, April 4.)

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*). Rare migrant; one flew over on April 12.

Zone-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albonotatus*). Rare winter visitor; one bird (presumably the same individual) first noted March 7, last seen May 16. Between these dates it was frequently observed soaring close over town.

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*). A few wintered in open field habitat.

Lesser Nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis*). Rare migrant; only record was of a large flock in town on May 12.

Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*). Rare migrant; only one certain record: a bird over town on May 25.

Chimney Swift (*Chaetura peligra*). Migrant, but dates and status unclear due to difficulty of separation from local Vaux Swifts (*C. vauxi*). Probably uncommon.

Buff-bellied Hummingbird (*Amazilia yucatanensis*). Probably resi-

dent, but much commoner in winter, becoming steadily less common after end of March.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*). Uncommon winterer; last noted April 13.

Northern Bentbill Flycatcher (*Oncostoma cinereigulare*). Summer only, in Chunhuhub, as far as data can show; first noted May 8, after which uncommon but easily found where territory established.

Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Nuttallornis borealis*). Rare migrant, wet forest; one (apparently the same bird) April 13-17.

Eastern Wood-Pewee (*Contopus virens*). Uncommon migrant; April 11-17.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (*Empidonax flaviventris*). Birds apparently of this species were rare or uncommon in winter (before end of March) in second growth and dry forest. Confusion with other species is possible. At any rate, some *Empidonax* larger and yellower than the Least is present.

Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*). Abundant winterer, especially in town, second growth, dry forest (in about that order); last noted May 8.

Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher (*Myiodynastes luteiventris*). First noted May 8, after which common in areas with large trees near open places.

Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*). Rare migrant, wet forest; Several on April 13 and 15. Two on May 19.

Purple Martin (*Progne subis*). Common migrant. This and the other swallows were most abundant in the town, next most abundant over fields; first noted March 5; last noted April 17.

Gray-breasted Martin (*Progne chalybea*). Common summer resident; first noted March 9.

Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*). Uncommon migrant; only certain record: small group in town on April 2.

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*). Abundant migrant in Quintana Roo, but in Chunhuhub noted only on April 14 (large flock in town).

Long-billed Gnatwren (*Ramphocaenus melanurus*). Summer visitor; first noted April 17; thereafter uncommon, locally common, wet for-

est and rare in dry forest. Thus, probably at least locally migrant.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*). Common permanent resident, but local birds vastly outnumbered in winter by hordes of wintering birds. These began to thin out in April. By mid-May, numbers were down to a steady low level.

Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*). Uncommon winter visitor, primarily in underbrush in wet forest; last noted April 15.

White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*). Abundant winter visitor. Most abundant in dry forest, second growth, and town. Left very rapidly; last noted April 12.

Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*). Common winter visitor, forest and town trees; last noted April 15.

Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*). Common migrant; first noted (slightly outside Chunhuhub) April 3. Last noted April 17, but some may have been confused with the following after that date.

Yellow-green Vireo (*Vireo [olivaceus] flavoviridis*). Common summer visitor; first noted April 12. Locally abundant in areas with large wide-canopied trees near open country.

Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora pinus*). Uncommon migrant; March 23—April 7.

Tennessee Warbler (*Vermivora peregrina*). Rare migrant; only record is of one at a field edge on April 29.

Northern Parula Warbler (*Parula americana*). Common winter visitor, primarily in wet forest.

Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*). Abundant migrant. Possibly wintering, but not noted before March 15; last noted April 29.

Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*). Abundant winter visitor wherever there are trees; last noted May 11 (in next ejido to west).

Black-throated Green Warbler (*Dendroica virens*). Common winter visitor wherever there are trees. Commoner in migration, especially in town; last noted April 17.

Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*). Same status as above; last noted March 30.

Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilla varia*). Same status as above; last noted April 17.

American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*). Abundant winter visitor everywhere; during winter, one of the most abundant birds in Chunhuhub; last seen April 25.

Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*). Uncommon winterer and migrant, primarily wet forest, also town and orchards; last noted April 13.

Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapillus*). Uncommon migrant, dry forest; only records: one on April 3 and one on April 18.

Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*). Only two records—a migrant in town on March 31 and one in rain forest on June 13—but the bird is an abundant winterer wherever there is fresh water in Quintana Roo.

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*). Abundant winter visitor in brush, weedy growth, and orchards; last noted April 29.

Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*). Common winter visitor and migrant; abundant in orchards and town trees.

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*). Common winter visitor, especially in orchards and town trees, where sometimes abundant; last noted April 17.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*). Uncommon migrant; last noted April 15.

Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*). Common-to-abundant winter visitor, especially in weedy second growth. Commoner in migration; last noted May 4.

Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*). Abundant winter visitor everywhere, most numerous in weedy second growth, fields, and town habitats; last noted May 8.

Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*). Uncommon migrant, town; a small flock on March 30; extreme dates: March 11 to April 15.

Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*). Rarely observed in winter. Became steadily commoner through April, and by May was common in town and nearby field and roadside habitats.

Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*). Common winter visitor, abundant in town trees; last noted April 18.

Northern Oriole (*Icterus galbula*). At least four birds ("Baltimore" form) wintered in town trees; last noted April 6. ♀

Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

Though it might be four to six weeks in the past when this *Tanager* is on your desk, let's note some welcome trends in the environmental news as this is written.

► A filibuster in the Senate defeated the President's energy bill that was the worst possible program for America in the '90s. It would have facilitated construction of new nuclear plants, encouraged drilling for oil off our coasts, and reduced regulation of polluting utilities. Equally onerous was the absence of support for conservation, for alternative energy sources, for higher mileage requirements for automobiles. Perhaps the most satisfying element was the defeat of the proposed invasion of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge by oil and gas interests. Last May, the bill—The National Energy Security Act—was voted out of committee by the daunting margin of 17 to 3. Letters to senators from the environmental community played a significant role in blocking the passage of this destructive measure.

► The House voted 297 to 136 for a California desert protection act that has been in the making for 15 years. The bill protects 7.1 million acres of land in the Mojave Desert and excludes 4.1 million acres from develop-

ment and off-road vehicles. However, 33,000 miles of roads and jeep trails remain available for ORVs. The bill upgrades Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Monuments to national park status, which provide a higher level of protection. It also converts the East Mojave National Scenic Area to a national monument, increasing habitat and wildlife values.

The bill goes to the Senate in 1992 where its path may be a thorny one. The nearly 3 to 1 vote in the House is encouraging and may rally support from undecided senators. California Senator Alan Cranston is author of the bill, but Senator John Seymour has his doubts about it.

► The California Board of Forestry has gone through a regulatory conversion, beating its breast and crying, "Mea Culpa!" The Board, widely suspected in the last decades to be a doormat for the timber industry, has publicly admitted that "Past failure to regulate industrial timberlands... has resulted in long-term overharvesting, drastically reducing both the productive capability of the land and maintenance of adequate wildlife habitat."

The Board has said there is a statewide emergency with an alarming shortage of mature timber and notes the overharvesting of ancient forests on private lands. These forests have

declined from 51,000 acres in 1984 to 5,000 acres today. The frantic rush to cut old redwoods and Douglas firs has been a scandalous device to convert those assets to cash in order to pay off junk-bond debt. The devastation of the land, the loss of wildlife, the destruction of watershed, the loss of consummate beauty—these are unforgivable crimes.

It remains to be seen whether this unusual admission by the Board will lead to more aggressive regulation of the industry and more protection for the giant trees. The timber companies will not go quietly into this good night and their power should not be underestimated.

How refreshing this recognition of past sins. It is to be hoped that many more public agencies are listening and are preparing their own words of contrition.

► Really good news! The mining company that proposed a gold mine at Cave Creek Canyon in southeast Arizona has given up. The avalanche of mail it received—and Congress received—from all over the country has saved this canyon and its marvelous profusion of wildlife from a potentially fatal invasion. Congratulations to all letter writers.

And so it goes, friends: a few glimpses of light in the darkening skies. ☀

Mountain Plover Sightings Wanted

Information on sightings of Mountain Plover is requested by Joseph Engler of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He asks that anyone observing Mountain Plovers contact him as soon as possible, so that he can follow up with a survey of the area.

Requested information includes: number of birds; specific site location so that he can relocate the site; type of habitat, such as native grassland, plowed field, etc.; time of day observed; presence of bands including color combination, whether the bands

are on the left or right leg, and position above or below the knee; and whether plovers have been observed here in past years.

The Mountain Plover is a species of concern and will probably be proposed for Federal listing as an endangered species this winter. The current population estimate for this species is about 5,000 birds, as calculated from nesting season data in 1990-91. Wintering data for this species is scant, though it is known that most of the birds winter from the San Joaquin Val-

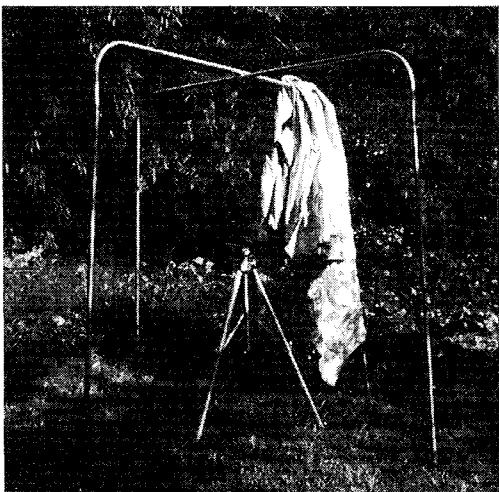
ley south. The importance of collecting wintering information is paramount, as winter habitat seems to be a limiting factor to this species' survival. Information collected will help in defining the Mountain Plover's wintering range, foraging habitat preferences and define specific critical use areas.

Send your information to Joseph Engler, Kern National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 670, Delano, CA 93216-0670. Or better still, phone him at (805) 725-2767. ☀

Lens View

by Herb Clarke

One of the best ways to photograph elusive wildlife, especially birds, is from a blind (often called a "hide" in some countries). This is a most satisfying way to photograph small creatures close up. Observing tiny fluffs of



Simple blind made from aluminum tubing and cloth

feathers in intimate detail going about their normal activities, unconcerned, is both enjoyable and informative. Generally, pictures of most larger birds are just as easily photographed from a distance with longer lenses. The main purpose of a blind is to disguise the human form which wildlife instinctively fears. Blinds are used commonly at nests, watering places and feeding areas. Usually, your subject quickly accepts altered conditions and resumes its customary routine, allowing you to watch or take pictures. Also, by being able to observe through the camera view finder right up to the moment of shutter release, last minute adjustments of composition and focus can be more easily made than when shooting by remote control away from the camera or from afar using a very long lens. In many situations, when the sun is not in the optimum position, one or more flashes may be required. As always, careful preparation and attention to

detail result in better photographs.

Satisfactory blinds can be made with ease. When unexpected opportunities arise or if a setup must be left unattended to allow time for an especially wary target to accept new conditions, improvised blinds often are constructed from material such as brush, branches, rocks or even snow, gathered at the site. Birds frequently will accept a car or a boat when used as a mobile blind. Sitting on the ground or on a stool with camouflage material draped over the photographer and camera works well, too. Inexpensive,

homemade blinds can be assembled using a framework of aluminum tubing or PVC pipe supporting lightweight material with ports cut at suitable places. Recommended dimensions are four feet square by six feet tall. A folding stool (with a back) and with legs that curve together to resist sinking into soft ground, makes extended waits more comfortable. The blind should be roomy enough to allow a visiting friend or another photographer and all required photographic equipment along with drinks and snacks when inside for long periods. Any neutral color is acceptable, and nothing should be permitted to flap in the wind.

It is recommended that the blind be lightweight and portable, yet strong enough to resist a brisk breeze. Vertical supports should adjust to compensate for uneven ground. The entire unit must enable you to easily and quickly set it up under often unfavorable conditions, with minimum disturbance of the subject. Improvements to your blind can be made as experience in the field is gained. There are more specialized blinds appropriate for unique requirements. Some examples are elaborate permanent structures where wildlife regularly congregates, or others built in tall trees or on towers to photograph canopy species.

Knowledge of your subject is essential. Awareness of nesting or feeding requirements adds greatly to your chance of success. Distance from camera to subject will vary according to terrain circumstances, size or wariness of the bird and length of lens. For a bird to accept and be in a good photographic position, sometimes a blind

has to be gradually moved closer over a period of time. When photographing, try not to move the lens quickly, and keep noise to a minimum. Don't go out of the blind unnecessarily. Protection of the bird must be paramount.

Caring for people's property rights is another important factor. Bird photographers have poor reputations because of some unfortunate and avoidable, tactless actions. Before attempting to photograph, always ask permission from the appropriate authorities in public areas as well as private property owners. When finished,



Improvised blind: camouflaged material draped over photographer

clean up the area and restore to original condition, as much as possible, any disturbed surroundings. Many times, a gift of a picture will go a long way in building friendly relationships. (Speaking of poor judgement, there is a growing tendency of some people in attempting to enlarge their photographic life list to approach too closely a well known rare bird, thus running the risk of frightening it away before other birders have a chance to observe it.)

Legend has it that birds can't count, and if two people approach and enter a blind and then one conspicuously goes away, the bird will return much faster. I have experienced little difference in lengths of time for birds to accept blinds whether or not this decoy method is used.

I have not covered the subject of blinds exhaustively. As in any outdoor activity, success depends on the resourcefulness of the photographer in meeting unexpected challenges.

Bookstore News

by Olga Clarke

A long awaited field guide for our Audubon Bookstore has finally arrived, *A Guide To The Birds of Thailand* by Boonsong Lekagul/Philip D. Round, Bangkok, 1991. It is written in English and contains 915 species and distribution maps (with the most up-to-date information) illustrated in color by two known Thai artists, Mongkol Wongkalasin and Kamol Komolphalin. In addition, there are sections on finding birds, some important bird watching sites are listed, as well as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries including a map of Thailand to help you find these locations. Also included is a quick reference key to families and genera on the front end papers in color. It is priced at \$59.95 (plus tax and shipping) and as Bookstore Chairperson, Olga Clarke, said, "This book is worth having in your library at any cost!"

Aves de Mexico by Roger Tory Peterson has finally appeared once again after a long absence from our bookshelves. For those of you not familiar with this book, it is written in Spanish and eliminates the necessity of carrying several books with you when traveling to Mexico, as it contains not only all of the resident species, but all of the North American migrants as well. Price at \$34.95 (hard cover).

Besides the Thailand Field Guide, there are several other new arrivals: *South Nevada Birds* by Titus; *A Guide to Western Bird Feeding* by Dennis; *Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Island*, Lonely Planet; *A Dictionary of Birds* by Campbell; *Illustrations of the Birds of California, Texas, Oregon, British and Russian America* by Cassin; *Birds of the Strait of Gibraltar* by Finlayson. As many books as we say "hello" to we say "good-bye" to, so don't wait too long to order that book you've had your eye on. In print today—out of print tomorrow. 

Art Exhibition by Doni Kendig

March 22, 1992—April 17, 1992

National Audubon Society

200 Culver Boulevard, Playa del Rey, California 90294-2799

Opening reception for the artist

4:00 p.m. — 7:00 p.m. March 22, 1992

Refreshments will be served.

Gallery hours: 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday—Friday.

Evenings and weekends by appointment.

For further information call National Audubon or the artist at 213 931-6692.



Big Day on Geneva Street

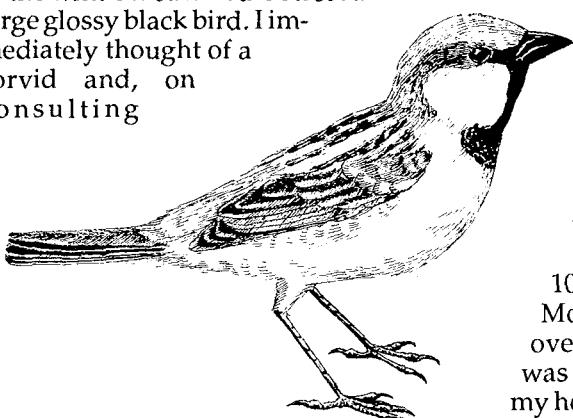
by Glenn Cunningham

The Big Day of Birding is a familiar phenomenon. We read about the Big Day in San Diego, the Big Day in High Island, the Big Day Here, the Big Day There. Why not, thought I, the Big Day in My Yard? My Yard, 50 feet by 150 feet, is extensive enough to accommodate the largest of birds, living or extinct. Yes, I decided, I would promote the Big Day, in fact a Birdathon, on Geneva Street.

Hoping to find a sponsor, I contacted Coca Cola, General Motors and the local Chamber of Commerce. Their lack of interest was monstrous—and unanimous.

Undaunted, I set the date anyway but only after consulting my astrologer who recommended October 25 as the most propitious. October 25, as every schoolboy knows, is the birthdate of Admiral Richard Byrd.

The Big Day began auspiciously while I was still in bed. I heard a loud "caw, caw, caw" outside and rushing to the window saw in the street a large glossy black bird. I immediately thought of a corvid and, on consulting



the field guide, determined it was indeed such, probably a White-necked Crow. I checked every detail. It seemed to match the description—black head, black wings, black tail—all it lacked was the white neck—a small deficiency but enough to disqualify him. I settled for the black-necked or Common Crow, still a spec-

tacular beginning to my Big Day.

But alas! He was still in the street. I concentrated on right thinking to bring him in, but he stubbornly refused to cross the curb. He did approach within 41 inches, a later measurement revealed, but hardly close enough to count. In an attempt to attract him, I left some bait on the lawn, choice macadamia nuts.

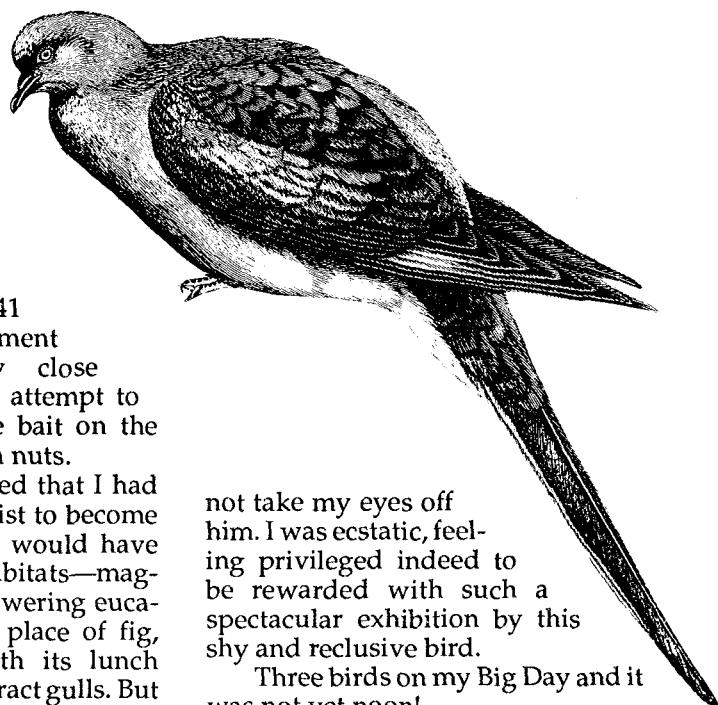
Once more I regretted that I had not enlarged my Yard List to become my Precinct List which would have greatly increased the habitats—magnolia trees as well as flowering eucalyptus, orange trees in place of fig, even a schoolyard with its lunch crumbs and scraps to attract gulls. But it was too late for change, only regrets.

After breakfast I resumed my search and was rewarded by a solitary Turkey Vulture soaring overhead. My property, by law, extends upward to infinity from the boundaries on the surface. Although the bird was flying well below infinity, I could not count him until certain that he was in my airspace. (Article IV, Section 22 of the

regulations of the Institute For Delimitation of Boundaries for American Yard Listers—IFDOBFAYL for short). A sextant and an hour of patient watching assured me, and I had my first bird of the Big Day, and a Big Bird, too! I was elated.

Later in the morning, at 10:44 to be exact, I sighted a Mourning Dove zigzagging overhead. One zig, or perhaps it was a zag, took him directly over my house. In general, he was flying in a northerly direction. Although it was October and he should have been flying south, I counted him anyway. Actually, I needed him for my Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday list as well.

Not long afterward, I heard a raucous call in the back yard and, stepping outside, I saw, not eighteen feet away (seventeen feet to be exact), a Scrub Jay. He was standing on the trash bin moving his head slowly from side to side. I was fascinated and could



not take my eyes off him. I was ecstatic, feeling privileged indeed to be rewarded with such a spectacular exhibition by this shy and reclusive bird.

Three birds on my Big Day and it was not yet noon!

Soon after lunch, I stepped outside to see what treasures the afternoon might bring and was just in time to witness the arrival of a flock of Starlings that settled on the wires in the neighborhood, some of them on my telephone lead. There, in my own yard, I counted no less than four of the splendid creatures. The chorus of their combined song was something to remember.

Yes, I know the Starling is an introduced bird and that, among birders, the purest of the purists allow no such, even appending to their lists NIB, "No Introduced Birds." But in this great nation, all of us birders, save a few Paiutes and Cherokees, derive from

Illustration (below) by Diana Saldo



introduced stock. Such a point of view is discriminatory at best and, in my opinion, downright un-American. All of my lists proudly bear the notation AIB, "All Introduced Birds."

Another immigrant appeared a short time later. Resplendent in his slate gray coat, a Rock Dove was perched on the utility wire that runs along the alley directly above my property line. Should I count him or not? I debated. But then I noticed his droppings in my yard, just barely in, to be sure, but definitely in my yard. This was proof positive that at least half the bird had been over my property. One half of the bird is enough according to IFDOBFAYL (Article II, Section 3). Which half is not specified.

When I turned on the lawn sprinklers in late afternoon, I really hit the jackpot. Two Brewer's Blackbirds appeared out of nowhere and began to bathe. A House Finch was flitting about overhead in the Chinese elm. And then—you will find this hard to believe—a Mockingbird flew down onto the lawn, driving the blackbirds away and taking over the bath! I was overwhelmed with euphoria. Three birds at one time! My cup ranneth over.

The Mockingbird did not remain long but finished his bath, flicked his tail and took off. What a stroke of luck to view this rare vagrant in my very own yard! The Big Day was a success.

But not an unqualified success. I had dared to hope for a glimpse of the House Sparrow, a seldom seen species which I also need for my Life List. It did seem like too much to ask for, but I understand that more than one confirmed sighting has been reported in southern California in recent years. But it was not to be, and *Passer domesticus* remains my most wanted bird. Hope springs eternal.

Finally I was unhappy not to include my crow. He did make several approaches during the day, one within eleven inches from the curb! I held my breath and prayed silently but he did not see fit to set foot in my yard, untempted by choice macadamia nuts. Perhaps I should have opened the can. Setting foot in my yard was an absolute requirement before I could list him (See IFDOBFAYL Article VI, Section 7). I felt better when a friend at Audubon House assured me that he was undoubtedly an escapee.

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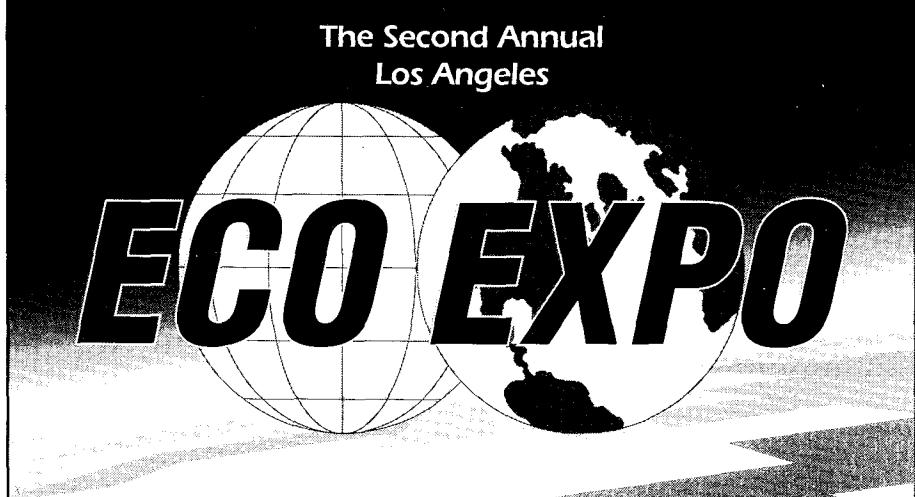
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Los Angeles Times



PROUD SPONSORS



Birds Of The Season

by Hank Brodkin

In March, spring migration starts in earnest. Our lowland flycatcher species and orioles lead the parade. We are always interested in receiving first reports of individual species, so if you think yours is a first spring sighting, please report it to me.

A lot of the Christmas counts were zapped with good weather (much needed rain). Our Lancaster Count on 14 December produced a Eurasian Wigeon, a Sandhill Crane, and a Vermilion Flycatcher, while the Santa Barbara Count on 28 December had a Ruddy Ground-Dove and a Pine Warbler among others.

In spite of the weather (or because of it) and mainly thanks to a couple of extremely active birders, this winter's reports are more numerous than average.

A Red-necked Grebe was at the Ventura River mouth on 7 December (Don Desjardine) and another was on a freshwater pond in Pollywog Park, Manhattan Beach (Don Sterba). Two Northern Fulmars were off the Balboa Pier on 7 December (Steve Mlodinow).

Among the scores of usually pelagic species such as Cassin's Auklets and Xantus' Murrelets, the 7 January storm produced a Fork-tailed Storm Petrel (most unusual in southern California) off Pt. Vicente (Mitch Heindel). Standing on a point, such as Point Dume or Palos Verdes, after a severe winter storm will often produce some interesting birds.

Forty to fifty White Pelicans were on Lake Piru, Ventura County, on 22 November (Ben & Lois Hitz), and 7 Tundra Swans showed up at New Lake, Whittier Narrows, on 15 December (Mickey Long). Nine Greater White-fronted Geese were on Holiday Lake in the west Antelope Valley on 26 December (Hank Brodkin), and a Ross' Goose was at the Ventura sewage ponds on 17 December along with a "Common" (the Eurasian race) Green-winged Teal (Bud Swanton).

Again this winter there were nu-

merous reports of male Eurasian Wigeon. The only female reported was at Heartwell Park in Long Beach. The Common Pochard again returned to Silver Lakes near Victorville on 15 November (Curtis Marantz). An immature male King Eider showed up at the Seal Beach pier on 13 December (Jeff Boyd) and moved to the Belmont Pier in Long Beach on 11 January where a female Black Scoter was also present (Bruce Broadbooks). Two to four White-winged Scotters were reported off McGrath State Park on 27 December (Jerry Friedman) and six Hooded Mergansers showed up at Whittier Narrows on 23 December (Ray Johnson).

A Bald Eagle was seen at the San Gabriel Canyon reservoir on 23 December (David Moody and MH). A Ferruginous Hawk was over Whittier Hills on 24 November (Bonnie Heindecker), and a dark morph individual was near Gorman on 26 December (Bill Principe). Single Rough-legged Hawks were at the San Jacinto Wilderness Area, Riverside County (SM), and at the Edmonton Pump Station off the Grapevine on 24 December (JF). A Peregrine Falcon stopped briefly in a Valencia backyard on 17 November (Jeff Targent).

A Sandhill Crane was present in the Antelope Valley from 10 December (Tom Martin) until at least 20 January. Eleven Pacific Golden Plover were at Anaheim Bay on 30 November (SM) and a startling 183 Mountain Plover were reported from Harper Dry Lake, San Bernardino County, on 14 December (Bea & Dick Smith).

Twelve Royal Terns and 150 Black Skimmers were at Seal Beach on 8 December, and an Elegant Tern was off stormy Pt. Vicente on 7 January (MH).

A Northern Pygmy Owl was seen in San Gabriel Canyon on 23 December (MH & DM), and 15 Long-eared Owls were at the San Jacinto Wildlife Refuge on 1 December (SM).

A Gray Flycatcher was found in the Westminster Cemetery on 1 January (SM), an Eastern Phoebe was at McGrath on 24 November (Bob Neuwirth), and a Dusky-capped Flycatcher was in Irvine on 14 December (SM). Single Tropical Kingbirds were reported from Pico Rivera on 26 November and from Chino Hills on 6 January (Gjon Hazard) and 3 Cassin's Kingbirds were in Seal Beach on 15 December (Barbara Lichina).

A late Northern Rough-winged Swallow was over Willowbrook Park on 7 December (MH). Single Winter Wrens were seen in San Gabriel Canyon on 23 December (MH & DM) and in Lacy Park in San Marino on 8 January (Kimball Garrett), and a Varied Thrush was in Topanga State Park on 24 November (Gerry Haigh).

A Tennessee Warbler was also in Lacy Park on 8 January and a Chestnut-sided Warbler was in Irvine Park on 23 November (JB) with another in Tapia Park on 24 November (MH). Two Palm Warblers were in the Sepulveda Basin on 15 January (Jim Peppermuller), and an American Redstart is apparently wintering in Redondo Wilderness Park (David Koeppel).

A Summer Tanager was seen in Banning Park on 14 December (MH), a Swamp Sparrow was in Irvine Park on 23 November (JB) and a White-throated Sparrow was at the San Jacinto Wildlife Area on 1 December (SM).

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 Brodkin OR David Koeppel
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

Continued from Page 12

Saturday and Sunday, March 21 and 22 - Owens Valley Grouse Trip. Mary Carmo-
na 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 hopefults. Limited to
16. Reserve with a \$10 check (see policy).
Include SASE for 7:30 a.m. Big Pine departing
location and lodging list.

Sunday, March 22 - Hansen Dam. Join
Dustin Alcala as he searches for birds in a
variety of habitats filling the old lake bed.
Resident Cooper's Hawks and late wintering
birds should be of interest. Meet at
7:30 a.m. for a morning of birding. From
the 170, 5 or 405 Fwy N, take the 118 Fwy
E to the Glenoaks Blvd. offramp, continue
SE for 1 mile, turn left on Osborne St., then
right on Dronfield St. Drive straight into the
parking lot. [LA, p.9, C-2]

Sunday, March 29 - Franklin Canyon. This morning walk will be led by Steve
Saffier. Franklin Canyon is located between
Sherman Oaks and Beverly Hills. Over 100 species have been seen in the
chaparral, lakeside and oak/pine woodland
habitats. Meet at the Sooky Goldman
Nature Center lot at 7:30 a.m. From Sunset
Blvd. in Beverly Hills, take Beverly Dr. N
to Coldwater Canyon Dr., continue uphill
onto the ridge, past a fire station, then
make a 90° left turn onto Franklin Canyon
Dr. for the remaining 1/2 mile to the Nature
Center. From the 101 Fwy in the Valley,
take Coldwater S into the hills, make a
90° right turn at the ridge onto Franklin
Canyon Dr., and continue on to the Nature
Center. The lot is past a gate designating
the William O. Douglas Outdoor Classroom.
[LA, p.23, B-6]

**Sunday, April 5 - Starr Ranch
Sanctuary.** Park Ranger Pete
De Simone will show us around
the grasslands and woodlands in
the sanctuary. A nonstrenuous walk
through fairly untouched oak woodlands
should be good for passerines and young
raptors. Take the 5 or 405 Fwy to El Toro
Rd. NE, turn right onto Santa Margarita
Pkwy. Continue to Antonio, and meet in
the Ralph's lot at the NW corner of the
intersection. Pete will be in the lot by the
Security Pacific Bank and will depart at
8:30 a.m. Bring lunch to eat at the ranch.
Reserve by phone with Audubon House.
Rain cancels. \$5 donation to Starr Ranch

very non-mandatory. Do not send money
to Audubon. Participation limited to 25.

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

**Saturday, April 11 - O'Melveny
Park.** Doug Martin, who spends
considerable time with the birds of
O'Melveny Park, will lead this
morning walk from the parking lot looking
for early migrants and breeding birds.
Take the 405 or 5 Fwy N to the 118 Fwy W
to Balboa Blvd. Take Balboa N about 2.5
miles to Sesnon Blvd., and take this left
straight through the gate and into the lot.
Meet at 7:30 a.m.

**Friday, April 24 - Chatsworth Park
South.** Join leader Allan Keller for
a morning of prime migration
birding. We will seek warblers, orioles,
grosbeaks and others in this chapar-
ral / oak woodland habitat. Take Topanga
Canyon Blvd. (from 101 or 118 Fwy), go W
on Devonshire and continue into the lot by
the Recreation Center. Meet at 8:00 a.m.
[LA, p.6, B-2]

Saturday, April 25 - Hansen Dam.
Leader Dustin Alcala. Meet at
7:30 a.m. See March 22 write-up for
details.

**Saturday and Sunday, April 25 and
26 - Eastern Mojave Long
Weekend.** Larry Allen will lead 15
durable birders in search of the four
toughest California thrashers, as well as
Scott's Oriole and other desert birds. Lots
of driving on paved and dirt roads, and
some rock-hopping and hiking. Meet in
Baker at 8:00 a.m. Tent camp Saturday in
the desert. Bring gas, food, water from
Baker for weekend. \$4 and SASE to LAAS
reserves.

**Sunday, April 26 - Tree People
Preserve.** Steve Saffier will lead
this new (for LAAS) field trip site in
Willacre and Fryman Canyons. Reported
to be nice woodland/chaparral.
Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the valley overlook lot
on the north side of Mulholland half a mile
E of Coldwater Canyon Dr. [LA, p.23, B-6]

Saturday, May 2 - Salton Sea. Chet
McGaugh leading. Meet 7:00 a.m.
at Salton Sea. \$8 reservation fee,
\$2.25 Refuge Fee. Maximum 20 people.
See April Western Tanager for details.

WESTERN TANAGER
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Tanager* for \$15 per year. The newsletter is sent
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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.

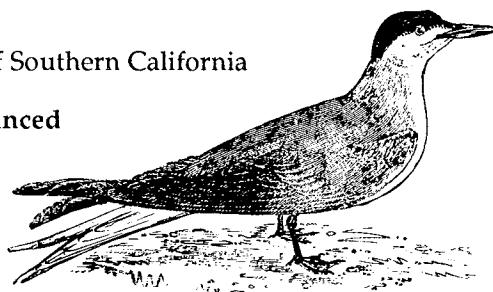
C A L E N D A R

E V E N I N G M E E T I N G S

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

March 10 - Dr. Pat Baird will present a program titled, "*The California Least Tern: On The Road to Recovery.*" This diminutive tern builds its nest directly on the sand on beaches from San Diego to Alameda County. Due to competition for this prime real estate from humans and their pets, the Least Tern is listed as endangered by both State and Federal Governments. Largely due to intensive monitoring and protection of nestsites, numbers of nesting terns have increased from a low of roughly 600 pairs to approximately 1,800 pairs last spring. Dr. Baird is at the forefront of the recovery efforts and will report to us on the current status of the program.

ID Workshop - Terns of Southern California



April 14 - To Be Announced

P E L A G I C T R I P S

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 Koeppe 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.

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, March 1 - 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]

Saturday, March 14 - 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, March 14 - Chatsworth Reservoir. Leader Dustin Alcala. Primarily an "old California" native grassland habitat with a large body of water and oak riparian woodlands in the adjacent arroyos. Late wintering and sedentary birds will be present. 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]

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 Ave., Arcadia, just south of 210 Fwy, on the west side of the street. No fee on third Tuesday only. [LA, p.28, C-4]

Continued on Page 11