



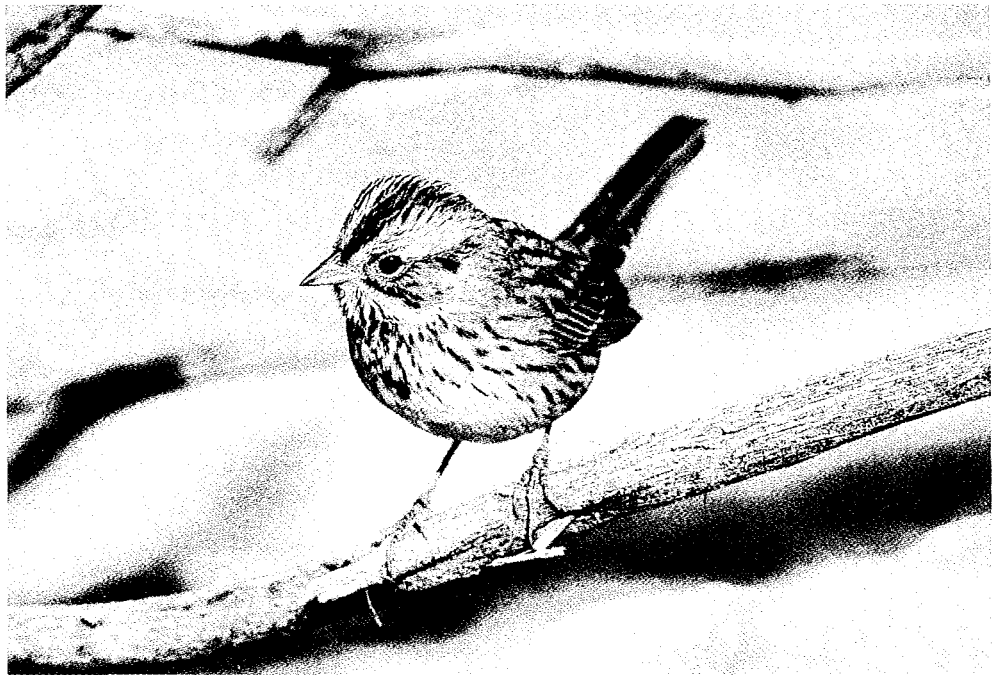
WESTERN TANAGER

The Los Angeles Chapter of
The National Audubon Society

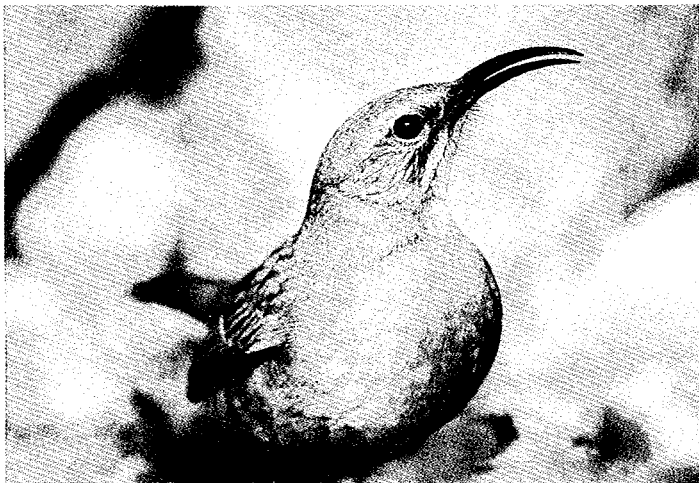
Volume 58

Number 7

April 1992



First Prize: Lincoln's Sparrow by Brad Sillasen



Second Prize: Red-faced Warbler (above) by Larry Sansone
Third Prize: California Thrasher (right) by David Koeppel



RAILS

by Rich Stallcup

It is four a.m., and except for the occasional gargling of western toads and weak trills from insomniac wrens, the marsh is quiet. Through the dangling mist, a Barn Owl ghosts low above the tules, silently prepared to quarter and drop on anything that moves. Suddenly and spontaneously a burst of raucous voices fills the void, sounding like the response to a dirty joke at a VFW convention. Virginia Rails. A high, trailing whinny follows. Sora. All this to sort out patches of territory—the damp equivalent of a coyote howl.

Because of their mostly nocturnal habits and botanically dense habitats, rails are more often heard than seen. Their voices are weird and distinctive, very much worth some night hours of listening. To see three species just takes time in early morning or late afternoon, watching the edge of their darkness. A visual connection with either of the two small rails, however, takes exceptional luck or answered prayers.

The Clapper

There are three California populations of Clapper Rail, and these are the

only ones in the western U.S. All three are fragile and could easily be "incidentally" exterminated. At San Francisco Bay, the northern race barely clings to the remaining 5% (the outermost *Spartina* margin) of natural habitat. In southern California, the situation is worse. Here, the "Light-footed" Clapper Rail hangs on in fragments of salt and brackish marsh that have thus far been preserved; there isn't much, and big money interests would just love a chance to drain and develop the rest. If overdevelopment weren't enough, recently the non-native red fox has become established all along the coast, and it delights in chewing upon Clapper Rails. *If these foxes are not eliminated now, both coastal Clapper Rail races might easily become extinct in the U.S. during the 1990s.*

The "Yuma" Clapper Rail population may include more birds than either of the other two. They live precariously at the south end of the Salton Sea (where water levels fluctuate radically) and on the lower Colorado River, mostly between Needles and Laguna Dam.

VOICE. Most familiar is the "Clapper" or "Clatter" call given

crepuscularly and year-round by both sexes and often in chorus with birds on neighboring territories. It is a rapid-fire series which may contain as few as 12 or over 100 quack-like notes. It is what gave the bird its name.

During the breeding season (February through April) the "kek" call is given by single males. It is an abrupt, highly audible, single note, repeated incessantly, quickening at times in response to other noises, particularly other rails. Males are known to wander through their territories, "kekking" as they go.

Advertising females have a sound all their own known as the "kek-burr." Given only during the breeding season to attract males, it has an electric, winding quality and could be mistaken (by humans) for the primary song of Black Rail. There are often several "keks" before the "burr."

Much of the above and other Clapper Rail speech (agitated kek, squawk, screech, churr and purr) are discussed by Barbara W. Massey and Richard Zembal—Vocalizations of the Light-footed Clapper Rail. *Journal of Field Ornithology* Vol. 58, No. 1., (32-40).

Note: There may be more Light-footed Clapper Rails in Mexico than in the U.S. Since large tracts of unmolested salt marsh remain along the Pacific coast of Baja from Ensenada to Laguna Ojo de Liebre and Laguna San Ignacio, stable Clapper Rail populations remain there. Below the Imperial Dam, where only a tiny trickle of the Colorado River is allowed south toward Sonora and northeast Baja, a few Yuma Clapper Rails have trickled too. There are recent records at Morelos Dam and Las Carapilas.

Virginia and Sora

Virginia Rails and Sora favor freshwater marshes, usually composed of tules or sedges. They also frequent the narrow edges of ponds or slow rivers with only small patches of shelter. During winter, both may be scattered sparsely in salt marshes. These two, like Clapper Rails, do much of their foraging on open mud—but never more than a moment's sprint from deep cover.

Though scarce (but findable, with some effort), both of these species

Rich holds a Black Rail rescued from flood-tide predators; photo by Jack Swenson.



were formerly abundant throughout North America and probably numbered millions in the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys before the massive delta marshes were diked and drained. If humans will have the grace and wisdom to restore wetlands, these birds will increase. If marsh-bashing continues, they and many other dependent forms will go spinning down the drain of extinction.

VOICE. Virginia Rails have a large vocabulary including the quacking, descending laugh mentioned above. Next most often heard is the flat, unmusical, two-syllabled "*kid-dick*," "*kid-kick*," or "*chickit-chickit*," which may crack on for several minutes. Sora deliver a shrill, descending, rapid whinny, mostly during the breeding season, and a sweetly whistled, rising "*surrree*" or (if you try hard enough) "*sooorra*." Both of these medium-sized rails also have several location or conversational notes that are quiet. Except for the usefulness of each species' two primary vocalizations, these birds should be identified visually.

The Yellow

In California, Yellow Rails nested in damp, grassy meadows east of the Sierran escarpment well into the first half of this century. This was most recently recorded at Bridgeport, Mono County. Some serious searches there after 1965 failed to locate any birds. The fact that each locality hosting appropriate habitat had been trashed by the amphibious presence of cattle was thought to have caused the demise. Recently, a breeding colony was found near Klamath Falls, Oregon, and it is likely that a systematic search in the northern and eastern California Great Basin will detect some current Yellow Rail activity.

In the late 1800s, Yellow Rails were also regular along the central California coast during winter, and numerous specimens were taken. Most records were from the vicinity of Point Reyes Station, where today levees (to create pasture for dairy Holsteins) and two roads have fragmented the former marsh and eliminated classic Yellow Rail habitat.

Contrary to what one might read about Yellow Rail distribution in California in winter, there are fewer than eight records of the species in the last



Clapper Rail; photo by Kenneth W. Gardiner.

50 years! At least three of these were of live birds in pickleweed (*Salicornia*) marshes, perhaps their best habitat choice after their favorite damp grassy fields. One of these winter records was a Yellow Rail caught and killed by a Great Egret during a winter flood tide.

VOICE. A long series of "*tic*" notes, alternating between bundles of two and three—"tic tic tic," "*tic tic*," "*tic tic tic*"—which can be imitated by ticking two pebbles or two quarters together. In northern Minnesota at midnight, after a long but successful slog to seek the elusive Yellow Rail, a weary and wet (but happy) birder asks, "How does the bird make that strange, unmusical sound?" "By ticking two pebbles together," the leader says.

The Black

Black Rails nest in delicate, threatened habitats around the north end of

San Francisco, San Pablo, and Suisun Bays, but since their behavior is more like that of a mouse than any bird, they are rarely seen. There is some post-breeding dispersal into marshes edging south San Francisco Bay, but because of development there are no longer any Black Rails nesting there. Fewer than 80 of these birds remain along the lower Colorado River, and the last remaining habitat at the Salton Sea which held about 12 pairs was successfully eliminated in 1990. There are still a few at seepages from the High Line and All American Canals in western Imperial County, but the water barons are rapidly sealing the canals to dry-up leaks. A few scattered around western Sonoma and Marin Counties, a few at Morro Bay, and (until recently) an occasional winter record from Newport Bay complete the Black Rail's bleak distribution pic-

Continued on Page 4

Lens View

by Herb Clarke

What to take and how to handle camera gear on nature outings is a continuing, vexing problem. I know several excellent and wealthy photographers who have such a plethora of equipment that they are overburdened in the field and are continually in a dilemma as to the optimum item to use in a particular situation with the result that either no pictures are taken or they are dissatisfied with their photographs. Nature photography is so unpredictable that oftentimes the very piece of equipment left behind is the item required.

So what to do? A basic rule is to *keep it simple*. If the target is known, take only what is considered needed. Experience will make these decisions easier.

On fast-moving trips, try to carry everything in one case. Here's what I recommend as a minimum: two camera bodies, a small zoom lens (mine is a 28-70mm), a larger zoom lens (recommended is a 75-300mm), a small flash and anything else you feel you must have. This basic equipment should cover most nature picture opportunities. When traveling by motor vehicle, you have greater latitude unless you are with impatient non-photographers. It's amusing. Most people are reluctant to give a careful photographer time to get his picture but are always anxious to see the results or want copies.

Modern photographic equipment is complex but surprisingly rugged. Generally, it requires only minimum care in the field. I have found the single best item for cleaning glass and other parts is a well washed cotton handkerchief. When cleaning dust or grease from lens elements, hold the lens downward and gently blow off any loose particles, breathe on the

glass, fogging it slightly and wipe lightly in a circular motion. Liquid cleaners are unnecessary. Dirty lenses are not a big problem and do not usually affect picture quality. It's better to use a dirty lens than risk damaging it by careless or too-frequent cleaning.

A clear or UV filter protects well. Plastic bags help shelter equipment when in wet or dusty conditions. Wipe off dirt and moisture, especially salt water, as soon as possible after a piece unavoidably gets wet. Keep everything covered when not shooting.

Another complication is the necessity of having back-up equipment along in case of a failure. After spending much time, money and effort to get in position, it's disheartening to have some simple little thing not work and the whole expedition goes down the tubes. Always check everything before and after each outing, especially batteries. Repair or replace anything in doubtful condition, even back-up items. 🐦

Continued in the May Western Tanager

RAILS

Continued from Page 3

ture for all of western North America. None are presently known in western Mexico, but thorough surveys at the huge *Salicornia* marshes in Baja may reveal populations.

The best chance to see a Black Rail is to stand on the boundary of a marsh known to contain birds or at least "old-growth" *Salicornia* during a winter flood tide. The tide must be at least 6.5 feet with rain or at least 7.0 feet without. If luck is on your side, you may see a Black Rail flying from the inundated vegetation of the outer marsh toward a better place to hide. These birds are often killed by predators (mostly Great Egrets, some Northern Harriers) during these periods, so be prepared for a blend of happy and sad emotions.

VOICE. The song, often written as "kicky-doo," is loud, winding, and electric, most unlike the voice of any other animal (but see Clapper Rail, above). During the breeding season as well as in the rest of the year, however, an-

other voice is more common: a high, growly, machine-gun-like "grrr, grrr, grrr, grr, grr." This is probably delivered by males and females alike and is usually in response to another bird, or to herald an irritable disposition. A high, peeping "yip-yip-yip" heard in late summer may be the cry of fledged juveniles.

In addition to the Great Egrets and harriers mentioned as Black Rail enemies during flood tides, owls may be primary nesting-season predators. Since Black Rails sing loudly at night without changing position. It is likely that some are picked off from above. In June 1988, during PRBO's extensive survey of Black Rails in San Francisco Bay, Robin Leong and I found a single owl pellet in a clearing on the large *Salicornia* marsh at Mare Island, San Pablo Bay. It was probably cast by a Barn Owl and contained remains of a Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse, the left lower mandible of a shrew (yet to be identified), and the complete skull and other bones of a Black Rail. California cuisine.

Because most Black Rails nest at San Francisco Bay and because of its real taxonomic affinities, might we just as well call it... Earthcrake?

The bottom line on rails is that

three out of five species occurring in California are hanging on by threads, and the other two, though not in immediate trouble, have been vastly reduced in this century. Wetlands is the word: salt, brackish, fresh, and upland. We must protect those that remain and rebuild those that have been lost. Think big—like releasing enough water to rehydrate former marshland no matter what it has been developed into. Use treated city sewage water to build marshes and Tringa habitat (grassy fresh-water pools needed by yellowlegs and Solitary and Pectoral Sandpipers, etcetera) on vacant city property. Let each town create its own wildlife wetland bird sanctuary by reusing gray water. Unleash water, and the wetlands with their marshes will magically reappear, unaided in any way. 🐦



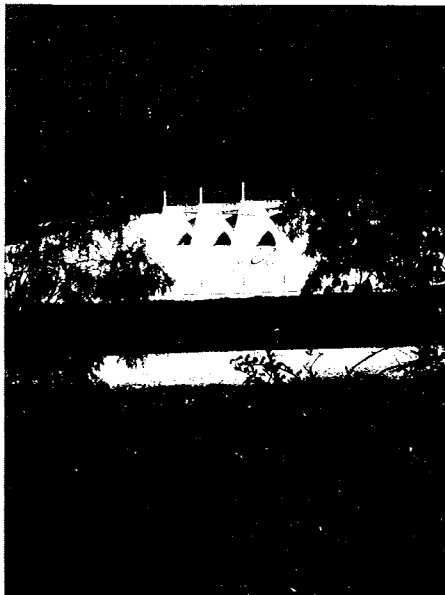
This article is reprinted from the *Observer*, the quarterly journal of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, with the kind permission of the author, Rich Stallcup. An annual membership in the Point Reyes Bird Observatory is \$35. LAAS encourages everyone to support them. Their address is: Point Reyes Bird Observatory, 4990 Shoreline Highway, Stinson Beach, CA 94970.

Conservation Conversation

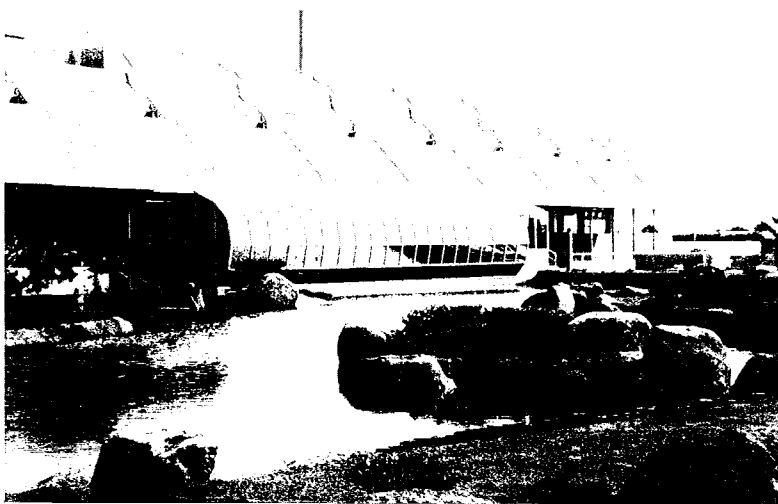
by Sandy Wohlgemuth

The recent flooding of southern California is a shock to our complacency. This sort of thing just can't happen to us. The press has reminded us that the Sepulveda Dam, in the San Fernando Valley, was built after the 1938 flood that killed 49 people and destroyed \$40 million worth of property. The dam was built to contain the angry torrents that our usually innocuous waterways become at unpredictable intervals. And this month the dam worked. It held the water back and prevented serious flooding downstream. So what went wrong? Why was there a near-disaster? It was not the confusion over who was to close the gates on Burbank Blvd. that would have prevented the demise of 46 cars and averted trauma to 48 nervous systems. The question that should be asked is—what was a 50-mile-an-hour 6-lane highway (Burbank Blvd.) doing in a flood plain? And why is there a huge water reclamation plant in a flood control basin?

The Tillman Plant was vigorously opposed by the Corps of Engineers years ago, and it is reported that political influence at the highest level overcame any objections. When the plant was built, it was declared to be outside the 100-year flood line north of the Los Angeles River; it would not be damaged by even a massive flood that statistically would occur once in 100 years. Recently a new survey revealed that the 100-year line was farther north and now would include the Tillman Plant. This was not because changes had taken place in the hydrology of the Valley. Uninterrupted development of every kind—homes, mini-malls, parking lots, office buildings—had paved over so much land that the amount of uncovered soil was reduced to the point where rain ran off instead of soaking into the ground. (Where are the vacant lots of yesterday?) A heavy downpour has no place to go but into the Los Angeles River. This can explain the incredible speed of the flash flood in Sepulveda on February 10th that forced so many



*The Sepulveda Dam (above)
The Tillman Treatment Plant (below)*



motorists to the roofs of their cars.

The Tillman Plant has replaced corn fields with impervious concrete and thus itself compounds the problem. In fact a large acreage of the basin must be excavated to a depth of two feet to compensate for the Plant, and a great earthen berm is to be built to shield it from flood water. Delay in excavation and construction left the facility defenseless, its pumps were drowned and millions of gallons of

partially treated water spilled into the basin. All of this, including repair to the Plant, will be paid by the taxpayers.

Common sense dictates that permanent structures have no place in a flood plain. Joe Evelyn, chief hydrologist for the Corps of Engineers, pulls no punches. A flood control basin's function is to store water, he said. "Our policy is to allow things that are compatible with inundation." He takes a dim view of the Arts Park proposal with its many buildings, including two underground theatres. "We always thought that was incompatible—not a safe thing to do," he said.

In the larger view, we have to come to realize that we must plan our cities with a sharper eye on Mother Nature. Was it wise to permit an RV park in Ventura to be built next to a river that might jump its banks? Though the vehicles were savagely

trashed and helicopter rescues were necessary, the owner of the park says he is ready to rebuild! What of the enormous Porter Ranch planned for the hills in the north San Fernando Valley?

How much more land will several thousand homes, office buildings and a large shopping center pave over? How much more sewage will be generated there for the Tillman Plant, stimulating a cry for additional treatment facilities in the basin? Will the planning commissions and the elected officials who appoint them learn from the Flood of '92 or will the seductive voice of the developer be irresistible? 🐾



Life Bird

I'd heard it and searched for it in Texas.
Long hours plagued by mosquitoes,
And bathed in perspiration from the heat,
With no luck. This was the fun of birding?

But I knew I'd try again—someday.
This time on the Louisiana coast,
Driving very early to Holleyman Woods
With a friend. Would it be a "fallout" day?

Nervously, we listened—silence. So first
We waited, sitting in the car, sipping tea and
Playing an owl tape. Suddenly there it was,
In front of us, on a branch, unmistakable.

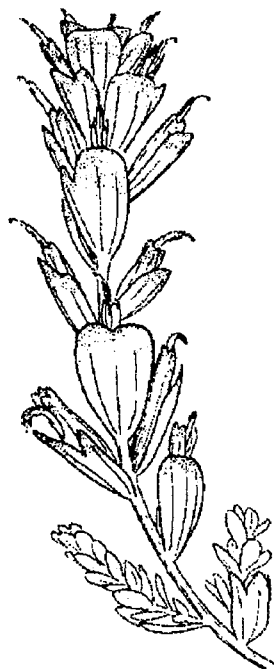
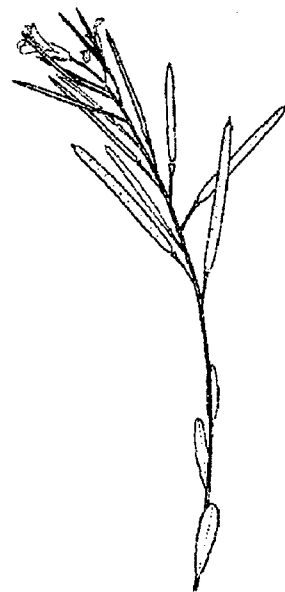
I looked long, then turned as it slipped back
Into the leaves. "Charlotte?"—she was looking at the
Field guide, the page open at Swainson's Warbler.
I pointed, "Is that what you just saw?"

"Yes", she said "Did you?"
"Yes". We both started to smile, then laugh—
Neither had wanted to call it
In case the other had missed the bird.

It was such a brief, though perfect look.
Not time to say, "There, right in the center
Of the bush." No time before the bird vanished.
But wonder of wonders, we had spotted it together.

Such a secretive bird, and we'd seen it
From the car! We jumped on the grass for joy.
Finding a life bird with a friend
Can be almost—euphoric.

Dorothy Dimsdale
May, 1989



Volunteers Needed

Every day you seem to read more bad news. **Hole in Ozone Growing. Spotted Owl Driven Toward Extinction. Global Warming Accelerated.**

Don't you sometimes feel frustrated, powerless, unable to do anything. Well, there is something you can do. **Volunteer.**

Perhaps you hadn't thought about it, but National Audubon Society literally started the modern environmental movement. At the turn of the century, individual action by Audubon members saved the egret from plume hunters, and the egret was (and still is) our symbol to remind ourselves of our purpose. Los Angeles Audubon Society, founded in 1910, is one of the oldest and most effective Audubon chapters in the nation, and all the good work LAAS has done over the years has been by volunteers like you.

So how about it? Get out of your chair and become part of the solution. You may not save the world, but you can do a world of good. Not all of the tasks we ask you to do are glamorous, but they are important. And we need you to help. In 1872, John Muir said, "Earth has no sorrow that Earth cannot heal." But Earth cannot heal herself; she needs your help. **Volunteer.**

*Remember,
Think Globally—Act Locally*

Open for Suggestions

The Board of Directors of our chapter has created a Steering Committee to seek out problems and suggestions our members may have that we may solve or implement to generally improve the organization. We are asking for ideas in all areas of the LAAS: Board Meetings; Bookstore/Sales; Education/Birdathon/Field Trips; Finances; Fund-raising; General Meetings/Programs; Goals/Strategy; Grants; House/Day-To-Day Operations; ID Workshops; Library; Membership Development; Publicity; Research/Database Projects; Sanctuaries; Things We'd Like To See; the *Western Tanager*.

Please mention if you would like to participate in Steering Committee activities. Send your suggestions to Steven Hirsh, Steering Committee Chairperson; Los Angeles Audubon Society; 2858 El Roble Drive; Los Angeles, CA 90041-1804. 🐦

Armchair Activist

Join the Audubon SWAT team. When an important issue is on the table, Armchair Activists can have a huge influence just by calling or writing the right people. Volunteer to be an Armchair Activist. All you need is a phone, a pen and desire. For further information, call Candy Lerman at Audubon House at (213) 876-0202.

CPA Auditor

LAAS needs to have its books audited so we can receive important grant monies. If you are a CPA and would be willing to certify our books, call Audubon House and volunteer.

Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Area

The 108-acre Wildlife Area, located just behind Sepulveda Dam, was under 20 feet of water after the recent rains. The ducks and the vegetation did fine, but the Area is littered with floating trash, and many new trees need to be planted. If you would like to help, call Audubon House.

Bookstore

Did you know that LAAS runs one of the leading ornithological bookstores in the nation, and it's done mostly with volunteer labor? Spend a few hours at Audubon House and join the gang at the bookstore. You'll be helping Audubon earn the money it needs to do all its good work, and you'll meet lots of good people, too. 🐦

Armchair Activists



Environmental problems seem to be multiplying exponentially. Every time you pick up the newspaper or turn on the radio you learn of a new threat to our planet. In most cases you can't take direct action, but often your congressman, senator, or state legislator can do something only he or she may not be as environmentally informed as you are.

Still, you may not know when an issue is coming up for a vote or exactly which legislator needs to be persuaded. You may feel as though you don't understand fully the impact of the issue or just how to state your position. What's more, you just don't have time to come up with the answers to all those questions.

That is why Armchair Activist was created. When you sign up to participate in this program you will receive a monthly newsletter devoted to a single, timely issue. It will give you the facts, a sample letter, and the names and address of the legislators to contact. If you can spare 30 minutes a month to read the newsletter and write a letter, you can make an impact. Your letter will join hundreds of other southern California Armchair Activists' letters on state and local issues and thousands of others from across the country on important national topics.

Now we need you more than ever. A disturbing article in the February 3 issue of *Time* Magazine detailed the efforts of anti-environmental groups that represent development industries such as oil, timber and cattle ranchers. They are actively mounting well-funded and highly-organized letter-writing campaigns to combat the environmental viewpoint on legislation. One of these groups has already persuaded General Electric to end its sponsorship of the National Audubon television specials.

Call Audubon House at (213) 876-0202 today to join. Or send us your name, address and telephone number. We ask only that you donate \$6 a year to help defray the costs. You'll feel better about the environment and your form of government. 🐦

Resolution of Support for Threatened Species

At its 5 December 1991 meeting, the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Audubon Society adopted the following resolution:

"WHEREAS the Los Angeles Audubon Society exists in part to promote the integrity of natural communities and their component wildlife and to preserve and restore natural areas in southern California to provide habitat for the greatest possible diversity of native plant and animal life, especially those species whose status is **Threatened** or **Endangered** under State and Federal guidelines;

"AND WHEREAS we recognize that imbalances in plant and animal populations can occur because of accidental or deliberate introductions of non-native species by humans, resulting in a threat to native populations;

"AND WHEREAS it may become necessary to control populations of non-native species (including, but not limited to, the Red Fox) that imperil the existence of native species after all alternative options are judged infeasible, ineffective or impractical;

"BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Audubon Society supports the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game in their efforts to protect native plants and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, by whatever humane methods are deemed necessary to remove individuals or populations of detrimental exotic species in order to restore more natural ecological balances."

Acknowledging that the control of exotic animal species is a sensitive and highly emotional issue, the Board felt that it was important to explain to the Chapter's membership the reasoning behind this resolution. Many conservation organizations have failed to take a strong lead in the feral animal issue, perhaps in deference to a vocal animal protectionist faction. In the interim, many declining bird species continue to be severely affected by predation from feral, non-native species.

Underscoring the devastation that can be wrought by feral predators as well as the anti-scientific and anti-environment underpinnings of many within the animal rights movement is the following announcement from the January 1992 *Ornithological Newsletter*: "Stray cats on the campus of Florida

Atlantic University in Boca Raton are devastating baby Burrowing Owls, the campus mascot. All but 4 of the 42 hatchlings disappeared this past sea-

Burrowing Owl, Speotyto cunicularia;
photo by Kimball Garrett.

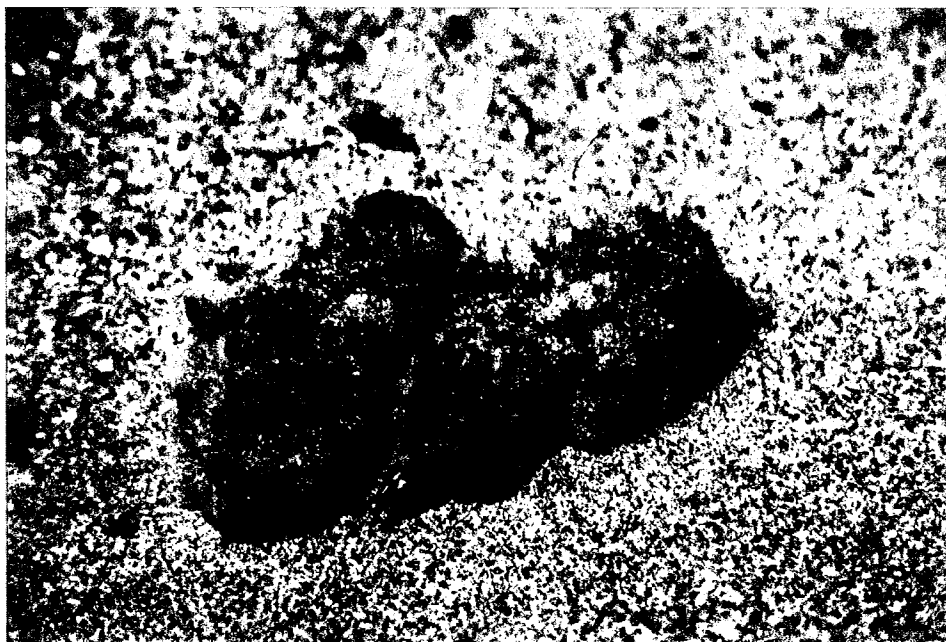


son from nesting burrows being monitored by Sheila Mahoney. Cats were seen with owls in their mouths. Animal preservationists have threatened to raise hell if any efforts are made to capture and remove cats... The campus is a dedicated sanctuary for Burrowing Owls, a Florida Species of Special Concern." Apropos of this, we note that feral cats and Red Foxes are increasingly seen in the last strongholds of the Burrowing Owl in coastal Los Angeles County: Playa del Rey and Dominguez Hills.

The reasons for concern about the establishment of feral populations of exotic predators have been set forth here in the *Western Tanager* (see "Conservation Conversation," June 1984; reprinted November 1988) and extensively in the ecological literature. The devastation wrought by established populations of exotics has been chronicled many times. The astounding thing is that this major issue has not been tackled more strongly by environmental organizations. Many such organizations have, in fact, steered clear of even addressing the issue. Why is this? In large part, this failure to act is in deference to a vocal animal rights movement which decries the harming of any animals.

The media continue to portray organizations such as Fund For Animals as "environmental" groups when, in fact, many (certainly not all) of the policies these "animal rights" groups espouse run entirely counter to the environmental imperative of protection of biodiversity. Anybody who has been to San Clemente Island can easily question the "environmental" credentials of groups which opposed the speedy and efficient removal of goats from that devastated land.

The Red Fox was not native to southern California in historical times; its spread through the coastal basins of Los Angeles and adjacent counties is relatively recent. This versatile predator efficiently kills a variety of terrestrial vertebrates with documented predation on many sensitive, Threatened or Endangered Species, including the California Least Tern and the Light-footed Clapper Rail. Other likely prey species include the Burrowing Owl, Belding's Savannah Sparrow, and Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse. These foxes (which should not be mistaken for our native Gray Fox)



Least Tern chicks, Sterna antillarum; photo by Kimball Garrett.

now wreak havoc in many of our most treasured bird habitats, from Bolsa Chica and Seal Beach to Playa del Rey and Pt. Dume. It is against the backdrop of a population explosion of this introduced predator that the Board of Los Angeles Audubon embraced the resolution printed above. Environ-

mental organizations such as ours must not shy away from this issue, but rather take the lead in educating a public that seems sadly pre-disposed to buy into the anti-ecological rhetoric of some factions of the animal rights movement. 🐦

Bookstore News

by Olga Clarke

Update from your Los Angeles Audubon Bookstore—The best source for your birding requirements

With upcoming spring migration and the spectacular displays of wildflowers, now is the time to upgrade your binoculars and telescope. The latest, highly improved optics of Bausch & Lomb/Bushnell, Kowa, Swarovski and Zeiss are something to see. Brighter and lighter weight—it will be like viewing birds and flowers for the first time.

In addition, we have the finest selection of field guides to birds of North America and foreign field guides available for your special trips. Along with checklists for every continent, there are now cassettes featuring bird calls and songs from most parts of the world, including cassettes specifically for California, Arizona and Florida. Learn how to identify bird songs with *Birding by Ear (East/West)*. Study the *Field Guide to Advanced Birding* by Ken Kaufman for help with those difficult species (flycatchers, shorebirds).

If birding at home is your specialty, prepare for the arrival of migrant hummingbirds and orioles with our feeders. For the seedeaters, we have cedar feeders and the popular tube types.

Wear your LAAS logo of the Western Tanager proudly with pins, embroidered patches, t-shirts (long- and short-sleeved) and sweatshirts. 🐦

**Give us
a call or
come by to
browse.
You will
be
delighted
with our
selection
and service.**



**BIRDATHON
'92**

**Help Raise \$10,000
To Support
Los Angeles
Audubon Society's
Environmental
Education Program**

April 1 - May 17

**Register today
310 574-2799**

Help kids learn what they can do to protect our planet.

FIELD TRIPS

Los Angeles Audubon Society's field trips are a great way to do your Birdathon. Sign up friends and co-workers at a few cents per species. Then attend any of the field trips between April 1 and May 17. Our experienced field trip leaders will help you see dozens of species. Your efforts will help Los Angeles' youngsters learn what they can do to help protect our planet.

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, April 5 - Starr Ranch Sanctuary. Park Ranger **Pete De Simone** will show us around the grasslands and woodlands in the sanctuary. An easy 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. **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, 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.

Saturday, April 18 - Chatsworth Reservoir. Leader **Dustin Alcalá**. Primarily an "old California" native grassland habitat with a large body of water and oak riparian wood-

lands in the adjacent arroyos. Migrants and early breeding 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]

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 chaparral/oak woodland habitat. Take Topanga Canyon Blvd. (from 101 or 118 Fwys), 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 Alcalá**. Meet at 7:30 a.m. From the 170, 5 or 405 Fwys 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]

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 and water from Baker for the weekend. SASE and \$4 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-mile E of Coldwater Canyon Dr. [LA, p.23, B-6]

Saturday, May 2 - Salton Sea. Leader **Chet McGaugh**, compiler of the N.E.S.S. Christmas Bird Count. Breeding desert birds, late migrating shorebirds and other migrants. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at sign-in booth at Wister Refuge on Davis Rd. We will bird Davis Rd., Red Hill and vicinity, then proceed around the South End Refuge, up past Salton City, and perhaps touch on the north end. \$8 + refuge fee. Maximum 20 people. Sign-up with Audubon House mandatory.

Sunday, May 3 - Topanga State Park. Leader **Gerry Haigh**. Meet at 8:00 a.m. See April 5 for details.

Friday, Saturday and Sunday, May 8 thru 10 - Sierra Owl Workshop. Conducting the workshop will be **Steve Laymon**, who holds a Ph.D. in Spotted Owl research from Berkeley; and **Bob Barnes**, who leads our annual South Sierras Weekend. Both will be with the group most of the time. Meet near Kernville at 7:00 p.m. Friday for orientation, then owl until 11:00 p.m. We will owl Saturday and Sunday mornings starting at 4:00 a.m. as well as Saturday after dinner. Steve will give a comprehensive talk on natural history, distribution, pellets and calls assisted by tapes, handouts and probably slides. Night sleeping will be sparse, but we will siesta Saturday afternoon. Saturday and Sunday mornings we will locate staked out owl nests. Sunday will take us to California City near Mojave, where the workshop will end in the afternoon. This program is being offered jointly by LAAS and the Kern River Research Center to which all gross proceeds will go. Fee \$75. Trip limited to 14 participants. Send check and SASE to LAAS for reservations.

Saturday, May 9 - Chatsworth Reservoir. Leader **Dustin Alcalá**. Being led as a joint venture between LAAS and San Fernando Audubon Society. Sign-up by phone with LAAS mandatory. Meet at 8:00 a.m. See April 18 write-up for details. 🐦

Birds Of The Season

by Hank Brodtkin

April is the height of spring migration. With the rains of February, the chaparral should be blooming and our local canyons will be redolent with the perfume of ceanothus. Between the second and third weeks of April, waves of western warblers, empids and vireos, along with Western Tanagers, Black-headed Grosbeaks and Lazuli Buntings, will pass through some of the more favorable of these canyons—such as Placerita and Eaton. Though it seems too much to hope for a desert bloom equal to last year's, there will almost certainly be an impressive bloom this year. And areas around desert oases, natural and otherwise, should also be productive for migrants. Yaqui Wells in Anza-Borrego State Park, Morongo Valley and Yucca Valley west of Joshua Tree National Monument, and California City and Butterbrecht Spring in Kern County are among the more popular areas. So get out and enjoy the delights of spring in southern California!

A couple of excellent bird finding guides to help you locate some of the better spring birding areas are *Where Birders Go in Southern California* by Childs and *Birder's Guide to Southern California* by Lane. I would also like to suggest a couple of flower books: *Flower Watchers Guide to Spring Blooming*, *Wildflowers of the Antelope Valley* by Stark, and *Flowering Plants, the Santa Monica Mountains, Coastal and Chaparral Regions of Southern California* by Dale. These books are all available at the LAAS Bookstore. There is also the wildflower hot line of the California Native Plant Society: (818) 768-3533.

The past few weeks preceding this writing (19 February) have been slow with few reports coming in—partly because of the recent storms and partly because this is a slow time of the year birdwise.

A **Red-throated Loon**, unusual inland, was at Whittier Narrows on 8 February (Ray Johnson). A pair of **Wood Ducks** was reported in Malibu on Malibu Creek on 16 February (Jerry Friedman), and a "**Common**" **Green-**

winged Teal was at Upper Newport Bay on 26 January (Harvey Fisher). **Oldsquaw** reports feature one at Thornhill Broom Beach, Ventura County, on 24 January (Bob Maurer), one on Quail Lake near Gorman on 2 February (Leo Edsen) and two on Alamitos Bay on 4 February (Mitch Heindel). A **Black Scoter** and four **White-winged Scoters** were at Mugu Rock on 11 February (Don Desjardine).


Two immature **Bald Eagles** were seen on the Oxnard Plain on 23 January (Bruce Broadbooks), and a **Peregrine Falcon** was in Malibu on 16 February (JF).

A **Red-necked Phalarope** was seen in the Catalina Channel on an LAAS Pelagic trip on 8 February along with two **Xantus' Murrelets**. An **Ancient Murrelet** and two **Cassin's Auklets** flew by Palos Verdes on 12 February (David Moody).

A **Pygmy Owl** was found at Mt. Baldy Village on 23 January (David Grindell), and an **Ash-throated Flycatcher**—very rare in winter—was near Castaic Junction on 2 February (Kimball Garrett). A **Tropical Kingbird** was on the Oxnard Plain on 23 January, and another was reported from Santa Ana on 9 February (Steve Mlodinow).

Most unusual was the **American Dipper** on the feeder stream of Upper Newport Bay on 8 February (Martin Byhower). A **Solitary Vireo** was in Valencia on 2 February (KG).

Irvine Park was a hot spot with a **Tennessee** and a **Chestnut-sided Warbler**, a **Summer Tanager** and a **Scott's Oriole** reported on 9 February (SM). A **Swamp Sparrow** was seen near Castaic Junction on 2 February (KG).

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:

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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., West Hollywood, CA 90046-6651.

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.

April 14 – Superbird Tuesday: Vireos vs. Cowbirds at the Riparian Gardens. Epidemic brood-parasitism combined with rampant habitat destruction has brought the Least Bell's Vireo to the brink of extinction. John and Jane Griffith have worked toward the recovery of the Least Bell's Vireo on Camp Pendleton and other southern California locations. Join us for a colorful and fascinating slide presentation.

ID Workshop: Guy Commeau will discuss his unique new educational book, *Mammals and Countries of the World: A Check List*.

May 12 – Listening in the Dark: Echolocation in Cave Swiftlets. Dr. Charles Collins of California State University Long Beach will present a remarkable illustrated account of his field observations on Palawan Island in the Philippines where thousands of swiftlets utilize a vast underground river cave for nesting and roosting. Cave swiftlets are the only birds known to use sonar.

FIELD TRIPS

A complete list of LAAS field trips for the period from April 5 through May 9 is on page 10. We welcome your participation and know you'll find each trip interesting and fruitful.



Trips highlighted with this symbol are designated Birdathon trips.



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PELAGIC TRIPS

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 Koeppel 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.

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